

Postscript

At the beginning of this investigation I was informed by some that enclosure was now a dead issue, while others maintained, like Chambers and Mingay [82], that ‘the complexity of the question and the important geographical variations make enclosure one of the most intractable and yet fascinating of historical problems’. Although enclosure was an important process in the emergence of the modern economic and social order, it does not offer any simple key to that emergence, and if one expects it to do so this is bound to lead to disappointment. There is some compensation, however, for because enclosure was not the uniform and radical process of modernisation it was once thought to be, its links with the farming in the common fields are of much greater intricacy and interest. Far from being a dead issue we are only in the early stages of a real understanding of the meaning of enclosure and the life of the common fields, and to whichever aspect of the subject one turns the need for new enquiry is strikingly evident. My hope for this book is that it will provide a springboard for such action.