

SOME LAND AND PRODUCE PRICES IN LATE 18TH CENTURY SUFFOLK

By G. E. FUSSELL, F.R.HIST.S.

Great developments were taking place in East Anglia at the end of the 18th century. Some of these, in that part of East Suffolk round Earl Soham, a village three miles or so west of Framlingham, were recorded by a surgeon who lived in that village. He kept a book of miscellaneous memoranda from 1785 to 1815, but only the first few years are really informative. His name was William Goodwin.

Scattered notes show that a good deal of building was being done both by resident gentry and by newcomers to the county. Estates, too, were changing hands. Lord Archibald Hamilton put his fine estate and manors at Rendlesham, Butley and Leiston on the market in London at a reserve price of £51,400 in June, 1786. Only Leiston was sold: it realised £10,200. No details of the sale are given.

The Manor of Earl Soham itself, the living and two fine farms containing 360 acres, were sold by a lady, Mrs. Boyfield, in July 1787 to John Ayton Esq. Mrs. Boyfield had bought this estate from Lord Hereford's executors and before that it had been owned by the Cottons, but how long before then these transfers were made is not stated. Ayton immediately began improvements and by 1789 a handsome brick house had been erected in place of the Old Lodge at Earl Soham. It still stands.

At the first Court Ayton held at the Falcon, an inn that was the scene of many festivities then and still flourishes, Mr. Harsant Jr. was admitted to Ivy Barn Farm of 28 acres with the buildings for a fine of £56, the holding being copyhold. He had paid the previous tenants about 1,000 guineas for it. The Falcon Inn itself changed hands at about the same time, and the total ingoing was £203.

Goodwin thought prices of agricultural property dropped after the war broke out. Sir Joshua Vanneck sold all his estate at Kenton, some 1,003 acres then under lease for eight years, in 1794. Goodwin felt that the prices realised in London at this sale were adversely affected by the leases as well as by the war, but they would have been reasonable enough just before 1914 and again between 1925 and 1935 when the value of money was altogether lower. Some of them were:—

Kenton Hall Farm, with a large amount of hardwood timber,		£5,800 — £24 per acre.
	<i>acres</i> <i>trees</i>	
Thos. Darby's Farm	144 118	2,880 — 19 " "
Abel Ashford's Farm	103 216	2,080 — 20 " "
Whitman's	184 444	3,390 — 18 " "
Welton's	91 140	1,600 — 17 " "
Fisher's Sudden Hall Farm	234 185	4,350 — 18 " "
<i>Total</i>	998	£20,020 <i>av.</i> £20 " "

The blacksmith's house, shop and orchards, etc. fetched £250.

Five years before this sale the estate of Jonathan Burwood of Woodbridge was dispersed. The prices his two farms realised were:—

Melton Farm	209 acres	£4,210 — £20 per acre.
Aspal Farm	113 "	2,000 — 18 " "
	322	£6,210 <i>av.</i> £19 " "

Goodwin was therefore mistaken about the effect of the war and leases upon the prices of farm land in his neighbourhood if these two sales are any guide.

Besides these two farms Burwood left several town properties in Woodbridge. His mansion house sold for £900 and his boat house, etc., for £730, the Quay realising £1,800. The Tide Mill House brought in £1,000, a Brick Kiln and 19 acres £1,400, a house in New Street £320 and the Coach House and 3 acres £425, so the late Jonathan Burwood must have been an enterprising as well as a rich man.

Building of fine new houses continued. Chaloner Arcedeckne bought Glevering Hall and lands for £10,000. He built a magnificent house on a site commanding an extensive view. The lands and plantations were newly and beautifully laid out, and, in Goodwin's opinion, very much improved that part of the county. Formerly Arcedeckne, who was a High Sheriff of the county, was a strong supporter of Pitt's Ministry. In spite of more than one petition signed by the Duke of Grafton and other gentry begging that the King should change his advisors the High Sheriff steadfastly refused to forward the petition to His Majesty.

At the same time Mr Edward Keer of Cretingham, a few miles south of Earl Soham, built himself a substantial house of red brick on an eminence commanding a beautiful view of the adjacent country. Unfortunately Goodwin does not say what it cost.

These large operations must have been facilitated by the opening of the Woodbridge Bank in June, 1791. It was set up by Francis Brooke, Philip Riches and Cornelius Collet. Their notes could be cashed at Mr. Riches and at Messrs. Thornton, Down and Free's in London. The system of farming practised in Suffolk at that date was mixed farming with some dairying. Wheat and barley were the cash crops. Some beans were sold and some hay. Turnips were bought by the acre for feeding off and carting. Butter and cheese were made for sale and stores were bought in for fattening and making manure. Suffolk horses, sheep and pigs were bred. Some fruit was sold. Goodwin made notes about the prices of all these things, but very irregularly. He was most consistent in recording the prices made by sheep and lambs at Ipswich Fair, though he nowhere mentions sheep-keeping as one of his own activities. He also recorded the prices realised by butter and cheese with some regularity.

Ipswich Fair.

1786	Lambs, (130,000 offered). £5 to £16 per score.
1790	(200,000) £8 to £15.10 per score.
1791	(200,000) £6 to £16.10 per score.
1795	(.....) ¹ 8/- to 10/- each.
1802	(80,000) 12/- to 27/- each.

Earl Soham Fair.

1785	Lambs, £6 to £11 per score.
1786	Lambs, 4/6 to 11/- a head.
1787	Lambs, 4/- to 10/- a head. ewes, 7/- to 8/- each.
1788	Ewes, 8/- to 9/- each. Wethers, 10/- to 11/- each.
1789	Lambs (fewer), 10% higher than 1788.
1790	2,000 sold at high prices.
1801	Lambs, 10/6 to 16/6 each.

Goodwin noticed a tendency for the maximum prices to rise by 1789 and both good breeding and the war had some influence here. Scarcity made prices rise in 1802 at Ipswich, but Lord Bristol's half-bred Leicesters and the best of his Norfolks were the sheep that made a guinea apiece in 1795. Southdowns were in great request. The polled breeds were the favourites in 1802 and these made the high price of 27/-.

The prices show only a modest rise between 1786 and 1796 for butter though flet or skim milk cheese had doubled in that time. Unfortunately the price of flet cheese in 1810 is not stated.

¹ Number not stated.

	<i>Suffolk Butter</i> Price per firkin.	<i>Flet cheese</i> Price per wey.
Feb. 1786	40 to 42/-	
Oct. 1787	30/-	30/-
Oct. 1788	30/-	30/-
Sept. 1789	30/-	26/- to 28/-
Oct. 1790	32/- to 35/-	32/- to 35/-
Oct. 1791	36/- to 39/- Retail 40/-	36/- to 39/- 3d. a lb.
Dec. 1793	Wholesale 40/- to 45/- Pinted butter 10d. at Earl Soham.	40/-
July 1794	Pinted butter 9d. at Earl Soham.	
Dec.	Pinted butter 11d. at Earl Soham.	2½d. a lb.
Nov. 1796	Wholesale 46/- Retail 1/- a pint.	60/- Cheshire Cheese 8d. a lb.
Feb. 1810	Wholesale 70/- to 72/-.	

Wheat fluctuated widely even before the outbreak of war, and often at different seasons of the year. In August 1786 Rivet wheat was selling at 17/6d. and red wheat at 18/6d. a coomb (4 bushels). In May 1790 it fetched 30/- a coomb, but in July £3 a quarter, and after harvest only £2 at the end of October. Five years later it sold at £3.3.0 a coomb in London just before harvest, and newly harvested wheat went off at £2.2.0 a coomb.

Before the 1795 harvest there was a scarcity bordering on famine. Many of the common people were in a starving condition. The previous harvest had been scanty, supplies for the troops had reduced the quantity coming to the market, and the 1795 harvest was late. Conditions were little better after the harvest was in, and a very large body of men and women assembled at Diss in October 1795, complaining of the dearth of provisions and their urgent necessities. The Magistrates acted at once. They called out 'Captain Maynard's Troop of Yeomanry read the Riot Act and dispersed them with fair but empty words.' No mischief of any kind ensued.

Barley which had sold at 12/- a coomb in February 1786 was everywhere being bought a 5/- a bushel in October 1795 to grind and mix with wheat to make bread. Goodwin remarked that the poor were in most shocking distress, absolutely in a starving condition. He thought that some of the scarcity was artificial, caused by the avaricious holding stocks.

Fair but empty words failed to prevent riots in Ipswich, Bury St. Edmunds and other places all over the country from Bristol to Derby. In the two Suffolk towns the mob took away stocks of butter,

cheese, flour, fowls etc. and sold them at their own reduced prices. They had done the same thing at Bury St. Edmunds and Ipswich in January 1795, but then the military were called in. The moneys received were, Goodwin believed, paid punctually to the owners of the goods. More practical action had been taken by the gentlemen of Earl Soham in May 1790 when the price of wheat rose to 30/- a coomb. They got together and subscribed £26. The trustees added £7 and with this money they bought wheat. This stock they sold to the poor of the parish at 5/- a bushel, allowing half a peck a week for the consumption of every individual. The poor took 5 coombs a week and the stock lasted until September, when the harvest was won and the price came down.

Little detail is provided about the crops grown. Tick beans sold for 14/6d. a coomb in October 1785, but, though mentioned elsewhere, nothing is recorded about the price they fetched. No doubt beans were largely consumed by the animals on the farm.

Besides the turnips he grew himself, Goodwin occasionally bought a few acres from neighbouring farmers, either to feed off or to draw. In December 1787 he bought 8 acres for £16, but three years later he had to pay £3.4.0 an acre, and some were then fetching £5.5.0. No explanation is offered for this increase in cost, though the season was poor and scarcity may have made the price go up.

Hay was being sold at Ipswich for £3.10.0 a ton in July 1785, a year of great drought. In July 1786 hay brought only £2. Yields were about 1½ tons an acre. Goodwin recorded also a good many Mark Lane prices, but these are well known and were set down as a matter of interest rather than immediate relevance to his own farming. In July 1794 a ton out of the meadows fetched 50/-, and the crops of peas and tares had been so much destroyed by lice that from 50/- to £3 a coomb was being asked for them. At the end of the year clover seed was very high, 90/- a cwt.

Goodwin went in for feeding stores and therefore made a few notes of prices of livestock, but these are not consistent enough to be tabulated. His comments are not indeed altogether consistent with the figures he supplies. Fat calves were sold readily to the packers for the London market at two guineas each in February 1786. The exact significance of the word 'packer' here is not known to me. Did these people carry the live calf to London in a cart, or did they slaughter the calf and pack the meat to London as speedily as possible in order to sell it fresh?

A cow with a calf by her side was sold by auction at Cretingham for what Goodwin called the enormous price of £9.14.0. in April

1786 though 'she was not the most extraordinary'. In the following October beasts sold freely for high prices at Melton Fair. They came up (from Scotland) in fine condition and sold at about 20% dearer than in 1786. Fifehire runts fetched as much as £14, a price that was a good deal more than the enormous price of the cow. The only other comment upon beast prices was made in July 1791 when fat beef kept a good price of 5/- to 6/- a stone, but lean beasts were 20—25% cheaper than at Bungay Fair. 'The drovers' said Goodwin 'are losing by wholesale, and some are expected to be ruined by consequence of the dry season.'

Goodwin made a few notes of wool prices, but I do not think he kept sheep. Nowhere in his diary does he say anything about buying or selling sheep or wool himself, nor does he make any comment about folding a flock on his turnips or clover. His 'green' crops were always consumed by cattle. In July 1793 wool sold freely for 13d. or 14d. a pound, but at Thetford Wool Fair in 1793 only three flocks were sold and these at 25/- or 26/- a tod instead of 40/-, the previous year's price. The Fair was 'numerously attended', but 'the stagnation of the manufactory in consequence of the war prevented business being done'.

Suffolk was a famous county for apples and Goodwin bought and sold them. On the 27 April 1785 he carried ten sacks of apples to Woodbridge and sold them at 6/- a sack. Five years later in October 1790 he paid 16/- for two sacks of apples, though in September 1788 they had been selling at 6/- down to 2/- a sack. There must have been a glut that year. Hops was another commodity he bought and these varied from 1/- to 3/6d. a pound at different times. Occasionally they were scarce and he had some difficulty in buying a supply.

Because of the war the price of meat rose during the period of these notes. In June 1786 fat beef was 5/- a stone, mutton 5d. a pound, fowls about 4½d. a pound, pork 4d. Eggs were cheap at seven for 2d. By January 1797 beef had risen to 7d. and 8d. a pound and mutton and pork to the same price. Veal was 10½d. and supplies were the scarcest that Goodwin had ever known.

Wages at Earl Soham in 1790 were:—Bailiff £20 to £30 a year. Chief husbandman £9 to £12. Second £5 to £6. Dairymaid £3 to £4, Reaper in Harvest 1/6d. a day and board. A good man got a shilling a day and beer from Michaelmas to Lady Day, from then to mowing 1/2d. and beer. After that until harvest was over he was paid 1/6d. and beer. Mowing an acre of grass or clover earned 1/6d. and shearing an acre of wheat 5/- or 6/-.

Finally, the method adopted for assessing his income, for the purpose of Pitt's execrated Income Tax, was:—

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' For a farm of my Own, occupy'd by Myself.

<i>Deductions</i>		<i>Rent</i>	
Land Tax	£20.0.0	Land Tax	£200.5.0
Quit rents	2.0.0	All parish rates	30.0.0
Repairs, 8% on annual value	17.8.0	Tythes	40.0.0
Assessed taxes for last year, not Treble assess.	8.8.0		<hr/>
	<hr/>		290.0.0
	47.16.0	Deduct 1/4	<hr/>
			72.10.0
		Annual value	54.12.0
		Annual neat rent	<hr/>
			200.0.0
		Income	254.12.6
		Deductions	<hr/>
			47.16.0
		Taxable income	<hr/>
			206.16.0

If you receive or pay interest it must be added or deducted.'

Though these notes of prices and sales are not sufficient to enable a calculation of Goodwin's profits or losses to be made, if his farm income did, in fact, equal his taxable income, or was greater, then he was a well-to-do man. Many a small squire had no more, but Goodwin had two other sources of income, his medical practice and a partnership in a wine merchants at Woodbridge.