

3.5. The open fields of Europe in their social and economic context: origins and use. Part II: General papers and UK

Panel organiser: Thoen, Erik, Ghent University, Belgium; Dyer, Christopher, Leicester University, UK; Williamson, Tom, University of East Anglia, UK

In the middle ages and early modern period open fields can be found in every country of Europe. These were extensive areas of land given over to arable farming, with provision for common grazing of animals, and were subject to rules enforced by communities. There were many varieties. Sometimes they occupied a high proportion of the land in a village's territory, but in some cases the open fields formed an element in a landscape also containing enclosed land, woodland or expanses of pasture. They were usually cropped according to agreed rotations, in which crops occupied each year a proportion of the land (a half, two thirds or three-quarters) and the rest lay fallow. They were replaced by enclosures, which could be as early as c.1200, but were often delayed until the 18th and 19th centuries. The enclosures could take place gradually, or in a single revolutionary act. The origin, character and function of the open fields were often studied by geographers, while historians were more interested in the process of enclosure. Approaches to the open fields are now commonly multi-disciplinary, and involve much archaeological attention as well as that of historians and geographers. There are debates about the environmental context, as scholars seek to explain the uneven distribution of open fields across varied landscapes. Some attribute the decision to change field systems to lords, or to ethnic groups, or even to the state, while others favour the view that peasants were the agents. Were open fields devised and managed in order to maintain and improve levels of productivity, was their prime function to avoid risk, or was it the consequence of a structural lack of capital? Did the fields impose equality on the cultivators, for example by ensuring that strips were scattered, or was there provision for individuals to make improvements, invest in livestock and implements, and raise their profits? How did tenures and other dimensions of land holding impact on the field organisation? Was the existence of open fields linked with technology, and did those technologies change? Developments within the open fields and in the processes of enclosure happened at a different pace, and this needs to be explained. The purpose is to examine origin, use and decline of open fields in the context of evolving social relations and economic change. The panel is divided in two parts. Part I deals with continental Europe. Part II with Europe in general and the UK. These panels are organized by the CORN network (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area).

Chair: Thoen, Erik, Ghent University, Department of History, Belgium

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3.5.1. Open-field landscapes in Europe

Renes, Hans, University of Utrecht, Netherlands

The landscapes of open-field agriculture were the bread-baskets of medieval Europe. After the heyday of this landscape in the early 1400s, the changing economic geography of Europe brought changes in the functioning and distribution of open field agriculture. During the Early-modern period, the open-field landscape almost disappeared, together with large-scale grain cultivation, in the central UK and in smaller regions elsewhere. At the same time, it survived in Central Europe and was newly introduced in regions on the south-eastern Baltic. This regional variety resulted in different research traditions and has influenced the development of landscape archaeology and historical geography.

3.5.2. Open fields, „planning“ and the environment

Williamson, Tom, University of East Anglia, UK

Much recent work on the English medieval landscape has emphasised the way that villages and open fields were created by manorial lords, and imposed on local peasant populations, to increase agricultural efficiency and facilitate the extraction of services and surpluses. This paper will argue that the fashionable model of settlement 'nucleation' and village 'planning' is misleading. What the middle and later Saxon periods witnessed was the stabilisation, and then the expansion, of settlement. In some districts settlements expanded in situ, leading to the emergence of nucleated villages with extensive communal open fields. Elsewhere, farms tended to disperse to varying extents across the landscape. These regional variations in the landscape are best understood, not in terms of spatial variations in social or tenurial structures, but as a consequence of complex hydrological and agrarian factors.

3.5.3. Manorialization and demographic pressure in landscape areas in thirteenth-century England

Kanzaka, Junichi, Soka University in Tokyo, Faculty of Economic, Japan

I have examined the degree of manorialization and population increase in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Oxfordshire, and Warwickshire, based on the Hundred Rolls of 1279–1280. Through a factor analysis (using the maximum likelihood and varimax rotation), I identified three factors, namely the 'population factor' and two aspects of manorialization: the 'classical structure factor' and 'freedom factor'. Since these factors were independent of each other, the relationship amongst the three factors varied according to the three regions. A high 'classical structure factor' score and low 'population factor' score characterized the first region, including the western champion Midlands, Cotswolds, Chiltern Hills, and the Forest of Arden. In the second region, including the southeastern champion and East Anglian Heights, population increase was linked to low levels of manorialization, a low 'classical structure factor' score and high 'freedom factor' score. In contrast, in the third region, the eastern champion Midlands, a marked population increase was linked to high scores for the 'classical structure factor'. Thus, the relationship between manorialization and demographic pressure was different in each region.

3.5.4. The village meeting in organizing open fields in medieval England

Dyer, Christopher, Leicester University, UK

Historians of medieval field systems in England assume that the villagers themselves were involved in managing the fields, such as fixing the times of fencing fields that were to be sown, arranging for the pasturing of animals, regulating the harvest and so on. This view is justified by the records of by-laws issued by the manorial court, and the punishment of those who offended against the rules. The by-laws did not deal with all of the problems associated with field management, and rules must have been agreed and enforced by meetings held away from the lord's court. There are also no detailed records of meetings earlier than about 1270, and this paper will speculate on the earlier hidden history of field management.

3.5.5. Four new indicators for the origins and development of open-field farming in England

Jones, Richard, Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester, UK

Despite capturing the attention of historians and archaeologists for more than a century, pinpointing the origins and spread of open-field farming in England continues to prove elusive. In this paper, the issue will be readdressed using four forms of evidence which have largely been ignored to date - animal bones, isotopic analysis, evidence for manuring practices, and place-names. Used together clear regional and chronological patterns emerge which appear to add greater precision to our understanding of the place and timing of the introduction of open fields to England and, perhaps more importantly, the pace and direction of their subsequent spread.

Participants

Dyer, Christopher

Chris Dyer is emeritus professor from Leicester University and specialised in economic history and historical geography of England.

Jones, Richard

Senior Lecturer in Landscape History.

Kanzaka, Junichi

Junichi Kanzaka is a professor in economic history at Soka University, Japan. He has studied the agrarian history of medieval England. His publications include 'Villein Rents in Thirteenth-Century England: An Analysis of the Hundred Rolls of 1279–1280', *Economic History Review*, 60–4, 2002. He is also carrying out research comparing the agrarian history of England and Japan.

Renes, Hans

Hans Renes is professor at the University of Utrecht, specialised in historical geography.

Thoen, Erik

Erik Thoen is professor of rural and environmental history at Ghent University (Belgium). He is a specialist of pre-modern agriculture and rural society in North Western Europe, and founder and chair of the CORN - Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area - Research Network.

Williamson, Tom

Tom Williamson is professor at the University of East Anglia specialised in historical geography.