
VILLAGE FOLK

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



LAXTON STORIES VOLUME 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Book design by Andy Columbine / andycolumbine.co.uk

Further acknowledgements for 'Laxton Stories' can be found on page 137.

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THE TENSIONS, THE
FRIENDSHIPS, THE
PETTY ANNOYANCES,
THE GRANDIOSE
ARISTOCRATIC
OWNERS AND THEIR
GENTLEMEN LAND
AGENTS OFFER US
A PICTURE OF AN
OLDER SOCIETY
WHICH WAS STILL
FIRMLY IN PLACE IN
LAXTON WHEN THE
FIRST WORLD WAR
BROKE OUT IN 1914



FOREWORD

BY PROFESSOR JOHN BECKETT,
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The three additional ‘Snapshot in Time’ booklets are a welcome addition to the history of the village. Each of them in its own way provides an interesting story of life in the village in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Life in the village, as described in the first of the three, is as we might expect: difficult people, nice people, babies, marriages, burials, and the daily round of life, particularly when it came to the farmers and their field work.

The tensions, the friendships, the petty annoyances, the grandiose aristocratic owners (who generally kept themselves to themselves at Thoresby Hall) and their gentlemen land agents (who frequently visited the village to let the tenant farmers know exactly where they stood) offer us a picture of an older society which was still firmly in place in Laxton when the First World War broke out in 1914.

It was a hierarchical society, with the vicar, living in one of the largest houses in the village, keeping a careful eye on the local people, their families, friends,

THE CHURCH, AS WE LEARN IN THE SECOND OF THE THREE BOOKLETS, WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT INDIVIDUAL BUILDING IN THE COMMUNITY

alliances, and fallings out. The church, as we learn in the second of the three booklets, was the most important individual building in the community, built of stone in the 13th century and largely rebuilt using much of the old stone in 1860.

But other buildings were part of the fabric of village life, among them the farmhouses strung out along the main street, the village shop, the post office, the nonconformist chapel and, of course, the Dovecote Inn. Not much disturbed the

community, at least before the war, which had far more animals than modern Laxton, and was a much quieter place – not that it is particularly noisy today – in the days when horses rather than tractors were the main motive power across the community, and people walked rather than speeding (often literally) through the village in cars, vans, and occasionally motor bikes.

Life was full of variety, as the third booklet showed, although some variety, particularly when it came to ill health, was less welcome than other. Everyone knew their place, or at least they knew where they were expected to be in the social hierarchy. The vicar wrote letters on embossed note paper, while the tenants scribbled away on whatever quality they could find, sometimes sending anonymous messages to their landlord for fear of what the Thoresby Estate might do if it knew who the writer was. Telephones were still virtually unknown but the post was collected and delivered regularly throughout each day. Ploughing competitions were frequent events.

FEW ENGLISH VILLAGES HAVE BEEN DOCUMENTED AS THOROUGHLY AS LAXTON, AND THESE BOOKLETS, PAINT AN UNUSUALLY DETAILED PICTURE OF A REMARKABLE VILLAGE

Occasionally the village had to cope with poor behaviour, but special constables were in post for the duration of the war, two of whom received long service awards subsequently. Finally, Laxton did its bit for the war, including taking in a Belgian refugee family, and of course the farmers had to do as they were told by the War Agricultural Committee.

Life was not idyllic: mysterious illnesses with no NHS, and the poverty of some local families, ensured that it was tough, but few English villages have been documented as thoroughly as Laxton, and these three booklets, added to the originals, paint an unusually detailed picture of a remarkable village over the first two decades of the twentieth century.

All the researchers and writers were local volunteers, mostly with little experience of historical research, and it is a measure of their commitment and, dare I say it, previously hidden talent that Laxton has been so carefully and accurately detailed via the three new booklets to add to the four originals.



PREFACE

Members of Laxton History Group set out to research a 'snapshot' of the village during the period 1900 – 1920. The project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, involved the writing of four booklets, each looking at a different aspect of life in Laxton at that time. The booklets were published in June 2016.

We found ourselves, however, in the unusual position of completing the aims of the project with funding to spare. We had moreover uncovered a tremendous amount of information which had still to be shared with a wider audience. An extension to the duration of our project has enabled us to write three more booklets which will further examine life in the village and its relationship with the Thoresby Estate at the turn of the twentieth century.

The booklets are a collaborative effort by Group members. They examine the lives of villagers and share some of their stories, shedding light on the times in which they lived and the difficulties they faced. The letters between the tenants and the Estate are the major source of the stories.



For the most part the tenants corresponded with the Estate out of need or necessity, so the letters reveal very little by way of good news, but they certainly paint a vivid picture of a very different age which was not so very long ago.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the trustees of the Manvers Estate for their foresight in depositing their collected Estate papers at the University of Nottingham and so providing us with such a wonderful resource from which to learn.

THE VICAR AND THE
SCHOOLMASTER
WERE WELL
RESPECTED MEMBERS
OF THE COMMUNITY,
AS WELL AS BEING
THE MOST LITERATE
PEOPLE IN THE
VILLAGE, THEY ALSO
LED VILLAGE SOCIAL
LIFE, ORGANISED
VILLAGE ACTIVITIES
AND MANAGED
SPECIAL EVENTS

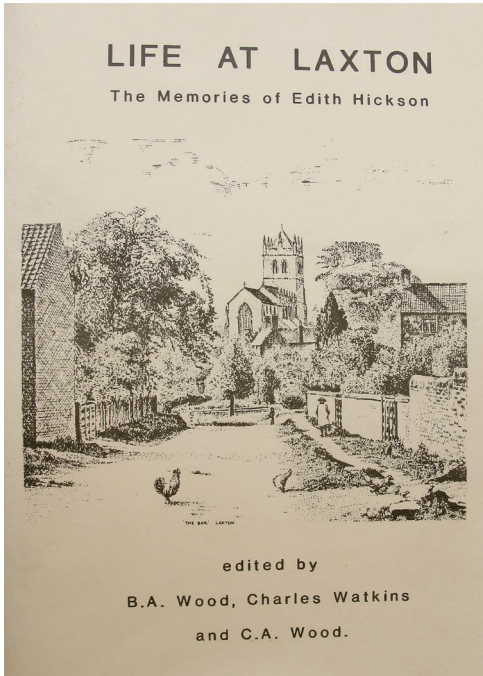


THE VILLAGE HIERARCHY

Whilst the death of Queen Victoria at the beginning of the twentieth century and the accession of Edward VII to the throne heralded the beginning of change in society as a whole, England was still bound by rigid class divisions and in their correspondence with the Thoresby Estate the folk of Laxton, reflected this. Their own places in the village hierarchy and their perception of the status of others are clearly demonstrated, as are the economic circumstances in which they found themselves and their relationships with other members of the village.

Members of the Manvers family still visited the village on occasion and their agents, Mr. Wordsworth, Mr Argles and Mr Spink, who managed the Estate on behalf of Lord Manvers, were frequent visitors to Laxton, and played an active part in the running of the village and the management of the farms.

The vicar and the schoolmaster were well respected members of the community, as well as being the most literate people in the village, they also led village social life, organised village activities



Pictured

Life at Laxton

and managed special events. The tenant farmers, provided they were hard working and managed their farms well, had the opportunity to earn enough money to live very comfortably.

The blacksmith, miller and wheelwright were also in the middle tier of village society, as were the shopkeepers and publican. Indeed in Laxton it was usual for the craftsmen and businessmen to also farm the strips in the Open Fields which were attached to their properties.

At the bottom of the village hierarchy were the poor farm labourers who were amongst

the poorest paid people in Britain at the time.

In “Life at Laxton, the Memories of Edith Hickson” she says:

“In fact some of the natives were not too badly off whilst others, the farm workers, the poor or the poverty stricken were often what they were of their own volition.”

This not only shows that some villagers were reasonably affluent, but it also reflects the attitude of society to the poor at that time. In the following collection of accounts, all taken from the letters sent and received by the tenants and the Thoresby Estate managers, these same attitudes show through and the hierarchical society of the time provides the framework for the tone of both letters and responses.

IT WOULD BE EASY TO BELIEVE THAT THE VILLAGERS WERE IN CONSTANT CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER AND THAT LIFE MAY HAVE BEEN QUITE MISERABLE IN LAXTON, BUT OTHER RESOURCES PAINT A DIFFERENT PICTURE

When reading the letters it would be easy to believe that the villagers were in constant conflict with each other and with the Estate and that life may have been quite miserable in Laxton at the time, but fortunately other resources paint a different picture. Edith Hickson and Frank Moody, who also wrote about his memories of the time, both say that Lord Manvers was well respected and regarded as a village benefactor. They both mention happy social occasions in the village and the festivities and fairs which took place.

Members of the Manvers family frequently attended these special occasions and Lady Manvers took a special interest in the school. Newspaper articles from the time also confirm this. This side of village life is dealt with in “The Village Schoolmaster” and in “Living in Laxton”, other booklets in this series.

Now through their letters and in their own words we can, in the following accounts, examine some part of their lives in Laxton.

QUEENIE SAMPSON

Charlotte Mary Sampson, known as ‘Queenie’, lived at Holme View Farm, next door to Blacksmith’s Cottage. Living in Stockport and in her 70s, she wrote to her former neighbour Mrs Kathleen Grundy on 8th Feb 1998, shortly before Mrs Grundy died. It was for this reason that Mrs Grundy’s daughter, Rosemary Crothers, kept the letter.

‘One of my sewing projects, and I’ve been at it for a couple of years or more is a sort of embroidered picture map of Laxton. It is rather large – about 6 feet long and 2½ feet wide. I’ve done the fields and roads and footpaths and Hall Grounds, the church, the schools and all the houses as I remember them with everybody’s name by the house. Now I am struggling to put cows and sheep in the fields and do wagons and carts and farm implements round and about. My inspiration was the Bayeux Tapestry which John and I went to see, on one of our holidays in France. It’s not a tapestry at all. It’s all embroidered.

So I thought, I can do something like that. But I think I’ve bitten off nearly more than I can chew. Perhaps it will get finished one day.’



The work to which Queenie refers depicts her recollection of Laxton c1925 and is currently owned by her niece Mrs Karen Rutherford of Tuxford who very kindly allowed Laxton History Group to borrow it and photograph it in detail.

Queenie has taken a little geographic licence with the layout to fit Main Street onto her fabric, but the detail she recalled so long after living here is astonishing. One of her favourite pastimes, we are told, was swinging on her rope swing in a walnut tree at Holme View Farm. Look closely and you can see a little blonde girl of about 10 years of age happily swinging.

There are many tiny details which must be clearly remembered. We can see a hay stack on fire, bee hives, geese and the cricket pitch on its original site behind Bar Farm. There are some inaccuracies with people appearing who had not yet been born and evidence that Queenie was much more familiar with the top end of the village than the bottom, but it was a monumental retirement undertaking - and she very nearly finished it!

We have used small sections of her work to illustrate our history of Laxton.

Pictured

Queenie Sampson's
Embroidery of Laxton,
c1925 (complete work)

THE NAME OF THE
PROPERTY OCCUPIED
BY THE BENNETTS
HAS CAUSED SOME
CONFUSION, WHICH
WE BELIEVE WE
HAVE RESOLVED
FROM FAMILY
PHOTOGRAPHS



THE BENNETT FAMILY

GEORGE BENNETT

In 1911 there were three families of Bennetts living in Laxton. George Bennett, who we are concerned with here, was born in Marnham in 1825, and at the time of the 1841 census was an apprentice wheelwright in Tuxford living with the Bowman family. The head of that household was John Bowman (70), a master wheelwright. Thanks to Elaine Jenkins, great granddaughter of George Bennett, we know that his marriage to Selina Hopkinson of North Collingham took place at East Retford, where the date is noted as in the 4th quarter of 1850. They first appear on the Laxton census in 1861, where George (36) is described as a wheelwright living with his wife, Selina (30) and their children, Mary (7), a scholar, and Sarah (3). At this stage son George was recorded as 3 months old.

By 1871 George was no longer described as a wheelwright, but as a Farmer and Maltster. They had six children, Mary (1853), Sarah (1858), George (1860/1),



Pictured

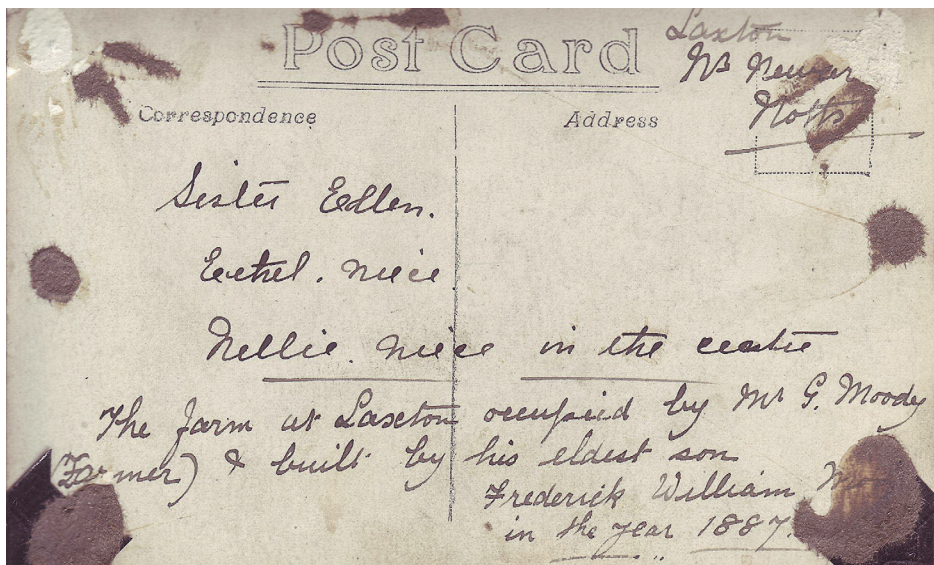
*Step Farm, right,
opposite horse outside
the old malt kiln*

Fanny (1864), Annie E (1866) and William (1868/9). We shall hear more of this William later. They also had two servants – Ruth Harvey, a general domestic servant aged 17 and George Rushby, a man servant from Askham.

John Beckett's 'A History of Laxton' sheds light on how the family came to Laxton. He discusses a rent rise in the 1860s, which had been contested, most notably by a John Keyworth. He was the son of Richard and Elizabeth neé Lee, whose father was at Westwood Farm. Keyworth had come to Laxton in 1798 for the marriage and very soon took the tenancy of Town End Farm. He subsequently acquired a second tenancy, referred to as Bottom Farm, which came with a malt kiln and was presumably where George plied his trade as Maltster.

John Keyworth protested the rent rise, threatening to quit both his tenancies, but was persuaded to go to Thoresby in December 1862 for negotiations with his 'nephew' George Bennett. Beckett says:

'Bennett (36) was a wheelwright, and the illegitimate son of Keyworth's wife Frances. It was agreed



that Keyworth would keep the 135 acre Town End Farm ... and Bennett would become the tenant of the 96 acre Bottom Farm.' They maintained a joint interest in the malt kiln – a brick building which survives today. George Bennett was probably the last actual maltster, dropping that occupation after the 1871 census. The 1895 Kelly's entry is 'Bennett Geo. farmer, Bottom Ho. [House] Frm. [Farm]'

Pictured

Bottom Farm builder information

The name of the property occupied by the Bennetts has caused some confusion, which we believe we have resolved from family photographs and Mary Haigh's work for 'Open Field Farming in Laxton', which drew on information contained in the 1911 census and Inland Revenue Survey data in 1910.

Brian Easton, a descendant of the Moody family, sent us a photograph of the present Bottom Farm captioned 'The farm at Laxton occupied by Mr G Moody (farmer) and built by his eldest son Frederick William Moody in the year 1887.'



Pictured

*Bennett Family
at Step Farm*

It is clear from this image and from a contemporary Bennett family image of Step Farm that the latter was the one referred to by the Bennett family. The malt kiln, which both Keyworth and Bennett had the use of, stands directly opposite Step Farm.

It is unclear whether the modern Bottom Farm was built on a site of ruins, or was simply made habitable by Frederick Moody, but a house certainly appears on that site in the 1635 Mark Pierce map.

Prior to him building the present house called Bottom Farm it is possible that Step Farm was the last farm at the bottom of Main Street and was consequently called Bottom House Farm.

ANN LEE BENNETT

George Bennett's wife, Selina, died in 1872, and he remarried in 1878 to Ann Lee, born in 1841 and 15 years his junior. The 1881 census shows the changed family with older children George (20), Annie (14) and William (12) from George's first marriage living with him and Ann plus their children Samuel (5) and Eliza (2). There was also a single servant at this time. Robert Lee was not yet born although as his date of birth was (1881–1941) he would have arrived soon after the census.

It appears their eldest son was born before the marriage.

We pick up the story of George and Ann again in 1900 when George, who was 75, was the tenant at Step Farm. He was then an established figure in the village with responsible positions. He was Foreman of Mill Field and was listed as a Manager of Laxton Parish School when it was transferred to the Board of Education shortly before his death.

His family living with him at that time was recorded as Ann (61), Robert (19) and Eliza (22). Older daughter Emma (24) was apparently living opposite at the original property on the site of what we know as New House Farm, working as a housekeeper/domestic for James Patrick (59), a farmer who had been born in Wakefield.

George died suddenly in mid-1903. His widow Ann took the sole tenancy from Lady Day 1904 at the age of 64. Robert and Eliza continued to live with her and both appear to have continued to work the farm and dairy. Mr Wordsworth asked his mother to see that 'Bob' would be about when he called to see what could be done about the cow house.

Ann Bennett outlived George only briefly. The Parish Almanack for 1909 shows she was buried in

Laxton churchyard on 28th September 1908.

Robert wrote on 9th October to inform Mr Wordsworth of his mother's death and asking to see him. On 30th November by Mr Wordsworth, had returned from a trip away and called to see Robert.

ROBERT LEE BENNETT

That meeting clearly concluded with a decision that the tenancy should pass to Robert, and it was suggested he might travel with his neighbour Sam Bartle as both had to attend the Estate Office to sign agreements.

Robert made reference to having a dairy business when, in on 9th October 1909, he wrote to Thoresby:

'I began yesterday to send my milk to Nottingham and the milk wants cooling before it can go on rails. At present I am taking it to Mr Fisher's of Sutton to be cooled. This is a distance of 5 miles and it is a long way for me to go to have it cooled. What I want is a

Pictured

Stand for milk churns



little place building at the end of the cow shed and a pipe to run the water from the pump to it, and then it would save me 20 miles a day with cooling it myself. And as I have no material and no bricklayer I should be very pleased if you would build me one. It will only be a small job and I will do what I can towards it.'

When Bennett later left the farm, the 'milk house' was raised as an issue. Mr Harpham, the Estate Valuer, noted that the drain had been damaged when this building was erected and questioned Bennett's account that Mr Wordsworth had given permission for it. As no further mention appears, we can assume he confirmed he had put the work in hand.

During Robert's early tenancy, while Eliza lived with him she was courting a man named Arthur Johnson from Sheffield. He was a master wheelwright and the family belief is that he may have known John Bowman from Tuxford, with whom Eliza's father George, worked as a wheelwright in his youth.

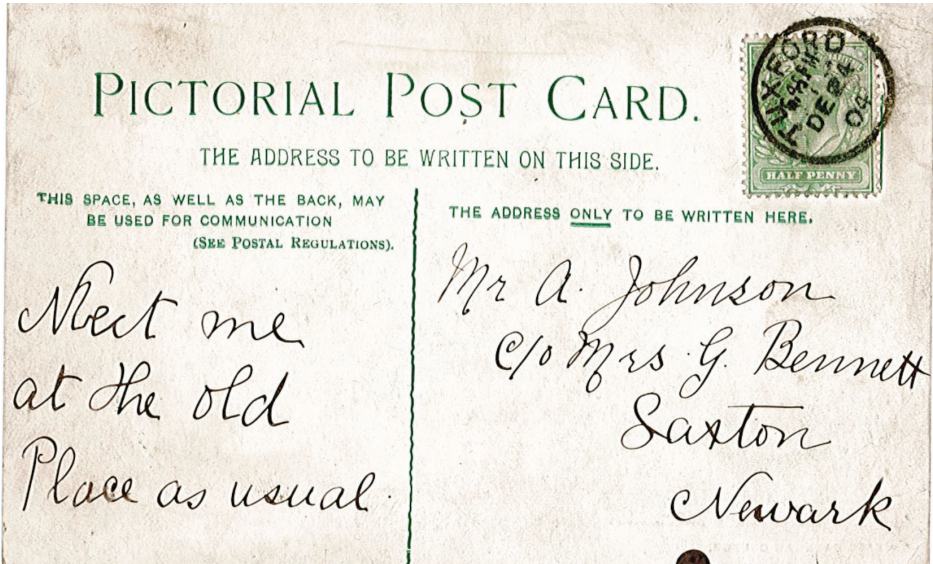
It seems Arthur came to Laxton and possibly worked here with Eliza's father who was described as working as a wheelwright in 1861.

An envelope written the year after George died and addressed to 'Mr A Johnson, c/o Mrs G Bennett, Laxton, Newark' bearing the post mark December 24th 1904 still survives.

Elaine Jenkins, Eliza's granddaughter, has a letter from Arthur dated 21st October 1903 which makes it clear the two were in love.

Another letter addressed to him in Laxton describes him as 'c/o Bottom Farm'. As explained above, this is the name given then to what is now called Step Farm.

After Ann's death Arthur Johnson had returned to live in Sheffield. Elaine Jenkins remembers her



Pictured

Postcard dated
24 Dec 1904

father recounting how the family business, 'Smith & Johnson' was established by Arthur with George Smith, who had married Robert and Eliza's sister Emma Bennett, 2 years Eliza's senior.

They moved to Netherthorpe, close to where Smith & Johnson was subsequently located. He put money into establishing the business, but the relationship soon became very strained and in an acrimonious fall out Arthur had to raise the money to buy George Smith out. This was devastating for him financially. Eliza alluded to his problems in a letter dated Feb. 22nd 1909:

'Glad to hear that you have done well this week. Got your only lost customer back again. Will make a little difference to you.' As she urged him to 'cheer up'

Robert Lee Bennett disapproved of the marriage. It is understandable that in the light of Arthur's financial difficulties, and no doubt hearing about

their fall out from his brother-in-law George Smith, he might have regarded Arthur as a young, reckless, struggling business man who could offer Eliza nothing. Whatever Robert's objections Eliza and Arthur made secret plans for her to join him in Sheffield, where they would be married.

Eliza's letter of Feb. 22nd 1909 replied to a 'loving letter' from Arthur. Her only reference to her brother was that he must *'look after the lambs himself'*. Apparently a practical sort of woman, among her endearments Eliza told Arthur he would have to make *'a potato masher for himself out of a bit of wood'*.

She went on to write of planning to go to Tuxford that day to look at patterns for her dress, which she would have a Mrs Hudson make. She wanted a nice one and promised to tell Arthur more later. She obviously did not plan to tell Mrs Hudson the whole story as she remarked that she wouldn't make the final decision that day, but would get her to make one for Easter and *'I shan't tell her what it is for'*.

What it was actually for is told in letters separately from Revd. and Mrs Collinson on April 5th and 7th 1909 respectively. The former was to Arthur regretting that:

'...things have gone across between Eliza and her brother and that you have parted in an unfriendly fashion. I am sorry you will not be able to have your wedding here ... I send you your certificate but I shall not make any charge. Give my very kind remembrances to Eliza – and I hope to hear of her welfare as time goes on.'

Rhoda Collinson wrote fondly to Eliza regretting that she would not be married here. She added *'I know you will feel leaving Laxton very much but you will soon get fond of your new home'*.

Eliza Bennett and Arthur Johnson married at St Mary's Church, Ecclesfield, Sheffield, (Church of England) in April 1909. They only had one child, a son, Arthur Bennett Johnson born on 18th June 1913, who was Elaine Jenkins' father. When his father died, he and Eliza continued to run the family business which, through Arthur's hard work, had become very successful.

ANNIE ELSIE QUIBELL

It appears likely that Robert was courting the woman who was to soon become his wife at the same time as Eliza was planning to leave. Robert Lee, then 28, was married at much the same time to Annie Elsie Quibell (27) on 3rd May 1909 in Laxton Church. Their ceremony was conducted by Revd. Collinson. The marriage certificate shows the place as 'Laxton or Lexington,' which seemed to be common at that time as it is also written this way on other certificates. Annie Elsie was the daughter of another Laxton family. Annie and her father, John Quibell, lived in one of the cottages they owned on The Bar. He later sold them to Lord Manvers and moved in with Annie and her husband.

These cottages have now been combined into what we know today as Beech House. Their daughter

Pictured

Robert Bennett's
Marriage certificate

Printed and Published by Messrs. W. & A. G. Lacey, Stationers and Printers, 15, Abchurch Lane, London, E.C. 4.

Certificate of Marriage.
Pursuant to the Births, Deaths, and Marriages Registration Act, 1836.

19 09 Marriage solemnized at St. Michael's Church in the Parish of Laxton or Lexington in the County of Nottingham

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.
263	3 rd May	Robert Lee Bennett	28	Bachelor	Farmer	Laxton	George Bennett Farmer
		Annie Elsie Quibell	27	Spinster	-	Laxton	John Quibell Peter Thomas

Married in the British Church aforesaid according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England by Christ B. Collinson or after None by me

This Marriage was solemnized between us Robert Lee Bennett and Annie Elsie Quibell in the presence of us Mark Barlow Christ B. Collinson Elsie Barlow

I, W. G. G. G. of Laxton in the County of Nottingham do hereby certify that this is a true copy of the entry No. 263 in the Marriage Register Books of the said Parish of Laxton and that such Register Books are now legally in my custody.

Witness my hand this 3rd day of May 19 09 Christ B. Collinson



Pursuant to the Act 6th and 7th William IV. Cap. 86.



No.	When and Where Born.	Name, if any.	Sex.	Name and Surname of Father.	Name and Maiden Surname of Mother.	Rank or Profession of Father.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When Registered.	Signature of Registrar.	Registration Mark if added after Registration of Birth.
494	8th Oct 1910 Laxton R.D.	Clara	girl	Robert Lee Bennett.	Annie Alice Bennetts formerly Lubbell	Farmer	A. S. Bennett Mother Laxton	28th November 1910	Madam Registrar	

I, the undersigned, Registrar of Births and Deaths in the Sub-District of KNEESAL, in the County of NOTTINGHAM, do hereby Certify, That this is True Copy of the Entry No. 494 in the Register Book of Births for the said District. And I further Certify that the said Register Book is lawfully in my custody.

Witness my hand this 10th day of November 1910



Registrar

By the Act of 5 & 7 Phil. IV. c. 86, s. 26, it is enacted, "That every Superintendent Registrar shall cause Indices of the Register-Books in his Office to be made, and kept with the other Records of his Office; and that every person shall be entitled at all reasonable hours to search the said Indices, and to have a certified Copy of any Entry or Entries in the said Register-Books upon the hand of the Superintendent Registrar, and for every particular Search the sum of One Shilling; and for every general Search the sum of Five Shillings; and for every particular Search the sum of One Shilling; and for every certified Copy the sum of Two Shillings and sixpence."

By s. 43 of the same Act it is enacted, "That every Person who shall, without lawful authority or cause, do or injure, any such Register Book, or any part thereof, or shall fraudulently, or shall unlawfully make or so falsify, or cause to be falsified, made or counterfeited, any part of any such Register-Book or certified Copy thereof, or shall, or cause to be made, in any Register Book or certified Copy thereof, any false entry of any Death, or Marriage, or shall wilfully give any false Certificate, or shall certify any thing to be a Certificate of Register Book, knowing the same to be false in any part thereof, or shall forge or counterfeits the Seal of the Registrar Office, shall be guilty of Felony."

Clara was born on 8th October 1910, and baptised in Laxton church on 28th November that year.

A second daughter Rose was born on 9th January 1911, but appears not to have been baptised in Laxton. Robert continued to work in the village, but by October 1911 arrangements were in place for Step Farm to pass to Thomas Bailey in March 1912.

ROBERT BENNETT'S SALE

Robert was reprimanded in the February for selling straw. Mr Wordsworth wrote: *'This is contrary to your agreement, which states that nothing shall be sold without the Landlord's consent ... Please do not do anything contrary to your agreement. I should be very sorry to have any unpleasantness when we part'*. This correspondence was shared with Mr Harpham, who was valuing for Thomas Bailey.

Robert acknowledged selling one stack of wheat straw, but said he would have the *'one fourth of his straw'*, as required by his agreement, for the incoming tenant. Seeming to also feel kindly towards Mr Wordsworth, he ended: *'I expect you will take something off in the valuation but I hope we shall be no worse friends. I shall not sell any more'*.

Pictured

Clara Bennett's Birth certificate



Pictured

*John Quibell, seated,
with his Bennett Family*

Robert instructed Messrs. Henry Spencer to conduct his farm sale on 23rd March 1912 at which 11 horses, 17 beasts, 23 store pigs and 3 open gilts were sold along with implements, harness, a Crossley 4.5hp engine and antique and modern furniture. The sale was advertised twice in successive weeks in the Newark Advertiser, first on 13th March in outline and then a week later on 20th with full descriptions of all the items for sale. It doesn't read like the sale of a man intending to continue farming.

He and his family moved to Kirton, taking the elderly John Quibell with them.

A sale was held on 14th August 1912 when Robert Bennett's standing wheat crop in 5 separate pieces in West Field was offered together with 2 pieces of tares in Mill Field. They had sons Charles and Fred while living in Kirton.

After the move, and at the advanced age of 88, a new Will was prepared for John Quibell by E S Spencer of Retford, whose firm had handled Robert's

Pictured

*Clara Bennett, aged
21, with Eliza Johnson*



sales. He left everything to his daughter Annie Elsie Bennett. This was witnessed on 4th October 1923 by P B Whittington, the Tuxford doctor familiar in Laxton, who then signed his occupation as 'Surgeon'.

Robert and Elsie's younger daughter Rose married first, to Fred Drury on 28th March 1932. The rift with Eliza must have been healed as she appears in the photograph of this wedding and later a family photograph shows her with her niece Clara.

Rose died in Lincoln on 20th August 1992. Clara married Walter Boole on 17th April 1933 and died in Kings Mill Hospital on 23rd August 1995. Their families still live in the area and we are grateful to his granddaughter, Rose Parker from Wellow, for photographs and information about Robert Lee Bennett and his family.

WILLIAM BENNETT

William Bennett was the son of George Bennett and his first wife Selina. He was 2 years old at the time of the 1871 census, so would have been just 3 or 4 years old when his mother died in 1872. He grew up with his siblings from his father's first marriage and their new family. He married Laxton woman Sarah Elizabeth Bagshaw from Town End Farm (born 25th September 1873). William (32) and Sarah (27), were married between censuses and were cottagers in 1901, living at what is now Moorend Cottage.

They were succeeded there by Sarah's sister Eliza Cree and her husband John. Another of Sarah's sisters was married to George Cocking at Manor Farm, and Fanny married George Burkitt, also of Laxton. William was half-brother to Eliza and Robert Lee Bennett who were then living at Step Farm, and their siblings Samuel and Emma.



In 1902 William took the tenancy of the property standing where New House Farm is now from the late J Patrick. It seems likely that this was James Patrick, employer of his sister Emma, who we saw earlier had married George Smith, sometime business partner of Arthur Johnson. Mr Wordsworth spotted William working there in September that year and commented:

'I was very glad to see you working where you were last Thursday and hope this is a good omen for the future.'

William obviously wanted to succeed now he had his own farm and in 1908 was reported in the Newark Herald among the attendees at a meeting in the Vicarage Room when a lecture was given by a Mr T Milburn PhD NDA from the Midland Agricultural and Dairy College about *'... the results*

Pictured

New House Farm with car parked outside

of recent experiments with varieties and manuring of crops' which had advised how farmers could benefit themselves from these results. Controlled experiments with artificial and natural manures on mangolds were carried out later in the village, very probably as a result of this lecture.

IN 1902 A MEETING OF PARISHIONERS WAS CALLED IN THE SCHOOLROOM TO DISCUSS WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO CELEBRATE THE FORTHCOMING CORONATION OF KING EDWARD VII AND QUEEN ALEXANDRA

In 1902 a meeting of parishioners was called in the schoolroom to discuss what might be done to celebrate the forthcoming Coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. This was to take place in Westminster Abbey in June, but having been postponed due to the King's illness, did not take place until 9th August that year. It was agreed to make a collection to pay for the celebration and William Bennett, together with Samuel Peatfield from the cottages at Ide Farm willingly offered to canvas house to house. The Newark Herald of 3rd May 1902 reported that the villagers '*contributed liberally*' and 20/- [£1] had already been collected.

In 1911 William was still living at New House Farm with his family. In their day this was a traditional

farm house that stood right up to the pavement edge and at one time housed the Post Office. This was pulled down and the present house built behind it in 1959. They had daughters Minnie, Alice, Lily and Doris aged 8 to 4 years and son Ernest who was 3.

In November 1912 William Bennett was called upon by the Estate to show Mr Clark from Ossington around 'Top House Farm' - now Town End Farm - for Mrs John Bagshaw following her husband's death. That he should have been asked to undertake this task is understandable as not only was she his mother in law, but the farm had been in his family's name when John

Keyworth was tenant. It is likely that his father George would have worked with him, at least occasionally before becoming a tenant in his own right.

Richard Clark's visit marked the beginning of a long association between his family and Laxton. Mrs Bagshaw was told that Bennett knew the acreages, but she was not to tell him the rent she had been paying. No doubt the practice of raising the rent when a new tenant arrived was already well established. Mrs Bagshaw subsequently sold a great deal of farm equipment and household goods through Henry Spencer. There followed a sale of crops in the open fields and the Newark Advertiser listed the details and purchasers on 20th August 1913.

It was during the exchange about showing Clark round that Bennett used an expression still occasionally used in Laxton today, but which seems certain to confuse outsiders. He asked to put off the visit for a day as he was short-handed for his task

RICHARD CLARK'S VISIT MARKED THE BEGINNING OF A LONG ASSOCIATION BETWEEN HIS FAMILY AND LAXTON

of 'leading stone'. The same expression was used in 2009 in a video interview with Gerald Bates of Kneesall in conversation with Colin Cree, reminiscing about Ken Woolhouse 'leading peas' in Laxton. The images these expressions conjure up are far more entertaining than the reality. The term appears to originate from leading the horses which drew the carts carrying the goods described!

VICARAGE FARM

In 1917 William Bennett took on the whole 91 acre Vicarage Farm from Samuel Bartle in addition to New House Farm.

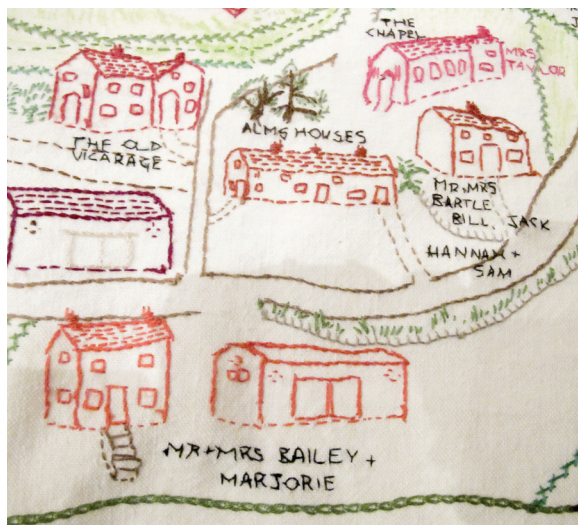
Although Vicarage Farm is in Chapel Lane across the lane from the Chapel, the two properties adjoin as New House Farm's buildings form the corner where the lane joins Main Street. Owing to the 'foul state of the arable land' a sliding scale of rent was applied for the first three years of the tenancy - £30, £30, £40 and the full rate of £75 from the fourth year.

The Estate appeared to acknowledge the scale of

his task in another way. Tenants were always directed to cart their own basic slag, but on this occasion when Bennett said he had too much work to do it, they arranged for it to be delivered to Ollerton with the rest of their order and subsequently stored with George Preston, the gamekeeper who lived at 2 Saywood Cottages. The whole job

Pictured

Step Farm and
Chapel Lane



seems to have been taken care of as Bennett was to be told when a man was coming to 'sow' it.

He would not have been pleased to be one of those receiving a ploughing up order in 1918 to add to his workload. Mr Argles appealed the requirement, but Bennett must have made a start before Mr Argles delivered the welcome news that the order on the 9.5 acre field between the two woods at Saywood had been cancelled. He was further told:

'So, when the time comes, kindly seed down the small piece that has been ploughed. I am glad this field can remain pasture, and I want you to do everything you can to improve the quality of the herbage.'

This tenancy appears to have been more than William Bennett could manage and on 27th February 1920 Mr Argles wrote to him:

' ... I hereby accept your notice to quit the farm you now occupy at Laxton, formerly in the occupation of Mr Sam Bartle, at Lady Day, 1921. I regret that you have decided to give up this land, but quite appreciate your position.'

This was clearly another of those Laxton occasions where news travelled quickly and by 15th April 1920 T&M Bailey had already discussed having Vicarage Farm with Mr Argles and wrote to enquire if Mr Bennett was keeping it, since if it was to be let to them, they wanted to prepare.

**BENNETT
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As they already occupied Step Farm and Bottom Farm, which face New House Farm, they would not have been likely to be interested in Vicarage Farm House for themselves and Bennett himself may have told them he was giving it up.

It was unlikely to have been a surprise to them that when they took over the tenancy, the house was occupied. We can only imagine that once the premises became their responsibility they soon told Mr Argles about it. On 6th April 1921, shortly after Lady Day, Mr Argles wrote to William Bennett, who was still in New House Farm:

'I am surprised to learn that two families are living in the farmhouse at The Old Vicarage Farm. Until two days ago I did not know that you had sub-let this house. When I let you the farm it was intended that this house should be occupied by people who were engaged in agriculture on the holdings which you occupy at Laxton. I will arrange to call and see you in the course of a day or two.'

Our information gathering ended with 1920 and we picked up a few later documents to allow stories to be concluded. We know only that William died on 29th November 1955 and his widow, Sarah, died on 26th November 1957. In this case we picked up the beginning. William and Sarah remained in the village beyond the period of our research so the rest of their story and those of their families is liable to remain between the pages of the correspondence books to whet our appetite for more research.

Pictured

*Cart Wheel courtesy
of Country Life
Magazine, photographer
Mark Fairhurst*





THE DUCKMANTON FAMILY

William and John Duckmanton were the sons of Mary and Henry Duckmanton, identified in the 1861 census as the village wheelwright. Henry died in 1895 and his widow continued to live in the village in what is now called Ivy Cottage. John and his wife Elizabeth lived at what is now known as 2 Bar Cottages. He is referred to in the 1911 census, aged 58, as a joiner. Elizabeth was the only woman who was directly referred to as '*going out to work*', which occurred in a letter in 1917.

William was living still at home with his mother in 1891 and 1901 and he was variously recorded as village joiner, carpenter and wheelwright. It would be easy to conclude that he was unmarried and had remained with his mother throughout. That his story is more complicated is revealed in the baptism of Frank Rushby, son of William and Charlotte Elizabeth Duckmanton which occurred on 25th June 1899 in Laxton – the same date as the baptism of Robert, son of George and Sabina Weatherall.



Pictured

*Ivy Cottage courtesy
of Country Life
Magazine photographer
Mark Fairhurst*

William and Charlotte had been married in 1898 in Glossop, Derbyshire where she was working as a servant at a Doctor's. Charlotte was recorded as from '*Laxton Moorhouse*', born in 1862

It is unclear when they returned to Laxton and the baptism may have been in the village because the families were both here. By 1901 however, when the census was taken just three years later, William was in Laxton living with his mother and listed as a wheelwright. Ten years later at the next census he was still there.

By the 1901 census, Charlotte Duckmanton had returned to live in Glossop and was working as a *'cloth hooker in cotton mill'*. In addition to her son Frank, she was supporting her widowed mother and her brother – another William, aged 39 – recorded as a *'retired farm labourer'*. In 1911 the household in Glossop consisted only of Charlotte and Frank. Charlotte was still *'hooker in cotton warehouse'*. She died in Glossop in 1945.

William returned to the family home and also apparently to his late father's successful family business which had been running in Laxton for at least fifty years. In an age when wood played a key part in so many aspects of life, the trades followed by both William and John Duckmanton would have been vital to the farmers and the Estate. Wooden carts were the order of the day and keeping them running was paramount for domestic and agricultural purposes alike.

The joiner was in demand for repairs and the wheelwright's skills, together with those of the blacksmith, were essential to ensure new wheels were made when needed. As if that would not keep them busy enough, house doors and windows needed repair as did barn doors and farm fences, so they would have been both in demand and fully occupied.

The first news of William following his return coincided with the Estate starting to develop plans

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to build new cottages opposite the Dovecote Inn. William's tenancy included the piece of land, part of which remains as a field in Main Street, a short way down from his home at Ivy Cottage.

It is through Wordsworth's next letter that June that we begin to realise that trouble is afoot when he told Duckmanton about the plan to build the cottages:

WORDSWORTH WOULD HAVE BEEN ACQUAINTED WITH OLD MRS DUCKMANTON DURING HER MARRIAGE

'fronting the road in the grass field between your home and garden and Hewitt's freehold so that we shall take a strip off the field next spring in order to do this.'

Wordsworth continued: *'...I am sorry that I hear very bad accounts of you in the way of intemperance.'*

He expressed concern for Duckmanton's 85 year old mother and also for the effectiveness of the joinery business, adding:

'I hope that you will take this as a warning for I cannot have the joiner's premises at Laxton occupied by one who is really of no benefit whatever to the tenants.'

Undoubtedly Wordsworth would have been acquainted with old Mrs Duckmanton during her marriage when her husband ran the business and there is no reason to believe that this relationship was anything less than cordial. He was doubtless aware that her son's behaviour would distress such an elderly lady.

By the November the plans for building were clearly progressing and Duckmanton had kept the

building land referred to above for the extra year.

Mr Wordsworth informed him on 1st November 1912 that he wanted him:

'... to sign an agreement for your cottage, shop and orchard which you hold from Lord Manvers together with your mother. The house has a common right and the rent will be £12. The remainder of what you now hold will be given up next Lady Day [25th March].'

It is also clear that Duckmanton had not heeded the earlier warning about his drinking. Mr Wordsworth remarked:

'I am sorry to hear that what I wrote to you lately has had no effect and that you are still frequently not sober. I don't want to have to turn your mother out, but the present condition of things is very discreditable to you.'

A reminder earlier that his first half year's rent was not paid produced an apology and payment, but Mr Spink wrote on 1st December after the Michaelmas Rent Day had passed, suggesting that Mr Wordsworth would be *'very much annoyed'* on his return if the next payment remained unpaid.

This proved to be an accurate assessment of the situation, as a week later, on 7th December Duckmanton received Mr Wordsworth's reaction, which throws light on events and confirms the earlier view of the overall situation:

"Mr Spink informs me that you never came near the Cottages on Rent Day, on Thursday at Laxton. Your mother, whom he saw, told him that you left the house at 10'clock, and had not returned by 3 in the afternoon. You paid neither rent nor arrears. Unless

MR WORDSWORTH DEMONSTRATED THROUGHOUT HIS CORRESPONDENCE THAT HE WAS A FAIR PERSON WHO EXPECTED THE SAME OF OTHERS IN RETURN

you come to this office on Tuesday morning next, at 10 o'clock, pay at least one half year's rent, and sign the agreement I wrote to you about, I shall take immediate steps for removing you from your holding. The condition of the village carpenter at Laxton is becoming a perfect scandal in the district and I certainly shall not allow it to continue.'

This was still not enough to persuade Duckmanton, who had previously promised to pay within a fortnight of

Rent Day, that Mr Wordsworth meant what he said. It was followed up on 20th January 1913 with the unmistakable warning:

'If the money is not paid to this office by Friday next, I shall instruct our solicitors to take proceedings against you.'

Mr Wordsworth demonstrated throughout his correspondence in our 'snapshot' that he was a fair person who expected the same of others in return. In lesser matters he referred to what 'he' expected, but when tested, he made sure the other party fully understood that it was Lord Manvers being wronged.

He was clearly concerned that Mary Duckmanton would suffer if he acted on his intention to evict her son. He would have been saddened to see this elderly lady, once the wife of a successful tradesman, reduced to keeping house for the son who had brought the business to its knees and did not want to

add to her troubles by making her homeless in advanced old age.

This led him to write directly to her soon after, on February 4th 1913, telling her that after much thought he had concluded he really could not *'allow her son to remain in the house as the example he sets in the village is one Lord Manvers would never allow for a minute'*.

He expressed his concern for Mrs Duckmanton, saying:

'Of course in making him leave his house my chief anxiety is yourself. I am given to understand that there are other members of your family who would gladly make a home for you, and I will ask you to kindly think this over, and arrange if possible that one of them should do so at Ladyday'

– just six weeks away. He offered to visit and talk the matter over with her but stipulated that:

'...it must of course be understood that I should only discuss the question with yourself and I shall not wish your son to be present.'

Mrs Duckmanton must have taken up the offer of a visit as Mr Wordsworth wrote to her again suggesting she sought help by having a *'little talk'* with Mrs Collinson before they met. This letter is typed, but carries a hand written post script: *'Anything I can do to help you I shall be only too pleased to do'*.

WORDSWORTH WAS CLEARLY CONCERNED THAT MARY DUCKMANTON WOULD SUFFER IF HE ACTED ON HIS INTENTION TO EVICT HER SON

WILLIAM AND JOHN HAD A SISTER, MARY, WHO MARRIED ARTHUR SMALL IN 1887 AND MOVED TO EAST DRAYTON

By February 21st Mr Wordsworth had received a note from John Duckmanton, William's brother, saying his mother had gone to Drayton, which he answered indicating he would *'take steps for getting possession of the cottage and shop (workshop) at Ladyday.'*

On the same date he wrote to William Duckmanton, Wheelwright:

'... in consequence of your actions your mother has felt need to leave her old home. ... It is a positive disgrace to the village. ... I shall require possession of all you hold under Lord Manvers at Lady Day next.'

Concern for Mary Duckmanton turned to ensuring that she was able to lay claim to and hold on to her possessions. William and John had a sister, Mary, who married Arthur Small in 1887 and moved to East Drayton, and it was apparently she who had taken her mother in. A note from Mrs Small, prompted Mr Wordsworth to write to Revd. Collinson on 25th February asking:

'How are we to get at the position with regard to the furniture in the house? I have written to Duckmanton, to say that I must have possession of the house at Ladyday, and I should imagine that, for her lifetime, old Mrs Duckmanton will have a call on at least a part of the furniture. Would it be any use telling William Duckmanton to come to the office and bring his father's Will?'

Fortunately things concluded amicably and Mr Spink, the clerk, picked up the correspondence saying he was pleased to hear that Duckmanton would willingly give up things his mother wished to have.

Hoping to settle the matter of the outstanding rent equally amicably he also suggested:

‘So as not to cause any further trouble to you, you had better sign me the accompanying note, so that the auctioneer, after the Sale, may pay to Mr Wordsworth the amount of rent that will be due from you at Ladyday’.

WE CAN ONLY IMAGINE THAT MOVING TO LIVE WITH HER DAUGHTER IN WHAT MUST HAVE BEEN A PLEASANTER ATMOSPHERE WOULD HAVE BEEN A RELIEF FOR MARY DUCKMANTON

The episode ended with William Duckmanton being instructed to hand the keys to his house and joiners shop to Tom Bagshaw tomorrow (29th March 1913) without fail.

We can only imagine that moving to live with her daughter in what must have been a pleasanter atmosphere would have been a relief for Mary Duckmanton. She was buried at Laxton on 9th March 1917 aged 91.

JOHN FROW
WANTED TO TAKE
ON A GRASS FIELD
PREVIOUSLY FARMED
BY MR QUIBELL,
WHO WAS GIVING
UP HIS FARM. HE
JEOPARDISED THIS BY
BEING AT ODDS WITH
THE ESTATE OVER HIS
RELATIONSHIP WITH
THE COURT LEET



THE FROW FAMILY

As our research began, John Frow (56) was living at Copthorne, Moorhouse, with his family. On the day of the census in 1901 this consisted of wife Mary (58), sons Hewson (25) and David (19), daughter Fanny (23), and a nephew, Richard Frow aged 13.

At that time he wanted to take on a grass field previously farmed by Mr Quibell, who was giving up his farm. He jeopardised this by being at odds with the Estate over his relationship with the Court Leet. His letter of 1st December 1899 to Mr Marsh, filed with the Tallents Collection, is written and signed in his very distinctive hand.

It was presumably sent in response to his summons to the Court. He quoted an appointment at Mansfield as his reason for not being able to be at Laxton that day, and went on to resign from the Jury. He denied guilt for '*... the trespass or action I am afined for and shall not pay the fine imposed on me*'.

On 11th December this had been communicated to Mr Wordsworth by Tallents, who replied saying Frow had to pay the fine and had no power to resign from the Jury. He was clearly annoyed by this stance and added that unless he paid the 10/- [50p] fine and accepted he had to serve on the Jury he would be

Coopthorne
Moorhouse
Newark
29 June 1904
I beg to inclose
Mr Wordsworth Cheque

Pictured

John Frow's
Handwriting
(Ma 2C 9 303)

given notice from Lady Day 1901 as:

'... it is absolutely imperative that the rules of the Manor Court are obeyed.' Until the matter was settled the offer of the grass field was withdrawn. He told Tallents that he had written a letter which 'I think will have the desired effect'.

It appears he was right. Frow's response to this was not rapid, but he gave in and in April 1900 paid, sending a Postal Order for the 10/- with an enclosure, filed with the Court papers for 1900:

'Gentlemen, I beg to inclose P.O. for 10/- as Mr Wordsworth wishes it to be so. All though it is not just and not plesent.'

Mr Wordsworth, for his part, acknowledged this and wrote to Frow that as soon as he agreed to the £7 rent for the grass field he could have it, otherwise it would be let to someone else. Normal relations

were resumed and in a letter of December 1900 Mr Wordsworth regretted being unable to allow Frow basic slag that year as:

'... with the death duties [following the death of the 3rd Earl Manvers in January 1900] to face I must be careful in that respect this year.'

Rent payments, or more accurately the lack of them, continued to be an issue until on 28th April 1903 Frow received a letter telling him he owed practically a year and a half. The rent for the newly acquired grass field was an additional and continuing issue as late as the new year of 1905. Mr Wordsworth dealt with it in a letter showing a degree of seasonal good will:

'Dear Sir,

Thanks for your letter, but tenants as a rule do find it material what Mr Wordsworth fixes the rent of their land at, and I fancy that it will be found so in your case. ...

Wishing you the compliments of the season'

The plans for the reorganisation of the Open Fields were already taking shape and Mr Wordsworth was clearly busier than normal. Frow was in the habit of writing about many different issues or little jobs he wanted done for him until even the normally patient Agent replied quite briskly saying:

'Please let me know what it is you wish to see me about. I have given the neighbourhood of Cophorne a good deal of attention lately and



Pictured:

*Knapeney, Primrose
and Copthorne Farms*

there are now others whose turn it is to be attended to so that unless it is something very urgent I cannot promise to come at present.'

In September 1905 Mr Wordsworth wrote again about the rent owed, which was then £117. It is hardly surprising that he was taken aback by a letter from Frow in response to this asking to be allowed to take a second farm – and one which was already promised to someone else! This provoked a rare display of annoyance from Mr Wordsworth which he admitted:

' ... not for one moment could I ask Lord Manvers to let a second farm to a tenant who is at the present moment practically a year and a half behind in his payment of Rent. I own that your letter has annoyed me a good deal. I think I had a right to expect something different from you.'



In June 1906 Frow wrote asking how much would clear his arrears. In the following months he wrote about a succession of other properties including Knapeney and Primrose Farms, both nearby and both farms created in the 1720s with their fields around them, but he was unsuccessful.

He then turned his attention to building works being carried out at his home, going to some lengths to say why he would like sash windows rather than side opening ones, but this was dismissed as a project for a new house, not repairs.

A further long letter insisting that things had been very bad and his land had been '*drowned*' for years seems to have been the final straw for John Frow and in 1908 he ended his tenancy at Copthorne and was not heard of again.



Pictured:

*Frank Moody and
Mother Annie looking
over the gate at their
home, The Bar, Laxton.*

THE MOODY FAMILY

A PATERNALISTIC ESTATE

Samuel and Elizabeth Moody were recorded in Laxton in the 1861 and subsequent censuses, although the baptismal record calls Samuel Leonard. Walter Moody, their son, was also born in Laxton and baptised here on 13th October 1861. On 21st September 1893 he married Annie Lacey, who had also been baptised here in 1868

By the time of the 1911 census they were recorded as having 5 children, 4 living. Walter Moody (49) and Annie Moody (43) then lived with their family on The Bar, next to the Dovecote Inn.

In June 1921 Walter, who worked as a woodsman, had apparently been unwell for some time. Mr Argles wrote to Annie, addressing her as Mrs Walter Moody as was the custom of the day. He sent firewood saying that if she had written sooner:

*'Lord Manvers would, of course, have been very
pleased to send your husband firewood without delay.'*

I am so glad to see from your letter that Dr Whittington considers your husband is progressing favourably.'

Walter did not improve. By July that year he was in need of hospital treatment and Mr Argles obtained a 'hospital ticket' for him. This note or certificate would guarantee the admission of one of the deserving poor to a voluntary hospital, usually granted by a sponsor of the hospital. Unfortunately Walter died on 18th August

1921 at the age of 60.

Becoming aware of this sad news, Mr Argles' next letter to Mrs Moody on 3rd September was to send a contribution of £7 from Lord Manvers towards the cost of funeral expenses for her husband along with a receipt to be signed and returned and his promise to call in a few days.

Mr Argles arranged for the Sanitary Inspector to disinfect and partially redecorate the property in the November.

Writing on 12th September to Revd. Bleau, who had succeeded Revd. Tunbridge, he referred to trying to get Mrs Moody's son a good position in service. The same day he addressed a letter to Mrs Massey, Registry Office for Servants, Friar Gate, Derby:

'I am writing to enquire whether you can find a situation for a hall boy. I can recommend for a

MR ARGLES' NEXT LETTER TO MRS MOODY ON 3RD SEPTEMBER WAS TO SEND A CONTRIBUTION OF £7 FROM LORD MANVERS TOWARDS THE COST OF FUNERAL EXPENSES

situation of this kind Frank Moody, 14½ years of age, height 4ft 8". His postal address is Laxton, Newark. You will remember I have sent you the names of some other boys from this district for whom you have found good situations.'

Directing Mr Smedley to undertake the work at Walter Moody's property, Mr Argles described it as, '*... the last house but one on the right as you go out to Egmonton.*' Argles also wrote to Annie Moody, about the pension arrangements made for her:

'... as explained to you on Saturday evening, you will now receive a pension from this office during Lord Manvers' pleasure of 2s/6d per week which will be paid to you every four weeks. The first payment will be made to you on October 7th.'

A second letter followed; brief, to the point and dated the same day, summarising all the actions he had organised:

'The drain at your cottage and the fireback shall have attention as soon as possible and I will send you some firewood shortly. Today I have written to Mrs Massey, Friargate, Derby asking her whether she can find your boy a good situation as a Hall boy in a big private house. Mr Smedley, the Sanitary Inspector, will call shortly at your cottage and disinfect it throughout. He will write to you and say when you may expect him. This is a very simple matter and will only take one or two hours.'

The son's name was Frank and quite how the news of these plans for him were received in the Moody household is not known as the exchanges fell slightly

later than our core research and it was picked up by chance in the latter part of the final correspondence book we studied. What we do know from Mr Argles' next letter to Mrs Moody is that she must have replied the same day with regard to Frank's future as he wrote back:

'Thank you for your letter of 12th. I note that your boy has decided not to take a position at present, but remain at home during the winter, so I sent a telegram to Mrs Massey on Tuesday morning to say he did not require a situation. I have told Favill that if he has any light work suitable for your boy he is to give him a few days' work sometimes during the winter when he is at liberty.'

Pictured:

Walter and
Annie Moody



George Favill was based at Saywood, near Kneesall Crossroads, and managed the team of woodmen who looked after fences, gates and other wooden constructions on the Estate. Frank Moody was being offered similar work to that done by his late father. This is the same Frank Moody who wrote a fascinating account of Laxton and his experiences in a booklet entitled 'My Lifetime Memories of Laxton' in which he often took to rhyme and which itself informed our research in other areas.

While responding to news of a death by attempting to arrange employment for the children who were old enough to work sounds

presumptuous and intrusive to modern ears, this is not the only instance we encountered. The previous year on 12th March 1920 Mr Argles wrote to Mrs William Bennett, Mrs Cocking's sister, having heard the previous day of the death of George Cocking:

'I do not wish to trouble Mrs Cocking with a letter today, but I was informed yesterday that she had two daughters 15 and 14 years of age, who would be wanting places. Mrs Tebb, Perlethorpe Home Farm, is looking for a servant girl, and if Mrs Cocking's daughter would like to apply for the place, perhaps you could write immediately to Mrs Tebb, The Home Farm, Perlethorpe, Ollerton, Notts. This would be a very comfortable place.'

Pictured:

A young Frank Moody

It is entirely possible that a woman left with grown children and no income from her husband would need to ensure the children brought in a wage to help keep the family, or at least themselves.

Frank does not appear to have had any ambition to follow in his father's footsteps. His brother Wilfred, aged 19 when their father died, worked on the railway. Frank joined him and completed over 40 years' service on the railway before his retirement.

It seems fitting to conclude this short part of the Moody family's story in Frank's own words:

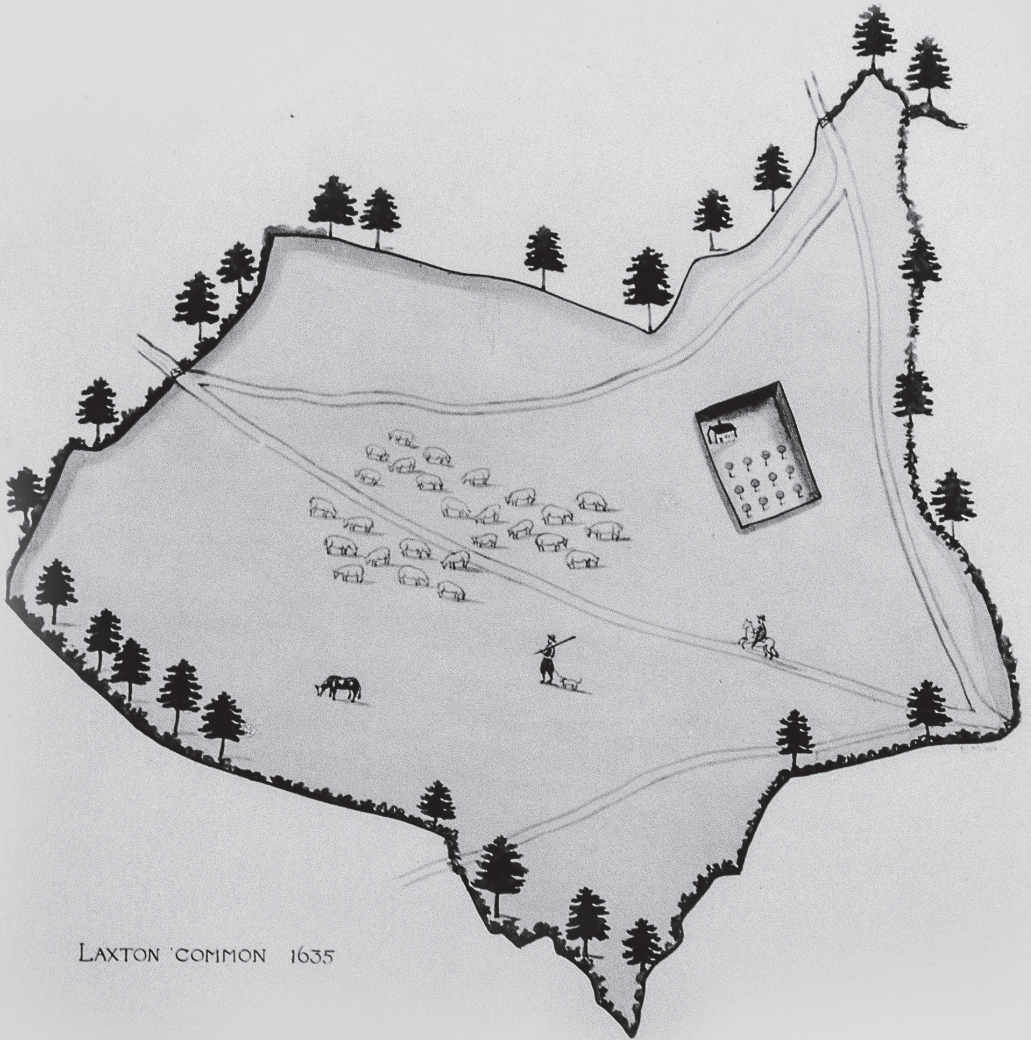


'My father died when I was fourteen years of age, about the time I was due to finish school. As I was unable to cope with the wayward sheep, and without any ambition to become a sheep farmer, I got up early one morning and we all set off on foot to the market at Retford, approximately twelve miles away.

The sheep looked more fitted for a hurdle race than the market, but when I told the auctioneer that they were off Laxton Common, he extracted a few more bids from the buyers.

I felt sad to see them go, and coinciding with the end of my school days, it seemed the end of an era.'

“THE SHEEP LOOKED MORE FITTED FOR A HURDLE RACE THAN THE MARKET, BUT WHEN I TOLD THE AUCTIONEER THAT THEY WERE OFF LAXTON COMMON, HE EXTRACTED A FEW MORE BIDS FROM THE BUYERS”



LAXTON COMMON 1635

Pictured

*Laxton Common,
courtesy of
Thoresby Archives*

THE PINDER FAMILY

Jane Pinder lived at what is now known as Westwood Farm, adjacent to Laxton Common, the large open area at the top of Cocking Hill, which drops down into Boughton. She was 72 years of age and the head of the household in 1901. Her occupation was shown as 'Farmer' in the census. Her son John Henry (30) was still at home, married and working on the farm where help was also provided by Thomas Hazzard, a 16 year old boarder, and others. Two daughters were also at home – Mary Ann aged 40 and 35 year old Fanny.

In this period the Common had a gated road running across it and it was used by the farmers of Laxton. It was later retained by the Thoresby Estate when Laxton was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture. A cottage in a poor state of repair adjoined the farm orchard. This is not mentioned at all in the 1901 census, suggesting it was unoccupied at the time. Mr Wordsworth was keen to get a tenant into it and stop the deterioration which had occurred while it stood empty and it had been offered to John Pinder. They arranged to meet about it on Rent Day.

It is not clear if John ever took up residence, but in April 1903 he is reprimanded through his mother

by Mr Wordsworth for failing to keep his promise to dig the garden at the cottage. It is described as *'untouched and running wild'*.

MISS PINDER HAD THE ADDITIONAL CONCERN THAT SHE 'WANTS TO SAVE WHAT SHE CAN FOR THE CRIPPLE SISTER WHO IS ENTIRELY DEPENDENT ON HER'.

References below to Jack appear to be to this brother, John Henry, as the only other brother appearing on a Laxton census is William, who was stated to be 34 on the 1891 record. Any other brothers, and a later reference suggested there were some, were not recorded during the time the family lived at Westwood Farm. Mary is recorded as Annie in 1891.

Mary Ann Pinder did not marry and there is correspondence that implies that the Collinsons befriended Mary Pinder in her troubles after her mother died.

On 4th March 1906 Revd. Collinson felt obliged to write to Mr Wordsworth urgently asking him to talk to Jack Pinder as Miss Pinder had just visited the Vicarage in great distress. Their brother, William, then living at Kirklington had been putting off his creditors by claiming to have a share in Westwood Farm. The previous day she had asked Mr Wordsworth if she and her brother (John?) could go to see him at Thoresby.

Mary had been threatened with the bailiffs unless some arrangement could be made that very day. The family at the Common were concerned that they would lose property at their farm. Miss Pinder had the additional concern that she *'wants to save what she can for the cripple sister who is entirely dependent on her'*.

They were due to see Spencer, a solicitor in Tuxford that afternoon. It appears that Mr Spencer may have had his own problems with the Pinders in Kirklington as letters in April 1906 recount how he had settled with a Charles Pinder in the presence of Mr Harpham, the Valuer.

Reading between the lines, Mr Spencer was owed money by Pinder and was hoping Mr Wordsworth might help him to recover it. Wordsworth replied that all debts should have been settled before the valuation was agreed, though had he known of the debt at the time he would have tried to help.

Miss Pinder's distress continued, but appeared to have a different cause shortly afterwards in July of the same year. This time Jack Pinder, his wife and their cattle were involved as Revd. Collinson described to Mr Wordsworth. He related the essence of the problem described to his wife by Miss Pinder:

'It appears that Jack Pinder and his wife have had to leave their house at Egmanton - on account of change of ownership or something - and they have migrated to the cottage at the Pinders' farm - together with all their stock - and the latter is the cause of Miss Pinder's distress'.

Miss Pinder felt their actions were wrong towards the Landlord, herself and Fanny, her disabled sister. The vicar described Mrs Jack Pinder as *'not being a particularly desirable person'*. He reported that they helped themselves to coal, potatoes etc. and that this

THE VICAR DESCRIBED MRS JACK PINDER AS 'NOT BEING A PARTICULARLY DESIRABLE PERSON'.

was a great concern to Miss Pinder, who *'would have written to you herself, but she did not like to.'*

Collinson suggested that Mr Wordsworth might investigate himself without mention of their correspondence, believing that Mary Pinder felt in need of advice for herself as they *'are getting the better of her sister'*. He ended by expressing the thought that the Jack Pinders might sell stock – possibly not all their own – *'quietly for their own profit'*.

Word must have been getting around that the situation at Westwood Farm was becoming untenable as Mr Harpham wrote on 26th that Mr Marrison would like to know if the Pinder Farm would *'be at liberty'* at next Lady Day – 25th March 1907.

Things must have gone from bad to worse as on 20th February 1907 Revd. Collinson expressed great concern for Miss Pinder to Mr Wordsworth, alerting him that the sale of the Pinder farm goods was to be held imminently on 5th March. It is apparent that Westwood Farm had already been let to Mr Thomas Marrison, who would be taking possession on Lady Day, only three weeks later.

Fanny Pinder's burial, on January 8th 1907, is reported in the 1908 Parish Almanack, so Mary Pinder, the kindly sister who had cared for her, would still have been coming to terms with this bereavement when she discovered she was being made homeless. Facing an enforced move at such a time would have been very difficult for her. She had no choice but to decide how she would support herself in the future.

Two thirds of the furniture in the house belonged to her and she had good bedding which would fetch little at auction, but be difficult to replace. Her dilemma was that if she had to take a job as a housekeeper, she would have nowhere for her belongings.

In that case her best course of action would be to put everything into the sale which was already

organised to deal with the other farm effects. If she could find a small house and let rooms, she would need the beds and bedding and did not want them sold. She had considered asking Mr Marrison if she could take a room at the farm in which to store her things until she was settled. If she needed to move it elsewhere, she was anxious to do so before the family horses were sold. Revd. Collinson reported that she was feeling *'fidgety and anxious'*, which in the circumstances seems an understatement.

Revd. Collinson himself was unsure how to advise her as he had heard of a possible housekeeper's job, but could not guarantee Mary Pinder would get it. Wordsworth's reply two days later would not have eased his mind as he couldn't help with a house and advised the housekeeper option seemed best.

UNFORTUNATELY THE DOCUMENTS WE DISCOVERED DO NOT TELL US THE END OF THIS SAD TALE AND WHAT EVENTUALLY BECAME OF MARY

Unfortunately the documents we discovered do not tell us the end of this sad tale and what eventually became of Mary. Her name stopped appearing in the correspondence, so she must have left Laxton if not the Thoresby Estate. Thomas Marrison and his sons went on to farm successfully at Westwood and to become significant members of the community.

BY THE TIME OF
THE CENSUS OF
1911, SIDNEY (34)
AND SOPHIA (37)
WERE STILL LIVING
AT HOLME VIEW
FARM. THEY THEN
HAD 6 CHILDREN



THE JOHNSON FAMILY

Sidney, alternatively spelled as Sydney, Johnson was living and farming in Laxton before our 'snapshot' began. He and his family lived at Holme View Farm. In 1900 the tenant was his father, George, who died at the age of 70 on 3rd June 1902.

Shortly before this, the 23 year old Sidney William Johnson had married Sophia Margaret Butcher of Tuxford in Laxton Church on 6th September 1900. Their daughter, Sophie Margaret was baptised there on 26th May 1901. They lived with the widowed George and Sidney's younger sister Lily Jane. Sidney was only 25 when his father died and he took on the farm. Son Sidney Jr. arrived in 1903 and a second daughter, Mary Elizabeth, was baptised at Laxton on February 26th 1905, the same day as Emily Sarah Moody, daughter of Sam and Martha Annie.

Other children followed and by the time of the census of 1911, Sidney (34) and Sophia (37) were still living at Holme View Farm. They then had 6 children – Sophie Margaret, apparently called Maggie (10), Sidney / Sydney (8), Mary (6), Agnes (4), Fred (2) and a baby of 1 month.

From the baptismal records this must have been Lily May, whose baptism was recorded in Laxton on 28th May 1911. From the Parish Almanack we can see there was a further daughter, Kate Sabina, born in 1914. The household in 1911 also included a cowman, a horseman and a domestic servant.

The first Estate correspondence with Sidney was dated 1908. That December he was hoping to get the landlord to have work done both at the farm and in his fields. He had drainage projects in mind - to relieve the flooding which recent heavy rain had caused as well as work he intended to do himself, but for which he wanted 2000 tiles.

He was having trouble with sheep getting on to land on Stubbingside where he wanted to sow turnips. William Favill had been asked to erect wire fencing there, but Mr Wordsworth also wondered if gates were being left open. If that were the case he told Johnson that John Dewick, in his role as Pinder, should put the sheep in the pinfold.

Five years later Johnson was still having trouble with his crops on Stubbingside falling victim to straying animals. This land lies to the far south of the estate and had been taken out of the open field strip system in the recent field reorganisation. A new hedge was planted at the bottom of the slope and another planted to divide the new, larger fields where farmers could now grow or graze what they liked. Being so far from his farm at the top of the village, Johnson may not have been able to keep a regular eye on what was happening although Mr Spink suggested he take note of whose stock seemed to be causing the problem.

Mr Wordsworth wrote again in November 1916 suggesting that if cattle and sheep were trespassing on his land, he was certain this must be due to someone leaving gates open as stock could not break through the new fence erected at the time of the field



re-allotment. He asked for the names of the offenders and said he would *'take care that it is stopped'*.

Drainage also appeared to be an on-going problem, as in February 1915 Mr Argles sent Johnson an estimate for the cost of the Estate men putting in drainage pipes in a wet section of West Field. The problem affected W Moody as well and he was offered the opportunity to have drains put in on his piece at the same time.

Johnson offered to do some of the work himself by way of payment since land he and his father, George, had drained was given up when the field was altered. It seems likely he did not feel inclined to pay for drainage again having lost the benefit of the earlier work. The work was agreed and a team under Mr Bagshaw was delegated to carry it out once Johnson confirmed the pipes had arrived. These were consigned from Walkeringham to be delivered to Tuxford Station.

It was a large order, consisting of 2,350 x 2½” pipes and 500 x 4” pipes. Johnson was tasked with carting them from Tuxford Station back to Laxton, and

Pictured

Brockilow Farm (lower left) and Stubbingside fields (lower right)

very likely up into the field as well. A small number were for Moody's work and Johnson was told to get Bagshaw to cart those.

On 18th March 1915, somewhat surprisingly, a letter from Mr Spink acknowledged Johnson's 'notice to quit' his farm, which he must have been to the Estate Office to discuss. Mr Argles wrote the same day referring to this visit and said he hoped to call soon. The notice would be effective on 25th March 1917, when the farms of S Bartle and J Bartle were also coming vacant. A new tenant was found for Holme View Farm, confirmed by Mr Spink writing to W Sampson.

Johnson was negotiating his own future and on 30th September 1916 he agreed a rent structure to help him take on Knapeney Farm, which lies to the south east of Laxton. It is the largest of the ring fenced farms created from open field land in the 1720s, so it presented a different type of challenge and farming situation, being unrestricted by the three field rotation system. A letter typed and signed by Sidney William Johnson said: *'Dear Sir, I agree to take Knapeney Farm as now held by Mr Bartle of Laxton, as and from Lady Day 1917, on the following terms:*

<i>Rent First year</i>	<i>£72</i>
<i>Rent second year</i>	<i>£72</i>
<i>Rent third year</i>	<i>£100</i>
<i>Rent fourth year</i>	<i>£154</i>

In moving to Knapeney, Johnson had taken on 207 acres, 82 of which were grass, along with an *'excellent house and buildings.'* This was quite a step up from the 91 acres he had at Holme View. He had been offered the tenancy after at least six other farmers

had expressed an interest and been to view it.

Sampson clearly did not feel his new house was quite so excellent as on 27th March 1917, just two days after the exchange, he felt compelled to ask Mr Spink to come to see the property, which Johnson had just left, describing it as *'in a terrible state and not fit to live in until something is done'*.

On May 17th 1917 all was not well at Knapeney. Mr Spink wrote:

'I am sorry to read of your bad luck ... I am rather doubtful about horses, what about a tractor? but we can discuss this when we meet.'

A letter the following year said that land at Knapeney was ploughed up in 1917 at the instruction of the War Agricultural Committee, and this may be the *'bad luck'* referred to.

A month later Mr Spink wrote again:

'I shall be glad to know when the cultivators have finished and whether you will be in a position to do the ploughing. If there is any doubt about this I think we ought to have the tractors.'

The theory of *'Ploughing up'* seems plausible as there was a discussion at that time about bringing in mechanical assistance to achieve what was demanded and get everyone's ploughing up done as efficiently as possible.

We have evidence that the following year they did call in mechanical assistance as on 11th July 1918 Mr Argles wrote to Joshua Walker Esq. War Agricultural Committee, Retford: *'Coal is urgently needed for steam cultivators'*.

He itemised the order for Lord Manvers' tenantry from Messrs Clarke & Son, Coal Merchants, Lincoln

which on this occasion were for Messrs Bennett, Laughton, Clark, Marrison, Newboul Snr & Jnr and Peatfield.

August brought a water crisis, resulting in an urgent message to the Estate woodman, Favill, instructing him and a colleague:

'...to go immediately to Knapeney Farm with water boots and clean out the reservoir, and then do as much as possible towards cleaning out the drinking ponds in the fields.'

In September the scale of the task in front of Johnson was acknowledged in correspondence between Mr Argles and Mr Harpham, the Estate Valuer. Referring to allowances for fixtures in his outgoing valuation from Holme View, Argles said:

'I agree to allow £10 for the cattle shed in yard, as I wish to treat Mr Johnson as liberally as possible. He has got a rather big task in front of him at Knapeney Farm, and Lord Manvers wishes to help him in every way possible.'

Even external things seemed to conspire against him and the basic slag required for the fields was delayed, causing *'serious inconvenience'*. It eventually arrived, and contrary to the norm of the farmer having to cart it from the station, on this occasion it was sent to Ollerton and Johnson was told that:

'Mr Hill will be delivering it at Knapeney tomorrow, Friday, and a man will come and sow it on Monday next, weather permitting.'

The Estate had tried very hard to get a tenant into this property, which was known for its heavy land.

They would have been in trouble with the War Agricultural Committee if land was unworked, not to mention the loss of rental income. It seems Johnson was unsure if he would be able to manage. On 13th March 1918 it was suggested that he went to Thoresby to discuss the situation and the meeting was followed by a letter from Mr Spink on 18th:

'...to confirm the arrangement I made with you on Friday last, vis that it is agreed between the Landlord and Tenant that six months' notice to quit Knapeney Farm shall be operative on either side if given on or before 20th September next.'

This would have enabled Johnson to leave the farm early if he felt compelled to.

It was soon apparent that Johnson, and perhaps more particularly his young family, was not happy at Knapeney – a matter Mr Argles was well aware of. In April 1918 he took the unusual step of writing to his colleague, W H P Norris Esq., at the Estate Office, Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham.

'S Johnson of Knapeney Farm came to see me yesterday to ask if you had two farms at liberty at Stragglethorpe, at present in the occupation of Strawson and Johnson. I promised to write you. S Johnson is a decent fellow, and wants to leave Knapeney owing to his young family being unable to get to school, and the wretched approach to his farm, which in these times His Lordship is unable to remedy. I do not know the size of the farms if they are to let, so I do not know if Johnson would be in a position financially to make application for them. Perhaps you will send me a line as he is anxious.'

Despite this, the daily business of farming Knapeney continued. The Estate offered to send men to help with the weeding ‘again’ that year and an order was placed for more basic slag, with half the cost to be paid by Lord Manvers. In the July Mr Spink arranged for ‘... the German prisoners’ to come to work a day at Knapeney at the same time as sending materials to clean out the pond. This was treated as a matter of importance and it implied the earlier works had not solved the problem as he wrote:

MR ARGLES SET ABOUT ENSURING HE WOULD HAVE A NEW TENANT READY TO TAKE OVER AT KNAPENEY

‘I know the water question at Knapeney is a serious one. Mr Hill will come over on Tuesday and report what he considers can be done to remedy matters. I will do something without delay. Can the Pond be made fit to use?’

Mr Argles had been serving in France with his regiment and having returned after the end of the war he wrote to Johnson on 12th March 1919:

‘After consideration, I think it better that you should sign a formal notice to quit your farm at Lady Day 1920, and have pleasure in enclosing one, which please sign and return. As I told you yesterday, your application for a farm on the Thoresby Estate shall have consideration, if there are any to let at Lady Day 1920.’

As soon as this was settled Mr Argles set about ensuring he would have a new tenant ready to take over at Knapeney and advertised this vacancy to solicitors and agents in the area asking them to recommend anyone suitable.

This strategy worked as from June Johnson was being asked to show prospective tenants over the farm. Some must have contacted him direct as Johnson felt he should write asking if he could show potential tenants around without them first making an appointment through the Estate.

Not long afterward we learn that Johnson had expressed a wish to take the tenancy of Brockilow Farm from the following Lady Day at an annual rental of £180. The confirmation stated that this included the water rate. This farm is another ring fenced property, created at a similar time to Knapeney and to the south of Laxton on the western side of the road to Kneesall within line of sight of Knapeney. It was rather smaller at about 149 acres, including 55 acres of grass. Mr Argles said he would ‘... endeavour to attend

to the matters you mentioned to me when we meet.’ Soon after the move, when he was trying to get himself set up, Johnson asked Mr Argles to call to show him where he proposed to fix the machinery he had moved.

In August 1919 Johnson had been borrowing an old horse to get his field work done and asked for the loan to be extended. Now the war was over the Army no longer had need of so many heavy horses and, doubtless hoping to help Johnson find a longer term solution, Mr Argles wrote on 30th August 1919 about imminent sales of these horses:

‘I have just heard that there are three sales of high class, selected, heavy draft Army horses at the Repository, Belgrave Gate, Leicester, on September 6th, 13th and 20th. One hundred and twenty five horses will be offered for sale.’

**NOW THE WAR
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HORSES**

The correspondence with the Estate continued at intervals, reporting water '*springing up*' in the covered yard in July 1921 and re-fixing some stockyard fencing to make a '*fowlhouse*'. More seriously in 1923 Johnson asked for the granary steps to be repaired as soon as possible as he would soon need to thrash. They broke last time and '*lamed one man*'. This work had been ordered some time before and was now deemed necessary to be done with minimum delay.

The move to Brockilow proved successful and eventually Sidney was succeeded at Brockilow by his oldest son, also Sidney. The farm stayed in the family's hands for many years. Current resident Margaret Rose recalled her grandmother walking across the fields to visit for family birthdays and her grandfather coming with the pony and trap to collect her when he could. If the weather was bad or fog drew in, she would stay the night rather than risk the long journey from the top of Laxton on foot.

Margaret's brother, the late Arthur 'Son' Frecknall, visited his Uncle Sid in his school holidays and worked for him on the farm. He retired to the village, where he remained until his death on 11th December 2014. Margaret's older son, Stuart Rose was the founding Chairman of Laxton History Group. He now lives with his family and farms at Bottom Farm, having followed on from his father Reg.



Pictured

Bottom Farm

**CURRENT RESIDENT
MARGARET ROSE
RECALLED HER
GRANDMOTHER
WALKING ACROSS THE
FIELDS TO VISIT FOR
FAMILY BIRTHDAYS AND
HER GRANDFATHER
COMING WITH THE PONY
AND TRAP TO COLLECT
HER WHEN HE COULD**



Pictured

*Whitworth family photo c/1894:
Eliza Moody [widow of George Moody].
Seated in front is her daughter, Mary
Ellen Whitworth née Moody, and her
husband Samuel Whitworth who was
born in Laxton in 1861. Ethel Adelaide
[b.1885], Charles [b. 1887], Sam [b.1889],
Cyril [b.1891], and Helena [b.1893].*

THE WHITWORTH FAMILY

Sam Whitworth was born in Laxton, and worked first as tailor in the village, as did his father before him. The 1891 census shows his age as 36 and estimated birth year as 1855. He was then recorded as a groom, a fact confirmed by Edith Hickson in her 'Life at Laxton'. He was married to Mary (25) and had Ethel (5), Charles (4) and Sam (2). Cyril, born in 1891 was not mentioned so was presumably born after the census date.

Sam's name cropped up frequently in the Estate correspondence. In the first instance on 17th January 1899 Mr Wordsworth wrote about him to Revd. Martin at the Royal Pier Hotel, Ryde, Isle of Wight. The tone of this letter and another which followed implied that the two men were close. They had no doubt worked closely when Revd. Martin was at Laxton.

Edith Hickson recounts how, during his time in Laxton, Revd. Martin '*... kept his carriage and pair and was driven by his groom-gardener, Mr Sam Whitworth who sat behind a lovely pair of chestnuts*'.

In addition to driving the vicar, Sam Whitworth used to cart the stone from Tuxford Station to be left

in piles along the village streets to fill in the ruts and potholes which developed. Having known Whitworth well in this capacity, Revd. Martin may even have recommended him to Wordsworth as a person with potential as a tenant. Wordsworth replied that he did not want to be committed to taking him on as tenant if Mrs Moody gave up. Indeed he said he had already promised it to another applicant in that event.

RUMOUR OF A MOVE COULD EASILY HAVE GOT AROUND IF WHITWORTH ANTICIPATED AN APPLICATION FOR THIS TENANCY WOULD BE SUCCESSFUL

Writing again to the recently retired vicar, Wordsworth expanded on his reservations about Whitworth, saying that *'to start with a considerable portion of borrowed money is a great mistake'*. The farm he hoped to take on is now known as Bottom Farm and had 45 acres.

The house was originally occupied by Mr George Moody and his family, having been built by his eldest son Frederick in 1887. His signature was discovered in the plaster when decorating some years ago. Mr Wordsworth felt anyone embarking on the tenancy of such a farm needs *'not less than £350 in ready money'*.

After receiving an enquiry from Mrs Pearson on 20th February 1899 about a cottage she believed would be to let, Wordsworth wrote to Sam Whitworth asking if he planned to move. Rumour of a move could easily have got around if Whitworth anticipated an application for this tenancy would be successful. It is typical of the way that aspiring tenants would try to be the first to get

their application in, and such letters may indeed have been the first the Agent knew of a tenancy potentially becoming available.

Just a week later, on 28th February 1899 Wordsworth had resolved what he would do with Whitworth. He wrote again to Revd. Martin with a rare admission to a degree of self-doubt.

'I have been weak enough to let S Whitworth Mrs Moody's for two years. They are to arrange the Valuation between themselves and if at the end of that time Sam is not free of the Valuation and borrowed money, he is to give it up. I fully explained to them the risk they ran and only hope and trust that I have not given them a helping hand to financial difficulties'.

By 3rd March the Agreement had been prepared as had a Memorandum about the valuation. Whitworth was asked to come and to bring Mrs Moody with him to sign. Things proceeded and Sam Whitworth's tenancy began on 25th March 1899.

Mr Wordsworth wrote to Whitworth on 1st May 1903 announcing he would visit him shortly. This is the first mention of any interaction since Whitworth took the tenancy and the two years' 'probation' period given him at the outset was over. He was still there, but Mr Wordsworth still had reservations. After their meeting Wordsworth wrote again telling him that as he had lost two mares he would help by accepting £13 11s 6d for a half year's rent, but would not consider any permanent reduction in rent or expenditure on the buildings as *'I must be satisfied that there is better prospect of your being able to stay on the farm than I can see at present.'*

The matter was not raised again in the next two years, but Whitworth was one of a number of tenant

farmers to receive a note from Wordsworth dated 10th June 1905 saying:

'As you are aware Lord Manvers has made a return of rent to his North Notts tenants who have paid their rents at the recent Rent Day. I am sorry to see that you have not done and unless the rent is paid before we close our books on 30th June I shall not be able to allow you the return.'

**CHARLES
WROTE ON 8TH
OCTOBER 1906,
HAVING BEEN
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SIX MONTHS
BY THE ESTATE,
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THE OTHER MEN**

The bad luck with horses returned in early 1906 when he lost two and had to take his very lame breeding mare to kennels – presumably to be put down. He asked, without success, if he could have one if the Estate were parting with any.

He mentioned that matters would be worse when his son went *'up for training in May'*.

Charles wrote on 8th October 1906, having been employed for six months by the Estate, asking for equal pay for doing the same work as the other men and also complained that despite not turning up for harvesting, he had not been told about the workmen's trip. This is the same Charles who enlisted at the start of the war and whose service

and death on 5th September 1915 are reported by Roger Cottee in *'Laxton in Wartime'*.

We learn that only a week later Tom Bagshaw had dismissed Charles, much to the annoyance of Sam

Whitworth, who wrote to the Estate in high dudgeon. He accused Bagshaw of acting without authority, drunkenness and unfairly reducing the lad's wages. He stated forcefully that Charles had been off work during harvest to help him at home.

The next day Wordsworth demanded that he either prove or withdraw the accusation against Bagshaw. Whitworth was instructed that he should name a date and Bagshaw would be summoned to the office to defend himself. This began an acrimonious exchange.

The extent of Wordsworth's annoyance showed in his final sentence: *'I am not prepared to let this matter rest where you have placed it.'*

Sam didn't back down, first confirming on 19th October that the accusation stood and that *'had Charlie been dismissed in a proper manner'* he would have said nothing. He further claimed that his son was owed two weeks wages in lieu of notice and accused Bagshaw of challenging him to fight when he asked for the money. Mr Wordsworth made it plain that Lord Manvers had no duty to make such a payment that

Charlie should not have been taken back on when he returned after the fortnight's absence without leave helping his father. Tensions remained evident until the end of the year.

Wordsworth returned to the business of re-allotting the field strips in early 1907. Whitworth demonstrated his confrontational streak again by his behaviour after the change, carting manure over

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John Cree's newly allotted land. It is in this period that letters flowed thick and fast about money and land matters as Whitworth tried to improve his situation under the new field layout.

Despite being in arrears to a considerable extent, Whitworth asked for a corn chamber to be put up. Maybe to help his chances he included a cheque towards his rent in his letter in February 1909. It appears this cheque was returned by the bank after which he was advised his arrears stood at £33 6s

6d. Shortly afterwards in return for agreeing to a slight increase in rent to £44 a year, he was told that his corn bin would be put in hand at once. Even significant arrears seemed not to damage an applicant's chances of getting work done for them. Whitworth's reply was that he would pay the higher rent as the lack of good buildings had cost him more than the difference in the last year.

More building work was done in 1909 when the stable was repaired and Whitworth expressed thanks for *'making it so comfortable round the kitchen and yard'*.

In early February 1910 Mr Argles asked when some payment of rent might be made towards this *'considerable sum'*. It was clear that the arrears were mounting rather

than being reduced. Just before Lady Day 1910, when tenancy exchanges took place, Whitworth's misfortunes seem to have caught up with him. He intended to visit the office with some rent but then recounted losing sheep, a yearling colt and a mare

JUST BEFORE LADY DAY 1910, WHEN TENANCY EXCHANGES TOOK PLACE, WHITWORTH'S MISFORTUNES SEEM TO HAVE CAUGHT UP WITH HIM

in foal and added that his son had been in bed for 3 months. He asked once more for a cheap horse.

Things did not improve and in January 1911 he was told that if he could not pay he had really better give up the farm. Whitworth's reply was another litany of woes of lost stock and spending money he had for rent on other things. His tone was despairing and he claimed to regret not giving up the farm.

Brian Easton, the Whitworth / Moody family historian who provided the picture of Sam and family taken in about 1884 also provided details about his family. He states that Samuel and Mary Ellen Whitworth, neé Moody, had fourteen children in total. He confirmed that Sam was born in Laxton in 1861. This agrees with the dates implied by the 1901 and 1911 censuses, which put his age at 39 and 50 respectively, compared to the age of 36 recorded in 1899. Such a large family can only have added to his financial difficulties.

Later that year Whitworth asked for a smaller farm, which was not available, and there followed a sustained correspondence about land exchange. Whitworth engaged in minor bickering about what was due to who, who should pay for what, who should or should not do various things on different pieces of land until once again, on 31st January 1912, Mr Wordsworth felt obliged to put him in his place.

'When I take the trouble to come over to Laxton to arrange an exchange between two tenants and those tenants agree on the ground to certain terms, I do not expect those terms to be called into question afterwards, and in the case of the one between you and Laughton, which is one of mutual convenience there is certainly no reason for this being done. What about, may I ask, the expense

which Lord Manvers is to be put to in grubbing hedges, planting new ones and providing grass seed. Should no consideration be given to this? I think you have no sort of reason to complain of the terms which I arranged for you, and they must stand.'

Surprisingly at the end of 1913 Whitworth applied for a larger place, which Wordsworth did not consider him able to cope with but he agreed to consider him if a suitable, slightly larger one became vacant.

An incident involving Whitworth shed light on the Court Leet. On 4th December 1915 Mr Argles wrote to Godfrey Tallents Esq., Newark headed 'LAXTON COURT':

'In reply to yours of the 1st, with reference to the copyhold tenants who refused to pay the fines levied on them, it is difficult to know in these times how to proceed. If you think it advisable, I would suggest that you write to Sam Bartle and Sam Whitworth saying that you are instructed by Lord Manvers to press for the fines in question. I presume we can legally enforce payment, but I doubt whether it would be advisable to take proceedings against defaulters. There is no doubt that the Court does a lot of good, and if possible the custom should be upheld.'

This was typical of a number of letters over the period in which the Estate resorted to the solicitors to inform them about the rules of the Court, Jury and open field system.

In early 1916 the Estate grapevine brought news of Whitworth's intention to take a farm elsewhere and Mr Argles wrote telling him that he was bound by his lease until Lady Day 1917. He had been offered the opportunity to quit in 1916, which he had declined.



Pictured

An older Mr Spink

Argles wrote the same day to Revd. Collinson saying:

'I cannot understand why Whitworth is trying to take another farm. He cannot leave his present holding until Lady Day 1917.'

In February Whitworth asked about more work being done at his place yet on 1st April Thomas Bailey

asked Mr Spink if he could take on the farm Whitworth had left *'now he has taken another farm at Clarborough'*.

The same day Whitworth wrote saying he had taken the Clarborough farm on 18th March. He expressed his intention to work both farms, having left a son and a daughter at Laxton, and to keep the Laxton one on until the end of the war. He also declared that, should he keep it on beyond that *'it would be at £10 a year reduction of rent to be on equal terms with my neighbours'*.

Just two weeks later Whitworth wrote to say he found the two farms too far apart and that Mr Bailey would take the Laxton farm off his hands. Mr

Spink contacted Thomas Bailey, who duly agreed to take Bottom Farm.

Alfred Spink's surprise at Whitworth immediately implying the Estate was trying to get hold of the farm and asking for compensation for various items is understandable.

**(WHITWORTH)
EXPRESSED HIS
INTENTION TO
WORK BOTH
FARMS, HAVING
LEFT A SON AND
A DAUGHTER AT
LAXTON, AND
TO KEEP THE
LAXTON ONE
ON UNTIL THE
END OF THE WAR**

He replied that Bailey was approached about the tenancy only because Whitworth had asked to be relieved of it and concluded that without a letter saying that Whitworth was willing to give up the tenancy without reservation, he would do no more. Within days the matter was settled and the tenancy was passed to Bailey from 1st May. There is some irony in that this meant Bailey now had two farms himself, having been the tenant at the next door Step Farm since 1912.

It seems Sam Whitworth then left the village and Thomas Bailey, who later took Mark Bailey into partnership with him and moved him into Bottom Farm, continued a long and successful relationship with Laxton which continues to this day.

**THOMAS BAILEY,
WHO LATER TOOK
MARK BAILEY INTO
PARTNERSHIP WITH
HIM AND MOVED
HIM INTO BOTTOM
FARM, CONTINUED
A LONG AND
SUCCESSFUL
RELATIONSHIP
WITH LAXTON
WHICH CONTINUES
TO THIS DAY.**

WILLIAM'S OLDER
SON, JERVIS
ROBERT, HAD BEEN
WORKING ON THE
FITZHERBERT ESTATE
IN DERBYSHIRE FOR
SEVERAL YEARS BUT,
FINDING HIMSELF
UNEMPLOYED, HE
WROTE IN MAY 1906
C/O HIS FATHER'S
ADDRESS LOOKING
FOR WORK ON THE
THORESBY ESTATE



THE WILKINSON FAMILY

In 1881 William Wilkinson worked in at Ecclesfield, Yorkshire as an agricultural labourer, where he lived with his wife and six children. By 1891 the family had moved to Laxton into the farm known today as Lilac Farm.

In 1914 he was described in his obituary in the Newark Advertiser as *'highly respected resident of the village ... who came of a well-known family from Sutton-cum-Lound'*. The death was described in the edition dated 21st January 1914 as one *'of tragic suddenness'*. He was survived by four sons and two daughters.

His older son, Jervis Robert, had been working on the Fitzherbert Estate in Derbyshire for several years but, finding himself unemployed, he wrote in May 1906 c/o his father's address looking for work on the Thoresby Estate doing draining or wood work.

The younger son, Richard, married Annie Dewick, daughter of the Bailiff, John Dewick in 1906. The Dewick family lived at what is now known as Cherry Tree Farm, formerly Buildings Farm, which stands

between Lilac Farm and its semi-detached partner, Blacksmith's Cottage.

That September Richard Wilkinson wrote to Thoresby hoping to be granted the tenancy of the Post Office, which he had heard Ben Moody was giving up. His mother was sick at this time and Mrs Pratt, one of Richard's sisters, wrote asking for a repair to the chimney so that a fire could be lit in the bedroom for her.

In August 1909 Richard, then 28, was preparing to take over the family farm from his father, who was 72. Mr Wordsworth was sufficiently concerned the Estate may become involved if any of Richard's

siblings challenged his tenancy of the farm that he wrote to the solicitors, Tallents & Co. enquiring where they would stand. Clearly Richard felt defensive and on writing to find out what was required by way of a valuation when his father handed over, he mentioned that his brothers and sisters were dissatisfied. He wanted to know if anyone '*could interfere*' with him.

From this point on it seems that Wilkinson Snr, the highly respected resident, must have despaired at the way his son went about things. He was clearly at odds with his fellow farmers as well as his family.

Barely a month after taking over, Richard's complaints began. He objected to farmers driving over his land in Bottom Field and to the ruts in the roadways. This issue was not quickly resolved as

**FROM THIS POINT
ON IT SEEMS
THAT WILKINSON
SNR, THE HIGHLY
RESPECTED
RESIDENT, MUST
HAVE DESPAIRED
AT THE WAY
HIS SON WENT
ABOUT THINGS**

two years on, in February 1911, Mr Wordsworth instructed Wilkinson to plough up the land beside the road in South Field at once and let him know who had been carting over it. Carts continued to be driven over Wilkinson's land, ruining a sizeable strip of wheat. In May 1912 Wordsworth recognised the encroachment of the road onto Wilkinson's land and offered compensation for it.

The ruined strip was described as 'one land', which is a measure of the distance between the bottom of one furrow and the next in a ploughed field. In Laxton this can be about 5½ yards (5 metres), but it varied from place to place, and in fact Mary Haigh measured 'one land' at the top of Rig Gate and found it to be nine metres.

John Dewick, Richard's father in law, next door neighbour and the Bailiff, obviously became a victim of his attitude during their formal interactions and a significant exchange is discussed by Mary Haigh in 'Open Field Farming in Laxton' p 56 - 7. Other tenants also complained about Wilkinson. Shooting caused disagreement as Wordsworth wrote to him:

'Complaints have reached me from more than one source of the excessive use you make of your gun. Other tenants refrain from shooting and do their best to keep their land quiet and so it

JOHN DEWICK, RICHARD'S FATHER IN LAW, NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR AND THE BAILIFF, OBVIOUSLY BECAME A VICTIM OF HIS ATTITUDE DURING THEIR FORMAL INTERACTIONS

is therefore rather provoking to them to see you doing the exact opposite. By your agreement you have no right to shoot game and you also undertake by the same agreement to preserve it.

There is no such amount of game in Laxton as can do any tenant the very slightest damage, and I think that considering all Lord Manvers has done for his tenants there, they might at any rate fulfil the obligation which by their agreements they undertake.

I shall be very sorry indeed to have to take any steps which might cause unpleasantness between us and I very much hope after what I have written, that you will do as I have asked - but I have felt it right in fairness to the other tenants to write what I have done.'

As Mary Haigh reports, a further clash with John Dewick in 1915 persuaded Mr Wordsworth's successor Mr Argles to end his tenancy, commenting to Revd. Collinson:

'I do not think he will be missed much at Laxton. He ought to go and live at some out of the way farm, where he cannot be constantly quarrelling with his neighbours.'

Usually tenancy exchanges took place on Lady Day, 25th March. Wilkinson's notice, decided upon in February 1915, was to take effect in 1916. For someone already unhappy with his neighbours, such a long legally required period under notice was liable to lead to further disagreements, but at first cordial correspondence simply revolved around replacing a post after a beast got into the stack yard at Wilkinson's farm.

On 30th March 1915, several weeks after his notice was served and almost a year before it would become effective, Wilkinson wrote asking why he was being asked to leave his farm, claiming he paid his rent on time and farmed well. He feared Mr Argles might try to stop him getting another farm. Argles responded by return:

'In reply to your letter of yesterday; please do not on any account think that I shall take any steps to prevent you getting another farm. I shall be pleased to do all I can to assist you in finding a suitable place, but I think it better that you should have a change and leave Laxton.'

He was as good as his word and on 29th April he wrote *'I have written to Mr Harrison on your behalf, and I hope he will let the farm to you.'*

News of the proposed move soon got around and about this time, in an undated letter, William Rayner wrote asking to be given a chance to take the farm if Wilkinson left. Maybe Wilkinson hoped for a change of mind, but on 10th September 1915 he wrote a very short and to the point note to Thoresby which read:

'Dear Sir, Would you please let me stop on my farm?'

Mr Argles took a few days to think it over and consulted the vicar for his opinion:

'... Will you kindly tell me in confidence how this man has been behaving recently. Do you think it is for the good of the village that he should leave? If so his Notice to Quit must stand, and I propose to let the farm before the end of the month to a new tenant.'

The response cannot have been favourable as on 22nd October William Henry Rayner had an interview for the tenancy and a letter sent that same afternoon confirmed he had been successful.

He arranged to work for Richard Clark at Town End Farm until he could move in and was invited to sign his agreement for the farm at The Dovecote when Tithe was being collected.

Undoubtedly this news was not well received by Wilkinson and on 29th October Rayner alerted Mr Argles to the news that Wilkinson was planning to plough up two fields 'at Rawbeck'. Argles responded at once promising his *'immediate attention'*.

In the following days Mr Argles made several attempts to go over the land with Rayner and Mr Harpham, the Valuer. Matters had been decided by 10th November and Wilkinson was sent a letter confirming the arrangements.

It appears he was not feeling co-operative as he did not sign and return the agreement speedily enough for Mr Argles. Two days later he was sent a copy in case he had 'misaid' the original.

Wilkinson appears not to have gone quietly. Mr Harpham wrote on 26th February asking to be forwarded the *'Notice of Claim under the Agricultural Holdings (England) Act 1908 from Mr Richard Wilkinson of Laxton'*.

On 10th August, Mrs Rayner wrote on behalf of her husband to let Mr Spink know that, when he was leading manure, he found Wilkinson had collected dock roots and seeds and put them at the bottom of the manure yard among the manure.

A LETTER DATED
ONLY '28 1915' ASKING
FOR A REFERENCE
FOR RICHARD
WILKINSON FOR
ANOTHER FARM
CONCLUDED HIS
RELATIONSHIP
WITH LAXTON, IN
ALL PROBABILITY
TO THE RELIEF OF
TENANTS AND
ESTATE ALIKE. THE
RAYNER FAMILY ARE
STILL REPRESENTED
IN LAXTON TODAY.

**“THERE WAS
NOTHING BRAWNY
ABOUT THIS ‘MUCH
RESPECTED AND
RESOURCEFUL
ARTISAN’.”**



THE BLACKSMITH

In a time when horse power was all important the blacksmith's shop was vital to keeping the farmers working. The horses needed shoes and the blacksmith kept them shod. He would also undertake any number of other jobs using his skills, tools and forge. This general smithing included tool making and repair and making metal fitments for carts such as gormer stays and the iron hoops to complete the wooden wheels made by the wheelwright for the many types of cart.

John Beckett tells us in his *'A History of Laxton'* that the three blacksmiths recorded in the 1881 census had reduced to one by 1894. Our research began at the turn of the century and by this time Thomas Hilton had the sole blacksmith's shop in Laxton. He was born in 1855 and it appears he may have been a twin as Ann Hilton died on 4th July 1886 at the age of 31, giving her the same birth year as Thomas.

Edith Hickson had clear memories of a highly skilled man who *'even in his leathern apron'* looked nothing like a blacksmith. There was nothing brawny about this *'much respected and resourceful artisan'*. She recalled his need to be resourceful *'handling the crude old implements and various tempered horses*



Pictured

*Blacksmith's
Cottage sign*

brought to his smithy. But above all he was a bee-keeper and was the master of several hives'. His annual visits to discuss the year's work would be full of talk of bees.

Mr Hilton was tenant of a house now known as 'Blacksmith's Cottage', where he lived with his wife, Elizabeth. Their daughter Dorothy was born in 1902 and baptised on April 20th of that year in Laxton church. Behind the house stood his forge, parts of which can still be seen, as described in 'Living in Laxton'.

There is very little reference to Mr Hilton in the Estate correspondence. He missed the Rent Day on 7th December 1911 and wrote on the 8th to Mr Wordsworth promising to pay in a month, explaining that he had been '*busy shoeing horses – it was a wet day*'. Did the farmers take advantage of a bad field work day to get their horses shod?

This was the beginning of several years of apparent financial difficulty which was only explained after Mr Hilton's death when Revd. Collinson, writing to Mr Argles, commented on Hilton's prolonged illness:

*'... and likely enough his business
has gone down very badly.'*

Thomas Hilton died on 2nd January 1915, aged 60. The 1916 Parish Almanack gives the date of Thomas Hilton's burial as 6th January 1915. The previous day Arthur Grundy wrote to Thoresby:

*'Doubtless you will have heard of the death of
Mr Hilton with whom I have been with (sic) for
three years. I should be pleased if you could
grant me an interview after the funeral.'*

Mr Argles replied:

*'I have your letter and am very sorry to
hear of Mr Hilton's death. I will see you
after the funeral as you request.'*

The Estate needed to consider the future of the tenancy and the blacksmith's business. On 8th January 1915 Mr Argles received a letter from Revd. Collinson whose thoughts he appears to have sought in the matter.

*'A. Grundy was Hilton's apprentice but is out of his
apprenticeship – and Mrs H wants him I believe to
carry on for a time. Ernest Jones late apprentice
(and a relation (nephew) of the Hiltons) was to
have finished his time of service in Royal Engineers
and then joined Hilton in the business. ...*

*Further Grundy I think would take on if Jones fails
to come back – and would no doubt find a wife!'*



It is clear that Mrs Hilton needed to support herself and her thirteen year old daughter after her husband's death. In a footnote to this letter Argles described Grundy as '*... a very decent young fellow ... from Lincolnshire*' and concluded that he thought Mrs Hilton could remain in the cottage running the business with his assistance.

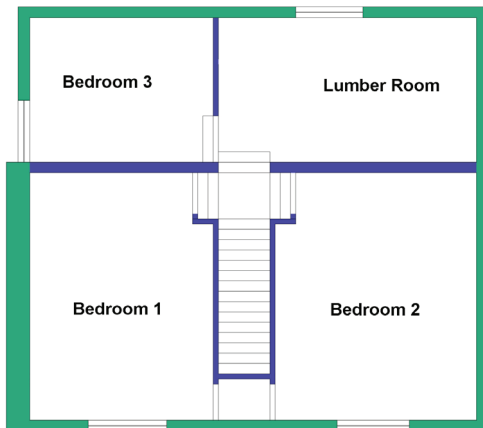
Arthur Grundy had moved to Laxton in 1912 from Walmsgate near Louth, where his family remained. He did indeed find a wife in Kathleen Clark, daughter of Richard and Kate Clark who had taken the tenancy of Town End Farm in the middle of 1913. He was sworn in as a Special Constable in November 1914 at the Newcastle Arms, Tuxford along with William Bennett, Thomas Walker, Richard Clark, Richard Wilkinson, John Bagshaw, Frank Sampson and Alfred Chell. He served in this role throughout the war years. In May 1913 the Newark Advertiser recorded that he was one of two MCs with J Price of The Dovecote Inn at the village dance.

Exchanges about a new blacksmith between Mr Argles and Revd Collinson continued over the next few days. On 19th January Mr Argles expressed his intention to visit Mrs Hilton to talk over his understanding that '*she wishes to continue the business, and that young Grundy is a good workman, and willing to stay and help with the business*'.

Grundy managed the business for her for the remainder of the war, after which the issue of who would finally take it over arose again. An undated paper filed with correspondence from November 1918 notes '*A Grundy applied for Blacksmith's Shop at Laxton. Has managed place for Mrs. Hilton.*' A second note below says '*Mrs. Hilton intends to give up and hand over to Sgt Jones who has done no agricultural work for 12 years.*'

Pictured

*Blacksmiths Cottage:
Top: c.1910
Bottom: 2016*



Pictured

Blacksmith's
Cottage, 1940:
Above: First floor
Opposite: Ground floor

On 13th February 1919 Mr Argles wrote to Sgt. E M Jones, 18930, L Coy R E, St Mary's Barracks, Chatham telling him he had *'arranged to let it to Mr Grundy, the man who has carried on the business so successfully during the war'*.

The final handover came a few years later when Mrs Hilton decided, at the age of 65, to pass business to Grundy. After she discussed this with Mr

Argles on 14th July 1921 he wrote to her the next day: *'... I will endeavour to hear of a cottage for you as soon as possible, to enable you to put (likely to be 'quit' mistyped or wrongly heard) your present house and hand over to Mr Grundy. I note that you would like, if possible, to get a small shop'*.

The process seems to have taken a while because the correspondence about a new tenancy for Mrs Hilton does not appear until 4th April 1922 when Mr Argles wrote to her to tell her that he had arranged for her to take the tenancy of a house and garden which would begin *'on 25th March last'* at £8pa. Once Mrs Hilton had signed, the change needed only Grundy's signature on his own agreement to complete it. Mrs Hilton and Dorothy moved along the road into what is now Crosshill House – then a much smaller property. She lived thirty years after her husband's death, until 25th July 1945.

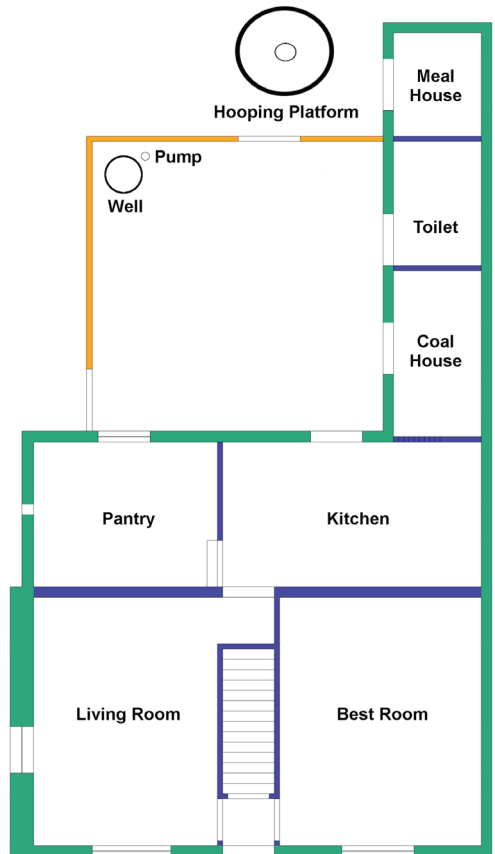
Interestingly after asking Mrs Hilton to sign the formal agreement Argles added *'Although the agreement stipulates for the rent to be paid monthly, it will be collected half yearly on the usual Cottage Rent Day at Laxton'*.

Arthur and Kathleen Grundy lived in Blacksmith's Cottage where their daughter Margaret was born in 1926 followed by two boys, Michael, who died aged two, Robert and finally another daughter, Rosemary who now lives in Egmonton and shared her memories with us. The layout of the house has not changed greatly to the present day. It had three bedrooms, and Rosemary remembers the lumber room which was also used as an apple store with a board placed across the room to hold back the fruit.

Although Rosemary was not born until sometime after the end of our 'snapshot', it is likely things at the property had not changed greatly since her father took it on. She remembers the thick ice on the windows, both inside and out in winter and how her mother would take a shelf from the wood fired oven, wrap it in a blanket and use it to warm their beds.

Rosemary recalls her sister Margaret, who was ten years older, would first cycle to Ossington then catch the bus to Newark to reach Newark High School.

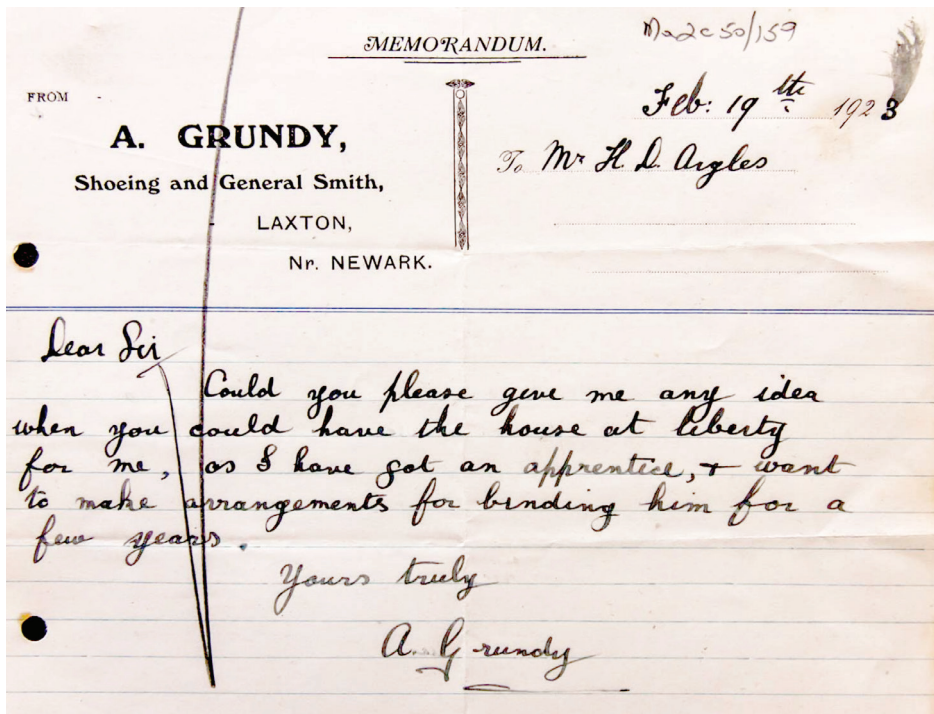
Arthur Grundy must have built the business back up following Mr Hilton's death as in February 1923 he wrote to Mr Argles on his own letterhead asking when a house would be free as he had an apprentice and wanted to 'bind' him for a few years.





Pictured

*Arthur Grundy in
his workshop*



He then took on the property now known as Smithy Farm and moved the apprentice, Bill Rayner, into the house. He was one of the sons of the family who lived at Lilac Farm next door but one from his. Smithy Farm came with its own land and Rayner worked with Grundy there both in the blacksmithing trade and on the farm.

Rosemary recalls the village wheelwright - then Mr Morton - bringing finished wooden wheels to have their metal tyres fitted. The hoop of metal was heated on a bonfire behind the house until it was red hot. When it was ready it was lifted by the men using long metal tongs and dropped over the wooden wheel which was waiting on the hooping platform. This is still present at the house, though it has been moved from its original location by the present occupants.

Pictured

Arthur Grundy's
Letterhead
(Ma 2C 50 159)



Pictured

The hooping platform

The platform is a cast iron disc of some 6ft in width by about 1½in deep with a central hole. It provided a level surface when the central hub of the wheel was lowered into the hole and the rim rested flat on the platform. The heated iron hoop could then be accurately fitted to the wooden rim.

Once the hoop was in place, water was poured over the metal until it was cool and had shrunk onto the wheel. Mr Grundy undertook this job on Wednesdays, although not weekly.

Beside the forge stood a stable, which still stands unchanged, complete with stalls for three horses. Rosemary told us that Saturday was always the busiest day for shoeing and it was a day filled with shouting, whinnying and the smell of burning hooves as the shoes were fitted. Men queued down the road waiting with their horses for their turn.

Rosemary remembers that her father made some shoes on the forge but also had boxes of pre-formed ones ready to fit. Factory made horseshoes became available in 1884. The first machine was invented in America and brought to England soon after that date. Cooks of Sheffield was founded in 1900 making all types of horseshoes followed by Arthur Cottons of Cattery Road, Sheffield founded in 1926. They made all types of horseshoes and sold them around the world. Arthur Grundy bought many of his supplies from Jackson's of Gainsborough, now Jackson Shipley.

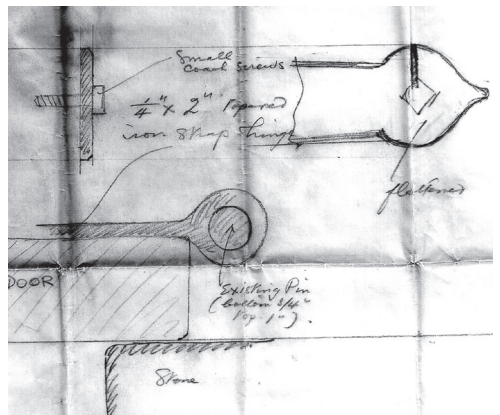
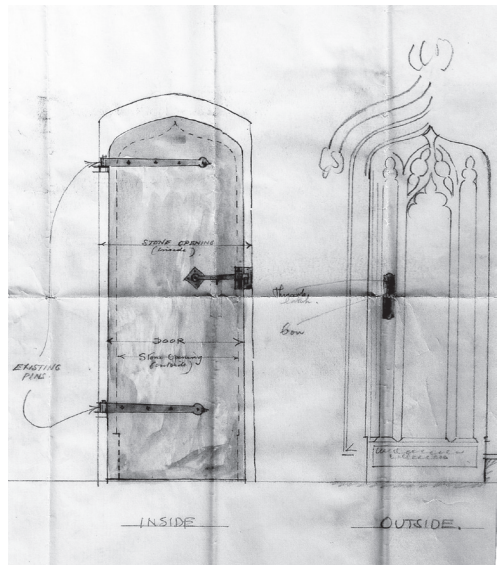
A drawing for hinges for the door of the church facing Timothy Road owed by Rosemary Crothers,

suggests he would have made the metal fittings for this and other buildings in the village. Unfortunately the drawing is undated and the post mark on the envelope in which it has been handed down is not readable.

The Laxton forge served local communities including Kirton, Kneesall and Egmanton. Mr Grundy would also travel to neighbouring villages to use forges in places such as Kneesall and Old Ollerton to shoe horses brought to him there. In Egmanton he shod horses in the old chapel. We have no record of when the travelling service began, but farmer Gerald Bates of Kneesall recalled it during an interview in 2009.

After his retirement, Mr Grundy remained in the cottage and a travelling blacksmith would come to use his forge and shoe there. Mr Grundy died at the age of 94 and his widow remained in the cottage until her own death over ten years later, then also aged 94.

Sgt. Jones did return from the war to marry Harriet Sampson, but more of them later...



Pictured

Church door ironwork detail

ERNEST JONES
WAS WOUNDED IN
THE SHOULDER IN
ACTION AND ON
30TH MAY 1915 CAPT.
P NEAME, RE WROTE
WISHING HIM A
SPEEDY RECOVERY
AND SAYING HOW
VERY SORRY HE WAS
THAT JONES HAD
BEEN WOUNDED



ERNEST JONES

As mentioned earlier and in more detail in ‘Laxton in Wartime’, although he had joined the Army before the war, Ernest Jones had anticipated joining his uncle, Thomas Hilton, in the blacksmith’s business in Laxton after his service came to an end. Things did not turn out as he planned, however, as Mr Hilton died while he was serving at the front with the Royal Engineers. Arthur Grundy, who had trained with Mr Hilton, first managed the business for his widow and then took it and the house over after the war.

Jones was photographed in a winning Royal Engineers tug of war team in 1910. A handkerchief used to mark the centre of the rope is preserved among his possessions. Surviving correspondence paints a picture of a well-respected man who was much valued by his colleagues.

Ernest Jones was wounded in the shoulder in action and on 30th May 1915 Capt. P Neame, RE wrote wishing him a speedy recovery and saying how very sorry he was that Jones had been wounded. He told him they would all miss him very much in the section and that he hoped Jones would be able to return to 15th Company when he had recovered.



Pictured

*Wounded men.
Ernest Jones sitting
up in centre*

Indicating the regard in which Jones was held he remarked ‘... *you were one of the most useful men in the section.*’

Sgt. Jones was courting Harriet, the youngest daughter of Samuel and Mary Sampson at New Bar Farm (then known as Bar Farm) and they were married by the vicar of Eginton, Revd. A Hope on 1st November 1916. Jones was then aged 29 and his bride was 27.

The Retford, Gainsborough and Worksop Times carried a report of ‘... *the first military wedding*’ at Laxton. Arthur Grundy was the best man and the bride was dressed in a brown travelling costume with a brown hat trimmed with blue.

The bridesmaids wore light blue serge and black velour hats trimmed with blue. The report details a number of the wedding presents and tells us that the reception was held at the bride’s home. The couple subsequently made their home there. They had the briefest of honeymoons in Sheffield before Jones



travelled to Southampton on his way back to the front.

Shortly after the marriage, on 17th November, WR Norton wrote to the new Mrs Jones from 282nd Coy RE, BEF:

'Dear Mrs Jones

Your husband, being one of my sergeants and having just married you should receive a wedding present from Mr Oates and myself. Therefore without telling him anything about it at all at any events until you have received it, we would be very much obliged to you if you would write and tell me what you would like. I hope you will not consider it an impertinence when I say that we consider you extremely lucky in your husband who is the best man we have, and I fear it will be correspondingly hard for you to be worthy of him in every respect. Wishing you the best of happiness in your married life'

Pictured

The mantle clock presented as a wedding gift to Sgt. Jones and Harriet Sampson

Pictured

Ernest Jones' medals



RE



18930
CPL E M JONES
Royal Engineers

The wedding gift was a mantle clock, which is owned today by Brenda Chambers. The couple had no surviving children and Harriet died at the relatively young age of 46. Sgt Jones served until the end of the war and his medals are also in the keeping of Brenda Chambers, whose grandmother Susan Bagshaw, neé Maddison, became his housekeeper in the 1930s after the death of Harriet and her own husband, the stallion walker Harold.

Ernest Jones served for many years as a Special Constable, receiving two long service bars for this. He remained farming in Laxton until he retired.

He and Susan Bagshaw moved to Surrey to join Ernest's brother where they married. They remained there until Susan died on 17th December 1962, aged 72, the day before her 73rd birthday. Her body was brought back to Laxton and interred in Laxton churchyard.

Ernest Jones continued to live in Surrey, dying on 8th October 1978, aged 90. He was cremated in Surrey and his ashes were interred in Laxton churchyard on 19th October 1978.

**ERNEST JONES
SERVED FOR
MANY YEARS
AS A SPECIAL
CONSTABLE,
RECEIVING TWO
LONG SERVICE
BARS FOR THIS.
HE REMAINED
FARMING IN
LAXTON UNTIL
HE RETIRED**

BY THE END OF THE
PERIOD WE STUDIED,
THE GREAT WAR
HAD DISRUPTED
LIFE IN RURAL
COMMUNITIES
BY TAKING AWAY
MANY OF THE
YOUNG MEN WHO
HAD WORKED ON
THE FARMS TO FIGHT
IN FOREIGN PARTS



CHANGES IN VILLAGE LIFE

The correspondence we have unearthed has painted a picture of rural life at the turn of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the period life in Laxton went on much as it had done in the past and certainly as it had done throughout Victorian times; every villager knowing his or her place in a strictly hierarchical society.

By the end of the period which we studied the Great War had disrupted life in rural communities by taking away many of the young men who had worked on the farms to fight in foreign parts.

Things would never be the same again; women and boys had been required to do men's work on the land and farm labourers and squires had fought side by side in the trenches.

Society was changing rapidly and the values and attitudes we see demonstrated in the letters which we have researched would change dramatically as the century went on. The accounts in this booklet reflect the beginning of those changes in village society.

APPENDIX 1

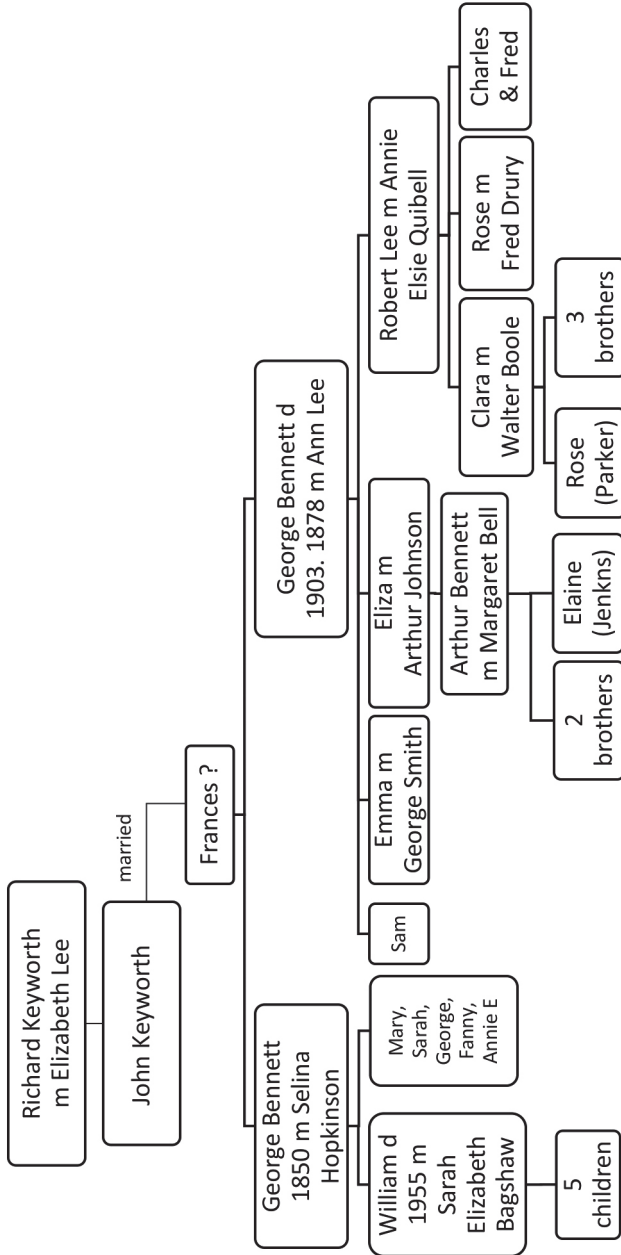
FAMILY TREES

These simplified family trees show the line of descent for the main people described in the text to help the reader follow the narrative.

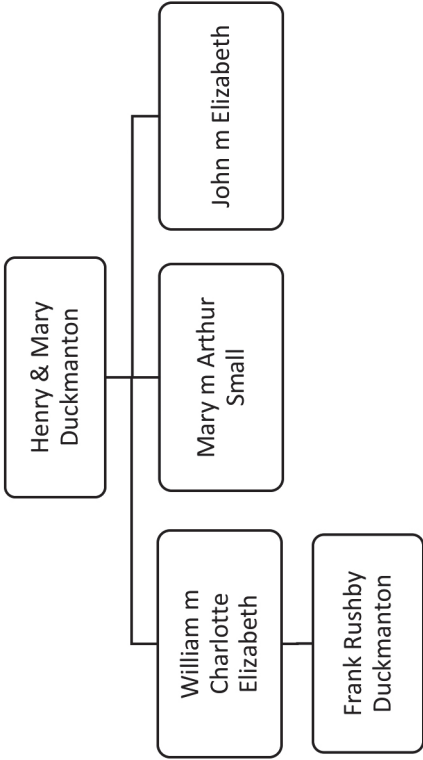
To help the reader, members of the family who have not been directly referred to have been grouped together in some cases.

The diagrams show those referred to in the stories and those of their relatives whose names were discovered during our research. There is no implication that all children or siblings have been included and where a name remains undiscovered this is represented by ‘?’

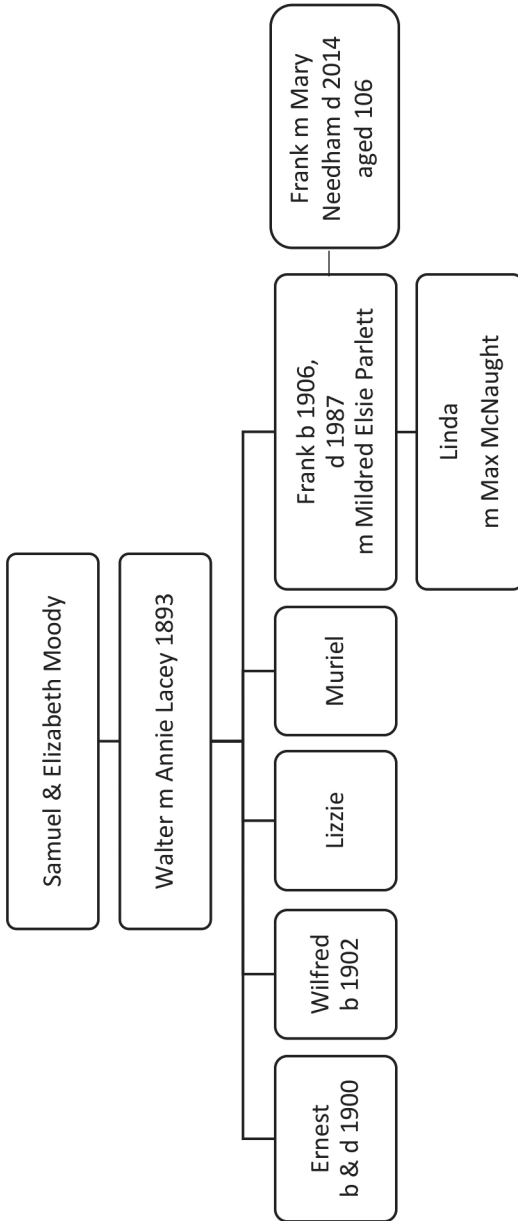
BENNETT



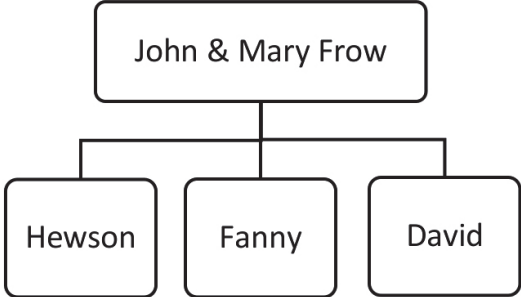
DUCKMANTON



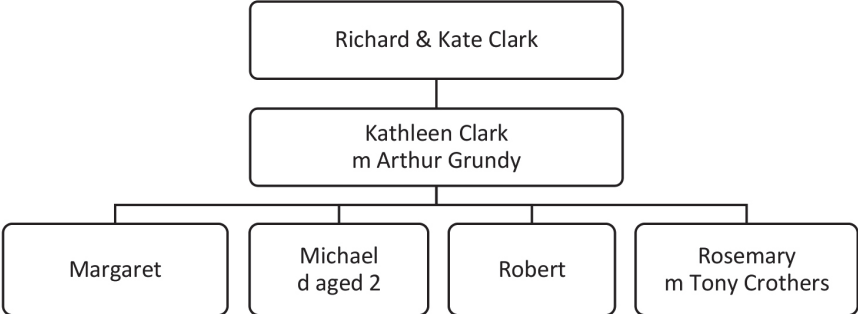
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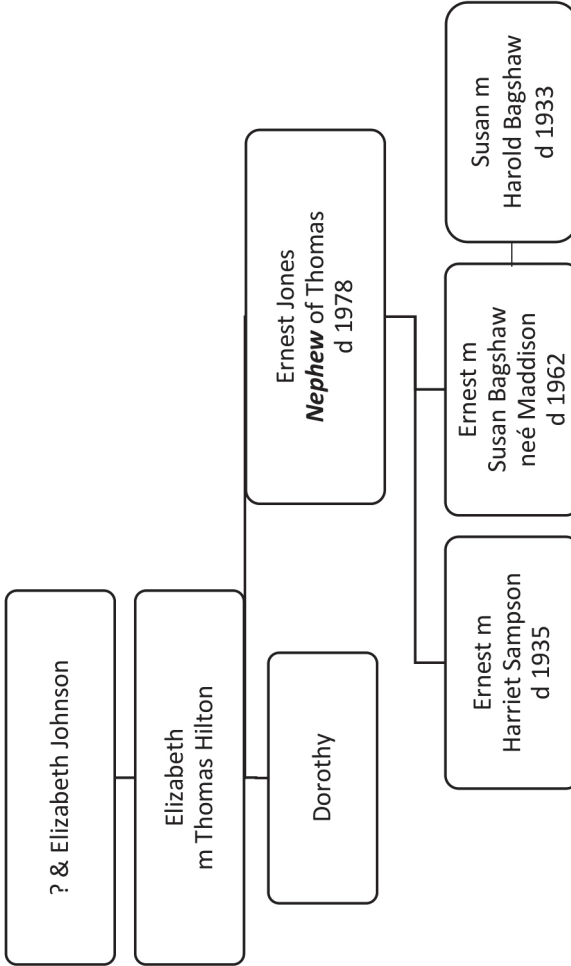


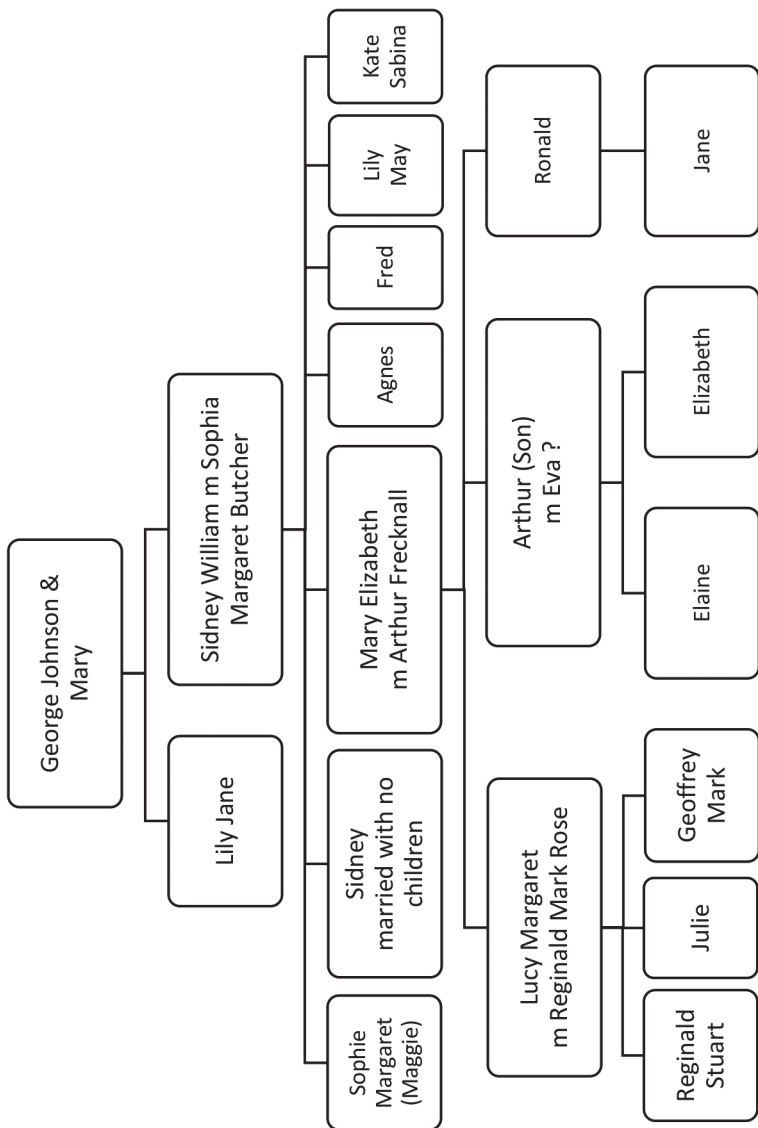
FROW



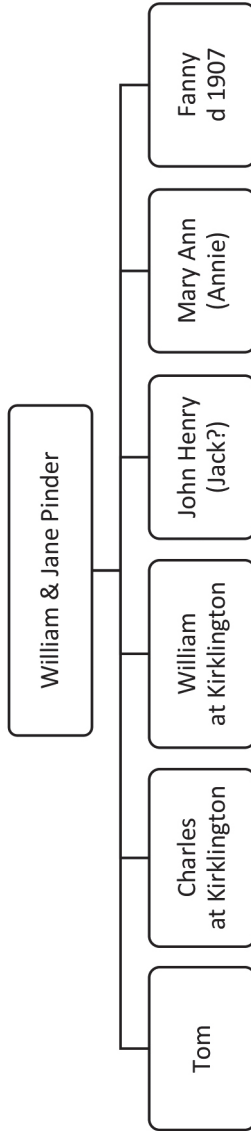
GRUNDY



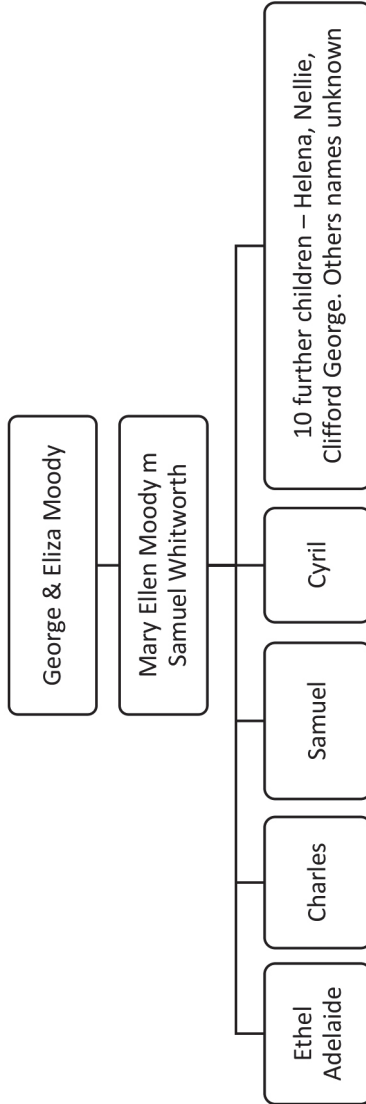




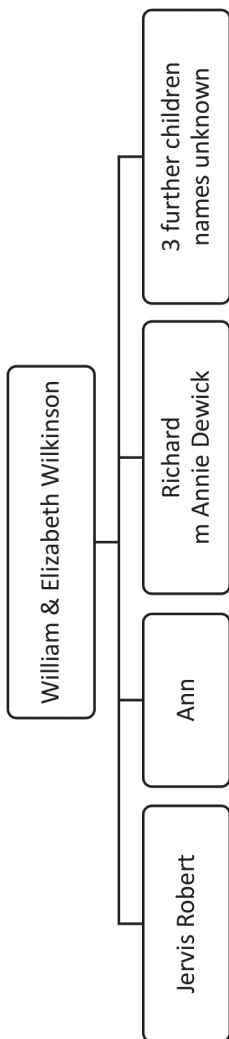
PINDER



WHITWORTH



WILKINSON



APPENDIX 2

MAPS OF LAXTON AND MOORHOUSE

Based on the 1910 Inland Revenue
Survey and the 1911 Census

Key to Properties

- 2 Town End Farm
- 3 West Lea
- 145 Aviary Cottage & Woodcutters Cottage
- 5 Top Farm
- 6 The Cottage
- 7 Toad Cottage & Westwood House
- 15 Bridlecroft
- 16 Holme View Farm
- 17 Blacksmith's Cottage
- 18 Cherry Tree Farm Formerly Buildings Farm
- 19 Lilac Farm

- 20 The Miller's House
- 21 Ivy House Farm
- 22 Smithy Farm
- 23 School House
- 24 School Farm
- 26 Greenpeace
- 27 High Street Farm
- 28 Church Farm

- Shop
- Infant School
- Big School
- Church
- Vicarage
- Chapel

← To Westwood Farm, Cocking Moor Cottage and Common

- 33, 34 1 & 2 Church Cottages
- 29 The Vicarage & Vicarage Cottage
- 29 Ivy Cot./Whitewright Cot./1912 1 & 2 Dovecote Cottages in paddock
- 57 Dijon House
- 58 The Bungabaws / Almshouses
- 62 Vicarage Farm
- 65 New House Farm
- 66 Farms Cottage / Lexington Court
- 69 Corner Farm
- 71 Corner Cottage & Kneesall Cottage
- 74 Manor Farm
- 75 Willoughby House

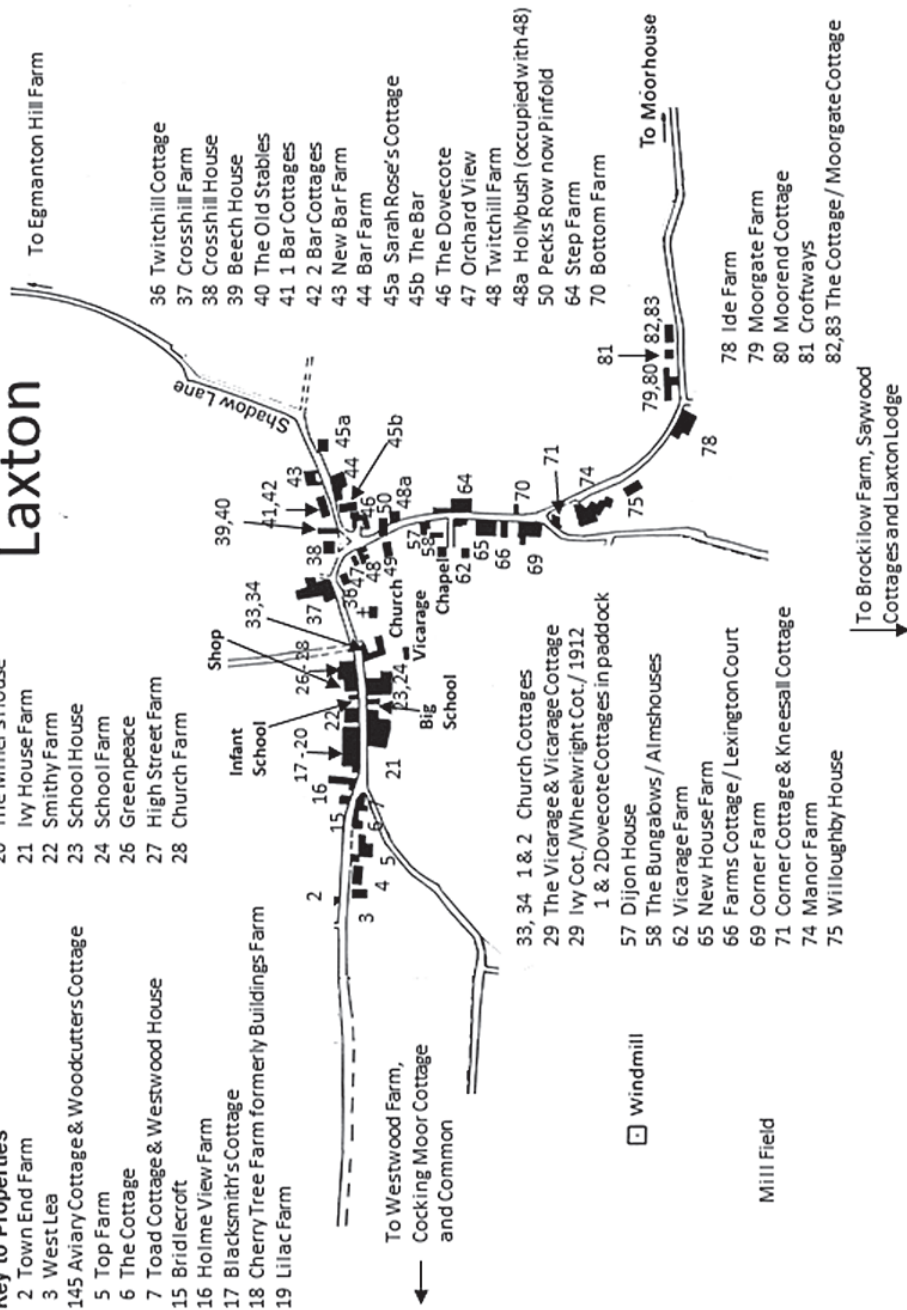
□ Windmill

Mill Field

→ To Brockilow Farm, Saywood Cottages and Laxton Lodge

Laxton

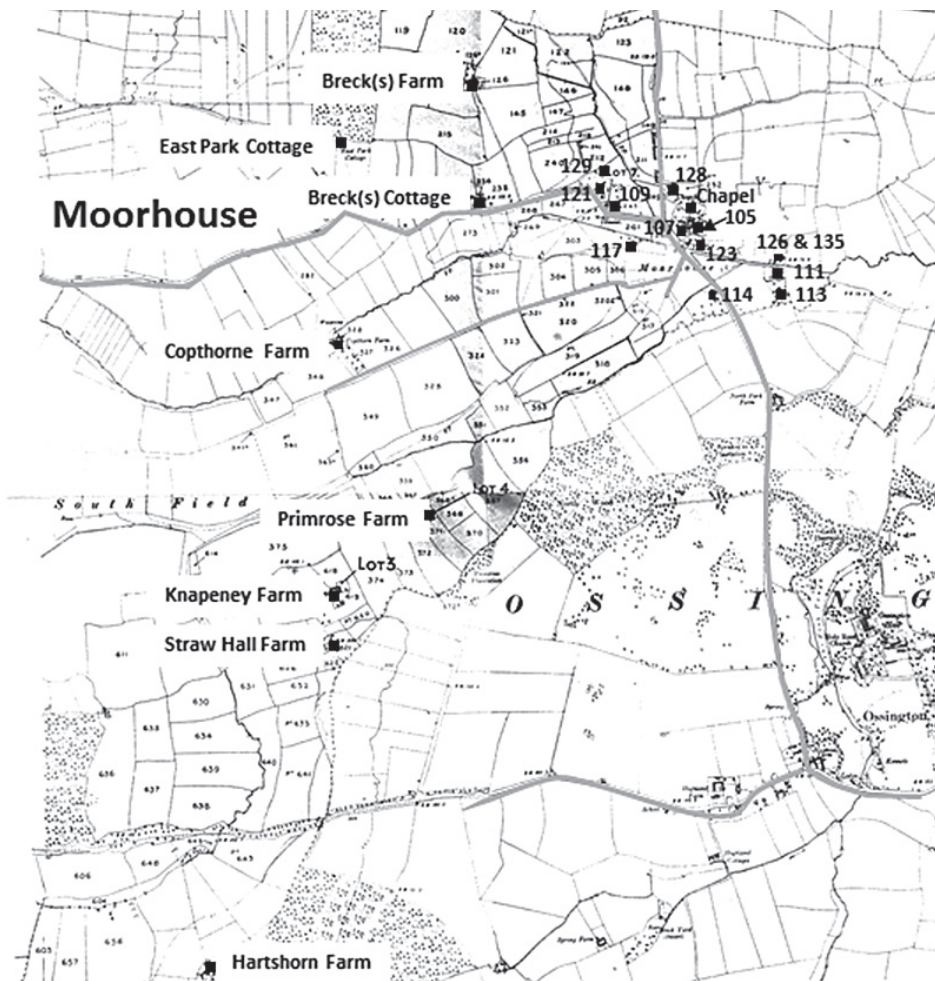
To Egmonton Hill Farm



- 36 Twitchill Cottage
- 37 Crosshill Farm
- 38 Crosshill House
- 39 Beech House
- 40 The Old Stables
- 41 1 Bar Cottages
- 42 2 Bar Cottages
- 43 New Bar Farm
- 44 Bar Farm
- 45a Sarah Rose's Cottage
- 45b The Bar
- 46 The Dovecote
- 47 Orchard View
- 48 Twitchill Farm
- 48a Hollybush (occupied with 48)
- 50 Pecks Row now Pinfold
- 64 Step Farm
- 70 Bottom Farm

To Moorhouse

- 78 Ide Farm
- 79 Moorgate Farm
- 80 Moorend Cottage
- 81 Croftways
- 82,83 The Cottage / Moorgate Cottage



Key to Properties

105	Church Farm	121	Aggrie House
107	Wilmington Farm	123	Bridge Cottage
109	Betcheners Cottage	126	Moorhouse Grange <i>(formerly 2 semis with 135)</i>
111	Thorpe Farm	128	Sunnyside Cottage
113	Beck House	129	The Cottage
114	Brookdale Farm		
117	The Holdings		

APPENDIX 3

Names of people in photographs and other attributions.

THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER

Page 51:

Back Row left to right: Unknown, Unknown, Bill Quibell, Unknown, George Hennell, Unknown, Mr Willis

Middle row: Unknown, Fred Johnson, Ted Rickett, Silverstand, Harold Sampson

Front row: Ron Cree, Walter Laughton, Fred Sampson, Unknown, Bill Bartle

Page 58:

Back row left to right: Mrs Clipstone, Ruth Walker, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown, Laughton, Milly Parlett

Middle row: Milly Merrills, Elsie Laughton, Doll Clark, Gladys Rayner, Unknown, Lil Johnson, Doris Bennett

Front row: Gladys Merrills, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown, Dora Moody, Unknown

Page 88: Laxton Choir

Back row left to right: Harold Sampson, Billy Bamford (organ blower), Frank Moody, Bernard Atkins, Dick Cocking, Son Bennett

Middle row seated: Samuel Moody, George Burkitt, Richard Clark (warden), Mr Willis, James Price, G. B. Atkins, Jack Cook

Front row: Fred Sampson, Steve Marrison, Walter Laughton, Tom Marrison, Eric Sampson

Page 96: Men at Wedding

Mr Willis, Hawkie Marrison, Richard Clark,
Charlie Hare, Jack Cook, Harold Willis,
Arthur Witham, Arthur Grundy

OPEN FIELD FARMING IN LAXTON

Page 70: Picture 1

Mark Bailey, Wilf Rayner (on cart)

Page 70: Picture 2

Norman Portsmouth (grandson of R. Clark),
Joyce Barker (on horse, Mark Bailey (on stack))

Page 82:

Wilf Rayner (on load), Mark Bailey (binding with
three horses), Wilf Rayner (on hay rake)

Page 93:

Mark Bailey (second horse from left)

Page 95:

Son Frecknall (boy in middle)

LAXTON IN WARTIME

Page 49:

Copy of letter in possession of Janet Cooke

LIVING IN LAXTON

Page 15:

Arthur Grundy in workshop (Photo by J. Cooke)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS FOR 'LAXTON STORIES'

FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS AND PERMISSION TO PUBLISH

Vernon and Jean Bartle

Doug Bradbury, Master Farrier

Professor John Beckett
for his support and help.

Catherine and
Rebecca Brunyee

Brenda Chambers

Andy Columbine
for the quality of his work
and his patient and unstinting
commitment to our project
in providing the graphic
design for our publications

Janet Cooke

Marian Cooper

Colin Cree

Rosemary Crothers

Jenni Dobson
for assisting with proof reading

Brian Easton

Amanda Hennell

Elaine Jenkins

David Lambert

Graham Laughton

John Littler

Linda McNaught

Rose Parker

Margaret Rose

John Rushby

Margaret Saxelby
for information on Methodism
in Laxton and Moorhouse

Janet Spink

Colin Taylor

Dik Allison
for designing the research
database and search routines
which enabled 'Laxton Stories'
to be completed on time

Chris Belton
for her aerial photographs

Karen Rutherford
for Queenie Sampson's
embroidery

Alistair Millar, Tallents
Solicitors for Documents
from the Tallents Collection

Thoresby Trustees
for photographs and documents
from the Manvers Collection
and from their private collection

Lesley Booth, Derek Storton
and Joy Allison
for producing bespoke
illustrations

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