

# Ploughing in Goxhill in the Eighteenth Century

There are some beautifully preserved iron Ploughs to be seen in Goxhill and it is easy to picture the scene as the ploughman and his team of horses plough the land. That is recent history the Iron plough was introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the year 1840 all of the land was ploughed by the new light iron ploughs drawn by teams of horses. What happened before the iron plough was used? For more than a thousand years the plough simply scratched the surface and the field was ploughed twice the second time at right angles to the first. This shallow cultivation produced very light crops.

In the twelfth century a new heavier plough began to be used which was made of wood with an Iron blade (Share) which cut through the soil allowing a flat wooden mould board to push the soil over to the side leaving a furrow which was deep and wide. This deeper cultivation of the soil produced heavier crops but was much harder work for the plough man and the animals which pulled the plough. For about six or seven hundred years there was then little change in the way that the soil was cultivated. This heavy wooden plough remained in use until the industrial revolution made iron readily available and manufacturing techniques enabled strong light Iron ploughs to be made at reasonable cost.

The wooden plough had a variety of designs in different parts of the country and I do not know which type of plough was used here. We do however have some information from the records of Thomas and Joseph Hardy 1762 *Iron for both the ploughs weight to Thos Young 57lbs.*

That is 3237 cubic centimetres of iron or a piece about half an inch thick and four inches wide by seven inches long for each plough. They let their blacksmith work each year to a blacksmith in the village.

*Michaelmas Last 1784 an agreement made with Thos Brown Blacksmith for to shoe 6 horses and keep two ploughs in repair and 2 pair of harrows and all things belonging there to and to find new shares for £1:18s:0d per year*

*For the year 1787 the sum was £2:2s:0d*

This wooden plough was a big heavy structure it had to be to give it the strength required. This made it difficult to manoeuvre and to pull. The motive power was provided in the main by oxen which may seem surprising but there were sound economic reasons for

this. The choice was between horses and oxen. Oxen can live and work all the year round on a diet of grass and low quality hay. Horses require oats and good hay. Horses are perceived to be faster than oxen because they are seen to trot and gallop but farm work is done at walking pace and ploughing with horses is little faster than with oxen. When the useful life of a horse was over it is of no value. When the ox finished its working life it could be put out to grass to fatten and then it could be sold to the butcher for meat for about the same price as was paid for it, (How about a tractor that has a scrap value the same as was paid

for it and runs on grass).

The record of animals bought and sold by Thomas and Joseph Hardy records the name of the buyer or seller and the price and the type of animal. This is Horse, Cow, Heifer, Beast, but always for Oxen the quantity of 2 is given. Oxen were bought and sold in pairs never singly. Stock men were always looking out for big male beasts that could become working oxen. They were paired when very young and were trained to live and work together. They worked together for the whole of their working lives and were never far apart. They were always yoked together side by side and one was the right hand and the other the left hand animal. They were given names and answered to voice command.

There were several problems in using oxen for although they ate grass it did not provide long lasting energy so that by mid day the ox needed to refuel and to spend the afternoon eating grass. As they walk quite slowly to fetch them from pasture in the Neatgangs to the village field where they were to work could take a whole morning so when they were working they had to be kept in a close near to home. The eight oxen plough team would probably not be needed for the soil at Goxhill and four oxen yoked in two pairs could be used but the length of the team and the plough would require a big headland for turning at the end of the furrow. Two men worked together the ox man drove the oxen and the plough man guided the plough and kept it in the furrow.

This heavy wooden plough with its team of oxen shaped the ridge and furrows of the open fields of Goxhill before the enclosure but at about that time some farmers began to use two oxen and one horse for ploughing because the horse kept the oxen moving faster. The note above regarding the blacksmith work may suggest that this happened here but horses were mainly used to pull carts for transport. When the smaller fields created by enclosure had to be ploughed the wide headlands needed to turn the oxen were a problem and horses began to replace the oxen.

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