The enclosure system

The **enclosure system**, which simply meant joining the strips of the open fields to make larger compact units of land, dates back to the 12th century but peaked from approximately 1750 to 1860. In this time, the British Enclosure Acts removed the prior rights of local people to rural land they had often used for generations, namely to open fields and wastes. The former were large agricultural areas to which a village population had certain rights of access, while the latter were unproductive areas assigned to pasture animals, harvest meadow grass, fish, and collect firewood.

As compensation, the displaced people were commonly offered alternative land of smaller extent and inferior quality, sometimes with no access to water or wood.

Anyway, enclosure was not simply the fencing of existing holdings, but led to fundamental changes in agricultural practice. Scattered holdings of strips in the common field were consolidated to create individual farms that could be managed independently of other holdings. This led to money investment in machinery, lime, manure or seed, to new interest in selective breeding and drainage methods, to new practices of agriculture, such as crop rotation, and resulted in a dramatic increase in productivity over time.

1 Match these words with their synonyms.

a. Enclosure	☐	**1.** Previous
b. Strip	☐	**2.** Property
c. To peak	☐	**3.** To remove
d. Prior	☐	**4.** Spread
e. Namely	☐	**5.** Fenced-in field
f. Waste	☐	**6.** Impressive
g. To displace	☐	**7.** To crest
h. Holding	☐	**8.** Band
i. Scattered	☐	**9.** Worthless land
j. Dramatic	☐	**10.** That is to say



2 Before reading the following text with the point of view of a farmer of the time, match the following phrases.

a. The benefits from enclosure will…	☐	**1.** sell their lands to rich landowners.
b. The roads may also…	☐	**2.** go and work in the factories.
c. New methods of farming…	☐	**3.** will agree with me.
d. The poorer farmers will…	☐	**4.** could produce more food.
e. Some farmers cannot prove…	☐	**5.** to the Parliament that the land is theirs.
f. Some villagers might have to…	☐	**6.** get better.
g. Enclosures may cause a huge…	☐	**7.** may become higher.
h. Enclosures would cause changes…	☐	**8.** in the price of food.
i. The prices…	☐	**9.** help some of us only.
j. I hope the other farmers…	☐	**10.** revolution in all our lives.

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3 Read the text and fill in the gap with the given words.

become • through • food • mixed • from • expenses • Parliament • jobs • methods • bad • landowners • combined • more • crops • woodland

Enclosure in the 1780s in Britain: yes or no?

I think that the benefits **1.** ..... enclosure will help some of us only. If we enclose land, the strips which are **2.** ..... into larger blocks may be more productive than before. We will get more food. We could grow what types of **3.** ..... we want. The roads may also get better as we would have to travel to our blocks of lands. There might be less weeds growing as we would use all the fields. We could also use new **4.** ..... of farming, new fertilisers which could produce more **5.** ..... . We could also do selective breeding and produce **6.** ..... fodder, which could help the animals survive **7.** ..... harsh winters. Thanks to fences, the villagers' animals would not get **8.** ..... together and spread their diseases to one other. However, enclosure is **9.** ..... for some people. The poorer farmers will end up selling their lands to rich **10.** ....., when they cannot afford the **11.** ..... related to the closing of the fields, such as building hedges and a farm house. Some farmers do not have the legal documents to prove to the **12.** ..... that the land is theirs. Those who worked and made a living from odd **13.** ..... such as taking care of the animals, pigs and fallow land will lose their jobs. They may be moved out of the village as they don't own any lands. They might have to go and work in the factories. The villagers will lose their right to graze their animals on the common. They also cannot take timber from the **14.** ....., as those lands will also be enclosed. Finally, we can say that enclosures may cause a huge revolution in all our lives. Many will have benefits, and many may not. Overall, I think that enclosures may be a bad idea as it would cause changes in the price of food. The prices may **15.** ..... higher, which may cause many other problems in the future. So, I think the lands should not be enclosed. I hope the other farmers will agree with me.

Abstract from: *Point of View of a farmer in 1780*

4 Read the text above again and say if the sentences are true or false. Correct the false ones.

	T	F
a. The benefits from enclosure will help everybody.	☐	☐
b. More food will be produced in the enclosures.	☐	☐
c. More weeds will grow.	☐	☐
d. New fertilisers will help produce more food.	☐	☐
e. Livestock grazed in the enclosures do not spread their diseases to one other.	☐	☐
f. Villagers are not allowed to take timber from the enclosures.	☐	☐
g. If the farmers lose their land, they have to go and work in the factories.	☐	☐
h. The price of food will be unchanged.	☐	☐

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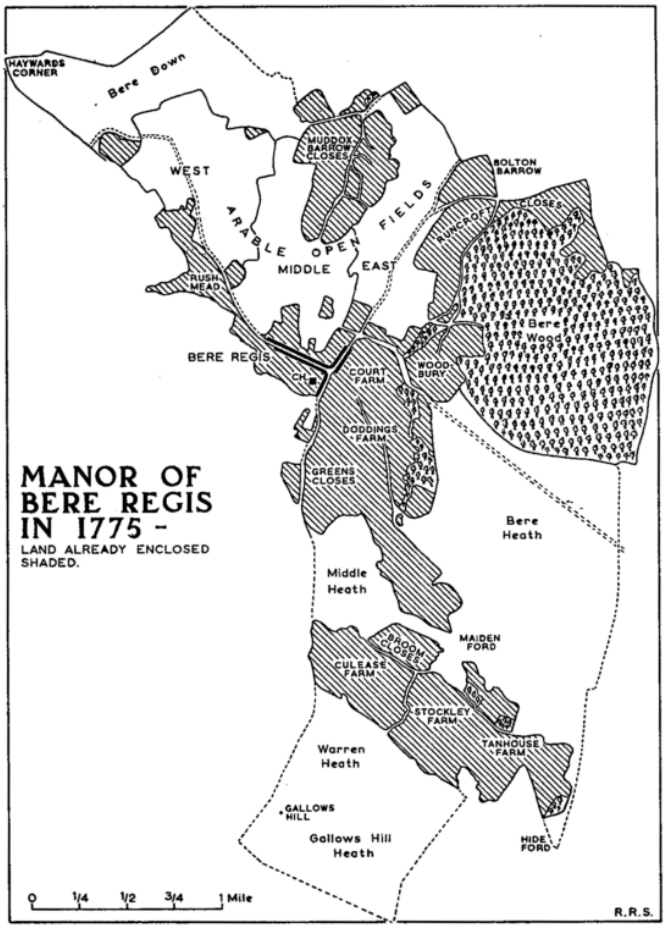
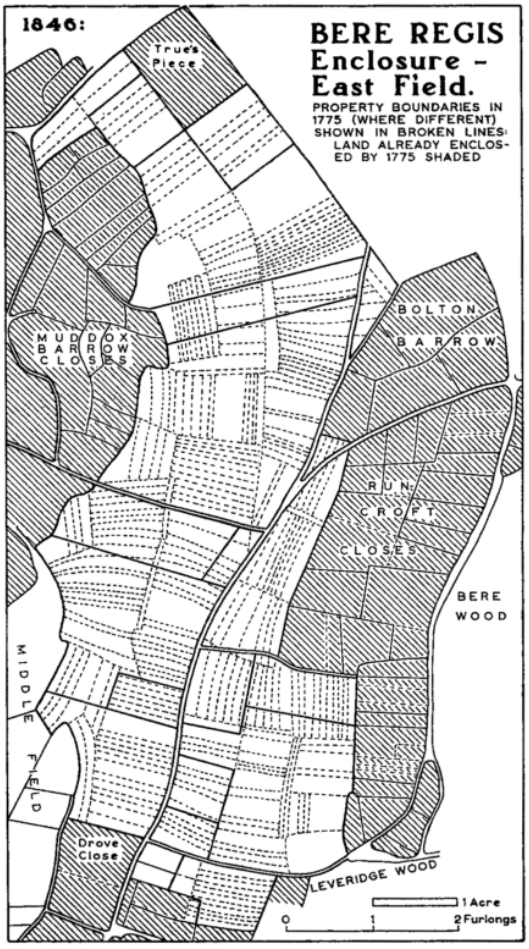
5 Answer the questions without looking at the text.

a. Will enclosures benefit everybody?
b. In the enclosures, will food production be improved?
c. What is the advantage of grazing cattle in a fenced area?
d. If farmers lose their jobs, where might they have to work?
e. Are villagers allowed to take timber from the wood land?
f. Will food prices be unchanged?







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