

STRIP FIELDS AT SHERBORNE ST. JOHN, 1816-17.

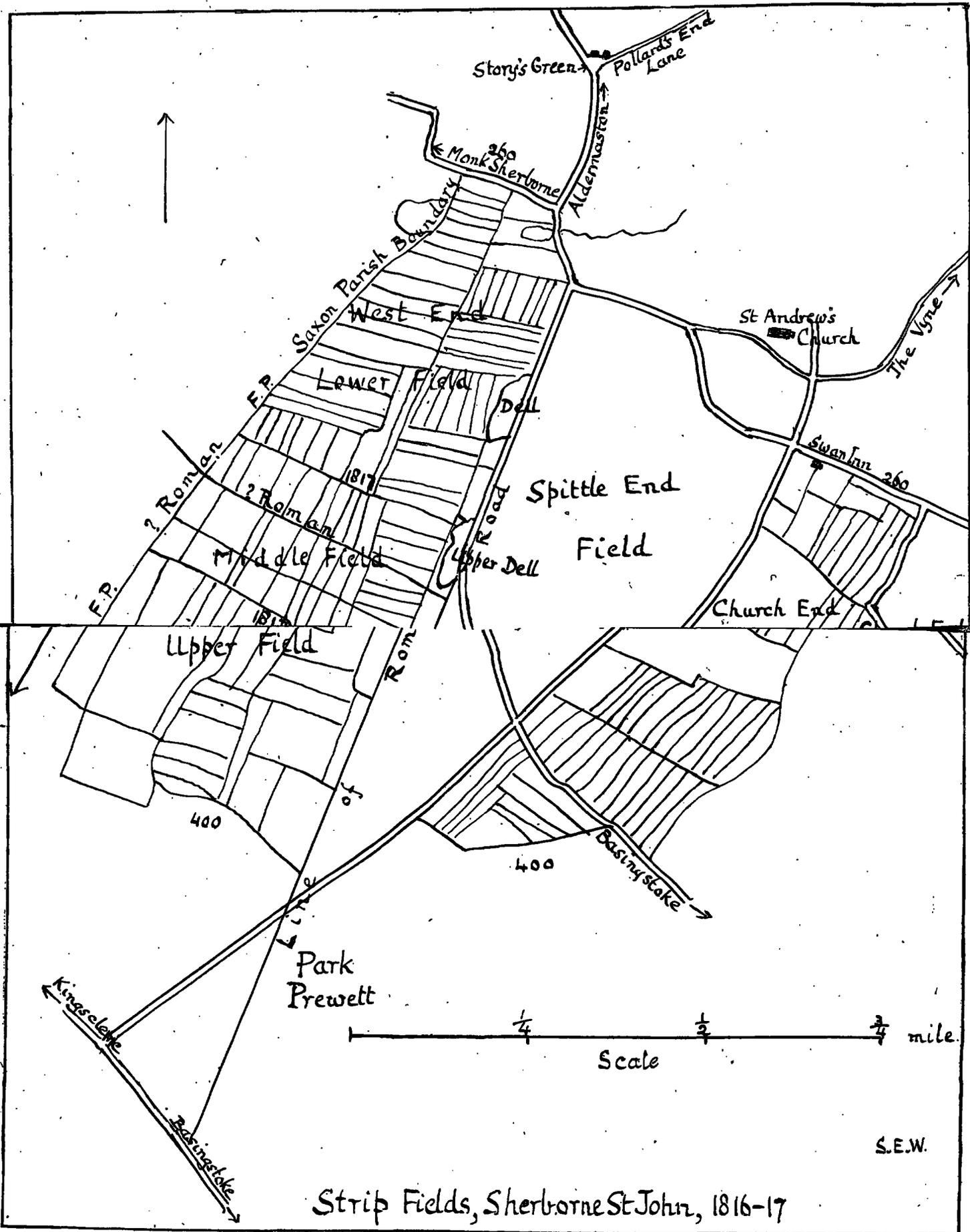
By S. E. WINBOLT.

THE two tracings of photographs of maps in the possession of Mr. C. L. Chute, of The Vyne, represent the strip lay-out of two big common fields at Sherborne St. John in 1816-17. The maps were very difficult to photograph owing to the fading of the colours distinguishing the strips, though with a glass can be made out many of the details, such as the names of the various owners. The drawings are meant to be supplementary, and merely to show more clearly in a general way the pattern, and not to reproduce accurately the number or limits of the holdings.

There can be little doubt that the system of cultivation by narrow strips in common fields was a survival of an original Anglo-Saxon lay-out of the land. In spite of many economic changes it continued right through Norman times, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and so on well into the eighteenth century, as at Basingstoke, and even into the nineteenth at Sherborne. Much of the countryside of those days must have looked like a modern allotment field on a big scale.

One map is of Church End Middle Field, 1816. The base at the North end is along the road by the *Swan Inn* for about 400 yds., whence the field extended south-west for 1450 yds. along the Elm Bottom Cross—Rooks Down Road which formed its western boundary. The eastern boundary marched between it and Church End Great Field. It was about 460 yds. at its widest. An average strip was about 200 yds. by 30 yds. ($1\frac{1}{4}$ acres); some were much shorter or longer, and many rather over $\frac{1}{2}$ -acre. There were 72 plots, lying mostly N.E.—S.W. The great majority of the narrow strips were in two zones towards the S.W. end, abutting on the Basingstoke—Aldermaston Road. There were only two big portions in the lower (N.E.) half, both belonging to W. Chute, one the so-called 'eighteen acres,' the other the 'sixteen acres,' each being nearly two acres less; but such names are apt to stick in spite of changes. Both were parcels of the Manor Farm, and may represent, either, parts of the original demesne, or the tendency for the strips to come into the hands of fewer owners. Some plots were 'Donation Land,' payments in respect of which were made annually to both Sherbornes for poor relief. Chute and Brocas owned by far the greatest number of the plots, but seldom grouped together.

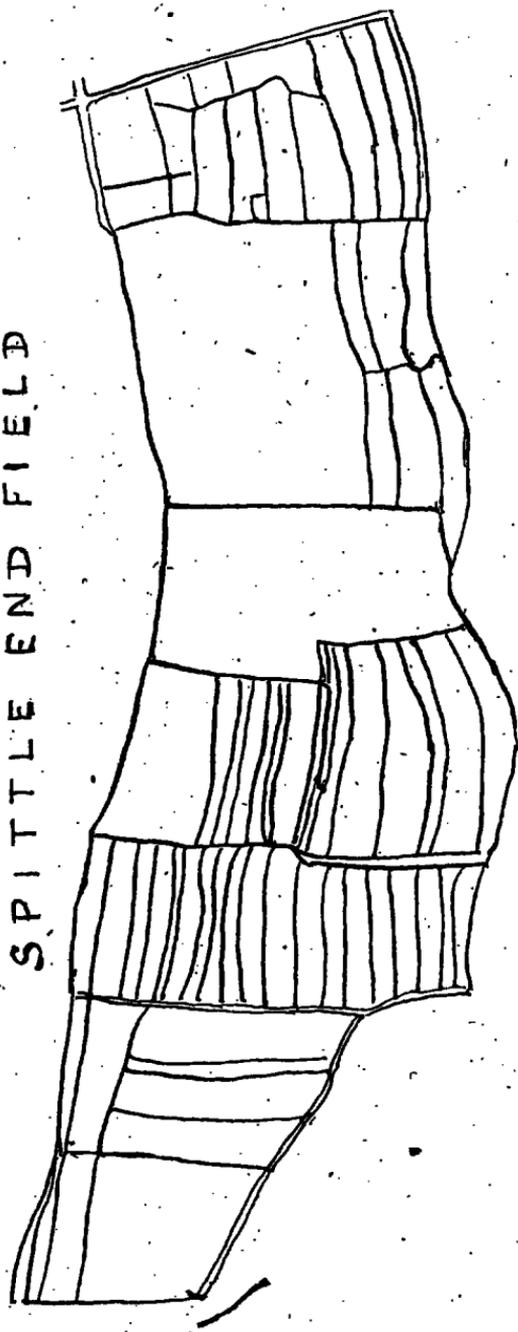
The other map is of West End Fields, 1817, based in the North on Monk Sherborne Road for about 90 yds. from the Aldermaston Road corner. The fields extend up hill from N.N.E. to S.S.W.



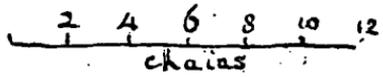
Strip Fields, Sherborne St John, 1816-17



SPIITTLE END FIELD



S.E.W.



SHERBORNE ST. JOHN
EASTERN STRIP FIELD, 1816

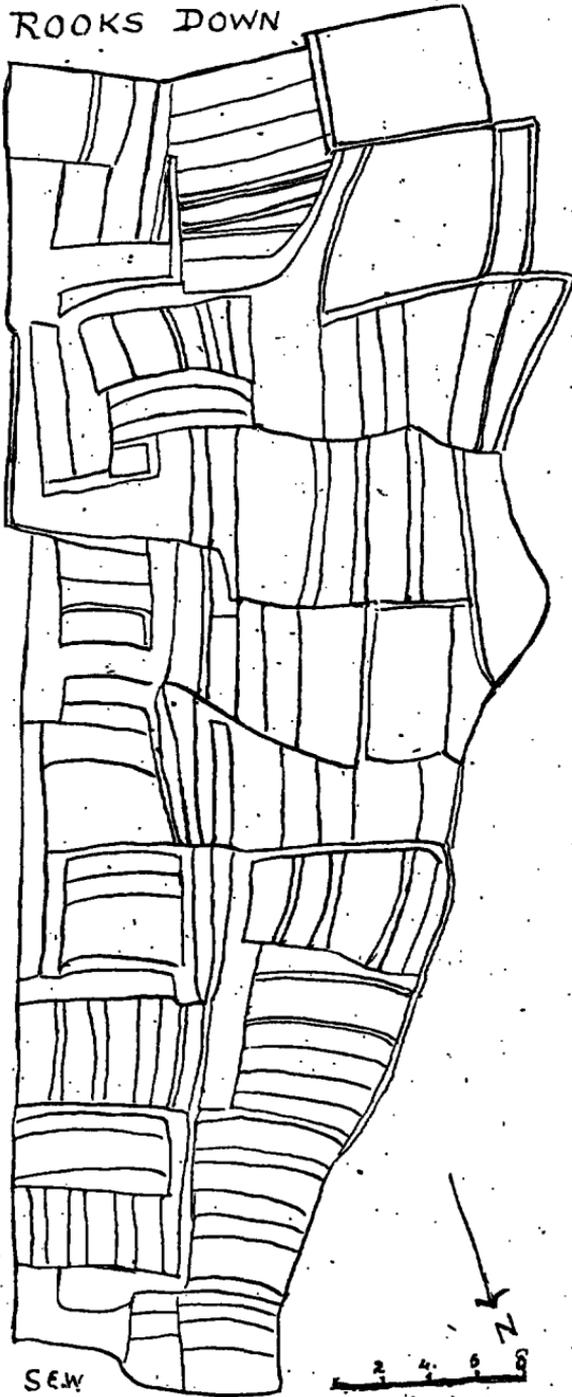
to Rooks Down for 1 m. 150 yds., with greatest width, at the western bulge of the path, of about 725 yds. The length is in three main divisions of unequal fields, Lower, Middle and Upper. The East and West boundaries were as to-day: the East, the line of the Roman road for 1680 yds. S. from Dixon's Corner, the West, the long path from the Monk Sherborne road to the Kingsclere road. The strips, of about the same size as in Church End Middle, *i.e.*, mostly a big acre or half-acre, are arranged in length now E.—W., now N.—S.; and there are only six or seven bigger plots, the largest (10 acres) belonging to Brocas. The great majority of pieces belong to Chute or Stubbs. Lower Field, 790 yds. long, was divided into 71 pieces, Middle, 395 yds. long, into 30, and Upper, 660 yds., into 62—163 in all.

Both these field groups start in characteristic Anglo-Saxon style from the Weybrook and clay land, and climb the chalk slope from altitude *c.* 260 to 400ft. The prevailing acre and half-acre sizes of the strips, and their setting in Saxon (if not Roman) boundaries, suggest that the system is a Saxon survival. Though by 1817 the majority of the plots had, probably over a long period, come into the hands of fewer owners, their plots are thoroughly shuffled in Saxon style, so that any one owner seldom has two or more contiguous strips.

The Sherborne fields are admirably illustrated by the similar case of the Hitchin (Herts) common fields, also mapped in 1816, as described by Seebohm in *English Village Communities*. This elaborate piece-meal arrangement was brought to an end at Sherborne by an Enclosure Act of 1831-2, though towards the end of the eighteenth century in most districts the plots were gradually being grouped into larger units of ownership. Sherborne held out till very near the end. The Sherborne St. John Tithe Apportionment map of 1840 shows the complete effacement of the strips.

[It was not possible to reproduce the photographs successfully, but only the tracings therefrom.—Ed.]

ROOKS DOWN



S.E.W.

2 4 6 8
Chains

SHERBORNE ST. JOHN
WESTERN STRIP FIELD, 1817.