

# Enclosures

By the late eighteenth century enclosures were becoming very common in Great Britain. Enclosure simply meant joining the strips of the open fields to make larger compact units of land. These units were then fenced or hedged off from the next person's land. This meant that a farmer had his land together in one farm rather than in scattered strips. The farmer now had a greater amount of independence. This was not a new idea. Enclosures had been around since Tudor times, but increased dramatically in the 1700s because they made it easier for farmers to try out new ideas.



## How was land enclosed?



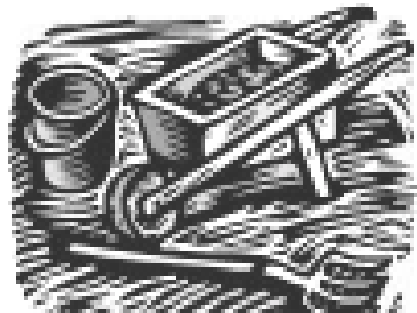
There were two ways to enclose a field. Before 1740 most villages were enclosed by agreement. This was when all of the major landowners in the village made a private agreement to join their strips together. This possibly meant buying out smaller farmers. When a small number of farmers did not want to sell their land an Act of Parliament had to be obtained. This became seen as perfectly acceptable after 1750 because it had a number

of really good points:

1. Each piece of enclosed land had legal documentation.
2. It provided a forum for opposition to be heard.
3. It allowed the whole village to be enclosed at the same time.

## Why did people enclose land?

Some agricultural improvers enclosed their land so as to reduce wastage. It also meant it was easier for them to make decisions about changing the use of the land. Because enclosure brought a farmer's lands together, it was worth investing in machinery, lime, manure or seed from one strip to another. Enclosures would also help farmers interested in selective breeding. It also made it worthwhile to dig drainage ditches around their fields. Historians generally agree that farmers enclosed land in order to produce a greater tonnage, thereby earning bigger profits. In addition, where land was enclosed landlords could charge tenants higher rents.



**Tasks - You have 20 Minutes to complete these three tasks**

1. Describe an enclosed field.
2. Describe the two ways to enclose a field.
3. Why did people want to enclose land?

**Extension Activity - if you finish early:**

GCSE Question

"Why was land enclosed in the eighteenth century?" (6)

Use the skills that you began to develop when writing the question on the Open Field System last week.