The Agricultural Revolution

Other Practices

In the mid-18th century, two British agriculturalists, Robert Bakewell and Thomas Coke, introduced selective breeding as a scientific practice (mating together two animals with particularly desirable characteristics) and using inbreeding (the mating of close relatives) to stabilize certain qualities in order to reduce genetic diversity. Arguably, Bakewell's most important breeding program was with sheep. Using native stock, he was able to quickly select for large, yet fine-boned sheep with long, lustrous wool. Bakewell was also the first to breed cattle to be used primarily for beef. Previously, cattle were first and foremost kept for pulling plows as oxen or for dairy uses, with beef from surplus males as an additional bonus. As more and more farmers followed Bakewell's lead, farm animals increased dramatically in size and quality.

Certain practices that contributed to a more productive use of land intensified, for example converting some pasture land into arable land and

recovering fen land and some pastures. It is estimated that the amount of arable land in Britain grew by 10-30% through these land conversions. Other developments came from Flanders and and the Netherlands, where due to the large and dense population, farmers were forced to take maximum advantage of every bit of usable land. The region became a pioneer in canal building, soil restoration and maintenance, soil drainage, and land reclamation technology. Dutch experts like Cornelius Vermuyden brought some of this technology to Britain. Finally, water-meadows were utilized in the late 16th to the 20th centuries and allowed earlier pasturing of livestock after they were wintered on hay. This increased livestock yields, giving more hides, meat, milk, and manure as well as better hay crops.

New Agricultural Tools

An important factor of the Agricultural Revolution was the invention of new tools and advancement of old ones, including the plough, seed drill, and threshing machine, to improve the efficiency of agricultural operations.