

DROVERS, CATTLE AND DUNG: THE LONG TRAIL FROM SCOTLAND TO LONDON

by CYNTHIA BROWN

‘Persons unacquainted with country affairs are apt to associate everything that is rustic and even vulgar with the vocation of a drover; but there was never a greater mistake.’¹

The annual show of Scottish and other beasts at Melton, Suffolk, in 1818 began on Wednesday 21 October. The cattle were in the finest condition and, although the prices were extremely high – four shillings, six shillings and as high as seven shillings a stone obtained for the short-horned breed – some of the largest droves of Messrs Armstrong and Jollie [*sic*] were nearly cleared the first day, possibly due to the large number of graziers and farmers who came from ‘distant parts’ (*I.J.*, 24 October 1818).

The Scottish cattle were nearing the end of their travels. Many of them, after fattening over the winter, would be driven to London and their final destination, Smithfield Market and the wholesale butcher. In January, Suffolk drovers placed notices in the local press advertising where they would be collecting stock. William Whitten, drover of Uggeshall, intended

drawing in Beasts and Sheep for Smithfield Market on Thursday the 21st inst. at Oulton Blue Boar, and Rushmere Hall by one o’clock the same day; and at his own house that night; at Yoxford, on Friday by one o’clock, Benhall Horse and Groom that night; at Ufford Crown, on Saturday by one o’clock; at Martlesham Lion that night, and so to continue every fortnight during the season (*I.J.*, 16 January 1819).

Smithfield Market was held weekly on Mondays and Fridays; Whitten would have been aiming for the Friday market. James Howlett of Brome, a drover and salesman, took a more westerly route to include Bury St Edmunds. He ‘respectfully’ informed the ‘Gentlemen Graziers, and Dealers in Cattle, and others’, that he intended taking in stock for Smithfield Market every week during the season at the ‘Bell’ inn, Wortwell, the ‘Cardinal’s Cap’, Harleston, the ‘Greyhound’ at Brockdish ‘etc.’ on Mondays; the ‘Swan’ at Brome, the ‘Dolphin’ at Wortham, the ‘Crown’ at Botesdale, the ‘Marlborough’s Head’ at Hepworth ‘etc.’ on Tuesdays; and the ‘Woolpack’, Pakenham, the ‘Ram’ at Bury St Edmunds, and the ‘Greyhound’ at Cockfield ‘etc.’ on Wednesdays. A postscript to his advertisement assured ‘those gentlemen who may be pleased to confer their favours’ on him that every attention would be paid to their stock, and every care taken ‘to obtain the best price the market will afford to the benefit of his employers’ (*I.J.*, 2 January 1819). The advertisement ends ‘Please to direct, 60 West Smithfield, London’, which suggests that he was commissioned by a Smithfield salesman.

In Norfolk ‘the season’ began at Candlemas, 2 February. One drover made weekly journeys during February and March, twice weekly during April, May and June, with possibly one or two journeys in August and September (Marshall 1795, II). The season appears to have been approximately the same in Suffolk.

The economy was balanced between the Scottish cattle breeder and the East Anglian farmer. The former, until improved methods of farming were developed in the early 19th century, was unable to bring his cattle to a condition suitable for a wholesale butcher; the Suffolk farmer, on the other hand, was within reach of the London markets, and had grazing, straw and, later, root crops, enabling him to fatten and finish the beasts; the resulting manure provided a valuable by-product. The young Frenchman, François de la Rochefoucauld, when he visited Suffolk in 1784, commented that he thought the consumption of meat in England was greater than in any other

country (Scarfe 1988, 152). However, there had not always been such a vast consumption of meat. In the later Middle Ages the diet of the aristocracy consisted of fish and meat in almost equal proportions; fish was served on Fridays, Saturdays and Wednesdays, on the vigils of major feast days and on six days a week in Lent (Dyer 1989, 58). The cattle were fed on grass or straw, and the benefits of improving the grazing with different species had yet to be discovered. It was not until after the Civil War that great changes took place in agriculture when returning exiles brought back Flemish methods of farming, especially in the use of fodder crops such as clover and turnips. Daniel Defoe in his *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* relates that east Suffolk was remarkable for being the first district in England where the feeding and fattening of both sheep and black cattle with turnips was practised; it improved the land and increased the numbers of fat cattle. On either side of the river Waveney, around Halesworth, Debenham, Eye and Saxmundham the country was used for this purpose. By the end of the 18th century there were many different ways of fattening, as instanced by Arthur Young (Young 1771, II). Beasts could be bought in the summer and turned first on to stubble and then on to turnips in the field. Another method, considered the most profitable, was to buy larger cattle to eat the after-grass (the grass that grows after the first crop has been mown), and afterwards to keep them in open yards where they were fed on a mixture of turnips or other roots mixed with chaff and given plenty of good litter – three wagon loads of straw, stubble or fern to every beast – which the cattle converted into dung for carting to the fields. It took approximately twenty-five weeks to fatten and finish a beast.

In the lawless days of Scotland, cattle were the main source of a man's wealth, obtained either by raiding or trading, and were being driven to England as early as the 15th century. The beasts were small and thrived on the hills, moorland and the intemperate climate which no doubt conditioned them for the long drives to the English markets. Continuing on his tour, Defoe noted that in the South West of Scotland the gentlemen took their rents in cattle. Some of them acquired such large numbers that they took their own droves to England; a Galloway nobleman would often send upwards of 4,000 head of black cattle a year. In the North of Scotland he found that the people lived dispersed among the hills. They hunted, chiefly for food and, again, bred large quantities of black cattle with which they paid their rent to the Laird. These cattle, which came from the remotest parts, were driven south, 'especially into the countries of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex'.

Bullocks under four years old did not fatten well, so they were commonly driven south at the age of four or five. Several thousand beasts were brought down in May to be sold for fattening on the marshes, Bungay being one of the principal markets (*E.A.M.*, 1955, 34). Purchasers could take advantage of advertisements such as the following:

Joist² cattle will be taken on to Beccles Fen from 12 May next to Christmas following at 10/- each, the money to be paid at the time of turning on . . . to apply to Mr. Owen Holmes of Beccles, Portreeve of the said Fen, by whom a person will be appointed to take proper care of them (*I.J.*, 25 April 1761).

By an agreement between the lord of the manor of Halesworth and 'the County Gentlemen, and Graziers, and Drovers of North Britain, and the North Part of Great Britain', the last market day in Halesworth in May, from 1710 or earlier, was annually supplied with lean cattle.³ Similarly in Woodbridge, 'on the last Wednesday in May next, being the 25th day of the month, and so annually on the last Wednesday in May thence following, there will be a Bullock Market . . . with all proper accommodation for Drovers and their cattle' (*I.J.*, 9–16 April 1726).

The burial of two Scottish drovers in Thrandeston – William Brown on 6 February 1682 and John Deek on 21 November 1688 – provides evidence of the traffic in cattle from Scotland to Suffolk in the 17th century.⁴ The term 'drover' covered a wide range of men, from the cattle dealer who turned over thousands of pounds a year to the hired hand who helped to drive the beasts.

In the year 1663, the number of beasts passing through, and paying toll at, Carlisle had

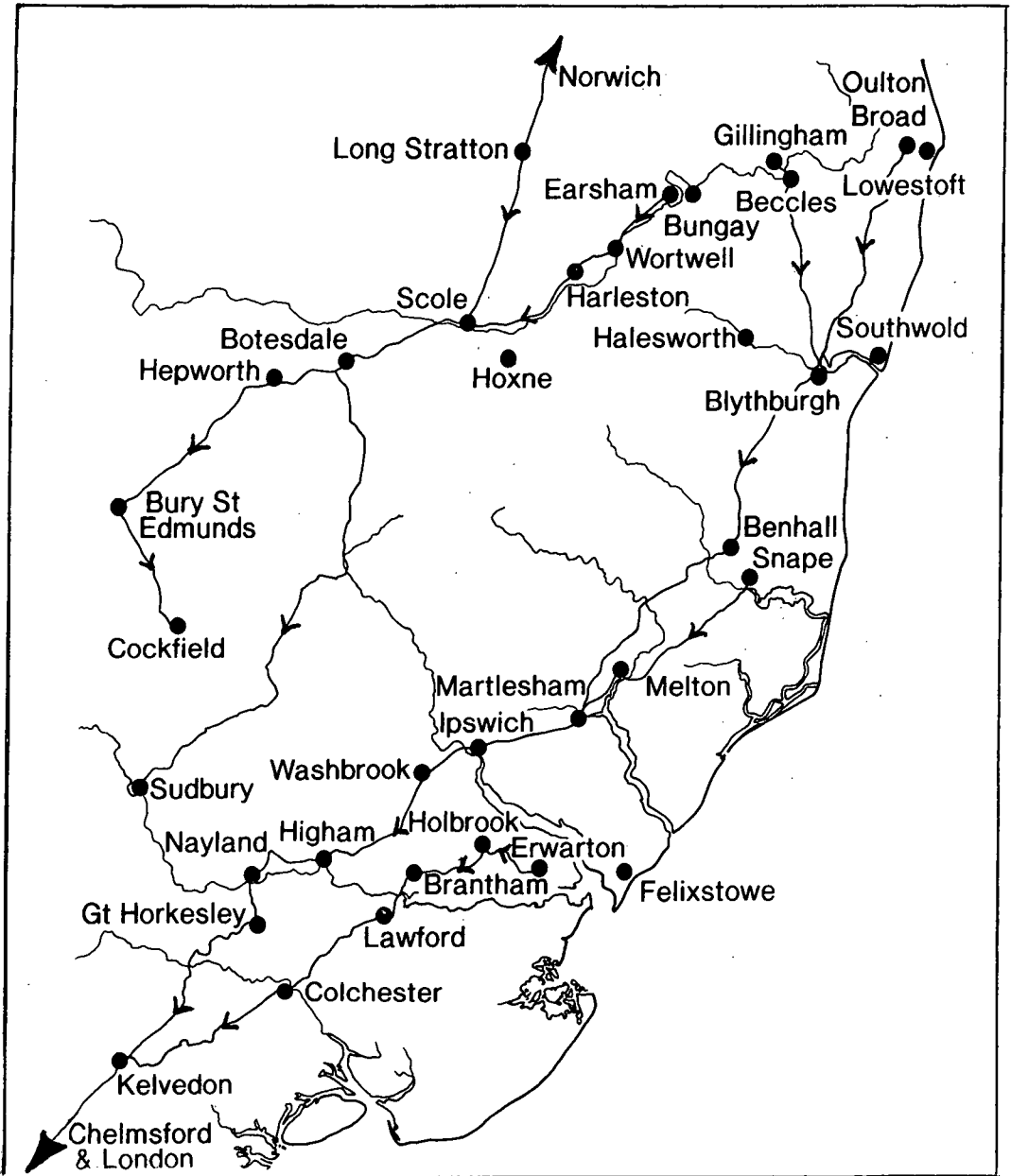


FIG. 93 – The drovers' collecting routes for taking beasts to the London markets (drawn by Sue Holden).

reached 18,574. From Carlisle, the path to East Anglia lay across the Pennines to what is now the Great North Road, turning eastwards south of the Wash. In the autumn, when the industry was at its peak, the roads south were thronged with cattle: 2,000 a day passed through Boroughbridge and there were many times when from dawn to sunset Wetherby was never free from beasts. The route chosen depended on the decision of the topsman, the head drover. If the weather had been wet the rivers might be impassable; if dry, certain paths would be devoid of wayside grazing. A drove would consist of 200 or more beasts with one man to every fifty or sixty cattle. They went

at a steady pace, averaging twelve to fifteen miles a day. The topsman, usually the only man mounted, would ride ahead to warn oncoming traffic and secure overnight pasture for the beasts and shelter for the men. If neither was available they slept in their plaids alongside the cattle. The men reputedly often travelled barefoot and carried their own food, a mixture of oatmeal and water called 'crowdie', in a leather bag. In the early 19th century they received between three and four shillings a day, twice that of a farm labourer, and ten shillings for the return journey. They had to pay their own expenses – nine pence a night for lodgings in the winter and five pence in the summer (Friar 1991, 118).

All export and import dues on cattle from Scotland and England were abolished in 1669, and in 1680 a commission was formed to encourage the trade between the two countries. By the time of the Union of 1707 it was estimated that Scotland was sending 30,000 head of cattle a year across the border. The most common breeds were Galloways, Fifeshire Runts and West Highlanders, Kyloes from Skye and the Western Isles and, in later years, a growing number of Irish which were brought into Galloway through Portpatrick. Although the import of Irish cattle was prohibited between 1683 and 1765 some continued to arrive. There was a sharp increase in 1784, when 18,301 were shipped across.

The farmers in the Highlands and Islands needed to reduce their stock in the autumn owing to the difficulties of winter feeding. Dealers would visit the Highlands to attend the local markets, and notices would be posted on church doors informing the farmers when they would be in the district so that cattle could be brought from the glens. Skye was a gathering point for cattle from North and South Uist and Harris, from where they would be ferried to the mainland. The business revolved on credit: a price was agreed and, if the cattle fetched more within a certain period, the seller received more; but the reverse also applied and farmers suffered many a loss. The cattle might change hands again before reaching Crieff Tryst which, until the middle of the 18th century, was the largest cattle market in Scotland.

Crieff in Perthshire was considered the gateway to the Highlands and convenient to both buyers and sellers. Before the Rising of 1745 the trade had been in the hands of the Scots, but later, English dealers in greater numbers were visiting the Scottish markets and Falkirk, further south, replaced Crieff in importance. The Falkirk Trysts were held in August, September and October and lasted several days. Endless droves arrived from the North, the Eastern Highlands, Argyllshire, Mull and the neighbouring islands, spreading over a large area of the surrounding country which was enlivened by many tents selling refreshments and interspersed with banks for the financial transactions. When an agreement was reached, the tar dishes were brought out and the cattle marked and taken from the field. Small jobbers would send their purchases to a common trysting place where they were consigned to a drover who collected cattle from several grazings. The topsman could, without scruple, reject any beast he considered unfit for travel, as his remuneration was a small sum per head for every beast safely delivered to a market. These men were entrusted with the management of other people's property worth thousands of pounds. By an Act of Parliament of 1562 (5 Elizabeth, cap. 12: Pickering 1763, 195–98), drovers were registered: they had to be married householders and at least thirty years old. This was obligatory until 1772. They came to enjoy a professional reputation which enabled them to assume the role of travelling bankers. It is probable that only the topsman was required to register.

The Galloways were bred in the South West districts of Scotland, and were popular in Norfolk and Suffolk as they were easily fattened. A similar pattern of sale occurred: a number of local cattle markets, a large weekly market and three autumn markets on the Whitesands of Dumfries. The droves for England from both Dumfries and Falkirk passed through Carlisle. The cattle were shod for the journey and accounts vary as to whether the shoes were fitted at the outset of the drive or when rough roads were reached. The 'cues' were made of thin, crescent-shaped metal plates and, to be fully shod, a beast needed two to a hoof, but often only the outer hoof was covered. To accomplish the operation, its front and back legs were tied together and the animal thrown on its back. An experienced man could shoe seventy beasts a day.

The largest droves went to St Faith's Fair north of Norwich, which commenced on 17 October, and Hempton Fair near Fakenham on 22 November. The St Faith's droves left Dumfriesshire on 14 September, the 340 miles taking twenty-eight days, approximately twelve miles a day. On reaching St Faith's each drover hired a field for his beasts, the farmer having kept 'a full bite of grass' for the purpose. The majority of the beasts were Galloway bullocks, four to five years old, mainly black or brindled, some dun and a few red. Before bringing all his cattle to show, the drover would assess the demand and likely price. If sales continued he might stay a fortnight (Marshall 1795, II, 50–52) before moving unsold stock to another market.

There were several autumn fairs in Suffolk specifically for Scottish cattle: Woolpit on 16 September and Bungay on 25 September, both before St Faith's. Melton Fair began on the Wednesday nearest 20 October, Halesworth Fair started on 29 October unless it fell at the weekend, while Hoxne Fair took place during the whole of December. Farmers with fields conveniently placed could reap the advantage as the following advertisement illustrates:

To Drovers, Graziers and others. 23 acres of remarkable good rawings⁵ to be sold, well fenced, in agreeable shifts, with 13 acres of stubbles, for lodging of cattle in the night. Also several tons of well-made hard land hay. Enquiries at Brundish Hall, Brundish in the centre of Halesworth, Harleston and Hoxne, being 8 miles from each (*IJ.*, 11 November 1786).

The drovers were fortunate if they sold all their cattle. After the 1756 December fair in Hoxne the 'Gentlemen Drovers' advertised in the *Ipswich Journal* of 1 January 1757

that there are still great numbers of both Scotch and English cattle to be sold there; and also that they propose staying 8 or 10 days longer there; and if at that time no graziers come, they propose moving from that place; and, further, any who have proper keeping, or can take any Scots a wintering, let them send their proposals to Mr. Roper's House, at the Fair Stand-Place of Hoxne, and there shall be treated with upon the subject by the drovers, and any who want to buy, may depend upon it Scots will be sold upon easier terms than they were at any time this season before.

In January 1761 there were 600 bullocks unsold consisting of Galloways, steers and Irish in five different hands (*IJ.*, 10 January 1761), while the following year there were more than 1,000, of which 400 had recently arrived. On this occasion the five different hands were named: John Graham, John Sevon, John Armstrong, Walter Grieve and Reginald Atkinson (*IJ.*, 2 January 1762). The Armstrongs were Yorkshire dealers who bought at Falkirk. Their credit was unlimited and they paid with their own private bills. They would leave home with only enough money to cover their expenses, and return with thousands of pounds. For example, they would buy a lot of cattle for, say £860, give their acceptance for £1,000, and get the balance from the seller, thus increasing their capital as they went. They eventually went bankrupt and paid three shillings in the pound to their creditors (McCombie 1867, 69).

It is unclear for how many years there had been a December fair for Scottish cattle in Hoxne before it was transferred to Harleston, Norfolk, in 1780. About the same year Woodbridge Bullock Fair was moved to Melton: both moves may have been caused by a need for more space, owing to the increased demand for beef. The industrial towns were mushrooming and the Navy Victualling Office was buying enormous quantities of beef for salting. The main salting season was from the end of September to the end of March. In 1794 the Victualling Board paid £18,000 for the supply of beef for the ships lying in the Thames. It can be no surprise to find that the droving industry reached its peak during the Napoleonic wars.

Inevitably misfortunes occurred. The drovers Benjamin Bell and his son Thomas farmed near Canobie in Dumfriesshire and took droves to East Anglian fairs, principally Braintree in Essex and Hoxne in Suffolk. They left home in mid October 1746 with a drove which

contained 500 particularly good beasts which Thomas had bought for £1,449 after bargaining for twenty-four hours. On reaching Hoxne in December they met with disaster. Thomas wrote to their backer on Christmas Day to say that the distemper raged in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex and there was no way for them to escape. The cattle were dying at an alarming rate, and one hand at Hoxne had already lost 300. Of their own 2,481 beasts, thirty-seven had died in the last two days. An Act of Parliament had been passed which obliged them to insure any cattle sold; they had sold forty beasts to a Mr Wilson of Colchester for £150 and had heard that they were all dead. On 7 January Thomas wrote again saying that he had found twenty-nine dead in one pasture, worth £5 a head, and twenty-five in other pastures; the rest were all infected. They were expected to dig pits and bury the infected beasts within three hours. The Bells had more than £1,000 in charges to pay in Suffolk, and no money. Benjamin aged sixty-six, had been to Essex and found their droves there in similar trouble. He added that they would be home by Candlemas and people could do what they would with them (Reid 1942, 6-11). It is good to learn that the Bells' fortunes recovered during the ensuing years.

Although the distemper kept re-appearing in Suffolk villages until 1757, the Scottish cattle continued to travel down. At Hoxne in December 1755 the inspectors reported that the great numbers of cattle at the fair were entirely free from the disease and had so been since they came to the area at the beginning of the month (*I.J.*, 27 December 1755).

In June or July 1766 there was an increased demand for Scottish beasts owing to a shortage resulting from the series of cattle plagues. Many of the English dealers went to Scotland for the first time and bought direct, depriving Scottish drovers of custom; this deprivation of trade stimulated a number of 'drovers' to become dealers in their own right. There developed a class of professional cattle dealer, referred to as 'drover', whose reputation for honesty and fair-dealing became recognized throughout the country. They were highly organized, hard-headed businessmen who rode thousands of miles to cattle markets; they therefore needed a stud of horses, and rented thousands of acres of grazing. Many of them dealt with the English markets and sent their own droves south, where they employed a salesman or used the services of another firm. These droves would start travelling down in January, February and March, when the usual venues were either the 'Pie' [Magpie] or the 'Cardinal's Cap' [or 'Hat'], both at Harleston, with Handford Hall, Ipswich, further south. George Campbell was one of the first men to sell in this manner; his notice in the *Ipswich Journal* for 2 January 1779 advised the gentlemen, farmers and graziers in Norfolk and Suffolk that he had on the road, on its way to Harleston and Hoxne, 'a capital drove of Galloway Scots and heifers which he is determined to sell upon the most reasonable terms at the above places'. The date of sale was to appear in a future issue. The advertisement was repeated in the editions of 9, 16 and 23 January. On 30 January a further notice announced that the sale would begin on the following Monday (1 February) and continue until all the cattle were sold. The first three days' sale would be at Harleston, the next three at Hoxne, 'and to change alternately'. The drove was said to be 'very capital' and would be 'sold cheap'.

The sale was evidently successful, for Campbell inserted a further notice on 20 February, intimating that he would be at Harleston with yet another capital drove by the end of March. The length of time the previous drove had been 'on the road' had evidently caused comment, for a postscript expressed the hope that 'his friends will not pay any regard to such idle reports as were spread before, purporting that he would not come etc.'. In March Campbell had upon the road 'the finest sized and largest drove of Galloways ever brought into Norfolk'. For the convenience of the gentlemen of the upper part of the county, the beasts would remain for two days (28 and 29 March) at Downham, and then proceed to Harleston, where the sale would begin on 5 April and continue for three days. The next three days' sale would take place at Hoxne, and the remainder at Harleston (*I.J.*, 27 March 1779).

Campbell's journeys emphasise the organization required of the drovers, who had to work to a

tight schedule to arrive at their destination on time. January, February and March were not the best months to be travelling on foot from Scotland to England. Grazing would have been at a premium, while paths could be water-logged, frozen, or obliterated by snow. Overnight stops with fodder had to be reached and occasionally the weather did defeat them. James Campbell, possibly a relative of the previous George, intended selling a capital drove at the 'Pye' inn, Harleston, on Wednesday 15 January 1794 which he advertised in the *Ipswich Journal* on 4 January. A week later a further notice informed the graziers that 'owing to the badness of the roads' the drove would be a day late and shown on 16 January.

A speculative assumption is that salesmen in Suffolk bearing the same patronym as Scottish dealers may have been related. For example, the Smiths were a well known firm from Jarbruck, Dumfriesshire, who kept cows for breeding, chiefly Galloways and a few Ayrshires. They bought two year old Galloway and West Highland bullocks at the October Falkirk Tryst and after grazing them for a year sent them south, principally to Barnet Fair. In February 1794 a William Smith was selling a capital drove of Galloway Scots and heifers and a few Irish bullocks at the 'Pye' inn at Harleston (*I.J.*, 1 February 1794), but on 10 January 1803 a drove of Galloway bullocks and heifers, the property of Messrs Smith, was sold at the 'Cardinal's Cap' inn, Harleston by Robert Hastings (*I.J.*, 8 January 1803). In 1812 Robert Hastings had a capital drove of Galloway bullocks, heifers and West Highlanders under his own name at the Fair Stand, Bungay (*I.J.*, 23 May 1812). William Smith was selling weekly at the 'Pye' inn at Harleston in January 1808: a capital good drove of Galloway bullocks, heifers and West Highlanders and Irish oxen on 11 January (*I.J.*, 9 January 1808), a capital good fresh drove of Galloway bullocks and heifers on 19 January (*I.J.*, 16 January 1808), a capital good fresh drove of Galloway bullocks and heifers on 25 January (*I.J.*, 23 January 1808) and a fresh drove of Galloway bullocks and heifers on 1 February (*I.J.*, 30 January 1808). There is little doubt that William Smith was employed as the salesman for Messrs. Smith and that Robert Hastings was acting for him on 10 January 1803.

Robert Hope, a competitor of the Smiths, came from Glenlee near New Galloway. He rented farms to the extent of £2,000 to £3,000 annually and his transactions in cattle, in one year alone, amounted to £300,000. There are advertisements for a James Hope selling a considerable number of droves at the 'Cardinal's Hat' at Harleston from 1810, and in May 1812 he had Galloway bullocks and heifers on his stand at Ditchingham (*I.J.*, 23 May). In 1819 a similar drove, 'the property of Mr Hope', was sold by Donald McPherson at the 'Cardinal's Hat' (*I.J.*, 6 February), while McPherson was selling his own capital drove in the December of that year (*I.J.*, 4 December). For many years James Hope continued to sell at Harleston; in 1828 he had droves at the 'Cardinal's Hat' on 22 January, 12 February, 25 February and 3 March, and yet another in May, and was a participant in the Melton fairs. The frequency of droves arriving in the winter reflects the improving agriculture and suggests that local agents were reporting to Scotland how much feed the farmers had left and the possible demand for stock if beasts were sent down.

Another name of note attending Melton Fair was William McTurk, possibly a relative of Robert McTurk who, in his day, was a dealer of consequence. A bystander recalled seeing one of his droves, numbering seventy-five score of Galloways, passing through Carlisle on its way to Norfolk. McTurk would buy between one and two thousand large cattle at Falkirk, sweeping the fair of the best lots before the other dealers had made up their minds to begin. He was a stout man with a calm, composed demeanour, who would sit on his pony and buy seventy score without even dismounting. He rented large grazings in Dumfriesshire, where he wintered his highlanders ready for the southern markets.

With a workforce of one man to fifty or sixty beasts there could be a number of Scotsmen at the fairs and sometimes tempers flared; a violent fight took place between the Scotsmen and the locals at the 'Bell' in Hempton, Norfolk, in August 1791. Several people were injured, two seriously. The drovers then broke into a neighbouring public house where they attacked people and swore they would defend themselves against the Civil powers to the last drop of their blood. The next morning Lord Townshend armed his servants and tenants, surrounded the house and

ordered them to surrender. The few who refused broke through the roof as evening approached and were caught nearby.⁶

A magnificent display of the best black cattle, North-Country Shorthorns and Welsh Runts was to be seen at the large autumn fairs in East Anglia. In the days leading up to the commencement, the roads from the North were crammed with endless droves which spread over many acres of the fairfields at Melton and Woolpit. Graziers in their hundreds came from all quarters of the country to buy stock for the winter.⁷ The Melton Fair lasted three days and was held on land adjacent to an inn. The innkeeper advertised the date of the fair and gave the time at which lunch would be served, when he would be pleased to see the graziers, farmers and others. In 1759, when the fair still took place in Woodbridge, it was held in a field between the 'Green Man' in Melton and the 'Sun' in Woodbridge (*I.J.*, 11 October 1759), while the next year it was in a field belonging to Mr Flat near the 'Cherry Tree' in Woodbridge (*I.J.*, 18 October 1760). But in 1762, 'the Bullock Shew that used to be kept at Woodbridge for Scotch and English beasts' was held in the fields by the sign of the 'Green Man', Melton. The landlord, Isaac Good, promised that all the gentlemen who favoured him with their company would meet with a hearty welcome; dinner would be served at 1 o'clock (*I.J.*, 16 October 1762). The fair continued at the 'Green Man' until 1780, when the inn was advertised to be let with its barn, stables, orchard, gardens and 16 acres of land (*I.J.*, 24 July 1780). The fair had moved to fields near the 'Coach and Horses' at Melton by 1789, and was sometimes advertised in conjunction with the 'Horse and Groom', where the innkeeper advertised that he would provide sustenance for both man and beast. The fair continued until the 1860s, its declining years matching those of the end of the droving era.

There was an art to selling lean cattle and a lot could be gained by choosing a favourable stand. The cattle looked best on a gentle slope with a minimum of forty beasts, especially the polled variety which stood closer together. Sixty were better and eighty better still. Ten beasts, matched for quality, would be segregated in one corner in the hope of persuading a grazier to buy all ten, in which case a discount would be given. The grazier had to know at a glance how much a beast would improve on good, bad or indifferent land as well as on turnips, in three, six or twelve months.

The success of the Melton Fair depended on when the Essex graziers made their purchases and how much they paid. In 1816 some of the droves were entirely cleared by the Essex and Norfolk graziers on the second day; prices were lower than the previous year, averaging four shillings and sixpence a stone (*I.J.*, 12 October 1816). The following year the show was large and more business carried out; beasts of fifty stone were fetching between eleven and twelve guineas, an average of five shillings a stone (*I.J.*, 25 October 1811). In 1819 there were more than 6,000 head of cattle. Again, few were disposed of until the second day, when some were purchased from 'Essex and other distant parts' (*I.J.*, 23 October 1819). In 1826, however, the show was again large, with about 8,000 cattle, but little business was done on the first day because the drovers were unwilling to submit to lower prices. Many graziers from Essex and further afield held off and went home empty handed (*I.J.*, 21 October 1826).

The Scotsmen did not have the prerogative of the fair at Melton. Besides the Armstrongs from Yorkshire, Suffolk was represented by John Jolly and William Long. John Jolly of Wortham (1778–1857), 'who united the trades of jobber, butcher and farmer and whose family were remarkable for being good looking' (Fletcher 1977, 103), had been in the business since the early 1800s. Besides showing at Melton he is mentioned as selling a good drove of West Highlanders at Handford Hall, Ipswich, belonging to Thomas and James Armstrong, the Yorkshire firm, in November 1803 (*I.J.*, 5 November 1803). Again at Handford Hall he showed Durham bred short-horned oxen in November 1819 (*I.J.*, 6 November 1819), Runts, West Highlanders and short-horned beasts in December 1825 (*I.J.*, 3 December), and polled Fifeshire and Aberdeenshire Runts in November 1828 (*I.J.*, 22 November).

William Long of Hasketon (1790–1831) began his career as a drover, drawing in beasts and sheep for Smithfield in 1825 with a route starting from the ‘Queen’s Head’ at Dennington (*I.J.*, 1 January 1825), and by September 1828 he was including pigs (*I.J.*, 2 September). Two months later, on 5 November, he was selling a capital drove of short-horned beasts from Yarm, North Yorkshire, in a field near the Market Hill in Woodbridge (*I.J.*, 1 November 1828), and on 18 November he had a good drove of polled or hornless Runts and Highlanders on the Fairfield at Melton (*I.J.*, 15 November 1828). At the end of the year he disposed of his Smithfield business to William Tye of Hasketon (*I.J.*, 6 December 1828). At the Melton Fair in 1829 William Long showed an exceedingly fine stand of Galloway and Highland Scots, which were considered the best in the fair (*I.J.*, 24 October 1829). He had earned a high reputation and his droves continued to receive very favourable comments. On 5 November 1830 he was selling a superior drove of short-horned beasts from Yarm at Handford Hall (*I.J.*, 30 October 1830); it is probable that these beasts had been bought at the Yarm annual fair on 19 October, travelling down to Suffolk via the Hambleton Drove. Yarm, situated at the head of the Vale of York in a bend of the river Tees, had a cattle market every Thursday and an annual fair for short-horned cattle on 19 October, one of the largest in the North of England.

The Teeswater breed of cattle was claimed to be the true Yorkshire short-horn. It became popular towards the end of the 18th century because of its value to both grazier and butcher; the bone, neck and head of the animal were fine, and it had a full chine, a broad loin, and a carcass which was large and well-fashioned. It was considered superior to the breed common in the Vale, which was ‘more active, more athletic, and fitter for the yoke or harness’. The fashionable horn on the banks of the Tees was a ‘clubbed down-hanging horn as if, in forming it, a dash of Craven blood had been thrown in’ (Marshall 1796, II, 178–79). Only William Long is mentioned as selling cattle from Yarm. He died in 1831 at the age of forty-one, ‘greatly respected [and] well known far and near as an eminent cattle dealer’ (*I.J.*, 10 December 1831).

The summer weather influenced the prices at the fairs; if there had been plenty of rain, producing abundant feed, the drovers could bring their cattle to, or keep them from the market as they thought fit. At Melton in 1829 there was a good supply of beasts in fine condition but trade was exceedingly dull because, it was thought, the swede and turnip crops were likely to be poor owing to the very unfavourable season (*I.J.*, 24 October 1829). By comparison, there had evidently been good weather in 1787; William Goodwin, surgeon, farmer and diarist of Earl Soham, noted on 15 December that he had ‘bought eight acres of good turnips to be drawn for twelve beasts in a warm yard well littered, £16 . . . sent seven Highlanders to be killed at London’. On 10 July 1791 Goodwin recorded: ‘a very sharp drought has prevailed this summer, little rain having fallen since beginning of May which has shortened our mowing grasses and made feed and water very low indeed The drovers are losing by wholesale and some are expected to be ruined in consequence of the dry season’.⁸

The high price of corn during the French wars had induced many farmers to plough their pasture, a practice much deprecated by Arthur Young, who thought that if the land was not re-sown with grass it was perpetually impoverished. The best grass land could be let for more than good arable and made a better profit. He considered 50 per cent arable and 50 per cent grass to be the most economical method of farming but only a farm of reasonable size could manage this percentage (Young 1768, 157). A man with only a few acres could not afford to buy cattle, but needed manure. A jobber, or dealer, would ‘sell’ cattle at an agreed price to the farmer, who would ‘sell’ them back when fattened, receiving the difference between the two prices.

New methods of farming improved the feeding of stock and encouraged the study of scientific breeding; the average weight of cattle and sheep sold at Smithfield doubled between 1710 and 1795 (Trevelyan 1945, 378; Stratton 1978, *sub* 1710 and 1795). Stock fattened in Suffolk went either to London or to the local butchers, and local demand in east Suffolk would have increased dramatically with the military stationed at Ipswich and Woodbridge during the Napoleonic wars.

The advertisements for the times and places for drawing in the stock for Smithfield invariably began with the drover thanking the graziers, gentlemen farmers, jobbers and friends for past favours and the hope that he would continue to merit their future custom. When each beast had had the owner's mark clipped from its coat, preparations for the journey (approximately a week from central Suffolk) were complete. The East Anglian drover, like his Scottish counterpart, had to be a man of integrity, financing the overheads of the journey and returning with his clients' profit in cash or short-date bills on a local bank, which he would dispense on settlement day.

A typical settlement day is described by William Marshall at the 'Angel' inn at Walsham, Norfolk in 1780. There was a roomful of graziers who had sent bullocks to Smithfield the previous week. The weekly journey was made alternately by the drover, J. Smith of Erpingham, and his servant. Smith sat with each man's account and a pair of saddle bags with money and bills lying on the table before him. A farmer would sit at his elbow, examine the salesman's account, receive his money, drink a glass or two of liquor, throw down sixpence towards the reckoning and return to the market. For many years the expenses were 7s. 1½d. for each beast. The drover on this occasion charged 3½d. for taking each beast. The cattle fetched an average of £12 10s. each. 'What a trust, no security but his honesty' (Marshall 1795, II, 267). Thomas Davey and William Collins of Diss in Norfolk, however, were charging 4s. a head, although their advertisement does not say whether this included expenses. They sent their bills of sale after every market day and the sum due was paid at the 'King's Head', Diss, on alternate Fridays (*I.J.*, 1 January 1780). William Collins was the name of one of the larger Smithfield salesmen, a number of whom had East Anglian interests.⁹ Arthur Young advised small farmers to sell to a local butcher in whom they had confidence, rather than risk the considerable hazards of consigning their beasts to Smithfield.

The East Anglian droving business was an occupation compatible with that of a prosperous butcher. In 1760 Robert Higham, butcher, of Bramfield in Suffolk advertised that he intended to carry on the business of drover, since Mr Nursy [*sic*] and Mr Milbourn [*sic*] had both died the year before. He had used the road for thirteen years, and hoped to give entire satisfaction to all who would favour him (*I.J.*, 5 January 1760). Alexander Milbourne had been a Southwold butcher,¹⁰ and Henry Nursey a butcher in Halesworth.¹¹

The Churchyard family of Melton were butchers, graziers and drovers. Jonathan, grandfather of Thomas Churchyard (1795–1865), lawyer and artist, was one of the first of the Suffolk 'drovers and salesmen' to advertise his route and drawing-in venues in the local newspaper. In 1793, in conjunction with his son Jonathan, he was collecting stock at the 'Crown' at Snape and the 'Coach and Horses' at Melton on the first day, then at the 'Buck' in Ipswich and the 'Swan' at Washbrook on the second day, the pattern to be repeated fortnightly during the season (*I.J.*, 26 January 1793).

William and Robert Bloss of Framlingham were another family of butchers who advertised as 'drovers and salesmen', taking beasts, sheep and pigs to any salesman their clients favoured at Romford or Smithfield markets during the season. Their route began further north: at the 'Swan' in Wangford, the 'White Hart', Blythburgh and the 'Griffin' in Yoxford on the Tuesday; the 'Horse and Groom', Benhall, the 'Chaise and Pair', Wickham Market, the 'Crown', Ufford, the 'Swan', Framlingham and the 'Horseshoes', Charsfield on the Wednesday; finishing at the 'Royal William' in Ipswich and the 'Swan', Washbrook on the Thursday. Again the pattern was to be repeated fortnightly during the season (*I.J.*, 13 September 1817).

The Smithfield salesmen who sold the beasts for the Suffolk farmers had the monopoly of the London Market. The term 'drover and salesman' in the advertisements in the *Ipswich Journal* implies that the drover was also a butcher, as instanced by the Churchyard and Bloss families, and was willing to buy stock for his own business at the drawing-in.

Daniel Muddock of Woodbridge represents the men whose main occupation was droving,¹² and advertised regularly between 1803 and 1817. In 1803 he collected beasts and sheep for the London markets on Sunday 23 January from the Oulton 'Blue Boar', the Gillingham 'Swan' and

the 'White Hart' at Blythburgh where he arrived the same evening. On Monday evening he reached the 'White Hart' in Saxmundham; on Tuesday, the Martlesham 'Lion'; and on Wednesday the 'Buck' in Ipswich. This was repeated fortnightly during the season (*IJ.*, 12 January 1803). In subsequent years his route commenced at Melton. He was commissioned by Smithfield salesmen; in 1804 he was collecting for Mr Archer, a London salesman, but could deliver to other salesmen if his clients preferred (*IJ.*, 22 December 1804). By 1809 the stock was being taken for Mr Capon, a bullock salesman, and Mr Wallis, a sheep salesman, 'the money to be paid into Woodbridge Bank as usual' (*IJ.*, 4 February 1809). As an added inducement he would 'regularly attend the drove personally' (*IJ.*, 30 December 1815).

If a drover advertised a weekly service he needed additional men to work the alternate weeks. Joseph Stevens, a Beccles drover, took beasts and sheep to Smithfield for the Monday and Friday markets, on Sunday 10 January and Thursday 14 January 1808, 'at the usual times and places every fortnight during the season', and stated that 'J.S. goes with the Friday's Drove' (*IJ.*, 9 January 1808).

Lewis Pitts, a drover and salesman of Sudbury with an address at 60 West Smithfield, pursued an ambitious programme with two long routes, one from Norfolk and one from the Shotley Peninsula, which, if all went well, met at Chelmsford and continued together to Romford and the London markets. Pitts ranks with James Howlett of Brome (also, co-incidentally, with an address at 60 West Smithfield), who took beasts to Smithfield *via* Bury St Edmunds in the January of 1819; they were either Smithfield salesmen in their own right or working in conjunction with one. Pitts's advertisement in the *Ipswich Journal* for 25 September 1819 gave the route of 'the Norfolk and Suffolk Road', and listed the places at which his drove would call weekly during the season. On Saturday evening it would be at the Stratton 'Swan'; at Scole Inn on Sunday; the Botesdale 'Greyhound' on Monday; Bury St Edmunds on Tuesday; Sudbury and Ballingdon on Wednesday; and the 'St Ann's Castle' public house at Great Leighs on Thursday. On Friday it would meet the Essex drove at Chelmsford. This latter drove would begin to draw in at the 'Queen's Head' in Erwarton, and would proceed by way of the Holbrook 'Compasses', the Brantham 'Bull', the 'King's Arms' in Wignall Street, Lawford, and the 'Rose and Crown' in Colchester, arriving at the 'General's Head' in Boreham on Thursday. On Friday the two droves would pass through Chelmsford to the Ingatestone 'Crown', and would stop at regular places on the road to the 'New Globe' at Mile End, where they would arrive on Sunday morning. Pitts's notice assured his employers that 'the most careful drivers' were employed and 'every punctuality observed in forwarding accounts', and concluded with an advertisement for 'a steady man . . . to drive the Norwich Road. No one need apply but can have a good character from his last employer'.

Although the lengthy, converging routes seem to have offered opportunities for endless difficulties, Lewis Pitts evidently succeeded. In 1823, after returning thanks for past favours, he announced that he had 'reduced the selling and Smithfield charges, which he trusts will be found to bear a fair proportion of the long and continued depressed state of agriculture'; he hoped 'by strict attention to the interests of his employers to merit their future favour and support' (*IJ.*, 4 January 1823).

Lewis Pitts mentions arriving at Mile End on a Sunday morning. On the outskirts of London there were 'layers'. These were areas outside the City's jurisdiction where the beasts could be fed, watered and rested before they were collected by the licensed London drovers in the early hours of market day. On this occasion the beasts were going to the Monday market.

A few more clues as to the proceedings near London are given by Serjeant Stow ('Serjeant' was his first name) and Stephen Durrant, drovers who combined two routes in 1816. Stow began at the 'Swan' in Washbrook every Tuesday, continuing to Capel and Higham and reaching Stoke that night; then on to Nayland, Great Horkesley and Kelvedon the next morning. Durrant started from the Stutton 'King's Head', calling at the Brantham 'Bull', Great Wignell Street, and passing through Colchester to join Stow at Kelvedon on the Wednesday. They arrived at

Plaistow, not far from Mile End, on the Saturday, where the stock was

put into good feed, till 3.0 on Monday morning, and then delivered to any salesman, as directed by the proprietor. Stock consigned to carcass butchers may be up on Saturday by two o'clock. The above plans possess great advantages as the stock goes into the market less fatigued and in better condition than is possible in the usual method of droving (*IJ*, 25 May 1816).

Evidently some beasts were delivered straight to the carcass butcher who, presumably, had commissioned them. Early morning departure for Smithfield appears to have been at 3 o'clock. This advertisement was in May, when at 3 a.m. it would just be possible to see the beasts, and the implication is that the salesmen came to the layers.

As the droves funnelled towards the Capital they caused much inconvenience to the local inhabitants. When it was proposed to close one ancient footpath in Hornchurch Lane the tenants of Havering Inclosure wrote in alarm to the Commissioners to say that the path 'enabled the women and children of the industrious tradesmen to enjoy the benefit of the air free from the dread and danger of the numerous droves of cattle and from the greater dread of insults from the drovers'. The path was used for taking eggs, poultry, butter and honey to the local market.¹³ 'Danger' was no exaggeration. On a Tuesday in March 1815 John Culham, a Woodbridge butcher, was passing a drove of bullocks in Melton when one of them attacked him. He was badly gored and died the next day (*IJ*, 18 March 1815).

It is not difficult to imagine the disturbance caused by jostling cattle being driven through the narrow London streets. In 1839 regulations were enforced as to the number of beasts and the hours in which they could be driven. No dogs were to be used. On their left, upper arm, the London drovers wore a metal badge stamped with the armorial bearings of the City of London and their licence number. Further regulations in 1850 stipulated the routes the cattle had to follow; those from Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridge were met at layers in Stratford or Mile End and were to be driven *via* Shoreditch, Worship Street, Barbican and Long Lane. Tolls were paid at the City gates and to the City of London for the beasts sold in the market. On reaching Smithfield the beasts were tied individually to long lines of oak rails where the salesmen negotiated sales with the carcass butchers.

Although the cattle had their prescribed routes through the City they caused much disruption and the public voiced their distress at the cruelty suffered by the beasts which, alarmed and frantic from pain, would rush in any direction but that which was intended. The consequent loss of quality through ill treatment had to be borne by the grazier.

The population of London increased from 959,310 in 1801 to 1,878,229 in 1831. On 4 January 1811, 3,264 beasts were sold at Smithfield, while on 7 January 1830 there were 4,005 sold.¹⁴ Smithfield Market had outgrown its size; with insufficient oak rails for tying the beasts, the overflow was formed into 'ring droves' or 'ings': about twenty cattle were forced into a ring, heads to the centre, where they might remain from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.; if they attempted to lie down they were given a blow on the 'haugh'. The whole area was surrounded by offensive slaughter houses. There were protracted discussions over many years until 1855, when the new Metropolitan Cattle Market was opened in Copenhagen Fields, Islington. Thirteen thousand, two hundred and thirty-two feet of rail were provided for tying 6,616 bullocks.

Country butchered meat was sold in London but, unless it was killed within fifty miles of the Capital, it rarely arrived in good condition in the summer. The carriers Betts and Bury of Ipswich sent their meat waggon weekly to London during the 'season'. In April 1815 it set out from the 'King's Arms' in Halesworth at nine o'clock on a Wednesday evening. It left the 'Griffin' at Yoxford at midnight; the 'Bell', Saxmundham, at two o'clock on Thursday morning; the 'Lion' at Glemham at six o'clock and the 'Crown' in Woodbridge at nine in the morning. It left the firm's Ipswich office at two o'clock on Thursday afternoon, and arrived in London at four

o'clock on Saturday morning, 'and so to continue during the meat season' (*I.J.*, 20 April 1815).

The coming of the railways in the 1840s enabled a man in Ipswich to send a dozen hampers of 500 or 700 stone of beef to London by the mail train and have the meat on sale in Newgate Market, the principal carcase market, before 5 a.m. (Gaspey 1852, 103). Understandably the wealthy Smithfield salesmen were opposed to the selling of country killed meat in London.

Droving as a major industry was nearing the end of its days. The increased enclosure of land had made both wayside feeding and the evasion of toll roads difficult, adding to the drover's expenses. The railways were surprisingly early in embarking on cattle transportation: the Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds Railway was inviting tenders for ten ox waggons, ten sheep trucks and eight horse boxes in 1846 (*I.J.*, 14 February 1846). With improved methods of agriculture the Scots were able to fatten their beasts in the north and send them south by boat or train.

In East Anglia few traces of the long trail south now remain. 'Bullock' or 'Fair' incorporated in the name of a road suggests a one-time involvement, while the inns, where farmers brought their cattle to be taken to London, now have large expanses where cars may be parked; was this where the men congregated with their cattle? And did the nearby rivers provide water for the drinking troughs?

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NOTES

- 1 Obituary of Robert Hope, *Dumfries Monthly Magazine and Literary Compendium*, III, Jul.–Dec. 1826.
- 2 'Joist': to take in cattle to feed for hire.
- 3 Advertisement in Craven Ord's 'Collections for a History of Suffolk', S.R.O.I., HD 1538/3, f. 68.
- 4 Thrandeston parish register of burials, S.R.O.I., FB 124/D2/1.
- 5 'Rawings': after grass, the grass that grows after the first mowing.
- 6 N.R.O., Col. 8/104/74/1.
- 7 H. Biddell, 'Agriculture', in V.C.H. *Suffolk*, II, 391.
- 8 William Goodwin's diary, S.R.O.I., HD 365/1.
- 9 Guildhall Library, London, PAM 5760 661.
- 10 Will of Alexander Milbourne, S.R.O.I., IC/AA1/184/157.
- 11 Will of Henry Nursey, S.R.O.I., IC/AA1/184/166.
- 12 Woodbridge St Mary parish register of burials, S.R.O.I., FC 25/D1/15.
- 13 E.R.O.C., D/DSa 64.
- 14 Corporation of London Record Office: weekly dues collected at Smithfield.

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Abbreviations

- E.A.M.* *East Anglian Miscellany.*
- E.R.O.C.* Essex Record Office, Chelmsford.
- I.J.* *Ipswich Journal.*
- N.R.O.* Norfolk Record Office.
- S.R.O.I.* Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.