

INTRODUCTION

The Lincolnshire Wolds is a living, working landscape and it is widely recognised that much of the attractiveness of the Wolds today is a result of the activities of generations of landowners, farmers and foresters. The farmed and wooded landscape has changed little in 200 years, with arable farming the dominant feature with its ever changing cropping patterns adding to the area's scenic charm.

'This is very fine corn country: chalk at bottom: stony near the surface in some places: here and there a chalk pit in the hills: fields from 15 to 40 acres, not without fences and cultivated all over. A very fine country, large fields, fine pastures, flocks of those great sheep, of some 200 to 1000 in a flock, not one single acre of waste land and not one acre of bad land' – Extract from Rural Rides, written by William Cobbett in 1830

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

There is a wealth of additional information available online about farming and forestry – here are some sources to find out more about how our landscapes are managed:

National Farmers Union:-
www.nfuonline.com

Country Land and Business Association:-
www.cla.org.uk

Championing the Farmed Environment:-
www.cfeonline.org.uk

Soils:-
www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes

Defra:- www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs

Forestry Commission:-
www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission

Rare Breeds Survival Trust:-
www.rbst.org.uk

THE LINCOLNSHIRE WOLDS

The Lincolnshire Wolds is a nationally important and cherished landscape. Most of it was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1973. Covering an area of 558 square kilometres or 216 square miles, the AONB contains the highest ground in eastern England between Yorkshire and Kent, rising to over 150m along its western edge. Rolling chalk hills and areas of sandstone and clay underlie this attractive landscape.

The Lincolnshire Wolds has been inhabited since prehistoric times and the appearance of the countryside today has been greatly influenced by past and present agricultural practices.

A Countryside Service helps to protect and enhance the landscape through partnership projects with local landowners, farmers, parish councils, businesses and residents of the Wolds.



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WONDERS of the WOLDS

Farming & Forestry of the Lincolnshire Wolds



One of a series of leaflets to help you get to know the Lincolnshire Wolds

Landscapes for life
.org.uk

LINCOLNSHIRE WOLDS
One of the AONB Family

If you would like this leaflet in an alternative format please contact us.

Farming & Forestry *of the* Lincolnshire Wolds

ANCESTRAL AGRICULTURE

Whilst every generation has left their mark on the landscape, the very act of farming has often wiped out this evidence. It is known our ancestors lived in the Lincolnshire Wolds around 300,000 years ago, but these people would not have farmed the land, rather hunted, gathered and taken timber as they travelled.

The fertile, well draining soils and free flowing springs of the Wolds encouraged farming development at an early stage, from the Neolithic Period after 4,000 BC, when there was light woodland and scrub. Following a period of selective tree removal for fuel and building materials, wheat, barley, sheep and goats would have been brought over from south-eastern Europe and the near East whilst cattle and pigs were domesticated from native animals. Subsequent generations farmed an open landscape, just as we enjoy today, with each successive farmer making their mark on the land.

The Romans saw the farming potential of the Wolds, building villas and creating a rich land management strategy, even bringing viniculture, the art of growing grapes for the production of wine, to the area, with the remains of terraces created for this purpose still visible today. Few signs of the Anglo Saxon period of cultivation endure, excepting the Scandinavian influence of the place names, and it is thought that Lincoln Red cattle were introduced to this country by Viking raiders. The cattle grazing today have altered considerably since then – from a horned, dual purpose breed (beef and dairy producing), it is now a polled (no horns) and specialist beef breed.

Between 1100 and 1600 AD, the wool trade became a very lucrative business, with the church as the most influential landowner. Sheep farming at this time was very profitable so some Monasteries deposed the peasants from the land to create open tracts of sheep walks. Following the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII, most land reverted back to peasant farming in the form of an open field system, or ridge and furrow farming. The distinctive fields of ridge and furrow grassland can still be seen today and was the result of tilling the ground with non-reversible ploughs. Farmers would typically rent individual strips of large fields, a system used until the Enclosures took effect.

THE ENCLOSURES

Enclosure Acts changed the way the land was farmed, shifting from an open-field strip system to enclosed fields which had to be hedged and fenced. New road networks and watercourses were made, along with land allotted to quarrying for road materials and for lime fertiliser. Occurring between the 1730s and the 1840s, the Enclosures brought about a change in the appearance of parishes and the landscape and revolutionised farming methods, agricultural economics and social relationships.

DEVELOPING AN INDUSTRY

Farming at this time was a mixture of the old open-field system, with managed rabbit warrens and sheep walks. From the early to mid-1800s, farmers in the Wolds adopted the scientific and profitable method of High Farming, enclosing fields and instigating a crop rotation of wheat, barley, turnips and sheep. The Lincoln Longwool is the largest British sheep, developed specifically to produce the heaviest, longest and most lustrous fleece of any breed in the world. Caistor and Horncastle were renowned for their sheep and horse fairs, with Caistor hosting a fair in 1858 when 60,000 sheep were sold. Land was drained and reclaimed from the marsh, steam engines were introduced for tasks such as threshing and planned farmsteads were built with an emphasis on efficiency and production.

Expansion continued until the 1870s, when bad harvests and cheap imports resulted in a general decline in the profitability of farming that continued until just after the Second World War. The Agriculture Acts of 1947 and 1957 saw an increase in production and farm size, with bigger and better farm buildings required for new machinery and a decrease in production costs and farm labour required. With the decline of the fishing industry in the 1960s, the Wolds saw a marked increase in farmers growing peas and vegetables suitable for quick freezing, being grown in areas close to the underutilised fish freezer factories in Grimsby, Immingham and Hull.

At this time, the Lincolnshire Curly Coat pig became extinct. One of the oldest breeds in the UK, the Curly Coat was a giant of a pig, sometimes weighing over 250kg, and extremely hairy. The use of the breed dwindled mainly due to a taste for leaner meat, leading finally to its demise in the early 1970s.

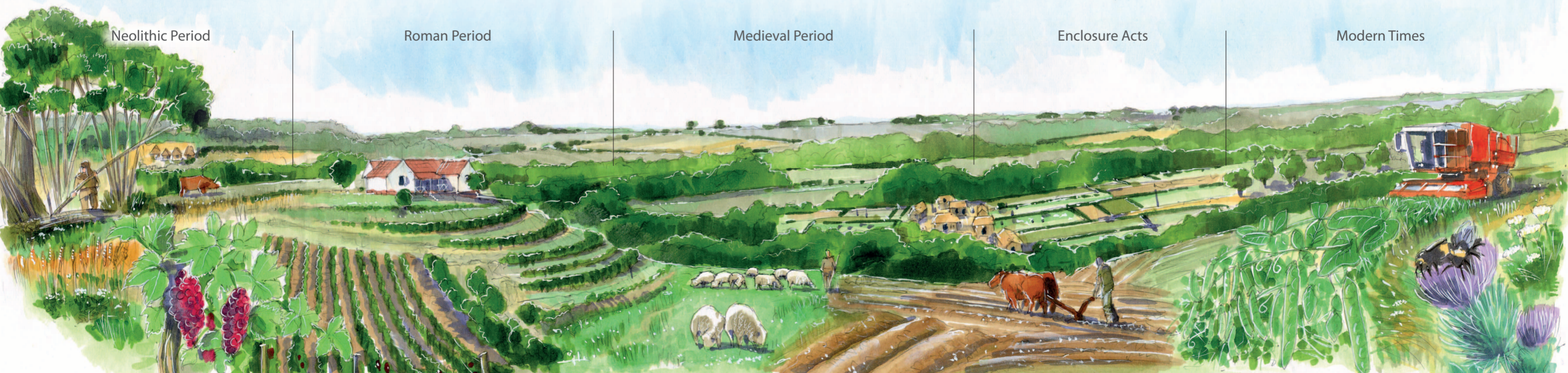
MODERN TIMES

Entry into the European Economic Union in 1973 brought with it little change initially, as many Wolds farms were operating more efficiently than most. Over the years, the Common Agricultural Policy dictated levels of production, crops grown and a level of price that reflected the cost of production – trying to bring the income of farms to a level comparable to urban businesses across the European Union.

Over the course of the past 25 years, there has been a steady shift away from increasing agricultural production via subsidies and a move towards encouraging the uptake of a range of environmental measures. Some farmers have the opportunity for being partially paid for wider work they carry out on their land, such as creating flower and nectar rich margins on arable fields, managing species-rich grassland, protecting water courses or ploughing less deeply to protect archaeological remains.

Current cultivation practices are increasingly focussed on the use of direct drilling, combined strip tillage, minimal cultivations and rotational ploughing which can help in the control of weed species and protection of soil. The use of cover crops avoids long periods of leaving land bare throughout the winter prior to the spring planting of cereals, which helps manage soil erosion and fertility, along with controlling weeds, pests and diseases and increasing biodiversity. Catch crops, planted to 'catch' and retain nutrients between main crops, provide winter grazing alongside multiple benefits such as cover for game and farmland birds, improved soil fertility and structure and reducing erosion.

Farming and forestry practices continue to change, adapting to new techniques and demands to find a place in European and World markets. They remain a driving force in landscape management, but as political and economic influences continue to change, new challenges and opportunities arise to securing a sustainable future. To retain the Wolds as a living landscape, farmers and foresters must be able to sympathetically work their land: for crops, for food, for timber, for wildlife and for the scenic beauty of a working landscape.



THE HIDDEN BENEFITS

Development of farming and forestry has evolved through the years, driven by a diverse range of factors and whilst Lincolnshire farmers have been at the forefront of agricultural diversification and reform in the past, much is now led by UK and world markets. Much more than food and timber are produced by our farmers, foresters and land managers – they protect water and soil resources, encourage biodiversity, enhance the landscape, protect key historic features and provide access to the countryside.

The current rural landscape of the Wolds owes much of its existence to both the previous and ongoing pursuit of various farming practices and country field sports throughout the centuries. Many of the Wolds woodlands, copses, hedgerows, field margins and winter cover crops continue to be actively managed to help support game rearing habitats. Well managed field sports can provide very important habitat diversity, supporting wider wildlife interests, including small mammals, farmland birds and insects, alongside generating significant income and employment for the local rural economy.



THE GROWING MEDIUM

The crops, tree species and land-use pattern of the Wolds are a close reflection of the underlying solid and drift geology and soils, as well as the climate.

The plateau tops are dominated by arable crops grown on the high grade light, chalky soils where beech and ash are found in the hedgerows, whilst the valley sides may show striking variations in colour and texture, reflecting the diverse underlying strata. Concentrated in the south-east, the glacial tills give rise to heavy, seasonally waterlogged soils, which are often under woodland or pasture.

In the Lymn Valley, the Spilsby Sandstone provides the base material for well-drained sandy loams with an acidic kick, which commonly support oaks and pines. However the impermeable Kimmeridge Clays, which lie below, can give rise to localised areas with a high water table which in turn support alder dominated wet woodland. In the Bain Valley, glacial sands and gravels produce deep, coarse permeable loams, whilst the lower grade agricultural land, mainly along the northern scarp face, is under rough pasture and scrub, with the blown sands from the last glaciation characterising the western edge scarp bottom.

However, it's not just the soils that dictate the species grown here but also the weather and climate. The Lincolnshire Wolds, on the eastern side of the UK, tend to receive less rainfall than more westerly parts, where the prevailing wind comes over the Atlantic. Generally, the Wolds are blessed with good temperatures; however, cold polar fronts coming in from the east can bring the temperature crashing down, especially on the elevated plateau tops where the soils, crops and trees are exposed to the very drying winds.

WOODLAND

The woodland cover of the Lincolnshire Wolds AONB is low, at under 5% but is still an important habitat and landscape component. The Domesday Book of 1086 recorded little woodland, with most being cleared to provide mixed arable and grazing during the early medieval period. Much of the present day woodland was planted during the period of parliamentary enclosures, often to provide a mixture of small game coverts, parkland, tree belts and avenues. There are some large Forestry Commission plantations around Market Rasen, as most coniferous species prefer the acidic sandy soils found here whilst larger blocks of ash and hazel woodland remain on the south eastern edge. Small plantations of conifer trees and clumps of predominantly beech are still dotted around the Wolds today and are one of its most dramatic of landscape features.

Trees provide many benefits – they enhance the landscape, are important habitats, improve air and soil quality, provide shelter and shade for livestock, cover for shooting interests and deliver a crop of timber – but they do need management. This may be via thinning – the selective removal of trees to improve the growth rate of the remaining trees; felling; and replanting. Removing all the trees at once is normally undertaken at the end of their productive life but this can have an impact on the landscape and biodiversity unless carried out sympathetically.

Species to replant should take account of the end use of the timber, soil conditions and predicated future climate changes, currently modelled as milder winters, wetter summers and more extreme weather events.

