



# POST-MEDIÆVAL HEDGES

## IN CORNWALL (1540-1840)

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*Rebellion against new hedges / 'horne and thorne' / open-fields / conspiracy to enclose / enclosure Acts and miners' smallholdings / industrial Cornwall / more commons stolen / George Worgan / enclosure made easier.*

Henry VIII was an intelligent scholar but he had no moral sense or conscience. His cold-blooded passion for efficiency and for the greatness of England led him to extend central government into Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. He took over the land which belonged to the church authorities by declaring independence from the Pope in Rome and then distributed the church estates amongst his political friends. He crushed the surviving feudal franchises and centralised the affairs of the country on a money economy under the authority of parliamentary government. Following his death, his reformation was continued by the landowners.

By Act of Parliament in 1536, Henry VIII broke up the smaller monasteries, soon followed by the richer monasteries as one by one they were bullied into surrendering their property to the king. In 1541, Walter Borlas acquired land from the Bishop of Exeter at



*Mainly post-mediaeval landscape near Penzance, with probably half the hedges remaining after modern hedge removal.*

'Treludrowe, Chironneck, Lawen and Seghtnans', on the west side of Newlyn East. A record made at the time said it was 'dry, furzy, barren, and uninclosed' and that he, by 'his great labours and expenses' had 'reduced and made them fat, fertile, fruitful, enclosed them with hedges and ditches, and also built divers houses.' Of these four farms only Lower Treludrowe still exists, but many of the hedges built by Walter Borlas remain.

Based on a return made by Bishop Veysey in 1542, it has been suggested that the dispossessed monks from the

monasteries represented one in forty of the population. The Act of 1545 forced the Bishop of Exeter to get rid of his church land in Pawton Manor, with its sub-manors of Ide and Trebose, to Sir Anthony Denny. More directly, the tenant of Tywardreath Priory, Thomas Treffry received a letter from the king bluntly stating: 'wherefore his Highness thinketh that ye be very unworthy to have rule of any town that cannot well rule yourself'; so the Priory was dissolved and its seven manors were acquired by the king. In similar fashion, he got the eleven manors of the Priory of Launceston, which had an income from its estate of £1000 per annum.

This confiscation by the king and subsequent sale of the monastic possessions introduced a new group of non-feudal landowners who had no local family traditions; in Constantine parish in 1522, three-quarters of the landowners were non-resident. This break-up of village life caused Thomas Becon in 1540 to suggest that landlords should attach to every cottage 'enough land to keep a cow or two'. He was urging the attachment of plots to village cottages similar to the burgage plots already provided in many of the towns. These village plots would be hedged when the land was ploughed. Usually it was more profitable for the landowner to convert the hamlet into a tenanted farm. The tenant of the farm Tregonissey, near St Austell, which the Duchy acquired after the execution of Henry Courtney, Earl of Devon in 1556, had '8 stiches of land containing 4 acres lying separately in the common field called Westerfyeld' when it was annexed.

A good example of the destruction of the traditional hamlet is Bodrugan Barton, near Gerrans, which was re-modelled during this period into a large farm of 440 acres (180 hectares) with fields each of about 15 acres obliterating most of the prehistoric hedges. The straight road, with its peculiar sharp corner between Gerrans and the farm, has the appearance of an access road to an open-field, supported by the three hedges on the west side. Worgan, in 1811, regarded it then as one of the five largest farms in Cornwall, and it is farmed today with most of the 16th century hedges still intact. Another holding, Trewandra Farm, near Landrake, of 185 acres, changed little between the 1580 Port Elliot estate survey, the 1779 estate map, the 1841 Tithe map and the 1963 OS map; the main difference being the loss of three hedges which may have been related to mediaeval stiches.

One of the causes of the Cornish protest in 1549, popularly known as the Prayer Book rebellion, was the enclosure of land, especially that which had formerly belonged to the monasteries. A contemporary writer reported that 'it was generally agreed amongst them [the Cornish], that no inclosure should be left standing but that all lands should be held in common'. In June 1549 the king issued a proclamation in support of the landowners, after '... a great number of rude and ignorant people...plucked down many hedges [and] disparted their parks ...

'. In July he enacted under martial law that no one was allowed 'to pluck down any hedge, pale, fence, wall or any manner of enclosure ... '. He forced the closure and demolition of Glasney College in Penryn, founded in 1265, the then third oldest academic institution in Britain and the centre of Cornish education and culture. The Cornish were eventually defeated near Exeter after being outnumbered by German and Italian professional soldiers brought in by the English. Retribution was savage. After the conflict, nine hundred Cornishmen were killed in



*This view near St Veep retains hedges from the post-mediaeval period.*

cold blood by order of the government in London. For most of the remainder, their lands were confiscated, so that they became farm labourers, still working the land but now for a 'foreigner' from upcountry.

In 1564, in common with other mapmakers at the time, Gerard Mercator, (of Mercator Grid fame) in his engraving of William Camden's map of the British Isles, showed Cornwall, Wales and Scotland as being separate from England. His later map of the British Isles published in 1594 and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, showed Cornwall as being part of England, and the British Sea was renamed the English Channel. So the status of Cornwall in the eyes of the government in London changed from being a separate territory to being part of England at some time during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

## ' HORNE AND THORNE '

Enclosures were not always in favour with the Parliament of the time, and over a dozen Acts were passed between the years 1489 and 1601 directing that abandoned homesteads should be rebuilt, and that enclosing hedges and ditches should be removed. Not more than one family was allowed to occupy each cottage, and to every cottage four acres of land were to be attached and hedged in. But the landowners flouted the law and continued their large-scale enclosure and hedge-building. Much of the legislation was evaded, partly by bribery and partly because the enforcers were themselves enclosers. Landowners found it worth paying a small fine in the courts to have the full use of the land. Although the destruction of cottages was forbidden, it was easy to keep within the law by keeping just one small derelict room for a shepherd. A single furrow ploughed across pasture satisfied the law that the field had been restored to tillage. The law that the number of sheep per landowner or occupier was limited to 2000 was evaded by flocks being owned in parts by members of the same family. A writer of that period speaks of flocks of 20,000 sheep as being not uncommon. Sheep at that time were still horned and men saw the prophecy 'Horne and Thorne [ie sheep and hedges] shall make England forlorne' coming true. (Bastard's Chrestoleros, 1598).

A lease made in 1553 between Philip Mayowe and Philip Croft concerning Croft Hendra, in the parish of Morval, contained clauses no different to those between landlord and tenant today. The tenant promised to '... sufficiently repair, sustain and maintain the desmesned premises and every part thereof in houses, hedges, fences, ditches and all other things thereunto belonging in all needful and necessary reparations during the said term and the same so repaired in the end of the said term and shall leave and yield.' The landowner kept for himself 'all manner of timber trees of oak, ash or elm now growing or which hereafter shall grow in or upon the premises.' Many of the trees would have been growing on the hedgebanks.

The parish tithes received by the Reverend Canon Taylor, the vicar of St Just-in-Penwith in 1590, came from around 26 farms in the parish each with at least 10 cows; hemp or flax from 28 farms; wool and lambs from more than 3000 sheep; 200 x 3lb cheeses and 240lbs of butter. In the parish of Probus in 1596, the payment of tithe was according to rules. 'Furze wood or wood of the hedge' that was not sold was free of tithe, but 'Oak, Ash, Elm, Beech or any other wood, not being 21 years growth, are accounted Sylva Caedua [regularly lopped or coppiced wood] and ought to pay tithe. '

The county of Cornwall could not be described as 'very largely enclosed' in the sixteenth century, but already this was changing. At the start of the 17th century, Carew was clearly in favour of enclosure, observing in his *Survey of Cornwall* that 'they fal everywhere from Commons to Inclosure, and partake not of some Eastern Tenents' envious disposition, who would sooner prejudice their own present thrift, by continuing this *mingle mangle* than advance

the lordes expectant benefit after their term expired.' He saw clearly the coming changes in local government. The de-centralised government of feudal times, discharged by a few immensely powerful barons, became a centralised government whose instructions were carried out by a much more numerous body of landed gentry, an economical (because unpaid) and efficient quasi-civil-service. These landowners were subsequently appointed as Justices of the Peace, with the power and duties of enforcing the law.

Carew described the traditional practice whereby Cornish farmers were accustomed to take crops of wheat and oats from a *close* (hedged field) for a year or two and were then 'driven to give it at least seven or eight years ley'. A later Cornish source specifies six or seven years as the length of the period during which fields remained as ley pasture to restore fertility between each cropping. As late as the nineteenth century, writers remarked on how different it was from the short three-year rotations with bare, ploughed fallows (not ley), found in open-fields in other parts of Britain. Farms laid out in numerous small enclosed fields were ideal for intensive livestock farming, as the Devonian John Hooker noted in about 1600 when he explained that livestock in his native county was moved from one field to another so that 'by their often changes they fed still as it were upon a new springing grass'. This has been the traditional practice in West Cornwall with its small fields since prehistoric times. Where, conversely, extensive grazing is applied to farmland there is a tendency for the redundant hedges to be neglected. In 1606 several burgesses at Liskeard were criticised for 'suffering their hedges to be ruinous and in decay.' A surveyor at Stuffle, St. Neot, wrote of the holding as 'all pasture ground, the inner hedges down, the fields without names.'

The smaller the hedged fields on a farm, the greater is the total length of the hedges and banks or walls which surround them. At this time these boundaries themselves were thought to be an asset; in Hooker, again, we read that Devonshire farmland was 'all the more profitable for being divided and severed with mighty great hedges and ditches'. When a surveyor of an Arundell property in Cornwall found that the farm measured 47 acres 'from out bound to out bound', but only 40 acres when the closes were measured individually, he observed that the difference was 'taken up ... with the hedges'. As today, the economic benefit of shelter, flood and erosion prevention, segregation and rotation of cropping and grazing, provision of coppice wood and extra herbal browsing for stock would be balanced against the take-up of acreage.

Carew remarked that the breed of sheep improved 'since the grounds began to receive

enclosure and dressing for tillage. When the shire lay waste and open, the sheep had generally little bodies and coarse fleeces.' He reported of villagers that 'Some remembered that their grounds lay all in common, or only divided by stitch-meal; little bread-corn: their drink water, or at best but whey ... and suchlike as came from the cow and ewe, who were tied [tethered] by the one leg at pasture.' But now he felt that conditions were much better, especially in East Cornwall.

Some people were still concerned about the plight of villagers. Gabriel Plattes, in 1639, pleaded that 'in every Parish where Commons are inclosed, a corner might be laid to the poor men's houses, that every one might keep a cow



*Post-mediaeval hedges near St Kew contain a bold modern palette within the fields. Some centuries-old small fields remain here, but most will have had internal hedges removed in recent times. The position of gateways, usually sited in or very near a corner when the fields were formed, indicates where a hedge has been taken out. Redundant gateways will have been blocked up.*



for the maintenance of his family.' This concept remained alive over the centuries, culminating in Lloyd George's famous 'Three acres and a cow' promise to the soldiers returning after the First World War.

## OPEN - FIELDS

The English open-field system was not widely adopted in Cornwall, though villages here and there, particularly in the north and east of the county, were remodelled during Mediaeval times. In parts of Cornwall these field systems persisted well into the post-mediaeval period, and here and there survive today. To get an idea of an open-field landscape in the 17th century, where remnants of the field systems with many of the stitches hedged can still be seen, we can look, on the 1:25000 map, at the land north of A392, the Indian Queens - Newquay road, up past St. Mawgan airfield and St Eval to St. Merryn. In contrast to much of Cornwall, this area was less affected by tin and copper mining. Much was part of the manor of Pawton, which included the parishes of St Breock, St Ervan, Little Petherick, St Merryn, Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Issey with parts of St Wenn, Withiel, and St Columb Major. This manor was one of the large areas of land given in 909AD by King Athelstan to his English bishop of Crediton. It stayed in church ownership for 450 years giving a continuity which is apparent in the sameness of the villages and hamlets, with the preservation of their Cornish names.

Starting just north of the A392, the enclosures south-west of Trebudannon have the appearance of burgage strips, each with its cottage in a row at the hamlet. The fields around Trencreek, on the edge of Newquay, have remnants of two layouts of stitches (long narrow strips of ground); the one to the north of the railway has the internal lane access characteristic of an open-field, with the ends of the stitches abutting it to either side. Tregaswith, west of St. Columb, has good remnants of stitches at Brookland. On the south side of Tregaswith, although many of the original stitches either were not hedged, or the hedges have been removed, there is a short length of double hedge shown on the map which clearly indicates another classic open-field. A similar situation may have been at Bosoughan, to the south-west. Moving to St. Mawgan airfield, much has been obliterated by the runways. Some of the stone for the runways came from hedges demolished at Bedrugga; the landowner Lord Falmouth was said to have been paid a shilling a ton for it during the second world war. This used to be part of the manor of Bejowan, with farms and cottages largely in the parishes of St Columb Major and Minor just inland from Newquay. There is written historical evidence for arable strips at the hamlet of Bedrugga ('intermingled parcels') and at Trebulsue ('pieces ... in a common field', and 'in diverse parcels divided').

Crossing St Mawgan airfield to Tregurrian, this was surveyed in 1606 as part of the manor of Carnanton then in the hands of the Crown, the surveyors in entry after entry enumerating acres 'in communibus campsis [in common fields] ... in stychemeal [divided into strips]'. The survey of lands of the adjacent hamlet of Trevarrian estate adopts a classification of land which acknowledges that many farms had both closes and unenclosed strips. The surveyor divides the acreage of each farm into three categories, in 'claus' (enclosed), 'vasta' (waste) and in 'stitches'. Of particular interest today are the hay meadows bordering the river at Mawgan Porth where the mowing stitches still (in 2007) have their original dividing ditches. Meadows tended to be sited on land which was flooded during winter, but which dried out early enough to give a bumper hay crop. This was used to feed the breeding livestock during winter when the pastures had been eaten off.

These two hamlets, Tregurrian and Trevarrian, were recorded in 1606 as having or

having had open-fields. All the nine villagers in Tregurrian and the three in Trevarrian have similar entries. Both hamlets had common grazing on the cliff land. The descriptions of the land are carefully set out, with closes distinguished from open-fields and commons. The entry for Otho Cornish at Tregurrian describes his holding in 'A close called the common Downe close in stitchmeal with Ursula Cornish and Barbara Best 3½ acres.' The words 'close in stitchmeal' added to 'a close called the common Downe' ('close' being used equally to mean 'enclosed' or 'an enclosed field') suggest that this was formerly an open-field in which the stitches have been hedged off from each other, much as it appears today. The entry for Ursula Cornish is similar: 'A close called the Downe close in stitchmeale 4 acres 2 roods', and for Barbara Best reads: 'Arable land in the common field called Down close 3 acres 2 roods.' Similarly Katherine Hodge claimed 'Arable land in the common fields in the south of the vill in stychemeale 3 acres 3 roods. Arable land in the common field called Downe close in stychemeale 6 acres. Arable land in the common field in the north of the vill in stychemeale 4 acres 1 rood. Arable land in the common field in the west of the vill in stychemeale 9 acres.' Sundry correspondence relating to Tregurrian and Treligga (St Teath) describes as late as 1833 '... stitches, the boundaries of which are mostly distinctly indicated by the ridges of furze or turf ... tilled with corn ... usually about once in twenty-five or thirty years', and refers to 19th Century enclosure of common land; 'We are now breaking it up for tillage' (June, 1856); 'I had no idea there were so many pieces of land' (October, 1870).

In Cornwall the word 'down' usually describes less fertile land which was likely to have been common land in earlier times. The inclusion of the term *close*, inferring hedged boundaries, seems to be the key to interpretation of these surveys as to whether or not there were open-fields. An important note was made by the churchwardens surveying the parish of St Merryn-in-Pydar in 1646 when 'this survey was made before it was hedged'. A look at the 1:25000 map does not clearly identify any hedged open-field systems here, in contrast to the neighbouring parishes.

Moving due north to the hamlet of Engollan there is a pattern of stitches clearly indicating an open-field, though traces of the access tracks having almost disappeared. To its east are traces of the 125 acre (49 ha) common which was enclosed in 1855. Penrose, to the north-east, still has many of its hedged stitches, the access track to the north-west being clearly defined, its original function being perpetuated in part as a public footpath down to the corn-mill at Porthcothan.



*Post-mediaeval landscape near Penzance with typical more recent removal of internal hedges from an original row of narrow curved stitches across mid-foreground, roughly twice as many removed as remain.*

Three tenants of Hornacott Manor near Boyton had '6 acres in the common fields called North Down and South Down with common of pasture in the downs as other tenants (containing in all about 30 acres).' There were three leases for these farms dated 1562, 1586 and 1601, which showed some permanence in this arrangement. The farm locations are not separately specified and they seem likely to have been cottages in Boyton village. There were probably two other villagers living in Boyton with similar rights in the common fields to make up the 30 acres.

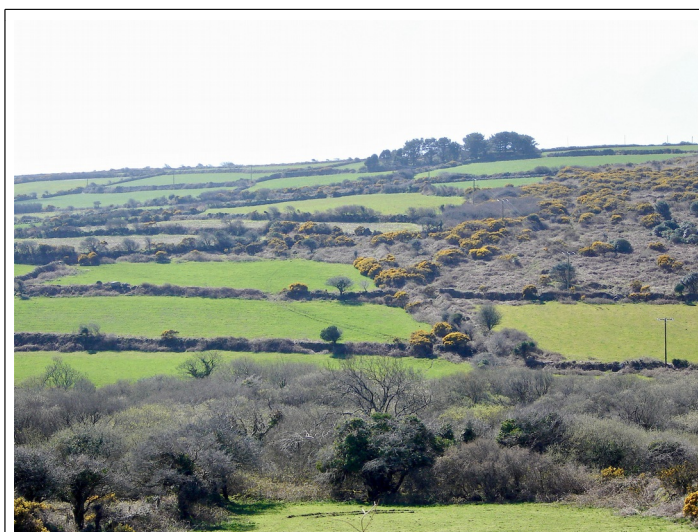
Late examples of strip-field

cultivation may be taken from the Lanhydrock Atlas, a mapped survey of the Robartes estate made in the late 1690s by Joel Gascoyne. The survey contains many maps showing land subdivided into stiches, among the best examples being one of Predannack Wollas (Mullion), which reveals that almost all of the land of the hamlet, rough pasture and furze excepted, was or had recently been divided into unenclosed strips. A map of Garrah shows, just to the north of Predannack, an extensive area of strips; and one of Bollowall (St Just in Penwith), near the western cliffs, where almost the whole of the cultivated territory of the hamlet was subdivided into small strips, called 'stitches' by the surveyor.

Land held in stitchmeal did not necessarily mean that the associated village had the classic open-field system. A piece of land shown as being a stitch may indicate merely a small enclosure owned or tilled by someone other than the farmer within whose land it was situated. For example there is, in the middle of Wicca Farm, Zennor, a small prehistoric enclosure called Uncle Will's Stitch which has nothing at all to do with any open-field system. Nearby in Zennor churchtown in 1616 the vicar reckoned to own 'one-fifth part of the whole churchtown', that is to have one-fifth share in its land, the four other shares belonging to other farms. By saying churchtown, the surveyor meant only the four farms on the east side of Zennor; those on the west side are in the different hamlet of Trewey.

## CONSPIRACY TO ENCLOSE

Henry Halhead's *Inclosure Thrown Open* (1650) described how would-be enclosers began by upsetting the field customs by which the cultivation of the land was regulated; how they told the people that they would be three times better off, that enclosure stopped strife and contention, that it kept sheep from rotting, and 'nourisheth Wood in hedges'. In fact there was a small element of truth in these assertions, bringing benefit to a few, but leaving the majority worse off. This was before the passing of the series of Enclosure Acts. If the landowners could not persuade the villagers by empty promises like these, they began a suit at law and made the commoners come to the law-courts, often in London, for months and even years. Periodically they offered to buy them out. If this failed, they continued the legal suit till a decree against the villagers was granted in the Chancery court in London.



*This West Penwith farm has been little changed by the centuries, still with quite small fields and relic furze croft (upper right). In the boggy bottoms (foreground) is the willow plantation which provided baskets for use on the farm and probably also for lobster pots to be made locally.*

Although the landowners usually won, they were not always successful. The new owners of Gwallen Down tried to stop the villagers from grazing it but were disallowed by the Commission after a plea of fifty years of custom. In 1643 David White was summoned 'for enclosing a part of the common [of West Looe] to his private use.' In 1690, Henry Etham was taken to court for hedging up the commons between the Manors of Tucoys and Carwithenack, in Constantine parish. A nearby corn-mill had become disused, and it is possible that he robbed it of stone for the hedges, an irreversible fate for many disused



buildings which continued until recent times. Today, the reverse happens, as hedges are demolished and robbed of stone for facing concrete buildings or creating gardens. At Tuccoys the landlord's officials included a 'Viewer of repairs whose business was to see that houses and hedges were kept in good order.' Perhaps it was he whose snooping landed the likes of Henry Etham in the dock. The manor of Helston, under the Duchy, also had two 'viewers of reparacions' with similar duties in 1650.

Other literature followed the fashion for extolling enclosure. Silvanus Taylor (1652) in *Common Good: or the Improvement of Commons, Forrests, and Chases, by Inclosure etc.*, wrote that 'Children are brought up lazing upon a common to attend one cow and a few sheep ... being nursed up in idleness in their youth they become indisposed for labour, and then begging is their portion or thievery their trade ... The two great nurseries of idleness and beggery etc are ale-houses and commons. ... The commons are, in fact, nurseries of thieves and horse-stealers.' In *Bread for the Poor, Promised by Enclosure of the Wastes and Common Grounds of England*, Adam Moore (1653) opined that 'commons were so over-stocked that one sheep in an enclosure is worth two on a common ... Furze and heath are encouraged by commoners, because they keep cattle and sheep alive in hard weather when fodder is scarce; but the same space covered with grass would be more useful ... That which is every man's is no man's, and no one tries to better the commons.'

Gregory King, in 1688, estimated that the woods and coppices were worth almost as much as arable land, and the parks and lowland commons worth about two-thirds as much. Hill and moorland used only for sheep averaged about one-fifth, and the most valuable pasture and meadow land worth about half as much again as the arable land. Most of the surveys during this period show that in East Cornwall there was much more pasture than arable. This encouraged the realignment of the East Cornwall countryside into sheep farms and larger fields but without commons. In West Cornwall more people were engaged in mining, fishing and ancillary trades, which meant that the land was farmed more intensively, with nearby fish waste, seaweed and sea-sand being valuable assets for arable crops. Some downs were taken in, but much of the land continued to be the small unaltered prehistoric smallholdings, together with their common land. Elsewhere in Cornwall, enclosure increased.

In 1649, Constantine parish contained about one-third of waste (crofts and downs), the same area still being described as furze in 1842, but by 1867 it was recorded that much of the furze land had been brought under cultivation. Two furze crofts at Sithney, about 8 acres, were noted in 1726 as: 'out of which are lately hedged in Four small Fields each whereof of one Acre or thereabouts, newly improved and made arable'. Land at Lewannick in 1727 was 'all fenced by stone-hedges', and at Mawnan was 'fenced partly by stone, partly by earth, planted with shrubs' - typical Cornish hedges.

Hedges around glebe fields are likely to be several centuries old, probably mediaeval. Fields with the name 'sanctuary' or 'sentry' were originally glebe fields, though the right of sanctuary was usually restricted to the church itself. The local vicars were often involved in enclosure, usually in connivance with the landowners. In Cubert, in 1680, 'Pool Close, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  acres was bounded and hedged on the



*Wealthy landowners extended their holdings from the 15th century. Hedge at Godolphin designed to contain deer in the park.*



southeast by the vicar and northeast hedged by Lord Arundel's tenants.' At Gwennap in 1727, 'the incumbent had recently divided up the Great Moor of 3½ acres into four parts, to drain and manure it more effectively.' During the same year in Cardinham parish, 'The fences are hedges, the cut fences belong to the rector'. In Endellion parish, 'a field ... the hedges all belonging to the rectory.' In the previous year, in Lanreath '... on the side adjoining the Grove tenement, the rector fences only his side and has three foot on 'Top of the Hedge', and in Ludgvan parish land was 'divided by a glebe hedge with three feet beyond for its ditch ... but where it joins a waste plot called Leddra, it extends nine feet beyond the hedge.' The Cornish people's reaction was indicated by this record of a glebe at Virginstow (Veryan) in 1680 : ' ... there is likely to be a little loss, for the boundaries of this have been removed by the late tillage and the incumbent cannot find any man who will inform him how far the glebe extends.'

The first general enclosure act was passed in 1709, and gradually more private enclosure acts were passed by Parliament each year. From 1709, the date of the first act, until 1876, nearly five million acres were enclosed in Britain under these special Acts, showing how important the common land had been to the villages. In the short period from 1765 to 1785 an average of forty-seven acts were passed every year. According to Rackham, for about half the parishes in England there is an Inclosure Act of the 18th or 19th century, with its accompanying map showing hedges.

## ENCLOSURE ACTS AND MINERS' SMALLHOLDINGS

Not everyone approved of the enclosures. John Cowper, in his 1732 *Essay proving that Enclosing Commons and Common-Field-Lands is Contrary to the Interest of the Nation*, stated that 'I myself have seen within these 30 years, above 20 Lordships or parishes enclosed, and every one of them has thereby been in a manner depopulated. If any one can shew me where an enclosure has been made, and not at least half the inhabitants gone, I will throw up the argument.'

This was not always the result of enclosure in Cornwall because of the mining industry. The population grew from 100,000 to 150,000 in the 100 years after the Restoration in 1659. This brought about a demand for more production of corn and in the early 18th century the landowners felt they were justified in asking Parliament for more powers to enclose common land. The laws that were passed were based on two principles. The first was that anyone who owned land plus rights to the common should receive a portion of the newly-enclosed land proportional to their holding (though this did not always happen); the other, that enclosure should not be prevented by the opposition, or inability to act, of a small minority.

Examples of the enclosure of commons for miner's small-holdings, with some associated hedging, include in 1742 a 'Dwelling House, little Orchard and Four Stitches of Land containing about one Acre and half ... part of a tenement called Croft Hendy.' ; the agreement included leasing part of the St Day common. Indentures in 1743 between Arthur and Francis Champernown of Tolgallow Manor, St Day and Thomas Gregor included '3/8ths part of Dwellinghouse, 3 pieces of land and 1 little garden lately built and inclosed by said Thomas Gregor from Nangumpus Downs' for 3 lives. In 1748, James Williams, a carpenter, took the tenancy of land that was 'Three Eights Parts of and in All that new erected Dwelling House, together with Two Acres of Land or Commons, inclosed or to be inclosed.' In the same year Martyn Skinner, a tinner, rented '3/8ths part of Simon Prisk's House ... and half the Lane (if such shall be made) leading to Little-beside-Houses or a sufficient Ditch or Liberty to mend & repair the Hedge of the Long Slip & Little Garden, but not to cut turf or take any other

Materials for the same more than Nine Feet from the said Hedge.' In 1757 land was let to Edmund Jeffery that was: 'bounded ... on the West by the great Moor Hedge belonging to Groce's ... sometime since inclosed by the sd. Charles Mitchell out of the Wastrell Lands'.

The miner built his own house, cleared his land and built his hedges. He would have owned or had a share in a cow and perhaps had enough butter and eggs to sell some. Polsue, editing (1974) *Lake's Parochial History of the County of Cornwall*, wrote of this period (about 1750) that 'A custom was



*Small fields taken in from surrounding croft land and low, sometimes roughly-built hedges, such as these near Crowan, typify the miner's smallholding.*

commonly adopted by the farmers of letting cows to dairymen for about £8 per year for each cow for the season of forty weeks. Many of the miners rented a cow, or one was rented between two families, each family milking her alternately.' The farmer was paid by butter sales, and the skim-milk was fed to the pig along with vegetables and fish scraps. When the cow became heavy in calf, the farmer took her back in return for a freshly-calved cow, and kept her on the common until near calving. Bottrell, writing *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall* in 1870, remembered that 'At that time, and long after, almost every cotter kept a cow, which found sufficient pasture in green lanes, and commons'. In the stony fields he grew potatoes and barley, which, together with salt fish, supported himself and his family. Often, goats were kept by cottagers for milk for their children. To prevent straying, they were hobbled by tying together the hind and fore leg on one side, a method known as a 'span' and until recently commonly used in West Cornwall where the poorness of many field hedges offers an incentive, especially to country-bred ponies, to climb out. The garden was a securely hedged-in bit of ground, usually, but not always, near the house. Some of these detached garden plots, often with excellent hedges, still belong to cottages today.

The staple food of the villagers was fish (mainly pilchards), potatoes and barley bread. Meat was a rare luxury and usually depended on the annual slaughter of the backyard pig. These smallholdings, sometimes called wheelbarrow farms because everything had to be done by hand, were to be found surrounding all the mining areas. The small fields and arrangement of their hedges can have the appearance of a prehistoric holding. Many smallholders were fishermen and miners, having that sustenance to fall back on in lean times. Sometimes the fishery failed, hence it was said in St Just-in-Penwith:

*Sâv a man, kebner tha li, ha ker tha'n hâl;  
Mor-teed a metten travyth ne dâl.*

Get up, take your breakfast, and go to the moor;  
The sea-tide of the morning is nothing worth.

## INDUSTRIAL CORNWALL

The year 1760 is generally taken as being the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and is a convenient year to mark the widespread transfer of many manufacturing skills from the countryside to the town. From now on, more and more land was enclosed, the

dispossessed villagers fleeing to the towns to get work.

In Cornwall, industrialisation meant mining and its associated industries. Richard Warne touring Cornwall in 1809 wrote to a friend that 'Nothing surely can be more hostile to the beauties of Nature than the process of mining. Its first step is to level the little wood (if indeed there be any) with which she may have garnished the spots where she has concealed her ores. It then penetrates into the earth, and covers the neighbouring soil with unproductive rubbish. It proceeds to poison the brooks around with its mineral impregnations; spreads far and wide the sulphurous smoke of its smelting-houses; blasting vegetation with their deleterious vapours, and obscuring the atmosphere with the infernal fumes of arsenic and sulphur.' Mining was as ever a speculative industry and the problems of local over-population and unemployment coupled with times of bad corn harvests provoked food riots which induced James Watt in 1788 to recommend that English soldiers be stationed in Truro and Redruth. There were at least fourteen food riots in the 18th century and four more in the 19th century.



*Typically poor and neglected smallholding hedge built of broken mine spoil, dividing fields to a miner's cottage of 1820, near Hayle.*

The industrialisation of much of Cornwall, with a huge influx of population from England, increased the pressure on the Cornish language. This dilution of the native population has continued ever since, with the attendant loss of the Cornish culture. Because mining was particularly concentrated in West Cornwall, for the first time the English influence really penetrated this far. In a survey of 1670 one of the fields at Old Lanyon, Madron was called *Parke an Henjyow* [field of old houses], but in the 1840 Tithe Apportionment this Cornish name had been replaced by an English one, Deep Field. At the end of the 17th century Bishop Trelawney thought it necessary to get the Marazion scholar Keigwin to translate Jordan's 'Creation' which had been written in Cornish about the same time as Shakespeare was writing 'The Tempest'. William Borlase noted that a local society of landowners, which met every Friday, commissioned in 1719 a poem in Cornish by William Gwavas. This would only have happened if the society members had at least a good knowledge of the Cornish language. In 1776 some travellers questioned an old fisherman in Penwith who answered "I only know four or five persons who speak British, and they are old people like myself, from sixty to seventy years of age; the young people don't know a word of it." In 1777 John Nancarrow of Marazion, then aged only forty, conversed in Cornish. In 1790 it was still spoken by some near Land's End, and William Matthews, who died at Newlyn in 1800, is said to have been well acquainted with it. Mathias Wallis, of St. Buryan, remembered his grandmother speaking Cornish well in about 1840. The last sentences in traditionally spoken Cornish were still remembered by Newlyn fishermen in 1890, just over a century ago. The loss of the language went along with the loss of the traditional villagers' rights.

*Ne vedn nevera doas vas a tavaz re hir*

*Bes den heb tavaz a gollas e dir*

A tongue too long never did good

But a man without a tongue lost his land

(William Pryce, 1790)



Mining incomes in the 18th century averaged £15 a year, while the typical mine-owning Basset family drew over £10,000 a year from their mine at Pool. In a letter written in 1793 Sir Francis Bassett said that he was encouraging miners to build cottages and enclose a few acres of land, and that in the past few years about fifty had done so. He was careful with selecting his tenants, refusing Arthur Benny because he was 'a man of bad character'. About thirty smallholdings were created on the south and west sides of Carn Marth, containing about 150 acres (60 ha) in all, at no cost to Sir Francis, who then got more rent each year from these smallholdings than the freehold value of the land before enclosure.

In many situations there was immense time and labour in clearing away the rocks. This was so on the south-west slope of Carn Marth where the enclosing tenants, chiefly miners and labourers, had to blow the rocks in pieces with gunpowder before they could remove them to where they were building hedges to their little plots. In such areas hundreds of tons of stone per acre might have to be removed before the ground was cleared. Richard Tomas wrote in 1819: 'Thousands of acres of downs, commons, and wastes have been enclosed by the miners and others on a small scale, generally from three to six acres in a tenement, on each of which one or two cottages are erected.' Only one recorded case has been seen where there was a proposal rejected because of the value of the common. This was at Pengigan Moor on Carn Entral, the reason given was that 'it is the watering place of the tenant's cattle'.

### MORE COMMONS STOLEN

Provided agreement could be shown amongst the owners (note, not the villagers) of not less than four-fifths of the land involved, the passage of enclosure bills through Parliament was little more than a formality. During twenty years from 1765 an average of forty-seven acts were passed through Parliament every year. Fraser, in his *General View of the Agriculture of Cornwall* 1794, estimated that some one-third part of the county was enclosed, another third was in open waste, and the remaining third was in crofts that were 'only broken up once in twenty-five or thirty years'. His definition of 'croft' was as marginal land of low productivity, which was sometimes hedged. The category 'open waste' would have included the commons. The first General Inclosure Act was passed in 1801, and in the same year 119 acts were passed nationwide, the total area enclosed probably exceeding 300,000 acres. It is likely that more than 25,000 acres of common in Cornwall were enclosed during the 18th and early 19th centuries, but there is no accurate estimate of the total area of common in Cornwall until 1860 when what remained amounted to only 200,000 acres, about one-fifth of the county.

Alongside the enclosures, older fields were being enlarged. Hedge removal, not a new activity, achieved national comment in the House of Commons Journal in 1792: 'The grubbing up of Hedge Rows is become general, and the Growth of



*Hedged common at Treen.*



Timber in them is thereby totally destroyed, owing to the great Price given for Corn since the Bounty took place for exporting of Corn and Beer, which gives every Farmer encouragement to grub Hedge Rows up, and convert them into Corn Land.' Yet in Cornwall, the landowners who started the Royal Cornwall Show offered in 1798 a generous prize of 21 guineas 'To the person who shall enclose and improve the largest Quantity of Waste Land, in the County of Cornwall, not less than ten Acres, in the best and most effectual manner, within the course of 7 years'. Ten acres of waste land in Cornwall would be likely to produce a quantity of clearance stone that would result in many hedges around small fields. Another prize of 7 guineas applied to land of less than two acres. However, there were relatively few Inclosure Acts in Cornwall, as compared with the rest of Britain. Between 1809 and 1818, there were three Acts in Cornwall enclosing meadow and waste, not common fields, at Boconnoc, Broadoak and St Winnow - 2300 acres; Castle Dennis and Goss Moor - 810 acres; and at Wendron, Mawgan-in-Meneage, Sithney and Helston (size not stated).

Schemes of enclosure usually began when the principal owners met in secret, resolved the points in which their own interests conflicted, selected the solicitor and surveyor, nominated the Commissioners, and settled the terms of the petition. Sometimes it happened that the first intimation which the villagers received of the scheme was that the petition had been presented to Parliament. Legal costs were incurred at all stages of the proceedings, which were generally prohibitive for any villagers opposed to the enclosure. Where the common was large, the landowners often sold off, after the enclosure award, a portion of the land to pay these expenses. Another factor was the cost of fencing the boundaries of small areas, a necessary condition of the enclosure award, which came to more than the value of the land.

Some Inclosure Awards were retroactive, perhaps back to enclosures 100 years before, thus legalising an earlier *fait accompli*. Most awards stipulated that perimeter hedges be built within one year, but there was no time limit for the building of internal hedges, and some have never been built. Where the landowners wished, the strict letter of the law was followed. Occupiers of arable land who were tenants-at-will were offered nothing on enclosure. Cottagers who had no land in the open-field received nothing, even if they had legal rights on the common. They were told that unless they already had their rights properly written on paper, they had none. Hundreds of cottagers who were deprived of their commons and had no farm work were driven into the towns in search of employment.

There are many references to these 18th and 19th century changes. Typical of these is that part of the St Day common was let, together with the common rights, to a tenant, the rent being 'the expense of inclosing the Ground'. There were numerous instances in which the common-field arable land was let for less than half the price of the enclosed arable adjoining; and the commons were very seldom reckoned to be worth anything in valuing any estate that had a right on them. In 1728 it was recorded that: 'to the plots on these Downs [St John's Downs] belongs a right of common of pasture without stint when not in tillage.' Many commons were unstinted, that is, with no grazing restrictions, and were consequently overrun with stock, which often belonged to jobbers and not to the commoners. Even if the common were stinted, often the richer men illegally grazed more than the custom allowed. The common of pasture, as upon Bin Down (Morval), was 'according to the proportion', that is, to the size of the farm owning commoner's rights, and was usually worked out to the nearest sheep. Exceptionally, such as on the manor of Eastway (Morwenstow), according to Norden's survey, the stint of sheep on the common pasture might be in units of five, tenants having allowances of 5, 10, 20 or 30 sheep according to the sizes of their holdings.

On the manor of Landrayne (North Hill), a sixteenth century surveyor noted that 'tenants ... have common ...[for] as much of all kinds of cattle as their several in-grounds will bear in winter'. This was the usual criterion for the entitlement. One Joshua Eva was allowed to hedge 10 acres of Reskajeage Downs in 1738, his common rights being restricted to not more than

eight horses or oxen and twenty sheep. Some jobbers hired a cottage or land at a double rent on the edge of the commons, and so obtained grazing rights which they used to overstock the land with their own sheep or cattle or with stock from strangers. At Twelve Men's Moor, a common on the south-east side of Bodmin Moor, Richard Luskey in 1758 had '10 bullocks, 40 oxen, 70 cows and calves, 30 horses, 20 mares with colts, 60 rams, 50 wether sheep, 1000 ewes and lambs, 40 he-goats, 300 she-goats with kids, 20 boars, 70 sows with young, 10 he-asses, 30 she-asses and foals, 30 mules and 700 geese with goslings.' He was taken to task for over-stocking these 800 acres of common and it was decided that the capacity of the moor was 48 horses, 48 bullocks and 2016 sheep, and that he had only two out of the twelve shares. Clearly he had been trying to force out the other commoners.

In a curious echo of the past, part of Bodmin moor is said to have been so overgrazed by the non-traditional Scottish breeds of sheep during the late 20th century by a few graziers exceeding their rights, that other small commoners have been unable to put their cattle out on to the moor for fear of their starving. This problem has, to an extent, been alleviated by new environmental schemes to manage the grazing.

The Mediaeval open-field system still lingered on around some villages, with strips and stitches being hedged as they passed into single ownership. Several land transfers in 1788 referring to the 'Borough Fields and Grounds of Kilkhampton' confirm that the stitches in the churchtown were regarded at that time as burgage strips. Nearby in the manor of Stanbury, the farmer at Uppaton in Wellcombe paid: 'To 26 yards of hedge around Smales Park at 8d/yd 17/4d. To 32 yards of ditto around the Moor at 10d/yd £1.6.8.'

Elsewhere the inexorable march of enclosure proceeded. In 1788, 6 acres of Bostraze moor, a common near St Just in Penwith, 'lately hedged in and enclosed' by Archelaus Thomas was then rented to him by Wm. Bosvargus for 3 lives at 19/- a year. A similar note in 1829 to Lord Carmanton from his agent relates to the enclosure of about 3 acres of common for each of 3 miners at St Agnes with a *heriot* (premium) of 7/6d and rent of 7/6d. In neither deed is there reference to consent from other commoners, and it is likely that they were denied any say in the matter. Some 1,500 acres of land at Hawke's Tor and Butter's Tor was advertised in the West Briton in 1815 for summer grazing; obviously the local commoners had lost their rights by then. In 1853, the villagers cutting turf on Rose Craddock Moor, St Cleer, were told that they had no rights despite proving that they had cut turf on the common for many years. Many of the French prisoners of the Napoleonic wars were kept in Cornwall and built some of the hedges found on the higher ground, where it would not have been economic for the farmer to pay

labour for the work. In West Penwith local people recount that some hedges between Greenburrow and Carn Galver were thus built. At Roscarrock, between Port Quin and Port Isaac, many of the fields of the farm are bordered with stone hedges built by these prisoners of war. The shape of some on the map suggests that they were ancient hedges, known locally as *gurgoes* (pronounced *gurjeys*), that were completely rebuilt at this time.

Just occasionally the land-owners met with setbacks. The West Briton in 1811 announced, 'Notice is hereby given, that



*In West Penwith many of the fields enclosed from moorland at this period are today only changed by being enlarged by some hedge-removal.*

application will be made in the next session of Parliament for leave to bring in a bill for inclosing, dividing, and allotting, and also for extinguishing all tin work bounds, within or upon certain commons or waste lands commonly called Coisgarne Downs, Chicoose Commons, Cold-Wind Common, Trevarth Common, Killiwerries Common, Feock Downs and Pennance Common, situate in the several parishes of Gwennap, Kea and Feock in the county of Cornwall.' What happened to prevent it is not readily apparent, but it is clear that no Act resulted from that application. At about the same time, an application to Parliament to enclose the commons around Bodmin to get money to repair the church was unsuccessful. There were problems on Bofernal Downs in 1814 where prosecution was threatened by the landowner, in a notice in the West Briton, against people cutting turf. These rights were not always denied; in July 1812, some 32 acres at St Just were advertised in the West Briton to let in lots for terms of 99 years, determinable by the deaths of three lives of the purchaser's nomination. Each lot carried the entitlement of cutting and carrying home 3,100 turfs from Bartinney Down.

In 1822, Bond, in his *Topographical and Historic Sketches of the Boroughs of East and West Looe*, wrote 'It is much regretted that West Looe Down is not wholly enclosed; the soil is very good, as is apparent from the fine state of the grounds of Polvellan ... The objection raised against this inclosure is, that the poor of West Looe would be deprived of gathering furze and fern for firing. But does not the labour wasted and cloaths [clothes] worn out in gathering this fuel more than counteract the gain? If an inclosure were to be made, in a year or two the hedges would produce greater quantity and more substantial fuel than can now be obtained. The Down belongs to the Corporation [of West Looe]; but various tenents of houses and fields claim a right to putting what is called Breaths [cattle], some more, some less, to depasture on it. ... The many advantages which would arise to the poor in particular from an inclosure should be considered. Exclusive of the numerous production which would follow, labour would be demanded, hedges must be made, manure procured, land ploughed, corn tilled, cut &c. &c. Milk, potatoes, &c. &c. would be obtained at a much more moderate price than at present; and, no doubt, the poor rate would soon find the benefit of an inclosure. ... Formerly the Corporation used to let out certain parts of this Down for tillage. ... In 1621 that part of West Looe Down which lieth on the West part of the Homer Well, was let to rent, for two crops, at 6s.8d. per acre.'

In the now time-worn way of propounding the 'many advantages' to the poor in robbing them of their commons, Bond was suggesting (optimistically at least, if not hypocritically) that 'in a year or two' the wood that would be got from the field hedges after enclosure would be more than was currently obtained from the scrub on the common; likewise that the improved land would provide employment for the villagers, as well as making food cheaper. No mention was made of the value of the common for the villager's cow, sheep or pigs, while the value for fuel was dismissed with typical frivolity. At the end of the day there was usually no hindrance to enclosure and no redress for the dispossessed.

Some pockets of resistance held out, and in 1847 Wallis was still able to write that 'There is a common [in St Sampson's parish] belonging to Glant [Golant], containing 29<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> acres, where the villagers depasture their cattle, and once a year are all busily engaged in cutting down the ferns, and stacking them for winter fuel.' In about 1904, the wives of the villagers tore down a hedge which had been built by the orders of the Lord of the Manor, Jonathan Rashleigh, enclosing part of the common.

## GEORGE WORGAN

George Worgan, who wrote *Cornish Agriculture*, the most-quoted report of these times, had an interesting background. He sailed as a surgeon on a convict ship, grew vegetables in

Australia, returned to Cornwall and became a schoolmaster in Liskeard. He then went farming at Glynn near Bodmin, where his introduction of new methods failed to pay off, and he finally committed suicide, aged 80. Despite his somewhat doubtful credentials, he was employed by the government in 1811 to report on Cornish agriculture. His report was suspect at the time, being described in the *West of England Magazine* in 1813 as 'in many places extremely quaint and affected'; and in the chapter on livestock, 'there is not much that is intended to any great utility in any respect whatever'. Even so, although sometimes misleading, his views are useful, and are the most complete for those times.

Worgan gave as an example of a typical lease covenant that the tenant was 'not to cut any wood, &c. for fuel, but at the proper seasons; when hedges are cut, properly to plash and cast the same'. He makes no mention of the value of common land for fuel and grazing to the villagers,

being clearly in favour of enclosure of what he calls waste land, even though he states that the principal article of fuel in the western parts of Cornwall is turf and furze, saying 'Though there be no case, till very lately, of enclosure by Act of Parliament in the county; yet there are numerous instances of parcels of land being taken up from the waste, and enclosed with temporary dead fences, for the purpose of securing two or three crops of corn; after which the land is consigned to waste again. However, of late years, some farms have been considerably extended,



*Furze croft (on further slope at right) still surviving near Gweek today.*

by enclosing many acres of waste contiguous thereto, with good substantial stone, or turf fences, for permanent improvement. Charles Rashleigh Esq. of Duporth, has within these few years, enclosed and cultivated a considerable tract of waste land near St Austell, which has been done with great spirit and effect [ie he had high-handedly overcome the villagers' objections]. E. J. Glynn Esq., of Glynn, has also enclosed a large quantity of land for permanent cultivation. Lord Grenville has just obtained an Act of Parliament, for enclosing a very great extent of waste lands in the neighbourhood of Boconnoc.'

Worgan felt that villagers had too much security of tenure, thus impeding improvements and he concluded 'that a general enclosure bill would be a great means of improvement, by removing the difficulties which occur in the division of commons and mixed property, there can be little doubt ... If therefore a man, by enclosing a piece of coarse land adjoining to his estate, adds to his profits, he enriches both himself and his country.' In his report he disputed the villagers' rights to the commons thus: 'The pasturage of the moors, downs, and crofts, as the waste lands in Cornwall are called, generally considered to belong to the tenantry, is the right of some manor or lordships ... The natural pastures consist of the uncultivated lands, which in Cornwall are distinguished by the names of moors, downs, crofts, and wastes. Nature has clothed them with two species of furze; with ferns, heath, and the poorer kinds of grasses ... Cultivated pastures are such as have borne two or three successive crops of corn, with the last of which grass-seeds have been sown: they remain as pastures from two to three, or five years, before they are again broken up for corn ... It has been much the custom of the county to grant leases to the tenants, for a term of ninety-nine years, determinable on the death of the longest liver of three lives, to be named by the taker. Upon the death of one of the lives named in the



lease, it was usual for landlords to consent to the adding a new life to the two remaining.' The premium for a new lease was usually 14-18 years' rent, for renewal of an existing lease 3 years' rent, depending on the estate policy. To pay the premium, often a mortgage was taken out on the lease by the tenant, and an insurance policy on the lives.

## ENCLOSURE MADE EASIER

In an Act dated 1831 the Duchy of Cornwall joined the movement towards the enclosure of commons which enabled the Duchy to grant leases 'for the purpose of improving waste Lands by cultivation or otherwise'. The main impediment for landowners was still that each common had to have its own Act of Parliament, which was cumbersome and expensive. A number of General Inclosure Acts had been passed after the 1801 act, but the landowners still wanted an easier way. In 1845 they at last got parliament to pass another General Act which devolved more authority for enclosing land to local commissioners. The scene was set for the final passing of the old way of life for the rural poor.

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