



## *Langham in the Past*

*Don Mantle*

## **About the Author**



Don Mantle was born and bred in Langham and lived in the village until five years ago. He comes from a family which has lived and worked in Langham since the 1700s and whose members have always taken a keen interest in the history and affairs of the village, serving as parish and district councillors for many years. He and his wife, Pat, have recently celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary and have three children and eight grandchildren, three of whom are currently studying at university. One of Don's ancestors opened the first Post Office in Langham and another, as well as being a farmer, was landlord of the Noel Arms for many years. Although now living in Cottesmore, Don still takes an interest in village affairs and is a valued member of the Langham 2000 committee.

## **Introduction**

Langham, as a village, was first established in Anglo-Saxon times as is clearly shown by its name. Of course nothing is known of its earliest days since written records were not kept until many centuries later. One man of whom we have some knowledge is Simon de Langham. He is reputed to have been born in the village in the 1300s, and went on to carve out a remarkable career becoming successively a monk and Abbot at Westminster, Bishop of Ely, Chancellor to Edward III, Treasurer of England and finally was created a Cardinal by Pope Urban V and translated to the See of Canterbury as Archbishop.

Although the building of our church was commenced in the 1200s it was, as were so many of the local churches, considerably rebuilt and enlarged in the 1300 & 1400s and the magnificent building we have today no doubt owes much to Simon's support and influence.

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Mike Frisby

## ***Major Changes to Village Life***

Until 1925, Langham had been, for about three hundred years, an estate village forming part of the Exton estate. This was, at one time, the largest of the local estates extending to some fifteen thousand acres with its wealth largely in the good quality farming land. It did not have the vast mineral resources, particularly of coal, which were enjoyed by the likes of Lord Londonderry in Northumberland and Durham and Lord Lonsdale in Cumberland and Westmoreland. It is true that ironstone was found in and around Exton and, due to the enormous demand created by the industrial revolution, it was quarried commercially from about 1860 onwards, but the returns were relatively small compared with the enormous returns derived from coal.

Matters were further complicated in the middle 1800s by the Earl of Gainsborough marrying Lady Norah Bentinck. She was a member of one of England's foremost Roman Catholic families and, as a result, the Noels were converted to that religion and, as is often the way of enthusiastic converts, made considerable benefactions to that faith. In the early 1900s the then Earl died, having lived to a great age and consequently his son, who succeeded him was already well into his sixties. Sadly he only lived for another seven or eight years and in about 1920, the family were faced with an enormous demand for death duties. It was totally impossible for the family to meet this demand from their own resources and part of the estate had to be sold. Langham, Braunston, Brooke and Ridlington were all sold in 1925 and thus came about what was probably the greatest upheaval that our own village had ever known.

Lady Campden has kindly made corrections to the above paragraph:

"The Noel family did not marry into Roman Catholicism, but they were converted by Cardinal Newman in the late 1850s. It was Charles, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Gainsborough and his wife Lady Ida Hay the daughter of the 18<sup>th</sup> Earl of Erroll and grand-daughter of Mrs Jourdan and William IV who were the ones who converted. Mr Mantle is correct in saying that they made "benefactions to that faith" as they then built the chapel adjoining Exton Hall, the chapel adjoining their house at Chipping Campden, the church in Oakham, the RC school in Exton, the church in Chipping Campden and having promised to build a C of E church in Broad Campden he said he would not go back on his word and built that too. This Lord Gainsborough died in 1881. Lady Norah Bentinck was his grand-daughter and was born a Roman Catholic and died in 1939. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Gainsborough, Charles William Francis, died in 1926 to be succeeded by his son Arthur Edward Joseph, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Gainsborough who died only a year later, and was succeeded by his son, the present Earl of Gainsborough, who was then a little boy of nearly five."

As this was the year in which I was born, I have no memory of the village prior to the sale but my father described it as "a model village". Not all the Parish was included in the Estate but seven farms were, and they ranged in size from just over seventy acres up to the largest of about three hundred acres. One of the largest farms was the Manor Farm and the other, which did not at this time belong to the Estate was Langham Lodge. (This latter farm has an interesting history which is described later.) In addition there were eight or nine smallholdings ranging in size from about twenty acres to fifty acres. From this it can be seen that quite a number of people were able to earn their living as tenants and quite a number more as workers on the larger farms. In 1925 several farmers were able to buy their farms as sitting tenants, my father amongst them, but one man through his agents, purchased almost half the total acreage of the parish plus three of the largest houses and a considerable number of cottage properties.

He was Mr. Owen Hugh Smith, a merchant banker who held directorships in a number of large companies including the LMS Railway. He also owned, or had a controlling interest in, Hays Wharf, a large dock and warehousing complex in the port of London and was reportedly a millionaire. His connection with Langham was due to the fact that he had for several years previously, taken a lease for the hunting season on the Old Hall. He purchased the Manor Farm, which of course included the Manor House, Ranksborough Farm though not Ranksborough Hall and its stabling which were privately owned, and three further farms which were not part of the Exton Estate named respectively, Holbeck Farm, Rocott Lodge and Northfields farm, this latter one being in Cold Overton, not Langham parish. He bought both the Old Hall and adjoining property and also Langham House, spending a considerable amount of money enlarging and altering them. He also built seven further cottages to house workers he was to bring into the village.

From being a village in which a number of people were able to earn their livings as tenants, quite independently of one another, suddenly, one man came to own almost half the farmland in the parish and a very large proportion of the property in the village.

Having acquired his land, farms and property, Mr Owen Smith set about organising his estate. One of his first actions was to engage the services of Captain the Honourable Fitzroy as estate manager and providing him with the Manor House as his residence. The foreman of Manor Farm was housed in a substantial cottage. Holbeck, Northfield and Rocott Farms all had good farmhouses and in each of these he installed a farm foreman. The fifth farm, Ranksborough, had no farmhouse so three cottages were erected, one of which was the foreman's home. Each foreman was responsible for the everyday

management of his particular farm and answerable directly to the estate manager.

Mr Owen Smith then proceeded to purchase a stable of pedigree Suffolk Punch draught horses, a herd of pedigree Suffolk Red Poll cattle and a flock of pedigree Suffolk Blackface sheep. Along with them he brought to the village horsemen, stockmen and a shepherd and so set about organising a gentleman's model farm. A considerable number of new buildings were erected on each of the farms. In the case of Manor Farm, apart from erecting further buildings in the yard behind Manor House, he also had built a complete new set of buildings on the north side of Manor Lane on what had previously been a stackyard, all the buildings on that side of the road, apart from some later additions, date from that time.

He sank a deep borehole at the top of the hill behind the village, installed pumping equipment and laid a pipeline to the Manor yard, taking off branches to supply water to all his fields on the way. In the Manor yard he had a strong steel tower erected, about twenty five or thirty feet high with a very large steel tank built on top and a pipeline was laid through the village to supply water to his various properties by gravity from this tank. The water supply was also made available to anyone else in the village who desired it at a charge, if my memory serves me correctly, of 1/6 (7.5p) per thousand gallons. (The Brewery already had its own water supply fed from a reservoir situated in one of the fields bordering Manor Lane so did not need to take advantage of this new supply). Concurrently, Mr Owen Smith was making extensive alterations and additions to his properties.

Although owned for so long by the Gainsborough Estate, Langham was not an "estate village" in the usually accepted sense of the expression. A true estate village was, of course, a village almost totally owned by the local squire who lived in the castle or manor house and spent a good deal of his time in running his own farms and overseeing life in the village in general. The everyday running of the estate would be undertaken by his steward and all orders were transmitted through him. A very sharp eye was kept on both farms and the village and any action of which the squire disapproved was rapidly brought to the attention of the offending parties, and if the parties wished to keep their homes and tenancies or jobs they soon complied with the squire's demands. All properties were maintained by the estate and there was a case in the 1920s, in a Rutland village which shall be nameless, where some of the cottagers objected to the colour in which their properties had been painted. They, therefore, went out and bought paint in a colour of their own choice and repainted doors and window frames etc. themselves.

This was soon noticed by the Lady of the Manor during a walk around the village and word was soon sent out that this action would not be tolerated and, if the offending cottagers wished to retain their homes and jobs, their premises would immediately be repainted in the colour chosen by the estate. This may seem unreasonable and overbearing to us today, but that was life in an estate village! Langham, in this respect, was more fortunate. Although the steward visited the village fairly frequently, provided that matters were conducted in an orderly manner, villagers were left to run things more or less in their own way within, of course, the limits of their tenancies and jobs.

When Mr Owen Smith purchased a large proportion of the land and many of the properties, many of the villagers thought that, with both landlord and steward now resident in the village, they would be much more restricted. In fact, this was not the case and provided they did their work satisfactorily and looked after their properties they were allowed to carry on much as they had done hitherto.

Mr Owen Smith, having bought the Old Hall, the Manor, Langham House and a considerable number of houses and cottages chose the Old Hall as his own residence and set about altering and improving it in accordance with his own wishes. The house, as it originally stood, was quite large but not large enough to suit his requirements and consequently he had built a completely new set of kitchens and domestic premises at the eastern end. He also added a new wing, running on a north-south axis, at the western end nearest to New Lane, to provide further residential accommodation.

There were five old cottages standing in the grounds and butting end on to Burley Road, these were gutted and rebuilt as a guest annexe, for, in spite of the enlargements to the Old Hall itself, there was insufficient room to accommodate all the guests at the parties he frequently held.

At the same time the grounds, which cover almost three acres, were laid out afresh and included an enlarged kitchen garden and additional glass houses.

Prior to 1925, the entrance to the Old Hall had been situated half way along New Lane and opened out to the front of the Hall. This entrance was built up by extending the existing wall but its position can still be seen as, for some reason, the left hand gate pillar was left in place. The pillar, surmounted by a stone plinth and stone ball can still be seen in the wall along New Lane. Below the gates, the boundary had been formed by a thorn hedge which continued down New Lane and round the corner into Church Street until it reached two old cottages which stood roughly where the present archway and tower now stand. These were demolished to make way for the present buildings which were set

back from the roadway, garages for his cars being built on the right hand side between the archway and the road. The older building, on the left, he retained to house his private electricity generating plant. The buildings, of which the archway forms a part, were extended behind the house on the corner and consisted of two storeys. The upper storey formed service accommodation with access by means of the doorway to the left of the arch. The ground floor, beyond the generator house, provided stabling, tack rooms and additional access to the service accommodation.

The house on the corner, which was built around 1900, was owned by Mr. Tom Munday, the butcher, and contained the butcher's shop. The slaughterhouse was behind the house. Mr Smith purchased all these premises and installed a Mr. Giles as manager, with the intention of retailing meat from prime animals on the estate. There was a roadway between the house and the slaughterhouse which was opened out to give access to the stable yard. Here further stabling and tack rooms were built backing on to the house with even more stabling behind the slaughterhouse. An entrance to the stable yard from the Hall was made by continuing the roadway right through. A large muck ring was built beyond the slaughterhouse and from there the boundary was formed along the lane by a hedge planted on a bank to the point where the Hall grounds joined The Limes property. This completed the alterations and additions, the Old Hall appearing much as you see it today.

Having got under way the works which he required for his own residence, Mr Smith turned his attention to his other properties. In the case of the Manor, this involved the building of a completely new wing on the back of the house containing new kitchens and domestic offices on the ground floor with further accommodation above.

Langham House presented rather more of a problem. He obviously could not build on to the front and the space at the back of the house was very limited due to the proximity of Church Street, or Middle Street as it was then known. His requirement was bathroom and bedroom accommodation and he solved the problem by building a narrow extension, three storeys high, to the back of the property. Between the east end of Langham House and the rear of the Noel Arms were two cottages, facing on to a paved yard; the smaller of the two he incorporated into the main house as further kitchen premises; the larger he refurbished as staff accommodation. The stable yard, with stabling for eight to ten horses, was situated behind the house to the north of Church Street and was improved but not extended. Additional storage accommodation was built, along with a generator house to supply electricity to the house and buildings.



Mr. Smith made minor improvements to some cottages and to Ivey House. Seven new cottages were built in the village; two standing back from Church Street opposite the Old Vicarage; two facing Manor Lane just above the Manor Farm buildings; and three at the Manor Lane/Melton Road junction. He also built two or three cottages at Ranksborough as, of course, the Hall and stabling were not included in the sale. New farm buildings were erected to the north of Manor Lane and in the Manor yard itself, as well as at Ranksborough. Existing buildings at other farms were extended.

Captain the Honourable Fitzroy, whom Mr Smith had appointed as agent for the estate and farm manager, occupied the Manor and continued to do so until 1938, at which time he unexpectedly succeeded to the title of the Duke of Grafton, the then Duke having been killed in an accident. Consequently, he left Langham for Euston Hall in Suffolk to take up his inheritance. His successor as farm manager was Mr Harry Slaney who had trained on Messrs Chivers farms at Histon near Cambridge. His training had been in horticulture as well as agriculture, something he was able to put to good use later. A trend towards a more commercial farming policy had begun under Captain the Honourable Fitzroy and the transition was rapidly completed by Mr Slaney, the estate being run on commercial lines from then on. When meat rationing was introduced early in World War II the butcher's shop was closed, the number of beef cattle reduced, and a herd of Jersey dairy cows introduced. The slaughterhouse was cleaned out and refitted as a dairy and a milk round started in Oakham and Uppingham. Following the installation of a second dairy herd at Ranksborough, the milk round was extended to include Corby and developed into a substantial business, employing a manager and four or five full-time staff.

During the war, a considerable amount of grassland had to be ploughed up. Further staff were engaged, more machinery purchased and the farms became mainly arable. Later in the war, Mr Slaney introduced the growing of strawberries and black currants which resulted in more land-girls being taken on. The number of staff rose to over twenty including a farm office manager, an assistant and two lady typists.

Mr Owen Smith died in 1948 and as there was no-one to take over, all the farms, with the exception of the Manor, were sold. Mr Slaney left to take up another appointment and Mrs Smith continued to farm Manor Farm for a few more years engaging Messrs Shouler and Son of Melton Mowbray as agents in charge of a younger man acting as farm manager. A second manager was employed when the first one left but Mrs Smith was now becoming elderly and Manor Farm and the Manor House were sold.

Mrs Smith retained the Old Hall and two small paddocks adjoining Manor Farm, Langham House having been sold some years previously. Ex-staff occupying estate cottages remained as tenants, each cottage being sold individually upon the death of the tenant. Mrs Smith lived in the Old Hall until her death when the remaining property was inherited by a nephew, Mr Abel-Smith.

Thus, in a period of less than fifty years, the village returned to more-or-less the state in which it had been prior to 1925, except that occupiers were now owners rather than tenants. Very few smallholders were left as, in the main, their holdings had been absorbed into the farms. In many ways this is a pity, as these small but independent farmers added colour and variety to the life of the village. Unfortunately, present-day circumstances do not permit a continuation of what was a traditional way of village life.

## ***Langham Lodge***

Langham Lodge has had a very long history, one which almost certainly dates back to 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Unfortunately there is, as far as I can ascertain, no documentary evidence before the early seventeenth centuries. Two very different theories have been advanced regarding its origins and I offer both for your consideration.

The first is that the property began as a grange. At the time of which we are speaking there were three local religious establishments. Croxton Abbey, Newbold Priory and Launde Abbey. Of the first two, Croxton Abbey, near Croxton Kerrial and Newbold Priory situated between Owston and Harefield nothing remains. They were both small houses containing only an abbot or prior and perhaps less than a dozen monks and in common with dozens or even hundreds of similar establishments up and down the country they rapidly disappeared when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and turned out the inhabitants in the 1530s. In the case of Launde Abbey - a somewhat larger establishment - there are still a few remains of the mediaeval buildings and of course it still retains its religious connections.

Granges came into being because, by the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> centuries abbeys and monasteries were being granted or willed large tracts of land by wealthy local land owners and these eventually became so extensive that they could not be controlled and administered by the abbey itself. A practice therefore developed by which a dwelling and outbuildings were erected at some suitable place to undertake and control activities in that area. Lay brothers were sent out from the abbey to undertake the everyday work and two or three monks accompanied them to direct the work, deal with administration and report back to the abbey.

Once established, this system continued right up to the time of the Reformation when Henry VIII finally broke away from the church of Rome, one of his first actions was to dissolve the monasteries, turning out their inhabitants and seizing all contents of value, even down to stripping the lead from the roof. He did not want the vast areas of land which they by then owned and these he sold off to his retainers and supporters, no doubt at a handsome profit, and this is how many of our great landed families of later years came into being.

A second theory put forward is that Langham Lodge occupies the site of a former drovers inn. A considerable number of these were erected in mediaeval times to serve the needs of the drovers and other travellers using drove roads or trackways for moving animals and goods to fairs and markets and it has been suggested that Mickley Lane formed part of a trackway from the salt producing areas of Worcestershire to the east coast ports of Wisbech, Kings Lynn and Boston. Salt in those days

was a valuable commodity and was frequently transported over long distances.

One may wonder why this particular site was chosen, but it must be remembered that apart from accommodating the men, adequate and reasonably secure grazing was required for the animals in their charge, whether they were cattle, sheep or pack horses. This would not be available within the village itself and of course, in the case of Langham, the open fields were all situated to the east of the village where the land was lighter and more easily cultivated. The inn was therefore built just beyond the boundaries of these fields in open country where grazing was available. The trackway would have passed quite close to where the present house stands and vestiges of it beyond that point can still be traced.

An interesting point in relation to this is the position of Loudall Lane. This is another ancient drove road or trackway which runs along the top of the hill behind the village, passing close by the deserted hamlet from which it derives its name. This hamlet is shown on maps drawn by John Speed and others in the early sixteen hundreds, it is omitted from maps drawn in the early eighteen hundreds and nothing of it now remains above ground. According to the early maps, Loudall would appear to have been situated some two to three hundred yards to the west of the point where the road from Langham to Ashwell reaches the top of the hill before descending into the valley towards Ashwell and I think its site can be determined by the fact that the double hedge bordering the trackway takes a ninety degree turn at this point and, after travelling in a southerly direction for forty to fifty yards, takes a right hand turn back to its original course. There appears to be no logical reason for this diversion unless it was to avoid some obstacle such as buildings and it is from this that I deduce that this could well be the site of the lost hamlet.

The trackway emerges onto the present road at the top of the hill and crossing it, descends into the valley in a south easterly direction to the side of the spinney. I believe that it joined the trackway passing Langham Lodge just before crossing where the railway now is by the means of Tambourine Bridge. From there it passes along a short lane down to the Oakham/Ashwell Road and crossing this, follows a trackway up to the top of the hill emerging somewhere near Burley Toll Bar. From there I believe it would have headed for Stamford, a town of very ancient origins, and beyond to Peterborough and possibly even Norwich. Situated where it is, Langham Lodge would have been well placed to server travellers on either trackway. Unfortunately, the only facts we have are the existence of the two drove roads and the three local abbeys and priory. The rest, although extremely interesting is of course pure speculation which sadly is unlikely to be resolved.

Now we must turn to that part of the Lodge's history of which we have a factual information. The present house was designed and built by a gentleman of some means named William Chapman. As a point of interest, there is a field up the Ashwell road that still carries the name of Chapmans but whether there is any connection I don't know. It was built in the early 1700s and Mr Chapman, who was related to the then Countess of Gainsborough, had been trained as an architect and had previously undertaken several commissions for the Gainsborough family. Whether he farmed the land is not known, but after living there for several years at a peppercorn rent he returned to Exton and built there a house very similar in design to Langham Lodge. This was later named the Presbytery and whilst it was being built he resided in the house at Exton facing the Green which is now the Fox and Hounds Inn.

The tenancy of Langham Lodge was awarded to a Robert Rudkin who, in his early years had been brought up by General Bennet Noel and his wife who lived at North Luffenham.

Langham Lodge had formed part of the Gainsborough estates until being sold away in the 1870s. Successive generations of Rudkins remained as tenants and may have remained so until the time of the sale. Who actually purchased the lodge when it was sold away I am not certain, but a tenant in the early 1900s was a Mr John Smith. Sadly he died of pneumonia when in his early fifties and his widow was obliged to give up the tenancy. He had three children, Stafford, Alan and Lillian. Staff Smith, as he was known farmed at Langham and Hambleton in partnership with his brother Alan, and he and his sister, who married a Mr Cloxton, lived in Langham all of their lives until they died a few years ago. Staff Smith and Lillian Cloxton will no doubt be remembered by many older villagers. In 1910 Langham Lodge was purchased by father and son William and Philip Williamson. Philip died in 1925 but the family with Philip's nephew Fred continued to live and farm there until William's death in 1930 when the property passed to Walter Williamson of Ashwell. Fred stayed until 1934 when he took a farm at Exton.

Walter Williamson was, by now getting on in years and, farming being in a very depressed state, he decided to sell rather than seek a new tenant, and the property was purchased by Captain and Mrs Whadcoat. They had been living for a number of years in the house, now known as Langham Cottage, and Mrs Whadcoat, being a member of the Players family of Nottingham meant that there was no shortage of money. They therefore set about making considerable alterations, building entirely new kitchen premises and generally enlarging the house. They also built two cottages next to the farmyard and put down a roadway from Burley Road, which is the present driveway to the Lodge.

It may now be difficult to imagine, but until this time the only access to Langham Lodge was along Mickley Lane. I do not remember it myself but my father told me that when he was a young man, the entrance to Mickley Lane was fenced off, a ten foot farm gate being hung in the centre, with fencing on each side of it. There was no question of it being a bridleway or footpath, the only people other than the tenant being entitled to use it being my father and my uncle, Mr Cyril Squires, who had land on either side of the lane before it reached Lodge property.

Captain and Mrs Whadcoat also improved and increased the number of farm buildings and erected a Dutch barn. Due to the extensive alterations being made to the house, they lived in the new cottages whilst these were carried out and did not actually move into the house until 1936. They remained at the Lodge until Captain Whadcoat's death in 1948, at which time Mrs Whadcoat sold the property and moved to Hambleton.

Langham lodge was then purchased by a Suffolk gentleman named Mr Buxton. He made further additions to the house and buildings, including a grain drier. He also built four further cottages, two facing on to Burley Road next to the drive entrance, and a block of two at the end of Mickley Lane near to the house. He remained there farming until 1960, when the property was purchased by the present owners, Mr and Mrs Hemsley, who have continued to improve the property and are still in residence, hopefully for many years to come.

In conclusion, I must gratefully acknowledge all the help and information given by Mr and Mrs Hemsley and also their interest shown in the compilation of this article. Also thanks to Rene O'Neill née Williamson.

*In 1910, Langham Lodge was purchased by father and son, William and Phillip Williamson. Phillip and his wife Annie had five children, Phyllis, Bernard (died in infancy), Irene, Frank and Emily. Fred Williamson, a cousin, son of Phillip's brother George of Hambleton, also came to live with the family on his father's death. Phillip died in 1925, but the family continued to live and farm at Langham Lodge until William's death in 1930 when the property passed to Walter Williamson of Ashwell, with Fred remaining to farm until around 1934.*



The Williamsons at Langham Lodge

## **Hunting**

I want to tell you something about hunting and the part it played in the life of the village in years gone by. Nowadays, of course, hunting is a subject which arouses very strong feelings and considerable acrimony between the opposing parties.

In the late 1600s, certain gentlemen gathered together somewhat nondescript packs of hounds for hunting on their own estates, but the earliest knowledge we have of fox hunting in this area is of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount Lowther bringing his pack down to Fineshade from Lowther in 1695. Thomas Noel, a cousin of the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Gainsborough, started a pack at Exton in 1732 but there was no connection between the two packs until Sir William Lowther, later the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Lonsdale, bought the Exton pack on the death of Thomas Noel in 1788. He built kennels for them at Cottesmore House, now sadly demolished, though some of the buildings still stand. By this time, fox hunting had been placed on a more formal footing and the pack was given the title of The Cottesmore Hounds - thus was founded the Cottesmore Hunt. The kennels moved several times, going to Stocken Hall, Normanton Park, Little Bytham and Barleythorpe before the move to the premises which they still occupy between Oakham and Ashwell.

Fox hunting really started in the 1720s and '30s. Until then deer had been the usual quarry and the sport was retained by the monarch for his own pleasure. Certain prominent and favoured noblemen were granted licence to hunt on their own estates but the situation was kept under very tight controls and penalties for poaching were very severe indeed. However, by the early 18th century more advanced methods were being introduced into farming and that, together with a rising population, meant that the deer's natural habitat, which is mainly woodland, was being severely reduced and the numbers of deer were falling rapidly. Two or three deer can do an enormous amount of damage to growing crops in a very short time and were, consequently, very unpopular with the farmers. There is no doubt that, where it could be safely done, quite a number were shot to protect crops.

Many more people, particularly farmers, were taking to horse-riding for pleasure as well as business and were looking for something to hunt which would give them a good gallop.

More and more land was being cleared and brought into cultivation and, since quite a lot of the cleared land was put down to grazing, the opportunities for hunting became more numerous and foxes became the favoured choice for a number of reasons: they were plentiful; no-one wanted to preserve them; being an imported species they had no normal predators to keep their numbers down; and they caused considerable damage to farm livestock. Last, but by no means least, when flushed from

cover they would run well, giving the hunters the opportunity for a good gallop.

Hunting continued to gain in popularity and the size of the "fields" grew, although followers still comprised mainly local gentlemen and those wealthier farmers with the larger farms. Hunting was fairly local due to the fact that the hounds had to be hacked to the meet and hacked home again at the end of the day. Followers had to adopt the same procedure, although some of the wealthier would have their horses hacked by grooms while they travelled to the meet by carriage. This state of affairs continued until about the 1850s, by which time railways had reached virtually all parts of the country, allowing a whole new group of people to participate.

The idea of being a country gentleman was gaining rapidly in popularity and wealthy business and professional men discovered that they could leave their offices and consulting rooms at about four pm on Friday and, by catching an "express", could be up in hunting country in comfortable time for dinner at a good hotel. In the early days they would keep two or three horses at a local livery and, having had a good day's hunting on Saturday, would return to their chosen hotels for a bath and a good dinner. Sunday would usually be spent visiting hunting friends in the locality and the return home would again be by express train on either Sunday night or Monday morning.

Within a few years a new idea, the Hunting Lease, came into being. This was a six-month lease from the end of September running through to the end of March. It must be remembered that, in those days, relatively few people owned their own houses and even large properties were, in many cases, held on lease.

The advent of the Hunting Lease enabled wealthy people to take a large house and stabling in the best hunting shires for the season and to bring their families, so that they too could participate. The usual practice was to bring their personal servants, stud groom, coachman and possibly one other groom, leaving the remainder of their staff at their town house on a "care and maintenance" basis. The rest of their staff would be recruited from local people, and this gave employment opportunities for housemaids, kitchen and scullery maids etc. in the house; and outside there was a need for garden handymen, undergrooms and stable hands. These opportunities were greatly appreciated by local people, as much work was still done on a casual basis, and the arrival of the Hunting Lease families provided an alternative source of employment at a time of the year when there was relatively little casual work available. As a result there was always much interest in the village as to who had taken houses and what their staffing needs would be. These positions were keenly sought after.



Of course, benefits to local people did not stop there. Additional business was available to local tradesmen such as farriers; harness makers and saddlers; boot makers and feed merchants; as well as grocers, butchers, bakers and various other traders. Farmers also looked forward to the opportunity to supply hay, straw and sometimes oats to the stables.

I remember my father telling me that, in many cases, the same tenants would return season after season and their arrival would be the subject of great interest and speculation, given the material benefits they brought. This was how Mr Owen Smith came to know of Langham as he had taken the Old Hall on a Hunting Lease for several seasons prior to the sale of the Estate in 1925.

When hunting people began to bring their families, they would often bring ten or a dozen hunters with them as well as coaches and coach horses, and quite often the stabling taken with the house would be insufficient. Consequently, additional stabling would be required. It was quite common for two or three members of the family to hunt, as well as the lessee, and consequently eight, ten, or even a dozen or more hunters would be required, as well as coach horses. In addition, further accommodation would be required for the coaches etc. so, in cases where stabling was inadequate, further facilities had to be secured nearby.

In Langham, the two properties which were usually let on a hunting lease were the Old Hall and Langham House. The Old Hall had sufficient stabling on the premises and was, therefore, self-contained. The stabling at Langham House was situated in a yard on the opposite side of Church Street and provided only eight boxes and little other accommodation. The Noel Arms, next-door, having always been a residential inn, had extensive stabling and other accommodation on the premises and it was, more or less, a standing agreement that whoever took Langham House would also take as much stabling as was required at the Noel Arms.

It is difficult to envisage now but the entrance to the pub yard was somewhat narrower than it is today and, from that point, a range of boxes and stabling extended all along the roadside right up to the far end of the yard. It then continued along the end and down to the boundary on the Langham House side to where the pub buildings commence, thus providing stabling for a dozen or more horses, as well as three or four coach houses and other premises.

The pub itself has undergone extensive alterations in recent years and at the time of which I am speaking, the public entrance was by means of a stout wooden door situated, more or less, where the glazed door of the restaurant now stands. The door which now leads into the bar was the landlord's private entrance. Going through the public entrance, a stone flagged passage ran the full width of the building with a window, which I believe is still there, at the far end. On the left side of this passage was a stone wall which also ran the full width of the building, with a door at the far end giving access to what is now the restaurant, but in those days, was a somewhat longer room with a fireplace in each end wall. This was known as the Rent Room for reasons I will explain later.

It was divided across the middle by a moveable wooden screen and when the hunting season commenced, the screen was erected, making the far end of the room available for storing hay, straw and feeding stuffs. In the half nearest the pub, a good fire was kept burning and it was used as a saddle room where the harness was cleaned and kept dry. It was also used as a bothy when single grooms were employed, their meals being provided by the pub.

This business was very much welcomed, as was the extra employment for the villagers, since it fitted in well with the summer trade described later.

In about 1900, when hunting was at the height of its popularity, a man named Mr Tommy Shuttlewood, decided to build further stabling accommodation on a grass paddock which he owned. This long, narrow paddock ran from Church Street, opposite the Chapel gates, right through to Burley Road. He built a row of stables, with storage above, along each side, with double wooden doors opening into the yard between them. These boxes extended about a third of the length of the property. He then built an office at the end of the left hand row, followed by a large muck ring, A further five, single storey boxes, standing somewhat further back, followed on the right hand side and beyond those, a large barn and more storage was built across the property, facing towards Church Street. Behind this, on the right, he built more boxes with storage above. On the left, he built a brick wall onwards from the muck ring, dividing the property from the front garden of Briggins Cottage and the top end of Briggins Walk. To utilise the remainder of the ground, he built the three cottages facing on to Burley Road, with gardens behind, which still stand between Briggins Walk and Yew Tree Cottage barn. The stables were in fairly constant use up to the end of the 1930s but stood empty until after the end of the second World War. Early in the 1950s, Ruddles Brewery bought the property and installed a soft drinks business in part of the stabling nearest Church Street. This ran for several years and when it closed the property was again sold, this time to Mr Seckington.

Mr Seckington had the lower half of the property nearest Church street demolished while retaining the barn and upper block of stables, the latter having been previously converted by Ruddles into a house for the foreman in charge of the mineral water works. Mr Seckington used this house to accommodate a groom and when he later sold the property, it became the private house it is today.

## ***The Noel Arms***

Catering for the requirements of the local hunting people became quite an important part of the business of the Noel Arms during the hunting season. However, hunting, in common with many other sporting activities, has a closed season which lasts from roughly the end of March to the end of September. The Noel Arms, being an inn in the true sense of the word, had always provided residential facilities in addition to the local bar trade, and my grandfather, William Joseph Mantle who, apart from his other business activities, was landlord through the 1880s and '90s, decided to develop this side of the business further, in order to maintain the level of business throughout the year.

Although not always realised, the continuing development of the Industrial Revolution had brought into being the largely new profession of commercial travellers, or representatives as they are known today. In earlier years, the manufacture and distribution of the many goods and articles required by the nation had been in the hands of individual local craftsmen working in villages and small towns throughout the country. Because of the small size of the businesses and the difficulties of distribution, almost all manufacturers dealt directly with their customers, who were all fairly local and, therefore, intermediaries were not required. However, with the advent of steam to power the various processes, large factories were built, particularly in the larger urban areas where labour was readily available. The increased manufacturing capacity, coupled with greatly improved facilities for distribution, meant that much larger areas could be covered and, as a result, manufacturers became more remote and employed staff specifically to liaise and maintain contact with wholesalers and retailers, and thus the commercial traveller came into being.

Today most "reps" are able to operate from home or office, returning at the end of each day but in the latter half of the nineteenth century, railways were the only rapid means of transport and a system developed whereby companies, or the travellers themselves, would write to suitable inns booking a room for a week and also hiring a horse and trap. In the case of the Noel Arms, the traveller would catch a train on Sunday afternoon to Oakham station where he would be met by a boy with a horse and trap and conveyed to Langham. After breakfast on Monday morning, a horse and trap would be waiting and he would set off for the day calling on customers, dealing with their needs, looking for new clients, then returning to Langham for evening dinner. This process would be repeated each day until Saturday when he would return in time for lunch after which he would be driven to Oakham station to catch the train home again.

This proved quite a lucrative business and Grandfather would have three or four such customers staying at the Noel Arms each week. Travellers visited their customers less frequently than is the case today and even those representing grocery and other foodstuffs companies would only call once a month. Those representing companies dealing in non-perishable goods would have larger rounds to handle and might call at longer intervals, in some cases up to three months. A valuable part of the business of the Noel Arms, this continued right up to the middle of the 1920s when motor cars were being manufactured in quantity and at prices that made the previous system obsolete.

Before leaving the subject of the Noel Arms, I should like to describe to you the pub as I first remember it. Such drastic and extensive alterations were made to the interior in the early 1970s that anyone who did not know it prior to that date will find it difficult to visualise its original form. I would guess it had been in the form which I remember since the early 1800s or possibly even earlier.

As I described earlier, the public entrance was a stout wooden door situated almost exactly where the present glass paned door gives access to the restaurant bar. On entering the original door, a stone flagged passage went the full width of the building and was lit at the far end by a window which is still there. On the left was a stone wall which also went the full width of the building with a doorway at the far end giving access to the Rent Room (more detail later). On the right hand side of the passage was a wooden screen which reached three quarters of the way up to the ceiling. At the point where the passage turned to the right was an opening which gave access to a room known as the Tap. This had a tiled floor and was furnished with benches round the walls, a couple of tables and several chairs. This was the room in which local people used to enjoy their drinks and a game of darts or dominoes. There was no bar and drinks were served through a doorway which opened into the small lean-to built on to the south side of the main building. Beyond this opening, the screen continued to where it joined the main wall of the building just against the doorway giving access to the stairs and upper floor. Having taken a right turn, the passage continued the full width of the building, ending at a doorway which, down two steps, gave access to Church Street. On the right hand side of the passage, beyond the stairs, was a full height wooden screen with a half glazed door in its centre which opened into what was originally the residents dining and sitting room. At the point where the fireplace, now in the middle of the bar-lounge, is situated, a stone wall went the full width of the building with a doorway in the right hand corner accessing the lean-to and landlord's quarters. There was no fireplace in this wall, the fireplace for the residents dining room being situated in the centre of the north outside wall.

In later years, after the pub had ceased to cater for residents, this room was converted to a public lounge and shortly after the end of the Second World War, a small bar was built in the corner where the doorway had been.

Beyond this point were the landlord's living quarters. A large fireplace was built on to the wall dividing it from the residents dining room. The landlord's quarters were a large room, the full width of the building and stretching down just beyond the door, which now gives access to the public bar but was then the landlord's private entrance. Just beyond it was another wall through which was situated the kitchen and scullery. There was no access from inside the main building to what are now the ladies toilets as this room was originally the brewhouse in which the beer was brewed and conditioned. A large opening filled with wooden slats in the outside wall of the brewhouse allowed the steam, produced by the brewing process, to escape. The door of the brewhouse opened on to the yard. The final room, now the gentlemen's toilet, was divided into two, one half being the gentlemen's toilet the other the ladies.

To return to the Rent Room, now the restaurant. As I mentioned previously, part of this room was used as a tack and harness room during the hunting season but when the alterations were undertaken the stone wall bordering the entrance passage was removed and the adjoining room (formerly the Tap) was opened up to accommodate the restaurant bar. The large fireplace which had stood in the centre of the passage wall was removed with it and the present fireplace on the west outside wall has recently been installed to replace it.

Until 1925 when most of the parish of Langham was owned by the Gainsborough Estate, rents became due at Lady Day, 6<sup>th</sup> April, and Michaelmas Day, 28<sup>th</sup> September. The tenants were divided into two groups; those whose rentals were less than £20 per year and those whose rentals were £20 or more. The first group, mostly tenants of cottage properties, paid their rents on, or shortly after, the quarter-days. Those in the second group which, of course, comprised all the farms and most of the smallholdings, came under a different system. The Gainsborough Estates, being fair and considerate landlords, realised that tenants would need to sell livestock or crops to provide the rent money and consequently the dates on which the rents became payable were set back to the third week in July and the second week in December. This enabled tenants to have fat lambs ready to sell or a stack or two of corn threshed to provide the necessary payment.

Tenants having been notified of the actual date two or three weeks previously, the Estate Steward would arrive at the Noel Arms on the morning in question and go to an upstairs room booked as an office for the day. Tenants would go to pay their rents and discuss any related

matters one at a time, thus ensuring privacy. When all the Estate business had been concluded, the Steward would come down to join the tenants who had assembled in the Rent Room - hence the name- and would preside over a luncheon provided at the Estate's expense and prepared by the landlord and his staff. The midsummer lunch was usually cold meats, vegetables and salads with pudding and cheeses to follow, while the December lunch was a full hot meal with roasts, vegetables, puddings, mince pies etc. The lunch would be followed by several toasts. The Steward would give a short speech outlining the Estate's activities and progress and take the opportunity to announce any changes in policies or conditions. A general discussion followed, ending in a vote of thanks. The party usually disbanded at about half past three. This occasion provided an excellent opportunity for the Estate and its tenants to get together to discuss matters of mutual interest and was known as the Big Rent Day.



Whitbread Dray outside the Noel Arms c 1950

## ***Allotments and the Use of Land***

I would like to explain how allotments came to be developed and the reasons why they became so necessary. Although a few early examples were started in the 1820s, the vast majority were brought into being during the 1830s and '40s. To discover why they became so important it is necessary to go back sixty or seventy years to the 1760s at which time the Parliamentary Enclosures Acts were being brought into force.

Up to this time the majority of the country had been cultivated under the old "three open field system". This was a system of communal cultivation started in a simple form back in Saxon times which became more highly developed during the Norman and Plantagenet periods and remained in that form right through until the 1760s. Under this system, each of the three open fields was divided up into strips of one acre in extent and every villager was entitled to rent such strips as he was able to cultivate. The strips in each holding were divided up between the three fields thus ensuring that everyone had a share of the poorer, as well as the better, land and enabling the simple three course rotation to be operated. Each year one field would be planted with wheat, the second with barley, oats or a mixture of grains known as dredge corn, and the third was fallowed. To us this seems a wasteful use of the land, but the cultivation of root and similar crops was not understood and this method was the only way in which the land could be kept clean, free of weeds and in a reasonable state of cultivation. Due to the fact that very little feed was produced for over-wintering livestock, only a few breeding animals could be kept on. The vast majority of livestock, having been fattened, was slaughtered in autumn and the carcasses salted down for use during the winter. As a result of this, very little manure was available, and a complete fallow once every three years was the only method available to keep the land in reasonable heart.

A small area of land was set aside as meadow, produced sufficient hay to feed those animals kept for breeding, and the rest of the parish was common land or waste, as it was usually known, and woodland. This common land was available to all villagers to graze their livestock. In areas where there was peat or turf, this could be cut and carted home for firing. The woods were available for villagers to run their pigs which fed on acorns, beech mast and other foods - dead wood provided fuel. In this way it was possible for a man to keep his family housed and fed by his own efforts, since, by the use of his garden and such strips as he was able to cultivate, he could provide flour for his bread, barley to feed a pig and sufficient vegetables to support his family throughout the year.

However, particularly during the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, water power was increasingly being used to drive woollen, cotton and other



mills, and people moving into the towns to operate them meant that a much larger proportion of the population was no longer in a position to produce their own food.

Determined efforts were being made to develop agriculture along more scientific lines, beginning in the 1500s under the influence of men such as Thomas Tusser and continuing throughout the 1600s and early 1700s by men such as Coke of Holkham and Robert Bakewell of Dishley Grange. Research into new strains of seeds produced larger crops of better quality. More root crops were being grown which were particularly important as their use enabled many more animals to be kept through the winter resulting, not only in more fresh meat being available, but also considerably greater quantities of manure being produced which, being returned to the land, greatly increased the level of fertility. This resulted in heavier and healthier crops and enabled a much wider variety to be grown. The growing of root crops meant that land could be kept clean during the summer, avoiding the process of fallowing and also providing feed for more animals.

Unfortunately, the old system of farming did not suit these methods and increasing pressure from landowners and others resulted, in the 1760s, in the enactment of the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts. Under this new legislation, Parliamentary Commissioners were sent out to every parish in the land, firstly to assess the total acreage and then to divide up the available land into suitable blocks. All the land in the parish was included in the survey, not only arable fields, but also meadow land, common land and woods and this brought about three very important changes. Firstly, it led to the formation of farms as we know them today. Secondly it brought about the development of lodge farms since the land having been divided up into blocks, it was more economic and sensible for those whose land lay further from the village to have a house and buildings erected on the land they occupied. The third, and perhaps, from the point of view of the farm workers and others, the most important point was that it took away their ability to house and feed their families by their own efforts.

Under the new system, although the Commissioners tried to allocate the land, as far as possible, in accordance with the wishes of the villagers, the primary object was to provide farms of sufficient size to enable the occupier to earn his living solely by farming that land. The old strip system had allowed tradesmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters and wheelwrights to do a bit of farming on the side. In view of the increased business likely to become available with the setting up of the new farms, most tradesmen sold their strips, which became incorporated into the new farms, and concentrated solely on their businesses. The most badly affected were farm workers and others who held only one or two strips. Those who elected to take the newly

formed farms had to pay the costs involved and many of the poorer people were unable to meet these costs. In addition, they lost the benefits of free grazing, formerly available on common land now enclosed, and as a result were obliged to sell their rights to others for the best price they could obtain. Previously, they had been able to feed and support their families by their own efforts but now they were forced to rely upon the wages they were able to earn. Of course, the newly formed farms were all requiring labour and this kept wages at a reasonable level with plenty of work available.

The process of Enclosures took a number of years to complete and by the 1790s we were at war with France. This meant that many men joined the army, either voluntarily or otherwise, and these recruits had to be fed, thus creating a demand for higher food production. As a result, prices of farm produce remained at a fairly high level and with fewer men available, work was plentiful and wages remained at a reasonable level.

However, following the end of the war, the situation began to change rapidly for the worse. Men were being discharged from the forces, and in those days it meant that they were simply paid off and left to fend for themselves. Many went to the towns to work in the mills and factories that were being erected as the Industrial Revolution developed and expanded, but many returned to their own villages. The increased competition for the available work coupled with the fall in prices of farm produce due to lower demand meant that wages began to fall and by the 1820s many farm workers were finding it increasingly difficult to provide food for their families. Wages were only eight or nine shillings a week, on average, and in some areas were as low as seven shillings. There was no guaranteed wage and if no work was available, because of bad weather or some other reason, men were simply sent home without pay - the loss of a day's pay was a very serious matter. This appalling state of affairs was observed by a number of more enlightened men who were in a position to do something about it and it was a number of these men who came up with the idea of providing allotments.

The first allotments in Langham were up the Ashwell Road, commencing next to the stream in the hollow, thus bringing into being the names of Allotment Hollow and Allotment Hill by which they are still known today. They were in a small field of about four acres on the left hand side of the road and extended from the stream up the hill to the top hedge some fifty yards or so beyond the point where the road takes a sharp right-hand bend towards Ashwell.

Just opposite this bend was a gate giving access to the field and inside this was a wide grass baulk which ran right across the field to the far hedge; thus dividing the field into two halves. The allotments on the lower

half ran from the stream up to the baulk, and those on the upper half from the baulk to the top hedge. The baulk was provided to allow free access to the individual plots or for carts or light implements. These allotments were greatly welcomed by the villagers and were all, very soon, taken up, providing much needed help.

In the 1860s, another field was brought into use, as the original field proved too small to provide allotments for all who wished to acquire them. This is the field lying between Mickley Lane and Burley Road where the remaining village allotments are situated. This field had distinct advantages over the original allotments since, not only was it much nearer the village but also, the soil was a lighter, easily worked, good, red loam. It proved to be extremely popular and the allotments were rapidly taken up. Like the original allotments, it was divided into two halves, the gate being situated on the Burley Road, more or less opposite to where the entrance to Sharrads Way is today. Inside this gate was, again, a grass baulk extending right across to the far hedge; one block of allotments being situated between Mickley Lane and the baulk and the other between the baulk and Burley Road. In its original form, the allotment land stretched right across to include what, in later years, became a tree planting area, children's play area and most recently the new burial ground development.

Apart from new allotment holders, most of the original holders, whose plots were situated on the lower side of the Ashwell Road, gave up their holding and moved to the new field, partly because it was closer and partly because, although the soil on their original plots was good, it was stiffer and much more difficult to work. By the time that I first remember them, all the lower half had been given up and the land returned to general agricultural use. The upper half, being a lighter, more easily worked soil, continued in use until well after the Second World War, with a single allotment still being cultivated today.

In 1925, when parts of the Gainsborough Estate, including Langham, were sold off, the New Allotments, as they were known, were purchased by Mr Tom Munday who had a butchery business in the village and, upon his death, were inherited by Mr Eric Munday, who was head brewer for Messrs. Ruddles. In 1937 or 1938 Eric Munday decided to repossess parts of two or three allotments in the corner adjoining Mickley Lane and Burley Road, where he built the bungalow which still stands there.

The remaining allotments remained in full cultivation until the 1950s but by then, the increases in wages had made allotments more of a pastime than the necessity that they had previously been and many were given up. Houses were built on those bordering the Burley Road and the far side of the field given over to the uses I described earlier. Those that

are left are tended by those who regard gardening as a pleasant and healthy hobby.

Thus has an idea, which originated as a desperate necessity, almost ceased to exist. There are still allotments in existence in many parts of the country but they are much fewer in number now than forty years ago.



Ben Walker & Mick Burdett discussing allotment tactics

## ***Spring Cleaning***

Although gas was brought to the village in the 1890s, mains electricity did not arrive until 1933 and so few families had the help of such things as vacuum cleaners and other electrical appliances. The fact that virtually the only source of heating was by open fires or solid fuel ranges meant that much more dust and dirt was produced than is the case today. Central heating was unknown except in one or two of the bigger houses and even that was operated by solid fuel boilers. A more modern version of the old Victorian cast-iron range was becoming popular in the 1920s and '30s. The frames of these ranges were heavily enamelled and had tiled hearths and doors and were consequently much easier to keep clean but they were still dependent upon an open fire for their operation. There were several different makes but they all became known as Triplex ranges. They all had two ovens and occasionally, in the larger versions, three. A back boiler, situated behind the grate, was available as an extra and this was capable of providing hot water for the kitchen and also the bathroom where one was installed, although many houses lacked the facility in those days. It did not, however, provide sufficient hot water to supply radiators.

Spring cleaning really was a major operation in those days and it was tackled one room at a time. Firstly, the heavy winter curtains were taken down and thoroughly shaken and brushed outside in the garden. If they were of suitable material they were washed, if not they were hung on the clothes line to air. They were then ironed and folded with camphor balls, or other moth protection, and put away in chests or drawers ready for use again next winter. Next, the bed was completely stripped down to the frame and the linen and blankets washed. Pillows and mattresses which were almost always filled with feathers or flock were examined and any repairs needed were undertaken. These were then taken outside to air and all moveable furniture taken out of the room as well. Large items of furniture such as wardrobes were covered in dust sheets. Ceilings, walls, floors, curtain rails and beds were all brushed down and washed or polished as appropriate. All mats and rugs were taken outside and thoroughly beaten, brushed and shaken. The room then having been, to use a popular term "thoroughly bottomed", the bed was made up with lighter blankets; lighter summer curtains were hung; rugs and mats re-laid; furniture dusted and polished and brought back in.

I have described the process for one room - this would be repeated in every room in the house. Carpets were much less common than they are today and, in households which possessed them, their use would be confined to the sitting room and would consist of a square or rectangle appropriate to the size of the room. (The wall-to-wall carpeting, universal today, did not appear until many years later.) At spring cleaning time, the

carpet would be rolled up and carried outside, along with its underlay, and laid out on the lawn where it received a thorough beating before being carried back inside. The ornaments in each room were taken out and either washed or polished.

Since it took most, or the whole of the day to complete each room, the process involved a week or more of hard work. Scratch meals were the order of the day and apart from moving heavy furniture and perhaps beating the carpet, men were expected to keep well out of the way. Today almost all houses have central heating, gas or electric fires and a wide range of domestic appliances and these, together with easy to clean surfaces and fabrics make this job, where it is still undertaken, a much easier and lighter process.

## **Pigs**

My thoughts on spring cleaning brought me to the realisation of how many events in village life, which were commonplace years ago, are now things of the past. One such event was pig-killing; most villagers were involved in this until about fifty years ago.

Pigs have provided a major source of food since before the dawn of recorded history and, not requiring the area of land needed by grazing animals, could be kept by many more people. In the days when the old open-field system of communal farming was practised, pigs were able to obtain a considerable amount of their food by foraging for acorns, beech mast and roots in the woodlands and common land in the parish. Following the Enclosure Acts, this extensive and valuable source of food was denied to many farm workers and cottagers and the increasing difficulty of many to feed their families led, in the 1820 and '30s to the introduction of Allotments. These were eagerly taken up as, not only could they provide a family with vegetables throughout the year, but also provide land on which sufficient grain could be grown to feed a pig. This was of prime importance as butchers' meat was expensive and many families relied almost entirely on home cured bacon and hams to supply the meat in their diet. As the pigs were no longer able to range the woods and common land, the cottagers had to erect pig sties at the bottom of their gardens and feed the pigs entirely by hand.

The pig's basic diet was barley meal ground from the grain grown on the allotments, mixed with a small proportion of weatings. This latter substance was, in appearance, rather like fine bran and was a by-product of wheat which had been milled to produce flour for bread. It contained virtually all the protein contained in the wheat grain and served the dual purpose of providing the only protein in the pig's diet and also lightening the barley meal, making it more easily digested. This was fed, in appropriate quantities, accompanied by a couple of bucketfuls of mixture from the swill tub or the same amount of plain water. The swill tub was a barrel kept filled with water, into which was tipped all garden vegetable waste, household food scraps and any other edible waste. Not everyone favoured the use of a swill tub and those who did not, supplied clean water and gave vegetable waste direct from the garden.

The pigs were brought in as weaners, at eight to ten weeks old, and were installed in the sty with a generous supply of straw for bedding. This was of utmost importance as the young pig was on its own, away from the litter, for the first time and unless provided with plenty of warm, dry bedding was very apt to catch a cold. This, combined with its separation from the rest of the litter, and removal to strange premises could lead to its death - a circumstance to be avoided at all costs. Most families had to save for some time to accumulate the

purchase price of a weaner and its loss meant a year without a major part of their diet.

If an animal died through accident or disease, in the case of many families, the purchase of a replacement could not be afforded. To cover this eventuality, most villages organised a Pig Club. All families who kept a pig were entitled to membership on payment of a small weekly subscription of a copper or two. Although the benefits available varied from village to village, depending on the level of subscription, one which was common to all was that, should any member lose his pig, for whatever reason, the Club undertook to replace it free of charge. A simple form of insurance but one which removed the main risks.

The rearing and fattening of a pig for killing at home was a totally different process from the modern commercial practice. The cottager required his pig to grow slowly and reach the greatest possible weight by the time of slaughter, thus providing him with the greatest amount of bacon and ham to feed his family throughout the year. For this reason the Large White breed was a popular choice as it would continue to grow and develop until it had reached a weight of about fourteen or fifteen stones, at which point it would have developed all its muscle, or lean meat, and bone and from then on it would produce almost entirely fat. Most people liked their pig to reach a weight of about twenty-five stones by the time it was killed so the proportion of fat to lean meat was high. Some would run their pig on to thirty or even thirty-five stones but most people considered that such pigs produced a coarser quality of bacon.

The killing season ran from mid-November to mid-February but wherever possible December or January was chosen. There were two sound reasons for this. Firstly, the carcass of a pig killed during cold weather cooled and set more quickly thus improving the quality of the resulting bacon; secondly, the dry-salting method of curing was a somewhat lengthy process and it was necessary, not only to complete the curing but also to get the bacon well dried and bagged before the weather began to warm up in the spring. The flitches and hams were enclosed in closely woven linen or cotton bags and then in a hessian, or similar, outer cover and most families kept bags specifically for this purpose, washing them after use and putting them away for use again the next season. The reason for these somewhat elaborate precautions was to avoid attack by the bacon fly! This is a species of fly which chooses, if possible, to lay its eggs on exposed flitches of bacon and, if it succeeds, the whole side will be spoiled and uneatable. Every effort was therefore made to ensure that the bacon was securely bagged and stored before this could happen.

The actual process of pig killing began with the animal being stunned with a humane killer, a process which became obligatory. The carcass was then bled, otherwise the meat would be inedible. The next process was to remove all the coarse external hairs. (In the case of most animals the skin, or pelt, is removed after slaughter but with pigs it is retained.) There were



two ways of removing the hairs. The first, and probably the most traditional was to place the carcass on a thick bed of dry straw and, after covering it with a further bed of straw, to set it alight. This burned away all the hairs leaving a clean, if somewhat smutty skin. This was used only where boiling water was not available. The more common method, which we adopted, was to lift the carcass on to a cratch and here I must digress for a moment as this article will not be familiar to many people.

A cratch (there are variations in spelling, a common occurrence where local terms are in use) was a wooden platform approximately four feet by two feet supported on four short, stout legs about eighteen inches in height. The outer sides, formed by lengths of wood about four inches by two inches were extended by about two feet at each end and shaped like barrow handles. The centre being formed by stout planks, its original purpose was to enable two men to convey heavy loads over ground unsuitable for a wheeled vehicle such as a wheel barrow. It also served very well for the purpose in hand.

When using the scalding method of hair removal, it was necessary to have copious quantities of boiling water available and this was obtained from a washing copper previously filled and heated. Four or five buckets of boiling water were poured over the carcass and two or three people would immediately start to scrape it clean. The butcher himself usually used one of his larger knives but a variety of instruments were brought into use. One of the more unlikely ones was a metal candlestick which was gripped by the stem, the edge of the base being used as a scraper! An unlikely tool perhaps, but one that was surprisingly effective. When one side had been thoroughly cleaned the process was repeated on the other. The horn, or toe nails, were removed and a slit cut through each hind leg just above the hock. The ends of a strong, scrubbed piece of wood about two feet long inserted into the slits, a rope or pulley was attached to a bracket in the centre and the carcass was hauled up and secured to a suitable beam, or branch if the operation was being carried on outside. Then began the work of dealing with the meat and offal.

The three or four days following the killing were ones of concentrated activity which required careful planning and extra help. Although it involved much extra work, this was tackled with good humour since it meant that a large proportion of the family's food for the ensuing year was secured. After the pig had been killed, the first things to be taken into the house were the small intestines to be cleaned and prepared as skins for the sausages. The offal, consisting of the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and smelt were next, and lastly the leaf. This large piece of hard white fat surrounding the kidneys was rendered down to provide lard.

As soon as everything had been taken in, preparations were begun; one lady being detailed to clean and prepare the sausage skins; a somewhat lengthy process involving repeated washing and cleaning in several lots of salty water, the skins being turned two or three times

during the process. A second job, one which my mother usually undertook herself, was the preparation of the pig's fries. This consisted of thoroughly and washing the various types of offal which were then cut up into small pieces, a mixture being placed on dinner plates. (Some families also included the lights but we did not, these were put to one side and cooked for the dogs.) Apart from our own share, plates were made up for relatives, who would be killing their own pigs later and would return the compliment, and for older friends who were no longer able to keep a pig of their own. When these had been prepared they were covered with a piece of caul, a thin lacy substance forming the inner lining of the stomach, and placed somewhere to cool and await the final ingredient. This consisted of small pieces of pork which would become available when the pig was cut up on the following morning.

The preparation for the rendering down of the lard would be undertaken by a third person. A large iron pot would be placed near the fire to warm and the leaf placed on a wooden board. The outer edges were removed and any small pieces which had traces of meat adhering to them, these being put aside to be dealt with later. The best of the leaf was then cut into small pieces and placed in the pot over the fire. Whilst it was heating, the lard crock was brought out and placed ready. This crock was a large earthenware vessel which was reserved for this specific purpose and never used for anything else. When the lard was completely rendered and had become a clear, colourless liquid, it was transferred into the waiting crock. This, in itself, was a delicate operation as great care had to be taken not to touch the bottom of the pot with the ladle and so disturb the residue. When all the lard had been extracted, the crock was carefully carried away and placed somewhere cool- in our case the dairy - to cool and set. It produced a superfine white lard which was reserved for use in all the best cooking throughout the ensuing year.

Once this was safely out of the way, the residue in the bottom of the pot was removed with a slotted spoon providing small crisp pieces of fat which were placed on a dish to cool. The remainder of the leaf was cut up, placed in the pot and rendered down in its turn. If, as sometimes happened, a small amount of the previous year's lard was left over it was removed from the crock, which was washed out and scalded, and added to the second batch of leaf to be re-rendered. When ready, the second batch was removed to the waiting crock and taken away to cool and set. Although excellent lard, it was not as fine as the first batch and was used for frying and more general cooking purposes. The scraps from the bottom of the pot were removed as before and as these had small pieces of meat attached to them they were darker in colour and slightly harder and were known as lean scraps. These were added to the scraps from the first rendering. (I know that some people today would not fancy them but I can assure you that they provided a couple of very tasty teas and were eagerly anticipated.) When the lard crocks

were completely cold and set, a piece of greaseproof paper was placed on top of the lard and the mouths of both crocks were covered with two or three sheets of clean newspaper tied firmly down. They were placed on a cold slab until required for use. This completed the first day's work.

When the butcher returned next morning the carcass would be taken down and placed back on the cratch for cutting up. First to be removed was the head which was taken off close to the shoulders. After the eyes had been removed the lower jaw was detached and sawn in two halves, these we called chops but were known in the trade as Bath Chaps. They were placed to one side then carried into the house to be lightly salted and were the first portions of the new bacon to be eaten. The ears were removed and the remainder of the head was sawn and chopped in half lengthways. The brains were then extracted and placed in a saucer. In our case, they were taken into the house to be cooked later for my father who was very partial to them. Otherwise they were included with the head, trotters, tail etc. to be stewed along with the bones and any other pieces to make brawn and gravy for the pork pies.

The hams were next to be removed and these were carried straight into the house and placed on the salting trough. There remained a large portion of meat of an irregular shape which was cut off square across the carcass and, when cut, provide two or three roasting joints and the meat for the sausages and pies. The rest of the carcass was sawn in half along the centre of the backbone, proving the two flitches. As was generally the case with dry salting, the shoulders were not removed but left as an integral part of each flitch. When these had been carried into the house the cutting up was complete and the cratch was scrubbed with hot water and soda, thoroughly dried and put away for the next pig.

Before returning to the kitchen, my next job would be the preparation of the salt for curing. This was of great importance as the thorough salting of the carcass was essential if the bacon was to be kept dry and sweet. Father was most particular about this and insisted that a block of pure salt, weighing about a stone (14lbs 6.4kg) was purchased from Ken Hale, the baker, for this purpose and there were very good reasons for going to this extra trouble. Firstly, it was pure salt without any of the ingredients which were added to household salt to enable it to run smoothly. Secondly, as a block wrapped in a paper covering, it was less likely to absorb moisture and thirdly, having been stored in the loft over the bread ovens it would be as dry as it was possible to get it. This meant that it was in the best possible condition to extract the moisture from the meat, something which is essential if the bacon is to be kept fresh in the ensuing months. In order to achieve this, the block was unwrapped and placed in a large galvanised bath where it was first cut into blocks and then crushed by a heavy rolling pin, or other heavy

wooden implement, until it was fine and smooth. This process continued until sufficient had been prepared for the first part of the salting, the remainder being wrapped back in its covering and stored somewhere warm and dry. The bath was carried down to the dairy and left next to the salting trough ready for use.

My next job was to deliver the plates of pig's fry to the friends and relatives, the ladies helping with the work, of course, taking theirs home with them. I quite enjoyed this task and was occasionally given a penny for doing it. A somewhat peculiar superstition had developed in relation to this which was that the plate containing the fry must be returned unwashed. How, or why, this had arisen I do not know but it was almost universally observed.

However, to return to the kitchen; the first job was to prepare the sausages. Once the roasting joint had been cut and taken to the cool slab in the dairy, the requisite amount of meat for the sausages was removed from the bones and cut up into small pieces. We usually made about twenty pounds of sausages to an old family recipe. When the meat had been diced it was put through a large mincer and placed in a large earthenware bowl. Dried bread crumbs, previously prepared, were added in appropriate quantity, (about a quarter the weight of the meat) chopped sage and finally salt and pepper, the whole being thoroughly mixed together. A sausage making tube having been fitted to the mincer, a length of sausage skin was fitted over it, the outer end was knotted and the mixture put through the mincer again. When the length of skin had been completely filled the other end was knotted; the length folded in half and the individual sausages formed by giving the skin a couple of twists at the required position. As the length had been folded over, the sausages were, of course, formed in twos and after the first ones had been formed all subsequent pairs were threaded back through the previously formed pair until the end of the string was reached. This process was repeated until all the meat mixture had been used whereupon the strings of sausages were taken to the dairy and hung up to cool and set.

Whilst this was being done, preparations for making the pork pies got underway. The large iron pot which had been used for rendering the lard was again placed on the fire with the appropriate amount of water. As the water was heating, the meat was cut from the bones into small pieces. Unlike the sausage meat, this was not minced but left in small pieces with pepper and salt thoroughly mixed in. No other ingredients were added. As soon as the water was heated, lard from the second rendering was added and the mixture heated until the lard had all melted and combined with the water. Plain flour was sifted into a large pancheon, salt and pepper were added and the pancheon placed near the fire to warm. When the lard and water mixture had reached the correct temperature (which was decided by experience) a hollow was

made in the centre of the flour and the mixture gradually added to the flour until a stiff paste was formed. This was then lifted on to a floured board and thoroughly kneaded for eight to ten minutes before being returned to the warm pancheon, covered over with a cloth and left to rise for about an hour.

Whilst the paste was rising, the pie moulds were prepared. We made about fourteen or fifteen pies, some 2lb in size and a smaller number of 1lb size. The 2lb pie was about six inches in diameter and six inches high when completed and the 1lb pie was two inches smaller each way. When the paste had risen sufficiently, it was removed from the pancheon, given another kneading and returned and recovered. Pie making then commenced! A quantity of paste (again decided by experience) was taken, placed on a floured board and rolled into a circle about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick and eight inches in diameter. A pie mould was placed in the centre and the paste gradually worked up the sides of the mould, great care being taken that an even thickness was maintained throughout. This was a very skilled job and took a considerable time to learn to do it properly. When the sides had been raised to the top, the mould was gently twisted and turned by one hand whilst the other gently held the case until it could be lifted out cleanly. The completed case was left to cool and set.

Once all the cases had been formed and set, the prepared meat was packed in, care being taken to completely fill the case. Further pieces of paste, which had been kept warm, were then rolled into a circle and placed on top of the filled case to form a lid. The top and sides of the case were pinched firmly together, after trimming, to form a seal. Four holes were made in the lid by a steel or other sharp, circular implement and the pies were placed on a baking tray ready to be taken to the bake house. The time for them to be delivered was arranged with the baker beforehand as the pies had to be placed in a cooling oven after the day's bread had been made. They also needed to be put into the oven as soon as possible after delivery because the paste would soften and the sides of the pie sag and bulge if they were left standing in the warm bake house for any length of time. I remember that my mother inspected them very closely when they were brought back and she would have sharp words with the baker the next time he called to deliver bread if this had happened.

The next day, after the pies had cooled and set, about four of them would be wrapped in greaseproof paper and placed in biscuit tins; a couple of sheets of newspaper would be placed over the tins and the lids firmly replaced. This formed a virtually airtight seal and, kept in a cool place, the pies would keep fresh for up to four weeks. The remainder of the pies were then gravied by pouring the reduced stock through the holes in the lids by means of a funnel and as soon as they had cooled they were ready for use or to be dispatched to relatives. A

proportion of the stock was allowed to get cold and was put on one side to gravy the stored pies when they were brought out. Using this method we were able to have fresh pork pies for a month to six weeks after pig killing.

The final job was to make brawn out of the remaining meat and apart from the curing, the job was then complete. Father always undertook the curing himself, with my assistance when I became old enough, and this was always started on the evening after the pig had been cut up. The flitches and hams were lifted off the salting trough, which had a drain hole in its centre, and after placing a large bowl under the drain hole, a layer of dry salt about three or four inches thick was spread all over the trough. A flitch was then replaced on the trough, skin side up and dry salt was worked, or rubbed, into it until it would not take any more. The flitch was then turned over, flesh side up and a small piece of salt petre was placed in any veins or cavities and pushed well up with a finger. This was done to withdraw any impurities, such as dried blood, which might remain and be detrimental to the keeping qualities. Fresh salt was then rubbed into the flesh until it too would take no more. The process was repeated with the second flitch and both hams but in the case of the latter, a good quantity of soft, brown sugar was rubbed in as well as the salt. Finally, the chops were well salted and placed beside the flitches, the whole being covered with a final thick layer of salt and left to cure.

After ten days the flitches and hams were lifted and as much salt as possible cleaned off them. They were laid on one side and all the salt, which was now very wet, was cleaned off and discarded. The draining bowl was emptied and replaced and fresh dry salt from the remainder of the block was spread thickly all over the trough. The hams and flitches were replaced, skin side up, and re-covered with a thick layer of dry salt. The chops were removed at this point and, after thorough cleaning, were hung up to dry. After a further ten days in salt, the flitches and hams were lifted, thoroughly cleaned of loose salt and a hole was cut in the end of each flitch. A loop of thin rope, attached to a piece of wood, was passed through the hole and they were hung up so that air circulated all around them in a warm place to dry them out. The hams were treated in the same way except that, in their case, a loop of rope was placed round the leg just above the hock. The drying out time depended upon the weather. If it was cold and damp the drying would take longer than if the weather was warm and dry. Once they were sufficiently dried out a closely woven linen or cotton bag was placed over each flitch and ham. This was drawn up and the neck tied tightly round the rope. A second coarser hessian bag was then drawn over the cotton one and this in turn was tied tightly round the rope. Each piece was lifted back so that it hung just clear of the wall and left to mature. (I have already explained that the reason for double bagging

was to prevent a species of fly from laying its eggs on the flitches and hams.)

I make no apology for having described this process at some length and in detail. Until little more than fifty years ago, it had been a normal and very important part of rural life for centuries and indeed, up to the early part of the twentieth century, provided almost all the meat available to many village families. Very few, if any, people cure bacon at home now and unless documented, present and future generations will have no idea of what was involved. I trust that I have not offended those of tender sensibilities and, of course, such bacon as I have described, would not be acceptable to many people today. However, there are many older folk, like myself, who regret its passing. The hybrid type of pigs produced today are not suitable for home curing; slaughtering is only allowed in public abattoirs and the handling of the carcasses is not sufficiently careful to allow the preservation of the meat for any length of time. Another part of everyday life has passed into history.

