

An English Landlord Describes a Troubled England (1623)

England's prosperity in the early sixteenth century had been built on the backs of bleating sheep, as exports of raw wool and finished woolen cloth boomed. Beginning about 1550, however, a severe depression descended upon the woolen districts. Thousands of shepherders and weavers were pitched out of work and onto the roads of England. England suddenly seemed to be overflowing with paupers and vagabonds, as described in the following letter by a Lincolnshire landlord.

What did he find most alarming?

Right honourable brother, the best news I can send you is that we are all in good health God be praised. I am now here with my son to settle some country affair, and my own private, which were never so burdensome unto me as now. For many insufficient tenants have given up their farms and sheepwalks, so as I am forced to take them into my own hands and borrow money upon use to stock them. It draweth me wholly from a contemplative life, which I most affected, and could be most willing to pass over my whole estate to the benefit of my children so as I were freed of the trouble. Our country was never in that want that now it is, and more of money than corn, for there are many thousands in these parts who have sold all they have even to their bed straw and cannot get work to earn any money. Dog's flesh is a dainty dish and found upon search in many houses, also such horse flesh as hath lain long in a deke for hounds. And the other day one stole a sheep who for mere hunger tore a leg out, and did eat it raw. All that is most certain true and yet the great time of scarcity not yet come. I shall rejoice to have a better subject to write of, and expect it with patience. In the mean time and ever

I will remain

Your honour's most loving brother to serve you

William Pelham

3.Lincolnshire Notes and Queries (Horncastle, England:W. K. Morton, 1888),vol. 1, no. 1,pp. 15-16 (a quarterly journal devoted to the antiquities, parochial records, family history, folklore, quaint customs, etc., of the county).