Driving the Country: Counter-Invasion Planning in Dorset, 1793-1803

by David Clammer

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‘Driving the country’ was the eighteenth century term for the systematic removal or destruction of any resources in an area that might be of use to an invading enemy: what today might be called a scorched earth policy. It was not a new idea. Such measures had been prescribed by a royal proclamation in 1779, during the American Revolutionary War, at a time when the combined Franco-Spanish fleets threatened an invasion of the Channel coast. With the outbreak of the French wars in 1793 however, and with the repeated invasion scares that reached their height between 1803 and 1805, the policy acquired a new force and urgency. Surviving documents allow a particularly clear insight into the preparations that were made in Dorset to implement this drastic policy, and show that the steps taken in the county anticipated Government policy, which the example of Dorset helped to frame.

Much of the Dorset coast is highly unsuitable for large-scale landings, and in any case far to the west of the main French embarkation port of Boulogne. Kent and Sussex were the obvious targets, and it may now seem that a ‘descent’ on the Dorset coast was improbable. However, it did not seem so to contemporary local opinion, remembering perhaps the lessons of the past. Much of the county’s coast had been raided by the French in the 14th and 15th centuries. The first action against the Armada had been fought off Portland Bill. Monmouth had landed at Lyme in 1685. The county felt itself to be in the front line. These fears were no doubt exacerbated by news of the abortive French invasion attempt at Bantry Bay at the end of 1797, and the successful landing at Killala in August the following year. Still more to the point was the fact that the enemy did manage to land a force at Fishguard in February 1797. What these attempts had in common was the fact that in each case the French had managed to elude the Royal Navy’s blockading squadrons. Perhaps they might do so in the case of Dorset.

As early as 1793 or 1794 Lord Rivers, the Lord Lieutenant, anticipated official instructions by drafting a memorandum of his own on the subject of driving the country, a concept that he said was based ‘in constant usage and sound policy.’ His words were addressed to the farmers and landowners of Dorset ‘and especially to those who have property on or near the coast’ outlining the dangers of invasion and calling attention to the measures it might be necessary to adopt in order to avoid panic and confusion in case of emergency. His message was addressed ‘not only to all the Gentlemen of the above description, but to men of all ranks, even to that of labourers.’

The first and chief matter to be considered, is, to remove from the coast immediately in danger of invasion, every article of live or dead stock [crops] that may be of use to the enemy, which whilst it disappoints and annoys that enemy, protects, and ultimately secures that stock to the owner.

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Rivers was well aware that even where receipts were issued to farmers and landowners to guarantee their stock, a huge amount of inconvenience would be involved. But in a crisis in which the public interest might require such drastic measures, he trusted that 'proprietors will consider the ultimate advantage resulting from this temporary inconvenience.' At this early stage Rivers made no reference to the evacuation of the population as a whole, or to the destruction of private property: that would come at a later date. But he did suggest that it would be necessary to assemble the appropriate men, with tools of all kinds, 'to demolish bridges, to render roads impassable and to throw up works of defence etc.' Lord Rivers' advice was initially followed up by the distribution of circulars to the farmers in the coastal parishes with a request that they should count their stock and decide where, inland, to drive their animals in case of invasion. Careful planning and preparation, said Rivers, were the best defence against the threat of invasion: 'By such timely precautions the confusion & panic which constantly result from sudden & unexpected attacks will be avoided, and every man may be found at his post in the employment allotted to him, free from hurry & alarm, and in perfect confidence'.

The problem was how best to implement this plan of civil defence. In Georgian times local government, as now understood, did not exist. The administration of the county relied instead on a network of officials, voluntary or elected, ranging from the Lord Lieutenant, one of the nobility appointed by the Crown, through the gentry, who occupied positions such as magistrates and deputy lieutenants, down to the humblest level of parish officials such as the overseer of the poor, petty constables and tithingmen. The outbreak of the long war with France, and the attendant threat of invasion, was to place a considerable strain on this peacetime civilian organization, as it attempted to implement a range of defensive measures, some required by government legislation, others, such as Lord Rivers' proposal to drive the country, local in origin. Neither the considerable Admiralty presence in the county, in the form of Sea Fencible detachments and coastal signal stations, nor the large number of Regular troops frequently stationed in the area had any involvement in these schemes. They were instead to be put into effect by a combination of civil defence planning combined with the efforts of the amateur local soldiers - the Volunteer infantry and cavalry.

Fortunately, one man was available to provide professional co-ordination and administrative skills to this essentially amateur structure. Edward Boswell, born in Puddletown in 1760, had been articled to a Dorchester solicitor before going into legal practice in Sherborne. The author of The Civil Division of the County of Dorset, a detailed account of the county's administrative organization and geography, Boswell's knowledge of how the county functioned was unrivalled. In 1793, the year the war broke out, he had been appointed Clerk of the General Meeting of the Lieutenancy – perhaps the Georgian equivalent of a chief executive officer. His would be a key role in planning the scorched earth policy.

1 Dorset History Centre, (hereafter DHC), DHC D/FRA x14
The Dorset gentry also responded swiftly to the threat of invasion, and by the spring of 1794 companies of Volunteer infantry were being raised all over the county, and at the same time Lord Milton raised a regiment of yeomanry cavalry, the Dorset Volunteer Rangers. Initially there were six troops, and by May 1795 the coastal areas had been roughly divided into six districts, each under the direction of the local troop captain, and extending six to eight miles inland. Richard Travers of Uploders commanded the area between Lyme and Abbotsbury, and Francis John Browne of Frampton the district from Abbotsbury to the Weymouth turnpike. From that road to Chaldon lay under the direction of Lord Milton's brother, Lionel Damer of Came, while the area between Chaldon and St Alban's Head was the responsibility of James Frampton of Moreton. R.E.D. Grosvenor of Charborough supervised the district from St Alban's to the Lychetts, and from there to the eastern boundary of the county fell to William Churchill of Henbury. As the war went on, several new Ranger troops were raised until there were ten, covering the whole county, which was divided more formally into defensive Divisions. This involved some alterations in the command of the coastal area. Churchill resigned, and was replaced by Henry Bankes, and his area was split between Bankes and Lewis Tregonwell, one of the new troop commanders. Grosvenor moved to command one of the new inland divisions, and his place in an expanded Purbeck division was taken by William Clavell, who was also High Sheriff. The shape of the remaining divisions was altered and much more closely defined, often by the pattern of the roads. This system, which covered about a third of the county, gave the Lieutenancy a convenient and efficient means of coordinating the responses of the coastal farmers, and one which minimized administrative costs. For example, Edward Boswell noted on 10 Sept 1796 'To arrange returns of live and dead stock along the sea coast from Lyme Regis to Easternmost boundary of the county into districts etc collected by the officers of Lord Milton's Corps from 86 parishes at 4d each. £1 8s 8d.'

The captains of the Rangers rode round their districts, or possibly directed some of their men to do so on their behalf, requiring the farmers to make returns of their animals and crops, together with the number of men they could deploy. Frampton, for example, appears to have visited every farmer in his area on this errand – a considerable undertaking. He recorded that there were only two or three farmers who made any difficulty. This may have been due to the social status of the yeomanry captains, or to the fact they were in a position to offer a real incentive: they had the authority to state that if returns were submitted, any stock destroyed would be paid for. However, no compensation would be forthcoming for stock that had not been officially listed.

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3 DHC D52/1
In the autumn of 1796, Captain Damer was issuing requests for information from 'the farmers residing in the several parishes on the Seacoast of the County of Dorset from Weymouth to Chaldon.' They were asked not only to list their live and dead stock, but were requested 'as early as possible to fix on proper places for driving these stock to, in case any Invasion of our coast should be attempted, the situation of the several places to be fixed on, is recommended to be north of a supposed line from Tincleton to Bockington [Bockhampton?] and from thence to Dorchester.' As an example, a farmer named James Wood wrote and signed his return in reply to this demand on 17 September. His farm was in the parish of Poxwell and Osmington, and about a mile and a half from the sea. He had 14 horses, 46 cows and 875 sheep. Although he had no beans, flax or hemp under cultivation, he did have 65 acres of wheat, 72 of barley and 35 of oats. Two acres were growing peas, and 95 were producing hay. Farmer Wood could mount seven men to help with driving livestock, and find three servants to wield picks and shovels. He had selected Kingston near Dorchester as the point to which he would drive his animals if there was a crisis, which was a distance of about seven miles.4

At the western end of the coast, Captain Travers was distributing similar requests for information about farmers’ plans, and recommending that the places of safety should be at least ten miles inland.5 Travers’ area consisted of 21 parishes comprising a total of 244 farms. Some of these were, of course, right on the coast, but Travers calculated that their actual distances, to the centre of each farm, varied from ¾ of a mile to 10 miles inland, and averaged about 2¾ miles from the coast. Captain Browne’s area, adjacent to Travers,’ had 16 parishes and 43 farms, varying from right on the coastline to some eight miles inland, with the average distance being a fraction under four miles.

In some cases, the inland locations chosen by the farmers to drive their stock to were still too close to the sea for comfort. Some indeed selected spots only two or two and a half miles inland from their farms. Others, perhaps with a more realistic idea of what an invading French army might be capable of, chose places 12, 14, 17 or even more than 20 miles inland. The average distance for Travers’ area was 6.9 miles, and for Browne’s, 10 miles inland.6

One reply to Travers indicated that the farmers were also taking into consideration the importance of being able to identify their animals in the event of a move inland. Edward Way, Joseph Stone, Thomas Chick and John Way, who farmed in the parish of Askerswell, declared their ‘concurrence with the Plan recommended by the Lieutenancy of this County’ and that they were resolved:

First — that we will use our accustomed Mark on our sheep, with the Letter A as the general Mark of the Parish.

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4 DHC D69/E3
5 DHC D29/x11
6 Minchinton, W E. Agriculture in Dorset During the Napoleonic Wars
Secondly – that we will mark our Cows and other horned Beasts with the Initials of our Names, and the Letter A as the General Mark of the Parish, burnt on the right Horn – and our Calves same Marks on the right fore-foot – and our Pigs with the Mark on the right fore-hoof.

Thirdly – that we fix on Eggardon Hill as the Place of Rendezvous for our Cattle and Waggons.\(^7\)

James Frampton was also well aware that the large-scale removal of livestock would require careful organization, and he accordingly drew up pages of detailed instruction for his troop to assist, so that nobody should be in doubt as to his role. First of all he allocated eight of his men, including George Boswell, Robert Alan and Robert Linnington, whose particular duty it would be to ride round assembling the rest of the troop and give notice to the farmers that driving the country was about to take place. Then he listed the names of the farmers to be alerted (some of whom were, of course, Rangers themselves) and their parishes. There was also a list of the men who were to make directly for Bere Regis, the place of assembly, and not to delay over the removal of animals. Bere was to be the place of rendezvous. Horses were to be kept ready, and the rest of the Ranger troop was to assemble there as quickly as possible with a greatcoat and two feeds of corn. Ball cartridges would be issued at Bere. In this way, Frampton hoped to minimize the confusion likely to take place in an emergency.\(^8\) Some idea of the scale of the problem may be gauged from the following figures:

\(^{7}\) DHC D.1/11730/4. Dated 1 June 1798

\(^{8}\) DHC D.29/ x13

### Table 1: Livestock in the coastal parishes, October 1796

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officer</th>
<th>Parishes</th>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Horses</th>
<th>Cows</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Pigs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>1238</td>
<td>3910</td>
<td>26,709</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browne</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>1498</td>
<td>20,830</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damer</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>22,521</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frampton</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>3196</td>
<td>22,231</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grosvenor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>1318</td>
<td>10,651</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>4251</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>86</strong></td>
<td><strong>654</strong></td>
<td><strong>4013</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,498</strong></td>
<td><strong>107,193</strong></td>
<td><strong>329</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total animals (less 50 deer which have been discounted): 124,130
Table 2: Area of crops in acres in the coastal parishes, October 1796

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Area (acres)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>9,999 1/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>9,496 1/4</td>
<td>Vetches (cattle fodder)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>6,738 1/2</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>368 1/4</td>
<td>Hemp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peas</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>Flax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>15 1/4</td>
<td>Hay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>9,999 1/4</td>
<td></td>
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<td>15 1/4</td>
<td>Hay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would have been particularly important to remove the horses, which would have been invaluable to an invader either as cavalry remounts or as draught animals for guns and wagons. They at least could have been removed quickly. The same could not have been said of the cows, and still less of the vast number of sheep. On the other hand, the returns also showed that there were 934 servants who could be mounted to assist with the driving, as well as 820 men on foot and equipped with picks and spades to break up roads and build defensive positions to delay an enemy advance. It is interesting to note the extraordinary precision of the crop returns — assessed to the quarter acre. It was clearly the intention of the Lieutenancy to deny the dead stock to the French (though the usefulness of crops would have depended on the time of the year the invasion took place) either by cutting and removing them or destroying them in the fields. Either option would have taken a long time, and would have depended on the number of carts and wagons available.10

The Dorset plans did not meet with universal approval. The Duke of Richmond, Lord Lieutenant of Sussex for instance, was very critical, and wrote to the government to express his concerns. He felt that the whole issue of driving the country was so complex that nothing but ‘Legislative Authority’ would suffice to organize it. He was worried about ‘a Plan for obtaining information of the Live and Dead Stock near the coast by means of the Voluntary exertions of the Captains of Yeomanry and Volunteer Corps, in imitation of what had been done in Dorsetshire’ and went on to point out that there would be ‘imperfections’ in the information gathered.11 No doubt there would have been, but he clearly underestimated the drive and efficiency of the Dorset authorities.

In official military circles, the Dorset preparations did meet with rapid approval. As soon as the rough figures were available, they were sent to the Lord Lieutenant, with copies to General Sir William Pitt, commanding the South West District, who forwarded them to the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of York. On 5 October 1796, York wrote to Lord Milton, thanking him for the zeal shown

9 Thompson, C.W., Records of the Dorset Yeomanry (Dorchester 1894) 20-21
10 Figures for individual parishes can be found in Minchinton, W E. Agriculture in Dorset During the Napoleonic Wars Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society, Vol. 77, (1955) pp. 162-173
11 The National Archives (UK) TNA, WO1/407 f 655-663. Richmond to Portland 24 Jan 1798
by the Volunteer Rangers in organizing the returns, and continuing: ‘As soon as
the system for driving the stock from the coast of Dorsetshire...is arranged in
writing [ie. finalized] His Royal Highness begs to have a Copy of it, in order that
similar measures may be adopted in other Districts.’

In fact, what might be regarded at the ‘Dorset system’ received considerable
publicity well beyond the army. William Morton Pitt MP, published (in London)
the first part of his *Thoughts on the defence of this kingdom* in 1796, which gave
details of the measures being taken in Dorset to organise the driving of the
country. The second part appeared in the following year, and the third part in
1803. On 1 May 1797, William Clavell, the high sheriff, used his ancient authority
to issue the county’s JPs with instructions to prepare to raise the *Posse Comitatus*,
that is the whole available strength of the county – in effect, *a levée en masse*,
which was accompanied by a schedule detailing how this was to be effected. The
removal of stock was mentioned briefly, and it was pointed out that it would be
necessary to ascertain the number of wagons available for the purpose, which had
not figured in the Rangers’ returns. In early 1798 W.M. Pitt published his *Epitome
of the plan relative to the Posse Comitatus adopted in the County of Dorset*. This had
the effect of giving Clavell and his preparations nation-wide publicity. Pitt’s
publication was referred to in a meeting of the Lancashire lieutenancy in March,
though not acted on, while Northumberland decided to adopt its
recommendations following its own meetings in January and March. And the
Dorset scheme was enthusiastically adopted in Buckinghamshire. The Lord
Lieutenant, Lord Buckingham, wrote to the high sheriff on 9 February 1798
warmly endorsing the plan: ‘A work having been transmitted to me entitled
Thoughts on the Defence of these Kingdoms by Mr William Morton Pitt,
containing Precepts, Warrants and Schedules under which a plan was digested a
few months since for raising the Posse Comitatus of the County of Dorset by their
very active and excellent High Sheriff Mr Clavell.’ Buckingham had already
communicated the plan to the general meeting of the lieutenancy, and issued a
summons for the magistrates and deputy lieutenants to meet him to discuss their
implementation in Buckinghamshire. And on 27 March Henry Dundas, the
Secretary for War, referred to Clavell’s initiative in the House of Commons.

The invasion scare reached its first climax in 1797, and the legislative
response, which the Duke of Richmond felt necessary, came in April the following
year in the form of an *Act for the Defence and Security of the Realm*. It was a plan

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12 Thompson, C.W., *Records of the Dorset Yeomanry* (Dorchester 1894) 22. As an example, the
Wiltshire lieutenancy adopted almost identical counter-invasion measures in July 1803, despite being
well inland. Livestock was to be driven from the area around Salisbury northwards towards
Beckhampton Down. Hobbs, S., *Home Guard: Preparations against Invasion in the Salisbury Area 1803*
Sarum Chronicle No. 6, 2006, pp. 2-6

13 DHC D.29/x10

No. 22, 1985

15 38 Geo III cap 27
both broad and detailed in its scope, and far-reaching in its effects, dealing not only with such matters as procuring land for the erection of beacons and batteries, and the training of volunteers, but with the enumeration of the county’s population and resources should driving the country be necessary.

This task was, of course, far too large and complex to be undertaken centrally, and was delegated to the deputy lieutenants and the sub-division meetings. Poole, the largest urban area in the county and relatively far from the centre, seems to have operated as a semi-independent sub-division, with its own deputy lieutenant and clerk. The main part of the county was organized into nine sub-divisions, being in numerical order Wareham, Wimborne, Blandford, Shaftesbury, Sturminster, Sherborne, Cerne, Dorchester and Beaminster. Each had a clerk and several deputy lieutenants, the number appearing to reflect the area to be covered. Wareham, Sturminster and Cerne each had three deputy lieutenants. Shaftesbury and Beaminster had four, while Dorchester had seven. With the exception of Dorchester, the county-town, where the meetings took place in the County Hall, all the meetings operated with an inn as their head-quarters – the Greyhound at Blandford, the Red Lion at Shaftesbury the Half-Moon at Sherborne, and so on, which was no doubt convivial as well as convenient. The deputy lieutenants were naturally all members of the gentry, and several were also magistrates or officers in the Volunteers or the Rangers. It is also worth noting that seven were members of the clergy.16

The Deputy Lieutenants were required amongst other things to find out:

...who shall be of the Age of Fifteen Years, and under the Age of Sixty Years; distinguishing which of them are, by reason of Infirmity, incapable of active Service, and which of them are engaged in any Volunteer Corps, and what Corps, and which of them are willing to engage themselves, to be armed, arrayed, trained, and exercised for the defence of the Kingdom, and upon what Terms; and which of them are willing to engage, in Cases of Emergency, either gratuitously or for Hire, as Boatmen or Bargemen, or as Drivers of Carriages or Horses, or Drivers of Wagons, Carts, or Cattle, or as Pioneers, or other Labourers for any Works or Labour which may be necessary for the Publick Service.

Also required were the numbers of people ‘who by Reason of Infancy, Age or Infirmity’ would be unable to remove themselves from harm’s way. This was vital because the Lieutenancy was also directed, in case of actual invasion, not only to remove live and dead stock, but to ‘give such Orders as shall be necessary for the Removal of the Inhabitants of any House, Hamlet, District, or Place’ including the very young, the aged and the infirm. Most draconian of all, preparations were to be made:-

16 DHC D52/6/143
...to destroy any Boats, Barges, Waggons, Carts, or other Carriages, Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Hay, Straw, Corn, Meal, Flour, or Provisions of any Kind, or any Thing which maybe of Advantage to an Enemy; and to remove, destroy, or render useless, any House, Mill, Bridge, or other Building, or any Matter or Thing whatsoever

that the emergency demanded. This was scorched earth indeed, but these rules were not to be enforced without compensation. The Treasury would appoint assessors to ascertain the value of what had been lost or destroyed, and to decide on the amount of compensation to be paid, if the owners agreed. If they did not, local JPs would be required to adjudicate and issue certificates of valuation to the Treasury for payment. The legislation had teeth: Any persons who ‘shall disobey an Order which shall be issued in pursuance of this Act, or shall obstruct or hinder the Execution thereof’ would be liable to a fine of not less than £5 and not exceeding £100, or would be jailed. The legislation was supplemented by the government’s Proposals for rendering the body of the people instrumental... also in 1798, which gave a great deal of specific guidance. It also envisaged extending the evacuation of the coastal area round the country as a whole, and defined the coastal strip as being 15 miles wide.17

If the coastal strip was to be denuded of its livestock and supplies, and the population moved to districts further inland, it would of course be necessary to feed them, and by 1798 the number, location and capacity of the county’s millers and bakers had become a special matter for concern. A large scale survey was conducted by the deputy lieutenants and published: An Abstract of the names and places of all the millers and bakers within the said county, together with the number of mills and ovens belonging to each; extracted from the returns of the petty constables and tithingmen, made on oath to the Lieutenant at their subdivision meetings held in the month of August 1798. This list, compiled by the subdivisions, hundreds and parishes, or towns and villages, gave a breakdown of the county’s bread-producing facilities. The Bridport division of the Beaminster subdivision had 17 mills and 32 ovens, for example. The Dorchester subdivision had 25 mills and 44 ovens, while in the north of the county, the Sherborne area had 21 mills and 30 ovens.18

But mills and ovens without wheat and flour would have been of little use, so the millers were required to state the quantities of grain they could furnish every 24 hours from their own stocks and from stocks which could be sent to them from within a ten mile radius, while the bakers were asked to state how many 3 lb loaves they could engage to produce every 24 hours ‘for a constancy, on an emergency’ and ‘by the help of additional Journeymen for a constancy.’ They were also asked

17 The full title was Proposals for rendering the body of the people instrumental in the general defence, saving their property, and distressing the enemy, by removing the means of subsistence from threatened parts of the country; as also for insuring the necessary supplies to His Majesty's forces, and facilitating their movements, in case of an invasion, without making expensive preparations. Published by authority, and printed by A Strachan, London. 1798

18 DHC L/B/1/1 Schedule 1

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the number of extra assistants they would require, the type of fuel their ovens used (wood presumably), and how much of it they would need every day. This was detailed contingency planning indeed.\textsuperscript{19} It appeared that across the county as a whole, the millers could grind 16,955 bushels of grain per week, and the bakers could produce 65,011 loaves every 24 hours.\textsuperscript{20}

As Table 1 above shows, the number of animals to be removed from the coastal parishes alone was huge, and it became apparent that not only would this require careful organization, but a high degree of discipline as well. On 10 Sept 1801, Edward Boswell, the Clerk to the Lieutenancy issued from Weymouth a General Order ‘to be strictly attended to by all Owners of Stock, and by All Persons who are to be employed in removing the Stock from the Coast of the County of Dorset in case of Invasion.’:

\begin{enumerate}
\item EVERY owner of Stock must begin to drive his Live Stock from off his Farm, as soon as possible after he receives an order for that purpose.
\item THE Live Stock is to be driven over the Commons or Fields wherever it is practicable, and is to avoid as much as possible the Great Roads which are to be left open for Waggons to be brought from the Interior to carry off the Dead Stock, and Persons who cannot remove themselves; and also for the passage of Troops, Artillery, etc.
\item IF the Live Stock of one parish should overtake the Stock of another Parish at any Bridge or Ford, it should Halt before the two Droves are intermixed, and not continue its march until the first Drove has got quite clear of the pass.
\item THE Stock of each Farm must keep precisely to the route here directed for it, and on no account vary from it in the smallest degree.
\item THE Stock must continue its March without stopping until it arrives at the Place of Halting, named in the Route.
\end{enumerate}

NB – Any inattention to the above Regulations would occasion the greatest confusion and delay, by the Stock of different Places crossing or overtaking each other, both of which are particularly to be avoided. \textit{No indemnity will be granted under the Act of Parliament for any Stock that may be destroyed, if it is driven or attempted to be driven by a different Route from that which is here laid down.}

And there was a sting in the tail: “The Regiment of Dorset Yeomanry Cavalry [ie the Rangers] is to see the same punctually executed, and to enforce obedience to them.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} DHC D52/6/62
\textsuperscript{20} DHC D/FRA x12
\textsuperscript{21} Thompson, C.W., \textit{Records of the Dorset Yeomanry} (Dorchester 1894) p. 39
Whether the other Ranger captains along the coastal area made elaborate plans to expedite the removal of live stock is not known, but Frampton, now promoted major, certainly did. It was not just the numbers of animals involved: there were even more horses, cows and sheep in Travers’ area for instance. Frampton was particularly exercised by the problem of Dorset’s principal river systems. The Frome, the Piddle and the Stour all run from north-west to south-east, and the first two lay virtually a right angles to the line of travel which the farmers in Frampton’s area would have to take to reach their inland depots. Frampton, with the attention to detail of a natural staff-officer, drew up a plan in 1801, which attempted to solve this problem.

There were three useful bridges across the southern-most river, the Frome, at Hurst, Moreton and Wool. Across the Piddle, the second obstacle, there were bridges at Tolpuddle, Affpuddle, Briantspuddle and Turners Puddle, and also a crossing at Chamberlayne’s Ford further east. Congestion at these crossing points, with flocks and herds converging on them from the south, had the potential for chaos. Frampton, listing the parishes from which stock was to be driven, and the depot towards which they had to move, drew up a detailed list of the river-crossings to be used. So the farmers from Ringstead were directed to cross the Frome at Hurst and the Piddle at Affpuddle for example, while those from East Knighton were ordered to use Wool Bridge across the Frome and to splash through the Piddle at Chamberlayne’s Ford. Whether the drivers of more than 3,000 cows and 22,000 sheep could have moved with the precision Frampton expected of them is open to doubt – but the plan was there.

As the war continued it became necessary to administer the lieutenancy subdivisions through smaller and more local areas each comprising ‘a certain Number of Towns, Tithings, and Places’ each under the direction of a superintendent or captain. These gentlemen were appointed with a view to their not having to travel more than five miles in any direction to fulfill their duties, and they were supplied with a list of the places covered, and the names of the constables and tithingmen in each. The superintendants or captains were ordered to familiarize themselves with The Plan and Proposals for rendering the Body of the People instrumental, and as the invasion threat began to work its way towards its crisis, Edward Boswell issued a fresh set of detailed instructions on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant, dated Dorchester, 17 August 1803 to guide them in their duties. A mere outline of the headings gives an insight into the complexities of the task represented by the defensive scheme. The superintendants or captains were required to:

1. Know the names of everyone in the area
2. The name and address of everyone in possession of wagons or carts, and riding and draught horses
3. Names of all millers and bakers and details of mills, ovens and supplies

22 DHC D/FRA x15
4. Numbers of livestock, quantities of deadstock and the names and address of the owners
5. Identify and appoint responsible persons aged between 17 and 55 not otherwise engaged, to act as their lieutenants or deputies
6. Select drivers of wagons and wagon conductors
7. Select persons to drive livestock and remove deadstock together with others to oversee the operation
8. Appoint guides both on foot and horseback
9. Select persons to act as pioneers, and form them into companies under suitable officers, and to list all available pioneer tools
10. List all persons actually engaged as Volunteer Cavalry, Infantry, Riflemen, Artillery or Sea Fencibles, together with all those between 17 and 55 not so employed, but who would be capable of bearing arms if it became necessary to raise the posse comitatus
11. To list those citizens incapable of removing themselves by reason of age or infirmity
12. To agree with the local farmers the daily rate to be paid by Government for the use of wagons and carts
13. To organize the routes by which livestock was to be driven to inland depots, and if possible to arrange for the animals in these parishes to be moved still further inland to make space.23

Each of these requirements was a major administrative task in its own right. That it was to be attempted by amateur gentlemen with little support is eloquent testimony of their determination to resist a French invasion. It is interesting to note that of the 72 superintendents or captains appointed, no less than 29 of them were clergy. Evidently this was a vital, but non-combatant, role that their social position fitted them to discharge.

In order to make the collection of this array of information easier, Boswell issued a series of precepts, containing clear instructions. Captains or superintendents of hundreds for example were given small printed tickets, or ‘forms of notice’ which they could issue to the men appointed as drivers of wagons, sheep or cattle:

*You are herby appointed a Driver of Cattle vis Oxen, Cows etc, and are to hold yourself in readiness to do that office as the case may require in case of Invasion.*

_Dated this ______________ day of December, 1803_

_Superintendent or Captain*_24*
The overseers for the driving of sheep and cattle were to see that the animals were marked with the initials of their owners, and the drivers were also to be numbered so that it would be possible to tell who was responsible for any particular herd or flock. Drivers were also to be informed of the names of the owners, where the animals were being pastured, 'and the bye roads, or rather the Line of Direction' along which they were to proceed inland. They were also to make arrangements to prevent groups of animal getting mixed up when the destination was reached.25

Similar precepts were issued in March 1804 to bakers, millers, wagon conductors and guides, overseers of the cattle and sheep drivers, leaders of pioneers and those charged with the evacuation of the helpless.26 In addition, the guides received special, detailed orders from Lord Dorchester, the new Lord Lieutenant: 'And I do command and require you to make yourself acquainted with all the Roads, Lanes, Footpaths, Bridges, Creeks, Rivers, Fording Places and other Communications...’ A tall order, and one needing extensive local knowledge.27

The number of personnel such a detailed scheme of defence would require was considerable, as is clear from a communication from the Lieutenancy Clerk to John Bond, the lieutenant of the Wareham division, in October 1803. On the basis of the information submitted, Boswell's office calculated that in addition to the eight superintendents or captains of towns and hundreds, Bond’s area would require ten overseers of wagons for the removal of the infirm, with 103 drivers. One hundred and sixty-six cattle-drivers and 17 overseers would be needed, while for the even more numerous sheep, 57 overseers and 285 men to drive were needed. Eight stationary stock agents were needed, with eight guides, 27 wagon conductors and 270 drivers. Also required would be three agents to millers and seven to bakers.28

There seems to have been considerable faith in the idea that if the French did land, their progress would be severely hindered by the breaking up of roads, destruction of bridges and the creation of obstacles. These were to be the work of the volunteer pioneers. This policy, indeed, had some official backing. In February 1801 a long memorandum from the Commander-in-Chief, and signed by Dundas, the QMG, to General officers commanding, stated clearly:

Nothing will more effectually disappoint and disconcert the project of an Invading Enemy, than the driving and abandonment of the Country and total destruction of the Roads for Twenty Miles round whatever point he made his landing at, or at least for several Miles on each side of the Route he meant to pursue. Could this be accomplished as easily as imagined, he would find himself in a Desert unable to advance.29

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25 DHC D52/4/103
26 DHC D52/6/167-176
27 DHC D52/6/68-78
28 DHC D/286/6
29 TNA, WO1/407 f. 465
It is difficult not to feel that this may have been a rather sanguine view of the situation, but in Dorset it was certainly taken seriously. Along with all the other enquiries went a demand to know not only the number of weapons the populace could produce, but the numbers of implements for the destructive work of the pioneers. In Frampton’s yeomanry district for example, it was discovered that there were 729 felling axes, 909 pick-axes, 1,709 spades, 765 shovels, 1,120 bill-hooks and 696 saws amongst other tools.\(^{30}\)

This enquiry was repeated across the county, and in Poole, the authorities came up with the following figures for weapons and tools available:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon/Tool</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swords</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pistols</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firelocks</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pikes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitch-forks</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill-hooks</td>
<td>4,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felling axes</td>
<td>989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saws</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spades</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shovels</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adzes &amp; hooks</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vices &amp; hatchets</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoes</td>
<td>4,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisels</td>
<td>1,269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was not made clear what “guns” implied; the term may have referred to the cannon used by the Poole and Brownsea Volunteer Artillery. However, it is interesting to note the number of weapons available amongst the civilian population.

The work of evacuating the ‘incapable’ was clearly a major element in the contingency planning – and a major problem. According to the ‘General View’ prepared by Boswell in May 1804, which summarised Dorset’s total resources, civilian, military and agricultural, the county as a whole had 28,144 people ‘incapable of removing themselves of both sexes from age, infancy, infirmity or otherwise.’\(^{32}\) Not all of these lived in the coastal parishes of course, but some returns have survived which allow an insight into the situation in the areas most under threat. One such is a schedule of the numbers of the ‘incapable’ in each of the eleven tithings of the Swanage second hundred for 1803.\(^{33}\) The document itself is a hand-drawn and written copy of a printed form, which itself speaks of the stresses of the time. There are some missing columns and some discrepancies in the figures – hardly surprising in the circumstances. Some men seem to have been included more than once, and allotted more than one task, but we can nevertheless gain an insight into the magnitude of the task of evacuation. In all the eleven tithings, the numbers of those unable to remove themselves (in other words of walking long distances) exceeded the number of able-bodied males, including the clergy and justices. In fact, they represented a significant proportion of the

\(^{30}\) DHC D/FRA x12  
\(^{31}\) A Levee En Masse, 1803 Doc 1 Poole Museum Service 1993  
\(^{32}\) DHC M6  
\(^{33}\) DHC D.150/1
population of each tithing, from 29% at Kingston to 53% at Whitecliffe. The average across the ten tithings for which the figures appear complete, was 38%, which, given the many other tasks to be performed, was a significant figure.

We cannot know how useful or otherwise the ‘unallocated’ part of the population may have been – males under 17 and over 55 and females of all ages. Had the French come, it is difficult to imagine that teenage lads or elderly men would have made no contribution. And the same would surely have been the case with at least that part of the female population inured to hard work in the fields. The authorities seem to have assumed neither of these groups could have had a useful role.

There was also the issue of providing sufficient wagons to move the aged and infirm. Another hand-written return dated 12 May 1804 of drivers, wagons and carts and persons not able to remove themselves for Corfe Castle, the second town of the Wareham division, and signed by William Hustens, one of the wagon owners, and by Robert Spencer, the wagon overseer for the removal of infirm persons, illustrates the difficulties. Seven wagon or cart owners are listed, each able to provide a single vehicle and driver (three were owner-drivers) and twenty horses between them. Corfe was listed as having 70 men not otherwise employed and capable of removing themselves; 268 women able to walk, and 236 infirm old men and women and young children not able to walk. In other words, 33 per wagon or cart, surely an unrealistic number.34 Despite the logistical problems involved, the Lieutenancy office found time to remind the overseers of their duty of care towards the evacuees. There must be:

...proper provision for the persons removed, and to determine on the places of refreshment and halting; and finally to make any previous arrangements for the accommodation and comfort of the aged and infirm men and women and also of the young children, taking care that the utmost attention and tenderness be used towards them on their march.

A note of humanity amongst the anxieties of the times.35

Amidst all these plans and preparations, it was not overlooked that in the event of the enemy landing, and a general evacuation and laying-waste of the coastal strip, it was very possible that disorder might break out. The Secretary of State had indeed issued instructions in November 1803 that ‘trustworthy Housekeepers and others’ were to be enrolled as special constables. In August 1804 these instructions were followed up with the issuing of Regulations for the Preservation of good Order to be adopted in case of actual Invasion.36

It was here that the local Infantry Volunteers were to play a role. It was directed that in each division of the county the remaining magistrates should sit daily at an

34 DHC PE/COC M133
35 DHC D52/4/102
36 DHC D52/4/139
appropriate place, and that they should be supported by an officer of the Volunteers, and by the superintendent of the local special constables. The Volunteers (assuming that they had not been deployed to confront the invader) would:

execute the Orders of the Magistrates in preventing and quelling Disturbances, in taking up and conveying Offenders to Prison, in supplying escorts for all Military Purposes required by the General or other Officer left in Command of the District, and in furnishing a Guard for the County Gaol or other Prisons if wanted.

It might be wondered how the normal imprisonment of offenders was to take place in the face of the French. They were also to ensure that local markets were kept functioning, to assist those persons who supplied the markets with produce, and if necessary to provide escorts for the safe passage of cattle and other provisions.

The Volunteers were also to provide patrols to assist the local constables in ensuring the local inns were orderly, and if necessary to close them down. They were also to apprehend ‘unknown persons who cannot give a satisfactory account of themselves’ and take them before the magistrate. The special constables and the Volunteers were also to patrol their own areas in the hours of darkness.

The Proposals for rendering the Body of the People Instrumental were re-issued by Lord Hobart to the Lords Lieutenant of the maritime counties in a circular dated Downing Street, 24 June 1803 and driving the country within fifteen miles of the coast was still regarded as a vital measure as the invasion threat intensified. The Royal Navy would cut the enemy’s communications, while ‘the Army will confine him on Shore in such a Way as to make it impossible for him to draw any Supplies from the adjacent Country.’ Stripping the coastal area of all supplies would be essential to achieve this outcome:

How much the Accomplishment of this Object will be facilitated by driving away the Live Stock, and consuming, or in case of absolute Necessity, destroying all other Means of Subsistence in those Parts of the Country which may be in imminent Danger of falling into his Possession, is too evident to need any Discussion.37

It remains, however, to consider whether these draconian measures would have worked. It seems unlikely that the sheer number of animals – especially the tens of thousands of sheep for which Dorset was so famous, could have been moved to their inland rendezvous points with the flawless efficiency which James Frampton, amongst others, planned for. It is equally difficult to believe that crops, either standing in the fields or harvested in barns, could have been completely removed or totally destroyed even given the considerable number of wagons and carts that were certainly available. And it seems doubtful that the pioneers allocated to the task could possibly have destroyed the mills, bridges and other

37 House of Commons Parliamentary Returns 1803-04, Vol XI

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important buildings, and have broken up the roads and created obstacles in the
time available, especially in the absence of explosives, of which there was never any
mention. The evacuation of the large numbers of the old, young and infirm unable
to remove themselves also seems doubtful of success. The plan probably failed to
take sufficient account of the enemy. The marching capacity of the French troops
was immense, and a 15 mile zone of devastation is unlikely to have proved an
impassable barrier. Moreover, their capacity to live off the land was legendary.
When a brutal scorched earth policy was implemented in Portugal in the autumn
of 1810, when Wellington retired within the Lines of Torres Vedras, Massena was
still able to maintain his army in an area apparently denuded of all resources far
longer than the British commander expected.

The main problem, however, was time. The policy of clearing the coastal area
might possibly have worked had there been enough notice of a French ‘descent’.
Major-General John Moore, (later Sir John Moore of Corunna fame), who was
commanding a brigade immediately opposite the main French embarkation port
of Boulogne, was equally doubtful. Writing on 1 July 1803 to Sir David Dundas,
commanding the southern district, he put his finger on what was probably the key
point: ‘If ten days’ or a fortnights’ notice [of invasion] were to be given, it might
be practicable. A few hours’ notice, in all probability, is all we shall have.’ Driving
the country would then be impossible. He went on: ‘England is a country so well
stocked, that no effort will remove to any distance the means of subsistence. It may
be laid down as an axiom, that as long as the enemy is permitted to stand on
English ground so long will he subsist on English property.’ Only horses and
wagons, Moore believed, should be removed. The only solution to invasion was
to attack the French with all available strength and defeat them as close to their
landing places as possible.38

The idea of driving the country as a counter-invasion measure was ruthless in
its conception, and in the case of Dorset at least, planned with equally ruthless
attention to organizational detail. Whether or not the reduction of the coastal area
of this fertile and productive county to a smoking and depopulated desert would
have had any significant military effect may seem unlikely. But in the long
perspective of the past, we may perhaps see the people of the time poised between
the threats of Philip of Spain and Louis XIV on the one hand, and Hitler on the
other, and the fact that such a measure was seriously contemplated and planned
for, is testimony to the utter determination of the people to resist the invader.