

Farming History



Introduction

This leaflet attempts to bring together from a very wide range of records, and from a great many documents, those which may be most useful for the study of farming (including live stock and orchards) in Devon. Users are further referred to the lists and indexes, including the specialised list of Farming Records, available in the search-room.

Primary Sources

Farming Records probably were created by men who were sometimes barely literate, and these records were kept in small exercise or pocket books, many of which have been lost. Nevertheless, most local Record Offices hold considerable numbers of such items. An exceptionally full and interesting record is preserved among the Drake records. As a result of the agriculturalist William Marshall visiting Buckland Abbey in 1791-4, model records were kept at the Home Farm there from 1794-1813 (ref. 346M/E6-23).

An archive of different quality but of much wider extent is that of Hussey's the auctioneers, which includes farm accounts and stock books as well as a large collection of sale catalogues of houses and farms for the later 19th and early 20th centuries (ref. 62/9).

Seventeenth century account books are to be found in the Courtenay (ref. 1508M/London/E12) and Tremayne papers (ref. 1499 add M/Estate/Accounts 2).

Later material is more common and includes the following:

- account book of Edmund Huxtable of Chittlehampton (ref. 2603M), 1776-1894
- farming diaries and account books for the Honiton area (ref. 337B/add 2/SS1c-e), 1787-1897
- similar records of the Braddick family of Clayhidon (ref. 1061A/ZB3), 1815-1897
- records of Bradford farm, Uplowman (ref. 190M/E1, and E6), 1881-1917
- farming records including that of a Steam Threshing Association at Chagford - enterprises of the Ellis family (ref. 1695M), 1888-1940
- farming diaries of the Pope family of Down St. Mary (ref. 1791M/F3-26) covering the later 19th century
- farming diaries of the Parkhouses of Willand (ref. 181M/E1-28a), 1809-1883
- farming diaries of Clement Venn of Whimble (ref. 56/4/6/2-36), 1810-1864
- farm accounts of William Holloway of South Tawton (ref. Z17/3/37), 1847-1855
- farm records of T. Whitter of Tiverton (ref. R4/1/PP34-35), 1858-1868
- a larger group of mainly 20th century estate and sheep farming records of Ford of Branscombe (ref. 1037M).



Farmer Hancock reaping and binding at Harford Barton, Landkey, 1930s [Beaford Photographic Archive, North Devon Local Studies Centre, Barnstaple]

Secondary Sources

Tithe Maps and Apportionments

Out of some 480 of these relating to Devon, less than a dozen are either missing or give unsatisfactory coverage. The rest give a very complete picture of land use in 1840.

More information about tithe records can be found in the Tithe Guide, available on the Research Guides page of the Devon Archives and Local Studies website.

Inclosure Awards

These number only some 80 documents with a date range, 1804-1923. All refer to inclosure of upland waste (including that for Exmoor, 1819; no. 33), or less commonly, to low-lying marsh (e.g. Braunton, 1824; no. 12).

Manor Court Rolls, Compoti and Estate Surveys to 1500

The interpretation of these records is work for the specialist, but attention is drawn to the following printed sources:

Tavistock Abbey - A Study in the Social and Economic History of Devon, Professor H.P.R. Finberg (Cambridge, 1951; Newton Abbot, 1969)

Field Systems of East Devon, Dr. H.S.A. Fox in Vol. 104 of the Transactions of the Devonshire Association (1972)

An East Devon Manor in the later Middle Ages, Dr. N.W. Alcock in Vol. 102 of the Transactions of the Devonshire Association (1970). The documents used in the first and third of these studies may be found in the Bedford collection (ref: W1258M), the second makes use of the Petre archives (ref: 123M).

Estate Records from 1500

Surveys, rentals, maps (mostly later in date than 1740) and leases at rack-rent with husbandry covenants are all useful in reconstructing agricultural as well as estate management practices. Major family collections including such documents are Bedford (ref. 1258M), Fortescue (ref. 1262M), Rolle (ref. 96M), Petre (ref. 123M), Courtenay (ref. 1508M), Drake (ref. 346M) and Kennaway (ref. 961M), Mallock (ref. 48/13), Shelley (ref. Z1), Northcote (ref. 51/24) and Champernowne (ref. Z15). Catalogue lists of this material are held in the search-room at Devon Record Office. Estate records also survive for the Exeter Bishopric lands both in Devon and Cornwall (ref. 382M).

Consistory Court Records

Deposition books (Ref. Chanter 855-880 and 8297-8299), 1556-1692, and papers in tithe causes (ref. Moger 1, 15-55 and 64-73), 1601-1849, give data, largely unexplored, of the impact on agriculture of tithing in kind.

County Records

These include:

- returns of corn prices (ref. Devon Q/S 124), 1733-1811
- returns of rates of wages (Devon Q/S 127), 1679-1809
- "Counties" (i.e. subsidies) to help growers (chiefly in East Devon) (Devon Q/S 43/1-59 and sub numbers), 1782-1790.

More recent county records include:

- minutes of the County Agricultural (and War Agricultural) Committee (ref. DCC 149/1/1/1-6), 1907-1946
- various minutes of Diseases of Animals and Agricultural Committees (ref. Devon Q/S 86/3 and 145/1 and DCC 149/1/1/7), 1866-1963
- records of the County Veterinary Officer's Joint Sub-Committee (DCC 149/1/4/1), 1933-1938
- accounts of the Cattle Diseases Committee (Devon C/T140/1-2), 1866-1889
- County Small Holdings Sub-Committee Minutes (DCC 156/3/1-5), 1920-1974
- Local District Committee Minutes for North Devon (DCC 156/3/6-11), 1908-1961
- Local District Committee Minutes for West Devon (DCC 156/3/12-13), 1912-1961
- Local District Committee Minutes for South Devon (DCC 156/3/14-15), 1913-1961
- Local District Committee Minutes for Newton Abbot District (DCC 156/3/16), 1913-1946
- Local District Committee Minutes for East Devon (DCC 156/3/17-18), 1908-1961.
- minute book of Education "Rural Crafts" Sub-Committees, 1897-1903
- Farm Engines (for threshing, sowing, ploughing etc.) are recorded in Motor Taxation records (ref. 2131 O/X LR1-5), 1899-1920.

Parish Records

These form an unexpectedly useful source. Early church-wardens accounts may record the existence of a parish flock and of parish income (distinct from Tithe) from sheep and wool.

Examples are:

- Shobrooke, sheep account (ref. PW77), 17th century
- Chagford (ref. PW1-4), 15th century
- Bere Ferrers (ref. PW1-47), 17th century
- Morebath (ref. PW1), 16th century
- Occasionally parish registers record weather phenomena and good and bad harvests. At Stockleigh Pomeroy in 1765 the introduction of clover "sixty years ago" is noted (ref: PR3), and at Lapford (ref: PR3) there is a poem on the extravagance of tenant farmers.

Land Improvement and Drainage

Inclosure Commissioners' papers and records of various companies may record these activities. An order of Royal Commissioners with map (ref. 146B add/23) records a plan for draining the Clyst Valley in 1870.

Activities of the "Landowners' West of England and South Wales Land Drainage Co." in North West Devon on the Rolle estate are recorded (ref: 96M/Box 85/1) in 1852-1864, and in the Tiverton area on the Troyte estates (Ref. 2547M/E1-7), 1854-1903 - the latter series also documenting the shortcomings in the company's methods. Mortgages to the "General Land

Drainage Co." by the Addingtons at Upottery (refs. 152M/Box 77/E1 and DA135, DZ11) from 1850-1867 also survive.

Records relating to National Food Supply

Sources are found in the correspondence of Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth (ref. 152M/C1800) during the near famine of 1800. The catalogue of this correspondence can now be searched on the Access to Archives (A2A) website.

Records of conditions in the West Country during the same period are also in the Fortescue papers (ref. 1262M/L43-63).

Returns of wheat prices at Exeter over a period of over 500 years (1316-1821) have been abstracted from the City Records by Dr. R. Easterling.

The Ford of Branscombe collection (ref. 1037M) includes records relating to food supply in the First World War, including National Food Journals, 1917 - 1918; Ministry of Food leaflets and correspondence, 1917, and Honiton War Agricultural Committee papers, 1915.

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