

50 Years of Agricultural Change

in the South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Introduction

The patchwork landscape of small fields, hedge banks, walls, hedgerow trees, woods, orchards and farmsteads was created by farmers and foresters over hundreds of years. Their continued work is essential in keeping the AONB a distinctive, productive, working agricultural landscape.

84% of today's South Devon AONB is farmed in some way with 598 agricultural holdings covering 26,867 hectares. 10% of this agricultural land is of grade 1 - the best quality land and 80% is grade 3 – average quality. 1,034 people are directly employed in agriculture within the AONB and this represents 6.1% of the working AONB population.



Potato harvesting, near Malborough.
© South Devon AONB Unit

June Farm Census

The June Agricultural Survey is an annual survey of agricultural activity which collects information from carefully selected agricultural holdings in England relating to land use, crops, livestock, labour, horticulture and glasshouse operations. (See www.defra.gov.uk for more information.) Parish level records for pre 1990 go back to 1866 and are held in the National Archives at Kew. We'd like to explore these records for AONB Parishes in more detail as part of our work on the 50th Anniversary of the South Devon AONB.

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Farming in 1960 v 2008

Whilst actually 48 years if we are being accurate and covering a wider geographical area than the AONB itself, an interesting picture emerges when comparisons are made between the 1960 and 2008 (the latest figures available at present) agricultural census data for the county of Devon*.

■ Holding size

Whilst the total number of holdings has remained almost the same in Devon at 17,000 there has been a substantial growth in the number of smallholdings (less than 5 hectares in size) and a modest growth in large farms (greater than 50 hectares) – both at the expense of medium sized holdings that have seen a 50% reduction in numbers.

■ Rough grazing

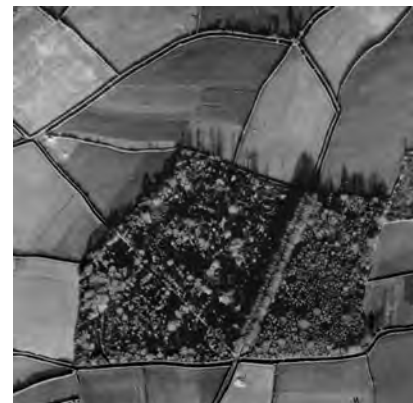
The area of rough grazing has reduced by 101,764 hectares and demonstrates the impact of machinery and techniques to improve land. The area of permanent grassland has consequently seen a 32% increase.

■ Area under agriculture

The overall area under agriculture has also declined by 98,990 hectares and suggests significant land use change – built development, equine facilities and increased woodland coverage as examples.

■ Mangolds

Mangolds, a commonly grown root crop in 1960 mainly used as animal fodder and often seen being harvested and stored from autumn onwards in the farming year are no longer a part of today's farmed landscape.



Huxton Wood, SW of Churchstow (1945) and the same wood (2006) in the top right corner.

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▪ **Cereals**

Significantly increased yields are achieved today for all cereal crops. The area under wheat has grown seven fold, whilst the area under barley and oats has seen a 50% reduction. Winter barley, in addition to spring barley is now a popular cropping strategy reflecting a change in cropping techniques.

▪ **Silage**

Silage is now the most common method for grass to be preserved for use as animal fodder over the winter. Its use has become widespread since the early 1970's.

▪ **New crops**

A much wider variety of crops are now grown reflecting changing food demands and climates. Energy crops such as miscanthus have appeared in our landscape and yellow fields of oil seed rape are widespread in May.

▪ **Orchards**

There has been a sharp decline in the area of orchards from 5860 hectares in 1960 to just 679 in 2008.

▪ **Cattle and calves**

The number of cattle and calves has increased by 17%.

▪ **Sheep and lambs**

The number of sheep and lambs has increased by 14%.

▪ **Pigs**

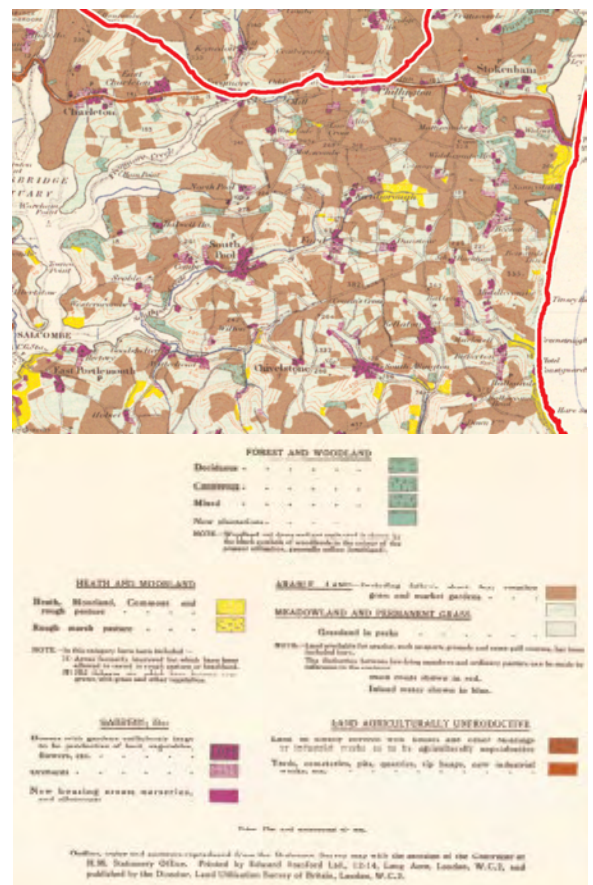
The number of pigs has fallen sharply by 46%.

▪ **Workers**

Overall there appears to have been an increase in regular workers by 2008, this is largely due to a significant decrease in full time workers at the same time as a four fold increase in part time workers.

* The administrative arrangements for land within the AONB have also seen a great number of changes – various government departments, agencies and local authority change. In particular the AONB in 1960 had a mixture of Rural Districts, Urban Districts and Municipal Boroughs in addition to the County and its Parishes.

difficult task. Frequently we have to look to reliable information sources a number of years either side. Whilst 1933 is nearly 30 years earlier, a resource of great interest is the first Land Utilisation Survey coordinated by Professor Sir Laurence Dudley Stamp who mobilised children from 10,000 schools and hundreds of teachers, students and young graduates to assist.



Map centred on South Pool – an extract from the Dudley Stamp Land Utilisation Survey 1931-33. ©

When comparing the survey's mapping with today's aerial photographs and Ordnance Survey mapping substantial changes are revealed. This story will be explored through the work to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the South Devon AONB.

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The first Land Utilisation Survey 1931-33

Finding comprehensive data that relates specifically to our inaugural year of 1960 is a