
OPEN FIELD FARMING IN LAXTON

A Snapshot in Time:
Laxton in Peace and War, 1900–1920



MARY HAIGH

Laxton History Group would like to thank the following people for their help with their project, "A Snapshot in Time: Laxton in Peace and War, 1900–1920", funded by the The Heritage Lottery Fund:

For hours of reading and recording a variety of sources; Dik and Joy Allison, Cynthia Bartle, John and Brenda Chambers, Roger and Joan Cottee, Jo Godson, Mary Haigh, Astrid Harvey, Roy and Jean Hennell, Jeff and Pat Naylor, Chriss Rose, Bridget Smedley and Heather Storton.

For talking to us about family memories; Vernon and Jean Bartle, Colin Cree, Vaughn Godson, Roy Hennell, Linda McNaught, Arthur Frecknall, Stuart Rose, John Rushby, Mavis Beckitt, Brenda Chambers, Janet Cooke, Rosemary Crothers, Jenny James, Margaret Noble, Margaret Rose and Jacqueline Smith. For talking about farming; Bill, Pat and Robert Haigh.

Dik and Joy Allison for the indexing and digitalization of our findings. Professor John Beckett for conducting the interviews and for his encouragement during this Project; Roberta Purlé and John Smith for their kind hospitality when we conducted the interviews; Linda and David Brown of the Dovecote Inn for allowing us the use of their premises for interviews.

The following people have given permission for their photographs to be used; Dik and Joy Allison, Brenda Chambers, Roger Cottee, Janet Cooke, Catherine & Rebeccah Brunyee, John Littler, Linda McNaught, the Bodleian Library.

We would like to extend our thanks to all of the members of Laxton History Group for their continuing encouragement, their hosting and catering of our events, their supervision of exhibitions and their good advice and local knowledge which they shared freely with us.

Book design by Andy Columbine / andycolumbine.co.uk

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INTRODUCTION

The survival of the open-field system of agriculture was already of interest to historians at the turn of the 20th century. Members of The Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, visiting Laxton as part of their 1902 Autumn Excursion, were furnished with a succinct summary of the old communal practice of farming by Mr. R. W. Wordsworth, resident land agent to Earl Manvers' Thoresby Estate:

'Laxton open-fields contain roughly 900 acres in all, divided into approximately 1,200 plots. They are cropped in rotation, thus: One field, white straw; one field, pulse or clover; one field, bare fallow. Each of the tenants, of whom there are thirty, has a certain acreage in each field, and most of them small pieces dotted about, so as to give them a bit of each class of soil which the field contains, and there are many. To have one acre in any one part is considered quite a large piece; many do not occupy half that quantity. There are juries chosen annually to go over each field to see that the commons interspersed in them are not encroached upon, and that no one ploughs nearer the road than he should.'

Pictured

View of Laxton Open Fields looking towards the West from above Copthorne. Clockwise from bottom left – South Field strips corn harvesting, Mill Field strips cultivated fallow, West Field in distance beyond the village

There are many old words in use in the parish in connection with these fields, which no doubt are becoming obsolete, such as “sick” (or syke), “stenting,” etc. The former is a grass baulk, the latter the place where two “lands” abut on each other, and the person who ploughs last turns his plough and horses on the other man’s land, which is already ploughed, much to his detriment. How they all know their proper pieces is a marvel.

There is an old saying in Laxton, that if you are first in the field with your harvest cart and last with your muck cart or plough, you are sure to be right. They are a peculiar people. The village is divided by the church into what are known as “up the street” and “down the street,” and these two parts are distinctly antagonistic to each other. The only time they combine is when a stranger ventures to take land in the parish, then they all pick him like a flock of crows.’

Those visitors will have been among the last from outside of the village to witness the historic arrangement of the open fields prior to the major restructure of the system managed by Mr Wordsworth.

Finally completed in 1913 this reorganization leaves the footprint of the three great open fields we can see today.



AT THE TIME THE
GREAT FIELDS WERE
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FARMING THEN WAS
FOR SUBSISTENCE.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LAXTON OPEN FIELDS

ORIGINS

Clues as to the origins of Laxton are contained in the old names for the village; Laxintune or Lexington – the tun, or farm of the people of Leaxa, which implies a sixth to seventh century Anglo-Saxon settlement. There may have been a Viking influence as some of the old terms such as syke, toft, flatt, gait, and wong used in connection with the agricultural arrangement of the village are Danish words dating from this time.

The written history of Laxton begins in 1086 when described in the Domesday Survey as follows:

'The Land of Geoffrey Alselin 'In Laxintune Tochi had 2 carucates of land [assessed] to the geld. [There is] land for 6 ploughs. There Walter, a man of Geoffrey Alselin's, has 1 plough and 22 villeins



Pictured

Ploughing at Laxton, 1635. Detail from Mark Pierce's map shows a horse leading a pair of oxen pulling a wheeled plough

and 7 bordars having 5 ploughs and 5 serfs (servi) and 1 female serf (ancilla) and 40 acres of meadow. Wood[land] for pannage 1 league in length and half a league in breadth. In King Edward's time it was worth 9 pounds; now [it is worth] 6 pounds.'

This entry indicates a possible total of 720 acres of arable land was under cultivation and 40 acres of meadowland were available for mowing. There was a considerable extent of woodland providing acorn and beech-mast pasturage for pigs. In addition, within the manor, there would also have been waste and scrub available for common grazing and providing materials for fuel, fencing and building. With an adult male population put at 35 it is believed around 120 people would have been living in the village.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE OPEN FIELD

At Laxton the soil is a friable clay type, now known as Keuper Marl. Whilst capable of holding its moisture this soil could be adequately surface drained for arable farming by creating ridge and furrow. It worked like this: 'Ridges' were set up down the middle of the entire length of a 'land' by the ploughman.



He first opened a top by turning anticlockwise at the end of the initial furrow and taking the return furrow-slice away from that one. He then turned and went back along the second furrow-slice in the opposite direction throwing it inward. Finally he returned back up the first one turning the soil inward against the other furrow slice, thus closing the top and forming the ridge. After that he would plough round and round with the plough's mould-board turning slices of soil over to the right and towards the ridge. Where two lands adjoin the last furrow-slices of each were therefore turned away from one another and this produced the 'furrow.' Repeating this work year after year along the same ridges resulted in the lifting of the soil from the outsides towards the middle giving rise to 'high-backed lands.' Rainwater ran readily from off the rounded ridges into the furrows and where the 'lands' followed the natural slope of the field would trickle away to discharge into a dyke or stream.

Pictured

Remains of ridge and furrow at Red Dykes. In 1635 this was the part of West Field called Lowsing Hill. At that time, it was divided into 9 strips and two small closes. By 1891 these had all been combined to form a 10 acre grass field



Pictured

Early twentieth century ploughing of 'lands' at Laxton

The width and length of a 'land' was dependent on factors such as the heaviness of the soil and on the geography of the field.

From the stub-ends of the ridge and furrow which remain on South Field a 'land' at Laxton would have been no more than 10 yards (9m) wide. A strip on the Laxton Open Fields may have comprised no more than a single, long 'land' or could have consisted of two or more shorter 'lands'. In either case it would have been as much as could be ploughed in a day by a team of oxen.

A group of strips, generally sharing the same orientation with regard to drainage into a dyke or a stream, was dubbed a furlong (or sometimes a flatt). Eventually the furlongs were organised to form East, West, South and Mill Fields.

THE THREE FIELD SYSTEM

At the time the great fields were being laid out the majority of the country's population was involved with agriculture in some way or another. Farming then was for subsistence. Each community had to supply its own requirements for staples such as bread, milk and meat.



Co-operation between neighbours would have been essential for the initial breaking of the land by plough. An individual villager's share of strips, scattered to provide a fair distribution of both good and poor land, would not have been sufficient for him to maintain his own plough team. Rather, in return for his contribution, be it the plough itself or an ox for the team, he would have been entitled to have each of his plots of land ploughed, alternating with those of the other partners.

An early form of crop husbandry recognised that land could not produce good corn crops year after year as its fertility became reduced and it became choked with weeds. The answer was to give land

Pictured

*Harvesting in Harwick
Cloase, Laxton, 1635*



Pictured

Weeds

a period of rest, the bare fallow. Not that the bare fallow was a rest for the farmer as the land was actively cultivated, ploughing up to six times during the summer to destroy pernicious weeds and bury manures.

This approach evolved into the three-course rotation. Land prepared during the fallow was available for autumn planting of the wheat crop. Once this was completed the farmer moved on to ploughing up last season's wheat stubble in preparation for spring sowing. A variety of crops may be sown at spring, for example barley for bread or brewing, oats, peas or beans. After two crops the land returned to bare fallow for one year.

The Three Field System at Laxton imposed this rotation on four open fields, with East and West Fields put together in the cycle.

The most important, and possibly the only, crop entirely allocated for livestock was hay. Meadow land was set aside for mowing and allocated in doles, representing roughly one days mowing with a scythe.

After the crop had been cleared those with rights to mow could turn out livestock to graze during the rest of the summer.

Elsewhere, those with the appropriate entitlement could graze livestock, subject to restrictions, on the grass commons, on roadside strips and wastes, on the open field stubbles and tethered on the sykes.

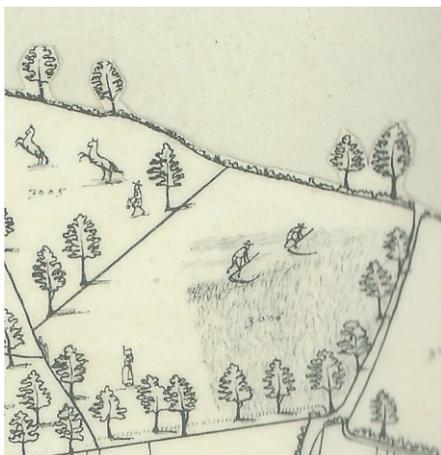
Administration of the open field rules was under the jurisdiction of the Manor Court.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

We have a detailed picture of how the agricultural land was arranged more than five centuries after Domesday in the form of a map accompanied by “A booke of Survaye of the whole Mannor and Lordshipp of Laxton with Laxton Moorhouse”.

Prepared in 1635 by Mark Pierce for the new Lord of the Manor Sir William Courten, these documents supplied full details of every holding for use in an appraisal of his investment. The whole manor at that time extended to 3853.27 acres, including 333.44 acres at Moorhouse.

The boundaries of the great fields plotted on the map contain almost half of the parish land area and probably represent the maximum extent of the medieval open field system:



Pictured

Top: Haymaking using hand rakes, 1635

Bottom: Cutting hay with a scythe, 1635

Field	Area of Open Field*	Parcels of land	Number of Furlongs	Area of land In closes	Area of Sykes
West Field	418a 2r 14p	492	30	72a 3r 30p	25a 2r 9p
East Field	134a 3r 16p	241	13	5a 2r 32p	
South Field	507a 2r 35p	748	25	47a 1r 31p	30a 0r 16p
Mill Field	833a 2r 2p	799	36	348a 1r 28p	24a 3r 39p
Total	1894a 2r 27p	2280			

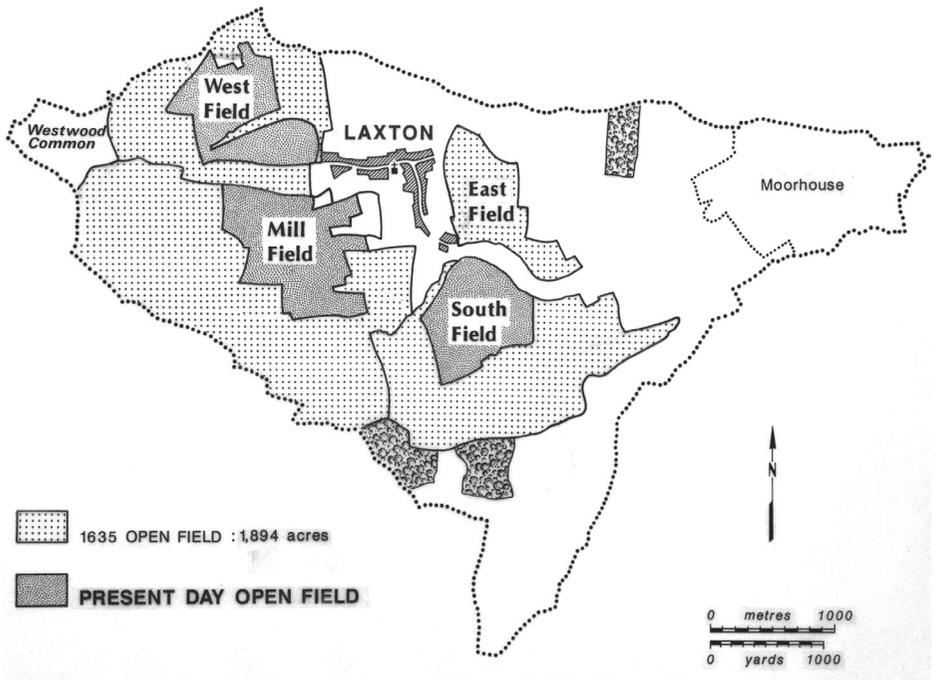
*see glossary

By 1635 the process of enclosing furlongs on the outer fringes of the Open Fields had already begun. This was most apparent in the far West of Mill Field next to Ompton Common & Westwood Lane, and at Hall Flowers, Foulesyke, Nabbing Close and next to Shitterpoole Lane and continuing round in the south towards Brockeley Side. Taking into account these enclosures together with the areas of the sykes and waste the extent of land under open arable cultivation was actually somewhere between 1300 and 1400 acres, divided into 2143 strips and baulks having an average area of around 0.6 acres.

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The distance a farmer needed to travel out from Laxton village to reach his furthest strips or closes could be between one and two miles. One solution to this problem would be to create new holdings in the partially enclosed fringes of the parish.

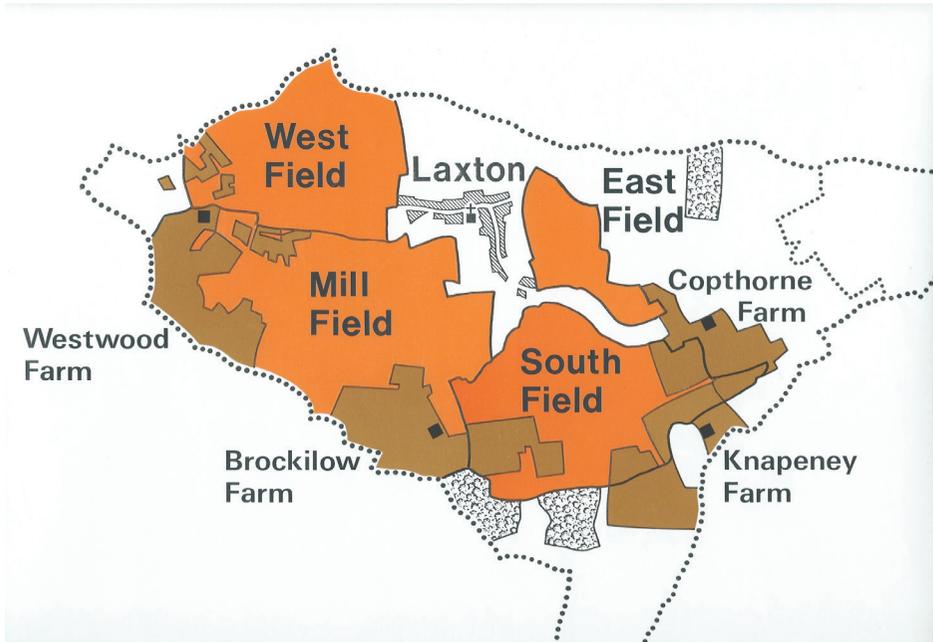
In the 1720's Laxton manor had been in the hands of the Pierrepont family (Earls then Dukes of Kingston) for eighty years during which time they had made further acquisitions and exchanges of land as well as clearing and enclosing areas of woodland.



This enabled them to layout four new farms: Westwood Farm, adjoining Westwood Common; Brockilow Farm to the south of Mill Field; Copthorne Farm and Knapeney Farm to the East and South East of South Field. In each case the holding was made up from existing closes, infields created by the enclosure of a number of strips to become a part of the farm and some 'lands' remaining in the open field nearby. A total of 169 acres of strips came out of the open fields to form these farms.

Pictured

Laxton, showing the extent of the open fields in 1635 compared with the present day



Pictured

The four new outlying farms of 1729

NINETEENTH CENTURY

The arable open fields in many of the villages surrounding Laxton underwent enclosure by Act of Parliament in the first half of the nineteenth century; Egmonton and Kirton in 1821, Norwell in 1826, Ossington in 1836 and Wellow in 1840. Finally the Moorhouse Enclosure Act went through Parliament in 1849, with the work being completed in 1860.

A new survey of Laxton was commissioned in 1862 by Sidney Pierrepont, who had recently succeeded to the title of 3rd Earl Manvers. In his report Thomas Huskington impressed the need for enclosure:

'The greatest cause of depreciation in the present value of this Estate and the one impediment to all Improvement, is the existence of the right of Common, and the uninclosed condition of the Open Fields. Until Inclosure, no substantial

improvement is possible. The Land cannot be drained with advantage, Buildings cannot be central, Farms re-allotted or the Lands renovated by seeding and pasturing with Stock, and the present miserable waste of time, labour and money must continue.

It is quite melancholy to see so fine a Property as this, capable of being made one of the best Estates in the district, comparatively unproductive and left subject to rights and usages so ancient and barbarous that their origin is lost in antiquity, and so adverse to improvement that the only two cases now remaining in the Midland Counties are Laxton and Eakring.'

During the 1860's Manvers brought the manor of Laxton effectively into single ownership when he agreed land exchanges with the Denisons of Ossington and the Saviles of Rufford. The larger of these transactions, completed in 1867, saw Henry Savile exchanging 778 acres of land, including all of his Laxton property, for 753 acres in Eakring. However, the enclosure of Laxton and the expense this would have incurred, was not a high priority in Lord Manvers' mind as he had commenced building his new Thoresby Hall.

In 1891, data from the Ordnance Survey was used by Earl Manvers' Estate office to compile an up to date terrier of land and property holdings. A memorandum at the end of the schedule details:

'The Parish of Laxton contains by the Ordnance Survey – 4006.665[acres], divided as follows. In Laxton 3672.881. In Moorhouse 333.748. Earl Manvers' property – In Laxton – totals 3153.551.

There are 87.096 acres of Commons in Laxton, and 82.649 acres of grass Baulks in the open fields.

Lord Manvers is Lord of the Manor of Laxton and Lay Rector.

The apportioned Tithe Rent Charge payable to the Vicar is £161.11.3 – and the living is a Vicarage in Earl Manvers' gift.

Tithe & Land Tax are both paid by the Landlord.

There are 25 Parish Gardens containing about 48 perches each on an average.

The Parish is unenclosed – the four open fields contain:

*Earl Manvers property 885.890 Other Freeholds
44.665 Total 930.555[acres].*

There are 104 Common Rights of which 92 belong to Earl Manvers' Tenants and 12 to other Freeholders.'

The 3rd Earl continued to add to his estate.

LITTLE CLOSE

At Michaelmas 1892 a piece of land, simply recorded as [Field] No 409 South Field arable 2.401 [acres] was bought from the executors of John Burkitt. Sitting in the middle of South Field and similar in size and shape to adjoining strips this area is something of a curiosity as it is surrounded by a hedge. It is now known as Little Close (or sometimes as Parson's Field).

Reference to the old maps indicate the strip was enclosed sometime between 1862 and 1885 when it was ascribed an individual field number (409) on the Ordnance Survey County Series Nottinghamshire 1:2500 map of that year.

The previous owner, John Burkitt lived on the site of what is now Moorgate Farm and farmed a total of 15 acres. The enclosure of the Little Close therefore appears to have been an ad hoc undertaking to meet the needs of a private owner, farming on a very small scale. After John Burkitt's death the tenancy of his holding was taken by his grandson, George Burkitt. Little Close was included in this letting and has continued to be cropped outside of the three field rotation by the tenant of Moorgate Farm.

1900

At the dawn of the new century Earl Manvers owned all but 18 ½ acres of the four open fields.

The ancient crop rotation continued:

	East & West Fields	South Field	Mill Field
1900	Fallow	Wheat	Spring Sown Crops
1901	Wheat	Spring Sown Crops	Fallow
1902	Spring Sown Crops	Fallow	Wheat
1903	Fallow	Wheat	Spring sown crops



Pictured

*The 4th Earl and
Countess Manvers
with their children and
Mr R.W. Wordsworth,
Land Agent (far left)*

THE LANDLORD AND HIS AGENTS

4TH EARL MANVERS

Charles William Sidney Pierrepont, 4th Earl Manvers, inherited the Manvers Estate on the death of his father in January 1900. His tenure of Laxton covers the whole of our snapshot in time and continued until his passing in 1926.

Lord Manvers was in a position to sanction the reorganization of the open fields as by 1906 the Estate had bought out all the other owners of strips. The last two pieces acquired were on South Field and amounted to 0.985 acres. These came as part of Primrose Farm, a total of 26.79 acres purchased for £600.

The Manvers Estate was not only interested in the agricultural land but also bought in cottages, some of which had been owned by its farm tenants. When George Weatherall left New Bar Farm in 1903 he sold 2 cottages with an orchard, 7 acres on the open fields and 9 acres of other land to the estate.

The Title to the cottages included a common right and two gaits. When six cottages and an orchard next to the Dovecote Inn were purchased from George Bagshaw in 1911 a further common right and two gaits were acquired by the estate. In this way Lord Manvers also built up control over the common rights.

The 4th Earl's landed estate was administered under the direction of two resident agents Mr R. W. Wordsworth, who was followed later by Mr H. D. Argles.

MR R. W. WORDSWORTH

Recalled by Edith Hickson:

'The Steward, Mr Wordsworth, was a connection of the Lakeland poet of that name and he was always reckoned to be a thorough gentleman who was to be looked up to.'

At the turn of the 20th century Robert Wordsworth was included amongst the Nottinghamshire Gentry. He was the son of Charles Wordsworth, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld & Dunblane (1852-1892), who in turn had been a classical scholar at Oxford, taught at public schools in England and Scotland before becoming a priest. Bishop Wordsworth's legacy to us in modern times however derives from his sporting activities and takes the form of a national institution; the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race which he instigated in 1829, rowing in the winning Oxford crew. Robert Wordsworth's illustrious relatives also include his great uncle, the poet William Wordsworth and his uncle Christopher Wordsworth, Bishop of Lincoln (1869-1885).

Born in St Andrews in July 1849, Robert Walter Wordsworth was educated at Trinity College, Glenalmond, Perthshire and Winchester College.

Before succeeding Mr H Horncastle as chief agent for Earl Manvers' Thoresby and Holme Pierrepont Estates in June 1883 Wordsworth had first trained under Mr. J. Ritchie, C.E., Perth, 1869-73; then worked on the Earl of Wemyss's estates, East Lothian, 1873-75; was factor at Gartmore, Perthshire, 1875-78; and assistant agent at West Dean, Chichester, 1878-83. He was a Fellow of the Surveyors Institute and a member of both the Royal Agricultural Society and Highland Agricultural Society.

Robert Wordsworth married Blanche Amelia Turing in July 1886 at St Jude's Kensington. His bride was the second daughter of Sir Robert F Turing, 8th Baronet of Chilgrove, Chichester. Their home was at Whitemoor House, Perlethorpe. They had two children; Blanche Katharine and Robert James.

Active within the community Wordsworth served as Councillor for Perlethorpe cum Budby on the old Southwell RDC and church warden at Perlethorpe St John the Evangelist.

Robert Wordsworth died "still in harness" on 27 April 1914.

MR H. D. ARGLES

Frank Moody recalled:

'Mr Argles became Estate Agent for the Earl, he was a very active person, to be seen on horseback, or his bicycle as he carried out his duties.'



Pictured

*Wedding of Lady
Sibell Pierrepont and
Mr H.D. Argles*

Hubert Davys Argles was born in York on 28 May 1879. He was the son of Rev George Marsham Argles, Rector of St Mary Bishop Hill Junior, York.

Educated at Charterhouse School Hubert Argles then went up to Balliol College, Oxford in 1898. After graduation he is recorded as 'pupil of Land Agent' at Nunthorpe, York.

H D Argles was recruited as an assistant Land Agent by Earl Manvers' Thoresby and Holme Pierrepont Estates in 1909. He was promoted after Mr Wordworth's death and continued as Agent until his retirement in 1950.

From early 1916 until the end of the war Lieutenant Argles saw service with the 3rd County of London

Yeomanry attached to HQ 3rd Cavalry Division in France. During this time he returned periodically to manage the Estate which had been left under the day to day supervision of his clerk, Alfred Spink.

In April 1923 Hubert Argles married Lady Sibell Pierrepont, youngest daughter of the 4th Earl Manvers. The couple lived at White Lodge, Thoresby Park, before retiring to Holme Pierrepont Hall. They died within three days of each other in January 1968.

**FROM EARLY 1916 UNTIL
THE END OF THE WAR
LIEUTENANT ARGLES SAW
SERVICE WITH THE 3RD
COUNTY OF LONDON
YEOMANRY ATTACHED
TO HQ 3RD CAVALRY
DIVISION IN FRANCE.**

of an Estate in the Parish of
LAXTON
IN THE COUNTY OF NOTTINGHAM
being to His Right Hon^{ble} the Earl Mansfield.

1862.



Pictured

1862 Plan of Laxton
Estate. Ma 5420

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WORDSWORTH'S TASK
OF RE-ALLOTTING 1162
OPEN FIELD STRIPS WAS
NOT MADE ANY EASIER
WHEN HE DISCOVERED
GEORGE WEATHERALL
AND OTHER TENANTS
HAD 'EXCHANGED
LANDS A GOOD DEAL'



REORGANIZATION OF THE OPEN FIELDS 1903–1913

The architect of the reorganization of the Open Fields was R.W. Wordsworth. His plans had to reconcile the practical needs of the farmer tilling the land with an increased use of mechanisation with the likely return to the Landlord on his investment in improvements to the system. As an intermediary between Earl Manvers and the tenant farmers Wordsworth was called on to display clear vision, skills in diplomacy, steely determination and mathematical genius.

R.W. Wordsworth had been in post as Land Agent for 20 years when, in 1903, he wrote to all the tenants explaining how he hoped to restructure the open-field system to make it *'more convenient for the tenants who hold land.'* The task of re-allotting 1162 open field strips was not made any easier when he discovered George Weatherall and other tenants had *'exchanged lands a good deal.'* From the beginning he insisted that his proposals should be accepted unanimously.



Memorandum of Agreement made the

day of One thousand nine hundred and three **Between**
The Right Honorable Charles William Sydney Earl
Manners of the one part and all The Tenants and Occupiers
of land in the Little Field at Eaton in the County of Notts of the other
part **Whereas** the Occupiers of Land in the Little Field at Eaton have
 heretofore enjoyed the privilege of jointly stocking the open land in the said
 Little Field after Harvest and when fallow but they are of opinion that
 it will be more advantageous to their occupation to have such open land
 enclosed with a fence and that the joint stocking of the land after Harvest
 and when fallow should be discontinued. **And whereas** they have
 requested the said Earl Manners as Owner of the Land to enclose the
 said land with a fence which he is willing to do on all the Occupiers
 of such land entering into this Agreement **It is hereby agreed**
 that the said Earl Manners shall erect a fence and enclose the said
 Little Field. And the said Tenants and occupiers of land in the said
 Little Field hereby consent to such enclosure and jointly and severally
 undertake and agree with the said Earl Manners and each other
 respectively that from the date hereof they will not turn any stock
 whatever upon the said Little Field and that they continue their
 respective Tenancies of the land therein subject to this condition. **And**
such of the said Tenants and occupiers as have common rights attached
to their own freehold acknowledge that they have no right of common in
such Little Field in virtue of such common rights. **As witness** the
 hands of the said parties the day and year first above written.

Witness to the signature of the
 said Earl Manners

George Bennett. Samuel Whitworth. John G. Bartle
 Joseph Merrills. C. S. Small. S. Sampson. George
 Herwood. George Cocking. George Peckitt. Samuel
 Peatfield. William Moody. William Bennett.
 John Cook. John Baptham. George Baptham
 Robert Crabtree. John Cook.

J. W. Woodworth
 Estates Office, Thoresby Park
 ELLERTON
 Estate Agent

Manners

George Bennett
 Samuel Whitworth
 John G. Bartle
 Joseph Merrills
 C. S. Small
 S. Sampson
 G. Herwood
 G. Cocking
 Geo. Peckitt
 S. Peatfield
 Wm. Moody
 Wm. Bennett
 John Cook

Today, a walk along the public footpath going south from Wood Lane, via the Football Field, down to Moorhouse Road follows the route of an earlier way through the old East Field. Passing between a series of fields bounded by hedgerows there is no hint of the old pattern of strips which have been gradually erased during the century following enclosure.

SOUTH FIELD

The trial enclosure of East Field was deemed a success and with the confidence to proceed Wordsworth sent a circular letter to the tenants in the spring of 1905 informing them:

'I have reason to believe that my efforts were not wholly unsuccessful. I am prepared to try and adopt a similar course in the South Field, coming fallow this year, if it be the wish of those that hold land in it that I should do so- only, if I do undertake this, I must have reasonable assurance from the tenants that they will accept whatever re-arrangement I propose... I suggest that the tenants meet and discuss whether they will accept my suggestion or not. If they accept it, I will promise them that I will do my utmost to make it a success and a help to every tenant in the field.'

The meeting with the tenants was duly held and Wordsworth recorded:

'..of their own accord they, with one exception, gave it their wish and opinion that Lord Manvers should, and could enclose such portions as were his freehold so long as no commons were encroached upon. And some of the older tenants stated that they knew that inclosures on these lines had taken place in their lifetime.'

In preparation Wordsworth first calculated the total area held by each tenant in the field, working across each furlong enlarging the largest of the original strips included in a particular tenancy, and eliminating the smallest wherever possible. The outcomes of these calculations were set out on South Field in a scene described by Rev Collinson, in his 1906 New Year letter to the parish:

'What a sight it was on Thursday, 4th May [1905] to see all the tenants of Laxton in South Field, when Mr Wordsworth undertook the difficult task of reapportioning the various holdings so that every tenant may have his land as much as possible in one piece! The enclosing of Stubbin Side for the purpose of sowing it down, and the cleaning and bridging of the Long-Syke dyke are notable changes.

Let us hope the stackyards of Laxton will tell a tale in the course of time, and the effective drainage of so much land will make things better. Let us also appreciate as we should the timely expenditure of so much money in improvements to the advantage of the place.'

The majority of the original 398 strips were re-allotted to a total of 78 numbered plots of land. Fifty four of these new strips remained under the open field rotation. Eighty two acres at Stubbinside, comprising plot numbers 58 – 78, were enclosed. These unrestricted strips, being the most distant from the village, were to be grassed down with each tenant having grazing rights proportionate to his land holding. At the top of Brockilow Hill parcels 48, 49 and 50 were also taken out of the open field system.



Pictured

Aerial photograph of South Field showing the pattern of strips dating from the 1905 & 1911 reorganization. Running across the middle of the open field is Rig Gate syke and across the foreground a section of the Long Syke. The larger blocks of land fenced below Long Syke are part of amalgamated former 'unrestricted' strips in Stubbin Side enclosed in 1905

At this time Wordsworth also took the opportunity to withdraw Knapeney Side Furlong from South Field. A fence was erected and the 32 acre block of land added to Knapeney Farm, making it a fully enclosed holding.

In spite of Wordsworth's diligence there were, inevitably, some misunderstandings.

One scenario, taking place in July 1905, is described in correspondence from Wordsworth to William Moody, who had recently taken over Top Farm from A. Small:

'I cannot understand how you have ploughed & manured B Moody's plot in the South Field.

You have by your agreement some 6 acres in the Field altogether and over 3 of this is in Stubbins Side, the plot you have between Laughton & Peatfield is near 3 acres as you can make it, so that you are not entitled to any more land.

You must come to some arrangement with B Moody for the work done & manure applied.'

IN SPITE OF WORDSWORTH'S DILIGENCE THERE WERE, INEVITABLY, SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Costs in respect of improving the surface drainage were to be met from the gait money (raised at the annual grass letting) on the basis detailed in Wordsworth's letter to J. Cook, Foreman of South Field, dated 5 December 1905:

'..I send you A/c against the Gate money for the proportion of outlay in cleaning out the Long Syke Dyke & opening new ones in the South Field.

As you suggested yesterday that Lord Manvers shd in future take over the upkeep of these Dykes, subject to an annual payment from the Gate money for upkeep. I shall be prepared to consider the question of doing this in all three fields, provided it is understood that the jury will allow a certain larger sum for putting the Dykes right in the Top & Mill Fields in the first instance, and this must at the same time embody a re-arrangement & consolidating of the various tenants lands in these fields, on the same basis as I have already done the Little & South Fields.

If the tenants in Laxton agree to this I will at once begin to set to work on the Top Field wh. is coming fallow this next season.'

This letter was read at the Court Leet held on 8 December where: *'...the Jury unanimously approved of his proposal.'*



WEST FIELD

Plans for Top (West) Field progressed apace. In February 1906, at a general meeting attended by nineteen of the tenants, the motion; *'That the matter of rearrangement of land in the Top and Mill Fields be left in Mr. Wordsworth's hands'* was passed with a sum of £15 to be paid out of the Gait money towards the draining of the Top Field. A pencil note from John Bagshaw, Foreman for West Field, adds:

Pictured

Plan of West Field after reorganization in 1906. The tenants named on each of the open field and unrestricted strips are from a later period. Ma 5431

'It is the wish of the Farmers for Mr Wordsworth to lot the field at once so as each one can plough their own.'

Even B. Moody, who didn't attend the meeting, looked forward to the reorganization, anticipating the enclosing of land on the Hollow Gate side, where most of his land lay, *'it would be a good thing for me to have a little enclosed land to grow me a few turnips.'*

The former 264 strips in West Field were consolidated into 65 numbered plots of land. Of these numbers 1 to 16 at Acre Edge were partially enclosed and, even now, the remains of these 'unrestricted strips' have no dividing fences.

On the West side numbers 46 and 51, a total of 18.4 acres were enclosed and added to Westwood Farm. Forty seven plots remained as new strips within the open field.

In his 1907 New Year letter Rev Collingwood commented:

‘A great deal of money has been spent this year [1906] in draining, road making and bridging in the West Field, and some enclosing has also taken place.’

MILL FIELD

Wordsworth walked over the Mill Field in March 1907. This was a last step in finalising his thoughts and an opportunity to meet the few tenants who had made representations.

Here 400 strips became 97 numbered plots of land of which 69 remained as new strips in Mill Field. Three blocks on the fringes of the Open field were enclosed. The largest to the East on ‘Hungry Hill’ comprised plots 58 -65 and 69 -80. Whilst parcels 1-5 near Westwood Farm and 84 – 86 near Brockilow Farm were also withdrawn from the open field system.

Pictured

Map of Mill Field after reorganization in 1907. The boundary between the open field and the enclosed, unrestricted strips is drawn in red. Ma 2P 169



LATER ENCLOSURES

THE BENEFITS OF THE FREEDOM OF CROPPING GAINED BY THE TENANTS WAS CONTINUED IN A SECOND, MUCH SMALLER, WAVE OF ENCLOSURES

The benefits of the freedom of cropping gained by the tenants was continued in a second, much smaller, wave of enclosures.

In 1911 on South Field strip numbers 27-31 at Copthorne were withdrawn from the open field. This was followed by the enclosure of West Field strips 62 & 63 in 1912 and Mill Field Strip 30 in 1913.

Brockilow and Copthorne Farms no longer held any land in the open field system whilst Westwood Farm retained just two strips in West Field.

HOW DID THE APPEARANCE OF THE OPEN FIELDS CHANGE?

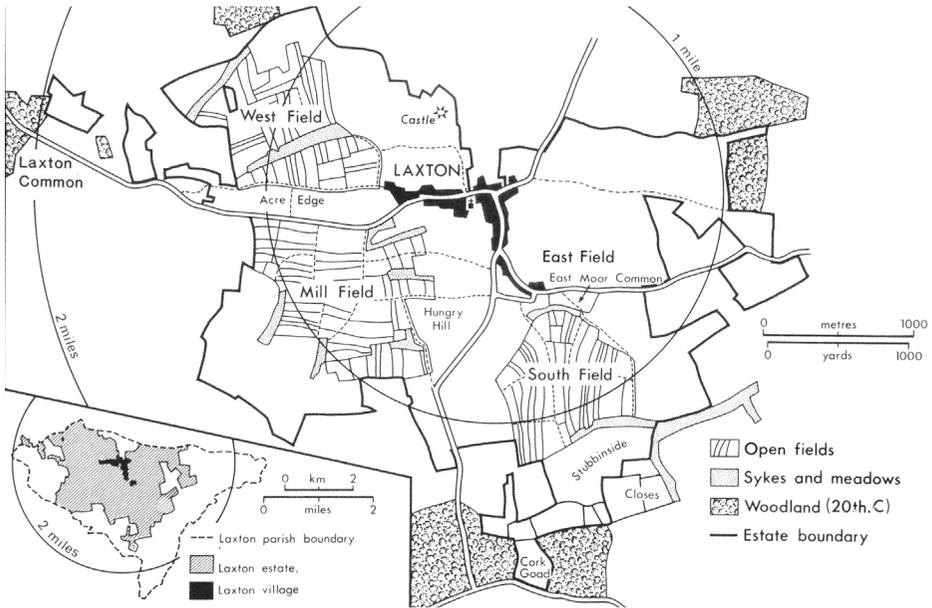
Consolidation and the consequential realignment of the enlarged strips saw the end of the grouping of lands into furlongs. Talk of the open fields no longer resonated with references to “Short Butts,” “Fourteen Roods Furlong”, or “Harwick Nooking.” Links to the old furlongs were retained in the identity of some of the blocks of the enclosed land, for example “Bowlands” “Stubbins” or “Acre Edge.”

The mean size of the open field strips increased from $\frac{3}{4}$ acre to 3 acres. Many of the very long, narrow strips disappeared in the reorganization, with the new strips being broader and some roughly square in shape. A basic feature of the strip pattern, the long reverse-S curve, was preserved, as ploughing was still horse drawn.

Open Field	Year of Re-Allotment	Before Reorganization			After Reorganization			'Unrestricted Strips'
		Acres	Strips	Acres	Strips	Date	Acres Enclosed	
East	1903	67	100	0	0	1903	67	23
South	1905	321	398			1905	135	24
West	1906	217	264	143	49	1911	43	5
Mill	1907	294	400	156	45	1912	7	2
Totals		899	1162	509	162		390	101

Table

Summary of Open Field Reorganization 1903-1913



The sykes and lanes were almost unchanged. On South Field the enclosure of Stubbin Side permitted the linking of Top Long Syke with Elder Tree Balk. The profile of the old ridge and furrow is just visible in the grass syke today.

Modern deep ploughing by tractor has flattened out the old “ridge and furrow” pattern of the historic lands in the arable areas of the open fields. We can now only get a feel for this where stub ends remain, for example on Rig Gate or Roebuck Sykes.



HOW DID THE REORGANIZATION AFFECT INDIVIDUAL FARMS?

The farm receiving the greatest structural change to the layout of its arable land was Step Farm. Prior to reorganization 63% of the 127 acre farm was spread across 96 strips in the four open fields. The smallest strip was a mere 0.17 acres (28 perches) with the largest being 3.83 acres.

After reorganization the total area remaining under the open field rotation was halved to 40.5 acres in 11 re-allotted strips. The smallest of these was now 1.93 acres and the largest 6.3 acres. This farm also had the largest portion of the enclosed East Field, 18.1 acres with a further 21.7 acres in the newly enclosed areas of South and Mill Fields.

The smallest holdings ended up with a single strip in each of the Open Fields where they held land previously. On this basis John Dewick's six strips of less than $\frac{1}{4}$ acre in West Field became one of 1.39 acres, three strips in South Field one of 1.59 acres and three in Mill Field combined to become one of 2.66 acres.

Not all the tenants were entirely satisfied with their reallocation. One such was Joseph Merrills (Ivy House Farm) after the allotment of South Field prompting this rebuke from Wordsworth:

"I am perfectly willing to see what I can do to alter things and make them more to your mind, or failing that to give you some help in management if the land is out of condition... I cannot move in any direction without it clearly understood that you will loyally carry out the resolution carried at the meeting of the tenants before I began to reallot the field that all tenants would abide by my decision, whether they liked it or not.

Pictured

Opposite:

Top: The Open Fields within the Laxton Estate now owned by The Crown Estate

Bottom Left: Remains of ridge and furrow in the syke linking Top Long Syke with Elder Tree Baulk, South Field.

Bottom Right: Stub ends of ridge and furrow on Rig Gate, South Field February 2016. South Field is in fallow and manure has been carted out from cattle sheds in the village and left in heaps to rot down prior to spreading on the land by machine. One hundred years ago, later in the season, individual cart loads would have been spread over the land by farm workers using forks

To attempt to do otherwise, as you spoke of doing yesterday would really not be honourable, and I am sure that upon consideration you will see this.”

Pictured

*Thomas Bailey & Ellen
Bailey at Step Farm*



OVERALL MERRILLS
LOST A TOTAL
OF 0.43 ACRES,
LESS THAN 1% OF
HIS OPEN FIELD
ACREAGE IN THE
REORGANIZATION

“THE RULES DRAWN
UP IN MARCH 1871 IN
A VESTRY MEETING
HELD IN THE SCHOOL
HAVE BEEN REDUCED
TO A FARCE, AND
WE MUST TRY TO
COME TO A BETTER
UNDERSTANDING



REFORM OF THE COMMON RIGHTS

As the reorganization of the land in the Open Fields neared completion R.W. Wordsworth turned his attention to the rights of common attached to Laxton properties.

In April 1907 he called a meeting with the other Freeholders, open field Foremen and the Steward of the Court Leet

'to discuss the question of what Commons should be let out at the annual letting' and to consider 'a number of complaints made to me with regard to the exercise of common rights.' Since *'The rules drawn up in March 1871 in a vestry meeting held in the school have been reduced to a farce, and we must try to come to a better understanding, satisfactory to all freeholders, and see that it is stuck to.'*

A report of the annual grass sale published in the Newark Herald on 20 July 1907 gives a hint of the way the wind was blowing:



Pictured

1635 Detail from Mark Pierce's map illustrating a flock of sheep grazing on Westwood Common (Cocking Moor) and cattle grazing on Roebuck and Radbeck Sykes, West Field

'The annual sale of mowing grass took place in the schoolroom on Thursday evening last week. Mr. B. Selby was the auctioneer. There was a good attendance, and the prices realised were considerably in advance of last year. These pieces of grass land are situated in

various parts of the extensive open fields, and are called "sics" or "sykes." Originally the proceeds from the sale were used, or rather intended to be used, to keep the dykes and roads in proper repair; but for many years the money has been divided amongst those holding the "Common Gaits." There are 312 of these "gaits," which are attached to the land, and 298 of them belong to land owned by Lord Manvers. Much to the regret of the antiquary the first step towards the enclosure of the Open Fields has been taken. Earl Manvers has been at considerable expense in draining, road making, etc., and his agent, Mr. R.W. Wordsworth, has informed the tenants that he will have something to say as to the distribution of the proceeds of the sale, and that some arrangement will be made "to prevent the constant and ever increasing complaints as regards the stocking of the fields and the proper maintenance of the dykes and roads."

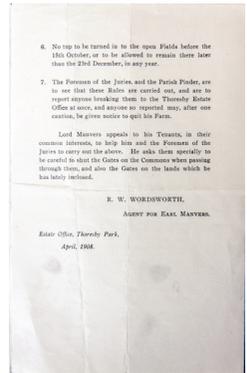
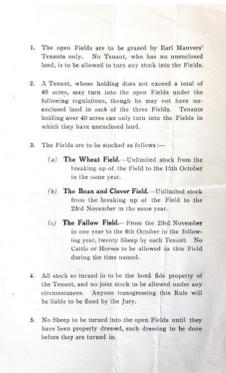
Wordsworth met with the tenants on 8 August. Counsel's opinion was sought and after further discussion in early 1908 a new set of Rules and Regulations for Grazing Laxton Open Fields was finalized. These regulations were printed and circulated to all the Laxton tenants.

In a letter accompanying their copy of the Rules, Wordsworth gave each tenant a clear explanation of the reasoning behind the changes now to be enforced:

‘I pointed out at that meeting [on 8 August last], in the first place, how very unfairly the number of “gaits” was apportioned; also that the first claim upon the “gait” money was the cleaning out of Dykes and maintaining the Gates, both of which had been much neglected; and I said that from Lady Day, 1908, Lord Manvers would retain all the gait money payable to his tenants, making a corresponding reduction of Rent to them, and would take the responsibility of maintaining the dykes and gates.

I find that last year the value of a gait was 3/5 [equivalent to 17p], which included a high letting of the East Moor. The Freeholders of Laxton have now decided that the East Moor is not to be let again, still Lord Manvers will make this a concession to his Tenants, and allow them a reduction in rent at a rate of 3/6 per gait, attached to their respective holdings.

Next, as regards “Cocking Moor.” There are no less than 104 Common Rights in Laxton, of which Lord Manvers owns 96. Were all those who claim the right to turn on to this Moor to exercise it, it would be interesting to know how many head of stock they would claim to graze there. On the face of it the position is quite an impracticable one.



Pictured

1908 Rules and Regulations for Grazing Laxton Open Fields. Ma183/1671/1

Then as to grazing in the open Fields. Complaints have been made annually as to some people turning on many more sheep and stock than they had any right to do, and a strong feeling existed that those who had no land in the open Fields, should have no right to turn in at all. Lord Manvers certainly felt that there was a great deal of reason and justice in this view, but the question was, how could this be carried out without doing injustice to others? He has now, after full discussion with the other Freeholders, come to the following agreement:-

1. That his Tenants only, who have land in the open Fields, but not otherwise, shall turn in there subject to the Rules enclosed herewith.

2. That the "East Moor" is to be grazed with Cows only belonging to the present Freeholders other than himself, but that they may sublet this right to other Parishioners in Laxton for their own bona-fide stock.

3. That as regards "Cocking Moor," Lord Manvers will retain 8 Rights, and the other Freeholders 8 Rights, such Rights to be limited to 10 sheep, 3 beasts, or 2 horses, there being no power to sublet these Rights. Lord Manvers will give the first offer of such rights to his small Tenants who have no such land in the open Fields, but if they decline to exercise them, then to some of his smallest Tenants in the open Fields.

It is clear to him that these Common Rights were intended, in the first instance, for those who had no other land to pasture, and he is equally certain that some have used them who had little or no right to do so.'

Woodsman, Walter Moody was one of the small Tenants, living in a cottage without land, who was affected by the changes. On 27 April 1908 he was advised by Wordsworth *'You will have now no further right to turn into those [open] fields, but I propose to attach to your place a right to turn on to Cocking Moor... on the condition you agree to exercise that right.'* Moody agreed. Walter's son, Frank recalled:

'My father had his full quota of ten sheep. Looking back, the pasture was not very wholesome for sheep to graze on, very tough and coarse. Consequently the sheep often strayed to the lovely lush pastures to be found elsewhere.'

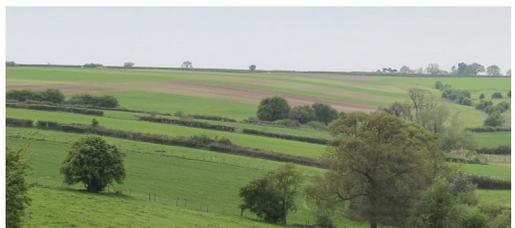
He further described Cocking Moor:

'Laxton Common in its original state was a joy to all nature lovers. It had masses of yellow gorse, and a spinney, the home of countless birds, and the rooks. It provided excellent cover for both birds and wild animals... Up to the outbreak of the Second World War approximately eighty acres of pasture land on the common was given Common Rights.'

The house now called Orchard View is another of the properties which enjoyed the benefit of a right of common. When William Atkinson followed Richard Beckitt as tenant in 1911, he was charged a rent of £7 14s 0d (£7.70p) a year for the cottage with the entitlement to turn 10 sheep, 3 young beasts or 2 horses on to Cocking Moor. He was also offered the right to run a cow on the [East] moor for 30/- (£1.50) a year.

Pictured

West Field from the Castle Mound



AT THE VERY CENTRE
OF THE OPEN
FIELD SYSTEM, THE
COURT DEVELOPED
AS THE MEANS
BY WHICH THE
EVERYDAY WORKING
ARRANGEMENTS
IN THE FIELDS WERE
CONSTITUTED,
AMENDED AND
ENFORCED



THE MANORIAL COURT

The Court Leet of the Manor of Laxton is unique in its survival with jurisdiction to hear and determine legal proceedings. At the very centre of the open field system, the Court developed as the means by which the everyday working arrangements in the Fields were constituted, amended and enforced. It has endured because it was essential to have an authority to exercise powers in respect of the agricultural cycle in the open fields, which was recognised and respected by the farmers.

During our snapshot in time Court meetings were held annually, usually in December (as they continue so to be). The court was called by the Bailiff. All persons holding land and property in Laxton would have been included on the Suit Roll of the Manor and required to attend. Failure to do so attracted an 'essoign,' or a fine of 2d, with totals of around 6/- being recorded each year.

Court business commenced with the Homage, the swearing in of a jury from those present. Firstly the Foreman took his oath, followed by the twelve jurymen in groups, each man signifying his consent by kissing a copy of the New Testament. A new recruit to the office of Pinder would also be sworn-in at this stage.

The Court then moved on to consider the Presentment Paper for offences committed in the open fields noted by the previous jury during their annual inspection, made a few weeks earlier. There was an opportunity to make representations concerning any misdemeanour and the level of fine imposed. Once endorsed by the incoming jury the fines due were to be paid before the next Court day.

Non-attendance by a juryman at either the Court or jury for which he had be sworn-in was taken very seriously with fines imposed of 2/6d for a first offence and then doubled for a second.

No Court was called in 1916 or in 1917. The Homage of December 1915 under the foremanship of James Laughton duly inspected Mill Field in 1916 and imposed a long list of 20 fines amounting to a total of 18/- mainly in respect of non-maintenance of dykes. As no new jury had been sworn they went out again and levied fines for “dykes” in 1917 and 1918.

THE STEWARDS

The Court summoned on 6 December 1900 was held ‘Before Godfrey Tallents, Gentleman Steward of the said Manor’.

Godfrey Tallents was a solicitor in the long established family law firm based in Newark who had also served as Town Clerk of Newark. He presided over the Courts from 1900 until 1908 and again in 1914 and 1915. No Court was held in December 1916 and Godfrey Tallents died in March 1917.

Hugh Tallents, son of Godfrey, succeeded his father as Steward when the Court was called again on the 5 December 1918, having presided as Deputy Steward from 1909 until 1913. Although a solicitor by profession, Hugh Tallents had also been

commissioned in the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry in 1905. By August 1914 he had been promoted to Captain and went on to serve at Gallipoli and in Egypt, Macedonia and Palestine. Major H. Tallents DSO was released from the army in February 1918.

The lack of a Steward due to the war service of the younger Tallents and the declining health of the older was probably the main reason no Court could be summoned in 1916 and 1917.



Pictured

Hugh Tallents, Steward
of Laxton Court Leet

THE BAILIFFS

When a vacancy for the position of Bailiff arose in 1907 there appears to have been no obvious candidate, prompting Godfrey Tallents to write to R W Wordsworth asking if he could suggest anyone from his tenants for the place. Tallents' job specification for the role of Bailiff was straightforward:

'The chief duties are to summon the juries to the Court, to collect the fines imposed by the jury and to collect & pay up the 2d for each Copyholder or Tenant who does not appear & answer to his name.'

Previously, Joseph Pinder, a retired farmer, had acted both as Bailiff and as one of the village pinders for 'many years' before his death, aged 80, in 1907. Born in Laxton, Joseph Pinder had farmed 94 acres at Holme View Farm initially with his mother- in- law, Ann Nicholson, and then in his own right.

A new Bailiff was appointed in time for the Court held on 19 December 1907. Although the Bailiff is not named in the proceedings, other correspondence indicates this was the beginning of John Dewick's

tenure of the post, which continued into the 1930's. John was descended from a line of Dewicks who were cottagers/ farmers occupying the holding now called Cherry Tree Farm. He died in 1939, aged 82 years.

In addition to his duties on Court Day the Bailiff also assisted with the policing of the open field rules and regulations. Sheep were particularly troublesome in 1912. Dewick wrote to R.W. Wordsworth on 29 August:

'I beg to inform you Richard Wilkinson is running a tup in the Open Field & when I requested him to remove it he used most Filthy & Disgusting Language & should not remove it for me. I am getting tired of this sort of thing I had to put up with the same from Frank Sampson after writing you about his sheep & think it is time someone put a stop to it or I shall have to give it up.'

Wordsworth had a word with the offender. Dewick was placated and did not carry out his threat to resign.

He clashed with Wilkinson again when delivering the notices of the Court Leet to be held in January 1915. The minutes of the proceedings record Dewick complaining about Wilkinson's bad language, a report to be made to Mr Argles.

This show of disrespect towards the office of Bailiff appears to have been the "final straw" for Argles regarding Wilkinson. He wrote to Rev Collinson on 3 February:

'I want to have a talk with you also about Dick Wilkinson. I do not think we can tolerate him any longer at Laxton. I have another complaint about him. Mr Tallents tells me that the Bailiff of the Court when he called to see Wilkinson "was received with abuse and bad language to his great annoyance and the

hindrance of his duties.” All things considered, I think there are good grounds for giving him notice, and he would have no grounds for unreasonable disturbance.’

A few days later Argles confirmed the action taken, again writing to Rev Collinson: *‘I am sending Dick Wilkinson a notice to quit.’*

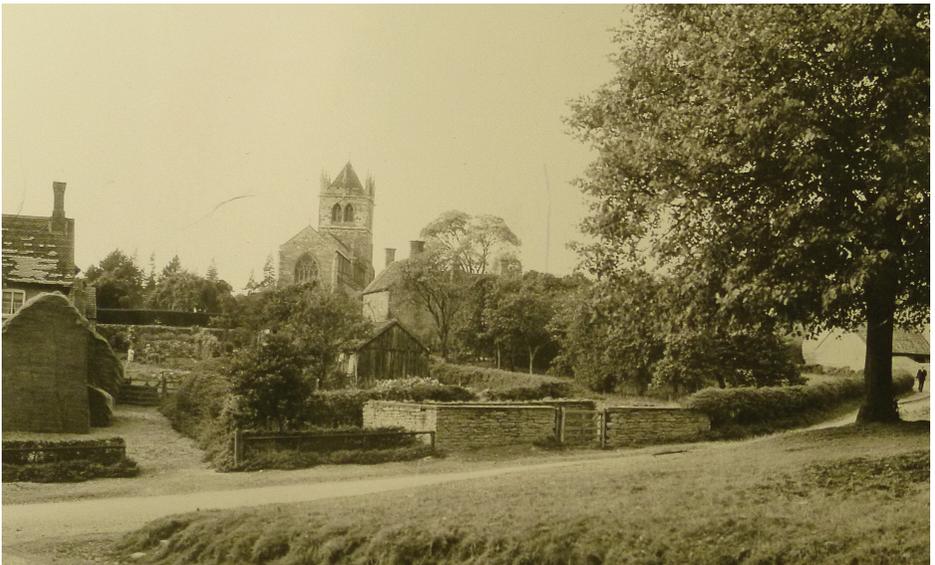
THE PINDERS

The village Pinder had the onerous duty of rounding up stray stock and confining them in the Pinfold. He was entitled to collect a fee from the offending farmer when he came to reclaim his animals.

Each Pinder swears an oath of service at the Court Leet. Joseph Pinder was assisted by William Rayner in 1900 and George Nettleship in 1903. John Dewick also held both the offices of Bailiff and Pinder in 1907, followed by three years of joint service with George Burkitt from 1909.

Pictured

Laxton Pinfold



Burkitt was sworn in again in 1912 despite complaining the previous year about the difficulties he had in “pinning” the sheep he had found straying on “The [East] Moor” due to the hedge on the boundary with South Field not being plashed and made stock-proof.

JURY FOREMEN

Once elected, a Foreman could expect to have responsibility for a particular Open Field over a number of years. Before the war John Cook was Foreman in South Field. In West Field, John Bagshaw was followed by William Merrills (1911), and in Mill Field the foremen were George Bennett, followed by Joseph Merrills (1903) and by James Laughton (1912). After James Laughton finished his three year stint during the period of the war, John Cook took over Mill Field (1918) and William Merrills South Field (1919).

Pictured

*Open Field
boundary stake*



The Jury Foreman’s main task was to oversee the annual inspection of the Open Fields. On Jury Day the jury sworn in at the Court held the previous year would assemble on the field which was going into winter corn. The date set was usually in November by which time the relevant field, which had been fallow during that summer, would have been ploughed over and a cereal crop of wheat sown. Working in small teams the jurors checked the alignment of strips, marking boundaries with small wooden stakes. In particular, they would be looking for encroachments

onto the sykes or the roadways. The main drainage dykes were also walked, as any hindrance to the free flow of surface water could lead to crop damage from flooding in the coming wet winter months.

At the end of the inspection the Foreman recorded the findings of the jury on the Presentment paper, together with a recommended fine for each offence. This was then signed by all the jurors and brought before the next Court Leet.

Examples of misdemeanours and fines imposed during the period:

Year		Fine
1904	John Bagshaw for ploughing up water course	3s 0d
1904	Mrs Pinder for encroachment (Hall-floor)	1s 0d
1905	George Cocking ploughed out too far on Ridge Gate	6d
1905	Mr John Cook Foreman of the Jury. For leaving soil in Long Syke. Should he remove it by twenty first of December 1905 to become Exempt	£1 0s 0d
1907	Mrs Ann Bennett ploughing Foxmoor	2s 6d
1907	Sam Whitworth 1 land Honey Hole	3d
1908	George Cocking fined for ploughing out to far and not shoveling Land Ends in	1s 0d
1908	Sydney Johnson. Ridge Gate Fined for not shoveling land ends in.	3d
1912	Mr Bayly Dykes meadow	1s 0d
1915	Lord Manvers Soil and stone in Radbeck sick	£1 0s 0d
1915	Samuel Whitworth wood on Meadow Ends	6s 0d
1918	Mr G Newbolt Brockley Dyke	5s 0d

During the rest of the year each of the foremen had responsibility for the day to day maintenance of the Field to which he has been elected. John Cook was the foreman of South Field when problems arose with a main dyke silting up. Mr Wordsworth writes on 31 July 1903 asking Cook:

'to help me in seeing that the main dyke, from the bridge leading to Primrose Farm to where it ends near Bollam Beck is thoroughly cleaned out.'

A month later he emphasises the point:

'The liability to see to the ditch in question rests with the Jury of the South Field, and if they have let it get into such a condition that it will take £25 or £30 to put it into order, the whole blame is theirs and they must see the work is done.'

With no apparent progress, on the 20 October Wordsworth set out his argument to Cook:

'It is, in my opinion, a very urgent and important matter, and has been neglected for far too many years. The cleaning of these main waterways & the maintaining of the roadways is the first charge upon the money obtained for the sale of grass on the commons... The keeping of them in proper condition is worth ten times as much to the occupiers of the open field land, in a wet time, as the gaits can be, and it is to my mind not only a neglect, but shortsighted in the extreme, to leave them untouched... Please consult your jury at once- every day now its condition is injuring a large area of open field land, and it is a disgrace to the Parish that it should be so.'

Following the 1908 revision of the Rules and Regulations for Grazing Laxton Open Fields a more formal, legal approach was taken when the Foreman, James Laughton, reported a flock of sheep suffering from foot rot had been turned into West Field. Mr Argles writes to Messrs Tallents as Stewards of the Manor on 13 December 1920:

'many people in the village are naturally complaining about this. I suggest you immediately write a letter to the Foreman of the Jury ordering the owners of these sheep to remove them at once onto enclosed land where the infection cannot spread.'

Adding:

'The offender I believe has declined to remove the sheep.'

Tallents confirms to Argles that;

'I have written to the foreman of the jury telling him to require the owner of the sheep with foot rot to remove them from the open fields and if he fails to do so then to drive them away to the owners premises.'

Pictured

Sheep grazing on Open Field, 1934





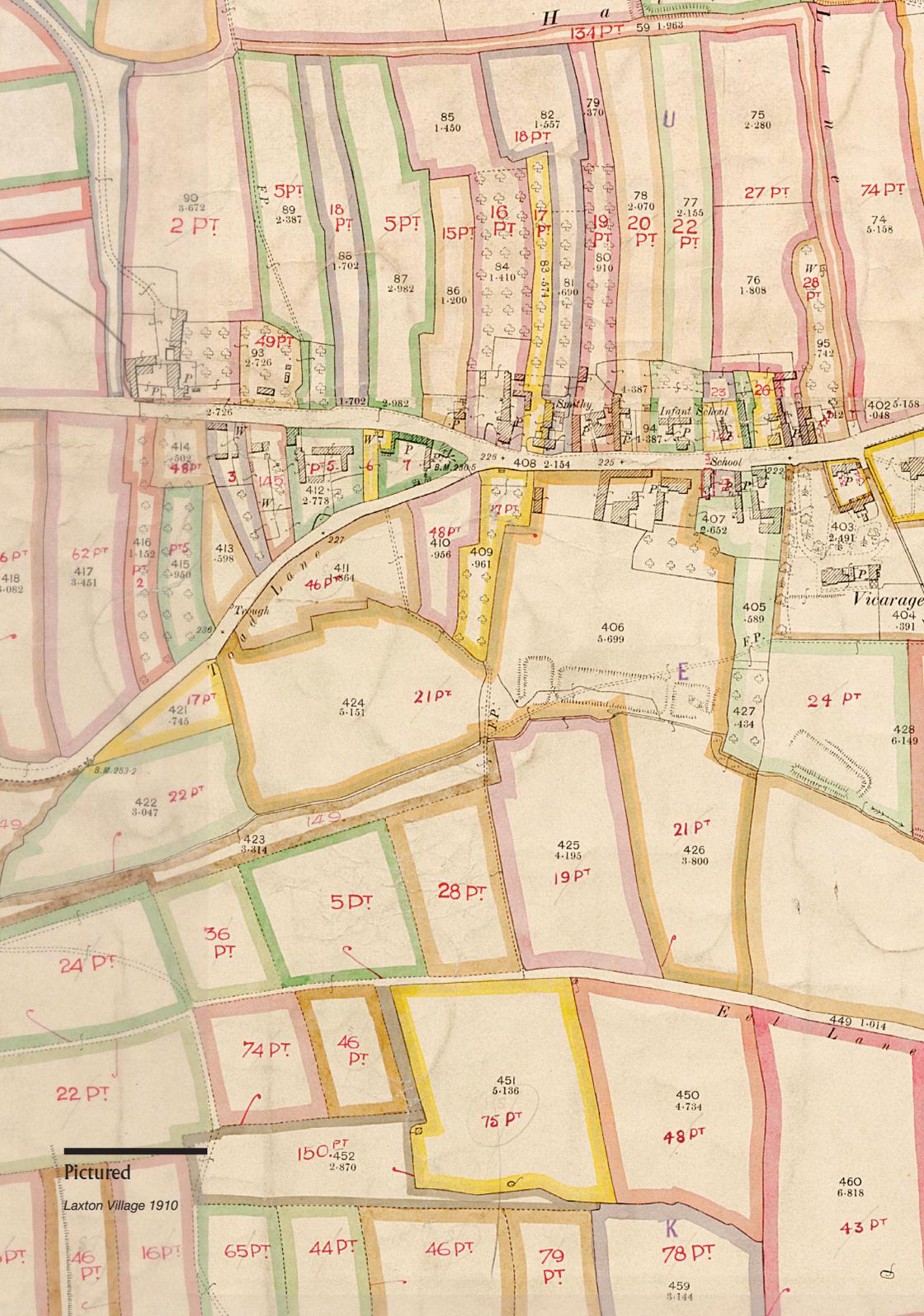
Pictured

Tofts and Crofts, Main Street, Laxton. View west from the Church tower with Church Farm in foreground

FARMS AND FARMERS

Little did I realise when asked for directions to a farm in the village by the driver of a delivery van, my habit of confirming the name of the farmer is perpetuating a custom of giving the address of a holding as the name of the occupier.

Although the outlying farms had been named when they were created in the eighteenth century all of the farms within the village (with the exception of Manor Farm) were referred to by the name of the tenant not only in correspondence but also in the Manvers Estate Terriers and Maps of the period. This can lead to confusion, especially when a farmer moved from one holding to another, as happened on a surprising number of occasions in our time period. My starting point in unravelling the story of agriculture in Laxton between 1900 & 1920 was, therefore, to link the names of tenants and their dates of occupation with the modern addresses of properties. This narrative uses the modern farm names in the interest of clarity for the reader, but remember that was not how our predecessors knew the village.



Pictured
Laxton Village 1910

H a 134 PT 59 1-963

85
1-450

82
1-557

79
370

75
2-280

90
3-672
2 PT

59
2-387
5 PT

18 PT

5 PT

15 PT

16 PT

17 PT

78
2-070
19 PT

77
2-155
22 PT

27 PT

74 PT

74
5-158

87
2-582

86
1-200

84
1-410

81
1-600

80
910

76
1-908

28 PT

95
742

49 PT

93
2-726

412
2-778

411
2-664

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408
2-154

407
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5-589

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3-891

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5-158
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2-726

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2-982

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408

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225

222

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222

212

212

6 PT

62 PT

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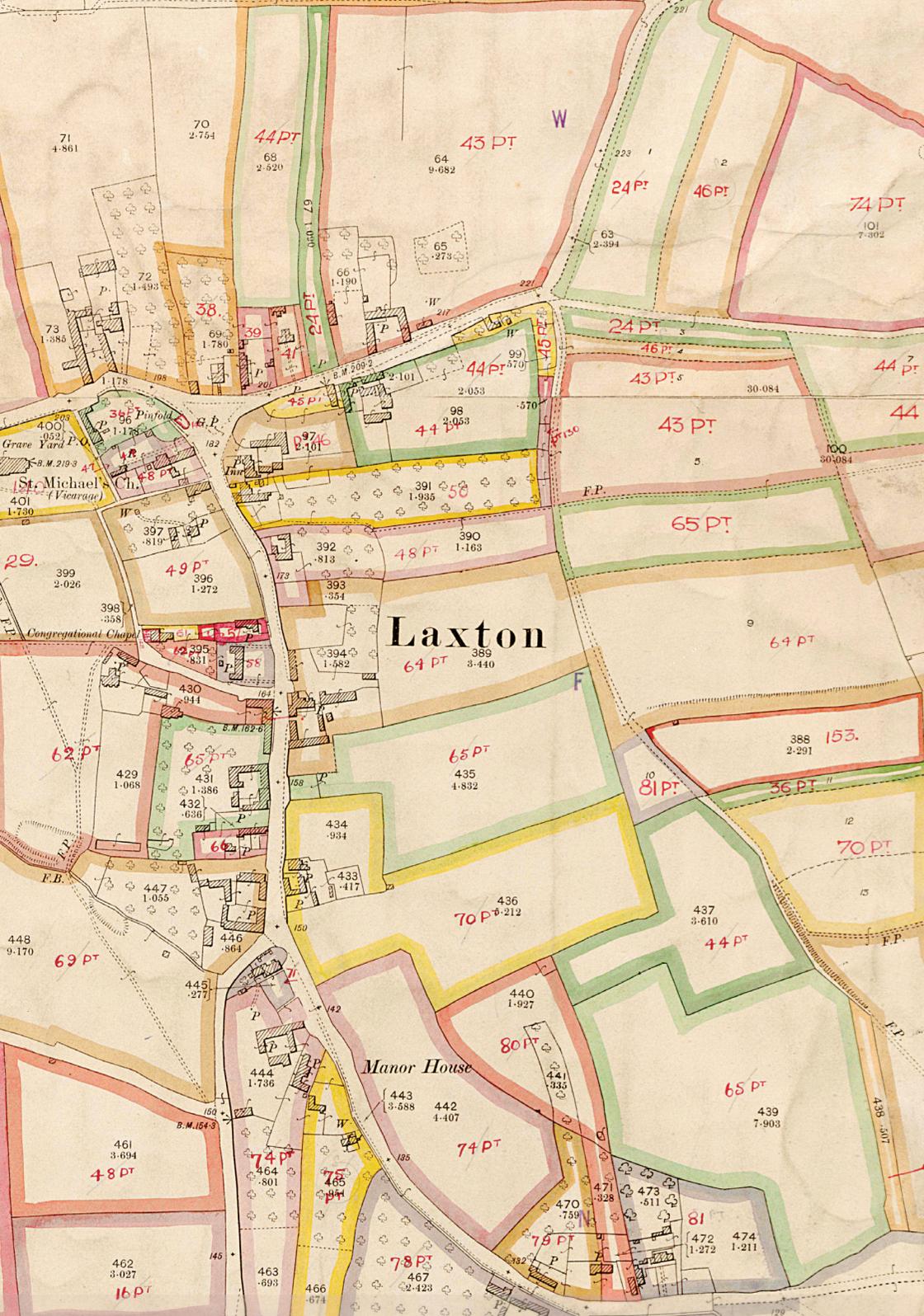
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Laxton

Manor House

St. Michael's Ch.
(Vicarage)

Congregational Chapel

Grave Yard P.O.

Pinfold

71 4-861

73 1-385

401 1-780

399 2-026

429 1-068

448 9-170

461 3-694

462 3-027

70 2-754

72 1-493

400 1-052

396 1-272

431 1-386

445 1-277

464 1-801

463 1-893

44 PT

24 PT

49 PT

62 PT

65 PT

74 PT

75 PT

78 PT

68 2-920

39 1-780

397 1-819

392 1-813

393 1-354

394 1-582

434 1-934

433 1-417

444 1-736

443 3-588

442 1-407

467 2-423

64 9-082

65 2-73

391 1-935

390 1-163

389 3-440

435 4-832

436 1-212

440 1-927

441 1-333

470 1-759

466 1-674

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153 2-291

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74 PT

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Map	Farm Name (2016)	Size in 1910	Farm Tenants 1900 - 1920
2	Town End Farm	145.69 acres	1) John Bagshaw died 1912 2) Richard Clark from 1913
5	Top Farm	84.19 acres	1) Arthur Small 2) William Moody 1905 -1920 3) George Moody from 1920
16	Holme View Farm	88.06 acres	1) George Johnson died 1902 2) Sidney Johnson 3) William Sampson from 1917
17	Blacksmiths Cottage	3.89 acres	1) Thomas Hilton died 1915 2) Mrs Hilton
18	Cherry Tree Farm	10.5 acres	1) John Dewick
19	Lilac Farm	67.86 acres	1) William Wilkinson died 1914 2) Richard Wilkinson 3) William H Rayner from 1916
20	The Millers House	38.5 acres	James Laughton
21	Ivy House Farm	144.15 acres	1) William Merrills 2) Joseph Merrills 1905-1918 3) James W Price from 1918
22	Smithy Farm	44.39 acres	1) Henry Bramford 2) Samuel Laughton from 1911
24	School Farm	74.36 acres	1) Joseph Merrills 2) John Rose 1905 – 1917 3) Frank Sampson from 1917
27	High Street Farm	10.36 acres	1) Thomas Bennett 2) Arthur Newbould from 1918
28	Church Farm	7.25 acres	1) Ann Merrills died 1902 2) William H Rayner 1903-1916 3) Walter Howe from 1916

Map	Farm Name (2016)	Size in 1910	Farm Tenants 1900 - 1920
36	Twitchill Cottage	22.68 acres	1) Samuel Sampson 2) George Hewerdine 1903-1905 3) Benjamin Moody 1905-1908 4) William Sampson 1908-1917 5) Frederick Merrills from 1917
37	Crosshill Farm	177.19 acres	1) Edward Small 2) William Merrills from 1905
43	New Bar Farm	83.58 acres	1) George Weatherall 2) Samuel Sampson from 1903
44	Bar Farm	53.93 acres	John Cook
46	The Dovecote Inn	49.22 acres	Hole & Co
48	Twitchill Farmhouse	61.25 acres	1) William Moody 2) James Laughton from 1905
62	Vicarage Farmhouse	72.25 acres	1) John G Bartle died 1905 2) Samuel G Bartle 3) William Bennett from 1917
64	Step Farm	127.41 acres	1) George Bennett died 1903 2) Mrs A Bennett 1904 -1909 3) Robert Bennett 1909 – 1912 4) Thomas & Mark Bailey from 1912
65	New House Farm	120.65 acres	1) James Patrick died 1902 2) William Bennett from 1902
69	Corner Farm	131.32 acres	1) John Rose 2) George Newboul 1905 – 1919 3) Edward Hennell from 1919
70	Bottom Farm	45 acres	1) Samuel Whitworth 2) Thomas & Mark Bailey from 1916
74	Manor Farm	104.97 acres	George Cocking 1900 - 1920

Map	Farm Name (2016)	Size in 1910	Farm Tenants 1900 - 1920
78	Ide Farm	101.57 acres	1) Jane Peatfield died 1901 2) Samuel Peatfield 3) John J Laughton 1919 -1921
79	Moorgate Farm	25.61 acres	George Burkitt
80	Moorend Cottage	10.25 acres	1) William Bennett 2) John Cree from 1902
	Westwood Farm	280 acres	1) Jane Pinder 2) Thomas Marrison & Son from 1908
	Brockilow Farm	169.18 acres	1) W & J Atkinson 2) Alfred Chell 1911 – 1916 3) John Taylor 1916 – 1920 4) Sydney Johnson from 1920
	Knapeney Farm	208.18 acres	1) Messrs J & B Bartle 2) Sydney Johnson 1917-1920 3) A E Elston from 1920
	Primrose Farm	52.37 acres	1) Samuel Lacey 2) John Sampson from 1917
	Copthorne Farm	126.51 acres	1) John Frow 2) William Quibell from 1908
	Breck's Farm	96.96 acres	1) John Hewerdine 2) H Fox 1905 – 1911 3) H L Marrison 1911 -1915 4) G H Wardell 1915 – 1919 5) John Turner from 1919
	(Site of) East Park Cottage	4.65 acres	Henry Dolby



THE FARMSTEAD

Pictured

New Bar Farm

A typical Laxton farmstead had a crew-yard (also referred to as a muck-yard) in very close proximity to the farm house.

In the photograph above the Sampson family are standing on the causey in front of New Bar Farmhouse looking over the wall into the crew-yard. Edith Hickson recalled the very same crew-yard, with its location:

'...quite understandably to be within earshot and eyeshot, for the farmer quite normally might have to turn out day or night to see what was causing a disturbance. In summer the muckyard was empty of life in the way of cattle, though pigs could be rooting around in the straw. Annually the muck-yard underwent a muck leading operation which might last



Pictured

Top: Barns and Stack-yard at Town End Farm. Painted by H. van Batenburg for Richard Clark

Middle: Manure leading at Town End Farm

Bottom: Building a haystack at Town End Farm



out a fortnight, depending on the animal population of the wintered livestock.

It was then an effluvium rose to the heavens and penetrated the whole surroundings... The barn, stables, cowhouses, calfpens and pigstys formed a square enclosed by raised, stone causeys which enabled men to traverse their way on a reasonably clean pathway, occasionally swept with a broom. In winter the muck-yard was a conglomerate of the unspeakable in which animals squelched, knee deep. Usually they were the bullocks or mixed sex yearlings. Cows stayed indoors, horses stayed in the stables. But the straw-yard bullocks roughed it in the yards and were lucky if they had any roof shelter.'

Hay-stacks and corn-ricks were constructed in the stack-yard. This was a separate open area located near to the main brick barn.

TO BE A LAXTON FARMER

Town End Farm enjoyed a long period of stability under the tenure of John Bagshaw who farmed there from 1880 until his death in January 1912, aged 68 years. He can be viewed as something of a patriarch in the village. In the photograph we see him seated with his wife Elizabeth and three of their seven surviving daughters. Emily Kate, who is standing next to her father married George Cocking of Manor Farm in 1904. Three of her older sisters had also wed farmers in the locality: Sarah, Mrs William Bennett; Fanny, Mrs George Burkitt and Eliza, Mrs John Cree.

After John's death his widow held a dispersal sale of all the farm stock, equipment and household furniture and vacated the farm in March 1913.



Pictured

John and Elizabeth Bagshaw with their daughters Alice, Emily, Kate and Lucy

Unusually, standing crops of wheat and oats in the Open Fields were also auctioned the following August, in preference to having them valued in the Tenant Right. Prices for the wheat ranged from £2 - £3 per acre whereas less than £1 per acre was bid for the oats. (At the time of the sale the market price for wheat was equivalent to £7.80p per tonne).

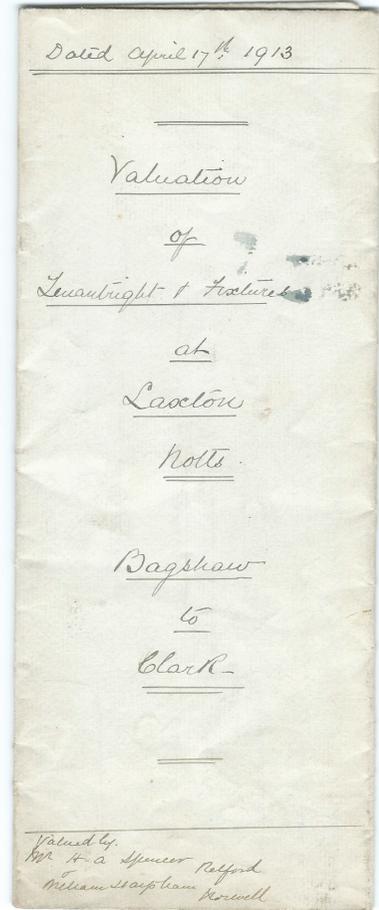
The value of Tenant Right and Fixtures was awarded at £66 0s 1d plus valuer fees. The incoming tenant was Richard Clark, who was familiar with the village, having been farm foreman for Jonathan Bartle at Knapeney around the turn of the century.



THE LAXTON FARMING LADDER

The range in size of farms on the Laxton Estate provided a very good ‘farming ladder.’ The smaller holdings were suitable for a farm or estate worker to step onto the first rung with relatively little capital. The story of William Rayner illustrates one family’s ascent.

William Henry Rayner was born in Radford, Nottingham in 1877. By his teens he was living in Laxton with his widowed aunt, Ann Merrills. The 1891 census records the 13 year old’s occupation as Farmer’s Nephew. Ten years later he is working as an Ordinary Agricultural Labourer.



Pictured

Left: Richard Clark, seated right, with Mark Bailey, Son Frecknell and Wilf Rayner (standing).

Right: Tenant Right document, Town End Farm

When Ann Merrills died in 1902 William stayed at Church Farm taking on the tenancy of the 7 acre smallholding. Now, having a home of his own, he married Rose Ann Pearson in 1903, and started a family with the arrival of Wilfred in 1904.

On such a small acreage William needed to supplement his income and continued to work as a farm labourer. In March 1911 he had been employed at Brockilow Farm, but was concerned that he would be out of work with the departure of William Atkinson. Taking the initiative, he wrote to Mr Wordsworth for a position with the Manvers Estate previously held by Sam Laughton who was about to take on Bramford's (Smithy) Farm. He was successful and joined Tom Bagshaw's team as a 'General Labourer on Estate.' This role became adaptable, however, in January 1915. With the shortage of farm labour following the outbreak of war Wordsworth wrote to advise Joseph Merrills:

'I shall endeavour to arrange for Lord Manvers' workmen to assist his Lordship's tenants as much as possible, if help is required. I can arrange to spare Rayner whenever he is wanted. If necessary, he can be spared from Bagshaw's gang for several weeks. You had better see him if you want assistance.'

In the following October, William's services for ploughing and farm work were offered to Robert Marston of Norwell Lodge with the expectation of him being paid a liberal wage to cover the wear and tear on his bicycle. By January 1916 William had agreed terms to work for Richard Clark until the following Lady Day when his status was to take a turn for the better.

Clearly, William Rayner had ambition. Over the years he had made several approaches to the Estate when he heard rumour of a small farm becoming

available. At last, his perseverance paid off following this undated letter, addressed to H.D. Argles:

'Dear Sir, I have been told that Mr Wilkinson is leaving his farm on March 25th 1916. If this is correct & you have not promised the farm to anyone, would you be kind enough to give me a chance to try & take it. Yours truly, Wm Rayner.'

A formal offer was made by Argles on 27th October 1915:

'Referring to our interview at this office this morning, I now confirm terms arranged with you for the tenancy from Lady Day next of the farm at Laxton, now in the occupation of Mr Wilkinson. The area is 67 acres, 3 roods 18 perches or thereabouts. Arable 45 acres; grass 22 ½ acres. The terms are as follows:-

Rent £60 0s 0d per annum.

Water rate £2 5s 0d per annum.

Lord Manvers will supply you with basic slag during the first year of the tenancy, to the value of £15 0s 0d, and I will send a man and drill through to sow it for you free of charge, you supplying horse labour.

With regard to the Tenant Right valuation, it is agreed that you are not asked to pay this on entry to the farm, but you agree to pay 5% interest on this valuation until it is paid off in instalments. The interest due will of course gradually decrease as each instalment is paid.

I note that you also agree that the amount of your outgoing valuation shall go towards payment of your incoming valuation.'



Pictured

Lilac Farm

The Tenant Right award to Wilkinson came in at £20 16s 8d, nett of a £6 dilapidations deduction for non-painting.

It is not clear whether an adjustment in the valuation was agreed by the Valuers following Rayner's reported discovery of dock roots and seed collected altogether and put amongst the dung at the bottom of the crew yard in an act of malice by the departing Wilkinson. William Rayner's outgoing valuation was settled at £14 14s 1d.

By the time of their move to Lilac Farm the size of the Rayner family had increased. Wilfred had been joined by William in 1906, Gladys in 1909, Cyril in 1912 and Albert in 1916. (Alec arrived in 1924). Rose Rayner certainly had her hands full with a new baby but still had to contend with a leaking roof and quickly writes to the Estate to get the tiles repaired so she can wallpaper the bedrooms.

William Henry Rayner died in 1947 and was followed at Lilac Farm by eldest son Wilfred.

Albert and Alec also became Laxton farmers at Holme View and Bar Farm respectively. His grandson Ivan, who, incidentally, is also a great-great-grandson of John Bagshaw, continues the family tradition.

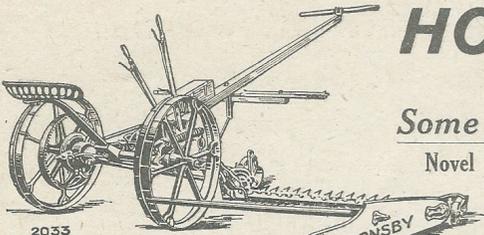
FARMING CAN BE A DANGEROUS OCCUPATION

On rare occasions a farm became vacant due to the death of the tenant as a result of an accident. A particularly tragic case in 1913 was that of Harold Marrison of Breck's Farm. This horrible incident is best recounted in the words of witnesses; Harold's father Thomas Marrison and Dr Whittington, whose statements at the inquest were reported in the Newark Herald:'

On 15 July... He said he was going to mow after dinner... witness was told his son had cut himself with a knife blade of the mowing machine. He said he was sharpening the blade, and as he was walking round in front of the stand, it slipped out and fell on his foot.' 'Dr Whittington... found the knife had gone through the boot and stocking and nearly through the foot. He was bleeding very much. Witness adopted the usual methods of stopping the bleeding. Death took place on 10th inst [August] from loss of blood and blood poisoning. Deceased was a peculiar subject and witness had had serious bleeding to combat with before.'

Pictured

Advertisement for a horse drawn mower



HORNSBY
No. 10 MOWER.
Some Special Features.
Novel Gearing. No Second-Motion Spindle.
Fewest Wearing Parts.
Lightest in Draught.
Ruston & Hornsby Limited,
LINCOLN & GRANTHAM

2033

Send for Illustrated Booklet E4753.

A NOTABLE INTRODUCTION IN THE 1911 LISTING WAS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTION MADE TO THE WORKFORCE BY THE FEMALE MEMBERS OF A FARMING FAMILY

Harold was only 27 years old when he died, leaving a wife, Mary, and sons, Stephen and Thomas. The family left Breck's Farm in 1915, moving to a cottage in the village.

THE WORKFORCE

In the 1911 census one hundred and twenty people living in Laxton were engaged in farming or an allied trade. A similar range of occupations for the men of Laxton was recorded in the 1901 Census when the village could also boast a Threshing Machine Engine Driver, a Carrier, a Cattle Dealer and a Shepherd. A notable introduction in the 1911 listing was an acknowledgement of the contribution made to the workforce by the female members of a farming family.

An agricultural labourer could expect to earn between 16/- and 18/- per week (80 – 90p per week).

Some workers relied on a range of different skills. James Price described Harold Bagshaw as working:

'for me when I want him. In the Shire Horse season he travels a horse [stallion] for Mr Forshaw. Just now he is busy killing pigs for farmers. He is a useful man in the village, & a very good horseman.'

Occupation	Number recorded in 1911 Census
Farmer	26
Cottager	1
Miller & Farmer	1
Publican & Farmer	1
Farm Foreman	2
Farmer's Son (working on farm)	11
Farmer's Daughter - dairy work	9
Farmer's Daughter - poultry	1
Cowman	8
Waggoner	11
Horseman	4
Farm Labourer	19
Farm Servant	7
Yard Lad	2
Forestry	9
General Estate Labourer	2
Shoeing & General Smith	2
Saddler & Harness Maker	1
Wheelwright	1
Gamekeeper	1
Mole catcher	1

THE LAXTON FARMING YEAR

Season	Month	Activity on the farm
Spring		Lambing, calving, farrowing of sows.
	March /April	Planting of Spring sown crops: barley, oats, peas, beans, tares. Planting of field vegetables: potatoes, mangolds, turnips, swedes, & cabbages.
	April/ May	Stock turned out to pasture in closes. Manure removed from crew-yards and carted onto fallow land. Start of Stallion leading season. Brood mares covered by travelling Shire stallion.
	May	Sheep washed in the sheep-wash. Sheep shearing.
Summer	June / July	Haymaking.
	July	Annual sale of syke grass for mowing. Ongoing manure spreading and repeated ploughing of the fallow field.
	August	Harvest commenced.
	Late August/ early September	Winter corn field 'broken' – stock permitted to graze stubble.
	September	Spring corn, peas & beans harvested and open field 'broken' for grazing. Threshing followed harvest and continued through autumn & winter.

Season	Month	Activity on the farm
Autumn		Root crops pulled, topped and tailed and stored in clamps.
	15 October	Animals removed from the Wheat Field. Tups permitted on open field until 23 December.
	October/November	Fallow Field ploughed, harrowed and sown with winter corn (wheat).
	23 November	All animals to leave open fields except for 20 sheep per tenant on the field coming fallow, through to 8 October the following year.
	Late November	Jury Day. Application of Basic Slag to grassland.
Winter	December	Court Leet. Ongoing ploughing preparation of fields for planting the following spring. Hedge laying/plashing.



Pictured

Top: Hermaphrodite (mophrey) in four wheel mode.

Bottom: Binder.

FARM IMPLEMENTS

In order to “tackle” his year round cycle of jobs, a Laxton farmer required an array of farm implements. We get an idea of how well a Laxton farm was equipped from an advertisement for Robert Bennett’s dispersal sale in March 1912:

IMPLEMENTS

“2 good hermaphrodites, Deering binder, nearly new reaper and mower, good Edlington horse rake, flat roll, turnip drill, 2 Ransome’s diggers, Bealby plough, hay tedder,

one-horse drill, 2 duck foot drags, chain harrows (nearly new), 2 sets of chisel harrows, 3 sets wood harrows, horse hoe, shake drag, 2 large zinc tanks, blacksmith’s bellows, anvil, blower, bakeoven tools, bench and vice, corn bin, ladders, 100 slag bags, stack cover, sheep troughs, sawn timber, 25 yards new metal piping etc. HARNESS FOR 6 HORSES.”

William Beckett recollected the single furrow Bealby plough to be ‘a rather crude tool but very effective.’

“BREAKDOWNS 1910 STYLE”

Shire horses were the motive power for the farm implements used at Laxton.

Unlike the machinery of modern times, a breakdown would not be readily fixed nor a loss easily replaced. Unable to progress with his land work a tenant could soon get into difficulties. In May 1910 the situation for George Cocking at Manor Farm was getting so desperate he sent this letter to R. W. Wordsworth:



Pictured

Hay rake

'I am writing to ask if you can relieve us in any way with a horse. We have had such bad luck & we really cannot stand against it. I lost 3 last year in a fortnight & bought another a young one & she is lame & has only been able to do very little for the last 3 months.

Then I bought another one a fortnight ago last Saturday- gave £14 & before she had been at work ½ an hour she sloughed her hoof off & Mr Talbot said she would have to be shot but however it turned to Lock jaw & she died last Wednesday she seemed alright when I bought her & she walked home from Retford but as soon as she got on loose soil she was done for. I doubt if we try to get our money back we shall only loose more over it.

When I paid my last rent I asked for a slight reduction of rent & Mr Argles promised to come over but we have not seen him yet but no doubt he has named

it to you for really I have had such luck. I have not known how to turn myself round. We have talked of asking you to find us another farm not quite so big as this, then if we changed farms we might change our luck or might change for worse, it is hard to say, for every one have troubles of some kind. I hope you will consider it over & do your best for us I am only too sorry to have to ask you but if you can relieve me in any way I shall be thankful.'

Clearly, disreputable horse dealers are not a new phenomenon.

Wordsworth's initial reply was that he had no horse to offer but would come over to discuss the farm with Cocking. A couple of weeks later, probably following that promised meeting, Wordsworth wrote:

'I have laid the question of your horse losses before Lord Manvers & he has authorised my sending you a cheque for £20. Wh. he hopes will be a help to you. Kindly sign & return the accompanying receipt. As his Lordship does not wish his gift to be generally known, I will ask you to treat it as private.'

Pictured

Cattle grazing in Fish Pond Field. Bottom Farm is in the centre left background with Ide Farm in the distance on the far right of the photograph



LIVESTOCK

Mixed farming was practised at Laxton, with the holdings carrying a variety of farm animals as well as growing a selection of arable crops.

A statement of cropping and stock on Brockilow Farm was prepared for the landlords in June 1910 listing:

*'5 milking cows, 1 Heifer, 11 Young Beasts,
7 Calves, 4 Working Horses, 3 Young Horses,
37 Sheep & 35 Lambs.'*

With almost 2/3rds of the farm down to pasture the business was relying on the stock based enterprises: dairy products, fattening cattle and lambs. The young horses were probably replacement working types.

When Mrs Harold Marrison vacated Breck's Farm, the remaining stock was sold by auction. B. G Selby was instructed and he put notice of the following lots in the Newark Advertiser:

6 HORSES; Brown mare 7 years old, brown mare 8 years old, both believed to be in foal; useful bay filly, 2 years old; chestnut filly, 2 years old, very active; yearling filly, yearling colt. 22 BEASTS; 3 red cows in full milk, prime fat bullock, young fat cow, 3 two and half years old bullocks, 2 heifers served for July and September, 4 red eighteen months old steers and heifers, 8 yearlings. 10 IN LAMB EWES. 7 PIGS; 2 in- pig sows, porket pig, 4 stores. 20 couples of Fowls, 4 Turkeys, 3 Geese, 2 Guinea Fowls, 3 hives of Bees. HARNESS, CARRIAGES and IMPLEMENTS. Light Spring Cart by Barham, Mey's 30 gal. separator, "The Ideal" over-end churn up to 30lbs. Sale to commence with the Harness at One o'clock. Sheep and Beasts. 2.30."



THE
MELOTTE
SEPARATOR

The Simplest to Clean and Operate.

FORTY Years ago The MELOTTE created a sensation. The original suspended Bowl Machine is a bigger favourite to-day than ever. It will pay for itself in a Season.

MELOTTE Railway Churns, Railway Milk Cans, Milk Covers, Strainers, Milking Pails, Cream Cans and Milk Flasks and other Dairy requisites are low in price and of irreproachable quality.

Pictured

Above: Cows and calves at Town End Farm. Painted by H. van Batenburg for Richard Clark

Below: Advertisement for a cream separator

COWS

The Lincoln Red Shorthorn was said to be the preferred breed of cow for the Laxton farmer. In the early days the 'Lincoln Red' was considered to be a dual purpose breed. It was both an excellent dairy animal with a high milk yield, winning a prestigious prize at The London Dairy Show in 1922, and could be fattened for beef on a grass based diet.

SHEEP

'Lincoln long-wools seem to have been a popular breed of Laxton sheep, owing to the wool being of more value than the mutton' according to Edith Hickson.

William Beckitt remembered *'hundreds of sheep were kept in Laxton... they used to run in the open fields at very little expense, and many a flock was raised from a cade [orphan] lamb!'*

Before 1913 the size of the "village flock" recorded in the June Return was always in excess of 1000 sheep, including lambs, reaching a peak of 1467 in 1910. Thereafter, numbers declined by around a half.

One of the problems faced by the Laxton shepherd is still seen to be newsworthy when it happens today:

Newark Advertiser 27 January 1915:

'On Friday last Mr J Newbould was shepherding, when he saw a dog worrying Mr J Merrill's sheep. He drove the dog away and then found three dead sheep and several more badly bitten. One has died since. The dog has been traced to Kneesall.'

Mr Argles acted on behalf of the farmers and obtained some compensation. He expressed his



Pictured

Above: Flock of sheep at Town End Farm

Below: Pigs rooting around in front of Holme View Farm

views on the subject in a letter to Joseph Merrills on 24 February:

‘Thank you for receipt for £5... These unpleasant occurrences could be avoided if people would take more care of their sheepdogs. I know there was a foxhound puppy with this sheep

dog, but foxhound puppies do not worry sheep unless they are led astray by an older dog. The sheep dog should have been kept under control and given plenty of work; and, if suspected as likely to worry sheep, it should have been destroyed long ago. As a result there has been a serious loss to yourself, Mr. Peatfield, Lord Manvers, and Mr. Gale. I hope I shall never have to deal with a similar case again.’



PIGS

‘Every farm, small holding and cottage had its quota of pigs to be killed for food, from the solitary pet to the three or four required to nourish a large family and the farm lads living in at the various farm houses of the wider acreage.’ (Edith Hickson).

Pigs were also kept commercially; Robert Bennett had 23 store hogs to go in his 1912 dispersal sale and Mrs Bagshaw 10 good store pigs in her sale in 1913.

In November 1920 John Turner at Breck's Farm informed the estate he was feeding a lot of pigs and would have 20 ready in the New Year. He was also using their manure to improve the light land.

ARABLE

The cropping section of the 1910 statement in respect of Brockilow Farm shows us a rotation on land not part of the three field system.

Area is in acres (a).

Name of Field	Area	Cropping
Brocoli	5.915	Wheat after Fallow
Brocoli	5.312	Fallow after Peas & Beans
Kneesall Lane Close	10.895	½ Oats after Barley ½ Clover after Oats
Small Close	6.502	Fallow after seeds
Rushey Close	11.521	5a. Peas & Beans after 3a. Roots, ½ a. Potatoes 1½ a. Barley, 6½ a. Wheat after Peas & Beans
49 South Field	13.1	5a. Fallow, 5a. Peas & Beans, 3a. Tares
60 South Field	3.856	Peas & Beans
86 Mill Field	4.119	Fallow after Peas & Beans

To the modern eye the acreage of cereals, particularly wheat as a cash crop, is very small. Oats, clover, peas & beans, clover and tares can all form part of animal rations.

The significant area of fallow amongst the enclosed fields suggests the farmer, William Atkinson, failed to get a crop established on land which still has a reputation for being 'heavy and cold'. The Statement was prepared as part of a review of the tenancy following the death of one of the joint tenants, leaving the surviving brother in financial difficulties. He left the farm in 1911.



Pictured

Corn stooks in Mill Field

CROP REPORTS

The anticipated yield of a farmer's crops has always been affected by the vagaries of the weather, together with the prevalence of pests and diseases, throughout the preceding year. It was no different 100 years ago; as the resumé's printed in a local newspaper reveal.

Newark Advertiser, 24 July 1901:

LAXTON. The prospects of harvest in this neighbourhood are not at all encouraging. In fact, it is feared that this will be one of the most serious that farmers have had to face. During the last few weeks wheat has certainly improved, but is sure to be considerably below the average. Then much of the wheat is found to contain a great deal of "smut." Barley will be a very moderate crop, but oats are almost a failure. Peas are doing very well. Beans have been attacked so much with filth that in many cases the farmer will not get his seed in return. Turnips in most cases have been sown

twice, but rain is greatly needed. Some crops of mangolds are doing fairly well. With regard to fruit there is in some orchards a fair show of plums and apples, whilst in others the trees are almost bare.

“Smut” in wheat is a fungus disease which infects the developing grain which ultimately breaks down releasing a soot-like mass of spores, hence its name. All that remains of the ears of infected plants is a blackened stalk. An added difficulty in the control of smut is that it can be carried over in seed corn. “Filth” in the bean crop is most likely to have been Black (or Bean) Aphids. In the early twentieth century the fungicides, seed dressings and pesticides upon which we now rely to combat such disease and pest problems had yet to be developed.

A more optimistic outlook was given in the Newark Advertiser of 21 July 1915:

LAXTON. THE CROPS - The general appearance of the crops has greatly improved since the much needed rains. The hay crops are light, but seeds are very good. Wheat looks better this year than of late years. Barley and oats look fairly well, but the straw is very short, and longer in some places than others; the ears are of fair size.

The root crops, such as white turnips, mangolds and swedes, are in a good condition, and from all appearances there appears to be a good supply forthcoming for the winter. The potato crops promise well. The fruit trees, such as apple, plums and pears have an abundance of fruit on them. Gooseberries, currants and raspberries are very small and poor. Strawberries are very plentiful and of a fair size. There is every prospect of an early harvest.

These reports remind us of the wide variety of crops which can be cultivated at Laxton, with cereals, roots and pulses continuing to be grown to a greater or lesser extent today. The importance of fruit other than as a garden crop is less familiar. Each of the farmsteads had an orchard, many extending to between one and two acres. Sadly only a remnant of the apple, pear, plum, damson, hazel and walnut trees now survive.

HARVEST

In his youth, William Beckitt helped with the harvest when all the fields were cut with the scythe or sickle:

'by a team consisting of two men and a boy. I was the boy in this team, which was made up of a chap called George Engleton, who swung the scythe all day from 8a.m. until dark. My Uncle Sam was the man who raked the corn together with a three pronged rake. He raked it into bundles of sheafs while my

Pictured

Cutting oats. Jack Cook swings the scythe while Ernest Jones uses a rake to gather the sheaves



job was to make bands out of straw to tie up the bundles into sheaves. If we worked hard all day then we could clear an acre per day. We had to stack the sheaves up in tens, five a side, to let them ripen and keep dry.'



Pictured

Harvest using a reaper-binder at Weston, early 1900's

Below Left: Hessian corn sacks

Below Right: Threshing tally on the granary door at Manor Farm

Then, in 1904, mechanisation arrived in the form of the reaper-binder: *'This device had a knife bar of five to seven feet wide. It also tied the corn up into sheaves, and it was a good neat invention, although it was very heavy, and the weather was often very wet.'*

THRESHING

At Manor Farm there remains a faint reminder of the toil of threshing days in 1912 when Jack Cooke and Ben Skelton left a tally drawn in pencil on the granary door. Each mark represented a sack of threshed grain carried up the steep wooden steps to the upper floor. Oats were the most likely grain to have been stored in the granary for use in animal feed, in which case the sack full weighed 14 stone. Sacks of barley were heavier at 16 stone and wheat at 18 stone. Wheat as the cash crop was often threshed as required for sale and carried away in hired hessian bags.





Pictured

*Threshing scene
at School Farm*

The ability to carry these weights relied not only on strength but to a greater part on technique whether the weight was supported across both shoulders (as we can see in the old photograph) or with the sack balanced upright on one shoulder.

Threshing was most definitely a team effort. There are twelve figures in the photograph of threshing in Joe Merrill's stack yard at School Farm, dating from before 1905. Posing for this picture will have given the participants a welcome break from the filth; clouds of smoke from the steam engine mixing with the dust rising from the threshing drum, and the infernal clatter of the machinery.

The horse drawn engine was probably the one driven by Frederick Rose of Laxton. He would have stoked up the engine with coal to get a good head of steam by dawn in the limited hours of daylight during the autumn and winter threshing season. The threshing set has been drawn up next to the rick from

which two men forked sheaves onto the top of the machine. Two men received these sheaves one cutting the band round each sheaf before it was passed to the drum-feeder to be fed into the threshing drum.

The threshed grain stripped from the straw fed down chutes into waiting bags. These sacks

were collected and weighed by the corn-carriers. They were then raised from ground level onto the carriers back with the aid of a 'sack barrow.' Other outlets on the machine spewed chaff and husks which were gathered onto hessian sheets by the chaff-carrier. Finally straw emerged off the straw-walkers at the back of the threshing machine. Two more men would restack this straw for use as animal bedding during the coming year. Throughout the day the steam engine would need to be supplied with water. This was the task of the water-boy.

The engine driver and his mate, who undertook the role of drum-feeder, may have been accompanied by regular threshing gang members. The team was supplemented by the workforce on the farm where the day's threshing was taking place. In 1912 Ben Skelton was a 25 year old waggoner at Manor Farm, while Jack Cooke, an 18 year old farm labourer lived in a cottage next to the farm.

With his early morning arrival, the engine driver could expect to breakfast with the farmer before the arrival of the other men at around 7am. The farmer's womenfolk would serve a cooked midday meal for the whole workforce and sometimes also provided a tea at the end of the day.



Pictured

*Collecting chop
after threshing*

BASIC SLAG

In the interests of good husbandry, one area where the Manvers Estate was particularly keen to cooperate with their farm tenants was in the acquisition and application of basic slag.

In the days before compound fertilizers basic slag was very widely used to add the plant nutrient phosphate to the soil. A by-product of the manufacture of steel from pig-iron the slag had phosphate levels of 12-16%. Ground to a powder (having about the same consistency as cement) the black, dusty product came in hundredweight (50 kilo) bags and was considered very difficult to spread accurately and a lot of work. These disadvantages were far outweighed by its effect as an improver of grassland, especially on heavier soils. Basic slag was said to “sweeten” the land and encourage the growth of wild white clover. Clover in turn fixes nitrogen from the air in its root nodules, a portion of which is released into the soil stimulating the growth of surrounding grasses.

Hy. Richardson & Company of York advertised in 1903:

“BASIC SLAG –For Autumn and Winter application, specially recommended for Poor Grass Land, Autumn Wheat, Seeds, Beans, Peas, Turnips, etc. Highest qualities supplied on favourable terms. Quotations on application.”

The Estate had arrangements whereby the agent would order the basic slag, initially from suppliers in London but in later years via Quibell Brothers Agricultural Merchants of Newark.

In some cases the Estate was prepared to share the cost, as in the order placed with Chemical Works, Leadenhall Street, London on 3 December 1900:

“Please send to Carlton on Trent Station 5 1/2 tons of basic slag- 2 1/2 consign to G Johnson and 3 tons to Joe Merrills both of Laxton. Invoice 1 1/2 tons of that for Johnson to me and 1 1/2 for Merrills to me. Send the invoices for the remainder to the tenants, their postal address is Laxton, Newark.”



Pictured

Horse drawn plate & flicker drill used to spread basic slag

In 1903 the price was 48s 3d (£2.41p) per ton and was steady at this level until the war years rising to 75s 0d (£3.75p) per ton for 26% phosphate in 1918.

Delivery could be to Carlton, Tuxford or Ollerton stations and the tenant was expected to cart his allocation home. The basic slag should be spread in late autumn, February was too late as Mr Patrick was advised. The normal application rate was around 1/2 ton to the acre every 3 to 4 years.

The Estate was also prepared to assist with the spreading, but not without conditions.

R. W. Wordsworth wrote to William Merrills on 4 December 1905:

‘If you will send a horse to be at the bottom of Cocking Hill at 9am on Thursday morning next, you can have our slag drill, only our man Joe Lee, who is accustomed to go with it, must sow for you, & you must find him a nights lodging, & then he can go on to the others who want the Drill. When I have let it out without man, it has come home broken, so I am not going to risk this again.’

Pictured

Laxton Post Mill



The Windmill,
Laxton, Notts. (B18)



THE FALL OF THE OLD TECHNOLOGY AND RISE OF THE NEW

A windmill had stood on a high point in the centre in Mill Field from medieval times and was illustrated on Mark Pierce's 1635 map. At the end of the nineteenth century the venerable wooden post mill, standing on a ¼ acre site owned by the Manvers Estate was operated by James Laughton.

Born in 1846 at Egmonton, James was the Laxton miller for over 40 years. Initially he also farmed 38 acres of land mostly situated in the open fields. In 1905 he took on a further 61 acres with the tenancy of Twitchill Farm. The father of a large family he was assisted in the milling business and on the farm by his sons. George W Laughton appears to have been last to assume the role of miller with his father.

By 1916 the mill seems to have fallen into disrepair and finally collapsed at 5.30 in the afternoon of Sunday 16 July:



Pictured

Above: 1916
collapse of the mill

Opposite Top: A
Bamford 2 ½ H.P.
engine built in 1926
driving a straw chopper.

Opposite Bottom:
1903 advertisement
for oil engine and
associated machinery

'...Mr Clark seems to be about the only person who heard it fall and he said it went down with a terrible crash.'

The old mill was not replaced. Technology had moved on. The days when the subsistence farmers would need to have all their wheat ground to flour in order to live had long gone.

Even the grinding of corn for animal feed could now be achieved at home; John Bagshaw, for example, owned a 3 H.P. portable steam engine with a pair of mill-stones, all housed in a corrugated iron Engine and Mill House at Town End.

Stationary oil engines made an appearance in Laxton well before the demise of the mill. Robert Bennett (Step Farm) operated a Crossley's 4 ½ - Brake H.P. Engine with belting from which he could drive a Bental Chopper, Nicholson Pulper, Bamford Cake Breaker, and Bamford Rapid Grinding Mill.

The engine itself would be the property of the tenant but the setting on a concrete floor or, even better, a brick engine house was seen to be a landlord's responsibility.



On this premise, when William Bennett (New House Farm) purchased an engine in 1907 the estate undertook to put down a concrete bed. Other farmers followed suit. Although Joseph Merrills had requested a floor for an engine installed for chopping; his successor at Ivy House Farm, James Price, managed to persuade the estate to construct a small engine house using old bricks already at the farm. This addition to the barn completed in 1920 is still standing, although the engine and associated line shaft have been removed.

With the proliferation of engines came a new concern for the estate, the increased risk of fire. In the spring of 1918 the estate office carried out an audit of farm insurance policies.

THE BLACKSTONE OIL ENGINES.
 THE BEST AND MOST ECONOMICAL. 2 to 60 H.P.

Also Makers of
AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS and MACHINES.

THE "TAUNTON" HAYMAKER.

THE "STAMFORD" RAKE.

NEW PATENT SWATH TURNER.
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 Fitted with stones for producing soft meal.

TURNIP CUTTERS.
 Oil-Cake Breakers.

ROOT PULPERS,
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 Steam Engines and Boilers.

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Catalogue with full particulars post free.
BLACKSTONE & CO., LTD., STAMFORD
 Telegrams: BLACKSTONES, STAMFORD. Telephone: No. 1 NATIONAL.



Mr Spink writing to Richard Clark:

'I am under the impression that your policy has not been endorsed allowing you to use petrol with your gas engine for chopping purposes. Will you please send the policy in the enclosed envelope, and say where the engine is fixed so that I can get the necessary endorsement made. If you had a fire now, there would be difficulty making a legal claim.'

Pictured

Engine house at Ivy House Farm, built 1920

WATER

Rev Collinson writes of the new water supply in his letter published in the 1914 Parish Almanac:

'On the 16 October [1913] the new water supply reached Laxton, and as time goes on, without doubt, will be of great convenience to all. The water is pure and wholesome, and suitable for all domestic purposes and there can be no hesitation in saying that it is more healthy than water derived from wells and cisterns which are liable to all sorts of pollution.'

OLD SUPPLY

Before the arrival of a piped supply, water derived from the wells and soft water cisterns situated around the village. This would have been drawn up by hand pump not only for household use but also for the farm animals. Each cow in milk needed to drink around 12

to 14 gallons of water a day. Even for a small herd that would require a fair amount of pumping. The watering of animals housed in winter will have taken the yardman an hour or two each day.

George Cocking had a water pump for each of the three wells at Manor Farm. One located at the back of the farmhouse for household use, another in the crew-yard for watering stock, and a third in the stack-yard. The Bagshaw & Moody families, who occupied neighbouring properties (now Kneesall & Corner Cottages), shared the use of the well in the stack-yard reaching it via a little footbridge and heavily trod path.

Joseph Merrills, at Ivy House Farm, had a soft water cistern in his front garden into which rainwater run-off from the roof of the house was collected. This was then piped directly to a pump in the back kitchen. This farmstead also used a well in the courtyard which supplied the water troughs in the crew-yard by a piped overflow system.

Spring water was piped to Brockilow, Saywood and through to Laxton Lodge. Originating at the Duck's Mouth, a spring situated to the North of Brockilow Farmstead, the water was raised up the hill by a hydraulic ram.

Pictured

*Advertisement for
a Hydraulic Ram*

WATER SUPPLIES.

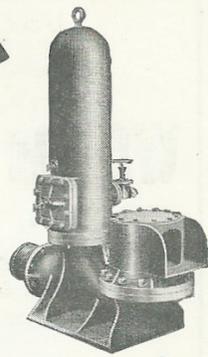
If there is flowing water on your Estate you can avoid the risk of shortage in the next dry season by installing one of our

"VULCAN" HYDRAULIC RAMS

which, having no metal in motion, will pump silently and continuously with practically no attention, and

WITHOUT FUEL OR OIL.

We have Installations all over the Kingdom supplying Estates, Country Mansions and Villages.





DANGER OF POLLUTION

Inevitably, the sharing of such a vital resource could lead to friction between neighbours, especially where there is danger of pollution. This happened at Moorgate in 1906. Here a well with pump was located at the rear of George Burkitt's house (Moorgate Farm) and shared with Mr. & Mrs. John Cree (the adjoining Moorend Cottage).

On 5 February, R.W. Wordsworth wrote to Mrs Cree:

Pictured

Moorgate Farm &
Moorend Cottage

'I hear you are keeping pigs in your coal house, for wh. it is not in any way suited, neither light, ventilation or drainage & quite close to the well. You must please get them removed at once – & put somewhere else. We shall have the well polluted if they remain there.' Mrs Cree replied the following day *'I am sorry people have nothing to do but sit all day studding how best to annoy us. The pigs are 3 weeks old tomorrow morning.'*

She went on to complain about Mr Burkitt, whom she suspects to be the informant. The piglets were moved from the coal house, however, and their progress recorded in further letters.

On 20 February Mrs Cree said:

'They got cold & 4 of them are dead & 2 more only just alive & the other 2 I can't say whether they will live or die. I have spent 5/- trying to get something

to do them good but it is of no avail. I would not have taken under £4 for them at the time you wrote to us to move them for they did look well & I had been at a lot of trouble with them. I must say that we have been very much put about, about it. We could have understood it if they had been doing any harm, either to the well or to our neighbour.'

Unfortunately, by June, all the pigs had died.

Later in the summer the water supply from the well dried up. Mrs Cree wrote to Wordsworth on 8 September:

'He has been fairly quiet since I last wrote but has begun again, about a week since & has been at it daily. We have no water & that has vexed him. He says he pays more rent than we do & he is entitled to more water than we are. He has a pump in his yard besides having the right to use the one intended for both parties & we have nothing but the one we both use. I have to carry what we require from the Sheepwash... I won't be cursed & sworn at for nothing.....I am not the only one who has threatened to complain about him.'

OUT IN THE FIELDS

Where stock out at pasture were not able to drink from streams or natural ponds it was essential to provide them with water by alternative means. This may require carting water to outlying fields, as B. Moody bemoaned having to do for his Westwood Closes, in 1906. If there was a reliable source from a spring this could be piped to a stone trough such as existed on Toad Lane, or over at Red Dykes. An elaborate scheme to provide a watering place for

Richard Clark's land adjoining Kirton Beck involved sinking a stone trough in the deep dyke and installing a hand pump to enable water to be raised up to the fields.

NEW SUPPLY

Civil Engineer W.H. Radford was instructed to find a reliable source for a new supply of water to Lord Manvers' Estate in the villages of Kneesall and Laxton. In September 1911, after making trial boreholes around Kneesall, a source of pure, soft water was found deep in the bunter sandstone to the South West of the village. Approval from the District & County Councils to lay water pipes along the public roads was sought in late 1912 and the scheme completed in October 1913. This supply was initially delivered for domestic use on the Estate with private households (including the Vicarage) connecting to the pipework at their own expense. R.W. Wordsworth to Rev Collinson: *'Water supplies are costly things.'*

It may not have received a wholehearted welcome amongst the farming fraternity. Tenancies, previously taken on the basis the rent included an existing supply of water, were now to be charged an additional water rate varying between £1 10s 0d (£1.50) for W. Sampson (at Twitchill Cottage) in 1914 and £3 10s 0d (£3.50) for T & M Bailey (at Step Farm) in 1920. The supply was not to be extended to grass fields as Wordsworth advised William Bennett in December 1913 *'I must wait and see how far my supply is sufficient for the houses.'*

AN EARLY
GOVERNMENT
INCENTIVE TO
PERSUADE FARMERS
TO PLOUGH UP
GRASSLAND IN
ORDER TO INCREASE
OUTPUT WAS THE
PAYMENT OF A
GUARANTEED PRICE
FOR CEREALS



THE WAR YEARS

During the Great War the farming pattern in Laxton saw relatively little change.

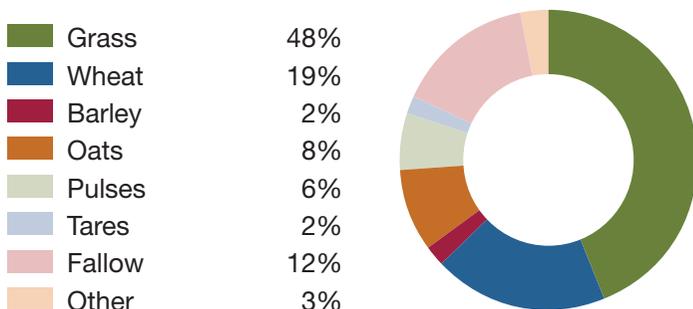
Nationally, the task of better managing the country's limited wartime agricultural resources fell to the War Agricultural Executive Committees. Established following a government food production campaign in 1915, they were a collaboration between the Board of Agriculture and County Councils. These bodies played a crucial role in publicising and implementing government objectives and in identifying local shortages in labour, horses, machinery and supplies.

An early government incentive to persuade farmers to plough up grassland in order to increase output was the payment of a guaranteed price for cereals. This was first introduced in autumn 1916 with a Board of Agriculture contract to purchase oats grown on land 'now in permanent pasture' at 41s 3d per quarter (£14.46 per tonne), which was about double the pre-war market price. Oats were a priority, as they were required to feed the horses serving at the Front.

In 1917, with an escalation in the number of merchant ships being sunk by the Germans, the country teetered on the edge of a food crisis.

The government responded to increasing shortages in basic supplies by introducing compulsory powers to improve land husbandry and extend the amount of arable cultivation.

1915 CROPS



At Laxton in 1915 the variety of crops, and the proportion of the land devoted to each, was very similar to those grown during the previous 10 years. Just under half of the available acreage was down to grass, mainly permanent pasture for grazing and mowing.

In spite of the various government initiatives, the June Returns for 1916 and 1917 show an increase in the area of land down to grass at Laxton. Although this could be explained by a shortage in the manpower required to undertake all the arable cultivations, it seems to have been sufficient to raise the profile of the Laxton estate with the Nottingham County Agricultural Executive Committee.

Under the heading *‘Ploughing up of Grass Land for the 1918 Harvest’* a formal direction was issued on 21 September 1917. The letter was accompanied by a schedule of the fields which had been identified by the Retford District Agricultural Committee as suitable for ploughing up, a total of 45 acres.

In response Alfred Spink, on behalf of the estate, wrote to Joshua Walker, Secretary of the Retford Committee:

'With reference to your Notice re ploughing up grass land in the Parish of Laxton, in the occupation of W.Merrills, W.G. Quibell, S.Peatfield, and J.Taylor; these tenants are only too wishful to do all in their power to assist in increasing the production of Home Grown Corn, but they all feel that with their present difficulty with labour, they have more arable land that they can properly cultivate at present, especially on such isolated farms as those occupied by Quibell and Taylor, where labour is most difficult to retain.'

Argles reinforced this argument in a letter dated 24 October 1917, penned whilst on a few days leave from France. Joshua Walker duly inspected the pasture land after which, on 4 January 1918, Spink informed Quibell: *'the field proposed to be ploughed up by you would not at present be asked for.'*

With a duty to ensure an increase in home grown crops the County Agricultural Executive Committee could not let matters rest. On 11 March 1918 orders, under The Defence of the Realm Regulations, were served on the Manvers Estate in respect of 24 tenants in Laxton Parish requiring them:

'...to plough up the field(s) shown in the Schedule below, and cultivate them as arable land for the growth of corn or roots for the Harvest of 1918. The serving of the order does not necessarily mean that your tenant is doing the work under compulsion, but this procedure is followed so as to safeguard the position of owner and occupier in regard to compensation.'

Representations were made on behalf of the tenants. Lord Manvers even attended a meeting of the Executive in Nottingham. With some substitutions for the fields originally scheduled, the total area of grassland ordered to come under the plough that summer was 255 acres. The work had to be completed, as Spink wrote to Thomas Bailey on 27 July 1918:

'I hear from the War Agricultural Committee that all land in Laxton scheduled for ploughing up is to be done. Therefore you have no alternative but make arrangements for doing the work as soon as you can.'

Even after he had undertaken all the additional work to comply with the ploughing order a farmer's troubles were not necessarily over. One situation led Alfred Spink to make a wry request of J Walker, Secretary War Agric Committee. On 25 November 1918 Spink wrote:

'Laxton, Brockilow Farm. Mr John Taylor has ploughed up the fields he was ordered to, adjoining what is known as "Kneesall Wood," and he complains now of damage by rabbits of his wheat that is just coming through. Could you assist Lord Manvers in any way in getting a man to kill the rabbits. We have a keeper living near the fields, but he is unable, by himself, to do much in the matter. His Lordship requested me to write to you on the subject.'

A reduction in the amount of grassland as a result of the ploughing orders did not become apparent in the official statistics for Laxton until 1919

The remit of the Agricultural Executive Committees also extended to taking actions which could result in

the eviction of a tenant where they considered he was not farming to the appropriate standard. This power was exercised in the case of Samuel Lacey, tenant of Primrose Farm. In the summer of 1917 Lacey was clearly struggling with his land work and it had come to the attention of the Retford District Agricultural Committee. Their first approach was to H.D. Argles who, after walking over the land at Primrose Farm on 26 July agreed:

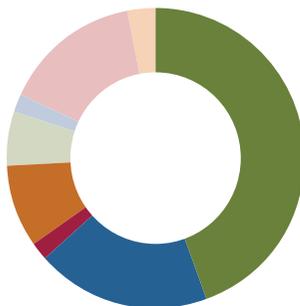
'It is, as you know, in a disgusting condition, and I shall be glad to assist your Committee in every possible way with a view to improving the state of the Holding.'

Lacey was unwilling to give up his tenancy stating in a letter to Argles on 11 August:

'I am in no arrears with my rent, and I have never received any notice either from you or from the War Committee. I certainly shall not give my consent for another person to enter immediately upon the arable land and cultivate it.'

1919 CROPS

Grass	44%
Wheat	19%
Barley	2%
Oats	9%
Pulses	6%
Tares	2%
Fallow	15%
Other	3%



Argles passed the matter back to the 'War Agricultural Committee at Retford.' On 22 September the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries issued an order authorising the landlord of Primrose Farm to determine forthwith the current tenancy of the holding on the grounds of it *'is not being so cultivated as to increase as far as practicable the food supply of the country.'*

A notice to quit was served on Lacey by Earl Manvers' representative on 27 September 1917.

The Agricultural Executive Committees also played a role in ensuring skilled men remained on farms to help to feed the nation. As farming was considered essential to the war effort an agriculture section covering specific, skilled tasks was included in the 1916 List of Certified Occupations, which were exempt from conscription into military service.

In June 1918 Edward Hennell, who was then horseman for George Newbould, was advised by Alfred Spink:

'I wired you this afternoon that the War Agricultural Committee will send you a protection certificate, and if you have any further calling up notices please return them to the Labour Officer, Milton Chambers, Milton Street, Nottingham.'

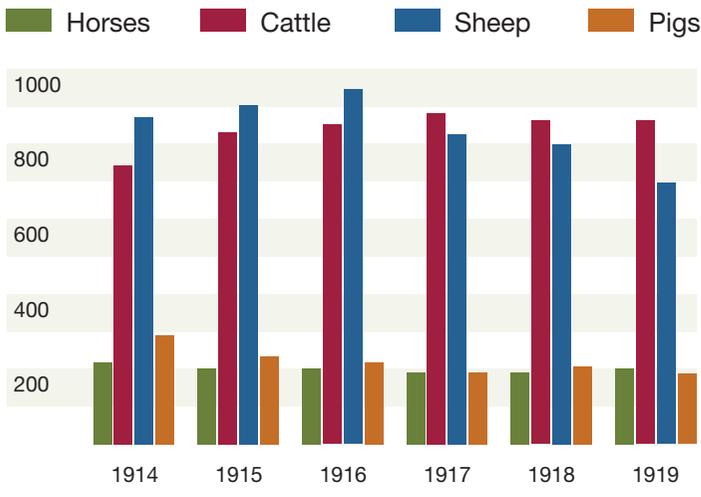
Edward Hennell was a proficient ploughman who went on to win competitions, including the trophy in the Tenants Class at the 1923 Thoresby Ploughing Match.

By the end of the war, shortages in supply had driven up the market price for cereals to levels equivalent to around £18 per tonne for wheat and £17 per tonne for barley and oats. This was almost two and a half times the pre-war figure.

Livestock numbers in Laxton Parish remained comparatively stable during the war years. Towards

the end of the conflict however, there was a noticeable decrease in the total number of sheep.

1914–1919



In 1914, before the outbreak of war, 216 horses were recorded in the village. There were 22 fewer in 1915, then a steady decline to 178 in 1918. We can assume some of these were requisitioned for military purposes.

Land cultivations remained almost exclusively horse drawn. Under exceptional circumstances, Sidney Johnson hired steam cultivators from Pye & Stacey of East Markham for work at Knapeney Farm in June 1917. They were considered to have done a good job. In 1918 John Taylor at Brockilow Farm was advised to approach Mr C Clarke, of Bridgegate, Retford, if he thought a tractor would do the scheduled ploughing work. In the years following the war, a tenant's request for the use of an estate tractor was rebuffed by Argles *'as it is a very expensive form of cultivation.'*

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ACRE

The standard area measurement in the Imperial system was the acre, equivalent to 4840 square yards. Derived from the 220 yards length (furlong or 'furrow long') by 22 yards breadth, a team of 8 oxen were deemed to be capable of ploughing in one day. (On the clay soil conditions at Laxton it is likely only half that area would have been achieved in a day.)

The imperial acre was divided into roods and perches, often abbreviated using the letters a. r. p. 40 perches = 1 rood, 4 roods = 1 acre. The modern metric area equivalents are: 0.405 Hectare = 1 Acre, or 1 Hectare = 2.47 Acres.

BALK OR BAULK

Unploughed banks, ridges and boundaries between two ploughed portions.

CAUSEY

Causeway, path or pavement.

CLOSE

Land that has been enclosed (usually by a hedge).

COTTAGER

Someone farming a few acres of land.

CROFT

A piece of enclosed land, used for tillage or pasture, adjacent to a house or homestead.

DOLE

A share, a small portion (of meadowland).

ESSOIGN

The allegation of an excuse for non-appearance in court at the appointed time; the excuse itself with a fine.

FALLOW

Land left uncropped for a year or more.

GAIT, GATE

A right to a run or pasturage for a cow, horse etc. on a common field, representing a share of joint ownership of the land.

HERMAPHRODITE

Convertible two or four wheeled cart (name often contracted to mophrey).

JUNE RETURNS

Board of Agriculture annual returns for the acreage of crops and numbers of livestock in each parish. Every farmer with a holding above 1 acre was required to complete an official form, annually on the date in June specified.

QUARTER

Measure used for trading of corn. Equivalent to 8 bushels, Imperial Measure of volume. The standard conversion to weighed measure varied with each commodity: 1 bushel = 60 lbs wheat, or = 50 lbs barley or = 39 lbs oats.

SYKE, SIKE, SIC

An area of common meadow in the open fields. Often associated with damp valley bottoms and bordering streams.

TARES

Cultivated vetches used principally for fodder.

TENANT RIGHT

When a farm tenancy comes to an end the tenant farmer may be entitled to Tenant Right.

This is compensation from the landlord for such things as the value of growing crops established for the coming season, unexhausted manure values and sod fertility, unconsumed produce (hay, straw or roots) which were to remain on the holding together with any tenant's improvements and fixtures. All subject to a deduction for dilapidations and any rent arrears.

TOFT

Site of a homestead and its outbuildings usually with attached croft.

TUP

Male sheep (ram) used for breeding.

WAGGONER

Looked after the horses under his control and drove them in accordance with whatever work was to be undertaken, e.g. ploughing, reaping, harrowing, carting, etc. Otherwise he drove a horse-drawn heavy four-wheeled wagon.

WONG

A piece of meadow land. A portion of unenclosed land under the open-field system.

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Sheep grazing on Open Field, 1934,
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ISBN 978-0-902435-08-7

Published by Nottinghamshire Local History Association.

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