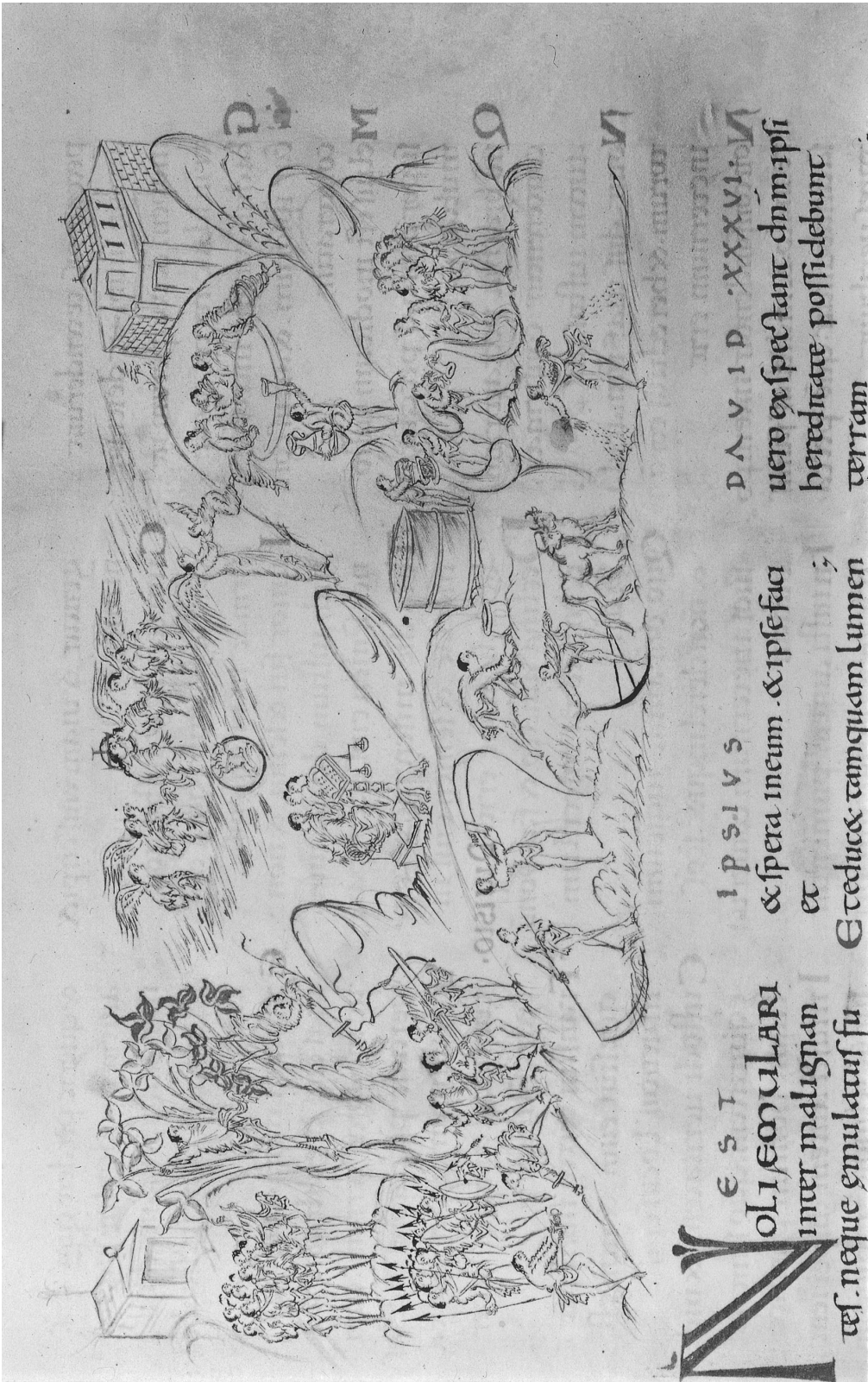


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Farming in the First Millennium AD



Frontispiece: The production and marketing of grain as depicted in the Harley Psalter c AD 1000, British Library MS 603, fol. 21.

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To Charles in friendship,
many a field and forty years on since
Fowler and Thomas 1962

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MASTER: ‘What do your friends do?’

MONK: ‘Some are ploughmen, some shepherds, some oxherds;
some again, huntsmen, some fishermen, some fowlers,
some merchants, some shoe-makers, salters, bakers.’

ÆLFRIC’S *COLLOQUY*,

trans. Swanton 1993, 169

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Preface

‘What do you say, fowler?’
 THE ‘MASTER’ IN AELFRIC’S *COLLOQUY* TRANS. SWANTON 1993, 172

My title is indicative rather than precise. Broadly, the book is about farming in Britain from the Roman invasion of AD 43 until about AD 1000. It is not intent on discussing farming in either the century or so before the birth of Christ or the eleventh century AD in detail. Narrow, however, would be a perspective which did not take cognisance of Julius Caesar’s description of the island he invaded or of *Domesday Book*, William I’s great survey of the land he too invaded and, unlike Caesar, successfully conquered.

This book is the sequel to my *The Farming of Prehistoric Britain* (Fowler 1983a, now O.P.). That paperback was itself spawned from *The Agrarian History of England and Wales I.1 Prehistory* (Piggott 1981; Fowler 1981a). *Farming in the First Millennium AD* is stimulated by the second part, volume I.2, of that same *Cambridge Agrarian History* (Finberg 1972a), in which I was privileged, as a young beginner, to be marginally involved (Finberg 1972a, 4, 385). My brush with great historians then has remained the inspiration of an ambition to write an up-to-date complement to their work. This essay is conceived as a preliminary step to that end. Relative to that, and to what can now be discussed compared to the state of knowledge when Finberg *et al.* were writing, the scale and size of this *Farming in the First Millennium AD* allow scope to do little more than to illustrate by example and discuss a few general points.

Yet this text steadfastly follows one very important precept in our three progenitors. Just as those works were not conceived in time-periods (Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, etc.) so neither is this essay on the first millennium AD conceived in terms of ‘Roman Britain’ and ‘Anglo-Saxon England’. My aim is to try to look at agrarian history during a particular thousand years consciously seeking a neutrality in terms of periodisation and cultural ascription. Dark (2000, viii), also most helpfully reviewing

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the whole of the millennium, nevertheless bases her work on the main archaeological and text-defined historical periods, remarking that this approach ‘faces the problem that such periods do not necessarily apply to the whole of Britain at the same time, if at all’. A wider problem lies in those last three words, for historians’ and archaeologists’ period and cultural labels are not necessarily relevant to agrarian history at all. They may even – and indeed probably – obscure significance in the consciously agrarian perspective adopted here. So I start by trying to assume only, on fairly good evidence, that farming was indeed practised throughout Britain between the first and the eleventh centuries AD. The obvious thought that such practice is likely to have retained elements of continuity, within perhaps rather than always throughout the millennium, is clearly a candidate for testing.

Farming in Britain throughout the first millennium is now demonstrated by a huge amount of primary evidence, mainly non-documentary. In that respect, the situation is fundamentally different from a generation ago. Agrarian material from the early centuries AD, for example, is probably at least thrice the quantity, and immeasurably both better in quality and wider in range, than when Applebaum (1972) produced his learned overview; and likewise, for the mid-millennium onwards, the settlement and agrarian archaeology of much of Britain has virtually been created since Finberg (1972b) in particular was trying to fit, too neatly, his farming story of Anglo-Saxon England into an historical framework. Nevertheless, my essay is highly, even painfully, selective: for one thing, too much relevant information across a considerable range of academic disciplines now exists for one individual to absorb even-handedly. So it is neither comprehensive nor inclusive; it cannot be, and makes no attempt to be so. I can but hope that my personal selection is interesting to others.

Among notable omissions in this survey is Ireland. I had intended to include it but Fergus Kelly’s *Early Irish Farming* (1998), produced at an enviable level of scholarly excellence while I was writing, makes such intention redundant. His work has, however, reinforced the view from across the Irish Sea that much exists in field and library in Ireland of relevance to the whole of Britain. In a continuation of the great two-way tradition in the middle centuries of the first millennium AD, therefore, I have raided Kelly as and when I have thought it useful to lift Irish material, not to attempt to tell Ireland’s agrarian history but to use Irish material to illumine land and practices further east. This is meant as homage, not pillage.

Similarly, but more generally, I am deeply influenced by the works, freely made use of here, of a few others in a select band of scholars

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in early historical *agraria* whose pioneering achievements I can but admire: Margaret Gelling, Della Hooke, Joan Thirsk and K.D. White. I also overtly acknowledge my dependence on others with respect to documentary sources. I am no linguist and use others' translations from Latin and Anglo-Saxon; but dependence on others' work, its accuracy and interpretation, is a hallmark of any attempted overview, so in a sense language is not particularly different from other evidence.

The chapter sequence goes from the general through the evidential and down a scale to greater detail within a functional framework before emerging with the outcomes of farming as witnessed by its edible product, the sort of societies it sustained, and a modern historical view of the process of farming in the first millennium. I have written with two audiences specially in mind. First, since the topic is of interest to people outside academia, the book tries to be fair both to current ideas and to the huge amount of evidence. It also attempts to present both in a way which could also be a reasonably good read for anyone with an interest in any or all of the countryside, history and farming. My text is an exercise in attempted communication. To that end, risking appearing unscholarly, I have removed to Appendix 1 most of the in-text references of earlier drafts, keeping in the published text only those references essential to underpin its academic generality and key specifics. I hope they are not too obtrusive for any general reader.

Second, I have in mind students of all ages. I have tried to provide second- and third-year University Honours undergraduates with a reasonably modern review incorporating both generalisation and a hard selection of detail. I have also indicated in Appendix 1 a good series of entry points into various fields of enquiry for the individual wishing to take an interest further. It has been structured to be useful, for example, in preparing an essay for 'continuous assessment', in starting a project during coursework, and even at the start of post-graduate work on an MA or higher research. Bibliographically, it should prove reasonably useful up to late 2000, even if some of the later references are not absorbed into the text and appear only in Appendix 1.

Questions about the past may or may not be interesting in themselves, but collectively they raise another: is there anything of relevance here to Britain as the twenty-first century begins? This question became particularly apposite in the summer of 1999 as much of this presentation was revised. Then, as 'big questions' continued to be asked about national identity and the nature of the British countryside, its history, its ownership and its 'traditional' ways of life, public debate was fired by suggestions that Anglo-Saxons were no longer 'politically correct' because they 'lost'

(cf. Sellar and Yeatman 1930). Public (and ministerial) consideration was also given to the suggestion that they should in any case be dropped from examination syllabuses because there was no longer room for such marginal persons. Whatever the Irish, Scottish and Welsh responses, what price English ethnogenesis? Romans, on the other hand, apparently continue to be acceptable, presumably because they were civilised and winners, two characteristics which brought about one of the supposedly ‘great’ periods in British history.

Yet, in the days either side of 1 January 2000, Anglo-Saxons (but not any other sort of Briton) were suddenly flavour of the moment in numerous public assessments of what life was like a thousand years ago. *The Observer*, following the chronological misconception perpetuated from on high, contained the lovely thought that ‘the millennial moment came and went and people scarcely noticed . . . it is a safe bet that at midnight on December 31, 999, virtually every one of the million or so souls living in England was asleep’ – a nice thought from the very end of our time-span with which to begin at the beginning.

Acknowledgements

I would first thank my personal, albeit unknowing, mentors, Professors H.P.R. Finberg, Glanville Jones and Shimon Applebaum, authors of the *Cambridge Agrarian History* I.2. Over forty years, Collin Bowen and Charles Thomas have been inspirational and helpful; the latter has in particular given authority to my linguistic observations and read the penultimate version of this text critically. I thank two anonymous readers of the same version for their knowledgeable, justifiably hard and constructive critiques, largely adopted. I benefited much from early comments from Professor David Austin, and have also enjoyed personal help from Professor Richard Bailey, David Breeze, Dave Cowley (Scotland), Christopher Loveluck (Flixholme), David Miles (Thames valley), Susan Mills and Bridget Boyd (Bede’s World, academic and culinary matters respectively), Peter Murphy (environment) and Robert Sheil (soils).

Key photographs of farming scenes about a century ago were copied from images on display (Pls. XXIII, XXX, XXXII) at the Musée de la Ferme d’Autrefois at Hyelzas on the Causse Méjean, Languedoc, France. Permission to photograph ards, ploughs and wooden tools there was also gladly accorded (Pls. XXI, XXII, XXVIIa, XXVIII). Similar material from Galicia, Spain, was collected in joint fieldwork with Peter Reynolds in 1974 (Pls. XXVIIb, XXXI). I acknowledge material and permissions from, and willing help from the staffs of, the British Museum (Pl. XXVa) and British Library (Pl. XXVb and cover); and Cambridge University Air Photographic Collection (Pls. IV, XVIII), and the NMR (Crown Copyright) (Pls. III, VIII, XX: the last also with the permission of the photographer, Tim Gates). Pl. XXXVIII is by Jean Williams, and Pls. II, V, VI, IX, XII, XV, XVI, XVII, XXIX, XXXIV and XXXVIII are unmistakably the work of Mick Sharp. It is a pleasure, and entirely to this book’s benefit, to be associated with him and Graeme Stobbs once more

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in a publishing endeavour. The latter prepared all the line-drawings, often working from graphics published by numerous colleagues whose original work is gratefully acknowledged. Framework (Gill Andrews and John Barrett) allowed me to use their unpublished plan of the Heathrow field system (Fig. 7.5). Similarly, Fig. 7.7 is based on recent field survey by RCAHMS.

Particularly seminal occasions were conferences in London in 1993 and San Marino in 1994 (Rackham 1994; Hines 1997). I could not have started without a corpus of scholarly work, highlighted in Appendix 1, and the detailed work of many people listed in the Bibliography. Among them, I owe a particular debt to the later twentieth-century generation of publishing scholars: Katherine Barker, Dr Martin Bell, Dr John Blair, Professor Wendy Davies, Dr Margaret Faull, Dr Margaret Gelling, Dr Della Hooke, Dr F. Kelly, Professor Martin Jones, Professor Henry Loyn, Professor William Manning, Professor Peter Salway, Professor Peter Sawyer, Professor Pauline Stafford, Dr Christopher Taylor, Professor K.D. White and Dr Tom Williamson. My dependence on them is overt, and obvious throughout the text; I acknowledge it with gratitude.

Much of the then available basic material was assembled and a first draft written (and subsequently scrapped) during a two-term study leave in 1991–92 granted by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Help was unconsciously provided by a decade of first-year undergraduates there who sat through my course *Britain in the First Millennium AD*. Some carried out neat pieces of specific work which I have drawn on here. Among them, Anne Larison assembled bibliographical data which I have relied on absolutely. The Vice-Chancellor, James Wright, also amicably agreed to my early resignation from an established Chair, creating in lieu a personal research post. Simultaneously, I held a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship to complete this book and I am most grateful to the Trustees for their Award and their patience. Their patience is, however, nothing as compared to that of a succession of editors at Cambridge University Press: I thank them all.

Editorial note

The following words are used only in the following senses:

agrarian to do with agriculture

agriculture synonymous with ‘farming’; not meaning only arable farming

Anglo-Saxon pertaining to something which is specifically of the Anglo-Saxon people and their doings, e.g. Anglo-Saxon kingdom or as in ‘Anglo-Saxon settlement pattern’ where it means only the pattern of settlements of Anglo-Saxons; but not ‘Anglo-Saxon period’ or ‘Anglo-Saxon climate’ (much of the book being directed towards trying to identify whether there was a characteristic ‘Anglo-Saxon agriculture’, although this is not assumed)

arable (as a noun) land cultivated for crop production; (as an adjective) produced by cultivation, as in ‘arable crop’

British as in ‘the British’ or ‘British people’, meaning all those who inhabited Britain before the Anglo-Saxons, or were descended from such inhabitants in the second half of the first millennium AD; or more generally meaning ‘of Britain’ as a geographical space consisting of what is now England, Scotland and Wales, with adjacent islands as appropriate (but not Ireland or Northern Ireland)

Conquest a term eschewed as far as possible but referring either to Romans and AD 43 when used by Romanists or to Normans and 1066 when used by early medieval historians

farming everything to do with the production of food from the land by people and therefore to do with the management of land

millennium unless otherwise indicated, the first millennium AD, AD 1-1000

pastoral based on pasturage, non-arable, as in ‘pastoral landscape’

Roman pertaining to something which is specifically Roman as in ‘Roman Britain’ meaning only Britain as a province of the Roman Empire, but not ‘Roman period’, or as in ‘Romano-British’ people, period, culture, etc.

Abbreviations

ADS	Archaeological Data Service, York
ASC	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> (the translation used here is in <i>EHD</i>)
BAR	British Archaeological Reports, Oxford
BG	Handford, S.A. and Gardner, J.F. (1982, 2nd edn), <i>Caesar. The Conquest of Gaul</i> , Penguin, Harmondsworth
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
EASE	<i>Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England</i> = Lapidge <i>et al.</i> (1999)
EHD	<i>English Historical Documents</i> = Whitelock 1955
HE	Bede, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i> (AD 731) = <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> = McClure and Collins 1999
HMSO	Her Majesty’s Stationery Office
NMR	National Monuments Record (English Heritage, Swindon)
RCAHMS	Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland
RCHME	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England