

Object(s): Scales

Object Number(s): STMEA: 76.A.37.4

Researcher details: John Reed, Volunteer

This Iron scales set with a copper pan, which is accompanied by a set of weights, was used by Aldeburgh cowman Alfred Cracknell. Alfred had a round in the town with a horse and cart supplying fresh fruit and vegetables direct to the residents of Aldeburgh. The produce came from Alfred's small holding of 1 ½ acres on Saxmundham road.

Standardisation and trust

Scales are synonymous with the dispensation of justice and have weighed the truth and mistruth of trade goods for millennia. The domestication of animals and the advent of farming, during the Neolithic period, resulted in surpluses of certain staples and allowed trade to happen. Civilised trading required the development of consensus units of weights and measurements. Instruments such as scales facilitated honest trading, eased interactions relating to trade, and helped people foster relationships that involved the exchange of more than just goods. Trade approved scales are used 'to ensure accuracy and reliability in weighing.'¹

Despite the small scale nature of his one and a half acre smallholding, Alfred's use of scales hints at his reliability. The scales were in use during WW1, when Alfred's goods would have been in high demand. Therefore, stringent action and accuracy would have been required to ensure he gained the trust of the local people and avoided deception and miscommunication.

Trade and markets

The town of Aldeburgh 'had a small market weekly on Saturdays'². Alfred, alongside his scales, may have frequented the market supplying vegetables grown upon his land. The nuclei of a small rural town is often its market, which would see different characters and occupations cross paths and attract folks from both countryside and town. Draws of the market include 'the pleasure of a more personal community-based relationship in shopping'³ and the knowledge that you are getting locally sourced goods. A government report from the 2000s includes that markets accentuate 'the vitality of town centres'⁴. Not only did markets attract people to shop at the markets themselves, but also to the town centre where there were other shops and facilities, such as the O&C Butcher Clothes shop⁵, resided. Alfred was part of a system that encouraged local people to interact, trade and communicate with each other.

¹ Marsden, Trade Approved scales: What they are and why you should be using them, 2018, accessed 09/10/20

² J. Kirby, The Suffolk traveller: or, A journey through Suffolk, Oxford, 1735

³ Market Failure?: Can the traditional market survive? , ninth report of session 2008-09, P171, London, 2009

⁴ ODPM, 2005

⁵ Aldeburgh Guide, <https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/suffolk-coast-towns-and-villages/aldeburgh>, accessed 16/10/20

Markets in the modern world and in bigger urban environments often see the mixing of different cultures, ethnicities and religions. The research of Watson and Stubbert titled 'markets as sites for social interaction' uses interviews and observations from eight different large English markets to illustrate the social importance of the market.

An example that demonstrates the comradery between different cultures was to be found at Ridley road market where 'long-established Jewish traders spoke of helping the new Asian traders settle into the market, explaining the customs and practices of market life.'⁶ The example of the Ridley road emphasises the ability of markets to create social harmony. Trading with people who live in the local area, regardless of their background, creates a good feeling. Alfred provided the service of vegetable trade and delivery which would have deeply embedded him in the local community because of his utility.

Wartime Aldeburgh

The Aldeburgh war memorial includes a Bertie Cracknell who may have been a relative of Alfred Cracknell. The destructiveness of WWI devastated the entirety of Britain and Aldeburgh was no exception 'Virtually every family in town was touched in some way by the carnage.'⁷ The town lost 84 young men to the war. Alfred's sizeable family would have been unlikely to come through WWI unscathed.

Wartime Aldeburgh was home to 'support airfields for Royal Naval Air Station Great Yarmouth in October 1915.'⁸ Further than this, the town airfield gained more significance, eventually harbouring 'one of the few bases for one of the first reliable and effective anti-submarine patrol aircraft, the Blackburn Kangaroo'⁹. German U-boats were effective in cutting Britain off from its imports by destroying civilian merchant ships. The Blackburn Kangaroo and Albert both attempted to lessen the impact of the U-boats. Alfred's cowman duties and his growing of crops were vital to the British war effort.

Saxmundham road, where Alfred's acre and a half was located, is home to the Aldeburgh golf club which was used as a reference point for pilots locating the local airfield. Saxmundham road is around a mile and a half mainly composing of fields heading towards Aldeburgh town centre.

The state of malnutrition in England was to the extent that 40% of those who were conscripted for ww1 were not fit for duty. In attempts to improve the health of the people 'Emphasis was laid on foods such as milk'¹⁰ because of its wholesome nutritional value. Therefore, Alfred's profession as a cowman and market grower would have been very important.

⁶ S. Watson, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/1940-markets-social-interaction.pdf> accessed 15/10/20

⁷ Aldeburgh Town Council, accessed 09/10/20, https://www.aldeburghtowncouncil.co.uk/?page_id=2442

⁸ Aldeburgh Town Council, accessed 09/10/20, https://www.aldeburghtowncouncil.co.uk/?page_id=2442

⁹ Air Fields of Britain conservation trust, accessed 15/10/20 <https://www.abct.org.uk/airfields/airfield-finder/aldeburgh/>

¹⁰ L. Mason, Food Culture in Great Britain, p202 Westport, CT, 2004

Victory Gardens

WWI emptied the British Isles of young men depleting the work force and straining supply lines. Kaiser Wilhelm stated that the German forces would 'starve the British people until they, who have refused peace, will kneel and plead for it'¹¹. The Kaiser's statement further emphasises the importance of men such as Albert producing fruit and veg. 'Before the war about 60 percent of the energy value of the British diet was derived from foodstuffs that were imported'¹² Rationing was introduced by the government to counteract the effects of shortages in imports and individuals were encouraged to grow. Massive swathes of land were taken by the government and given over to food production 'even the flowerbeds at Buckingham Palace were given over to food production.'¹³

Wartime propaganda and patriotism ensured that individuals who did not fight in the war were scrutinised, shamed and questioned. The knock on impact of the shame campaigns were that so many men left for war and that production and industry in the UK suffered shortages of workers. The government introduced measures to keep the country running and stop vital workers leaving by creating reserved occupations. 'First World War reserved occupations included... farmers'¹⁴, so as a cowman over a certain age, Alfred was required to stay at home. Below is an American WWI Homefront propaganda poster that underlines the importance of civilians growing foodstuff. The importance of individuals growing their own products was emphatically illustrated by WW1. Before the war Britain was urbanising and people were moving into cities thus losing independence.



¹¹ M. Roberts, *The New Barbarism?: A Portrait of Europe 1900-1973*, p42, 1975, Oxford

¹² I. Gazeley and A. Newell, *European Review of Economic History*, The First World War and working-class food consumption in Britain, pages 71-94, 2013

¹³ A Plantsman's response to WW1, <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens/features/a-plantsmans-response-to-world-war-i>, accessed 16/10/20

¹⁴ Reserved Occupations and Exemptions, <https://www.royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk/the-haslam-diaries/reserved-occupations-and-exemptions#:~:text=For%20the%20First%20World%20War,especially%20in%20factories%20which%20were>

Fig 1: ww1 American propaganda poster¹⁵

Land owning

The late 19th century saw demand for allotments and land set aside for gardens increase because of an agricultural depression. 'Three acres and a cow'¹⁶ was the slogan of the agrarian reformist and MP for Ipswich (1880-86) Jesse Collings whose entire career as a liberal MP and then unionist centred upon the topics of land reform. Jesse wanted to create a new class of 'peasant proprietors'¹⁷ to overhaul the rural estate system. The 1908 small holdings act went some way to readdress rural production monopolies of the wealthy by 'obliging local authorities to provide allotments for the labouring population'¹⁸

From the depths of prehistory to the present day, the owning of land has regulated status, wealth and power. Separating the worker from the land, from their lifeblood, opens them up to dependency and exploitation at the hands of big business. In a 1970s oral history study a male interviewee aged 85+ from the south-east of England recounted his memories of young boys scavenging stale bread given to the birds 'cause they'd got nothing to eat to go to school,'¹⁹. Britain at the height of imperialism could not find the wherewithal to treat the ailments of rampant industrialism. Poverty, malnutrition and exploitation engulfed the working class of Victorian and Edwardian England. The acquisition of land, for the working man, was crucial to ensure the survival of ones family in the face of laissez-faire capitalist governance. Alfred's Acre and a half would have saved him and his family from poverty.

Types of crops grown

Small holdings and market farming stems from the late medieval period and the kind of crops grown continually metamorphosed. The diary of small holding grower James Hall, dating from the late 19th century states that James grew Peas, beans, cabbage and sprouts²⁰ and these were the predominant vegetables grown by the Evesham man. The introduction of the potato in the 17th century brought major changes in the following century as 'An acre of potatoes provided about two and a half times

¹⁵ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sow_victory_poster_usgovt.gif

¹⁶ Jesse Collings, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/three-acres-and-a-cow>, accessed 23/10/2020

¹⁷ Jesse Collings, Sir John Little Green, Life of the Right Hon. Jesse Collings, 1920, London

¹⁸ M. Willes, The Gardens of the British Working Class, London, 2014

¹⁹ Thompson, P., University of Essex. Department of Sociology, Lummis, T., University of Essex. Department of Sociology: "Interview with Mr. Cox" in "Family Life and Work Experience Before 1918, 1870-1973" 7, UK Data Service [distributor], 2009-05-12, SN:2000, Para. 116.

²⁰ <https://www.badseysociety.uk/market-gardening-and-farming/market-gardening-1878-1923-james-hall-a-badsey-grower>, accessed 30/10/2020

as many calories as an acre of wheat'²¹ Generally the growing of hearty root vegetables was predominant when Alfred was tending his acre and a half.

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²¹ M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: the Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* Page 102, Cambridge, 1996

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