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A HORTICULTURAL LADDER

by

R. R. W. Folley

and

Judith Humberstone.

Department of Agricultural Economics

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A HORTICULTURAL LADDER

An account of self-advancement in
market gardening in a Vale of Evesham
parish between 1926 and 1949

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INTRODUCTION

The country town of Evesham (population 18,000) in Worcestershire is the commercial hub of a well-known horticultural area; and the sixteen or so villages for which it serves as social centre are remarkable in many ways too. In contrast to the general movement away from the land in the last fifty years, the expansion of the horticultural industry in the Vale of Evesham has led to an increased rural, and urban, population. There is early land in the Vale, and there is strong land too, but the district's natural advantages do not wholly account for its present importance.

Nowhere else among the agricultural communities of Britain are there so many private, independent market gardeners, or so well-developed a social system. The "master man" has considerable standing in and around Evesham, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of those striving to qualify for the title. Among themselves, these small proprietors had worked out ways of providing opportunities for progress for anyone who had the ability to succeed as a market gardener. As their resources and skill developed, the tyro and the land-less worker found opportunities of climbing higher up the economic ladder: and what is equally important, and a good deal more rare, the same system provided for the grower to withdraw from the top of the ladder once his physical powers began to wane. Such a system ensures continuous, good use of the land available. It also militates against the emergence of the "big man". .

When so much in the farming scene is regarded as inflexible,

any practical means of introducing flexibility into the affairs of a community living directly off the land is worthy of attention. The secret of the flexibility in Evesham market gardening is the easy interchange of land - not whole holdings as a rule, but separate fields or parts of fields. One man's evening becomes another man's morning: "Loss" and "gain" are words to be avoided in this context, because equity prevails between the old occupier and the new. To keep the system going, there must first be a relative scarcity of land, but also mutual respect and confidence among the gardeners, goodwill and support from the landowners, and voluntary partial retirement in later life in favour of a younger man. The latter is perhaps the gardeners' most far-reaching and novel self-imposition.

Features of Evesham ^{market} gardening

To see twenty to thirty men working in a field of as many acres, and to note the number of new brick houses outlying the nucleus of old stone houses and black-and-white timbered cottages, helps anyone passing through the area to comprehend the density of settlement. A gardener's land and his house are generally some way apart. The houses are clustered in villages which are seldom more than a mile apart, each having its church, big house and community centre (village hall). There are good public transport services in the area; and all "main services" are widely available. People of all ages use bicycles for travelling short distances.

The Evesham landscape carries few visible signs of its strong social coherence. There is none of the rectangular but untidy pattern that a large area of allotments usually presents,

and none of the regimentation that characterises an official small-holding scheme. Plantations of plum trees cap the higher slopes of the gently undulating countryside. The cultivated land, however, is worked in strips which in places still follow the sinuous course of the ridge-and-furrow lines of mediaeval ploughing, and ~~A+~~ shows everywhere the mosaic pattern of fragmented tenure. As in manorial days, a gardener to-day may hold several parcels of land in different places in more than one parish. Few holdings are ring-fenced. The single plots of a holding are known locally as "pieces" or "cuts", or even "lands". In the following pages they are called "pieces".

The gardeners do not consider fragmentation a disadvantage. They can reach their pieces easily and quickly by bicycle, and they look with favour upon having a variety of soils and conditions to work with, because it enables them to spread their risks - in two ways. First, they can hope to grow well a wider range of crops, and secondly they can expect to suffer less from damage by hailstorm and late spring frosts. Frosts in May can have serious effects, but are prone to be very localised.

Vegetables have been grown near Evesham since at least 709 A.D.^x and there are references to "gardening at Evesham" at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. Trade connections with markets in the Midlands had been built up with horse transport before the first railway link (to South Wales) was completed in 1840. Subsequently, ease of rail

^x Smallholdings Studies. article by C.V. Dawe.

communication with the North, Midlands and London has been a feature in the development of the area.

Most gardeners prefer to rent land than to buy it. Under the Evesham custom of tenure, an outgoing tenant could claim from an incoming tenant the full value of unexpired work on the land, and he also had the right to appoint his successor, provided that the person of his choice was acceptable to the landlord also- as he nearly always was.

The precedent of letting land for horticultural use is ascribed to the Church, private landowners following this lead on a considerable scale in the 1870's, when good farming tenants were hard to find. More and more land was taken in for horticulture by both public action and private arrangement, up till 1942. Expansion since then has been slow.

A balance has been reached in this area between the agricultural effort and the horticultural effort. Farm crops have been ousted from the central parishes of the Vale, but they continue in the outer parishes and on the larger holdings. ~~At~~* Local farmers took to vegetable growing after 1920, and five years ago holdings of 50 acres or more had vegetable crops like Brussels sprouts, green peas and runner and French beans: smaller holdings had a greater variety of crops and relied more upon asparagus. Grass was coming back on the small intensive holdings in the guise of soil conditioner.

(1)* Vale of Evesham. An economic study. E.B. Fekete, University of Bristol, 1952.

On a sample of 43 holdings of all sizes, acreage was divided up as follows:

Vegetables, 36 percent. Fruit, 20 per cent. Grass, 30 per cent. Other crops (herbs etc) 14 per cent.

The Nature of the Study

This insight into some of the social implications of market gardening in one parish was obtained from a study of the rent rolls of two estates, courteously made available to the authors whilst at the Institute for Research in Agricultural Economics in the University of Oxford.

The parish concerned is Bretforton^x, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Evesham. This is one of the easterly parishes, and is not at all specialized agriculturally. Market gardening came to this parish rather late, the first fields being set out between 1880 and 1890. The soil is generally heavy, with good lime content, being derived from the calcareous Liassic clay. The land surface is relatively flat. Cold air tends to lie there rather than be drawn away, and for this reason fruit crops are irregular: there is some top fruit, but very little soft fruit. Glasshouses are mainly used for propagation.

In this parish there are intensive market gardens, small mixed holdings and vegetable-growing farms: it is one of the marginal market gardening parishes. Asparagus used to be the most important horticultural crop: at one time during the Second World War 10% of the country's output was grown there. Since 1945 the acreage has further increased, but not so much as in some other areas. Other common crops on the market gardens

^xParish statistics:

Area	1720 acres.	Population	511 in 1841
			766 in 1931

Density of population

1921	.44	persons	per	acre
1931	.45	"	"	"
1939	.48	"	"	"

are: beans, cabbages, carrots, leeks, marrows, outdoor tomatoes, savoys, sprouts and rhubarb; some annual flowers are also cultivated.

insert para. from p. 8. → *In 1949.....*

The social background

Studies in land tenure would normally relate to holdings rather than to occupiers. The choice in this instance fell on occupiers because as units they were numerically less and had a slower turnover than land-units.

Details regarding location and size of the lands let out for rent, rental values and rents paid, and the name of the occupier of the individual lands at six-monthly intervals, were taken from the rent books previously referred to. A new name in the books denoted a newcomer to the estate, while transfers between established growers could be followed by noting changes of tenancy of the individual ^{pieces} ~~lands~~. All names were checked against a list of present-day parliamentary voters, and any not on the list were excluded, since such people would not be resident in the parish.

It was intended that the enquiry should cover 25 years, but as information for 1925 was fragmentary and the transfers of land for 1950 were not completed at the time the field work of the enquiry was being conducted, only the period 1926-1949 was covered. A prominent local gardener gave unstinted help with the unravelling of transfers of land between close relatives: where a piece was transferred between two gardeners of the same name, only local knowledge could establish whether it had passed from father

to son, from brother to brother, or from uncle to nephew, and whether there was any significance (e.g. father to son-in-law) in transfer between families. An estimate of the transfer value was made at the same time as the transfer was checked. As the gardener in question was a most popular though unprofessional local valuer, and had an excellent memory and records this procedure was not so objectionable a research method as it sounds.

Transfers of ownership of pieces could not be satisfactorily covered. Lands owned by gardeners are included along with lands rented by gardeners in the data relating to sizes of holdings.

In 1949 market garden crops occupied 996.5 acres of Bretforton's 1720 acres. The area covered in this survey is 660 acres: of this, 363 acres was on private estates, the Worcestershire County Council held 204 acres either as lessee or owner, and 93 acres was owned by the occupying gardeners.

In all, 129 gardeners were included in the survey. 98 were tenants on a private estate, 58 also held land from the County Council: that is, some gardeners rented land from more than one source. In fact, in one case a gardener had four landlords and himself owned land in addition. Gardeners who did not rent any land were not included in the survey.

One outcome of the approach adopted in the survey is that the area covered in the survey is not constant, but grows year by year from the starting date, 1926. In part this feature is due to the expansion of the market gardening area, in which the gardeners in the sample shared, but more important is the effect of taking 1949 as the datum year for growers. The gardeners concerned in the study were all renting land in Bretforton and

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to p. 7*

neighbourhood, ^{were} and resident in that parish in 1950. Some have held some pieces throughout the period; others have acquired their interest during the period, and more land has come within the survey by being taken over from gardeners not included in the survey (e.g. those who gave up before 1949) than has been lost by included gardeners relinquishing land to gardeners not included. Consequently, the sample gives decreasing coverage of the market-gardening area back towards 1926 because occupiers antecedent to the present ones have not been included. Thirty-nine gardeners were covered for 1926, compared with 129 in 1949.

Though finally concerned with recruitment to market gardening, and the development of individual gardeners' businesses, the present enquiry has also brought to light some little-known facts about rents and ingoing valuations of holdings in the parish. It thus provides for a small but experimentally valuable area an account, covering a period of twenty-three years, of some of the movements resulting from pressure of an agricultural population on a relatively fixed area of land.

ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF OPPORTUNITY.Size and Composition of Holdings in 1949

Later in this Report attention is focused upon certain dynamic aspects of sizes of holdings; at the present juncture a statement upon the static distribution of holdings by size may not be out of place, particularly as there is no element of selection in the holdings concerned. The part-time holding is shown to be numerically important (see Table 1): its social importance is discussed in the next chapter.

Table 1. 129 market garden holdings: distribution by size, 1949.

Size group	Number of holdings	Total acreage	Per cent of total acreage	Average size (acres)
Under 3 acres	37	66.3	9.0	1.79
3 to 4.9 acs.	29	115.5	15.6	3.98
5 to 7.9 acs.	39	227.8	30.8	5.83
8 to 11.9 acs.	15	155.6	21.0	10.37
12 acs. and over	9	175.2	23.6	19.47
	129	740.3	100.0	5.74

By farm standards, these holdings appear very small, but local opinion holds that 6 acres ought to maintain a family and give full-time work to the proprietor with help from his wife. Fekete^{*(*)} has calculated that one man is engaged upon 4.4 acres of vegetable crops and if this is so, a gardener's wife

(*) *
op.cit.

customarily spends one-third of her working day in the fields. Holdings of 5 to 8 acres were in fact most frequent and 75 per cent of the area was held in this 'mature' way. The smaller pieces were originally intended to be let to part-time gardeners and no doubt very valuable experience has been gained on this 66 acres.

As was explained in the Introduction, holdings were an aggregate of strips or pieces of land. Table 11 shows the composition of holdings in terms of pieces.

Table 11. 129 market garden holdings: composition by "piece" in 1949.

<u>No. of pieces per holding</u>	<u>No. of holdings</u>	<u>No. of pieces</u>
1	33	33
2	39	78
3	22	66
4	17	68
5	14	70
6 and over	4	31
Total	<u>129</u>	<u>345</u>

Given an average per "piece" of 2.11 acres, the typical holding of 5.8 acres would consist of either two or three "pieces". In practice, more gardeners occupied two pieces than any other number. One gardener at the top of the ^{size} scale had nine dispersed pieces totalling 31 acres. Occupants of one piece on the other

hand were usually not full-time gardeners.

Land in private ownership was on the whole let in larger pieces than land in the hands of the County Council, the average sizes being 2.8 acres and 1.6 acres respectively. As far as can be ascertained, pieces on the private estate were originally larger, and also included areas of orchard and pasture, whilst the more recently developed Council estates were all "gardening" land, and purposely let out in relatively small pieces so as to afford a reliable bottom rung of the farming ladder to a relatively large number of applicants.

The prospective market gardener is not deterred from venturing upon a holding by thoughts of a shortage of labour - labour he is prepared to supply himself. Land and capital, however, he must have in addition. Residential small holdings abound in many parts of Britain but all too frequently they are offered for sale and not to let, and they necessitate too large an investment in the dwellinghouse to suit the man who has to work his way up - his best opportunity will be found within the 'colonies' of market gardeners which have sprung up either spontaneously or by some official agency such as the Land Settlement Association.

The Evesham gardener manages with very little land, and with very little capital too. Apart from his own subsistence,

and the means of buying six months supply of seed, plants and materials, his only other financial commitments are rent and ingoing, and ~~perhaps~~ ^{only one} of these is ^{likely to be} considerable.

Rental values of land

Average rental values of market gardening land were remarkably stable over the whole period of 24 years - and indeed average money rents paid were no higher in 1950 than in 1927 (see Figure 1). This seeming failure of rents to keep pace with the rising general price level is partly induced by the method of calculation^{is} and arises from the averaging of all rents. It should not be assumed that the failure of money rents to rise reflects a continual relative decline in the economic prospects for gardeners - rents are not nearly "economic" enough to be influenced in this way.

Figure 1 here →

Two types of event have helped to keep average rents low. First, in cases of real hardship, a grower's rent may be remitted and remissions, by reducing the total rent paid for estate land on any accounting day will have the effect of reducing the average rent per acre of estate land. Secondly, the introduction of new land at low rents (not because prices are low, but because the land is unimproved) at times when remissions are unlikely, tends to reduce the average rental per acre.

However, the course of rentals of single pieces is also remarkably steady. In a period including the 1931-33 depression and the Second World War, many rents have not moved beyond ~~2~~ ¹ per cent of the mean value for the period. No individual or downward adjustments of rents were made

during 1931-33 (though several cases were noted of outstanding rents being written off) and not until after 1945 did the upward adjustment begin. Rentals of County Council pieces rose more quickly than those privately-owned, but were lower at the outset. Council tenants had their rents raised twice, other tenants once.

Figure 1

Annual rentals of holdings on two estates in
Bretforton, 1926-49.

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to
p. 13*

The most pronounced movements were in 1931 and 1941. Both were concerned with extensions of the market gardening area. In 1931/2 some 35 acres were acquired by the County Council and let out in 'pieces' for market gardening at £2.9.4d. an acre (see Table IV. p.). In 1941 a further 33 acres was added to the private estate, and the pieces concerned carried rents averaging £3.0.4d. an acre. The latter being "improved" pieces it is evident that the gardeners' estimates of what the land was worth were retrospective rather than forward-looking.

Rental values were not customarily expressed by the acre, but

by the piece. In terms of acreage, however, rents in 1949 varied between 50s. and 80s. an acre, the Council's pieces although smaller, being 5s -10s. an acre lower.^{*(2)} Taking into account their smaller size, the average Council piece was let for £4.3.0 a year, against £8.8.0 for the average privately owned piece.

Tenant Right Valuation

Ingoing tenants in the Vale made payments to outgoing tenants as in usual farm practice. Under the Evesham custom a Tenant Right Valuation did not concern the landlord in any way, and an outgoing tenant claimed the full value of cultivations performed, of standing crops, manurial residues, permanent equipment transferred, and any improvements he himself had made. Consequently, considerable sums of money may have changed hands when a piece was taken over by a new tenant. Cultivations alone may have been valued at £20 an acre, and where fruit plantations or asparagus beds featured largely in the transaction, the value may have risen to £100 an acre, depending upon the expectations of revenue from the piece. All in all, however, the net income per £100 tenant's capital is probably higher in the Evesham locality than anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

The course of tenant right valuations over the 24 year period is very different from that of rents: for substantially the same crops on the same size of piece (but, of course, increased

²⁾ Rents of pieces in the more favoured parishes than Bretforton would be higher than this. Dawe (op.cit) sets the limits at 30s. and £6 an acre, according to fertility and investment.

costs for seed and labour) the ingoing had doubled in value between 1927 and 1947.

Post-1945 ingoings averaged £25.16.0d. an acre, or, for the average piece transferred, £55.10.0d. The trend of ingoing values was more steadily upward than the general price level. By 1949 ingoings were in line with the fall in the value of money since 1926-30, but in the interim, ingoings had been high in relation to the price level during 1931-35 and low during 1941-45. Figure 2 shows graphically the relation between rents, ingoings, and the price level. Is it fair to say that the gardeners were more realistic in dealings among themselves than with their landlord? *See Figure 2.*

Figure 2.

Rents, Tenant Right and Prices level 1926-49.

Table III below shows average tenant right payments for each 5 year period. It also shows that new entrants moved first into relatively lightly capitalized pieces.

Table III. Tenant Right Valuations.

<u>All valued transfers</u>					<u>Valued transfers to new entrants.</u>			
Period	Acres transferred	No. of valued transfers	Value of ingoing total (£)	per acre (£)	Acres transferred	No. of valued transfers	Value of ingoing total (£)	per acre (£)
1926-30	18.3	13	225	12.3	.9	4	45	4.5
1931-35	23.1	13	339	14.7	2.0	1	20	10.0
1936-40	29.4	17	602	20.5	5.7	3	195	34.2
1941-45	82.2	40	1773	21.6	7.1	5	105	14.8
1946-49	73.3	42	1889	25.8	15.1	6	340	22.5
Total	226.3	125	4828 (<i>av</i>)	21.3 (<i>av</i>)	39.8	19	705	17.7 (<i>av</i>)

New entrants pieces were not always the new pieces. When new land was taken in, average ingoing values were much reduced: but in the period 1936-40, when only one 'piece' was added to the area, it would appear that new entrants had to pay something in the nature of a premium when taking up occupation. Latterly, the lack of new pieces had meant that the newcomer was bidding for established pieces. To what extent personal preference, and not the highest offer, motivated a gardener in the choice of his successor, is not known.

The Occurrence of Opportunity

Opportunity to start market gardening in Bretforton arose

either when addition land was parcelled out, or when a holding or piece was given up by the occupier. Both types of opportunity were occurring frequently. The acquisitions of farm land for market gardening are reported in Table IV, and the turnover of pieces is summarised in Table V.

Table IV. Additions to the market gardening area, 1926-49.

Year	Acreage added	No of pieces	Av. size of piece (acres)	Total annual rental value £	Average annual rental value per acre £
1926	12.6	5	2.5	31.16. 0	2.10. 9
1929	5.7	3	1.9	14.19. 0	2.10. 3
1931	35.1	(24	(1.6	87. 0. 0	2. 9. 4
1932	2.0	((4.12. 0	2. 6. 0
1938	5.4	2	2.7	10.16. 0	2. 0. 0
Totals	60.8	34	1.8(av.)	149. 3. 0	(av) 2. 9. 1(av)

The 61 acres of land recruited for market gardening represented a 9 per cent increase in land area, or an 11 per cent increase in the number of pieces on the two estates in 25 years. Major single additions to the area were the outcome of national economic conditions. In 1931/2 additional small-holdings were created to help in reducing the numbers of people who could not find work; public action, operating through the County Councils brought about the biggest expansion in Bretforton realised between 1926 and 1950. At one stroke, the area was increased by nearly 7 per cent and the opportunity (in 1931 and 1932) by 55 per cent. The Council had responded

to the demand for holdings with fairly extensive schemes at infrequent intervals whilst the release of privately-owned land was more regular and gradual. There has been no new public scheme since 1932.

Apart from major extensions, there were frequent minor extensions which, in the long run, were equal to one major extension. The land drawn from private ownership, whether in large or small amounts, was surrendered from the home farm and did not constitute a change of tenancy and use of land on tenanted farms.

Turnover of pieces is recorded for five-year periods in Table V. The full annual record is given in the appendix.

Table V. Turnover of pieces and land.

Period	No. of transfers	Turnover of pieces (per cent)	Areas transferred (acres)	Turnover of land (per cent)
1926-30	30	7.3	72.9	7.7
1931-35	38	5.4	87.1	5.6
1936-40	52	5.3	103.2	5.3
1941-45	90	7.0	168.8	6.0
1946-49	86	7.7	163.3	6.3
Total	296	(av.) 6.6	595.3	(av.) 6.0

For individual years, the proportion of pieces turned over, including first letting of new pieces, varied between limits of 1.25 per cent and 11.95 per cent. Over the whole period, 6.6 per cent of pieces and 6.0 per cent of land area have been

transferred annually; this result suggests that it was the smaller pieces which were more often transferred, and that, in the aggregate an area equal to the whole area changed hands every 17 years.

This purposive exchange of land means that a gardener need not keep a piece longer than he wants to: it makes for more effective use of land by minimising the area which is under-farmed, and in this way has a secondary effect of increasing the area available for cultivation. The new pieces, nominally of 61 acres, being turned over an average of 1.4 times, actually provided 84 acres of land in the 24 years, whilst the opportunity provided by ordinary transfers was equivalent to 595 acres.

By no means all transfers, however, were opportunities for new entrants. Transfer may have been a mutual exchange of pieces between established growers for the sake of convenience of working; it may have been an opportunity for one man to increase his holding and for another man to withdraw. The transfer which opened up to a man entering into his first piece the prospect of a market gardening career, was still, however, relatively frequent. Rather less than one in four transfers was to a new entrant - 72 out of a total of 296.

The Bretforton gardeners would no doubt wish that for the good of the industry, inherent skills should be maintained, at the same time as new vigour was introduced. Both these desiderata seem to have been met by the prevailing system. Recruits from the retiring gardener's family took a number of pieces on transfer, but not so many pieces as passed to a recruit not of the gardener's family.

To understand the position fully, the two sources of opportunity - new land and transferred pieces - must first be related to the two types of entrant - family and non-family.

Opportunity to start came much more frequently through transfer than from new land. New land was largely taken up by established gardeners, but its effect was noticed several years later in the greater number of pieces available for transfer. In all, 81 new gardeners started out in business during the period in question: 9 of these took new land (all before 1939), and 72 took established pieces. In no five year period was the expansion of area as efficacious as transfers in providing opportunity.

Table VI shows ^{the record of} transfers to new entrants. At the time of the County Council scheme, recruiting of gardeners was at the rate of 8 per cent of gardeners ^{a year}; during the war years it fell to 2 per cent; the average rate for the whole period was 5 per cent.

Table VI. Opportunity to start market gardening.

Period	<u>Number of transfers</u>			<u>Number of transfers to new gardeners</u>			<u>Propn. of new entrants</u> (per cent)
	<u>Old</u> land	<u>New</u> land	<u>Total</u>	<u>Old</u> land	<u>New</u> land	<u>Total</u>	
1926-30	30	8	38	13	4	17	8
1931-35	38	24	62	11	5	16	5
1936-40	52	2	54	16	-	16	4
1941-45	90	-	90	11	-	11	2
1946-49	86	-	86	21	-	21	4
	296	34	330	72	9	81	5 (av)

Family entrants absorbed less than half the opportunities - 34 out of 81: so the effort to ensure continuity of the family connection in market gardening cannot be said to have monopolized transfer activity over the period as a whole. The importance of the family is discussed as a social matter in the next chapter.

Although the opportunity figures may appear reasonable, and transfer activity was greater in the 1940's than in the 1930's, opportunities to start gardening in the absence of special measures to correct this tendency, would have diminished throughout the period. Without the relief of additional acreage experienced before 1941/2 there would have been relatively fewer new entrants in the later years.

Reactions to economic change

The normal transfer of pieces being much the more frequent source of opportunity, it is worthwhile trying to see what effect economic factors have upon the rate of transfer.

Transfer activity of established pieces was notably less between 1931 and 1940 than either before or since. The annual rate has been more sustained since 1941 than previously, but the triennium of greatest activity was 1928-30, and of least activity, 1935-7.

How far these changes in activity were the individual gardener's reactions to economic movements is not made at all clear: nor can many economic influences be evaluated for Bretforton. For example, there is no measure of the opportunity to leave market gardening in favour of a more highly-paid job outside the industry. A gardener's age - and the social ~~aspects~~^{repercussions} of the 1939-45 war - must be modifying influences, too. Nevertheless, a high rate

of transfer of established pieces must be the result of increased desire to relinquish, relative to readiness to acquire. The economic stimulus to change whether strong or weak, is likely to be rooted in the prospects for the industry. If they are improving, buyers will be keen..... If they are declining, now is the time to get out.....

Change in the economic scene is therefore likely to influence a gardener's decisions: and change will have a cumulative effect - three years of declining prices, for example, will have a bigger effect than one year, although the changes in the second and third years may not be large.

Nothing of this hypothesis is evident in the figures.* The transfer rate for each five-year period remained steady, unaffected by the 1931 depression or the early years of the war. Year-to-year changes are best accounted for by a theory that falling relative prices of vegetables were noticed, and acted upon, by gardeners before 1939: after 1945, the level of vegetable prices and their up-trend, seems to have acted as an incentive to transfer. *See Figure 3.*

Prices, or economic factors in general, therefore apparently have little influence upon gardeners' decisions about staying in business or expanding. Some non-economic social factors are referred to in the next chapter.

* attempted correlations of the transfer rate with (a) the general price level (b) the weighted average price of vegetables (c) purchasing power of vegetables and (d) change in the purchasing power of vegetables were meaningless.

Figure 3.

Annual transfer rate and annual price index of
vegetables 1926-1949.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF OPPORTUNITY

The importance of the family.

So far it has been possible to build up a picture of the intending market gardener either living in or moving to Bretforton and there as a young man earning his living by his labour. The time comes when he can enter into his first recognised piece and graduate as a gardener. There will be ample opportunity for giving occasional help to his neighbours and friends, and as he approaches the prime of life he will be able to add other pieces by arrangement, and in addition to being a master man himself, become an employer of labour - for there will be other young men deserving of a chance to start up for themselves, just as he once was.

During his middle age there will be opportunity to jockey for a more compact holding - to express in a practical way his judgement of the value of pieces in relation to their accessibility and as complements to the pieces which he has decided to hold until he wants to retire. Above all, he will try to avoid being overcapitalized, or "overgrounded" as the more descriptive local term runs. Later in life he will realise that his present holding is beginning to tire his ^{own} physique ~~and~~ ^{and} he will be prepared to relinquish, or share, his holding on a partnership principle - which will ease the capital situation for the junior partner - frequently a son or nephew will be ready to accept the piece, a more distant or less productive piece: the alternative of running the piece with hired labour is not often adopted.

Family connections did not have the hold on acquisitions of land that might have been expected. Perhaps the best-connected

gardeners were being offered pieces in parishes other than Bretforton: be that as it may, there was no evidence that on the two estates in question, transfers within a gardener's own family were monopolizing the opportunities.

Transfers are classified into family and non-family groups in Table VII.

Table VII. Importance of family in transfers to new entrants.

Period	No: of all transfers.	Inter-family transfers		Extra-family transfers	
		No:	per cent	No:	per cent
1926-30	30	6	20	11	37
1931-35	38	5	13	11	29
1936-40	52	8	15	8	15
1941-45	90	4	4	7	8
1946-49	86	11	13	10	12
Total	296	34	11.6(av)	47	16.2(av)

In the aggregate, as was shown above, about one-third of new entrants in Bretforton ~~had~~ succeeded to "family" pieces. The opportunity for other new entrants ~~was~~ ^{came} when freshly-broken land was made available, for the periods in which the proportion of non-family entrants declined ~~d~~ were the periods of greatest expansion of the market gardening area. These pieces command ^{ed} no ingoing and the gardeners ~~are~~ ^{were} increasing their capital by working and stocking the soil. In the absence of revenue during the first year, additional capital ~~is~~ ^{was} necessary however, to meet living expenses.

Extra-family transfers accounted for 58 per cent of all transfers to new entrants. Including the letting of new pieces, where the "family" element was absent, 47 out of 296 transfers (16 per cent) were a realized opportunity for a gardener not of the gardener's own family, to start on his own.

The young gardener who succeeded to a family piece had one advantage: he saved on the ingoing. In this way, the money saved was available for a second piece, and the partnership of father and son could "move up a step".

The growth of individual businesses

The commercial histories of fifteen gardeners whose holdings have been recorded annually throughout the period covered, enable clearer conceptions of what the rise and fall of endeavour means in terms of years. Figure 4 shows how these gardeners in the aggregate built up their holdings to a maximum in 1941-43 and subsequently reduced them. The process of accretion continued for fifteen years after 1926, when each gardener had on the average two 'pieces' of land. In all probability these must have been acquired since 1920: all the gardeners were members of well-known families and can be assumed to have acquired land by inheritance - the waiting period to obtain a first 'piece' would not have been long. Thus the period of accretion can be assumed to be 20-22 years and if the rate of loss is commensurate with the rate of gain, the commercial life of a Bretforton gardener will extend to 35-45 years, depending upon ease of succession. At the peak size, their average holding was $8\frac{5}{2}$ acres (4 - 5 pieces), which is consistent with another member of the family joining in in about one quarter of the cases, and the "economic" size of 6 acres for a married man was maintained for

approximately 25 years, though it may be that the opportunities presented in 1932 and again in 1941 made progress relatively easy for this group of gardeners.

Figure 4.

Average size of holding, fifteen gardeners, 1926-49.

In most individual cases, the period of maximum holding was short - between two and eight years. There were a few gardeners who built themselves up into minor capitalists, but the majority were more concerned about continuance of the established order, and took on additional land as their eldest son developed physically and was able to help; whilst the son was at home, a 'de facto' working partnership existed and when the son married and left home, he became the official tenant of some of the family land. The working partnership with his father remained, but financial responsibility was spread and the rent rolls showed

the truncation of the father's holding and the beginning of the son's.

Where there was no one in the family to "follow on", the need ~~is~~^{was} supplied by an outsider, for whose part the opportunity became^a a valuable apprenticeship.

Merits and demerits of the Evesham example

Both social and economic pressure upon the facilities for horticulture - particularly for land - can be recognised in the mosaic of market gardening in the Evesham district. A widespread desire by growers to expand production, such as prevailed in the early 1930's was relieved by enlarging the cultivated area: this type of pressure is more largely economic. The more largely social type of pressure arises from a desire on the part of individuals for greater opportunity either to begin or to progress in a market gardening business. As far as can be seen, the practice of organizing a holding as a number of "pieces" and the "commodity" aspect which land acquires as a consequence, and the mutual confidence engendered by the corporateness^{of nature} of enterprise, are features which facilitate progress. Variations in the rate of opportunity have largely been dictated by events of national, not local importance. Economic pressure may fluctuate, but social pressure is constant, for within wide limits set by economic aspects, social aspects, become decisive. The gardener's quest is self-realisation and in and around Evesham the quest need never be abandoned.

During the period in question the market gardening acreage in Bretforton was expanding, and both local and national horticultural output were expanding to keep in line with demand. Now that the demand for volume of vegetables has ceased to expand at the same time as mechanization of some cultivations enables gardeners to

work larger areas, the pressure upon existing land is likely to continue, but there will not be the same good reason as formerly for expanding acreage further. Social adjustments will involve reducing the number of gardeners, which in turn will reduce the number of opportunities: and if the number of opportunities is significantly reduced, recruitment will tend to be made exclusively from the families of existing gardeners, and a monopoly will ultimately develop. While this state of affairs may be economically sound, it may have undesirable social consequences. Reasoning of this sort may have influenced the Government's decision not to allow a gardener to appoint his own successor, as was the practice under the Evesham custom.

No doubt the principles by which the Evesham gardeners conducted their affairs will be tested in the process of adjustment to the deteriorating economic situation. And whatever the demerits of the principles, their merits are clear enough to warrant examination. How far are they capable of wider application?

From an economic standpoint, the habit of farmers, who fear retirement, of staying on as tenants in farms too big for them to want to manage intensively, is a source of loss to the community. The Evesham growers had to a large extent freed themselves from the same sort of stigma. But is their system capable of adaptation elsewhere?

Upon examination, it seems that many of the circumstances disposing to the easy exchange of land do not occur, and could not be created, outside small communities. Among economic factors there may be mentioned the relatively small sums of money involved, and the absence of buildings and large fixtures to be valued each

time a piece changes hands, whilst the units are in handy, manageable pieces. The absence of high fixed costs helps the Evesham system too. Costs can be reduced in the same proportion as land given up. Among social factors may be mentioned the close community and the fact that one type of horticulture prevails: transferer and transferee are usually well-known to each other, and both have a deep and common interest in commercial market gardening. There is also the further, technical point, that it is incapacity for manual work as distinct from managerial work, which induces a gardener to relinquish some of his holding in later life. In 1949, mechanization had made nothing like the same impact on the Evesham holdings as it had on the mixed farm, and the wisdom of "letting go" cannot strike the farmer in the same light as the grower.

All the same, the Evesham gardener, whether by choice or compulsion, sets a good example in relating the size of his business to his capacity. His community spirit - fortified no doubt by local social pressure - and his private forbearance lead to a use of land and the resources which go with it that would be hard to improve upon.