

Warnham Historical Society

Contribution No. 12

Some Recollections on Farming in Warnham 1850-1950

by Richard Wilks

The Napoleonic wars had brought prosperity to the English countryside owing to the demand for corn. Over 60% of the land in Warnham Parish was arable, more than is the case today (1985). The wet heavy Weald clay was not very suitable for wheat, but French prisoners of war were employed to lay tile drains, many of which are still running today. However, by 1850 the days when the farmer, mutton bone in hand and red kerchief round his neck, could stand at the back door and bellow across the yard at his stable lad to bring his hunter were beginning to pass. The Farm workers had not benefitted much from the prosperity.

The former manorial lands had by this time been enfranchised and most of the land in the parish of Warnham was owned by three or four major landowners who had moved into the area from London and elsewhere, whilst most of the mainly small farms in the area, as elsewhere in England, were tenant occupied.

1850 was the beginning of the golden age of the sporting squire and large estates. The English countryside is largely man-made and most of the woodlands and copses we value today were laid out to provide cover for foxes and game for hunting and shooting, and the wealthy landlords provided work for the declining agricultural population as domestic servants, grooms, gardeners, foresters and gamekeepers and besides this these gentry were considerable benefactors of the parish and much was done by Mr. Broadwood of Lyne, Sir John Pelly and after by Mr. C.T. Lucas and later still, Sir Henry Harben to improve the lot of the farming community as they bought in the many small farms which in most cases had existed from the 17th and 18th centuries. It was thus still a very closed community.

Wealden roads were dreadful so travelling was minimal. Many would never travel to London in a lifetime or see the sea at Brighton more than once, if that. Villages were tight communities, largely self-sufficient with farming the main industry. Kelly's Directory of 1855 lists 23 farmers in the parish of Warnham. They and their workers required all the necessities of life to be available within walking distance. The many surviving footpaths originate

from the short cuts to Church, shop or beerhouse. At that time, besides a post office, Warnham boasted a grocer, butcher, tailor, several boot-makers or cordwainers, a blacksmith, a wheelwright and a timber merchant, the original J & S Agate timber works which moved to Horsham after the railway came to Horsham. The blacksmith was, of course, one of the most important trades, shoeing the horses and repairing farm implements. With no welding available, bolts and rivets were used to join metal together and a good smith could heat together two pieces of mild-steel to become one. There was also a beerseller in Friday Street at what is now the Greets Inn and two public houses, the Sussex Oak and the Wheatsheaf (now Cromwells) at Kingsfold. Enormous quantities of ale were consumed and many farmers brewed their own. At Haytime and Harvest this was provided for their labourers, not only to replace their sweat and keep them happy, but to provide the necessary carbohydrates for their long hours of toil.

With this lack of mobility it is not surprising that the same local names of farmers keep cropping up over the decades, such as Agate, Charman, Muggerridge, Nightingale, Redford, Stanford, Linfield, Freeman and several more which occur in Warnham from generation to generation. There was no doubt that infiltration of new names from Irish labourers and itinerant young single workers seeking seasonal employment came from time to time, but by and large the population was static. At Bailing Hill Farm there are definite signs of habitation, not only in the attic of the farmhouse, but also over the cartshed, which is the beautiful building in the middle of the farmyard. Single men would probably be lodged free and fed once a day in the Farmhouse by the farmers wife. Many were hired on an annual basis at Fairs.

By 1870 times were becoming harder for farmer and worker alike. A general reduction in the corn acreage occurred as American and Canadian wheat started to come in from the prairies at a very competitive price. The land went back to pasture and grazing. The number of independent farms decreased, as shown in the census of 1871, to 16, as will be seen in the Appendix to this note. This, however covers only about 2500 of the 6000 odd acres of the parish under cultivation. The rest was held in park land or in hand by the large estates.

All operations were carried out by hand. The milking was done mainly by the farmers' wives and children. Corn and hay had to be cut by scythe and horses did the ploughing and cultivation. These great animals ate a lot of food, so many acres had to be devoted to pasture and oats to maintain them. Oxen were still used in Sussex up to 1900, usually Sussex cattle, which were strong, quiet and provided beef eventually, their dams being used for milk production.

There were no chemicals or fertilisers so that with less labour

affordable crops became inundated with weeds through lack of labour. That great observer of the rural scene around London, Richard Jeffries, wrote about 1875 "The quantity of thistles in the barley fields is hardly credible" and "whereas the general experience is notoriously that farming is not profitable".

Mechanisation had to come. One great innovation was the arrival of the steam traction engine fitted with a winch. This would park on the headland of the field, always assuming that it did not get bogged in the clay, and pull a three-furrow plough by cable backwards and forwards across the field, doing many more acres in the day than the three or four horses required to pull a single furrow. These machines also toured the farms in winter threshing the corn from the stacks, a vast improvement on the previous system of a horse walking round and round driving, through a crown-wheel gear, the thresher. The first steam threshing machine in Warnham was owned by Albert Agate in 1865, farming at Bailing Hill. In 1880 Moses Muggerridge ran a steam engine from Maltmayes.

Mr. R. Linfield remembers an occasion when Mr. Agate's steam thresher was working at Strood Park when he, Mr. Lindfield, spent the whole day carting buckets of water on a yoke across his shoulders from Strood Lake to feed this machine.

A team of at least 10 men was required to cart coal and water, feed the machine with sheaves, bag off the corn and cart it away and others to handle and stack the straw. Later a stationary baler was used to cope with the latter.

Next came the corn drills to obviate the hand sowing with a "fiddle" and the mower and binder, both of which would cut ten times more in a day than a man with a scythe.

Mr. Piper and his two sons, Ben and Eric, who farmed at Bailing Hill farm until 1918 used one of the early binders there, a 4'6" cut Albion, pulled by three horses, two abreast and one in front, the latter being led so that it did not tread on the headland sheaves at the corners. He later purchased a 6' cut Massey Harris. Mr. Piper always bought his working horses from London Breweries and very fine animals they were.

By present standards yields of grass, corn and milk were all very low and it was still customary to leave some fields fallow each year, ploughing them several times through the summer to kill the weeds and build up fertility. Lime to adjust the soil acidity had to be carted by horse and cart from the chalkpits of the North and South Downs.

At the turn of the century conditions on the farm were hard. Mr. Eric Linfield, who was a chauffeur at Warnham Court from 1926-35,

remembers the times when his father was a carter at Strood Park farm for 44 years. In 1912 wages were 15 shillings (75p) per week. The farmer was Mr. Strachan and he kept 5 cows and had standings for 39 bullocks to be tied up and fattened over the winter. The rations were chaff (chopped straw), hay and slabs of linseed and cotton cake, which had to be ground up by hand; also mangolds and swedes. The rain would sometimes penetrate the hay stacks, making it musty with mould, so that molasses had to be added to make it palatable to the beasts. Good hay was £6.00 per ton and much was sold in trusses of half a hundredweight, compressed in a hand-operated press.

Mr. Strachan ploughed with horses using a steel plough, but his fallow fields he always ploughed with a wooden "Guildford" plough.

There were seven hay wagons on the farm, all with broad wheels to prevent them sinking into the clay. They were loaded by pitchfork and to obtain the necessary height one man stood half-way up the load in an alcove of hay, facing outwards and took the truss of hay from the man on the ground, raising it over his head and up the ladder. Ale and cider were always available in the hay and harvest field, kept cool under the hedge with the green grass to cover them.

Milk was produced largely for local consumption and it was not until the arrival of the railway in Warnham in 1867 that things began to look up as it opened up the London market to daily deliveries. Some enterprising farmers, such as the Lovells of Somerset set up their own dairy business in London to deliver butter and cheese direct to the shops, thus cutting out the middle man. Up to this time most of the local farmers had persisted with their beef cattle. The arrival of the railway in Warnham gave a considerable boost to the local dairy industry and it was at this time that several far-sighted farmers moved into the district from the West Country. Rents were only £1.50 per acre, compared with £3.50 in Somerset, combined with an extra two old pence per gallon for milk sent to London. Amongst those who came to take advantage of the new market in London at the expense of the city's herds of cows which were kept inside all year and never saw a blade of grass, was Mr. Horace Corp who came from Glastonbury in 1897, renting Broomlands Farm from the Warnham Court estate. He hired a train for all his live and dead stock to travel direct to Warnham. He had 30 shorthorn cows, later expanding to 60, a very big herd for those days. Milk was sold by the Barn gallon (2 imperial gallons plus one pint) and in 1900 he received 6d (2 1/2p) per Barn gallon.

Mr. Cliff Jackson came to Warnham as a boy of 14 in 1915. He recalls that at this date most of the local farmers were in a bad way, farming mostly beef and arable and that they were

impoverished. Gradually their farms were taken over by men from other counties with more up to date ideas and many of the older Warnham farming families were leaving the area for other activities. The Jacksons also hired a special train to transport their 50 cows and followers, 5 horses and their farm machinery, bringing also 3 workers with them.

The first world war gave a temporary boost for farming. More land had once again to be ploughed up. Tractors were being built, largely in the United States, and mechanisation could have helped but with shipping at risk at sea supplies being imported were limited.

Hardly had the war ended than agriculture was once more plunged into depression.

At this time many of the facilities we now take for granted were still not available. Minor roads were not made up with tarmac and farms had no mains electricity or main water. Most farmhouses were lit only by oil lamps or candles and water was pumped up daily from the wells. There was no mains water to the fields, the cattle drinking from ponds which were usually sited at the corners of fields to give access to more than one field. When these dried up water had to be brought in from the river by horse and cart. Mains water did not arrive in Warnham, via Broadbridge Heath, until 1933.

By 1930 agriculture in Warnham was suffering from the nationwide depression. Farms could be rented for little or nothing and the labourers were on subsistence wages.

The price of corn was on the floor and farmers went back to a "dog and stick" existence, spending nothing and using what grass grew naturally to graze their cattle or sheep. By 1931 it was possible to buy a gallon of milk and a dozen eggs for one shilling (5p).

In 1933 the Milk Marketing Board came into existence and for the first time dairy farmers had a guaranteed market and an efficient marketing organisation which transformed the industry. Standards of milk production and hygiene were improved and the industry built up to a level which continued to be the backbone of farming within the parish for the next 50 years.

The late Mr. Francis Winchester, who worked at Bailing Hill as a cowman for many years, recalled how at these bad times his mother, being a widow with several children, took in washing. The children went to school in ladies shoes bought at a jumble sale for a few pence, from which she removed the high heels. The only meat they had was rabbit, usually poached with snares set on the

way to school. Fortunately from their point of view the countryside at this time was overrun with rabbits and several hundred were shot in a day in Warnham Park by a shooting party.

The workers were isolated by distance and quite unable to cooperate in strikes though one did occur in 1927. The wage for a 50 hour week was £1.25p. Those who lived in tied cottages dared not protest, since if they lost their job the farmer could legally have them evicted to make way for his new employee. It was not until 1947 that the Agricultural Act gave farm tenants security of tenure, but still not the workers.

In the 1930s the farmers with dairy herds in the central area of the parish were Mr. Leslie Holton at Bailing Hill, who took the farm, as he said, "with only 6 pence in my pocket", Mr. Corp at Broomlands and Rookwood, Mr. Hodgson at Westons and the Gregsons at Ends Place. There were also dairy herds at Field Place and Warnham Place. Up to this time the Warnham Court Farm had been farmed for the Lucas's largely as an amenity to provide dairy products and meat for the big house by Mr. Harris, who had taken it over from Mr. Nash, but in 1934 death duties demanded it be let. Mr. & Mrs. C.F. Luckin took over the tenancy. The acreage at Warnham Court was about 200 and included the land at Knob Hill, the village green and the land where the Council Houses and the allotments are today. A large Barn, called Hollands Barn, stood behind where Stanfords yard now is and is where he lambed his ewes. Mrs. E. Luckin recalls turning out late at night with a lantern to attend them. There were no street lights at that time. when the cows were being grazed on the west side of the farm, behind the vicarage, they would be walked down Church Street to be milked and this was a regular sight.

Mr. Luckin came from Thakeham. He recalled that as a boy sheep purchased at Lewes Fair would be driven along the roads over the Downs home to Thakeham. There were few vehicles on the roads, so cattle and sheep would be driven long distances along them.

On arrival at Warnham he found stabling for 10 horses and he employed six men, three of whom were cowmen for 45 cows. Being the Home Farm, Mr. Luckin had the use of electricity and water from Warnham Court, the water being stored in two tanks on the farm and the electricity supplied by generator.

The cropping was roots, corn and pasture for the cows. His first tractor was bought in 1938 - a Fordson Standard. His milk was collected by a haulage contractor, a Mr. Pearce of Dorking, and some went to Horsham Dairy and some to Purley in Surrey.

Threshing was done, at first, by a steam threshing machine hired from Mr. Searle and amongst the casual labour requirements was

the landlord of the Greets Inn, then only a beer house. The supply of coal for the machine was the farmer's responsibility and a horse and cart had to be sent to Billingshurst to fetch it.

Mr. Luckin had a great knowledge of Shire horses, since his father had bred them. Both he and his son, Tom, who now farms Broomlands and Rookwood as well, have always had a fine eye for livestock and in 1957 won First prize at Horsham Christmas fatstock show with a Sussex steer, an unusual victory over the Aberdeen Angus.

At the outbreak of war in 1939 the War Agricultural Executive Committees were formed in each county, with local representatives drawn from local farmers. These representatives visited farmers in their area and advised them how to increase output, cajoled them into ploughing up pastures for corn and generally dealt with crises. Mr. Luckin soon found himself with one when a German incendiary bomb set fire to the large barn that stood opposite the eastern end of Friday Street. He lost all his winter fodder. Mr. Lucas's Warnham Court fire engine turned out, but to no avail. The Local "War Ag" representative was Mrs. Molly Gregson at Ends Place, whose wide knowledge of the countryside and its occupiers, which she had gained as Master of the Crawley and Horsham Foxhounds stood her in good stead. She knew almost everyone. The local committee, chaired by Sir Merrick Burrell of Knepp Castle, were contacted and finally head office at Chichester issued a permit for Mr. Luckin to buy fodder. All he was able to obtain were five lorry loads of straw from Essex. This meagre ration did nothing to improve his cows' milk yield.

On one occasion Mrs. Gregson telephoned Mr. Luckin and said she had been allocated 1500 sheep, arriving by train the next day, because the authorities were flooding Romsey Marsh to discourage a German landing. How many could Mr. Luckin take? He had little grazing available so he telephoned the secretary of the cricket club with a view to putting some on the cricket field. With a typical English sense of values the secretary regretted that it was impossible since they had a match next Saturday!

In 1938 Phillip Barr farmed at Marches Farm, Kingsfold, Ted Burgess at Andrews Farm, Turner Bros at Warnham Place, William Hillacre had succeeded Mr. Corp at Broomlands, Mr. H.J. Lambert had Joanlands and Mr. Batchelor, Tickfold Farm - almost all still familiar names to most Warnham residents in 1985.

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 we were importing most of our food. The threat of maritime blockade required that food production at home should be increased, so that farmers slowly became more prosperous. Although farming was a reserved occupation, many young men had joined the forces so that labour was very short on the farms. Thus the Women's Land

Army was formed. Girls and young women from all walks of life found themselves in a strange environment, doing men's work, and doing it very well. One such was Mrs. B.E. Phillips who came to Bailing Hill in 1943 to work as a landgirl for Mr. Leslie Holton. She was lodged in the little wooden bungalow, now derelict, with the cowman and his wife and child. There were three rooms, a kitchen and outside toilet. The dwelling was connected to the farmyard by a path of railway sleepers laid in line. Mr. Holton milked 34 cows and employed two men and two landgirls, whose hours of work were 5.30am to 5pm, plus overtime in the summer. Mrs. Phillips's first job in the morning was to light the dairy boiler to provide hot water to sterilise the milking equipment after use. She was also responsible for clearing out and feeding the calves, chopping up Mangold Wurzels with a hand chopper and a multitude of other tasks - hoeing, haying and harvesting. She had every other weekend off.

There was one tractor and one horse on the farm. The girls had to learn to hand milk and were sat down under an old quiet cow for anything up to two hours at a time, often until their hands were swollen and muscles ached. Eventually they would get the knack.

A landgirl's wages were £2.50 per week, of which they paid half back to Mrs. Holton for their lodging.

Student girls also came and went, one arriving to work at 5.30am in full make-up, lipstick, eye-shadow and all. After two hours under the old cow it was all running down her face and she was told to go and wash it all off. Mr. Holton telling her that the cows did not need wooing and adding "nor does the bull". The latter lived in the cowshed with the cows, all tied up of course, and was exercised daily on a bull pole, usually up Robin Hood Lane and home again.

However, it was not until after the war had ended that the major revolution in agriculture took place and the farmers of Warnham were naturally a part of this. The 1947 Agricultural Act showed the way ahead for increased production. By the end of the period in 1950 agricultural chemicals were beginning to appear and Harry Ferguson had invented the hydraulic system for tractors, which revolutionised both farm mechanical work and mobility. Thus the scene was set for the end of food rationing, the almost total self sufficiency of the UK in temperate food production, the continuous fall in the cost of food and, of course, the food surpluses of which we hear so much today.

APPENDIX

The Census of 1871 shows the following:-

Active Farmers

<u>Farm</u>	<u>Occupier</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Employing</u>
Tickfold	Henry Charman	155	3 Men 1 Boy
Den	James & Thomas Charman	250	3 Men 2 Boys
Brookhouse	John Walder	60	2 Men 1 Boy
Stone	Richard Nightingale	360	9 Men 3 Boys
Joanland	John Muggeridge	130	3 Men 1 Boy
Cradles	Benjamin Muggeridge	177	3 Men 1 Boy
Old House	Ellen Muggeridge (widow)	100	3 Men 1 Boy
Ends Place	William Churchman	336	13 Men 2 Boys 2 women
Sands	Mary Stanford (widow)	80	3 Men 1 Boy
Cyder Mill	Matthew Muggeridge	16	1 Man
Street Farm	John Agate & 2 sons (Also Timber Works : Now Old Manor)	102	16 Men 2 Boys
Cox	John Holland	117	3 Men 1 Boy
Andrews	Henry Henley	47	1 Man
Westons	William Nash	250	9 Men 2 Boys
Broomhouse (Broomlands)	William Wood	254	7 Men 2 Boys
Rookwood	Peter Parkhurst	100	2 Men 1 Boy

This accounts for only 2534 acres of the 4920 acres of the Parish of Warnham, plus 102 of the 126 agricultural workers shown elsewhere in the census as resident in the village. However, this does not include some of the larger holdings with farming land attached owned by the larger landowners, e.g. Warnham Court, Warnham Lodge, Northlands and Field Place. Kingsfold, Shiremark, etc, are not shown as farms, probably because they were not resident in the Parish on the day of the Census.