

Bottom Lands and Pasturage in late Sixteenth Century England

Raphael Holinshed and John Stow: *Chronicles* 1586

Our meadows are either bottoms (whereof we have great store) or else such as we call land meads, and borrowed from the best and fattest pasturages. The first of them are yearly and often overflown by the rising of such streams as pass through the same, or violent falls of land-waters that descend from the hills about them. The other are seldom or never overflown, and that is the cause whereof their grass is shorter than that of the bottoms, and yet it is far more fine, wholesome and batable, since the hay of our low meadows is not only full of sandy cinder, which breedeth sundry diseases in our cattle, but also more rowty, foggy, and full of flags, and therefore not so profitable for stover and forage as the higher meads be. The difference, furthermore, in their commodities is great, for whereas in our land meadows we have not often above one good load of hay, or peradventure a little maize in an acre of ground, in low meadows we have sometimes three, but commonly two or upward, as experience has oft confirmed.

Of such as are twice mowed I speak not, since their later math is not so wholesome for cattle as the first; although in the mouth more pleasant for the time: for thereby they become often times to be rotten, or to increase so fast in blood that the garget and other diseases do consume many of them before the owners can seek out a remedy. Some superstitious fools suppose that they which die of the garget are ridden with the night-mare, and therefore they hang up stones which naturally have holes in them, and must be found unlooked for; as if such a stone were an apt cockshot for the devil to run through and solace himself withal, whist the cattle go scot-free and are not molested by him. But if I should set down half the toys that superstition hath brought into our husbandmen's heads in this and other behalves, it would ask a greater volume than is convenient for such a purpose, wherefore it shall suffice to have said thus much of these things.

Blackies English Texts ed.W.H.D. Rouse, (modernised spelling)

Glossary:

Batable: 'eatable' (mod. . edible)

Cockshot: 'narrow passage'

Garget: 'bloat'

Rowty: 'rank'

Stover: 'fodder'

Sufficient Etymologies & Notes

Batable: mistakenly given by Rouse as 'fertile' but meaning uncertain - poss. 'eatable', as this refers to the 'grass' not to the land itself; cognate with verb *bite* and noun *bait*. Otherwise fr. *bate* cogn. with *beat* – but this meaning unlikely in this context.

Cockshot: strictly 'cockshoot': 'glade where woodcock were netted as they shot through' or otherwise 'shoot': 'narrow passage for driving cattle' – by confl. and corr. of Fr. 'chute', in yod-dropping English accents. 'Cock' abbr. of 'woodcock'. Note: modern spelling honours the Fr. origin, thus n. formally spelled 'chute'. But v. remains 'shoot', also as colloq. noun. Strictly a cockshot was a 'cock-shy', a target in the shape of a farmyard cock (not a woodcock) set up for throwing things at, not Holinshed's meaning here.

Garret: given unhelpfully by Rouse as 'a disease of cattle'. Prob. 'bloat', colloq. term for distended stomach caused by unsuitable fodder. Unkn. origin.

Rowty: limp or 'clung', otherwise tough and fibrous – given as 'rank' by Rouse, but this term can mean any unpleasant characteristic e.g. overgrown, noxious, stinking. 'Rowty' origin unkn. Not found in Claxton, Nall, or Forby E. Ang. glossaries, but preserved (uniquely?) in central southern Norfolk as 'rawty' (pr. 'rorty') in sim. sense.

Stover: 'fodder'. Aphetic of O.Fr. *estover* n. 'necessary provisions', i.e. 'staple' food, 'provender'

General note on spelling: Holinshed *et al* wrote at a period when orthographical conventions were fluid. It may be safely assumed that what now appear as the missing vowel features of 'shoot' and 'bait' were of little or no concern to them at a time when these words were in current use and well understood in context. The Blackie text is a little cavalier with archaic & obsolete terms, taking on trust the original orthography which, as in these examples, is sometimes productive of error and difficulty.

Note on style: For 3rd pers. sing. past inflections. Holinshed and Stow appear to favour the old-fashioned -th suffix in two cases that occur here – 'breedeth' and 'hath'. and the -s suffix (already well absorbed by this period) is avoided, (although 'has' appears here – perhaps for euphony). – perhaps to lend authority or dignity to the text. . It is curious that in such a narrative so few occur. The authors often use plural forms and 1st pers. plural (and auxiliary verbs) and this has the effect of drawing the reader into closer, more communal and yet also more intimate involvement. It is declamatory, addresses the nation, a public speech rather than a simple narrative for, or personal dialogue with, the reader.

Complete etymology of 'scot-free'. O.E. *scotfree* "exempt from royal tax," from *scot* "royal tax," from O.N. *skot* "contribution, reckoning, shot" + *free*. Related to O.E. *sceotan* "to pay, contribute," Du. *schot*, Ger. *Schoß* "tax, contribution" . O.Fr. *escot* (Fr. *écot*).