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Monks at the Abbey—were they the original Evesham growers?

THE ORIGIN of market gardening at Evesham will probably never be settled, but two distinct schools of opinion have been in evidence over the last 150 years. One school would like to give the main credit to the monks of Evesham Abbey. Tyndal, whose "History and Antiquities of the Abbey and Borough of Evesham" was published in 1794, disputes this theory and suggests that it goes back no farther than Francis Bernardi in the mid-17th century.

May ("Descriptive History of The Town of Evesham," 1845) acknowledges Bernardi's contribution, but disagrees with Tyndal and endeavours to support his claims for an earlier origin by citing the royal grant given to Sir Philip Hoby following the dissolution of the monastery in 1540. By Letters Patent in 1543 the royal grant conveyed to Sir Philip "the house and site of the late dissolved monastery . . . vineyards, orchards, gardens, land and soil lying and being as well within as without . . . the same late monastery." That gardens did exist at the

monastery is, of course, indisputable. Vineyards, too, were a normal feature of such establishments, but this does not imply gardening in the sense of market gardening such as has grown up during the last three centuries.

On the subject of vineyards, a few further notes may not be out of place. Abbot Walter was appointed to Evesham by William the Conqueror in 1067, and it is recorded that he planted a vineyard which, from information available, must have been at Hampton, on the slope below Clarke's Hill, overlooking the river.

The Domesday Book, prepared during the period 1084-86, records that of the 65 servants of the Abbey, three only served in the gardens, and five in the vineyard. These numbers compare

with seven in the bakehouse, four in the brewhouse and five in the kitchen. It is not clear as to whether crops other than grapes were grown in the vineyard although, from what is known elsewhere, it is unlikely. Nor is it known whether the gardeners were engaged primarily in preserving the amenities of the place or to what extent they were employed in growing useful crops. The number in the bakehouse is possibly explained by the fact that ordinary citizens were not allowed to bake their own bread, but must obtain their supplies from the almoner. However, it is obvious that gardening at the Abbey at that time would not have been on a very large scale.

Perhaps we can get a better idea of the sort of crops grown in the Abbey gardens prior to the dissolution by examining the position of horticulture in Britain as a whole. If we do this, certain very significant facts emerge.

In the first place, although most of the commoner fruits were widely grown, there is little evidence of vegetables as we know them being grown to any great extent before the reign of Henry VIII. London, usually a reliable authority, writing in 1824, states that before the 16th century some of the commonest vegetables, such as cabbages, were imported from the Netherlands.

By R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H. This is the first in a new series of original articles in which Mr. Sidwell will trace the history of Evesham horticulture. He emphasises at the outset that he will be glad to hear from readers who have new facts or comments to contribute.

David Hume, in the mid-18th century, says that it was not until the reign of Henry VIII that salads, turnips, carrots and other edible roots were produced in England. The few vegetables used were imported from Holland and Flanders. Fuller, in 1660, states that "gardening for profit was first brought to England about 70 years ago, before which we fetched most of our cherries from Holland and our apples from France. Peas from Holland . . . were dainties for ladies. They came so far and cost so dear." He states that gardening from Holland crept out of Sandwich in Kent and thence to Surrey, from which place he was writing.

Henry VIII's palace of Nonsuch at Cheam in Surrey is reputed to be the first place in Britain where cherries were cultivated, although it seems a surprisingly short time for this crop to have been in cultivation.

Prior to this great movement which followed the Reformation, it is fairly certain that the useful plants mostly grown in gardens were either medicinal herbs, aromatic herbs or pot herbs. The latter included all plant material used in cooking, so that we find parsley and coleworts both included in this group. There is, however, very little evidence that "vegetables" as we know them today formed more than a small proportion of the "pot herbs" grown.

The main use of the botanist was to discover and identify plants which might have economic uses, usually medicinal. The aromatic herbs were used to hide objectionable odours emitted by the person and the home under the insanitary conditions of the time. The pot herbs were chiefly for disguising the flavour of bad meat rather than as articles of diet in their own right. Salads were rarely eaten.

To return to May and Sir Philip Hoby, we are probably justified in saying that the taking over of the monastery site by Hoby coincided with the awakening of interest in salad and other vegetables. The stage is now set for the entry of Francis Bernardi a century later. The words usually used are that he "amused himself with gardening." His son, John Bernardi, who was born in Evesham in 1657, has recorded that his father spent about £10,000 on the indulgence of his horticultural tastes, partly at Windsor and ultimately at Evesham. It is not clear whether Bernardi really tried to make money out of his gardening. If he did, then his example in this early experiment could hardly have been called a success.

From the end of the 17th century we have better records than over the earlier period. The 18th century saw rapid strides in all aspects of life, not the least in

gardening. The continent of Europe was still the main source of inspiration, but it is interesting to note that the modern cauliflower was very much a product of 18th century England, and that we actually exported these to Holland and the Low Countries from areas around London.

In 1794, Tyndal could say that gardening was the sole manufacture of Evesham. "These gardens now occupy the whole of the Abbey site, and form a circle of considerable dimensions almost around the whole town; but chiefly on the inclining banks to the south and west of it . . . Ten thousand pounds are, at the lowest valuation, annually turned by these gardeners, who supply all the neighbouring towns, but especially Birmingham."

The population of the Evesham parishes are given at this time as All Saints 1,052, St. Lawrence 796 and Bengeworth 580.

Loudon (1824) mentions the fertile Vale of Evesham and states that the white onion is extensively grown, and asparagus and cucumbers for the Birmingham market. The same writer also refers to crab stocks and warrants for their fruit being produced at Pershore. It appears that crab pips were also sold to London seedmen by the Pershore growers for raising rootstocks. From another reference in Loudon one gathers that the currants grown around Pershore were sold for the making of British wines. This would warrant a full investigation.

One presumes that the "white onion" is a salad onion of White Lisbon type, but it could be a silver-skinned pickling onion.

Bentley's Directory for Worcestershire for 1841 stated that nearly 500 acres were under garden cultivation in All Saints, St. Lawrence and Bengeworth parishes at rents in some cases of £10 per acre. In the same directory, including a supplementary list, we find that of about 500 total entries only 38 are gardeners. The term "market gardener" does not appear to have come into use until a little later. Compared with the number of gardeners, there were 35 taverns and public houses, 16 beer-sellers, six wine and spirit merchants and 19 butchers.

The average of 13 acres per gardener seems rather high as there is no evidence as yet of any large growers who would raise the average on the whole. Thirteen acres with the methods of the day would probably employ three to four people.

A few years later, in 1845, May was able to say that the area cultivated within the borough, presumably for market garden purposes, was a little over 594 acres. Of these, 459 acres were in All Saints and St. Lawrence parishes and 135 in Bengeworth. As far as All Saints and St. Lawrence are concerned this probably represented all of the top-grade land in these parishes.

It is interesting to note that in 1942 the area under market gardening and fruit in these two parishes was around 400 acres and this included a certain amount of heavy land. Recent building encroachments will have reduced it still further.

The Bengeworth land was mostly on the southern side of Bengeworth in the neighbourhood of Church Street and Cooper's Lane but it also included a fairly large block bounded by Broadway Road, Elm Road and Badsey Lane. There was as yet little development on the Leys, which were probably still mainly under grass.

No gardeners are listed in the villages around Evesham in the 1841 Bentley but Pershore is mentioned as being important in fruit and vegetable growing. Nevertheless the number of gardeners listed is only six out of a total of 200 entries. On the other hand it is obvious that much of the early fruit planted at Pershore was on the farms, and the main fruit growers would not be included in the list of gardeners. Pershore "gardeners" were, in fact, in a very small way of business, many doing it as a part-time job, for we find "gardener and seedsman," "baker, gardener and maltster," "gardener and beer-seller" and even "tailor and gardener" among the early entries.

R. W. SIDWELL, 1960

EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

Sir—Mr. Sidwell has inevitably relied principally on out-of-date secondary authorities for his comments on market gardening in the Evesham area in the Middle Ages, and has, no doubt as a matter of common sense, arrived at the conclusion that local market gardening is post-medieval. Although no adequate work on the medieval economic history of the region has been printed, there is sufficient source of printed material to enable us to give a fairly definite answer to the question put by Mr. Sidwell. Manorial accounts from the Evesham Abbey estates do not seem to have survived, but there is no indication in the Evesham Abbey cartularies or the Evesham Abbey chronicle that any but the normal type of arable farming characteristic of most Midland villages was carried on.

Furthermore, accounts have survived from other Avon Valley medieval estates. These include the estates of the Bishop of Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Priory, Pershore Abbey and the Earls of Warwick. These are still in manuscript in various archive repositories, but sufficient work has been done on them to confirm that the most advanced type of arable farming in the Vale was aimed at the production of the traditional cereal crops of wheat, barley and oats, with an increasing proportion in the 14th and 15th centuries of peas and beans. Urban toll lists and accounts of part payment of wages in kind (to building workers at Stratford-on-Avon, for example) suggest that the only garden vegetables of importance (apart from herbs) were onions, garlic and leeks. I doubt if the acquisition of Hoby Evesham Abbey lands by the affected the situation at all. The fact is, of course, that the market conditions necessary to stimulate specialised horticulture were not present in the West Midlands in the Middle Ages, nor for a considerable time to come.

May I also venture to correct one of Mr. Sidwell's statements? According to Domesday Book (1086), there were at Evesham 27 farm servants of the Abbey. The figure quoted of 65 servants comes from the Evesham Abbey Cartulary in the British Museum (Cotton MS. Vespasian B.XXIV, folio 41v). The date to which this entry refers has not been established, but it is not earlier than about 1100, and may be considerably later in the 12th century.

Yours faithfully,
R. H. HILTON.

Fladbury,
November 5, 1960.

THE SOILS OF THE VALE—SOME IMPORTANT PHYSICAL FACTORS

By R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

In our last article an attempt was made to show something of the origins of Evesham market gardening up to around the 1840s. Before proceeding further with this side of the subject it will be as well to cover some of the geological and topographical features of the Vale, since these are of great importance in connection with the utilisation of the land.

The basic geology of the Vale is Lower Lias. This is primarily a clay deposit but its lower strata consist to some extent of flat bedded limestone. Outcrops of this are to be found along the ridge running from South Littleton to Cleve Prior and again along Haselor Lane.

To the west of these Lower Lias limestone outcrops lie the small areas of Red Keuper Marl that come within the Vale. One of these gives rise to the red soils at Merry Lane, Offenham, extends behind the Fish and Anchor, and eventually widens northwards to embrace much of Hartington, Bidford and Dennington. The second Keuper area, to the west of Haselor Hill, may be traced northwards through Craycombe Hill along the west of the Lenchies.

The Lias formations are geologically more recent than the Keuper and therefore lie above them. On the south and western side of our area we find deposits belonging to the Middle Lias. These consist of brownish clay loams and may be seen around the lower reaches of Bredden Hill, Dumbleton Hill and the main Cotswold Range. Above this lie, successively, the Upper Lias Clay and the Inferior Oolite. The characteristic feature of the latter is the well known Cotswold limestone.

SOLID

The above formations constitute what are known as solid formations. That is to say, they are the undisturbed materials as originally laid down. The fertility of the Vale would be far below its present level if it were to rely solely on such deposits. Much of the area is covered by what the geologist calls drift deposits. It is to these that the Vale owes much of its fertility.

Drift deposits of two main types are to be found here. One of these types found to the south of the Vale consists of fragments brought down, from what we now call the Cotswolds, by glacial action. They are to be found in the villages of Broadway, Childs-wickham, Badsey, Bretforton, Aldington, Sedgeberrow, Ashton-under-Hill, and Beckford, as well as covering an area on the

Cheltenham Road, Evesham, including part of the Martin's Charity land. The gravel and stone fragments found in these deposits are rough and angular and have not been transported for very great distances.

In contrast to this the second type of drift shows evidence of much wear and tear. This is that which forms the rich pebbly areas along the River Avon and includes the Abbey Gardens themselves. This pebbly sandy loam gives rise to some of the earliest market garden soils in the Vale and they are particularly well developed at Hartington, Offenham, Fladbury and Pershore. These materials have a long history and have travelled great distances, but their last move was by river action and they are spoken of as river terraces.

Soil survey workers give local soil names in an attempt to classify them. Soils are divided into series based on the nature of the parent materials, and are further divided into soil types. The principal soils of the Vale are shown in the table below.

MINOR SERIES

Other soil series of minor importance cover small areas in the Vale.

It will be seen that soil series receive a name from an area where that particular soil was first studied. Thus South Pether-

ton is in Somerset but the soil retains its name wherever it is found. We will consider some of the most important features of the various soil series.

Worcester Series

The red marls are better known further north in the county. They are not easy soils to work, but will grow reasonably good fruit and malncrop vegetables with good management.

Evesham Series

The clays and heavy loams of this series have long been noted for their suitability for plums and asparagus. Their high natural lime content gives them a good crumb structure with weathering. They usually have a high potash content.

Haselor Series

These are at times too shallow for satisfactory work and the excessively high lime may lead to nutritional troubles in fruit trees.

Croftthorne Heath Series

These are light pebbly loams rather like the Pershore series but they are very lime deficient and years of leaching has led to the deposition at a depth of a foot or two of iron concretions, known as iron-pan or "mother stone." These concretions often lead to impeded drainage as well as restricting root run and the soils are not very good where this feature is strongly developed. This soil series is best observed

on the Pershore to Croftthorne road but it is occasionally found elsewhere, on Greenhill for instance.

It is amusing to reflect on the explanation given by Tindal for this rusty conglomeration. It had apparently been observed by various people on the ground near the site of the Battle of Evesham, and it had been suggested that it might be the congealed blood of the warriors killed five centuries earlier! Tindal disbelieved this but suggested that it could at least be the residues of their rusty weapons. It seems a pity to destroy such romantic notions.

Pershore Series

These are the early soils of the Vale; hungry and quickly drying out, but responsive to high feeding. The area of this series in the old Abbey Gardens is now reduced to well below fifty acres. It is to be hoped that further encroachment on this area will be most strongly resisted. It is the cradle of Evesham Horticulture.

Badsey Series

These soils also have a place in history. The solid Lias Clay of the area north-west of the Cotswolds seems to possess natural undulations producing a series of basins. The glacial movement left these basins filled with gravels and surfaced with varying depths of fine brownish loam or clay loam. Water was retained by the clay bottom and this, together with the fertile top soil, created sites ideal for early settlements. All of the villages of this area are to be found on Badsey Series soils, although large expanses of clay of the Evesham Series separate the villages.

The remaining series are of lesser importance and need not be considered here. What about topography?

The Vale of Evesham is fortunate in its possession of a series of low ridges which have proved to give good air drainage and consequent freedom from spring radiation frosts. The Avon at Offenham Ferry is 75ft. above sea level, Knowle Hill and Horse-bridge Hill are over 150ft. Clarke's Hill, Greenhill, Longdon Hill, the Littleton/Cleeve Prior ridge, and much of Norton exceed 200ft. The highest point in the Lenchies, between Craycombe and Sheriffs Lench, exceeds 400ft.

Exceptional years with high wind frosts have sometimes given contradictory results, but over a large number of years it has been found that an elevation of 200ft. with the surrounding ground falling away well to the river will give freedom from frost damage in most seasons. In some years the 150ft. mark has been the safety line.

How growers have learnt from bitter experience and moved out to the higher land with their fruit, leaving the lower land to produce crops for which it is better suited, will be told in future articles.

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Series	Type	Origin
SOILS DERIVED FROM SOLID FORMATIONS		
Worcester Series.		Keuper Marl.
Evesham Series.	Evesham Heavy Loam, Evesham Clay	Lower Lias Clay.
Haselor Series.		Lower Lias Clay with Limestone bands.
SOILS DERIVED FROM SUPERFICIAL DEPOSITS		
Hipton Hill Series.		Red Boulder Clay. Mainly of Keuper Marl origin.
Croftthorne Heath Series.		Glacial or River Terrace, Bunter origin.
Pershore Series.	Pershore Sand Pershore Loam	Mainly River Terrace, Bunter origin.
Badsey Series.	Badsey Loam Badsey Clay	Glacial drift and snow sludge overlying calcareous gravel.
Honeybourne Series.		As Badsey but without gravel.
South Petherton Series.		Fine sandy silts from Middle Lias.
Sherbourne.		Clay loam with limestone fragments from Inferior Oolite.

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A HISTORY OF EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

RICHARD VARDEN, OF SEAFORD GRANGE

By
R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

IN MY first article I mentioned that the people listed as gardeners in the Pershore Directory of 1841 were in a rather small way of business. The Pershore tithe map of 1842 throws a good deal more light on the situation at this time.

This map includes the area near the centre of Pershore bounded by Three Springs Road to the north-west and on the south-west by Defford Road, and includes what is today Saint Andrew's Road. It also covers the top side of Three Springs Road from the edge of Tiddesley Wood to Holloway. In these two areas there are approximately 150 acres of land which was mostly under horticultural crops.

The areas designated as "orchards" were under 20 acres, but these were all pasture orchards and it is obvious that the terminology was that still in use among Vale of Evesham natives. Orchards were grass orchards; the cultivated plum plantation was either a "nursery" or a plantation, or, in the language of the tithe map, a "garden."

It is almost certain that this area would carry some fruit, probably Yellow Egg plums, for this variety had been discovered at Tiddesley Wood about 1833. We are probably safe in assuming that fruit growing and gardening also extended from Pershore towards Pirvin. The earliest record of the Yellow Egg Plum being grown is at Gidbridge. But it was not on a large scale.

The Evesham-Worcester railway line was completed in 1852. One of the engineers in charge was a man named Richard Varden. He apparently then decided to give up surveying activities and take to fruit growing.

There is some doubt as to whether he built Seaford Grange, Peopleton, or whether he bought it after it was built, but in 1852 he came into possession of this estate of about 250 acres. The parish register of Peopleton records that a son, Frederick Medvin, was born to Richard and Elizabeth Susannah Varden on September 30, 1855. Bentley's Directory for that year records Richard Vardin, The Grange, Peopleton, Farmer. The spelling is probably an error on the part of the compiler.

Varden began planting fruit on the grand scale and he must have been instrumental in bringing new fruit varieties into the district, especially from the London area. He was a friend of Thomas

Rivers, of Sawbridgeworth, Herts., who was rapidly establishing himself as the leading fruit nurseryman in Britain.

The scale of Varden's work aroused much attention and he became one of the accepted authorities on fruit in the County of Worcester. He was a member of the Chamber of Agriculture for Worcestershire and became a county delegate to the Central Chamber of Agriculture in London. In 1855 he served on the Worcestershire committee of The British Pomological Society.

His association with Thomas Rivers undoubtedly led to the introduction of many plum varieties into Worcestershire. The plum Sandall's, discovered in 1800 by a Mr. Sandall, of Fulham, became very widely planted around Fulham and Chiswick in the middle of the last century. Thomas Rivers recorded finding large trees of Sandall's in "Richard Varden's fruit garden at Pershore" in 1868. Large trees of this variety were still to be found there until a few years ago. The variety was always grown on its own roots so that suckers came true to type.

Another plum which must have been planted by Varden at Seaford is the plum known as "Coe's Late Red" in the Vale of Evesham. This is quite distinct from the true Coe's Late Red which is still found occasionally in the Eastern Counties. The Evesham plum is really the American variety Lombard. It would be interesting to know when and how it acquired the name Coe's Late Red. The old stumps of these trees existed until a few years ago, and they are the earliest record I have of this variety, which appears to have been introduced into Britain a little before 1850.

Other plums of interest that I found at Seaford a few years ago were Goliath, Van Mons Red, Rivers' Early Favourite, Autumn Compote and Rivers' Blue Profile. Seaford Grange was, in fact, a plum museum and included every variety of possible commercial importance.

Reports differ somewhat as to the exact scale of Varden's fruit growing, but the following article in "The Garden," of January, 1872, and dated December 9, 1871, is of interest.

"A Worcester Fruit Farm"

"Mr. Varden has worked out

the idea of a fruit farm on a vast scale near Pershore. His estate is 250 acres. Of this, about 140 acres are planted with fruit trees. These include 60,000 gooseberry bushes, 100,000 currant trees and about 6,000 plum trees, to say nothing of pear, apple and other trees. The extent of the farm may be imagined when we mention that for weeks during the fruit season Mr. Varden has sent off four or five tons of fruit a day. One lot of currants to one customer weighed seven tons."

The currants would, of course, be mostly, if not all, red.

In giving evidence before the Central Chamber of Agriculture in 1872, Varden stated that there were about 1,600-1,700 acres of fruit around London and between 1,500 and 2,000 around Evesham, with 400-500 near Pershore. He then gave his own acreage as 120 acres with 100 acres underplanted with soft fruit.

Richard Varden died in 1873, aged 62 years. He was buried at Peopleton on May 9. Twenty years is a short career for a fruit grower, yet in that time Varden played a tremendous part in showing the way to those that were to follow.

The later history of Seaford is not without interest. Benjamin Bomford is stated by Gant (History of Worcestershire Agriculture) to have bought the property in 1878. This would have been one of that great man's last purchases, for he died in 1880.

The remnants of Varden's "fruit museum" have provided the present occupier, Mr. C. F. Bloxham, with plenty of marketing headaches during the last fourteen years but, stump by stump, the old trees have vanished to be replaced by varieties more acceptable to the present markets.

I have not been able to trace any of Varden's descendants, and it is not known what happened to his son. A few years ago, two ladies claiming descent from Richard Varden visited Mr. and Mrs. Bloxham. They were apparently on a pilgrimage from South Africa, but they left no address. I would appreciate any information however slight.

(I am indebted to the Rev. H. M. Stone, vicar of Peopleton, for help in matters concerning parish records, and to Mr. and Mrs. C. F. Bloxham for tolerating a number of visits and inquiries over the last ten years.)

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A HISTORY OF EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

Mid-19th century developments and experiments at Evesham

Feb 10 1964

BY R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

The mid-19th century was, as we have said before, a critical and important period in the development of Evesham horticulture. The railways had come and brought with them the possibility of quick transport of perishable produce to distant markets. James Myatt came to Offenham in 1852 and began large-scale market gardening on land which had previously been under farm crops. Myatt was therefore contemporary with Richard Varden, of Seaford Grange, dealt with in our last article, and he exerted an influence at least as great as that of Varden.

We will not pursue Myatt's work further at this stage but will turn our attention to Evesham itself and examine the position there at this time.

UNSYMPATHETIC

When May published the 1845 edition of his "History of Evesham" he did not think it necessary to modify his description of our industry contained in the edition of 1834. He writes:

"Gardening is . . . the staple employment of the labouring class." And continues: "The early period of life at which their labour usually begins, appears to repress their growth to middle height or under it; and although the frame is in general strongly compact at manhood, yet they soon begin to fall away and are often lame or decrepit, when if rationally worked, they would have still continued in their prime. Their wages average ten shillings weekly."

May was an Evesham bookseller and printer, not very much in sympathy with market gardening, and one can detect that slight strain of snobbery, not unknown today. He was, nevertheless, sufficiently close to the job to be able to assess the status of the market gardeners of his time with fair accuracy. The wages stated would be rather less than

those paid to labourers in most occupations. To May, market gardeners were, in fact, people of the lower orders and likely to remain so.

One of the most influential figures at Evesham at this time was Charles Randell. Randell was born on December 31, 1810. So far I have not been able to trace anything else about his early history, except that he lived at Prospect House, how more usually known as "The Elm," around 1840. By 1845, when he was a subscriber to May's History of Evesham, we find his address given as Lenchwick. He later moved to Chadbury where he became agent for the Duc d'Aumale on the Woodnorion estate, and also farmed on his own as a tenant of the estate. He was a man of some means, for we find that he had sunk somewhere near £12,000 capital in his 300-odd acres of rented land by about 1880. His farm included about 380 acres of arable. Gault deals at some length with Randell's work in his History of Worcestershire Agriculture, but there is no point in repeating his observations here. It is sufficient to say that there are a few slight discrepancies between Gault's statements and some other information which has come to hand, which I hope to resolve in the near future.

HIGHLY FARMED

Randell's farm was "wonderfully well managed and very highly farmed with aids of every description . . . an immense talent and large capital always working on it." The quotation is from a notebook of C. H. Smith who, starting as a pupil under Randell in 1864, succeeded him as agent

on Randell's death in 1888, and was also agent for several large Cotswold estates. C. H. Smith himself is worthy of treatment in this series, but that must be for another time. For the moment we are grateful to him for some valuable information about Charles Randell and the Chadbury Farm.

Farming became unprofitable around 1875 and it is clear that Randell, originally a straight farmer and an important figure in the sheep world, took to vegetable growing as a new source of income. He was probably influenced to some extent by Myatt in this.

Mr. John Haines, who was 15 years old when Randell died, remembers him quite well, and recalls that Randell was the first man he knew to grow drilled cabbage. Around 1885 he had 30 acres of this crop at Twyford on the left-hand side of the main road from Greenhill to the Lenchwick turn. Early peas too, were an important crop on this farm.

THE DEALER

The period saw the rise of a new class of trader in Evesham, that of the dealer or grower-merchant. No doubt dealers of sorts had existed from the early days, but the railways presented great opportunities for the expansion of businesses of this kind. Peas were a particularly suitable crop for dealers to buy "on the piece," and this became a common practice. Mr. Haines remembers his father, Alfred Haines, of the George and Dragon, Bewdley Street, Geo. Cole, of the Vauxhall Inn, Merstow Green, and Fred Watkins, of High Street, joining forces to buy 100 acres of peas at Fladbury on one occasion.

C. H. Smith gives Randell's rotations at Chadbury as follows: First-year, cabbage followed by cauliflowers; second, early peas followed by turnips; third, mangels; fourth, barley; fifth, seeds; sixth, wheat.

This would obviously apply to the lighter land only. The turnips could have been a dual purpose crop, either fed off or sold as a vegetable. Actually he appears to have clamped the crop as a rule

and sold it if the price was good enough. On January 22, 1888, he "sold turnips to Fred Watkins at 35s. per ton delivered to Evesham station." This was regarded as a good price for what was, after all, only a late summer catch crop.

The manual programme followed for the cabbage crop was probably copied from the Evesham market gardeners. It was as follows:

- 1 to 2 tons leather dust per acre ploughed in.
- 1 ton soot harrowed into surface at planting time.
- 1 ton Peruvian or fish guano in two applications in March.
- 1 1/2 cwt. nitrate of soda in three applications (if possible) at intervals of a week or so in April i.e. 1/2 cwt. per application.

The crop was usually harvested fully hearted. Cauliflowers following cabbage would therefore be late summer or autumn crops. We are told that in 1881 Randell manured 16 acres of cauliflowers after cabbage as follows:

- 3 cwt. kiln dust, soaked in liquid manure, per acre.
- 2 cwt. fish guano.
- 1 load of burnt ashes.

An excellent crop was obtained. C. H. Smith makes an entry in his diary for August 7, obviously intended as a reminder: "Drill cabbage seed second week in August and cut out like swedes or mangels. Best early cabbage were grown this way 1886/7."

The following prices were ruling for fertilisers around 1870/80: Peruvian guano, £11 15s. per ton at Liverpool plus 14s. 2d. per ton to Evesham. Nitrate of soda, £15 2s. 6d. per ton. Kiln dust from Flower & Sons, 30s. per ton at Stratford. Leather dust (Messrs. Burlingham), £4 10s. per ton.

It is perhaps some comfort to note that the nitrate of soda was just about the same price on a unit basis as present-day nitrogenous fertilisers are, added to which present-day materials are subsidised, making them, in fact, very much cheaper. But what a clamour there would be today for some real 1880 grade Peruvian guano at £12 or so per ton!

PIECE WORK

Some of the piece-work rates of this period may be of interest to readers. Rates for picking: Pershore plums, 3d. per pot. Gooseberries, 6d. per pot. Peas, 6d. to 7d. per pot. Digging potatoes, 2d. to 6d. per pot of 80 lbs.

Cultivations: 15s. to 25s. per acre. Breastploughing, 10s. per acre (1 1/2). do. turf, 22s. 6d. per acre. Singling turnips and swedes, 5s. per acre. Hoeing and moulting potatoes, 3s. 6d. per chain. Planting cabbages, marked out both ways, 10d. to 1s. 3d. per 1,000.

This latter rate seems high by comparison with present day standards, but the plants were more widely spaced than is the custom to day. It is hard to believe that marking out both ways was a normal practice for cabbage. Piece work rates of 1s. 6d. per 1,000 are given for savoy and Brussels sprouts.

It is hoped that the foregoing notes have given some idea of the changes in the pattern of Evesham market gardening of this period. In my next two articles I must turn to the smaller growers and see how they were adapting themselves to, and profiting from the new ideas and opportunities. We will see how Joseph Masters, perhaps the greatest champion the Evesham growers ever had, not only won legal recognition of the Evesham Custom, but crowned it all by being elected Mayor of Evesham for three years in succession in 1888/90, the first market gardener to hold this office. Market gardening had attained respectability little more than forty years after May had published his rather slighting words. Wealth lay just ahead.

I wish to thank Commander R. Dudley-Smith, O.B.E., R.N., for permission to use extracts from his grandfather's diary and note-books, and also Mr. John Haines for allowing me to draw on his rich fund of memories.

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HISTORY OF EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

JOSEPH MASTERS AND HIS FAMILY

BY R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

EVENTS of the second half of the nineteenth century reveal a period of steady progress for the Evesham market gardening industry. Intelligent and progressive people were being attracted to the profession and it was becoming obvious that this was no mere occupation for labourers.

During this period no man figured more prominently than Joseph Masters. Few men in Evesham's history have worked harder for the welfare of others.

Joseph Masters was born at Headless Cross, near Redditch, in 1826/27 and he was educated mainly at Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School. The family moved to Twyford while Joseph was still young and his father apparently kept the toll-house at the top of Greenhill for some years.

MISSIONARY SON

He seems to have been little over twenty years of age when he married a sister of John Stephens, a prominent local Wesleyan, and from then onwards threw in his lot energetically with that movement. His eldest son, Dr. F. J. Masters, became a famous Chinese missionary who served through the Boxer rising and eventually became head of the Chinese Wesleyan Mission on the Pacific coast of North America.

Dr. Masters was a well-known Chinese scholar in that region. These points are not of great horticultural interest, but they do serve to set a framework for Joseph Masters' work in other fields.

FRUIT PIONEER

By 1855, when he was still under thirty, he was a market gardener with an address in Merstow Green. Fruit was obviously interesting him very much and in his later years it is as a fruit grower and as a pioneer in new fruit growing techniques that he seems to have been specially prominent.

He planted fruit on Greenhill, probably around 1860 to 1870, and he is regarded as one of the first men to realise the value of elevation in giving frost-free sites. In the early days, almost the whole of the Abbey was under fruit trees, and frosts often reduced the crops to zero.

The site first planted by Joseph Masters appears to have been the six-acre block above Oxstalls Cottages. This was in the occupation of ~~the late~~ Mr. E. L. Edwards for many years and is now occupied by Mr. Geo. Wills. It

is probable that the oldest trees still standing on this site were actually planted by Joseph Masters.

By 1873 he had moved to Durocot Lane, Bengeworth, in which house he lived until his death on June 17, 1895. We are not certain how long he retained his Greenhill land, but we do know that he had land in the neighbourhood of Hinton around 1880, for his son, Henry Masters, lived at Hinton Lodge at about that time and managed the land for his father. His grandson, our present Ald. F. J. Masters, was born there. From various gleanings of information it seems probable that this Hinton land was probably that at present occupied by Mr. A. E. Longworth.

Joseph Masters always took a prominent part in matters concerning the welfare of market gardeners, and he was a member of the deputation to the Board of Trade which successfully obtained a reduction of railway freight charges which were regarded as excessive for market garden produce. From February, 1890, until his death he was secretary of the Evesham Fruit Pests Committee which worked in conjunction with Miss Ormerod, Entomologist to the Royal Agricultural Society of England. In this connection he was responsible for trying out various spray chemicals such as Paris Green for caterpillar control. He and James Myatt seem to have been the first to try greasebanding in Evesham, as early as 1864.

THE MARKET

In 1880 he was prominent in stressing the need for a local auction market. It was at this time that Messrs. Urwick and Hunt, of Ludlow, set up an auction in the Market Square. This operated for three days each week. In the following year, Harvey Hunt started what later became the Smithfield Market, near Evesham Station. This was a great step forward as it brought buyers into Evesham and also increased the efficiency of the local buying agents who could now see a wide range of produce displayed at one centre. The effect on growers was also beneficial as they were able to see their own produce alongside that of other growers. Competition of this kind could have nothing but good results.

Although Joseph Masters was a man of strong convictions and would not move from a course that he knew to be right, yet he showed remarkable moderation and proved to be a master of conciliation when handling difficult problems. In no field was this side of his character more prominent than in the negotiations over the Evesham Custom. This has now passed into history and has been recorded by several other writers, including Mr. C. H. Gardiner, in these pages, so that

it is not necessary to go into the matter in great detail.

Briefly it amounted to this. In February, 1872, the tenants on the Ridge Estate at Evesham were served with notice to quit their holdings in the autumn because the then Squire Ridge wished to farm the land himself. Joseph Masters undertook to negotiate on behalf of the tenants, of whom he was one. The full correspondence is preserved in the Evesham Public Library for those who wish to read the whole story. Joseph Masters emerges as a man of dogged determination, of unswerving loyalty to his fellow growers, yet a man of gentlemanly politeness withal.

INCENTIVE

From this time onwards the Evesham Custom obtained legal recognition although, as Mr. Gardiner has pointed out, it has always been frowned upon by lawyers who dislike the idea of dual ownership. Nevertheless it must be stated that the Evesham Custom was probably the greatest single factor in the building up of a successful market gardening industry at Evesham. What better incentive is there to a man intending to give up his land than the knowledge that he could sell his tenant-right to the highest bidder?

It would be wrong to suppose that the Evesham Custom dates from Joseph Masters. The Evesham Custom had existed as an unwritten law from the very early days, but its full acceptance by all of the principal landlords is undoubtedly due to the work of this man.

He became an Evesham borough councillor in 1872, was an alderman from 1887 until his death, and mayor of Evesham in the three years 1888-90. He was the first market gardener to hold this office, an office subsequently held by his son and grandson.

It has not been possible to determine with accuracy the acreage occupied by Joseph Masters at the time of his death, but it would probably be around 100 acres. This would make him one of the largest market gardeners of the time in the district.

It would, of course, be wrong to suppose that others were not moving along similar lines. How this was being done and how horticulture developed with the full force of the Evesham Custom in operation must be left for another time.

The writer wishes to thank Ald. F. J. Masters for making available certain private papers concerning his grandfather.

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HISTORY OF EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

The effects of new ideas on the 'real' Evesham gardeners

BY

R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

IN EARLIER articles, I have tended to stress the effects on horticulture in the Vale of Evesham of new ideas coming in from outside. Francis Barnard, Richard Varden, James Myatt, Charles Randall and Joseph Masters were all people who exerted great influence in the vale, although they themselves had no roots here. Contrary to popular opinion, outside influence has always been of great importance, and this has continued right up to the present time when the influx of Dutch settlers has transformed much of the face of Offenham.

However, we must not allow this fact to overshadow the importance of the real men of Evesham themselves, and it is to these men that I must now turn.

Reference to Bentley's Trade Directory for Evesham for 1841 reveals names such as Brotherton, Clements, Cook, Field, Grove, Knight, Langston and Spiers, all of which are to be found among our market gardeners of the present day. These were the men who represented the real core of Evesham gardening, the traditional gardeners. They were probably all small growers, perhaps ranging from a few acres to 10-15 acres each.

The coming of the railways in the middle of the century and the agricultural depression of around 1870-1880 both gave a great impetus to market gardening. By 1880 we find 42 gardeners sufficiently important to be included in Kelly's Directory. Six of these carry the name of Grove, which was overwhelmingly the most important name in Evesham gardening for many years. Bengeworth claimed seven of the forty-two gardeners at this stage.

DAMASCENES

The type of gardening and crops grown must be given some attention. The Damascene, which is peculiarly a Vale of Evesham damson variety rarely seen outside the Avon Valley from Stratford-on-Avon to Tewkesbury, figured prominently on the Abbey Gardens where it probably covered 80 per cent of the total area. It was the practice to plant boundary rows about 1 ft. from the edge of the holding with the trees 5 ft. apart in the row. As the occupier of the adjoining land did the same the effect was to produce a dense boundary fence. Survivals of this are still to be found in parts of the dis-

trict, especially at Hampton, and it is now possible to walk down the boundary only by executing a sort of rumba!

A crop which has always interested me, and one on which more information can be collected, is that of "sawed radish." The practice was probably in vogue for 150 years or more. It was usual to sow the warm borders in the Abbey Gardens and elsewhere with the long red radish, Wood's Early Frame, around December to January, and to cover them with straw when bad weather threatened. The straw covering probably served as some slight protection against birds, but not protection enough for we find radish minding a common occupation for the youth of Evesham.

FROM LONDON?

The method was also commonly found in the London area in the 18th century. It is perhaps a debatable point as to whether the London people learned from Evesham or vice-versa. Conclusive evidence is lacking, but I suggest, without very strong conviction, that perhaps the Londoners were first with the practice.

This crop certainly became one

of the most profitable crops for the smaller growers and probably reached its peak from early in the present century to some period between the wars. I should be interested to hear from anyone who has grown sawed radish, commercially, at Evesham since about 1950. It is assumed that the practice has now died out with the change over to French Breakfast types under frames and cloches.

CUCUMBERS

Outdoor cucumbers also figured prominently among Evesham market garden crops in the earlier part of last century, and they are very often mentioned by earlier writers. They were mostly used for pickling. Some of these were probably started under hand lights.

Incidentally, the use of hand lights, cap glasses, rings, etc., in forwarding crops is a useful study in itself, and it is hoped that specimens of such types as are at present available will be preserved in our own museum before they are lost for ever.

Most of the ordinary vegetable crops would also be grown. Brussels sprouts were still comparatively unimportant, but peas were already beginning to pass into large scale farm cultivation by 1870.

By 1872 the number of market gardeners at Evesham was over 100; nine of these appear to have been Groves, six Brothertons, and five News, together with most of the other well known Evesham names.

One name now appears for the first time in our lists of Evesham gardeners, that of Byrd. George Byrd, of Out Street, was apparently the first market gardener of this name of whom we have records. The story of this exceptional man will be told in our next article, for when George Byrd became a market gardener he founded much more than a market gardening business. He founded what was virtually a dynasty, which was to have profound effects on the pattern of horticulture and indeed the social life of Evesham for the century to come.

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The Influence of George Byrd.

Until the late 19th century the Evesham market gardeners were small men, doing their work with family labour, but there was evidence by now of a new spirit and for the more vigorous and far sighted men the sky must have seemed the limit.

An ambitious young ~~grew~~ gardener in Evesham at this time could expand in one of two ways. He could either keep adding to his land by taking additional pieces from his neighbours under the Evesham Custom or he could get out of the town completely and take a sizeable holding elsewhere. To the man of small means the first alternative was the only one available. As an example of how this system worked we can hardly do better than take George Byrd.

George Byrd was born in 1845 of poor parents. His father was a tannery worker. By 1872, when he was still in his twenties, we find that he is established as a market gardener. Conventional 'education' did not come George Byrd's way and he did not waste much time going to look for it. At the beginning he could not afford to pay ingoing to existing tenants for any of the better land so he took directly from the Rudge Estate a piece of clay land at the foot of Greenhill on the right hand side of the Worcester Road. The frontage is now built on but the remainder is still in the occupation of his descendents, Saml. Byrd and Sons Ltd. He later took a small piece on the opposite side of the Worcester road by the present factory of Messrs Smedley. By 1890 he had added land at Badsey Lane, Cheltenham Road, the Abbey, and Greenhill, totalling over 30 acres. A little later he moved to Twyford House at the end of Blayney's Lane, taking additional lane there at the same time. In 1899 he built 17, Greenhill in which house he remained until his death on 31st October 1913.

These are bare chronological facts. What of the man himself? In the first place he possessed few of the social graces. He was first and foremost a grower, with a ~~fix~~ feeling for the soil, and an understanding of crop production, that placed him ahead of most men on his time. Mr John Haines, who married George Byrd's daughter, recalls that his father-in-law was the best cabbage grower at Evesham and he himself was pleased to follow the same methods.

George Byrd had a shrewd idea of the value of land, and, as he acquired wealth, he was ready to spend it on obtaining the best land in the borough. Before the end of the century he was paying a hundred pounds, ~~an~~ ~~acare~~ or more 'ingoing' for land at the Abbey or other favoured sites. This policy of paying heavily for the tenant rights of the best land was pursued by his sons Fred and Samuel, and his sons in law H.J. Phipps and John Haines, so that by the time of George Byrd's death almost the whole of the Abbey land and much of the best land in Evesham was in the occupation of the family, and has remained so to this day.

This, perhaps, shows the working of the Evesham Custom at its best. The best men got the best land because they were better able to make use of it. Mr Haines himself recalls how in 1905 he paid £875 ingoing for 7 acres of land. This at a time when a skilled foreman would be earning about ~~323x32~~ 30/- per week. So the small people left the Abbey and market gardening became big business.

The standard set by the gardeners of this period was one of superb cultivation and absolute perfection of soil management. Hand digging still accounted for much of the basic cultivation. It is one of the modern ~~tra~~gadies that with the advance of technical education, and mechanisation we are forgetting, more and more, the simple management of soil. The handling of soil is something quite easy to learn if one grows up with it, but extremely difficult to teach,

hence the deplorable state of cultivation seen in so many horticultural Colleges and centres of instruction to-day. Few university graduates in agriculture or horticulture seem to have more than the most elementary ideas about the handling of land. Yet this still constitutes the most important factor in farm management. We cannot put the clock back but we must adapt our new ideas to the basic needs of the soil. We hear a lot of talk about 'tired land' to-day and about the need for more humus. Organic matter certainly improved the working properties of soils but much of our tired land is tired only of being mauled about during the untimely visits of the modern wheeled tractor. Tractor drivers tend to be mechanics rather than gardeners.

This, however, is digressing. The line of development we have traced back to George Byrd - the line of big Evesham 'traditional' growers - reached its peak possibly in the 1930's and its greatest exponent was probably Mr John Haines, who, in his 88th year still retains a lively brain and a love of soil and plants.

The second world war and after saw a decline in standards. However highly mechanised we become, however large growers may be and however wealthy the fact remains that the old order has passed but we can still look back and learn something from it.

RWS. Howell

HISTORY OF EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

The coming of commercial glass

to a modern Vale

By

R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

THE TIME has now come to look at a different side of our horticultural industry, that of commercial glass. This is a fairly modern development, but we can trace three distinct phases of glasshouse development in the Vale of Evesham.

The Toddington glass, comprising about two acres of heated, steel-framed houses, built between 1885 and 1890, marks the real beginning. Most people who know anything about the remarkable Toddington venture think mainly of fruit, for it was the largest single planting of fruit ever undertaken in Britain. We will, however, leave that side of the story until another time. In some ways the glasshouse development at Toddington showed a greater originality of outlook than the fruit planting. It undoubtedly exerted a great deal of influence on further developments in the Vale.

STARTED PROGRAMME

The Fourth Baron Sudeley succeeded to the title and to the Toddington Estate in 1877 at the age of 37. He immediately started a programme of horticultural development on a grand scale. Private garden glass was well

developed on most large country estates but this was something quite different. The Toddington glass was sited at two different points. The main block, comprising about one and a half acres, was built within the village near the edge of the park. A further block at Shetcombe, now in a derelict condition, is still to be seen as one approaches Winchcombe from Sedgeberrow. The Shetcombe glass was probably the last to be finished and it was certainly built after 1887.

The Toddington houses were of two types; twelve-foot-wide steel houses with curved roofs and twenty-two-foot-wide houses with steel glazing bars and wooden purlins. These latter were of a type which would pass as modern today.

The steelwork was shipped over from Belgium and Belgian workmen were brought over by Lord Sudeley to do the erection.

Financial disaster overtook the Sudeley fortunes. Lord Sudeley became bankrupt in 1892, and in 1901 the estate was bought by Mr. Hugh Andrews. Shortly after this some of the Toddington glass was

dismantled and re-erected by Mr. T. H. Powell at Hillside Nurseries, Mickleton. This appears to be among the earliest of the Mickleton glass and within the last few years Messrs. R. R. Smith and Sons, the present owners of Hillside, have scrapped six 100 ft. by 12 ft. and one 100 ft. by 22 ft., which had been moved from the original Toddington site.

The main block of the Toddington glass is now being renovated by the present owners, Messrs. H. W. Panes and Son. This now comprises about one acre.

SPREADING RAPIDLY

By about 1910 the idea of commercial glass was spreading rapidly through the district. Not only was Mickleton starting on its way but odd nurseries were springing up in several other places. Compared with districts such as the Lea Valley, the area was small, but it was large enough to add a new interest to the district. The Winchcombe Road Nurseries at Sedgeberrow were built by Mr. Bowley about 1909-10, and Mr. Richards built the Wickhamford Nurseries, now occupied by Mr. Pearce, at about the same time. Mr. Pearce's father was the original foreman at Sedgeberrow, but took over the Wickhamford Nursery on his own shortly after.

The late Mr. Joseph Webb built his first glass at Mickleton about 1910-12, and he had completed about four acres by 1920. This seems to have been the largest single area in the district up to that time. A 150 ft. by 30 ft. cold house of the Mickleton pattern was built at this time for £200. Practically the whole of this Mickleton glass was put up by Henry Grinnell, who also built houses at Offenham and Badsay. By 1939 Mr. Webb and his son, our present Mr. Joseph Webb, had about nine and a half acres of glass between them. This still remains our largest glasshouse holding. The total glass in Mickleton is now about 15 to 16 acres.

UNHEATED

The Mickleton glass was built primarily for the early cauliflower crop. Most of the glass was unheated and with it grew up the now familiar "Mickleton tradition" of early cauliflower growing.

The recent history comprises some further extensions of the Mickleton system but since the late 1930s the Dutch influence has dominated the scene. That, however, is for another time.

The author wishes to acknowledge help given by many people and in particular the following: Mr. J. Webb, Mr. R. C. Payne, Mr. R. F. Panes, Mr. C. Olsson, Mr. R. Pearce, and Mr. R. Purton.

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Diaries of Jan 5 1968 James Hall

R. W. SIDWELL begins the story of
a successful Badsey gardener, and
looks carefully at the books he kept.

MARKET GARDENING, creeping out from Evesham, reached the village of Badsey around the middle of last century. Farms were on the verge of bankruptcy and landowners and speculators found that they could get much bigger rents by letting the land out in small lots to farm labourers for market garden purposes. The rise in population which resulted from this change of land use was remarkable. The population of Badsey increased from 487 in 1871 to 1,127 in 1911. Purely agricultural parishes whether near Evesham or elsewhere in the country all declined in population during this period, often by as much as 30 per cent. Nor was this the whole story, for there was often insufficient labour in the village of Badsey to meet its needs and men travelled from Evesham and neighbouring villages to supplement the local supply.

Today, of course, Badsey is becoming just another dormitory village. A few good growers remain and the best of these are as good as ever they were but numbers decline and much of the land slides back into indifferent farming.

The remarkable revolution during the late 19th century, which made Badsey almost unique among the whole of the villages of Britain, is now a piece of interesting social history. But what sort of men were they who wrought such a change in the life of this village? Stories abound of men who mixed hard work with hard drinking. They were often illiterate but they brought soil management to a degree of perfection far beyond the grasp of university educated soil science lecturers or authors of popular gardening books.

A family that contributed to the rise of Badsey was that of Thomas Hall. He was the village shoemaker and was born at Dumbleton in 1818, coming to Badsey in 1844. His three sons, Charles born at Dumbleton in 1839 and Theodore James and Owen Joseph, born at Badsey in the years 1845 and 1849 respectively, were all market gardeners and in 1890 had about 20 acres between them. The two younger sons seem to have been known by their second names and will be so called from now on.

The changeover from farming was not accomplished without friction. Farmers resented the land being split up among their labourers. Many who took land to work in their spare time were dismissed. When they saw how things were turning out, landowners were only too willing to fall in with the new trend and mortgagees were ready to foreclose when the opportunity occurred for the enhanced rentals which they were able to get when the land was let in small lots.

In this somewhat turbulent world Thomas Hall was the small man's champion. Arrogant and truculent, he was a born rebel, but he was not without a cause and by the time of his death in 1909, at the age of 91, it was possible to walk over a thousand acres of land around Badsey village without touching farmland at all. Most of the growers had about five acres but some would have more. Badsey had become a village of small master men.

At least one of Thomas Hall's brothers had settled in America and in the mid 1870s James decided to do likewise and took his younger brother, Joseph, with him. James had married Jane Field, of Aldington, in December, 1866. Settling near Auburn, in the west of New York State, they began

farming on a small scale and from March 1, 1876, he began a daily diary in which all business transactions and domestic expenses were recorded. He does not record what capital he had to start with but his profits after two years were 945 dollars 89 cents—a little under £200 at the rate of exchange of the time. This was real wealth for a man of Badsey who as a farm labourer would have received about £100 or even less as his gross income during that period.

Whether James and Jane tired of the American way of life or whether news from home told them of the new prospects that Badsey had to offer we do not know but they certainly decided to return. They left New York on April 27, 1878, arriving at Liverpool at 11 p.m., on May 6. Joseph had returned the previous November and was already gardening at Badsey.

After spending a couple of weeks visiting relations they took temporary accommodation with his sister, Mrs. Thomas Moisey, at Badsey. On Wednesday, May 22, 1878, he paid brother Joseph £12 ingoing for a piece of land at Aldington, owned by Thomas Byrd, bought a hoe for 2s. and recorded that he spent the day 'hoing bones.' James Hall was back in business.

The diary continued with almost daily entries, mostly records of financial matters, until his retirement in April, 1914, apart from a break of five years, i.e. 1887-91 inclusive. This break is unfortunate as it covers a most vital period. The diary is in three books—no doubt a fourth book has been lost. Regrettable though this is, we are most grateful for what has been preserved, as it reveals the pattern of living of the successful men of Badsey during this interesting period.

James Hall was abstemious, he was a lay preacher and was very active in the chapel at Aldington. In this he differed from some of his contemporaries but it was not easy to earn a living for all that. He does not appear to have ever been short of money but this was more because of the care he exercised in spending it than because he found it easy to make. In many years he showed a loss and that wad of American dollars must have been very useful. The record year by year is shown in the table.

These figures require some explanatory notes. The credit and debit columns show how much his savings grew or shrank during the year after all his domestic expenses had been met. In some years substantial payments for equipment, such as a pony and cart, were made and this was charged to the one year. He made no attempt to produce a balance sheet. It was simply a record of income and expenditure.

The five-year gap was probably a period of affluence. His first piece of asparagus came into cut in 1886 and from 1892 onwards this crop dominated his whole activity and provided most of his income. The missing years, therefore, could hardly have been anything but prosperous. His known activities during this period including paying £120 for 3 roods 28 perches of land on which he built his house, Bredon View, in 1889 and also lending Joseph £100 towards the cost of building Auburn Villa on the adjoining plot of land.

After 1906 he gave up most of his land and we must not read too much into the last seven years. The area he now worked could not have provided him with a proper living but it did offset some of his domestic expenses.

In future articles we will consider the diaries in greater detail.

THE RECORD YEAR BY YEAR

Year	Turnover			Credit balance			Debit balance		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
1878	30	5	9	—	—	—	27	17	4½
1879	89	15	8½	—	—	—	14	2	1½
1880	94	4	6	—	—	—	14	6	0
1881	144	6	1½	20	11	11½	—	—	—
1882	139	11	2½	20	4	9½	—	—	—
1883	102	6	5½	—	—	—	3	6	5½
1884	96	15	2½	—	—	—	7	16	6
1885	119	4	11½	5	5	11	—	—	—
1886	94	12	3	12	18	8½	—	—	—
Gap of five years									
1892	172	12	1	43	9	2½	—	—	—
1893	158	0	1½	47	8	11	—	—	—
1894	152	6	3	4	1	8½	—	—	—
1895	79	9	10½	—	—	—	31	7	4½
1896	120	19	10	40	5	3	—	—	—
1897	117	13	10	13	15	1½	—	—	—
1898	161	18	11	48	17	1	—	—	—
1899	119	3	7	14	16	10½	—	—	—
1900	166	12	2	35	12	0	—	—	—
1901	191	4	3	45	10	2	—	—	—
1902	176	15	8	31	7	1	—	—	—
1903	146	11	9	7	8	9	—	—	—
1904	191	19	8	27	12	10	—	—	—
1905	149	8	5	5	13	3	—	—	—
1906	140	12	0	10	0	7	—	—	—
1907	66	4	3	—	—	—	21	5	7
1908	57	10	5	—	—	—	25	15	7
1909	58	2	10	—	—	—	9	19	2
1910	78	12	8	7	2	1	—	—	—
1911	65	12	2	—	—	—	18	16	0
1912	60	1	8	—	—	—	21	6	1
1913	79	10	3	—	—	—	3	0	8

Jan 19 1948

Badsey grower of 90 years ago

By R. W. SIDWELL

THE SCALE of activities of James Hall may seem very small when compared with the market gardening businesses to which we have grown accustomed in the last 40 years. Taken in isolation they are certainly puny and insignificant. But it must be appreciated that this holding was typical of many hundreds which came to dominate the economy of whole parishes on the east of Evesham as well as small colonies elsewhere in the Vale.

James Hall does not often speak of acreages and the rent paid is sometimes the only clue to the area he cultivated. In the early years he still grew some farm crops and wheat and field beans must have occupied a considerable part of his land. He seems to have taken about seven acres in the first place and a further two acres was taken rent-free for a year in July 1878. The references to squitch forking indicate the state of the ground.

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In 1883 he gave up this two acres, reverting to his original holding. This, with the cottage at Aldington to which he moved in November 1878, came to £19 10s. per annum rent. As £6 15s. of this appeared to represent the cottage the net rent for the land was £12 15s. per annum. He retained this land until 1906 but in 1888 he bought almost one acre on which his house was built the following year and in 1897 he took a further two and a half acres opposite the Wickhamford turn on Willersey Road, Badsey, paying £58 ingoing to a Mr. Williams. The annual rental was £4 18s. but it rose to £5 12s. 6d. in 1902. This land he subsequently purchased, but that was after these diaries ceased.

The reduction of his acreage in 1883 coincided with his first sowing of asparagus and possibly a slight change of approach. Cropping will be considered in detail in later articles but the general pattern of management is well shown in the table.

In the first article the figures for profit and loss were given just as James Hall worked them out. As some of the expenses were capital items or domestic furniture they have been extracted as a separate item and depreciation spread over a period. This rough and ready system of accountancy now gives a truer picture of annual profit and loss and is shown in the last column. This figure represents saving after domestic expenses have been met.

The 11 years 1892-1902 were obviously times of real prosperity, apart from the disaster year of 1895, to which we will return when we look at asparagus. For reasons given in the first article, the missing five years before 1892 must also have been prosperous.

Year	Approx. acreage	Wages £ s.	Seeds £ s.	Fertiliser £ s.	Approx. profit or loss £
1878	7	16 17			-14
1879	9	3 7	1 9	1 11	+3
1880	9	8 0	2 7	1 5	-16
1881	9	23 6	8 14	2 14	+17
1882	9	17 17	8 3	1 5	+18
1883	7	17 14	3 13	2 12	-7
1884	7	12 13	5 5		-4
1885	7	15 0	2 14	5 17	+4
1886	7	11 12	4 19	1 3	+9
Gap of five years					
1892	7½	17 6	3 18	3 16	+52
1893	7½	18 10	4 17	4 19	+43
1894	7½	18 4	4 15	5	+23
1895	7½	19 2	2 8	4 17	-33
1896	7½	16 5	2 9		+45
1897	10½	22 3	1 13		+10
1898	10½	35 1	7	2 12	+48
1899	10½	21 4	1 10	5 12	+13
1900	10½	32 10	2 6	3 19	+32
1901	10½	40 5	2 8	6 1	+42
1902	10½	40 8	2 10	4 10	+27
1903	10½	34 1	2 1	9 2	+3
1904	10½	49 10	4 9	11 17	+40
1905	10½	42 16	3 18	8 19	+2
1906	10½	29 10	2 5	3 9	+6
1907	3½	3 6	1	3 10	-23
1908	3½	5 2	1 2	2 13	-28
1909	3½	3 4	1 2	1 9	-12
1910	3½	4 6	1 6	9	+11
1911	3½	5 3	1 9	5 10	-20
1912	3½	7 14	1 1	3 15	-23
1913	3½	8 16	1 7		-7

All of the labour in the first nine years was casual and women were employed very largely for crop harvesting, especially pea-picking. From 1892 onwards casual labour was less important and regular workers were employed for the busy season. Harry Geden worked from March to December 1892 and February to December of the following year. The wages paid were 6s. to 7s. 6d. per week for the first year and 7s. to 10s. for the second. E. Hartwell did the next year and A. Taylor the year after. Frank Herbert, who died only a year or two ago at a great age, put in the three summer seasons 1896-98 and appeared occasionally later. After this the amount of casual and women labour increased again but the winter months remained almost devoid of outgoings for labour and income from crops.

In January 1901 there was a change of approach. A full-time

all-the-year-round worker was engaged. On January 28 James Hall recorded "Hired George Moisey at 18s. a week for about 9 months and 15s. 6d. for 6 weeks before and after Christmas, the short days of winter."

George Moisey was 27 years of age at this time and was James Hall's nephew. Many Badsey residents will remember him quite well for he was parish clerk for many years and a very highly respected man.

The arrangement continued more or less until June 1906 when it is very probable that George Moisey started on his own account, for after then he helped his uncle on odd occasions only. There was also an earlier break of nine months. It is probable that George Moisey's leaving prompted James Hall to give up his Aldington land.

In the earlier years the principal seed suppliers were from Webbs and Watkins and Simpsons whose accounts were settled punctually in June or July. In 1884/85 Nash & Co. appear as suppliers. The first reference to Yates is in 1886 and, as this was three years before the Evesham branch opened, it presumably referred to the Manchester business. Later purchases would have been through Evesham. Unfortunately after 1893 he makes no reference to seed supplier but just enters the item as "seed bill." Throughout, small cash purchases of seed were made locally.

*Mich
would be
£15 per
this period
would be in
range*

Jan 19 1998

Badsey grower of 90 years ago

By R. W. SIDWELL

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1883	7	17 14	3 13	2 12	- 7
1884	7	12 13	5 5		- 4
1885	7	15 0	2 14	5 17	+ 4
1886	7	11 12	4 19	1 3	+ 6
Gap of five years					
1892	7½	17 6	3 18		25 +
1893	7½	18 10	4 17		91 +
1894	7½	18 4	4 15		
1895	7½	19 2	2 8		
1896	7½	16 5	2 9		
1897	10½	22 3	1 13		
1898	10½	35 1	7		
1899	10½	21 4	1 10		
1900	10½	32 10	2 6		
1901	10½	40 5	2 8		
1902	10½	40 8	2 10		
1903	10½	34 1	2 1		
1904	10½	49 10	4 9		
1905	10½	42 16	18 3		
1906	10½	29 10	5 2		
1907	3½	3 6	1 1		
1908	3½	5 2	1 2		
1909	3½	3 4	1 2		
1910	3½	4 6	9 1		
1911	3½	5 5	6 1		
1912	3½	7 14	1 1		
1913	3½	8 16	7 1		

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In January 1901 there was a change of approach. A full-time

WALKER HALL, EVESHAM
BRING & BUY
MISSIONS TO SEAMEN
Kemerion, Tel. Overbury 225, 8095
From: Shirley Jones, April House
Tickets 7/6, 5/- and 3/6
OVERBURY VILLAGE HALL
at 8 p.m. each night at
SATURDAY, 27th January, 1908
FRIDAY, 26th January
THURSDAY, 25th January
(Sullivan)
(By W. S. Gilbert and Arthur
Trials by Jury
A Comedy in One Act by
Yves Cabrol)
THE FISH
Present
THE HILL PLAYERS
School
Wednesday, 24th January, 1908
at 7.30 p.m.
Tickets for non-members 5/6
Juniors (under 10) 4/-
May be obtained from Committee
Members or at the door.
A special coach will leave Willesey
at 6.30 calling at Broadway, Wick-
hamford, Badsey, picking up in Eves-
ham and returning after the concert.
8094

The principal fertiliser was soot and, as this material is stacked for a long time before use, the year of purchase was not the year of application to the ground.

Guano or fish guano was bought from time to time apparently in fair quantity as individual purchases were in the £2 to £5 range. A few sizeable purchases of leather dust were also recorded.

Nitrate of soda was used regularly from 1900 onwards and occasionally earlier but the quantity was insignificant—usually one to two hundredweights per annum at about 10s. per cwt.

On the whole it would seem that fertiliser usage on this holding was well below that of the more progressive Evesham growers of the period, but it must be understood that brassica crops were much less grown than on the Evesham holdings.

*Michael Ploke
would cost about
£15 per ton.
His purchases
would be in ¼ - ½ cwt
range.*

Feb 2 1968

James Hall's diaries

By R. W. SIDWELL

ALTHOUGH meticulous in his overall financial records, James Hall did not often show separate returns for mixed consignments. We are often left guessing as to exactly how much each crop was making, although the broad picture is clear enough. In the table I have taken some of the important crops and have included the brassica crops for comparison.

Peas were the first crop he harvested when he started in 1878 and in both this and the subsequent year his entire crop was sold to Fred Watkins at 3s. per pot. He apparently thought it better to accept a flat rate rather than to speculate on an unpredictable market.

By 1881 he was more venturesome and, from the special entries that he made, he took pride in the fact that in this and the next two years his few earliest supplies in June made 9s. 6d., 7s. 6d. and 10s. per pot respectively, but it is not clear how much the main batch made in any year. Some of the produce at this time went to Evesham market but most of it was spread over about three buyers including Joseph Myatt, son of the well-known James Myatt.

Even in those days, peas were being grown on a large scale, often on farms. They were commonly sold on the piece and several well-known Evesham merchants were ready to bargain for them. They had already ceased to be a small man's crop, apart from a few very early picks, and James Hall cut down on the crop as the years went by. Even at his peak he probably had no more than about one and a half acres.

Runner beans are unique among all the crops grown on the holding in that it was the only crop he never dropped altogether. Every year he grew some, although there was considerable fluctuation. Once again it is difficult to separate the items to arrive at a price, but two pots in August 1895 made 2s. 9d. and, over 1901-02, prices ranged from 1s. to 4s. per pot.

Dwarf French beans were grown almost every year, the extra early pick that they provided being useful. Sometimes a late crop of dwarfs was grown in addition.

A surprising thing about broad

beans is that in only one year, 1893, is there evidence of autumn sowing. It is practically certain that all of the others were spring-sown. The crop was mainly concentrated in the earlier years and appeared only sporadically afterwards. I find this a little surprising, as I had been under the impression that the crop had lost popularity in more recent times and that it would have been grown much more around the turn of the century.

None of James Hall's land would be considered "cabbage land" by modern growers and he certainly must have thought the same then, for the crop was of trifling importance and then only in the early years—but what of Brussels sprouts?

When one considers how little income was earned during the winter months it is surprising that sprouts were so slow in being adopted as a main vegetable. From November 1895 to February 1896 the four months' sales totalled 4s. 9d. In the four months from De-

cember 1896 to March 1897 it was nil.

This was not a peculiarity of this holding. It was much the same throughout the Vale. Although it was possible to find 100 acres of peas on one farm it would be hard work to find five acres of sprouts. Yet 40 years later we had growers whose main activity was sprout growing. Indeed some of these looked upon summer crops as things that had to be grown in order to keep their labour for the busy winter season!

Sprout strains were poor by comparison with those of the present day. In this they were in contrast with peas and beans, the strains of which were very good indeed at the end of last century. Sprouts were, in fact, a vegetable for the "gentleman's garden."

Of the other brassica crops, a few broccoli were grown in 1878-79 and four pots of cauliflowers in 1899. Savoys and autumn cabbage were never grown at all. I find all this neglect of brassica a little surprising.

ANNUAL PRODUCTION—counted in pots

Year	Peas	Runner beans	Dw. French beans	beans	Brussels Cabbage sprouts
1878	163	some	?	?	—
1879	184	some	?	?	—
1880	212	72	—	65	30
1881	185	88	14	164	65
1882	175	135	124	242	62
1883	113	171	73	132	88
1884	143	177	59	84	58
1885	135	147	45	102	45
1886	68	191	33	65	56
Gap of 5 years					
1892	102	121	23	—	17
1893	81	80	34	40	6
1894	112	104	18	—	39
1895	35	129	28	—	—
1896	70	89	21	—	—
1897	55	85	56	—	7
1898	30	28	27	—	—
1899	23	81	11	—	—
1900	31	151	23	14	14
1901	18	147	49	—	—
1902	41	102	63	—	3
1903	—	111	66	—	—
1904	3	76	73	—	7
1905	4	90	115	8	—
1906	23	108	64	55	—
1907	—	81	37	—	—
1908	—	44	41	14	—
1909	3	67	34	—	26
1910	—	121	18	—	—
1911	—	9	5	24	—
1912	—	83	24	—	—
1913	—	52	6	—	18

MAY 11 1962

History of Vale horticulture

May 11 1962

Back to Bernardi

By R. W. SIDWELL

I WOULD LIKE to turn away from the recent history of Evesham horticulture for a time and go back to the earlier days. In the first article of this series, on November 4, 1960, I suggested that there was little evidence of any direct connection between the monks of Evesham Abbey and the origin of market gardening, although the idea still exists in the popular mind that there is such a connection.

Mr. R. H. Hilton, of Fladbury, in the issue of the *Journal* following the first article, corrected a number of errors which I had made and, at the same time, added some valuable information confirming the view that I had expressed, namely that market gardening at Evesham was post-mediaeval.

Most of the authorities on Evesham history over the last couple of centuries have credited Francis Bernardi with playing a leading part in the development of gardening in the town in the latter half of the 17th century.

How much do we really know about Francis Bernardi? The answer is very little. Most of what we do know seems to have come from his son, Major John Bernardi, who wrote a short history of his own life, published in 1729.

'Amused himself'

Nash, in his "Collections for the History of Worcestershire," published in 1781, obviously makes use of Bernardi's autobiography but does add a little more information without giving his source. For instance, he says that John Bernardi was born in Evesham in 1657 and that his father, Francis, retired to Evesham, where he amused himself with gardening.

John Bernardi, as we will see shortly, does not mention Evesham at all, but speaks of Worcestershire. Tindal, in his "History and Antiquities of the Borough of Evesham," published in 1794, refers to Nash, but misquotes him so badly as to assert that it was Major John Bernardi who pioneered gardening at Evesham; a statement that can be refuted right out of hand and can only be ascribed to carelessness on Tindal's part.

Like Nash, the Dictionary of National Biography states that John Bernardi was born in Evesham, but quotes no source for the information.

We will now examine John Bernardi's own account of the story. In the year 1651, Francis Bernardi was appointed agent in England for the republic of Genoa, an office that his father, Count Philip de Bernardi, had held some time previously. I will quote Major John Bernardi in full at this point:

'Most famous'

"About two years after King Charles was restored, the said Republic sent over another person to succeed Francis Bernardi in his Ministry, and the said Francis Bernardi, being born in England at the time when his father, Count Philip de Bernardi, was here also in the Embassy, and loving the country which was the place of his nativity, he lived and died in this kingdom, having spent thirty thousand pounds in indulging his particular taste he had in gardening, being the most famous gentleman in the kingdom of his time for fine gardens. He lived for some time near Windsor when first out of his Ministry, but moved afterwards into Worcestershire to be more remote and unknown and his son John, arriving at the thirteenth year of his age, began to entertain thoughts of getting from his father's discipline..."

"Accordingly John Bernardi escaped from his father in the 1670..."

From the above it is obvious that Francis Bernardi could not have resigned from his ministry before 1662 and the date of his arrival in Worcestershire would have been some time after this, depending on how long he spent at Windsor. This raises a point of no small interest, for if John Bernardi was born in Evesham in 1657, then Mrs. Bernardi must have been resident in Evesham at least five years before her husband settled here. The references given in the Dictionary of National Biography are not helpful on this point, except that Macaulay, in his "History of England," considered John Bernardi's autobiography "inaccurate in certain particulars." This probably refers to the later part of John Bernardi's story.

A few obscure references from other sources still remain to be examined and some official records

checked; but prospects of finding vital information on Francis Bernardi's work in Evesham are not very bright.

E. A. B. Bernard tried to collect information on Bernardi, but was quite unsuccessful. It is, perhaps, surprising that Bernard failed to observe the inconsistencies mentioned above.

On the subject of John Bernardi's claim that his father was "the most famous gentleman in the kingdom of his time for fine gardens," this has every appearance of gross exaggeration. A considerable literature exists on the gardens of England at the end of the 17th century. Charles II took a great interest in gardens. This was the age of John Evelyn, of London and Wise, and of Quintinye. So far as I can trace, no mention is to be found of Bernardi in any published work of the period.

The main horticultural interest of the age was landscape gardening, but "French gardening"—the cultivation of fruit and herbs—attracted quite a lot of attention and it was presumably in this field that Francis Bernardi excelled.

Nor is the fame quite consistent with his desire to be "more remote and unknown." There has been a great degree of insularity about Evesham market gardening, even into modern times, and it is quite possible that Bernardi's fame did not penetrate the fashionable circles of his time.

Unsupported

Whatever the truth about Francis Bernardi, we have to face the fact that the only evidence we have that he lived in Evesham at all is an unsupported statement by Nash written more than a century later. This does not mean that the statement is inaccurate; but we cannot, on the evidence, build much of a story around it.

There is, however, plenty of evidence that gardening at Evesham grew up through the 18th century and it certainly seems to stem from the time of Bernardi. This will be studied in more detail shortly.

I am grateful to Mr. Huddy and staff of Evesham Public Library for their help in obtaining several valuable early works.

ES. 1 June 1962

1 JUNE 1962 More about the 18th century

WE DO NOT know what proportion of the 18th century Evesham gardeners were part-time people, running their land in conjunction with other occupations. We do know that in the early 19th century this state of affairs was common and it is quite possible that this was also the case a century earlier. Nevertheless, we have evidence that gardening was being carried on as a full-time occupation, probably on a larger scale than many have supposed.

As far back as 1711, an Evesham gardener, John Roberts, was able to advance to Thomas Cave the sum of £100 against the security of Cave's house in Bridge Street. This suggests a reasonable level of prosperity for John Roberts.

On the other hand, some of the gardeners seem to fall into the less prosperous group described by May a century later. Will inventories of Evesham gardeners are disappointingly few in number, but one of the most interesting is that of Susannah Hughes who died in 1742. Some of the more interesting items of this inventory are as follows:

A little bag of turnip seed, 2s.; a little lettuce seed, a little cabbage seed, 1s.; a little cucumber seed, a little onion seed, 10s.; a strike of beans, a few kidney beans, 1s.; odd seed in little bags, 1s.

R. W. SIDWELL continues the History of Vale of Evesham Horticulture

In the stable:

A horse, a pig, a little fodder, £3 2s.; crop on the ground, £2 10s.

Her domestic inventory reveals a state very near the poverty level. Her linen and wearing apparel were valued at £1 and her old house in the High Street, valued at £45, was mortgaged to the extent of £60. Life was probably rather tough for poor Susannah.

Thomas Powell, of Pershore, who died in 1747, "... giveth to my wife Marey Powell all that pees of garden ground that lise in the prislane which I bought of Mr. Bullin, of Evesham." The inventory included garden seeds to the value of five shillings.

A suggestion of somewhat larger scale business is to be found in 1775, when Elizabeth Baldwyn, of Evesham, widow, leased for twelve years to Valentine Grove, Evesham, gardener, four acres of orchard near the top of Greenhill on the east side of the road (i.e., All Saints' parish) and nine acres in the parish of St. Lawrence at £24 16s. per annum.

The said Elizabeth Baldwyn similarly leased to John Knight the younger, gardener, a close of six acres in the parish of St. Lawrence at twelve guineas per annum.

Arthur Young, writing in 1771, stated that there were between 300 and 400 acres of garden land at Evesham let at rentals ranging from 50s. to £3 per acre. In addition to the ordinary garden crops and asparagus which we have mentioned several times in earlier articles, Arthur Young makes special reference to seed being sent from Evesham to Stafford, Lichfield, Nottingham, Leicester, etc. Other writers, too, have referred to onions being grown for seed on a large scale at Evesham at this time. This is an interesting point that is worth noting.

Young tells us that the poor women and children were employed chiefly by the gardeners and adds, as a final note, "All drink tea." This is apparently an indication of the degree of affluence that they had attained, for tea was an expensive commodity in those days.

Young was much impressed with the flocculation of the Evesham clays, as have many people since, for he says, "... they have neither marl nor lime nor do they want them, for the natural richness of their clays is very great, being of that sort that falls like lime with the winter's frosts."

HISTORY OF EVESHAM HORTICULTURE

Sept 29 1961
Sept 29 1961

Spread to the villages of the Vale

By R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

THE TIME has come to look into the spread of market gardening to the villages around Evesham. A perusal of old directories gives a broad picture of the rising importance of market gardening from the middle of the last century.

There is little doubt that a great deal of the market gardening was in the hands of part-time people, and few of those so engaged were considered worthy of inclusion in the directories. Billings' Directory of 1855 gives 34 gardeners and market gardeners at Evesham, 18 at Pershore and five at Eckington. No other villages within the Vale record any at all. The importance of Eckington in the earliest days is well established; but neither Eckington nor Pershore contributed much to the rapid expansion of the second half of the nineteenth century, when compared with Evesham and the villages on its eastern side.

The 1860 Kelly's Directory gives slightly different figures from those of Billings, Evesham claiming 42 names, Pershore 10 and Eckington six. Hampton and Charlton are given two each.

Farmers

James Myatt, who was pioneering market gardening at this time at Offenham, was included as a farmer, and we must accept that quite a number of farmers within the Vale were beginning to be interested in horticultural crops even as far back as this. Varden of Scaford Grange who, as we have seen, was the largest fruit-grower of this time, also considered himself a farmer. The

term "market gardener" was reserved for the smaller men.

Badsey, which was soon to attain an importance second only to Evesham itself, could not claim a single gardener or market gardener in 1860. One suspects that a good many part-timers existed nevertheless. In 1876 we find our first three entries for Badsey and Aldington. These are George Field, probably of Aldington Parks, Joseph Jones and George Higgins. Eight years later, Aldington could claim 15 and Badsey 26. The picture is clearer in table form.

Parish	1860	1876	1884	1896
Evesham	42	72	4	126
Pershore	10	17	2	25
Eckington	6	4	7	2
Aldington	0	3	15	12
Badsey	0	3	26	88

The rise over the last 12-year period is quite phenomenal. Almost the whole of the Badsey entries for 1896 are market gardeners. With a population of 574 for 1891, it could be said with safety that the village was almost wholly dependent on market gardening for its subsistence.

The reasons for this remarkable increase are interesting points for speculation. Of course the two agricultural depressions, first in the late 1870s and again around the mid-1890s, had made ordinary farming pursuits unprofitable. The examples of the Evesham men had shown horticultural crops to be the ideal alternative. But why should Badsey have outstripped its neighbours in this develop-

ment? Even Offenham, in spite of the lead given by James Myatt, had not yet woken up to its potentialities.

The clay ridges forming Knowle Hill, Horsebridge Hill, and the rising ground above Aldington were proving themselves good plant sites by the end of the century, yet there were other sites as good or better that were not planted up until much later. No doubt the realisation that plans were a successful alternative to wheat on the heavy clay land was an important factor in itself.

Another point of importance when one compares Badsey with Offenham is that, as yet, the value of extra early vegetables was scarcely established, and for maincrop vegetables Badsey soils were probably superior. Acidity, due to lime deficiency, was virtually unknown at Badsey, but at Offenham was probably causing numerous crop failures. The free working medium loams overlying gravel which form the soils of the lighter Badsey Series are perhaps some of the finest vegetable soils in Britain, certainly for maincrop work.

Whatever may have been the cause of Badsey's rise to prominence and prosperity in the field of horticulture, there can be no doubt about the pride that was associated with it. As recently as twenty years ago the older men of Badsey would take it for granted that their standard was the highest that could be found in the Vale. Badsey was the great centre of small growers during the first half of the century. The range of crops grown was certainly the

widest in the Vale. Flowers were more prominent here than elsewhere. One could certainly forgive a man who had spent the greater part of his life working in Badsey Fields for thinking that this was the centre of the universe as far as horticulture was concerned.

Delight

Personally, I probably just missed seeing the greatest days of Badsey, but as recently as World War II it was still one of our show places. To go down Badsey Fields Lane to the hundreds of acres of superbly grown crops in the largest unfenced area in the Vale of Evesham was an education and a delight.

During recent years Badsey parish has declined more than some. The heavier, poorly drained land has probably gone out of horticulture for good. But there is still an element at Badsey that has not forgotten how to cultivate land. We still have young men there who have faith in the future and who may well win back some of the lost glory.

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History of Evesham Horticulture

The rise of Badsey

By R. W. SIDWELL,
N.D.H.

THE STORY of the rise of market gardening at Badsey is such an interesting one that it will be profitable to pursue it in greater detail. Before doing so, a brief reference to the pattern of development at Bengeworth will be appropriate. The old Bengeworth gardening, around Cooper's Lane in particular, probably goes back as far as that of Evesham itself. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century the movement east had already begun.

When Prospect House, now known as The Elm, was sold in 1834 with almost 200 acres of land and "an infinity of the best farm buildings in the county," the auctioneer's bill stated that "this estate, with the view to profit, might be turned to great advantage, as a greater portion is adapted to gardeners' ground and accommodation pasture." This indicates the feeling of the time. The rest of the story of Prospect House and Bengeworth gardening is very much the story of Henry Field and will be told later, but for the moment we are probably justified in regarding Bengeworth as the stepping stone to Badsey, both geographically and historically.

That Badsey was already alive to the possibilities of similar development is borne out by a handbill of the Evesham auctioneer, Thos. Jarrett, who sold at the Woolpack Inn, Bengeworth, on August 11, 1828, four lots at Badsey. One particular lot was an "excellent close of arable land in a high state of cultivation of 3 A. 3 r. 0 p., well adapted for garden ground."

Thanks to information from the *Evesham Journal* files, backed by generous assistance from the Rev. P. Braby, of Badsey, I am now able to piece the story together with somewhat greater accuracy.

The Allotments and Smallholdings Association held its fourth conference on February 5, 1890, at the Farmers' and Merchants' Hall, Evesham. This association, which seemed to have had strong Midland connections—the president was Mr. John Fell, Mayor of Leamington—had previously held a meeting in Northampton. At the Evesham meeting, in addition to eighteen important personages from the county and district, were sixteen delegates from Badsey, six from Broadway, and one from Eickington.

Familiar names

The Badsey delegation was led by Thomas Hall and included his sons, Charles and Owen Joseph Hall, L. White, T. Marshall, Henry Stewart, G. Geden, H. Geden, W. Collett, J. Hartwell, J. Crane, C. Knight, W. Knight, R. Keen, J. Knight, and W. Field. All of these names have become familiar to us in connection with Badsey market gardening during the last half century.

Thomas Hall was a shoemaker by profession and at no time considered himself a full-time gardener. He was born at Dumbleton and came to Badsey around 1844, after spending a year or so at Aston Somerville. He died at Badsey on July 13, 1909, in his 92nd year. Owen Joseph Hall was a market gardener and married Fiza Keen, a daughter of Henry Keen, of Aldington. Henry Keen was a market gardener and baker and the younger son of Thomas Keen, miller, at Aldington.

Thomas Hall was in a rather truculent mood at the meeting at

Evesham, but he gives us an outline of the development of the allotment movement at Badsey. I hope to fill in many further details later, but for the moment the following is the rough story.

During the period 1838 to 1844 the church affairs at Badsey were in the hands of the curate, the Rev. T. G. Griffiths, who was a son-in-law of the absentee vicar, the Rev. Charles Phillott. It appears that about 1841 some of the glebe land was let out in smallholdings of one to two acres each at an increased rental. There are said to have been about ten original tenants, which gives some idea of the area of land involved. It is possible that this land was in Sands Lane, opposite the present recreation ground. This later passed into the hands of Christ Church, Oxford. Thomas Hall tells us that later on that "the College" let out 50 acres on similar terms. It was some of this that Hall took.

Was dismissed

A man named Bennett also took some but was promptly dismissed by his employer and told that he could not have a house in the village. Bennett went to Broadway where he took land but later returned to Badsey, taking six acres of land, being by now a full-time market gardener. He died leaving £600 to his family and the land was valued at £200 higher than when he took it. We are not clear whether this £200 was paid as in-going to his family by the new tenant, or indeed whether the land remained in the family occupation.

Mr. Braby estimates that the area of glebe land at Badsey around the middle of the last century would be about 100 acres. In the period 1832-35 there were three tenants only. At some time during the period under review the whole of the glebe land apparently passed into garden smallholdings, but details of this are lacking. The figure of ten tenants in the original allotments is provided by Thomas Hall.

Another estate came into the hands of speculators on the death of the owner. It was let at £3-4 per acre to small men. Hall states that the land was then sold at a large profit because of its higher rental value.

Another young farmer became financially pressed and decided to let his land. Thomas Hall found tenants.

Hall told the meeting that he and his sons now occupied 20 acres of land. Only one farmer was now left in the parish and this farm was to be sold. If a man with plenty of money would care to buy it and let it to small tenants, he, Thomas Hall, would guarantee to find tenants at a profitable rent. The building of houses was essential. He did not want cottages at 10d. to 1s. per week, but decent houses at £7 to £8 per annum.

Hall gives the following figures, which may or may not be accurate. There were 100 houses in the parish of Badsey and 96 allotment men, two or three from one house in some cases. Including men who lived outside the village there were about 150 smallholders working land in the parish. I am not certain whether the term "parish" is used in its strictly accurate sense. It is an important point to remember in connection with market garden development at Badsey that

the village lies on the western edge of the parish and some of the earliest land occupied as smallholdings by Badsey men certainly lay in the parishes of Aldington, Wickhamford and Bengeworth. In the same way, much of the eastern side of the parish is worked by men from Bredforton.

Returning to our meeting, a touch of comedy seems to have been provided by Henry Stewart, who said that when he was a boy, if he met a farmer in the street and did not nearly "pull the peak off his cap" he "got a clout with a stick." He was proud to say that those days were over. He was independent and it was the allotments that had made him so.

In the early days these smallholdings would be largely planted with crops for home consumption, such as wheat, beans, potatoes and turnips. Thomas Hall makes references to the "hacon on the wall, the sack of flour on the landing and potatoes under the stairs." However, the growing of crops for sale would have stemmed from this activity. With the example of the Evesham men before them it would require little imagination to switch over to garden crops.

By 1890 the men of Badsey knew where they were going and it was the pure market gardening that was the main attraction. Nevertheless, apprehensions about the excessive expansion of market gardening were felt in many quarters. Mr. Beard, the delegate from Eickington, thought there was a

danger in too great an expansion of gardening and that smallholder should concentrate on subsistence crops for winter consumption. Even Joseph Masters, in a letter to the *Evesham Journal* (February 15, 1890), was concerned that market gardening should not be overdone. He felt that the smallholdings should be let at an agricultural rent and not at the enhanced market garden values. The crops grown should be for home consumption. This would have meant the continuance, indefinitely, of part-time allotments. It is to the great credit of the Badsey pioneers that they disregarded such warnings.

Incidentally, the first "market gardener" to be so described in the parish records was George Addis in 1870. This agrees closely with the first Bengeworth record, that of Hule in 1867 (information kindly supplied by Mrs. Trippass, of Bengeworth Vicarage).

Population

Perhaps the real force of this small market gardening movement at Badsey is best shown by the population figures of the period, which I quote from Gault's "History of Worcestershire Agriculture" (pp. 445-6). Taking the aggregate populations of six farming parishes north of Pershore and comparing them with Badsey and Bredforton we have the following figures.

Abberton, Flyford Flavel, Flyford Grafton, Naunton Beauchamp, North Piddle, Upton Snodsbury: 1,079 (1851), 1,207 (1871), 1,049 (1891), 808 (1911), 760 (1931).

Badsey: 390 (1851), 487 (1871), 574 (1891), 1,127 (1911), 1,165 (1931).

Bredforton: 575 (1851), 611 (1871), 529 (1891), 688 (1911), 760 (1931).

In my last article I suggested that I had just missed seeing the greatest days of Badsey. Mr. Arthur Keen told me the other day that he thought the greatest days of Badsey were before the First World War. Looking at the above figures I think that Mr. Keen is right. I missed the great days by a bigger margin than I had thought!

A delicacy known to the Romans . .

ORIGINS OF ASPARAGUS

By R. W. SIDWELL, N.D.H.

SO FAR our approach to the history of Evesham horticulture has been from the standpoint of people and places. It is obvious from comments made to me recently by a number of people that there is an interest in the history of some of the more important crops in the Vale. Asparagus will be taken as the first of these.

Most writers on asparagus during the last 150 years or so make reference to the fact that Cato the Elder (c. 200 B.C.) was familiar with the crop and that Pliny, in the first century A.D., recorded that at Ravenna, where the crop was grown to a high standard of perfection, three sticks have been known to weigh anything from 1½ oz. to 1 lb. (varying with the author concerned. We repeat the information here in order to maintain the tradition!) There seems little doubt that the Romans grew and ate asparagus.

Wild asparagus

Wild asparagus grows in a few places around the coast of Britain, but it is a different form from the variety cultivated and it is practically certain that the cultivated variety did not arise by direct selection from the British wild form.

Fuller ("Worthies of England," 1662) is of the opinion that

asparagus was brought over from Holland in the 16th century and that this marks the modern period of its cultivation in this country. It is also thought that the Huguenots, taking refuge here at the end of the 17th century, played a big part in extending the cultivation of asparagus in the London area.

Richard Bradley, in his "New Improvements of Planting and Gardening," 1721, refers to asparagus as bringing great profit to the gardeners near London.

During the 18th century, asparagus growing extended considerably in the London area south of the Thames. Mortlake, Battersea, Deptford and Gravesend all became famous for asparagus and all gave their names to supposed local strains. The early writers refer to "red topped" and "green topped" asparagus. The so-called "red" is what we today would call "purple." Most commercial strains were of this type.

A few notes on the methods of cultivation in the early days may be of interest. It is never easy to be sure that recommendations made by a particular author really reflect the current practice of his time. So many popular writers then, as now, wrote books by copying one another or by simply

rehashing someone else's work, often a work in a foreign language. There is, however, close agreement between Richard Bradley and John Abercrombie, whose "Every Man His Own Gardener" was first published about 1770. This latter work ran through many editions and was a source of information for many authors for the next hundred years. The present writer's copy is the 21st edition of 1818 but it is, in fact, little changed from the first edition. It can be regarded as indicative of 18th century practice.

Planting method

The method of planting was to mark out beds 4½ ft. wide on the flat. Four rows of plants were planted, starting 9 in. from the edge and allowing 1 ft. between rows. The plants were planted 10 in.-12 in. apart in the row. Alleys 2 ft. wide were allowed between the beds. Broadcast onions were usually grown on the beds for the first year. Alleys were dug out in the autumn and cutting commenced three years after planting, although Abercrombie thinks that four years should elapse before full cutting takes place. Cutting finished, as with us, around the third week of June.

With good management a bed would be kept ~~about~~ for ten to twelve years.

Some time later, in the 19th century, three rows to a bed became a more commonly accepted practice and this has been followed in private gardens right up to the present time. In fact, we can say that Abercrombie's methods have changed very little indeed in private gardens. What has happened is that private gardens growing asparagus have become fewer and fewer.

Loudon, whose "Encyclopaedia of Gardening" was published in 1824, relies largely on Abercrombie, but he does make a few interesting observations, including recommendations for the area required to provide for the needs of the household. He suggests that in the larger houses one-eighth part of the kitchen garden is often devoted to this crop, although it is not grown at all by cottagers.

Abercrombie's figures for yield of asparagus are difficult to compare with modern standards. He suggests that five square poles of ground (one 32nd part of an acre) yield at least 120 buds daily in the season. If we allow for sixty cutting days, we arrive at a yield of something like 2,000 "hundreds" of asparagus per annum. One suspects that a lot of spruce would be produced with such close planting.

Direct sowing

One of the earliest authors to call attention to the advantages of growing in single rows was Walter Nicol, in his "Forcing, Fruit and Kitchen Gardener" (1809). Nicol was a sound practical gardener. He advocated sowing the crop in its final position in single rows 3 ft. to 4 ft. apart, thinning out the seedlings to 5 in.-6 in. spacing. He considered that the advantage from having no transplanting check was very great. It is doubtful if Nicol's idea found much support, although other authors did advise direct sowing on three and four row beds.

For information on the acreage of asparagus grown around London at the end of the 18th century, we are indebted to Patrick Neill who contributed an article on horticulture in the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia early in the 19th century. The figures are: 80 acres at Mortlake and 80 acres on one holding alone at Deptford.

It is unfortunate that the Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin No. 60, "Asparagus" (1932), should quote Rhind ("The Vegetable Kingdom," 1853) as evidence of the acreage of asparagus in the Mortlake and Deptford areas in the middle of the 19th century. Rhind relies almost entirely on Neill and Abercrombie for his information and this applies to half a century earlier.

The cultivation of asparagus at Evesham will be considered against this background in the next article.

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Evesham Asparagus

IN THE 18th AND
19th CENTURIES

By R. W. SIDWELL

THE Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin on Asparagus Growing makes reference to the growing of the crop on the "ancient" market gardens of Evesham, but states that the modern period began with James Myatt bringing crowns from Camberwell in 1852 and with Arthur Jones, who first planted at Badsey in 1860. This statement, although it contains some germs of truth, is misleading to say the least. Arthur Jones was not born until 1863 and it was his father, Joseph Jones, who probably first planted asparagus at Badsey. This may have been somewhere about 1860, but could have been later.

The reference to the ancient market gardens at Evesham conjures up pictures of monks in flowing robes toiling over their asparagus beds. In fact, these "ancient" gardens were flourishing during the 70 or more years immediately prior to 1850. There are many references to this crop being grown commercially at Evesham during this period. As with market gardening generally, there was a great expansion following the coming of the railways in 1852, but asparagus was already there and had been for a very long time.

E. A. B. Barrow is not often very helpful to us in horticultural matters, but he has provided a very useful reference for us on this subject. A letter from an Evesham

During the last war, outdoor cucumbers were grown—sometimes with great success—by market gardeners in the Vale of Evesham. Has any grower got any accurate information as to yields of this crop, particularly peak yields? We all know that when virus is severe the yields might be almost nil, but I believe that the maximum potential yield is very high. Information would be welcome.

writer in the "Morning Chronicle" of August 30, 1782, speaks of the failure of many crops that year in this "Eden of England." The writer states that "not above fifty bushels of cucumbers have been picked this season; whereas, in some years one hundred thousand bushels, at least, are exported to the different neighbouring counties." He mentions Birmingham, Warwick, Henley, Worcester, Bewdley, Kidderminster, Campden, Moreton-in-Marsh, Winchcombe, Gloucester, Chipping Norton and Oxford as places normally supplied. . . . and, in the asparagus season, Bath and Bristol . . .

Gaut mentions that James Biggs, a Worcester seedsman, offered "some exceedingly fine roots of the Large Green Battersea asparagus" in 1799.

Pitt saw several flats of asparagus in Evesham in 1805—evidence of commercial production.

Champion, 1830

The Vale of Evesham Horticultural Society, established in March, 1827, was for some years encouraged by an annual gift of a silver medal from the London Horticultural Society. In 1830, this medal was awarded to Mr. Anthony New, of Evesham, for his fine specimens of asparagus exhibited at shows of the Society in this and previous years, and for his communications to the Society of improvements in its cultivation. In 1833, the Society divided the asparagus class into two sections, one for red asparagus and one for green. It is interesting to note that in 1840 asparagus beetle was seen, apparently for the first time.

London, in his famous "Encyclopædia" (1824), mentions asparagus

and cucumbers being grown at Evesham for the Birmingham market.

In 1856 (Gaut quoted again), two Evesham gardeners made a bet of two sovereigns as to which could produce the heaviest hundred. The result was: John Huxley 20½ lb., Joseph Grove 19½ lb.

Do we need more evidence than this to prove that asparagus was an established crop in Evesham before the middle of last century?

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the establishment of asparagus in the Vale of Evesham is not the fact that it was grown here at an early date, but that at some time it ceased to be grown on the lighter soil and became established as a clay land crop. It is probably the only place in the world where it is grown commercially on such soils. This change-over on to the heavier soils may have coincided with the shifting of the crop to the Bengeworth and Badsey areas.

Single row beds

The Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin mentioned above says that towards the end of the last century Mr. Arthur Jones, of Badsey, evolved a method of growing asparagus in ridges which contained a single row only. I am not yet convinced that this was the beginning of the single row bed system. Mr. L. J. Jones, son of the late Mr. Arthur Jones, tells me that his father certainly planted asparagus in single row beds at Bower's Hill at the turn of the century. Mr. William A. Griffin, of Aldington, who is now aged 92, assures me that most of the asparagus around Badsey was in single row beds by about 1898.

Local records of cultural methods are so few that it is largely a matter of conjecture as to which methods were used in the Vale during the 19th century, but we would give a lot to see Anthony New's communications to the Evesham Horticultural Society.

Has anyone got any information that throws light on the early cultivation of asparagus in Evesham? Contributions would be welcome.

I should like to acknowledge the assistance given by Messrs. W. A. Griffin and L. J. Jones, and in particular to Mr. C. W. T. Huddy and his staff of the Evesham Public Library, who are continually helping with these articles in a variety of ways.

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Asparagus in the Vale of Evesham in the twentieth century

BEFORE proceeding further with the history of Evesham asparagus, I would like to correct an error in the last article. I had given little more than a cursory glance to Mr. A. J. Jelfs' "Asparagus in the County of Worcester" (1913) and relied largely on Gault's quotation referring to "several flats of asparagus" being seen in the fields at Evesham. Like Gault, I had assumed that this referred to the market containers for asparagus. A closer reading of Pitt, however, reveals that he uses the term "flat" for an area of ground occupied by a crop for, after speaking of flats of asparagus, he mentions that cucumbers are also "grown in large flats in the enclosures north of Evesham."

Long established

Mr. Huddy has also reminded me that Arthur Young, in his "Six months' tour through the north of England," published in 1771, makes reference to asparagus at Evesham, a fact that I have since verified. All this goes to support my contention that asparagus has a long association with Evesham horticulture, which is contrary to the views expressed in several well-known books and publications current today.

Turning now to the real subject of this article, we cannot do better than start with a note from a correspondent in the *Evesham Journal* of August 18, 1900. The correspondent stated that asparagus had "about paid its way and left very little to be put into the bank. Taking the crop all round—it was not worth much," the writer continues: "Talking about asparagus, an old grower tells us that he knows of beds that have lasted for 21 years and possibly some of our readers know of still older beds."

"The average length of a bed's life, however, seems to be about half this. With favourable seasons a bed will last for twelve years, ten years of which are available for cutting. Some people believe in a shorter life."

Narrow beds

"By the way, the old wide beds seem to be going quite out of fashion, nearly all the asparagus at the present time being planted in narrow beds."

I was very pleased to find the above reference to the crop, for it shows that the idea that the beds did not last as long as they used to seems to have been current from the early days. I am reminded of a quote by the late John Hall who, on being told that asparagus did not last as long as it used to be remarked, in that rich Breckfordian voice, "No, and it never didn't!" However, there is probably some truth in the notion.

There is little doubt that the first asparagus planted on the east side of Evesham was put on to land not long broken up from turf. There would still be a good deal of fibre in this soil and one would not be surprised if it produced a good standard of asparagus. There is also a widely held belief that when asparagus is planted a second time on the same land, even after a lapse of several years, it is never as successful as the first time. No

critical scientific work has been done on this subject, but it would not be surprising to find that this commonly held view is well founded.

On the subject of the change-over from double to single beds, it is of interest to note that the last of Myatt's asparagus was still to be seen at Offenham around 1905. Adam Howley remembers this being in the old-type double-row beds. This adds weight to the view, which I have hinted at in earlier articles, that Myatt probably did not make much contribution to asparagus growing at Evesham. The methods that he used were probably those of Camberwell. Our modern Evesham methods seem to stem from the work of the traditional Evesham growers themselves.

Large scale

We have no information on the acreage of asparagus at Evesham at the turn of the century. Many of the larger growers were still interested in the crop, and some remained so for twenty years or more, but it did not lend itself to their methods. Fairly large-scale planting by small growers is indicated by an advertisement of a house with seven acres of garden land, including three acres of asparagus, to let at Breckford in January 1900. The largest acreage on that side of Evesham on a single holding was probably that of Messrs. F. Stewart and Sons, who had sixteen acres in 1927. Stewart's in those days were still a small firm and they decided that the way to prosperity did not lie through asparagus.

The founding of Littleton and Badsey Growers in 1908 was an event of some importance for the asparagus crop. As Mr. Binyon has recorded, asparagus played a bit part in keeping the society going in its early days.

In 1925, the Vale of Evesham Asparagus Growers' Association was formed as a non-trading organisation to succeed the earlier Badsey Asparagus Show, which seems to have been functioning since about 1922. The first secretary was Mr. A. S. Bowler, who died recently.

Experiments

From the outset, the Association co-operated very closely with the County Advisory Staff and with Long Ashton Research Station. They sponsored much experimental work. The committee, in the early days under Mr. Binyon's presidency, included such enlightened and progressive small growers as J. E. Knight, John Hall, Ralph R. Smith and Adam Howley, among others. In 1927, the venue of the annual show was changed from Badsey to Evesham Town Hall and the Association continued to hold annual shows until the outbreak of war.

During the war, the Association organised sales of asparagus in aid

of Evesham Hospital. Shows were resumed after the war.

The Association collaborated closely with the Ministry of Agriculture in 1930 when the National Mark Scheme for asparagus was launched. The outcome of this was the starting, in 1930, of an asparagus grading pool by Littleton and Badsey Growers Ltd. The Ministry made a grant of £100 to meet certain costs incurred in connection with this experimental scheme. The asparagus pool was a brave effort. About 40 growers, with about 75 acres of asparagus, participated in the scheme.

In 1938, the asparagus pool was abandoned. I cannot do better than quote Mr. Binyon's own words: "Unfortunately, the extra expense of sorting, grading and tying swallowed up the extra price received, and growers strongly objected to paying for this work, hitherto done voluntarily by their wives and daughters." The pool had never catered for a very large

and Gloucestershire agreed that growers should be allowed to plant up to 75 per cent of any asparagus grubbed, on application, being made. In fact, very few such applications were made and not all of those who did apply wanted to plant the maximum allowed. Refusals of planting permits were very few and these were made on sound technical grounds. It was rather fortunate for the asparagus grower that most of the Evesham Horticultural Sub-committee (W.A.B.C.) representatives from asparagus producing districts were, in fact, members of the Asparagus Association committee. Nevertheless, although the crop was viewed with the greatest sympathy by the authorities, the acreage declined very sharply in the war years.

Small return

The reasons for this decline were obvious. Many other crops paid much better for the labour entailed. In times of bad prices, one could always get something for asparagus and, although it meant a lot of hard work, there was almost a guaranteed, even though a small, return. Many other crops may have been unsaleable, but not so asparagus. In war-time, anything would sell and asparagus became one of the poorest economic propositions. By the end of the war, the area had fallen to around 500 acres. At this time, the Asparagus Association approached the Ministry with regard to assistance in getting the crop back on its feet again. A committee was set up to carry out inspection of beds in cut, with a view to propagating from the best strains. A substantial quantity of seed was thus produced, which was sold to growers through L.B.G.

Work on spacing was carried out at Ludington and, later on, long-term breeding work was started at the National Vegetable Research Station at Wellesbourne, by Dr. Haigh and his team.

Mr. Adam Howley, who has for many years been one of the mainstays of the crop in the district, has co-operated closely with the Wellesbourne work and also provided facilities for manual trials conducted by the N.A.A.S.

Defies research

It is no reflection on the excellent teams of experimental workers to say that, in spite of all the efforts, little real fundamental progress has been made in asparagus growing during the last century. The crop seems to have defied the research workers. New insecticides have given better control of asparagus beetle. Mechanisation has been improved, but these things are merely the adaptation of materials and methods originally developed for other purposes. It is very doubtful if yields and quality are any better, if as good, as they were 70 years ago. If Dr. Haigh's work at Wellesbourne succeeds, it will be the first major breakthrough in research on this crop recorded by British workers.

The latest picture we have of the crop is one of still further decline in acreage. In 1951, the official acreage, now shown separately in the June returns, was 416 for Worcestershire. Almost all of this would have been around Evesham. Ten years later, in 1961, Worcestershire no longer held first place in the counties of Britain, for we now find that Suffolk has 471 acres against Worcestershire's 371. Even throwing Gloucestershire's 10 acres and Warwickshire's 8 in, it is apparent that asparagus today has but a shadow of its former importance. So our county, which must have held the premier position in asparagus production for at least 60 years, has now slipped into second place and is by no means sure of holding even that. The best growers, who are prepared to put in the work, and who still take a pride in maintaining their traditionally high standards, are certainly making the crop pay, but far too many are looking for easier ways of earning a living.

We still have the asparagus land and, even now, we could probably regain some of the lost ground. Evesham growers were the pioneer place in asparagus-growing by breaking away from the traditional methods of the old London market-gardeners whom they replaced. The Evesham methods were far ahead of those current anywhere else at that time and the reward of enterprise was justly won; but methods that were new in 1880 are archaic today. This, however, is not the place to speculate about the future. We are supposed to be dealing with the past.

No fortunes

The whole asparagus story at Evesham may best be summed up by saying that no large fortunes have ever been made from the crop, but it has helped to provide a living, and sometimes a very good living, for the hard-working small grower on the clay land. It is not too much to say that Evesham would never have maintained its clay land smallholdings were it not for asparagus. The acreage rose to its peak in the depression of the 1930s because asparagus was the alternative to ordinary vegetable crops.

When our recent little depression of the late 1950s came, the alternative to vegetable growing was not asparagus but a job at "the camp" or in some neighbouring factory. Those who have remained have done so because it is a way of life with rewards that cannot be measured in terms of pounds, shillings and pence. We salute these men as one salutes the last survivors of a great race; but the story is a rather sad one.

Acknowledgments

In addition to the many growers and others who are too numerous to mention, I should like to thank Messrs. Victor Smith and T. F. Jelfs, of Littleton and Badsey Growers Ltd and Messrs. Adam Howley and D. A. Jelfs, president and secretary respectively of the Vale of Evesham Asparagus Growers' Association.

History of Evesham Horticulture

By R. W. SIDWELL

proportion of the total crop of the district and it is doubtful if it ever got very near to satisfying the wishes of its sponsors. In view of this, it is unfortunate that the Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin should, in the edition of 1949, speak of the L.B.G. asparagus pool as still being in existence.

Markets

Covent Garden has always taken the bulk of Evesham asparagus since the days of expansion in the late 19th century. Quite a lot of this has passed through the Evesham auction markets and a good deal also has been bought by Covent Garden salesmen through their resident agents, who were frequently asparagus growers themselves. In recent years, it is estimated that up to 10 per cent of the crop has been purchased on contract for processing.

In the Asparagus Bulletin of 1934, the estimated acreage for the Vale of Evesham was 1,488 acres. This was probably an over-estimate, because Wickhamford is credited with the largest area of any parish—250 acres. Even allowing for the fact that much of the Badsey asparagus is actually grown in Wickhamford parish, it would be very difficult to arrive at a figure approaching this. Most of the other main parishes seem to be much nearer the probable figure and there is little doubt that the total would not have been less than 1,300. By the late 1930s, a decline had set in and the position at the outbreak of war was that some growers were finding other crops more profitable.

In April 1940, the War Agricultural Committees of Worcestershire