

# Sons of the Soil: tracing agricultural labouring ancestors

Janet Few



[www.thehistoryinterpreter.wordpress.com](http://www.thehistoryinterpreter.wordpress.com)



@Janet Few

## Timeline of British Agriculture 1750-1950 – selected events

c. 1750-1850 Agricultural Revolution

From late C18th Enclosure Acts

1815-1836 Agricultural depression

1830 Swing Riots

1834 Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers

1836 Tithe Commutation Act – monetary payments replaced payments in kind. Led to production of Tithe Maps and Schedules

1843 Parliamentary Enquiry into Women and Children in Agriculture

1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws

1848 Failure of the Irish Potato crop

1851 Census includes acreage/number of employees

1867 Agricultural Gangs Act

1872 National Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers' Union

1873 Return of Owners of Land

1889 Board of Agriculture created

1908 National Farmers' Union established

1915 Board of Agriculture training courses for women

1916 Ministry of Food established

1930s Marketing Board set up for milk, potatoes, pigs and hops

1936 Tithe Redemption Act abolished tithes

1939-1945 'Dig for Victory' campaign and use of Land Army

1947 Agriculture Act – gave farmers an assured market and established guaranteed prices for farm produce. Discouraged imports in order to increase productivity.

## General View of Agriculture Surveys

In the 1790s, the Board of Agriculture commissioned a series of books entitled *General View of the Agriculture of ....* (county name) *with observations on means of its improvement*. Some were reprinted in the 1800s and 1810s. A list of these for British counties can be found at

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General\\_View\\_of\\_Agriculture\\_county\\_surveys](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_View_of_Agriculture_county_surveys)

A number have been reproduced as facsimiles and some are available on Google Books

<https://books.google.co.uk>.

## The Scottish Statistical Accounts

Old Statistical Account 1791-1799

New Statistical Account 1834-1845

Accessible and downloadable online <https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk> (click on the map)

## Scottish Valuation Rolls 1855-1989

At National Archives for Scotland. Available on Scotland's People [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/record-guides/valuation-rolls](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk/record-guides/valuation-rolls).

[www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/valuation-rolls-1855-1989](http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/valuation-rolls-1855-1989)

### **Griffiths Valuation**

Freely searchable at [www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation](http://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation)

### **Tithe Maps and Schedules**

Available at The National Archives, in County Record Offices and via

[www.thegenealogist.co.uk/tithe/](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk/tithe/)

Tithe maps for Wales online <https://places.library.wales/>

### **Land Tax**

Most useful for 1780-1832. In County Archives. 1798 Return at National Archives and available on [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk).

### **The Valuation Office Survey**

1910 also known as Lloyd George's Domesday. These records for England are held at the National Archives (TNA), in Kew. The equivalent records for Scotland and Ireland are held at National Records for Scotland and The National Archives, Ireland. Becoming available on The Genealogist subscription website [www.thegenealogist.co.uk](http://www.thegenealogist.co.uk).

Arranged geographically. Field Books IR58 give information about owner, tenant, tenancy. Description of property, often for farms, a sketch map showing outbuildings.

### **The National Farm Survey**

Taken in 1941

In Class MAF32 at The National Archives. Arranged by parish.

Covers all farms of 5 acres or more.

Four forms relating to each land holding, filed separately in the parish bundle. These are:

The Farm Survey itself, completed by the surveyor.

The 1941 Agricultural Census, which lists the acreage, crops and livestock on the holding.

The Labour and Motive Power Survey. This lists tractors and machinery but also gives information relating to tenanted land, such as the rent paid and when the tenancy began.

The Soft Fruit and Vegetables for Human Consumption Survey, particularly useful in market gardening areas.

### **Directories**

Historic Directories available on

<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4>.

### **Newspapers**

Make provide details of farm sales, adverts, agricultural shows and fairs, crimes, disasters,

Accidents. Many available at [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) or on [www.findmypast.co.uk](http://www.findmypast.co.uk).

### **School Log Books**

In County Archives.

### **Diaries and Letters**

### **Estate Records**

May be in county archives or private hands.

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/landed-estates/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/landed-estates/)

Irish Landed Estates Court Rentals 1850-1885, with details back to 1760s on FindmyPast.

### **Gamekeepers' Licences**

Available with Quarter Sessions Records in County Archives. London 1727-1839 licences on

[www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk).

### **Smit Marks**

<https://quillcards.com/blog/smit-marks-to-identify-sheep/>

[www.lakesguides.co.uk/html/topics/smitfram.htm](http://www.lakesguides.co.uk/html/topics/smitfram.htm)

[www.cphc.org.uk/shepherds-guides](http://www.cphc.org.uk/shepherds-guides)

### **Livestock**

[www.countrylife.co.uk/out-and-about/dogs/shaggy-sheep-stories-21-native-british-sheep-breeds-recognise-153367](http://www.countrylife.co.uk/out-and-about/dogs/shaggy-sheep-stories-21-native-british-sheep-breeds-recognise-153367)

[www.countryfile.com/wildlife/mammals/native-british-cattle-breeds-and-how-to-recognise-them/](http://www.countryfile.com/wildlife/mammals/native-british-cattle-breeds-and-how-to-recognise-them/)

[www.countryfile.com/wildlife/mammals/native-british-pig-breeds-and-how-to-recognise-them/](http://www.countryfile.com/wildlife/mammals/native-british-pig-breeds-and-how-to-recognise-them/)

### **Weather**

The Met Office issued monthly weather reports for the UK and Ireland from January 1884-December 1993 and these can be downloaded from:

<https://digital.nmla.metoffice.gov.uk/collection/7498a04d-6a40-4207-a27f-772663ffd2fc/> See

also their historic weather station data at:

[www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/climate-historic/#?tab=climateHistoric](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/climate-historic/#?tab=climateHistoric)

For London weather from 1900 (but applicable elsewhere) and notes on key events of the year see

[www.london-weather.eu/category.46.html](http://www.london-weather.eu/category.46.html) Scroll down and click on the appropriate year.

### **Books and Museums**

Shire Publications [www.bloomsbury.com/uk/series/shire-library](http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/series/shire-library)

Museum of English Rural Life <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/>

Scottish National Museum of Rural Life [www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-rural-life/](http://www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-rural-life/)

St. Fagan's Museum, Wales <https://museum.wales/stfagans/>

National Museum of Ireland – Country Life [www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Country-Life](http://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Country-Life)

### **Select Bibliography**

Beech, Geraldine and Mitchell, Rose *Maps for Family and Local History: records of the tithe, valuation office and National Farm Survey of England and Wales 1836-1943* 2nd ed. National Archives (2004)

Brown Jonathan *The Edwardian Farm* Shire Publications (2010)

Brown, R J *English Farmhouses* Robert Hale Ltd. (1993)

Clark, Gregory 'Farm Wages and Living Standards in The Industrial Revolution: England 1670-1869' in *The Economic History Review* Vol. 54. 3 pp. 477-505 (2001)

Cook, Olive *English Cottages and Farmhouses* Thames & Hudson Ltd. (1985)

Evans, E J *Tithes, Maps and Apportionments and the 1836 Act* 2nd revised ed. Phillimore (1993)

Eveleigh, David J *The Victorian Farmer* Shire Publications (1991)

Fussell, G E *The English Rural Labourer; his home, furniture, clothing & food, from Tudor to Victorian times* Batchworth Press (1949)

Ginn, Peter and Goodman, Ruth *Tudor Monastery Farm* BBC Books (2013)

Hall, Stephen J G and Clutton-Brock, Juliet *Two Hundred Years of British Farm Livestock* British Museum of Natural History (1989)

Hammond, John & Barbara *The Village Labourer* The History Press (2005)

Handford, Kay *The Agricultural Labourer in 19th Century England* Grosvenor House Publishing (2011)

Horn, Pamela *Labouring Life in the Victorian Countryside* Sutton Publishing (1987)

Lake, J, *Historic Farm Buildings: an introduction and guide* Cassell Illustrated (1989)

Langlands, Alex (ed.) *Henry Stephens's Book of the Farm* Batsford (2013)

Langlands Alex, Ginn, Peter and Goodman, Ruth *Victorian Farm* Pavilion Books (2009)

Langlands Alex, Ginn, Peter and Goodman, Ruth *Edwardian Farm* Pavilion Books (2010)

Langlands Alex, Ginn, Peter and Goodman, Ruth *Wartime Farm* Mitchell Beazley (2012)

Loveridge, Pat *A Calendar of Fairs and Markets in the Nineteenth Century* Romany & Traveller Family History Society (2003)

Overton, Mark *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* Cambridge University Press (1996)

Peters, J E C, *Discovering Traditional Farm Buildings* Shire Publications (1981)

Porter, Valerie *Yesterday's Farm: a taste of rural life from the past* David and Charles (2008)

Stratton, J M and Brown J H *Agricultural Records AD220-1977* Baker (1969)

Thirsk, J [ed.], *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* Cambridge University Press (vol. IV 1967; vol. V 1985; vol. VI 1989)

Turner, M E, Beckett J V and Afton B, *Farm Production in England 1700-1914* Oxford University Press (2001)

Verdon, Nicola *Working the Land: a history of the farmworkers in England from 1850 to the present day* Palgrave Macmillan (2017)

Waller, Ian *My Ancestor was an Agricultural Labourer* Society of Genealogists (2008)

Williamson Tom *The Transformation of Rural England: Farming and the Landscape, 1700-1870* by Tom Williamson Exeter University Press (2002)

Mark Overton's assessment of the Agricultural Revolution

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire\\_seapower/agricultural\\_revolution\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/agricultural_revolution_01.shtml)

Nicola Verdon's article *The Employment of women and Children in Agriculture: a reassessment of agricultural gangs in nineteenth century Norfolk* [www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/49n1a3.pdf](http://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/49n1a3.pdf)

John Patrick's article about Agricultural Gangs [www.historytoday.com/archive/agricultural-gangs](http://www.historytoday.com/archive/agricultural-gangs)

Return of Owners of Land 1873  
[https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Return\\_of\\_Owners\\_of\\_Land\\_1873.html?id=-RJPAAAAYAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Return_of_Owners_of_Land_1873.html?id=-RJPAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y)

The Swing Riots [www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/ruralife/swing.htm](http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/ruralife/swing.htm)

Historic Farm Buildings Group [www.hfbg.org.uk](http://www.hfbg.org.uk)

Historic Farmsteads

[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/farmsteads\\_eh\\_2006/downloads.cfm](https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/farmsteads_eh_2006/downloads.cfm)

Listed Buildings Register <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

Farm Wages in England [www.najecon.org/naj/cache/62501800000000238.pdf](http://www.najecon.org/naj/cache/62501800000000238.pdf)