

ECONOMIC HISTORY

Minehead's economic history has seen many ups and downs. In the Middle Ages it was an agricultural parish and even in the 21st century a large part of the ancient parish is still rural containing cultivated lands and rough grazing. Fishing has been important for centuries and although commercial fishing has ceased it remains an important part of the tourist economy. During the Middle Ages Minehead's craftsmen were such as served any agricultural community including smiths, a wood turner, a weaver and tailors.¹ However, the rise of the port of Minehead in the 15th century stimulated the development of several industries and trades. From the late Middle Ages until the early 20th century the fortunes of the port were closely related to local industries like cloth-making and tanning and even gas production. Mercantile wealth overseas trade drew many craftsmen and retailers to set up business in the town. Migrants came from Wales and Ireland and also other parts of England including tailors from Taunton and Montacute in the late 17th century, a joiner from Westminster in 1698 and a sawyer from Bristol in 1731.²

However, prosperity peaked in the 17th century and after 1700 there was empty property and house sites were turned into gardens.³ In 1703 there were 221 ratepayers of whom 193 were in the town⁴ but in 1766 poor households included building, leather and cloth workers, a fiddler and watch and clock makers, some of whom had come to Minehead to work.⁵ The decline in trade, coupled with several serious fires in the late 18th century,⁶ John Fownes Luttrell's refusal to grant leases

¹ Cal. Inq. Misc. I, p. 265; SDNQ, XXXI, 458; F. H. Dickinson (ed.), *Kirby's Quest etc.* (Som. Rec. Soc. 3), 245; Cal. Pat. 1429—36, 167; SHC, DD/L P26/2, P26/7/2.

² SHC, D/P/m.st.m 13/3/1.

³ SHC, DD/L 1/52/31/3.

⁴ SHC, DD/L 1/51/26/1.

⁵ SHC, DD/L 1/59/6/11; below, soc. hist.

⁶ Above, intro.

for fear of political opposition,⁷ and poor returns from agriculture plunged Minehead into poverty until its rebirth as a seaside resort. Many tenants had clocks, tableware and good furniture seized to pay rent and other debts indicating that they had formerly been comfortably off.⁸ In 1816 Luttrell tenants were threatened with further distress,⁹ c.1820 many tenants were unable to pay their rents and two had run away and in 1846 working people were said to be destitute.¹⁰ In 1821 only 76 out of 280 households were involved in trade or manufacture.¹¹

The railway, opened in 1874, probably damaged the coastal shipping trade but brought in more visitors. As Minehead began to grow again it became increasingly important as a retail, service and administrative centre, taking from Dunster its position as the local centre for west Somerset and north-east Exmoor. In the 1920s many people moved to Minehead to set up business to cash in on the tourist trade although some failed.¹² Although the traditional seaside resort went into decline in the late 20th century, Minehead continues to be a popular place to visit and to retire to. Its economy still depends heavily on tourism and on social care. Butlin's is the largest employer in the town with over 200 employees in 2001, followed by a social care provider with over 100 employees.¹³ In the 2000s a business park was established between the railway and Alcombe.

AGRICULTURE

⁷ SHC, DD/X/HRG 9; below, parl. rep.

⁸ SHC, DD/L 2/35/2.

⁹ SHC, DD/L 1/51/24/1.

¹⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/4/12/4, 1/52/28.

¹¹ Census (1821).

¹² SHC, D/CC/ta 7; below, this section.

¹³ Inf. from SCC Info. Unit, 2001.

The favourable climate probably led to Minehead having been farmed in prehistoric times and there is a small Iron-Age enclosure with later lynchets near the former East Myne farm. There was extensive pre-Conquest settlement on North Hill and medieval and later arable fields and water meadows. The medieval field system consisted of enclosed farms on the high ground, which still have ancient field and boundary banks, and several small common arable fields on the low ground shared between the demesne and cottagers. The larger farms were mainly on the higher ground but still had a large amount of arable. Greenaleigh on an old landslip north of the hill, despite having little light in winter, was an arable farm in 1842.¹⁴ Before the later 19th century the low ground was densely cultivated in many small holdings. In the 1780s it was said that growth was nearly a month earlier than inland and that myrtles thrived in the open.¹⁵ Today the many large fuchsia hedges on the south side of North Hill are indicative of the milder climate.

By 1086 there were at least 30 farmsteads including Myne and three holdings at Bratton. Minehead manor had 12 ploughlands but 13 ploughteams of which three were in demesne worked by 12 serfs and the rest were worked by 27 villeins and 22 bordars indicating a large number of well established farmsteads. The demesne also had 12 a. of meadow, 24 a. of woodland and pasture, four leagues by two, presumably on North Hill, and the estate had increased in value from £5 to £6. Demesne livestock comprised 300 sheep, 16 cattle and 10 pigs. The neighbouring Bratton manor had four ploughlands and teams equally divided between the demesne and the two villeins and four bordars but there was only one serf on the demesne. There were 2 a. of meadow, 100 a. of pasture, 60 goats and 12 cattle on the demesne and the estate had increased in value from 5s. to 30s. Even Myne on the top of North Hill had two ploughlands and

¹⁴ SHC, tithe award; Som. CC., HER.

¹⁵ SHC, A/AQP 8.

teams, both in demesne worked by four serfs, 1 a. of meadow, 4 a. of woodland, 50 a. of pasture, 107 sheep and 50 goats and had increased in value from 10s to 15s. The only tenant was a bordar with apparently no arable land.¹⁶

Middle Ages

In the mid 13th century the Minehead demesne had a gross income of nearly £30 a year and produce in 1260 included oats, barley, poultry and 300 eggs, the oats and eggs mainly consumed at Dunster Castle. The arable was sown with oats (53 a.) and rye for the following year using 12 oxen.¹⁷ In the 1270s income had fallen and pasture was let out but £4 13s was received from grain sales. Staff included two drovers, a shepherd and a bullock herd and produce included wheat, rye, peas, oats, and a small number of lambs and piglets, which were used by the household, delivered to Enmore and Somerton, for the assizes, or sold. Surplus works were sold but 83 a. of demesne arable was sown. The demesne buildings included a grange and oxshed.¹⁸ In 1330 the demesne comprised 168 a. of arable, 40 a. of pasture and underwood and 18 a. of meadow in addition to rough grazing. It was worth £7 8s. compared with the value of works (£7 12s.) and rents (£13 13s. 6d.). Two thirds of the 102 tenants were villeins.¹⁹

The extension of cultivation on North Hill, probably in the 13th century, created c.18 new farmsteads at West Myne, North Ridge, Combeshead, Hindon and Wydon.²⁰ An incomplete Minehead manor survey of 1354 appears to show little fall in the number of tenants since 1330 with 24 tenants holding a half virgate measured as 24 a. of arable,²¹ 20 holding a ferling or 12 a., 31 holding 6 a., 17 with less or none

¹⁶ VCH Som, I, 502—3.

¹⁷ SHC, DD/L P17/2.

¹⁸ SHC, DD/L P26/3.

¹⁹ SHC, DD/L P1/1.

²⁰ SHC, DD/L P26/5—6.

²¹ In Carhampton holdings conformed to the same system of tenement measurement.

and 154 a. acres in demesne. One tenant held only enclosed lands and nearly half, even those with the largest holdings, recorded no oxen, presumably hiring them as required. Recorded fields were Waterlete and Wettehull, west of the park, North of the Lane, South of the Lane east of Lower town, the field opposite the court gate or Courtyate, Someryate, possibly by the way to the marsh, and fields at Foulbridge and Tethullbrigge. The Waterlete, watered by labour service, was used for corn and pasture and the two demesne pastures of Fenne (10 a.) and Northmarsh were common to all tenants between 29 September and 2 February. All tenants also had common pasture on the 'Egge' and on the fields after the corn was carried. Works owed varied from common farming tasks like haymaking and ploughing to carrying seed from distant markets, enclosing land before the court gate called Barlichlonde,²² digging the vineyard²³ or making charcoal in the park or wood and bore no relation to the size of holding. Tenants of 1 a. or less owed four and a half days work per year. Allowances of loaves or half loaves were given.²⁴

In 1380 pasture was let at South and North marshes, wood was sold in Westwood, pannage would have been sold in the park and Northwood but for a lack of acorns, most works were sold, hay for the manor was brought from Carhampton in 36 loads and there was no demesne livestock. Clearly as elsewhere the demesne farm have been divided up between tenants.²⁵ In the early 15th century the manor income came mainly from rents of 108 tenants (over £60), and court profits and almost all works were acquitted and those still required appear to have been used outside the parish. The park supplied honey for mead and the produce of the gardens were sold.²⁶

²² No record of Barlinch priory having interest in Minehead.

²³ Site unknown, work probably replaced by vineyard silver: below this section.

²⁴ SHC, DD/L P26/2—3.

²⁵ SHC, DD/L P26/3.

²⁶ SHC, DD/L P26/5.

Minehead park, recorded by 1354—5 but probably the Derefolde of 1252,²⁷ was pasture and wood covering 150 a. in 1428 when it was worth 20 s. more than it cost to maintain game.²⁸ A parker's house and hunting were recorded in 1456 and maintenance of the park pale and hedging was a regular expense but grazing in the park produced an income of up to £4 a year.²⁹ Closes taken out of the park in the 15th century appear to have been thrown back into the park in the 1500s and the income from grazing rose to over £13 by 1540 but Leland said it had been destroyed, presumably divided into fields.³⁰ There is little record of agriculture on Bratton manor but it was assessed at two carucates or ploughlands in 1330³¹ and in 1383 there were 13 tenants.³²

In 1421 31 holdings on Minehead manor varied in size from 8 a. to 40 a. with a farm of 100 a. actually two at East Myne held by a single tenant. At West Myne the houses were down on five of the six holdings and at North Ridge one of the three tenements had lost its house probably reflecting a fall in population and decline in cultivation on the hill as by the 1450s some North Ridge rents were lost.³³ There were 31 tenements with 6a. or fewer of which 14 were described as of ancient tenure and several had only small parcels of demesne land. Many of the 72 cottagers had a garden and up to 3 a. but one had 6 a. Parcels of overland and waste were let to tenants except Northmarsh, which was reserved for the lord's animals. The annual

²⁷ H. C. Maxwell Lyte and T. S. Holmes (ed.), Cartularies of Bruton and Montacute Priors (Som. Rec. Soc. 8), p. 59; Cal. Pat. 1354—8, 231; above this section.

²⁸ Cal. Inq. pm. XXIII, p. 22.

²⁹ SHC, DD/L P2/9/3, P15/2, P27/9, P28/17.

³⁰ SHC, DD/L P28/16/1, P28/17; TNA, C 142/106/55; E. H. Bates, 'Leland in Somersetshire; 1540-1542', Proc. SANHS, XXXIII, 98.

³¹ Cal. Inq. p.m. VII, p. 218.

³² SHC, DD/L P32/4/11.

³³ SHC, DD/L P26/7/2, P 27/9, P28/17.

rental of over £65 included customary payments such as larder, vineyard and mill silver.³⁴

In 1428 the demesne comprised 220 a. of arable worth 1s. 4d. an acre, 40 a. of meadow worth 2s. an acre, 20 a. of wood of which the pasture was worth as much as meadow, and 400 a. of rough ground worth only 1d. but it was all let out except for 7 a. of meadow. There were still 182 manual works, which could be called on at any time, called Churrys,³⁵ 107 harvest works, 15 pea stacking works, 15 hay stacking works, and one winter and one Lent ploughing work. They varied in value from a farthing for Churrys to 5d. for ploughing. Some meadow near Hopcott in Wootton Courtney was in hand but most works were sold or utilised on Carmoor in Carhampton.³⁶ In 1456 the Northlawn was furrowed for water to improve the pasture and by the early 16th-century hill land was broken up for rye for a small fine but some farms on the hill could still not be let. In the 1520s arrears accounted for over a third of the rental. Holdings included land called marl and rye land, arable in Court, North and Broad fields, several meadow called Broadmead and pasture called Horsfold. The largest recorded farms were at Combeshead and Hindon with 50 a. each but hill holdings were sometimes combined and one farmer had two at North Ridge and one at West Myne.³⁷

16th to 18th Centuries

The manor produced over £100 a year by the 1550s although some rents were lost due to deaths from 'sweating sickness' in 1551, which also prevented the courts being

³⁴ SHC, DD/L P26/7/2, P 27/9.

³⁵ Possibly gave their name to Chur, later Cher, field.

³⁶ Cal. Inq. pm. XXIII, p. 22; SHC, DD/L P26/7/2, P26/9.

³⁷ SHC, DD/L P2/9/3, P27/9, P28/16/3.

held,³⁸ and egg rents were taken in kind in 1557.³⁹ Leases indicate that most cultivated land was inclosed by this date although names like Great field or Wester field were still used⁴⁰ and by 1585 the demesne pasture on Heddon and Periton hills was bounded out. The third of the manor allotted to Margaret Strode as dower in 1585 comprised 41 houses and cottages, 428 a. of tenanted land excluding orchards and gardens, 12 a. of wood, 30 a. of marsh, 36 a. of pasture and 124 a. of hill pasture.⁴¹ Minehead manor tenants on North Hill claimed rights of grazing as far as Hurlstone and that West Myne Common extended into Selworthy parish where it was tilled for payment to Minehead manor.⁴² On the low ground meadow was watered and sometimes tilled.⁴³ In 1553 that part of the Warren in Minehead manor was said to cover 12 a., which could support 400 pairs of rabbits.⁴⁴ It was overflowed by the sea at times and was let in 1636 to a fowler.⁴⁵ It survived as a strip of rough pasture by the seashore in 1842 but was later covered by an extension to the promenade.⁴⁶

By 1647 there had been further amalgamation of farms on the hill; the combined two holdings at North Ridge and one at West Myne had one barton and no house and four holdings at Hindon had become two. Other farms were held together while retaining separate farmsteads. There were parcels of overland without farmsteads including 21 a. of arable. Hill arable was divided between marl, wheat and rye land. Of the recorded holdings five had fewer than 20 a., 19 between 20 a. and 50 a. and three had more, the largest having 104 a., mainly pasture. Most farms shared common grazing for 1,310 sheep including 17 rams. Manor tenants could graze stock

³⁸ SHC, DD/L P3/10, 1/23/1b.

³⁹ SHC, DD/L P29/6/1.

⁴⁰ SHC, DD/L P29/39, 43; P30/47.

⁴¹ SHC, DD/L P29/42.

⁴² SHC, DD/L P29/41.

⁴³ SHC, DD/L P3/10.

⁴⁴ SHC, DD/L 1/23/1b.

⁴⁵ SHC, DD/L P30/83.

⁴⁶ SHC, tithe award.

on Minehead, Periton and North Hills and on Minehead marsh and take turf and furze for their own use but round up animals on 24 June between Hurlstone Point and Dunster haven and from Owey and Periton commons in return for a dinner.⁴⁷ In 1653 sheep were still grazed on the marsh then driven along the seafront and up onto North Hill.⁴⁸ In 1666 4 a. of common were ploughed and in 1669 the bounds of the hill lands were viewed.⁴⁹ Many townspeople had crofts and 28 rented closes in Churr field south of the town, the Wester and Easter fields, the old South or South of the lane field between Friday Street and the Marsh where landshares were still recorded, probably enclosed strips, and in the Fenns and Marshes to the east, parts of which had been recently inclosed with ditches. There were barns in the town and a linhay in Butts Lane in 1668.⁵⁰

Although farming followed the usual mixed pattern of grain and livestock many farmers also had other interests just as tradesmen kept pigs or poultry. In 1645 one farmer kept a flock of 90 sheep and had his own wool spun presumably for sale to weavers⁵¹ and a Bratton farmer who died in 1664 also held Bratton mill and had a large stock of barrels and hoops.⁵² Wealthy Robert Quirke of Hindon, a member of a merchant family, died in 1662 with corn and livestock worth nearly £300 and £140 invested in shipping.⁵³ By the 17th century there were clearly orchards in the town and on farms. Two widows had orchards and hedges of apple and fruit trees in 1668.⁵⁴ A Woodcombe farmer in 1676 had a flock of 60 sheep and a cider press⁵⁵ and in 1688 John Giles of Bratton had a cider press worth £6, two barrels of cider and apples and

⁴⁷ SHC, DD/L P3/12; P29/48.

⁴⁸ SHC, DD/L 1/54/39/1.

⁴⁹ SHC, DD/L 1/51/24/5.

⁵⁰ SHC, DD/L P3/12, P30/75; *ibid.* A/AOW 77/1; *ibid.* tithe award.

⁵¹ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1645/58.

⁵² SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1664/37.

⁵³ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1664/60.

⁵⁴ SHC, DD/L P3/12.

⁵⁵ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1676/49.

pears, besides corn, hay, pigs, poultry, cattle, 63 sheep and wool.⁵⁶ Most farmers at this period kept sheep as they could graze the hill land and the local cloth industry needed wool. By 1678 rights in the marshes were excluded from copyholds and leaseholds, which may have deterred cattle-keeping by small farmers.⁵⁷ One man died in 1697 owning nothing but his cloth and sheep worth £27 and the same year wealthy farmer John Quirke of Hindon had sheep and wool worth £160, as well as other livestock worth £100 and corn worth £80.⁵⁸ Less usual were the geese kept at Hopcott on the boundary with Wootton Courtney in 1666⁵⁹ and hopyards in Middle Street in 1668 and at Hindon in 1686.⁶⁰

Local farmers prospered and one wealthy retired yeoman in 1688, as well as owning plate and napery worth £33 and 18 furnished beds, had lent out over £400.⁶¹ More typical was John Davies of Bratton with livestock worth £44 and corn worth £22 in 1690 who had a clock, a dozen silver spoons, pewter and linen. He also had a cider wring, which at £7 was worth far more than his two horses.⁶² Arable crops mainly consisted of wheat and barley but peas, oats and beans were also grown.⁶³ Hugh Payne, a merchant and shipowner who died in 1721, had produced corn worth over £146 and possessed a flock of sheep worth over £101, 16 pigs and 12 horses.⁶⁴ There was presumably enough marketable grain or other produce for Sarah and Thomas Jeffries and Hannah Baker to be licensed as badgers or traders between 1712 and 1717 and grain was often shipped to Ireland.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1688/40.

⁵⁷ SHC, DD/SAS PR/484; DD/L 1/45/5a—6.

⁵⁸ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1697/12, 32.

⁵⁹ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1666/36.

⁶⁰ SHC, DD/L P3/12; 1/44/4a/9.

⁶¹ TNA, PROB 4/16007.

⁶² SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1690/12.

⁶³ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1664/48, 1691/18.

⁶⁴ SHC, DD/SP Inv. 1720/23.

⁶⁵ SHC, Q/SO 9, ff. 83, 115, 155, 199; below this section, maritime trade.

By 1709 Alexander Luttrell had acquired almost all the 52 ancient rights in Minehead Marsh and was able to let the marsh in parcels of 10 a. to 20 a. leaving 15 a. for those still with rights.⁶⁶ By 1725 only two tenants' right survived and when they were extinguished the whole 80 a. could be let for up to £100. They could have been used for imported livestock to recover from their journey. A butcher took a lease of marsh in 1743 when tenants had to share the cost of watering the whole marsh, which was divided up by ditches destroying the old pattern of watercourses including the boundary stream. On Minehead, Periton and North hills sheep could be kept without stint and tenants could take turf, heath and furze for their own use and pay 1s. per acre to till the commons. They also had pasture rights on Oway Common, a detached part of the parish in the south near Knowle.⁶⁷ Rights on the commons by the 1780s were confined to landholders and the poor had no right to cut furze or fuel.⁶⁸ That may always have been the case and in 1820 21 holdings still had common rights on Minehead or North Hill, Great and Little Haddon and Periton Hill.⁶⁹ Most holdings were copyhold but a freehold farm at Bratton was rack-rented in 1728 on condition that 4 a. of clover was sown in the last year but the landlord paid £1 10s towards lime.⁷⁰ A freehold at Headon and Veniford south of North Hill produced wheat and oats in 1772.⁷¹ Overland called Waterleats (24 a.) was let in 1749 with a penalty of £5 an acre for tillage and an undertaking to add 120 loads of dung or 10 hogsheads of lime on each acre sown with wheat.⁷² Lime was burnt using pebbles washed up on the beach and was the principal manure in the late 18th century. There were kilns along

⁶⁶ SHC, DD/L 1/52/31/2.

⁶⁷ SHC, DD/L 1/47/9/18, 1/52/29/1, 1/53/36/12; *ibid.* A/AOW 19.

⁶⁸ SHC, A/AQP 8.

⁶⁹ SHC, D/P/m.st.m 13/1/1.

⁷⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/51/23/3; DD/CH 13.

⁷¹ SHC, DD/L 1/50/17/18.

⁷² SHC, DD/L 1/34/4/10.

the shore by the 1750s and two survived in 1842.⁷³ Hill farms used waterleats to produce hay and those at Wydon farm were still in use in the late 20th century.⁷⁴ In 1753 the Minehead manor hill farms were between 15 a. and 75 a., still let for lives, and had orchards. Some had new farmbuildings in the 18th and early 19th centuries, by which time Hindon and Wydon were single farms.⁷⁵ The town area also had many orchards and a lessee of one orchard in 1797 was offered the use of a mantrap!⁷⁶ Minehead manor was valued for sale at over £35,600 in 1767⁷⁷ and in 1777 the rental of Minehead manor including the demesne but excluding the woodland was almost £2,500.⁷⁸

19th Century

Potatoes exported from the 1760s may have been grown locally as early 19th-century tithe accounts show c.30 a. under potatoes.⁷⁹ In 1815 of 208 $\frac{3}{4}$ a. of arable tithed 95 $\frac{1}{2}$ a. was under wheat, 89 $\frac{1}{2}$ a. under barley, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ a. under oats, 7 a. under beans and 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ a. under peas.⁸⁰ By 1842 the titheable land was divided between common (2,106 a.), arable (1,135 a.), meadow and pasture (525 a.), woodland (85 $\frac{1}{2}$ a.), garden and homestead (69 a.) and orchard (44 $\frac{1}{2}$ a.). Excluding that part of Knowle in the parish, the only significant landholdings apart from John Fownes Luttrell's estates were Earl Lovelace's Bratton manor (662 a.), the former park owned by Sir Thomas Dyke Acland (c.170 a.) and the glebe (26 a.). Apart from woods, commons and part of Knowle farm there were 12 holdings of between 10 a. and 20 a. usually just land, 13

⁷³ SHC, A/AQP 8; *ibid.* DD/L 1/52/29; *ibid.* tithe award.

⁷⁴ SHC, A/BNI 2/6.

⁷⁵ SHC, Q/REI 8/7; *ibid.* DD/L 1/52/29; D/P/m.st.m 13/1/1; *ibid.* A/BNI 2/6—7..

⁷⁶ SHC, DD/L 1/5/18; *ibid.* tithe award.

⁷⁷ SHC, DD/LV 10/3.

⁷⁸ SHC, DD/L 1/4/13.

⁷⁹ SHC, DD/L 1/56/8/6; DD/X/WBB 105/2; D/P/m.st.m 3/2/1.

⁸⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/53/33/3

of between 20 a. and 50 a. and 11 of between 50 a. and 100 a. The only larger farms were East Myne (160 a.), Hindon (267 ½ a.) and Bratton Court (358 ½ a.).⁸¹ The importance of arable explains the willingness of the Luttrell estate to buy a threshing machine for an undisclosed sum and spend over £216 setting it up in 1814 for a farm rack-rented at £230 a year.⁸² It probably also explains why despite the small number of farms 106 households were employed in agriculture in 1821.⁸³

At Oway in the south of the parish common was being inclosed by 1820 and in 1822 most of the enclosed land on North Hill was arable as was the remnant of the field between Quay town and Lower town. Farms around the town were small and their farmers were in financial difficulties⁸⁴ but further afield they were larger and already being amalgamated. Combshead was held with East Myne and West Myne (234 a.) included several inclosures in Selworthy.⁸⁵ By c.1840 Bratton comprised Bratton Court farm (317 a.), two farms of c.35 a., and 6 smallholdings under 20 a., one of which was created from waste on Haddon or Headon Hill.⁸⁶ There is evidence of intakes from common land at East Myne, over 100 a., Higher and Lower Woodcombe and Periton Hill.⁸⁷

Among the produce of Higher Woodcombe (65 a.) taken in distress for rent in 1836 were two wheat mows and one rick of wheat in the straw, a barley mow, an oat mow, two hayricks and part of another, peas in the haulm, cider, pigs, a colt and a heifer.⁸⁸ In 1842 1,135 a. out of 1,759 a. of cultivated titheable land was arable. There was 2,106 a. of common, mainly on North Hill but also at Great Haddon and Periton

⁸¹ SHC, tithe award.

⁸² SHC, DD/L 1/51/24/2.

⁸³ Census (1821).

⁸⁴ H. Binding and D. Stevens, A New History of Minehead, 208.

⁸⁵ SHC, DD/L 297/1.

⁸⁶ SHC, DD/CCH 3/3.

⁸⁷ SHC, DD/L 297/1; *ibid.* tithe award.

⁸⁸ SHC, DD/L 1/45/6/89.

Hill with a small amount at Oway. Little Haddon had been enclosed and partly planted with timber and Bratton Common had been enclosed and added to Bratton Court farm, which was described in 1857 as a 'model of comfortable farming'. There were still 12 smallholdings under 20 a. and 13 between 20 a. and 50 a. Eleven farms had between 50 a. and 100 a. and three had more than 100 a. namely East Myne (160 a.), Hindon (267 a.) and Bratton Court farm (358 a.).⁸⁹ Potatoes and apples were shipped from Minehead to Cardiff from 1840 until the 1890s and in 1896 when production peaked at 67 a. of potatoes and 55 a. of apples, 94 tons of potatoes were shipped to Newport.⁹⁰

In the 1860s agriculture was still chiefly arable but employed mainly men and boys from 10 including 12 ploughboys recorded in 1861 but only seven shepherds. Wages were only 8s. or 9s. with cider but no cottage.⁹¹ A remarkable number of small farms employed outside labour until 1881 or later, probably reflecting the amount of arable cultivated. Numbers of labourers, who may not all have worked on farms, remained constant at just over 100 but by 1901 there were only 56 of whom only 27 were described as farm labourers and some of those were retired. Farms were gradually amalgamated; two farms at Woodcombe merged before 1851, at Bratton and Periton the large farms absorbed the smaller in the 1860s, and Wydon, whose farmhouse burnt down c.1862, absorbed East Myne farm after rebuilding to cover 336 a. in 1881. At the same time Combshead and West Myne became permanently absorbed in Hindon farm, which was the largest farm in the parish with c.500 a. in 1881 when only 13 farms over 20 a. were recorded farms compared with 18 in 1861.⁹²

⁸⁹ SHC, tithe award; *Guide to Minehead and its environs* (Minehead, 1857).

⁹⁰ TNA, MAF 68/1626; SHC, Q/RUa 18—19, 22—3.

⁹¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on Children, Young Persons, and Women in Agriculture* (Parl. Papers 1868—9 (4202), xiii), 449; TNA, RG 9/1601.

⁹² TNA, RG 9/1601; RG 10/23481; RG 11/2353; RG 13/2260.

In 1870 George Fownes Luttrell ceded Myne, Hindon and Wydon to Sir Thomas Dyke Acland who built new cottages and farmbuildings.⁹³

In 1851 local farmers were improving livestock including Essex and Berkshire pigs and although Exmoor sheep won prizes at Dunster shows, the Dorset Horn was being introduced as a larger animal with earlier lambs.⁹⁴ Dairying supplied not only the local population but also the holiday trade. There was a dairy at Periton until 1871 or later and in 1861 three women aged 80 to 90 still called themselves dairymaids.⁹⁵ In 1876 recorded livestock comprised 220 cattle, 3,787 sheep and 75 pigs and over the next two decades more cattle and pigs were kept and fewer sheep. The quantity of arable did not change but after 1876 more barley and oats were grown at the expense of wheat. Root and brassica production increased by 50 per cent and clover and artificial grasses accounted for over a quarter of the arable.⁹⁶ In 1880 there was a Minehead Farmers' Club to whom Sir Thomas Dyke Acland spoke about the low state of agriculture.⁹⁷ However, in 1881 one farmer had a resident assistant and another had a pupil farmer⁹⁸ and in 1886 the Bratton estate was described as 729 a. of valuable inclosed land let to enterprising tenants with free working arable producing good crops and orchards making excellent cider.⁹⁹

20th century

By 1901 several farms had lost land for building development and their houses were private homes or hotels. Surviving farms had less arable and in 1905 there were 954 a.

⁹³ SHC, A/BNI 2/7

⁹⁴ T. D. Acland and W. Sturge, *The Farming of Somerset* (1851), 22—3.

⁹⁵ TNA, HO 107/1920; *ibid.* RG 9/1601; RG 10/2348.

⁹⁶ TNA, MAF 68/486, 1056, 1626.

⁹⁷ britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk accessed 29 Nov. 2011.

⁹⁸ TNA, RG 11/2353.

⁹⁹ SHC, DD/TBL 90/10.

of permanent grass and 677 a. of arable.¹⁰⁰ Greenaleigh farm, hitherto arable, had a cowherd by 1901, stalls for 18 cows and a dairy in 1910 providing the cream teas for which it was noted by 1857. However, its pasture was poor and the arable produced good barley and potatoes. Woodcombe and the higher hill farms still had good arable and pasture and well-maintained farm buildings but were short of meadow. Two new cottages had been built for Bratton Court farm, abandoned farmsteads at East and West Myne and Combeshead were used for cattle housing, Wydon had a cider mill and Hindon had a horse gin.¹⁰¹

After the First World War some smallholdings were given up or absorbed into other farms. There was an increase in horses from 96 in 1906 to 123 in 1926, cattle increased slightly but sheep numbers slowly declined although there was a temporary rise during the war. Hay production increased from 274 a. in 1906 to 330 a. in 1926 and permanent grass for grazing increased from 590 a. to 963 a. Pig numbers increased until outbreaks of swine fever in 1921 and 1923 caused a slight fall. Arable production declined steadily except for beans and brassicas for both human and animal food. Apples, pears, plums and soft fruit were grown on 70 a. in 1926..¹⁰² Nurseries like Shrives' supplied hoteliers and local people with fruit, vegetables, seeds and flowers and offered to lay out and maintain gardens as well as running a shop in the Parade by 1904 and making jam by 1923. Other greengrocers grew produce locally¹⁰³ and by 1929 allotments covered c.14 a. and there were large nurseries and market gardens near the Town Mills and behind the almshouses for most of the 20th century.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ TNA, RG 13/2260; statistics supplied by then Bd of Agric. 1905.

¹⁰¹ TNA, RG 13/2260; *ibid.* IR 58/82385—6; Guide to Minehead and its environs (Minehead, 1857).

¹⁰² TNA, 68/2196, 2766, 3312; SHC, DD/ASC 9/1/2. Note that from 1916 the smaller Alcombe farms are included owing to the change in boundary with Dunster.

¹⁰³ Mate's Illustrated Minehead (1904); Kelly's Dir. Som. (1923); SHC, D/CC/ta 7/118, 122.

¹⁰⁴ SHC, C/V 14; OS Map 1:2500, XXXV.5 (1929 edn); OS Map 1:2500, SS 9746 (1963 edn).

There were still 79 regular and 30 casual agricultural workers in 1926 but that had fallen to 61 and 3 by 1936 and the number of horses had slumped to 48 and sheep from 2,185 to 686 but pigs had increased from 125 to 730 and cattle and poultry numbers had only fallen slightly.¹⁰⁵ One man farmed out over 60 ewes and a ram to a Dunster farmer who took the wool and half the lambs. Joseph Yandle's dairy with 16 cows in 1938 could not provide the 140 gallons a day he needed in the summer season and he had to buy milk.¹⁰⁶ In 1941 most holdings were A rated except Hindon, which was mainly rough grazing, had insufficient labour and was infested with bracken and gorse, Higher Moor, which had suffered trespass and pilfering by troops, and a pig and potato smallholding in Middle Street whose farmer lacked ambition. Arable accounted for about half the land on the hill farms producing a wide range of grain and fodder. Despite its small dairy herd Greenleigh was still largely arable. Bratton and Hindon had tractors but horses were widely used. Hill farmers rented extra grazing; Bratton Court stock were put on the golf course, Hindon stock on Selworthy Beacon until it was requisitioned and the farmer at Wydon bought 20 a. of grass but his rough grazing (126 a.) was also requisitioned. At a lower level dairying predominated; Parkhouse farm (100 a.) was mainly grass for dairy cattle, Lower Moor was also a dairy farm but also kept sheep and grew oats and roots and the convent had a small dairy herd but also pigs and 7 a. of potatoes. At the mill grass supported bullocks, Webber's nurseries also raised bullocks, pigs and poultry, grew oats for their horses and employed 16 men full time, while at Middle Moor Miss Stephens combined farming with driving a mobile canteen.¹⁰⁷

The amount of agricultural land declined to 1,030 a. in 1943 and 897 a. in 1946 despite the war effort, presumably because of the expansion of the built-up area,

¹⁰⁵ TNA, 68/3312, 3809.

¹⁰⁶ SHC, D/CC/ta 7/18, 143; above, Dunster, econ. hist.

¹⁰⁷ TNA, MAF 32/143/108.

but fruit and vegetables for human consumption covered 63 a. in 1946. In 1947 a market gardener had over 3 a. near Alcombe producing asparagus, strawberries, salads, winter vegetables, soft fruit and violets and nearly 17 a. at Woodcombe with, 2,000 apple, damson, pear and plum trees besides potatoes, vegetables including artichokes, rhubarb, soft fruit and spring flowers. Horticulture remained important in the 1950s when 16 of 24 agricultural holdings covered fewer than 15 a. There was a fall in pigs and sheep in the 1940s but sheep numbers recovered in the 1960s to over 1,000¹⁰⁸ before falling to 605 in 1976. By 1976 only 25 people were recorded as employed in agriculture and the 16 recorded holdings, all under 50 ha. (115 a.), were worked part-time. Two specialised in horticultural crops and glasshouses covered 7 ½ a. ha. Livestock numbers declined, especially pigs and poultry.¹⁰⁹

Before the 1980s East and West Myne farm buildings were abandoned.

Wydon farm concentrated on cattle and new cowsheds were built in the late 19th and mid 20th centuries¹¹⁰ but livestock numbers fell further to 475 sheep, 181 cattle and no pigs in 1986, and the only crops were horticultural. The size of holdings had fallen and none of the 19 returned had more than 30 ha. (74 a.) but employed 35 people.¹¹¹ By 1988 West Somerset College had its own farm with a flock of 30 Dorset ewes.¹¹² Hindon farm (479 a.) is farmed organically but also offers accommodation to tourists. Much of the hill land, including Greenleigh farm, has been abandoned as cultivated land but on the southern slopes around Bratton elephant grass was extensively cultivated in the early 21st century.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ TNA, 68/4066, 4177, 4547, 4997; SHC, DD/KW 1947/15.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, 68/5497.

¹¹⁰ SHC, A/BNI 2/6.

¹¹¹ TNA, 68/6024.

¹¹² SHC, A/BJs 1/9/1.

¹¹³ SHC, A/BNI 2/7.

TIMBER

Minehead was not a well-wooded parish until North Hill was planted in the late 19th century but in the mid 18th century elm was offered for the navy,¹¹⁴ 800 ft of good walnut timber was cut c.1790 for gun stocks and Bratton Wood (25 a.) produced timber worth £1,247 in 1838.¹¹⁵ In 1842 there were 85 a. of woodland in the parish mainly at Bratton and in plantations on Haddon.¹¹⁶ The demand for pit props and other timber for the South Wales coal mines probably encouraged woodland management in the Minehead area as it could easily be shipped out in return for coal. Bratton timber was described as thriving in 1886 by which date wooded walks and drives had been laid out on North Hill and there was a sawmill near the beach replaced by premises in North Road c.1902, now a garage, and south of the station by 1929.¹¹⁷ The amount of woodland had increased to 573 a. by 1905 and sawmills employed Portuguese workers camped in poor conditions at Middlecombe in 1917—18.¹¹⁸

MILLS

Minehead had a mill in 1086,¹¹⁹ possibly that given to Bruton priory before c.1195.¹²⁰ It was recorded in 1237¹²¹ but did not form part of the later rectory estate. If used to endow Dunster priory it may have been on the site of the Stewkeley's 17th-century

¹¹⁴ TNA, ADM 106/1151/121; ADM 106/1199/343.

¹¹⁵ SHC, DD/L 1/4/13; DD/CCH 3/3; OS Map 1:10560, XXXV. NW. (1888 edn.).

¹¹⁶ SHC, tithe award.

¹¹⁷ SHC, DD/TBL 90/10; D/U/m 22/1/151; OS Map 1:10560, XXXV.NW&NE (1888 edn.); 1:2500, XXXV.5 (1929 edn.).

¹¹⁸ Statistics supplied by then Bd of Agric. 1905; SHC, A/CVZ 1/1(4); *ibid.* D/U/m 2/2/5.

¹¹⁹ *VCH Som*, I, 502.

¹²⁰ H. C. Maxwell-Lyte and T. S. Holmes (ed.), *Cartularies of Bruton and Montacute Priors* (Som. Rec. Soc. 8), pp. 12—13, 54.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 59.

fulling mill, which by 1680 was two fulling mills under one roof driven by the stream through the park.¹²² It was recorded in 1791 and had gone by 1842.¹²³

The manor had a watermill by 1330 when it was worth 53s 4d but it was valued at only 20s. in 1428.¹²⁴ Two water wheels were bought in 1486¹²⁵ and thereafter it was described as two water grist mills.¹²⁶ Tenants owed suit to the manor mill but by 1354 those at Myne could grind where they pleased.¹²⁷ By 1513 there was a second watermill on the manor,¹²⁸ possibly that required to be rebuilt by the tenant Richard Craftsman in 1549, and a mill at Bratton. There were concerns about their water supply.¹²⁹ Craftsman's mill, with a tucking mill, had been rebuilt before 1591 by merchant James Quirke.¹³⁰ Later known as the Lower or Puddle Mills they were in Puddle Street on the site of the later hospital.¹³¹ The upper mills west of Bampton Street, later known as the Town Mills, were the customary mills, although half the tenants failed to grind there in 1603,¹³² and were kept in hand in the 17th century. Both were driven by the Bratton stream which runs straight through the lower town to the sea and both were destroyed in the 1791 fire and rebuilt.¹³³ Their early millers were not prosperous; both John Forrest in 1665 and Walter Broke in 1671 were worth less than £40.¹³⁴ However, by 1820 both millers were bakers and flour merchants and their profits were assessed at over £10, more than most businesses.¹³⁵ The Lower Mills appear to have ceased working by 1842 and were later demolished. The Town

¹²² TNA, CP 25/2/346/15 Jas I, Trin; CP 25/2/870/9 Wm III, East.; SHC, DD/L 1/44/4a/2.

¹²³ Collinson, *Hist. Som.* II, 30; SHC, tithe award.

¹²⁴ SHC, DD/L P1/1; *Cal. Inq. pm.* XXIII, p. 22.

¹²⁵ SHC, DD/L P28/17.

¹²⁶ SHC, DD/L P39/7/1.

¹²⁷ SHC, DD/L P26/2.

¹²⁸ SHC, DD/L P39/7/1.

¹²⁹ SHC, DD/L P29/29/2.

¹³⁰ SHC, DD/L P29/4.

¹³¹ SHC, DD/L 1/52/29; *ibid.* tithe award.

¹³² SHC, DD/L P30/48.

¹³³ SHC, DD/L P3/12; 1/10/35A; 1/44/5/53, 1/53/36/1; *ibid.* tithe award.

¹³⁴ SHC, DD/SP inv 1665/17, 1671/14.

¹³⁵ SHC, D/P/m.st.m 13/1/1.

Mills remained in use although from the 1890s to 1920s the millers were also farmers, merchants and auctioneers and ran Dulverton mills. By the 1930s the mills were auction rooms and are now dwellings.¹³⁶

There was a watermill on Bratton manor between 1534¹³⁷ and 1842 but it was a ruin by 1890.¹³⁸

FISHING

Shore Fishing and Seaweed

Fishing from the shore in the form of fishweirs and stakes with nethangs had probably been established by the 12th century.¹³⁹ In the 1420s there were seven fishweirs belonging to the manor and another had recently been destroyed¹⁴⁰ and in 1520 three weirs and a stake were recorded.¹⁴¹ The household at Dunster Castle was a major customer for fish. In 1431 over £3 was spent on fish including 24 congers caught on Minehead shore where traps survive.¹⁴² A plan from Henry VIII's reign apparently shows a row of four stakes with nethangs north of the quay.¹⁴³ Two new fishweirs were built near the Warren c.1584¹⁴⁴ but none was recorded later and it would appear that sea fishing by boat was more important. Many fishing boats and nets were destroyed in the great storm of 1703.¹⁴⁵ By the late 18th century shore fishing was let with the Warren and in 1791 shellfish, sole, flounder, ray, and skate were common

¹³⁶ Pigot & Co., Dir. Som. 1830; Som. Co. Gaz. Dir. 1840; SHC, tithe award; Kelly's Dir. Som. 1861—1939.

¹³⁷ TNA, CP25/2/35/238/26 Hen VIII, Mich.

¹³⁸ SHC, tithe award; OS Map 1:10560, XXXIV. NE (1890 edn).

¹³⁹ Above, Dunster, econ. hist.

¹⁴⁰ Cal. Inq. pm. XXIII, p. 22; SHC, DD/L P26/7/2. In 1986 the woodwork from a weir was dendrodated to 1466: SHC, D/DC/w.som 22/5/12.

¹⁴¹ SHC, DD/L P28/16/3.

¹⁴² SHC, DD/L P18/3; SCC, HER. Most sea creatures were regarded as fish at this period.

¹⁴³ SHC, D/RA 9/24.

¹⁴⁴ SHC, DD/L P3/18.

¹⁴⁵ D. Defoe, The Storm (2005 edn.), 122—3.

and porpoises and sharks were found sometimes.¹⁴⁶ It was said that people were discouraged from fishing in the early 19th century¹⁴⁷ but shore fishing continued in a small way and the last nethang was cut down in 2007.¹⁴⁸

The right to take oare north of the quay was let out in the 1580s.¹⁴⁹ Seaweed was collected and burnt for the Bristol market where it was used by glassmakers. Edible laver was gathered in quantities from the rocks and sent to Bath, Bristol, Exeter and London in the late 18th and 19th centuries. One of the women paid 2s. 6d. a year for the right to collect it but a keg of laver sold for 5s. 3d.¹⁵⁰

Herring and Sea Fishing

Fish were an important part of the local economy and many of the cellars near the quay were probably fish cellars. The lane from the church to the quay was known as Fisher Lane by 1609 and was probably the Fishway of 1469.¹⁵¹ It is not always clear whether fish was caught by local fishermen or imported from Ireland but in the late Middle Ages barrels of herring and large quantities of dried hake were traded and cod, ling and mullet were bought at Minehead for Dunster Castle.¹⁵² In 1535 Thomas Browne left a barrel of herring to the church, another to maintain the port, a kilderkin¹⁵³ to a priest, salt to a servant and two trawl fishing lines.¹⁵⁴ Although the

¹⁴⁶ Collinson, Hist. Som. II, 30; above, Dunster, econ. hist.

¹⁴⁷ BL, Add. MS 36517, f. 55.

¹⁴⁸ Above, Dunster, econ. hist; SCC, HER. The remains of many fishweirs are visible on the shore.

¹⁴⁹ SHC, DD/L P29/32.

¹⁵⁰ SHC, A/AQP 8; A/CVZ 1/1 (4); Robson's Dir. Som. (1839).

¹⁵¹ SHC, A/AOW 19, 77/1; *ibid.* DD/L P28/13/2, P30/47.

¹⁵² T. B. Dilks, Bridgwater Borough Records (Som. Rec. Soc. 60), p. 10; (Som. Rec. Soc. 70), p. 22; SHC, DD/L P1/17/1; below, this section.

¹⁵³ 18 gallons or half a barrel.

¹⁵⁴ F. Weaver, Wells Wills (1890), 106.

Atlantic fishery was important only occasional shipments came directly to Minehead until the 1660s when a Minehead fleet went annually to Newfoundland.¹⁵⁵

The herring industry was vital to the local economy but was both seasonal and unreliable experiencing long cycles of abundance and failure. In the 17th century Minehead developed its own fish processing industry, which probably encouraged local sea fishermen. In 1675 a prosperous man had a half share in a fishing boat as did a sailor of modest means in 1680. The latter also had twelve barrels of herring and three of salt. The herring was worth as much as his share in the boat. Several seamen traded in herring and salt, as white herring was processed at sea. One seaman had salt worth £25 in 1683.¹⁵⁶ In 1679 2,669 barrels of herring were shipped to France and Spain and small quantities to Ireland and Barbados but in 1706 only 1,245 barrels were exported, to Barbados and Leghorn, and in 1715 only 1,138 barrels; in each year two thirds were red. However, only white herring was exported in the 1720s.¹⁵⁷

Red herring were dry salted and then smoked, probably in the Wexford area in the 16th century¹⁵⁸ but in Minehead by the later 17th century. A red herring cellar was built c.1685, five were recorded in 1703 and two new ones in 1717, but one decayed before 1720, several were destroyed in the storm of 1739, and one in the Butts was a barn by 1753,¹⁵⁹ probably reflecting herring supply. In c.1720 a property with workshops on the edge of the beach, presumably for fish processing, had paid an extra £3 rent in a good herring season and up to 4,000 barrels of cured herring were said to be shipped to the Levant. Herring returned in the 1740s but stocks had declined again

¹⁵⁵ VCH Office, Taunton, draft history; TNA, E 190/1085/5; Binding and Stevens, Hist. Minehead, 61.

¹⁵⁶ SHC, DD/SP Inv 1675/80, 1680/71, 102, 1681/71, 1683/2.

¹⁵⁷ TNA, E 190/1092/3; E 190/1102/1; E 190/1108/1, E 190/1113/3, E 190/1115/1.

¹⁵⁸ D. Taylor, 'Somerset's 16th-century maritime trade' in A. Webb (ed.), A Maritime History of Somerset I (Taunton, 2010), 10.

¹⁵⁹ SHC, DD/L 1.46/6a/41, 1/51/26/1, 1/52/29, 1/52/31/3; DD/AH 12/12/2; TNA, C 108/6 (1738—9).

by the 1780s. A statement in 1770s that up to 4,000 barrels of cured herring were shipped to the Levant probably relates to an earlier period.¹⁶⁰ Twenty fishing boats were working in the Minehead area in the 1790s¹⁶¹ but in 1794 the fishing trade needed encouraging not only to supply the poor with cheap and wholesome food but to provide winter employment for seamen.¹⁶²

A red herring cellar was recorded near the tannery in 1842.¹⁶³ During the mid 19th century herring was plentiful providing cheap food for the poor¹⁶⁴ but by the end of the century good seasons were rare. A lookout on a cottage roof at the Warren may have been for a 'huer' to watch for herring shoals.¹⁶⁵ A few herring fishermen survived c.1900¹⁶⁶ and two firms of fish merchants operated in 1901¹⁶⁷ but commercial fishing gradually died from the 1920s although the herring periodically returns.¹⁶⁸ Boats can be hired for mackerel fishing.

¹⁶⁰ SHC, DD/L 1/52/29, 1/52/31/3; *ibid.* A/AQP 8; New Display of the Beauties of England (1776), 321, mostly copied from Defoe's Tour.

¹⁶¹ Universal British Dir. (1793—8).

¹⁶² VCH Som. II, 401.

¹⁶³ SHC, tithe award.

¹⁶⁴ Women and Ch in agric. 448.

¹⁶⁵ H. Binding, Old Minehead and Around, 63.

¹⁶⁶ SHC, SANHS slide colln.

¹⁶⁷ TNA, RG 13/2260.

¹⁶⁸ G. Court, Minehead to Watchet (1996), 11.