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978-1-316-51798-7 — The Enclosure of Knowledge  
Books, Power and Agrarian Capitalism in Britain, 1660–1800  
James D. Fisher  
Frontmatter  
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## THE ENCLOSURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The rise of agrarian capitalism in Britain is usually told as a story about markets, land and wages. *The Enclosure of Knowledge* reveals that it was also about books, knowledge and expertise. It argues that during the early modern period, farming books were a key tool in the appropriation of the traditional art of husbandry possessed by farm workers of all kinds. It challenges the dominant narrative of an agricultural ‘enlightenment’, in which books merely spread useful knowledge, by showing how codified knowledge was used to assert greater managerial control over land and labour. The proliferation of printed books helped divide mental and manual labour to facilitate emerging social divisions between labourers, managers and landowners. The cumulative effect was the slow enclosure of customary knowledge. By synthesising diverse theoretical insights, this study opens up a new social history of agricultural knowledge and reinvigorates long-term histories of knowledge under capitalism.

JAMES D. FISHER is a historian of early modern Britain. He is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Exeter (2020–23) and has previously taught history at King's College London, Royal Holloway, and the University of East London. James is trained in disciplines across the humanities and sciences, including political philosophy and physics.

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JAMES D. FISHER

*University of Exeter*



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*For my parents*

## Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	page viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Notes</i>	xii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Introduction: Pen over Plough	i
1 Rethinking Agricultural Books, Knowledge and Labour	36
2 Learning without Books: The Mystery of Husbandry	60
3 Standing on the Shoulders of Peasants: The Appropriation of the Art of Husbandry	89
4 Learning without Labour: Codification and Managerial Knowledge	122
5 Dividing Head and Hand: Gentleman Farmers, Agriculturists and Expertise	170
6 Monopolising Knowledge: Professionalisation, Education and Stewards	205
7 The Master Should Know More: Book-Farming, Power and Resistance	229
Conclusion: New Histories of Knowledge	263
<i>Appendix</i>	276
<i>Bibliography</i>	294
<i>Index</i>	326

## Figures

0.1	‘The Goddess Ceres in her Chariot drawn by Dragons, Teaching Mankind the Art of Husbandry’, engraving printed as frontispiece in Thomas Hale, <i>The Compleat Body of Husbandry</i> (1756)	page 2
0.2	A graph of the total number of titles published in England each decade between 1661 and 1790	21
0.3	A graph of the total number of titles published in Scotland each decade between 1661 and 1790	22
4.1	Frontispiece to John Worlidge, <i>Systema Agriculturae: The Mystery of Husbandry Discovered</i> (1675)	136
4.2	Frontispiece to Giles Jacob, <i>The Country Gentleman’s Vade Mecum</i> (1717)	137
4.3	Frontispiece from John Mortimer, <i>The Whole Art of Husbandry</i> (1721)	138
4.4	Title page of John Worlidge’s <i>Systema Agriculturae</i> (1669)	139
4.5	A schematic diagram of agriculture in Richard Blome’s <i>The Gentleman’s Recreation</i> (1686)	140
7.1	Frontispiece to Richard Graves, <i>Columella: Or, the Distressed Anchoret</i> (1779)	232

## *Tables*

o.1	Number and proportion of titles catalogued as subject 'agriculture', based on ECCO searches	<i>page 23</i>
5.1	A classification of manual labours in agriculture, tabulated from John Claudius Loudon, <i>An Encyclopædia of Agriculture</i> (1825)	172
5.2	A classification of agriculturalists, tabulated from John Claudius Loudon, <i>An Encyclopædia of Agriculture</i> (1825)	174
B.1	British agricultural writers whose first publication appeared 1669–1792	284



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xi

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This study began loosely as a history of work, took a tangent into a narrower history of books, before expanding into a broader history of knowledge, which enabled me to eventually tell a new story about work that I could not have conceived at the beginning. It is a story that remains startlingly relevant in the present ‘knowledge economy’.

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## *Notes*

In the interests of accessibility, some early modern spellings (instances of i, u, v and vv) have been silently modernised.

## *Abbreviations*

AgHR	Agricultural History Review
AHEW	Agrarian History of England and Wales
EcHR	Economic History Review
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>