

# **A Short, Angry History of Land in Britain!**

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Remote production, mass transportation, environmental degradation and monopoly. These are not prerequisites of a functional economy nor society, these are the hallmarks of oligarchy, and the economics of Empire.

Here's an updated version of my Short, Angry History of Land. A document I put together a few years ago, as an attempt to see the overall timeline and understand how exactly we got in this mess...

If you have any questions, or think there's something I've missed – please do let me know, my email address is: thom {a} wum.land

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*Dedicated to the great White Oak, of Malvern.*

*“Tall ships and tall kings  
Three times three,  
What brought they from the foundered land  
Over the flowing sea?  
Seven stars and seven stones  
And one white tree.”*

– gnomonic verse, by Tolkien.

4000(BC) – 1066 There is a surprising amount of continuity, in ‘open field systems’ from the fourth millennium BC up until the Norman invasion. Meaning British communal land management traditions originated several millennia before the Anglo-Saxon era; and thereafter continued through the Anglo-Saxon period as the system of law known as ‘folkland’, whereby land was held in allodial title by the group or regional community. Individual land ownership did occur, but it was limited to ensure that the needs of the group were met.

450 – 1066 Anglo-Saxon Charters grant land to ‘lay people’ (commoners), and set-up administrative areas that still today closely correspond to our modern parish boundaries. The earliest surviving charter of King Hlothhere of Kent was drawn up in AD 670.

1066-7 Norman invasion displaces Anglo-Saxon commons/ land ownership model. William the Bastard declares that all land, animals and people in the country belong to him personally. This was as alien to these Isle's customs as the colonial land-grabs were to the First Nations of America. Still today, the monarch's land monopoly remains, in theory and practise, a legal reality. Britain was parceled up and given out as payment to Williams forces. We go from a country in which >90% of people owned land, to a country of landless serfs, themselves owned by foreign lords.

The intended effect was precisely the result: the dispossession of the ‘common folk’ (i.e. anyone who wasn't a Latin speaking Norman aristocrat) of their ancestral lands

and rights, by the descendants of those whom Thomas Paine would later call the “French bastard and his armed banditti,” being William the Bastard-Conqueror and his mercenary army.

It is critically important, perhaps even more so today, that this moment of history be studied and recognised for what it is. For it is nothing less than the birth of the so-called ‘British’ empire, which would later metastasize into a model of globalisation which was to be exported across the globe, devastating the Earth’s ecological and ethno-cultural complexity wherever it went.

1066-70 The ‘Greenmen’ resist the Norman invasion. Wearing foliate camouflage, they run guerilla warfare campaigns against the invaders who call them the ‘silvatici’ (the men of the woods).

1069–70 The ‘Harrying of the North’, William burnt down every building between York and Durham, killing by starvation or sword in excess of one hundred thousand people. Many of the largest land owners in this country today still proudly trace their family wealth back to ancestors who were involved in this bloodbath.

1135 – 1154 Civil war during the reign of King Stephen saw the strength of the regional lords/ barons rise relative to the Crown as they sought to establish political and judicial arenas other than those defined by the Crown – creating a degree of regionalisation. England’s population more than doubled during the 12th and 13th centuries, which further stressed the economically inefficient and socially intolerable land monopolies.

1215 The Barons at Runnymede, forced King John to limit his own power by signing Magna Carta which restated certain ancient, customary rights. Some of which had a distinctly pre-Norman flavor and likely echoed back to ancient oral traditions, existing long before the Roman invasion. Possibly the result of a partial assimilation, on part of the regional Lords/ Barons into the Brythonic and ‘Anglo-Saxon’ cultures?

“From the outset, the opposition barons had been aware of the danger that, once King John had left Runnymede, he would renege on the Charter on the grounds that it constituted an illegitimate infringement of his authority. The barons came up with a novel solution to the problem in the famous clause 61, the security clause. In this, King John conceded that ‘the barons shall choose any twenty-five barons of the realm as they wish, who with all their might are to observe, maintain and cause to be observed the peace and liberties which we have granted’. Any infringement of the charter’s terms by the king or his officials was to be notified to any four of the committee; and, if within forty days no remedy or redress had been offered, then the king was to empower the full committee to ‘distrain and distress us in every way they can, namely by seizing castles, lands and possessions’ until he made amends. In this remarkable clause, then, the charter introduced the novelty

of obliging the king to sanction and institute armed action against none other than himself.”<sup>1</sup>

1217 Charter of the Forest (Carta Foresta) re-established rights for Freemen to access and make use of the Royal Forests without persecution. It also set limit on the amount of land which the Crown could enclose for their own exclusive use. At its peak in the late 1300s, almost as much as one third of the land in England was designated as a Royal Forest. No Trespassing!

1235 – Statute of Merton encouraged landowners to convert arable land into pasture, as demand for British wool increased. Displacing traditional peasant agriculturalists and farmers.

Commons Act 1236 allowed Lords to enclose common land. Wool was the backbone and driving force of the medieval English economy between the late thirteenth century and late fifteenth century the trade (a primary driver of enclosure) was called “the jewel in the realm” or ‘half the wealth of the kingdom’.

Statutes of Westminster 1275/ 85/ 90- restrict subtenure/ sale of parcels of land (a threat to the state’s land monopoly) other than to the direct heirs of the landlord. It was prompted by certain Lords who were dissatisfied with increasing amount of sub-tenures. These restrictions gave rise to ‘livery and maintenance’ or ‘bastard feudalism’, i.e. the retention and control by the nobility of land, money, soldiers and servants via salaries, land sales and rent. In-effect, this was the start of modern wage-slavery, and still works today, to ensure that the regions remain economically dependent on the core, via state subsidised and enforced land monopoly , which restricts regional economic independence and thus political power.

Rising European merchant class capitalise on the mass production of wool facilitated by displacing agrarian communities. British wool became very sought after in Europe. Increasing demand for British wool, led to more mass displacement of peasants – generating an uprooted landless ‘class’ of urban dependents.

Great Famine 1315 and the Black Death 1348 killed 1/3 of the population, forcing the landed classes to value the productive members of their society: the peasants who grew all the food.

1337-1453, Hundred Year War vs France, financed by merchant capital to gain control of the Flemish wool industry and weavers.

1340-1380 purchasing power of rural labourers increased 40%.

1351/ 49 The Labourers Acts were the nobility’s reaction to the rising bargaining power of peasants, they fixed wages to ‘preplague levels’, restricted free movement and price-fixed foods.

1377 John of Gaunt imposed a new tax, the Poll (head) Tax.

1381 Peasants Revolt : Kentish rebels joined by many townsfolk, entered London. They destroy gaols, burn down the Savoy Palace (Gaunts home), plunder Lambeth

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<sup>1</sup> Magna Carta Trust.

Palace, burn books and buildings in the Temple, killing anyone they came across who was associated with the Royal court. The following day, Richard met the rebels at Mile End and acceded their demands, including the abolition of serfdom & poll tax (the only promise not reneged upon soon after).

1400-1409 Owain Glyndwr, the last native Prince of Wales (Tywysog Cymru) viewed as a de facto King, led the 'Welsh Revolt' rapidly gaining control of large areas of Wales. Eventually his forces were overrun by the English, but despite the large rewards offered, Glyndwr was never betrayed. His death was recorded by his kinsman in the year 1415, and was said that he had joined the ranks of King Arthur, awaiting the call to return and liberate his people.

1450 – Jack Cade led an army of Kentish peasants (described by Shakespeare as “the filth and scum of Kent”), the rebels persuaded the first army dispatched to pack up & go home, skillfully evaded a second comprised of 15,000 men led by Henry VI, and then defeated a third army in battle, killing two of the King’s Generals in the process.

1450–1451 John and William Merfold’s Uprising centered around Sussex, mostly comprised of artisans pillaging and killing local gentry and clergy. “[The rebels wished\] as lollards and heretics, to hold everything in common.” – the King’s Indictment, 1451.

1489 Depopulation Act ‘agaynst pullying doun of Tounes’, the King introduces anti-enclosure Acts, due to widespread clearances and the depopulation of entire villages. There were to be 11 similar Acts & eight Commissions of Enquiry over next 150 years. Henry VIII legislates against early cloth factories & enclosures, a primary source of wealth for the emerging ‘middle class’ of land owners and merchants, but the institution of the Crown lacks the strength to fully implement his changes.

1515 Henry VIII orders all pasture be converted back to arable in an attempt to reign-in the vast and politically destabilising fortunes being made by the merchants (proto-capitalists).

1536 to 1541 Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, who privatises church lands (then 1/5th of the country). As these lands were often used by commoners, for grazing – this dispossesses people further from essential access to the land and generates yet more landless people who are wholly dependent upon the emerging model of selling their labour to survive i.e. wage-slavery.

1549 Kett’s anti-enclosure rebels 16,000 strong, took Norwich. Kett was 57 years old and one of the areas wealthier farmers.

Erection of Cottages Act 1588 “against erecting and maintaining of Cottages” by people with less than four acres of freehold land. Prevent people building homes, farming remaining common land

1607 the agrarian changes (depopulation/ clearances and enclosure) in the Midlands had led to wide-spread armed revolts of the peasantry.

1607 to 1636, Government pursued an active anti-enclosure policy. Charles I, the 'Commoners' King' was 're-commoning' lands previously enclosed by lords and merchants, just before Civil War.

1620 Sir Edward Coke 'greatest of English judges', and a keen opponent of enclosure, declared depopulation against the laws of the realm 'the encloser who kept a shepherd and dog in place of a flourishing village community was hateful to God and man.' Ethnically cleansing 'peasants' is a clear violation of our ancient Common Law of Tort which is 'cause no injury, harm or loss'.

1626–1632 The Western Rising was a series of riots in the Dean and other Forests against the disafforestation of the Royal Forests

"In 1633-4 we find a proposal that all inclosures made since James I. should be thrown back into arable on pain of forfeiture." Enclosers are still being prosecuted in the Star Chamber as late as 1639.

1638 in the Forest of Dean "The deer were to be disposed of, as demoralizing the inhabitants and injuring the young wood; the commissioners recommended ejecting the cottagers who had established themselves in the Forest, as often before, in defiance of authority, and who numbered upwards of 2,000, occupying 589 cottages, besides 1,798 small enclosures containing 1,385 acres. As to defraying the cost of executing the above works, the commissioners recommended the sale of about 440 acres of detached Crown land adjoining the Forest."

Charles I gave us a short break from clearances and enclosures, he's then beheaded for his troubles. During the post-civil war period, enclosures are accelerated by a largely landowning Parliament, blighting our entire population to this present day.

1642-1651 the English Civil War, was essentially a struggle between the old feudal/landed aristocracy and the new, ascendant forces of merchant-capital.

1649 a mass-redistribution of land and title, as Cromwell sells 1,677 Royalist Estates.

1649 Gerrard Winstanley at the head of a peasant army, called the 'True Levellers' (later, the Diggers) declaim the Earth to be a Common Treasury for all. The Diggers print radical protestant literature, aimed at reforming the social order, promoting a return to an agrarian lifestyle based on the creation of small egalitarian, self-sufficient communities, a more 'ecological' interrelationship between humans and nature, "true freedom lies where a man receives his nourishment and preservation, and that is in the use of the Earth."

1659, Forest riots 'probably excited by the efforts which the Government had recently made for the re-forestation of 18,000 acres; to effect which 400 cabins of poor people, living upon the waste, and destroying the wood and timber, were thrown down.'

English nationalist discourse in the mid-17th century spoke of throwing off the 'Norman yoke' – i.e. feudalism, land monopoly.

1671 Game Act made it illegal to hunt wild animals, considered a common right since time immemorial. This also had the effect of making it illegal for farmers to protect crops from rabbits, and other animals. Starvation or criminality? Around now the precursor to our modern banking system arrived in England from Holland, leading

to a century of boom and bust bubbles, and exceedingly expensive wars in which dynastic banking families made huge profits loaning money to both sides.

1680 in the Forest of Dean “there were remaining about 30 cabins, in several parts of the Forest, inhabited by about 100 poor people, (The Crown) had taken care to demolish the said cabins, and the enclosures about them.” These were not the Forest “free miners”, although “they had been born in it, and never lived elsewhere,” but as “cabiners,” who had to work seven years in the pits before they could become “free.” Freedom=Slavery.

Glorious Revolution of 1688 led to the Bill of Rights 1689. Important milestone in the formation of the British Constitution and Common Law, generally. Arguably this countries greatest export.

1700-1850 Parliamentary Enclosures, now no longer held back by the sections of the Church, nor by the power of the (heavily indebted) nobility and Monarchy, land enclosures increase exponentially in both speed and size, and the new urban slums grew correspondingly

Wool prices fall due to ‘foreign labour’ and the importation of cotton from colonies abroad. Lands once enclosed for sheep must find a new purpose, facilitating the arrival of early forms of mechanization, which allows landholders to still exclude peasant labourers from the land, at the expense of productivity, land-monopolies are thus sustained. Burden of tax is transferred from land (merchants/ manufacturers), to goods consumed. Most of the remaining Commons are enclosed, and the final nail driven into the coffin of the self-sufficient rural economy. Mass starvation ensues.

By 1700 half all arable lands are enclosed, and by 1815 nearly all farm land was enclosed; hunting, grazing, pannage, foraging, wood collection and gleaning rights, are all but lost.

From 1750 to 1820 desperate poachers were ‘hanged en-mass’.

1790-1830 a third of the rural population migrates to urban slums. Where they are put to work in early forms of factories, workhouses called by Blake the “Satanic Mills” of modernity, i.e. the ‘Industrial Revolution’.

1788 Mr. Miles Hartland, assistant-deputy-surveyor stated to the Dean Forest Commissioners, “cottages and encroachments in the Forest have nearly doubled within the last forty years.”

1811 – 1816 Concerned that machines would replace their highly skilled labour, the Luddites smash machinery, and threaten industrialist. The Luddites were not, as is commonly thought, anti-technology – they were pro-workers rights. In our modern times, as we face new forms of technological dispossession and automation, we could learn a thing or two from the spirit of Capt. Ludd.

Early 1800’s Industrialist Robert Owen talks of a ‘moral rebirth’ and sets about (as he sees it) improving the living conditions of his workers.

1800-1850 the Highland Clearances led to the displacement of up to 500,000 Highlanders and crofters, tens of thousands of which died in the early-mid 19th century, their settlements and economies replaced by Sheep. An esteemed member of the

‘British’ aristocracy noted: ‘It is time to make way for the grand-improvement of mutton over man.’

1808 Dean Forest Timber Act

1814-1816 11,000 acres of the Forest of Dean are enclosed, excluding Commoners who has traditionally used the land for grazing.

1831, Warren James with 100 Foresters demolished enclosures at Park Hill, between Parkend and Bream, unarmed Crown Officers were powerless to intervene. Soon a party of 50 soldiers arrived from Monmouth, but by now the number of Foresters had grown to around 2000 and the soldiers returned to barracks. A squadron of heavily armed soldiers arrived from Doncaster and the day after, another 180 infantrymen from Plymouth. Warren James was sentenced to death, later transportation to Tasmania (never to return).

1845 – 1852 Irish Potato ‘Famine’. British troops seized foods and exported them at gun-point, leaving the Irish population to starve.

1845 and 1849: 616 major landlords owned 95% of the British Isles and rented marginal lands to land-workers (peasants).

1849 Forest of Dean ‘a general feeling prevailed against the deer, on the ground of their demoralising influence as an inducement to poaching, and all were ordered to be destroyed, there being perhaps 150 bucks, 300 does: “if once men begin to poach, we can never reckon upon their working afterwards.” Mr. Nicholson’s statement before Lord Duncan’s Committee.

1872 the British Government published ‘The Return of the Owners of Land’, only the second audit of land to have taken place in British history, the other being the Domesday book. After 2 years of gathering all the information the returns found that 1 million people owned freeholds, about 5% of the population. 10 Dukes owned over 100,000 acres each with the Duke of Sutherland owning 1,350,000 acres, 1/50th of the entire country. Return of Owners of Land, confirmed that 0.6 per cent of the population owned 98.5% of the land. Half of Britain was owned by 0.06% of the population. These findings are still well hidden till this day.

Late 1800s: Industrialists build entire new villages for ‘their’ workers, in anticipation of higher productivity. Strict religious ‘rules’ concerning the behavior and conduct of residents and the prohibition of drinking, dancing, singing or fraternising with the opposite sex were common.

Late 1800s – early 1900s land reforms start making headway, the Allotment Acts, and numerous attempts to introduce a Land Value Tax- which would return the tax burden to land owners, rather than good consumed. Landowners, fearing land may soon become a liability, sell >1/2million acres in a short space of time – though mostly to other large landowners.

1899 Commons Act permits District Councils, National Park Authorities to manage commons for ‘exercise and recreation’.

1900-1946 A quarter of a billion Europeans die from war, famine or as a direct result of war. This enables land-grabbing on an unprecedented scale.



1920-47 Plotlands were the first chance for workers to own land and build dwellings on it – they lead to the invention of new Planning regulations designed to prevent poor people building houses in the countryside.

1925 Law of Property Act s.193 gave the right of the public to “air and exercise” on Metropolitan commons, but not rural commons.

1925 Land registry begins, to-date about 50% of land has been registered.

1930’s ‘Green Revolution’, a euphemism for the petrochemical based agriculture of the (post-)war period, has succeeded only in finding and expanding new ‘markets’ for the petrochemical corporations who became incredibly wealthy and politically influential by selling fuel & chemical weapons during the wars. In fact, many of the insecticides and herbicides that have been sprayed on our foods are modified or sometimes even simply ‘rebranded’ chemicals that were originally designed as weapons of war. Of course, the exact same chemical corporations also manufacture and sell us pharmaceutical drugs, making additional revenue by ‘treating’ the ‘diseases of civilisation’ which so often result from exposure to these chemical. As the head of the Nazi Chemical Giant, I.G. Farben infamously said... “we intend to make the human-body, our market place.”

Currently more than 70 per cent of UK land is owned by fewer than two per cent of the population. Much of which is directly traceable to Guillaume (William) the Bastard/ Conqueror whose 22nd great-grand daughter/ niece still sits upon the ‘English’ throne today.

Meanwhile, Britain’s 16.8 million homeowners account for barely 4 per cent of the land between them, which is about the same as that owned by the Forestry Commission. Today, Britain has the second most unequal distribution of land ownership on Earth, after Brazil.

1962 start of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which was the largest political bribery structure ever conceived by man.

1981, The Foresters won an exemption from the Forestry Act’s land sales. Then MP Paul Marland quickly changed his mind about supporting the sale saying... “Today’s Forester is of the same independent mind and rugged character as were his forefathers. It is our duty to preserve his ancient rights and traditions. The Forest would be sold off over my dead body.” Take note!

1986 Inheritance Tax finishes off the remaining Anglo-Norman landed gentry, well, those not already in-bed with ‘globalist’ financiers.

1996, 500 ‘The Land is Ours’ activists occupied 13 acres of derelict land on the banks of the river Thames in Wandsworth.

In 1999, the British activist group ‘The Land is Ours’ celebrated the Diggers 350th anniversary with a march and reoccupation of Saint George’s Hill, the site of the first Digger colony.

CROW Act 2000 recognises the ‘freedom to roam’ on common land.

2008, the first low-impact development is granted a form of planning permission, to Tony Wrench of ‘that round-house’, after an attempted eviction fails (quite dramatically).

2009, nearly a hundred activists converged on a piece of derelict land at Kew Bridge in south west London to create an ‘eco-village’.

2010 HOOF successfully fought a nationwide forest sell-off due to be made possible via the new Public Bodies Bill. The campaign led to the government backing down and setting up the Independent Panel on Forestry. Most of its recommendations have been thoroughly ignored ever since.

2012 The Wilderness Centre was reopened in spring, much to the surprise of Gloucestershire County Council, who had it earmarked for privatisation.

Yorkley Court’s ‘disorderly settlement’ begins in the Autumn of that year. Probably the largest ‘squatted’ land occupation this country has seen since the time of the Diggers.

2012 “Runnymede Eco-Village started by ‘the Diggers 2012’, modeled after Gerald Winstanley’s Diggers of 1649.

Low-impact development planning policy further develops in Wales, under the ‘One Planet Development’ scheme – with its flagship project, the Lammas eco-village in Pembrokeshire.

Oxford University produces a DNA map of Britain which reveals that “most people in Great Britain still live in the tribal territories which existed over 1000 years ago.” Geneticist Professor Sir Walter Bodmer of Oxford University said: “What it shows is the extraordinary stability of the British population. Britain hasn’t changed much since 600AD.

Originally written as part of a document promoting the concept of Low-impact Development in the Forest of Dean: <https://cabiners.wum.land>

More on the folk history of the Forest of Dean: <https://cabiners.wum.land/history.html>

The law locks up the man or woman,  
Who steals the goose off the common,  
But leaves the greater villain loose,  
Who steals the common from the goose.

– Unknown Poet.

“Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours. Free as Spring clouds and wild as summer flowers is faded all – a hope that blossomed free. And haft been once no more shall ever be. Inclosure came and trampled on the grave Of labour’s rights and left the poor a slave.” – John Clare (1793 – 1864)

“It was the sad fate of the English poor to be the first to be subjected to the unmitigated brutality of this developing social mechanism. It goes without

saying that they considered this fate an absolute degradation, and those who accepted it were scorned by their peers. At the time of the Levellers, it was already commonly considered that those who sold their labor for a salary had abandoned all the rights of “free-born Englishmen.” — Leopold Roc, *Industrial Domestication*.

“Poverty is therefore a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society. It is the source of wealth, since without poverty, there could be no labour; there could be no riches... no benefit to those who may be possessed of wealth.” — Patrick Colquhoun, enclosure supporter and founder of the first police force.

“I have persecuted the natives of England beyond all reason. Whether gentle or simple I have cruelly oppressed them; many I unjustly disinherited; innumerable multitudes perished through me by famine or the sword.....I fell on the English of the northern shires like a ravenous lion. I commanded their houses and corn, with all their implements and chattels, to be burnt without distinction, and great herds of cattle and beasts of burden to be butchered whenever they are found. In this way I took revenge on multitudes of both sexes by subjecting them to the calamity of a cruel famine, and so became a barbarous murderer of many thousands, both young and old, of that fine race of people. Having gained the throne of that kingdom by so many crimes I dare not leave it to anyone but God.” alleged to be William the Bastard’s death bed confession according to Ordericus Vitalis c AD 1130

“The power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the creation by your ancestors by the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you, their children. And therefore, though you did not kill or thief, yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword; and so you justify the wicked deeds of your fathers, and that sin of your fathers shall be visited upon the head of you and your children to the third and fourth generation, and longer too, till your bloody and thieving power be rooted out of the land.” A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England.

The Ted K Archive

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