

A HISTORY OF ANCIENT
TENURES OF LAND IN
NORTH WALES AND
THE MARCHES

Containing Notes on the Common and Demesne Lands of the
Lordship of Bromfield, and of the parts of Denbighshire
and Flintshire adjoining; and Suggestions for the
Identification of such Lands elsewhere: to-
gether with an Account of the rise of the
Manorial System in the same Districts

By
ALFRED NEOBARD PALMER,
and
EDWARD OWEN, F.S.A
Barrister-at-law

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Preface

OVER a quarter of a century has elapsed since the publication of the first edition of the present work, and the favourable reception which it has always met with from the select class to which it was addressed, has given rise to the hope that a new and enlarged edition will receive equal approbation.

Although the illustrations of the working of the Welsh system of land tenure are drawn from a somewhat wider area than that covered by the earlier edition, the present work remains essentially a history of that system as it manifested itself in the great lordship of Bromfield and Yale. The present authors are quite conscious of the danger of yielding to the seductive tendencies towards broad generalizations from either very minute or narrowly localized facts, but great as has been the advance in the study of the social and economic phenomena of land tenure in the past quarter-century, they are of opinion that the expressions employed in the preface to the former edition are still applicable to the Welsh phenomena. It was then said—

The complaint of such readers as are not specially interested in the district treated is likely to be that a

great subject is discussed from a purely local standpoint. This is, however, the only way in which a subject so great can, at the present stage of it, be treated. The enunciation of general principles is less needed than the accumulation and marshalling of pertinent facts. And these facts, which the historian seeks, can only be obtained as the result of a minute and careful investigation of particular districts conducted by men who live within those districts, and who are well acquainted with their present condition and past history. This is a task which has been attempted for a portion of the counties of Denbigh and Flint, and especially for the lordship of Bromfield—a district in which Englishmen and Welshmen contended for the mastery, and in which the systems of land tenure of England and of Wales are instructively commingled.

But the constant accretion of fresh material, and the close and friendly intimacy of fellow-students, has resulted in a different presentation of much of the evidence, and an alteration in the point of view from which that evidence has been regarded. The partnership has also admitted of a broader consideration of the difficult problems involved in the inquiry, and a wider outlook for similar problems elsewhere in North Wales.

Whilst, therefore, the general scheme of the first edition has been preserved, there is not a single paragraph that has not been re-considered, and much of the work has been entirely re-written.

The chief fresh authorities which have contributed to the present edition are :—

- (1) A valuable extent of the entire lordship of Bromfield and Yale, made in the year 1507.
- (2) A fine survey of the lordship, of the latter end of the reign of Henry VIII.
- (3) A very complete extent of the same area, taken in the year 1562.

The importance of the first of these arises from the circumstance that it was taken whilst the Welsh system of land-holding was still in active operation over a large portion of the lordship. By the year 1562 every vestige of Welsh tenure by gwely or gafaél, and descent of lands by gavelkind had vanished from the records. The intermediate survey, taken only a few years after the legislative incorporation of Wales into England, marks the opening of a new social epoch.

Numerous subsidiary official documents, such as the yearly accounts of various manorial officers, deeds and other small sources, have contributed to the picture which is here presented.*

* It has been known for some time that a survey or extent of the lordship of Bromfield and Yale was taken in the 15th year of Richard II (1391), but as diligent and oft-repeated searches at the Public Record Office failed to discover it, it was feared that it was no longer in existence. Since this book was written, however, it has been found. And not only so, but portions of a still earlier extent of the reign of Edward III have come to light. The present writers hope to issue both at an early date.

Owing to the unexpected death of the intended publisher, this book is issued by the authors, whose addresses are appended.

ALFRED NEOBARD PALMER,
Inglenook, Bersham Road,
Wrexham, North Wales.

EDWARD OWEN,
5, Old Palace Yard,
Westminster, S.W.

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CHAPTER I

THE COMMON FIELDS

THE ancient arable area of the township of Wrexham Regis, or a great part of it, is called in old deeds and surveys "The Town Fields," or "The Common Fields." Nearly all the closes lying within this area were formerly divided into separate strips, composed of single butts or groups of butts, lying parallel each to each, and held by different persons. These strips, now commonly called "quilletts," were, in later times at any rate, not divided from each other by balks¹ or strips of unploughed land, but their extent was marked at the four corners by what were called "mearstones."²

Various scattered quilletts are still found within the ancient arable areas of other townships in the same district. Fields also frequently occur which are wholly divided into many quilletts of nearly equal size. In the latter case the field, or one of the fields, so divided, is generally known

¹ But see p. 30 and p. 42, and notes.

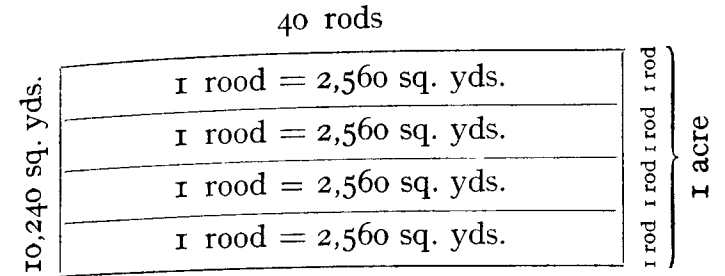
² For a fuller description of the common fields of Wrexham Regis, see Palmer's *History of the Town of Wrexham*, etc., pp. 100-104. See also pp. 182-185 of the same book for an account of the common fields of Wrexham Fechan.

But it is pretty certain that the thing itself once flourished in the district, though under another name—that of “erw.”

We first note that a division of the customary acre of Bromfield—the rood, or “quarter”—is identical with the cyfar of Flintshire. The references to it in John Norden’s survey of 1620 enable us to give an accurate account of its area if not of its shape. Norden states that the acre in which he has expressed his areas is the “olde and accustomed acre in theis partes and in most countries next adjoyninge,” which acre contained “a hundred and three score perches to the acre and fowere and twenty foote to the pearche or pole.” That is, it contained 10,240 square yards and was thus more than twice as large as the statute acre.¹ It corresponded in fact to the area of the customary acre of Cheshire and south Lancashire. This acre of Bromfield Norden divides into four “roods,” each exactly equalling in area the Flintshire cyfar. Nothing, however, is told us of the *shape* of this acre, with its four “roods” and 160 perches. If it conformed to the usual shape of the acres of England it would be plotted out somewhat thus (the figures are not to scale) :—

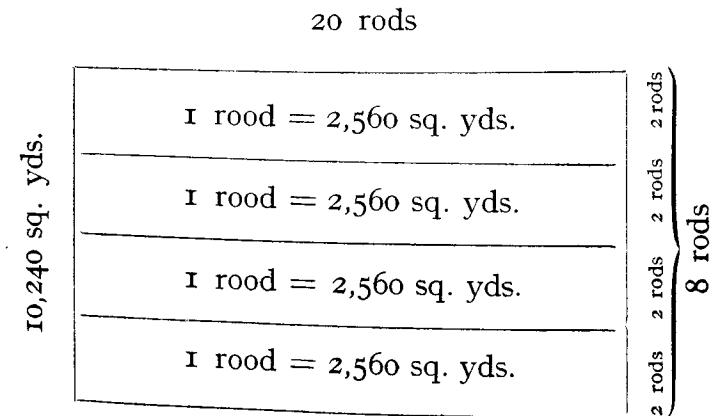
has been met with occurs therein. John Almer had then fifteen “kevers” (*cyfeiriau* or *cyfars*) for the stipend of his office as King’s attorney.

¹ To convert numbers stated in terms of this customary acre into statute acres, multiply by 2.115; that is, 100 customary acres are equal to 211.5 statute acres.



or $\frac{(24 \times 40) \times (24 \times 1)}{9} = 2,560$, and $2,560 \times 4 = 10,240$.

In other words, according to this scheme, the acre would be ten times and the rood forty times longer than broad. On the other hand, if the area were plotted according to the scheme of the Welsh *ystang* (colloquially called *stang*), where the rood is treated acre-wise, we should get an acre where the rood was only ten, not forty, times longer than broad.



or $\frac{(24 \times (20) \times 24 \times 2)}{9} = 2,560$, and $2,560 \times 4 = 10,240$.

