

**THE ENCLOSURES IN
ENGLAND:
AN ECONOMIC
RECONSTRUCTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649439294

The Enclosures in England: An Economic Reconstruction by Harriett Bradley

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HARRIETT BRADLEY

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THE ENCLOSURES IN ENGLAND
AN ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

BY
HARRIETT BRADLEY, A. M.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN THE
FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK
1918

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Columbia Univ. 11-20-28 11:17 P.
p. 23

"It fareth with the earth as with
other creatures that through
continual labour grow faint and
feeble-hearted."

From speech made in the House of Commons, 1597

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EMILIE LOUISE WELLS

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INTRODUCTION

THE enclosure movement—the process by which the common-field system was broken down and replaced by a system of unrestricted private use—involved economic and social changes which make it one of the important subjects in English economic history. When it began, the arable fields of a community lay divided in a multitude of strips separated from each other only by borders of unplowed turf. Each landholder was in possession of a number of these strips, widely separated from each other, and scattered all over the open fields, so that he had a share in each of the various grades of land.¹ But his private use of the land was restricted to the period when it was being prepared for crop or was under crop. After harvest the land was grazed in common by the village flocks; and each year a half or a third of the land was not plowed at all, but lay fallow and formed part of the common pasture. Under this system there was no opportunity for individual initiative in varying the rotation of crops or the dates of plowing and seed time; the use of the land in common for a part of the time restricted its use even during the time when it was not in common. The process by which this system was replaced by modern private ownership with unrestricted individual use is called the enclosure movement, because it involved the rearrangement of holdings into separate, compact plots, divided from each other by enclosing hedges and ditches. The most notable feature of this process is the conversion of the open

¹ V. G. Simkovitch, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. xxvii, p. 398.
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