

Shrawley Tithe Book 1769-1781, an Analysis

By R.D. Sproat

Preface

The collection of tithes, (or tenths), was a system of taxation that had existed for centuries to finance the clergy. Responsibility for its collection rested with the Rector or Vicar of each parish. Records remaining for Worcestershire are sporadic and incomplete but the tithe collection book for the parish of Shrawley, (Hereford & Worcester Record Office Ref. 728 Loc. 1202. B.A. 2854), gives a rare and detailed account of each tithe collected. The book shows who paid the tithe, the quantity of each commodity, or acreage assessed, and the amount of money received from each tenant.

Searches of the records of Hereford and Worcester Records Office, St. Helen's branch, for any other tithe account books has shown few records remain with such completeness as Shrawley. Most being odd references to either acreage titheable, or slips of paper of a tenant's receipt. The only other record of real value to this analysis so far found is a tithe collection book for the Parish of Chaddesley Corbett, (Hereford & Worcester Record Office Ref. 705:260 B.A. 4000 par. 298). The information given in this book can give a comparison to that of Shrawley. This record although much smaller than the Shrawley book and covering the years slightly later, (1784-1797), and it also gives the quantity of detail useful to this project.

The amount of information held in both records is considerable. The Shrawley book has 156 pages of entries and the Chaddesley Corbett book 18 pages. To assist in the analysis two publications have been drawn heavily upon: -

A History of Worcestershire Agriculture and Rural Evolution
by R.C.Gaut

General View of the Agriculture of the County of Worcester 1813
by W.Pit

These publications give many practical examples of how agriculture operated in the 18th and 19th centuries including other publications, which are shown below in the Bibliography.

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The Parish of Shrawley – a description

The parish is situated 5 miles south of Stourport-on-Severn and 10 miles north of Worcester on the West Bank of the River Severn. The soil is of stiff loam with subsoil of marl and clay over bedrock of gravel in different parts. Old Red Sandstone occasionally outcrops along the riverbank. The largest concentration of soils is mineral poor porous Triassic sandstone with some overlay of regions of Keuper Marl. Rich alluvium is found along the riverbank. Shrawley Wood and the wasteland to the west have sandstone soils.

Shrawley, a typical small Worcestershire parish, occupies an area of 1830 Acres. Woodland covers almost one quarter of the land. The main crops grown in 1904, (from Kelly's Directory 1904 pp.230) were wheat, barley, and beans similar crops to that grown in the late 18th century. Wheat was grown on the marl of the common great open field and hay and good grass along the water meadows of the riverbank.

The majority of fields in Shrawley are typically small with early enclosure before the Inclosure Act of 1801. Shrawley does not have an enclosure map, nor any features associated with the Inclosure Act except for some evidence of post-enclosure dividing of some fields seen on the Tithe Award map. This would indicate that the Vernons or some previous landowner enclosed all common land. Post-medieval expansion would have occurred as ribbon development westward onto the higher and poorer land of the 'waste', and northwards along the ancient road (B4196) north from Worcester. Further expansion in the early 18th century, possibly with the encouragement of the Vernons, was made into the previously uncultivated corners of the Parish, and existing farms were consolidated into larger farming units.

18th & 19th Century Shrawley and the Tithes

British agriculture between the years 1760 to 1830 saw great changes. Gone was the old medieval system of open-field systems with its strips and common land, and servitude to the lord of the manor. Shrawley had the "great garden of the lord (of the manor)" rented to Hugh Beauchamp in 1389. A fertile area of land south of Shrawley Wood worked by tenants on allotments in a large 'open field'. In its place came compact farms, enclosure, a transformation of agricultural practises, and a fundamental revolution in agricultural society. Landed gentry replaced the old aristocratic landlords with radical improvements to maximise investments and income from the land. The time when medieval peasantry could be secured of protection and patronage from his lord was gone. Rich tenants were given large holdings to run and smaller tenants sold up their tenancies and became labourers to the new farmers. From the 18th century to mid 19th century England had a land-less labouring class whereas in the 17th century and before all worked on their own tenancy land. Shrawley was no exception, the old aristocratic families of the Mortimers and Richard Neville Earl of Warwick (1450-71) who had previously owned the manor were replaced through the passage of time by minor gentry. The wealthy lawyer Thomas Vernon of Hanbury Hall purchased the manor in the year 1700. Early Shrawley copyhold rent rolls from the 16th and 17th century show tenants holding "yardland" rentals (15-40 Acre strips) in 'open field' systems. Agricultural work was communal at harvest time or gathering in the hay, and 'rights' to graze animals on common land. Later rent rolls and particularly the tithe book show that every householder became responsible for payment in kind or money for his occupancy.

Rents reflected the tenant's ability to pay their tithes. For arable crops in the 18th century, rents generally constituted 1/3 of a farmer's income therefore he needed to raise 3 times his rent to make a good income. Nationally rents in boon time were usually about £2 per acre, and produce on average per acre = 30 bushels of wheat. The tithe books will show a useful comparison to the accepted figures.

The church was slow to change and jealously guarded its rights to tithes and tithe land. Collection of tithes from each tenant remained the practise from the Saxon 9th century till the Commutation of Tithes Act of 1836. By then all tithes were allowed to be commuted to a rent charge and Commissioners were empowered to negotiate land charge values. Tithes were finally abolished by the Tithe Act of 1936.

The Shrawley tithe book shows that by 1769 its tithes were being collected in money rather than in commodities reflecting the more modern attitudes of the Vernons. By the time of the tithe surveys in the 1830's all tithes were commuted to payment of money but it can be said that no one paid the tithe willingly and non-payment of tithes was a major source of grievance of the English Civil War a hundred years earlier.

Tithes settled in money ('modus decimandi') was a disaster for the clergy since tithes took no account for inflation over time. Tithe values for example would stay the same for 50 years. Tithes given in animals had to be sold off to the laity, also an inefficient method of collecting money since animal prices varied and farmers resented giving up their best beasts. Towards the end of the 18th century tithes were increasingly becoming an outdated method of collecting dues. Inflation increased as the war with Napoleon progressed and tithes became a block on agriculture i.e. the more produces you made the more tithe you had to pay. Priests could run farms, (farmer priest), or employ a tithe farmer to collect all his tithes. At Shrawley the Rector for this period, Daniel Piercy M.A., (1764-1782) appears to have controlled Glebe land (church land exempt from tithe), and collected tithe for property near to the church, "house in the churchyard belonging to me". The tithe book shows very tight control of the tithe system in Shrawley with no withholding of tithes by the tenants. The Vernons totally controlled the running of the parish and had the right to appoint the clergyman (advowson). Many Rectors before and after Piercy were either Vernons themselves or relatives of the Vernons. Rectors were wealthy men and owned land. They were entitled to the 'Great Tithe', wheat, barley, cattle, and hay, (hay was most important). In 1840 according to the tithe survey the then Rector John Vernon M.A. owned

land in Shrawley in his own right separate from the trustees of Thomas Bowater Vernon (a minor) the heir to Shrawley.

The Vernons 1733-1829

The period of the late 18th century was a troubled time for the occupants of Hanbury Hall, (which is probably why Piercy took such a meticulous record of his tithes). Thomas Vernon, Member of Parliament for the City of Worcester between 1746-61, would have needed to spend much of his time away in London. Thomas died in 1771 aged 47, leaving Emma his widow, and his only daughter aged 11 years, also called Emma. Emma Vernon with no other heir than her daughter was desperate to have her suitably married. For a period they lived in London to complete young Emma's education. There she met Henry Cecil, nephew and heir to the 9th Earl of Exeter. They were married in 1776. For a time Cecil set about improving the family estates and his name as 'Earl of Exeter' can be found at the head of several Shrawley Court Rolls, signifying that he was content to follow in the old Worcestershire ways of land management with copyhold tenancies. Both Emma and Cecil were spendthrifts; Cecil "a selfish, extravagant young man", and Emma a headstrong girl. After she he eloped with the Hanbury curate in 1789, Henry Cecil fled the county and Hanbury Hall was shut up. In 1793 Emma returned and married John Phillips of Droitwich who then took on the task of restoring the family wealth with much vigour. John Phillips continued to live at Hanbury Hall until 1829.

For the administration of Shrawley the Vernons employed a steward but it was the gamekeeper (wood keeper) within the village who collected debts, checked tenancies of land and was the 'eyes and ears' of the steward.

Land management was strictly controlled indicating few tenants were allowed to fall behind with their tithe payments. Piercy would have had a smaller holding in Shrawley compared to the Vernons, it was therefore in his interests to maximise the yields of tithes from his parishioners. Daniel Piercy died in June 21st 1782 aged 52. William Cox (1782-1809) succeeded him as Rector.

Aims of this analysis

The information contained in tithe books for Shrawley and Chaddesley Corbett give many answers as to the actual practical running of agriculture in the late 18th century Georgian Period, and also raise many

questions. Shrawley gives almost exclusive material on arable farming, wheat, barley, oats, grass, clover, peas, hemp etc. whereas the Chaddersley Corbett tithe gives a vast variety of produce from sheep and cattle to potatoes and turnips. Therefore for changes over time Shrawley will be more used, and for diversity of product Chaddersley Corbett will be more appropriate.

The following aspects will be discussed: -

- a] The Rector, his identity and methods, (this subject has been touched on before).
- b] The tenants, their names, family history (FRF forms), land each tenant farmed, how long he remained on the tenancy, personal circumstances of the farmer, deaths in the family, continuity of tenancy (father to son, husband to widow), if their holdings increased or decreased in acreage, estimated earnings per year of each farm taking into account rents and labourer's wages, was the holding improved to give greater yield.
- c] Maps - map of tenancies, map of produce types, map of acreage worked, map of rotation of crops, map of topography, map of geology.
- d] Graphs – variation in amounts of tithe money received by Rector, graph of increase or decrease in acreage worked by principal tenants,
- e] Tables – total amounts of tithe money received by Rector, variation in commodity prices over time.
- f] Parish totals: - Acres worked per year,
Price of produce per year
Number of tenants per year
- g] Each parcel of land: -
Field Name
Location within the parish.
Topography
How this influences the type of crop grown, strengths of the crop e.g. whether grown on poor land.
Crops: -
Types of crop grown.
Most favoured crops.
Crops grown on which type of soil.
Yield per acre.
Climatic conditions – did weather

affect yield, bad weather high prices.

Variation of crops grown by each tenant (any evidence of fields being left for fallow).

Use of nitrogenous crops, peas, beans, clover.

Rotation of crops.

Price indicating quality of crop.

Price: -

Total holding of tenant.

Comparison between parcels of land, indicating good and poor land.

Comparison with other parishes per National prices.

Price trends over time.

Comparison of types of crops
e.g. wheat more expensive than barley, barley more than oats and why.

Total price per tenant – increase or decrease (may indicate age of tenant, e.g. a garden and hemp grown).

Field or place name of holding.

Animals: -

Types raised, e.g. cows, sheep, pigs.

Numbers raised animals.

Prices of animals.

Other tithes commodities: -

e.g. honey, potatoes, turnips, hops, flax, hemp.

Tithes on properties: -

e.g. mill, house, garden, meadow, pasture, wood.

h] Database – transcription of both tithe books, database forms.

i] Other sources relating to tenants, parish registers, gravestones, wills and Inventories, Deeds, etc.

- j] Other sources relating to holding, rent rolls, Tithe map and Apportionment 15th November 1838.
- k] Total acreage of parish, useable land etc.
- l] Miscellaneous data revealed, time when tithes were collected, tithes paid in modus, relationship of tithe to the farmers tenancy rent.
- m] Local history aspects relating to the Parishes, special circumstances concerning the agriculture in the area, e.g. land management organisation by the Vernons and their stewards, (see previous text).
- n] Comparison between Shrawley and Chaddersley Corbett.
- o] Back-ground references, national sources, local history sources from other parishes, Worcestershire Archaeological Transactions, appendices.

The Shrawley Tithe Book - Description

The notebook measures 155 mm. x 205 mm x 40 mm deep. Inside it is of good quality paper, hard backed with heavy card and dyed a pale brown colour and in good condition for a book of its age. The writing is of typically black ink written with a quill pen.

Entries are given in chronological order for each year with each tenant's name listed in alphabetically, acres of commodity (wheat, barley etc.), price (sometimes price per unit), and total sum of tithe paid to the Rector. Items from the acres of wheat from the main farmers to the penny for hemp from the old widow was all recorded. An 'X' written by each entry must have indicated that all must have been collected. The first page gives its purpose: -

“1769. 1770. 1771. 1772

An Account of the corn and Hay Tithes etc, as given by the several Occupiers of land in the Parish of Shrawley.”

Analysis

The size of the amount of material means that a full transcription of would take too long to complete before any results could be formulated. It

was therefore necessary to set up of a database and an example of the data sheet is shown.

Annual income from tithes

From an initial analysis of the tithe book, the total income per year of tithe collected for the Rector is given below. The amounts also given in the year 1840 from the tithe apportionment of the then Rector in 1840 Rev. John Vernon is given as a comparison. Decimal figures are given for ease of calculation.

Income from the tithe 1769-1781, & 1840

1769 - £104. 17s. 0 1/2d. =	£104.85
1770 - £ 95. 2s. 6d. =	£ 95.13
1771 - £ 86. 19s. 10d. =	£ 86.99
1772 - £104 2s. 2d. =	£104.11
1773 - £101. 5s. 8 1/2d. =	£101.29
1774 - £105. 19s. 10d. =	£105.99
1775 - £122. 7s. 7d. =	£122.38
1776 - £124. 11s. 10d. =	£124.59
1777 - £127. 11s. 2 1/2d. =	£127.56
1778 - £126. 0s. 3d. =	£126.01
1779 - £133. 8s. 6d. =	£133.43
1780 - £137. 0s. 5 1/2d. =	£137.02
1781 - £140. 0s. 7d. =	£140.03
1840 - £315	= £315.00

The graph shows that from 1768 the tithe decreases to 1771, which may indicate worsening weather conditions and poorer harvests. Analysis of other records e.g. increases in deaths shown in parish registers may reveal or confirm the cause. After 1771 yields start to increase at a steady rate whilst dipping at 1774 and 1778. After 1775 the Rector took a continuous rise in the value of his tithes indicating a stable situation in farming. The graph after 1775 to 1840 shows a constant average increase in growth at a rate £2.97 per year. The graph at 1840 is shown out of proportion with regards years but the slope of the line is correct. Therefore the graph shows that income dropped for the first 3 years then increased, (not counting any annual variations), at a constant rate to 1840.

If yields and income did decrease during the time of the wars with Napoleon direct data is not available. The graph does show that John Phillips, husband to the heir of the estate, and Thomas Shrawley Vernon

who inherited the estate in 1818, held a tight grip on their tenants with regard to payment of rent and so to tithes. The Vernons were known to have employed strict bailiffs whereas the clergyman at Chaddesley Corbett under the lordship of John Throckmorton (late 1700's) sometimes experienced great difficulty collecting his tithes.

Commodities collected in Shrawley

The greatest majority of tithes collected in Shrawley appear to have been arable crops (compared to Chaddesley Corbett were more livestock and 'lesser tithe' tithe associated with a vicar rather than a Rector was collected). The following are lists of the commodity collected: -

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|
| (1) Wheat & Rye | lambs | garden |
| Barley | pigs | meadow |
| Clover | wool | orchard |
| Pulse | | 1 years Composition |
| Grass | | (Modus) |
| Hemp | | |
| Hemp seed | | |
| Peas | | |
| (2) Beans | | |
| (3) French Wheat | | |
| Hops | | |
| Oats | | |
| Vetches | | |
| Flax (very little grown) | | |
| Rye | | |
| (4) 'Lent grain' | | |
| Hay | | |
| Hop poles | | |
| Hops | | |
| Turnips (a rare crop in Shrawley) | | |
| (5) Clover | | |
| Seed clover | | |

- (1) The records show wheat/wheat & Rye/French Wheat/ were grown, possibly indicating that wheat and Rye crops were grown together in the same field. In parts of Worcestershire it was common practice to grow a variety of crops in the same field (Pitt).

- (2) Also garden beans grown. The large quantities of beans grown possibly shows that beans were grown for their nitrogenous value as for the market.
- (3) French Wheat was lesser priced than English Wheat 15s. 3d. compared to £1. 13s. 8d., and less was grown. Pitt describes this as buckwheat and was used primarily to feed poultry and game. Game shooting was a popular sport in Shrawley Wood and would also have been used by Foley on his Witley estate. It was also used for feeding pigs.
- (4) Lent grain – was this winter wheat?
- (5) Clover was a compulsory crop grown, farmers were even instructed on how many acres of clover they had to grow and land agents were sent round to check that the farmers were complying with their instructions. Clover seed as well as fields under clover itself was subject to tithes. Pitt says that clover was used extensively as a fodder crop and generally sown in April at 6 or 8 to 12 to 14 pounds per acre. It was sown before wheat for its nitrogenous value and harvested as hay produce.

The Agricultural community

The study of population has many different theories, complications and assumptions that must be averaged to give a National view. The tithe book being an actual record can give a more accurate interpretation of the true numbers of people employed in agriculture in the Parish of Shrawley. Censuses giving actual populations of parishes began in 1801. 1801, 1811, 1821, and 1831 censuses give only three categories of occupation, (agriculture, trade or manufacturing, or others). The 1841 census gives considerably more information but it is too late in years for this study. A more plausible approach is to study the parish registers of Shrawley. This again is a long-term study since to my knowledge these have not been transcribed. The following list gives total number of tithe payers per year but adjustments need to be made since tradesmen, agricultural labourers of the larger farms (who may have been land-less as mentioned before or lived out of the parish), and others are not included. Apart from the water mill, which was titheable, a thriving brick-works was known to have existed in the late 1700's on the banks of the River Severn. This shows that only ancient tenancy and agricultural produce was subject to tithe. The general household multiplier for this period is generally considered to be approximately 4.5 times. Below are annual totals of tithe payers for each year of the Shrawley tithe book: -

tithe
year - payers - est. population

1769 -	82 -	369
1770 -	86 -	387
1771 -	64 -	288
1772 -	75 -	338
1773 -	72 -	324
1774 -	70 -	315
1775 -	73 -	329
1776 -	58 -	261
1777 -	58 -	261
1778 -	57 -	257
1779 -	66 -	297
1780 -	68 -	306
1781 -	70 -	315

The above figures show that the population was high in 1769 & 1770 at an estimated number of people at 387. The numbers drop to there lowest in 1778 before rising to 315 in 1781. Studies of this low period in the book show that few areas of large acreage of land were being worked. The do however show that there were no great dramatic changes in population during the period covered by the study.

The price of the Pound 1720-1850

The graph opposite the shows the value of the Pound 1720-1850 (after “A History of the Cost of Living” by John Burnett, publ. Penguin 1969). Moderate fluctuations are seen at no great height till after 1770 when the value of the Pound drops dramatically over the next three years. After a short rise the trend continues downwards to its nadir in 1810 when the value of the Pound was less than of a half of its price thirty years previously. Burnett in his book shows the value to remain constant and calm, (not counting local fluctuations), from the year 1600 till 1770. European wars and the weather would have had a great effect after 1770. In the year 1795 were particularly severe. In January and February the Rivers Wye and Severn froze over and in France bad harvests, poverty, and great dearth gave suffering to the ordinary people. Shrawley, (as a small parish in north Worcestershire), shows a consistency of rural management but must have been affected by national influences. A study of prices of commodity per acre has shown that the tithes paid over the period (1769-81) were varied and numerous. Perhaps there was a personal negotiation between the Rector and the tenant, but the value of the tithe did not seem

to advance with the value of the Pound, (see graph before). This further advances the theory that the clergy were receiving less in value for their tithes, and so were becoming themselves, more impoverished in the late 18th. century.

	1769	1770	1781(**)
Wheat	3s./Ac.	3s.6d./Ac	4s./Ac.
Barley	2s./Ac.	2s. /Ac.	3s/Ac.
Oats	2s./Ac.		
Lent grain	2s./Ac.	2s.3d./Ac.	
Clover	2s.6d./Ac.	2s.3d/Ac.	2s./Ac.
Pulse	1s.6d./Ac.	2s/Ac.	
Beans	2s/Ac.		
Grass	1s.6d./Ac.	1s.6d./Ac.	
Severn grass(*)	2s/Ac.		
Hemp	1s.4d./Bushel		

Lambs(***) 2s.6d. each

(*) Severn grass was water meadow foliage, hay, lush grass, etc. a product of the annual flooding of the riverside meadows every winter.

(**) By 1781 many of the major farmers were paying their tithes by “agreement”, by modus e.g. £2.2s.0d., £9.9s.0d., £13., £9. etc., and many small tithe payers were giving 1s.0d. and 1s.6d. for a garden. Some small farmers were however giving returns on their acreage to give valid returns for the analysis.

(***) What is remarkable as compared to Chaddesley Corbett, is how little livestock was tithe-able, the only other being calves and pigs.

Note!

In agriculture a bushel was a unit of dry measure, the capacity of a container.

1 peck = 2 gallons (a gallon contains 10 pounds of water)

4 pecks = 1 bushel

A bushel of wheat on an average weighed 60 pounds

“ barley “ “ “ 47 pounds

“ oats “ “ “ 40 pounds

The fullness and compactness of a bushel of wheat grain shows how its value to the farmer greatly outweighed that of any other grain seed.

Hemp

What is remarkable is the amount of hemp that was grown in Shrawley. Hemp, according to Pitt was grown in small patches and so impoverished the soil that it was considered a scourge. In Shrawley hemp appears to have been grown in great quantity particularly by retired tenants and widows on their garden plots. A clue to its activity would be the proximity of the rope weaving factories further up the River Severn past Stourport at Bewdley.

The day of collection

The very last entry in the book dated March 22nd 1782 quotes “A Funeral from Ombersley – for which I received five shillings”.

This was a unique entry for the Rector to make in the book for he never before had mentioned his pastoral work and may already have realised that he was a sick man. Daniel Piercy’s monument in Shrawley Parish Church showed that he died on the 21st June 1782 aged 52, a month after attending to this funeral. There are several references in the book to “tithes due on Midsummer Day” though several farmers are clearly shown to have been overdue on making over their payments and had to resort paying modus estimated on the previous year’s tenancy rental. Since no other mention is made of the year 1782, Peircy would therefore have died before 1782’s tithes were due for collection. No records have been found so far of the tithes collected by the next Rector William Cox (1782-1809).

Acknowledgements

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