

Walter of Henley's *The Treatise on Husbandry* (c. 1270)

Introductory Notes

This translation of *Walter of Henley's Treatise on Husbandry*, by Elizabeth Lamond FRHS, was published by Longman, Green & Co. of London in 1890, under the title *Walter of Henley's Husbandry*.

Who was Walter of Henley? We do not know for certain. This is his only known work. It seems almost certain from his practical knowledge of his chosen subject that he had worked as a professional bailiff – indeed he refers to such a role in the treatise – probably in the south of England. One of the numerous manuscript copies of his treatise hints that, in later life, he became a Dominican friar. It is thought he wrote *Husbandry* in the third quarter of the 13th century, probably in the 1270s, early in the reign of Edward I.

The treatise is aimed at the owners of medium and large estates who worked their demesne lands, rather than farmed them out for cash rents, but might have little direct knowledge of agriculture. Direct working of demesnes was the norm for most of the 13th century, when the markets were developed enough to provide sufficient means of exchanging goods for cash, and before the agricultural disasters and social upheavals of the 14th century. Walter is particularly keen to inform his readers of the tricks and scams dishonest employees can get up to; some of these may prove difficult to understand in a casual reading, but a little thought will pluck out the gist of his meaning.

The Treatise on Husbandry

This is the treatise on husbandry that a goodly man once made, whose name was Sir Walter of Henley; and this he made to teach those who have lands and tenements and may not know how to keep all the points of husbandry, as the tillage of the land and the keeping of cattle, from which great wealth may come to those who will hear this teaching and then do as is found written down.

Survey your lands and tenements by your sworn men

Survey your lands and tenements by true and sworn men. First survey your courts, gardens, dove-houses, curtilages, what they are worth yearly beyond the valuation; and then how many acres are in the demesne, and how much is in each cultura, and what they should be worth yearly; and how many acres of pasture, and what they are worth yearly; and all other several pastures, and what they are worth yearly; and wood, what you can sell without loss and destruction and what it is worth yearly beyond the return; and free tenants, how much each holds and by what service; and customary tenants, how much each holds and by what services, and let customs be put in money. And of all other definite things put what they are worth yearly.

And by the surveyors inquire with how much of each sort of corn you can sow and acre of land, and how much cattle on each manor. By the extent you should be able to know how much your lands are worth yearly, by which you can order your living, as I have said before. Furthermore, if your bailiffs or provosts say in their account that so many quarters have been sown on so many acres, go to the extent, and perhaps you shall find fewer acres than they have told you and more quarters sown than necessary. For you have at the end of the extent the quantity of each kind of corn with which one shall sow an acre of land.

Further, if it is necessary to put out more money or less for ploughs, you shall be confirmed by the extent. How? I will tell you. If your lands are divided in three, one part for winter seed, the other part for spring seed, and the third part fallow, then is a ploughland ninescore acres [180 acres]. And if your lands are divided in two, as in many places, the one half sown with winter seed and spring seed, the other half fallow, then shall a ploughland be eightscore acres [160 acres]. Go to the extent and see how many acres you have in the demesne, and there you shall be confirmed.

Some men will tell you that a plough cannot work eight score or nine score acres yearly, but I will show you that it can. You know well that a furlong ought to be forty perches long and four wide, and the king's perch is sixteen feet and a half; then an acre is sixty-six feet in width [an acre is one furlong (40 perches; 220 yards) long and four perches (22 yards) wide]. Now in ploughing go thirty-six times round to make the ridge narrower, and when the acre is ploughed then you have made seventy-two furlongs, which are six leagues, for be it known that twelve furlongs are a league [this is the "Domesday league" of 1.5 miles]. And the horse or ox must be very poor that cannot from the morning go easily in pace three leagues in length from his starting place and return by three o'clock.

And I will show you another reason that it can do as much. You know that there are in the year fifty-two weeks. Now take away eight weeks for holy days and other hindrances, then there are forty-four working weeks in all. And in all that time the plough shall only have to plough for fallow or for spring or winter sowing three roods and a half daily [a rood is 1/4 acre], and for second fallowing an acre. Now see if a plough were properly kept and followed, if it could not do as much daily.

And if you have land on which you have cattle, take pains to stock it as the land requires. And know for truth if you are duly stocked, and your cattle well guarded and managed, it shall yield three times the land by the extent. If free tenants or customary tenants deny services you will see the definite amount in the extent.

Of overseeing your labourers

At the beginning of fallowing and second fallowing and of sowing let the bailiff, and the messor, or the provost, be all the time with the ploughmen, to see that they do their work well and thoroughly, and at the end of the day see how much they have done, and for so much shall they answer each day after unless they can show a sure hindrance. And because customary servants neglect their work it is necessary to guard against their fraud; further it is necessary that they are

overseen often; and besides the bailiff must oversee all, that they work well, and if they do not well let them be rebuked.

With a team of oxen with two horses you draw quicker than with a team of all horses, if the ground is not so stony that the oxen cannot help themselves with their feet. Why? I will tell you: the horse costs more than the ox. Besides, a plough of oxen will go as far in the year as a plough of horses, because the malice of the ploughmen will not allow the plough (of horses) to go beyond their pace, no more than the plough of oxen. Further, in very hard ground where the plough of horses will stop, the plough of oxen will pass.

And will you see how the horse costs more than the ox? I will tell you. It is usual and right that plough beasts should be in the stall between the feast of St. Luke [October 18] and the feast of the Holy Cross in May [May 3], five-and-twenty weeks, and if the horse is to be in a condition to do his daily work, it is necessary that he should have every night at the least the sixth part of a bushel of oats, price one halfpenny, and at the least twelve pennyworth of grass in summer. And each week more or less a penny in shoeing, if he must be shod on all four feet. The sum is twelve shillings and fivepence in the year, without fodder and chaff.

How you must keep your oxen

And if the ox is to be in a condition to do his work, then it is necessary that he should have at least three sheaves and a half of oats in the week, price one penny, and ten sheaves of oats should yield a bushel of oats in measure; and in summer twelve pennyworth of grass: the sum three shillings, one penny, without fodder or chaff. And when the horse is old and worn out then there is nothing but the skin; and when the ox is old, with ten pennyworth of grass he shall be fit for the larder, or will sell for as much as he cost.

April is a good time for fallowing, if the earth breaks up after the plough; and for second fallowing after St. John's Day [June 24], when the dust rises behind the plough; and for ploughing for seed when the earth is firm and not too cracked. But he who has much to do cannot wait for good seasons. And when you fallow, if you find any good earth deep down, then plough a square ridge, to let the good land rest, but do not cut off the bad land; and plough cleanly, so that none remains covered or uncovered. At the second fallowing do not go too deep, but so that you can just destroy the thistles, for if the earth is ploughed too deep at second fallowing, and the earth is full of water, then when one must plough for sowing the plough shall reach no sure ground, but goes floundering, as in mud. And if the plough can go two finger-lengths deeper than at second farrowing, then the plough will find sure ground, and clear and free it from the mud, and make fine and good ploughing.