THE VARIETY OF VILLAGE LIFE

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

LAXTON
HISTORY GROUP

LAXTON STORIES VOLUME 3

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Further acknowledgements for 'Laxton Stories' can be found on page 131.

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FOREWORD

BY PROFESSOR JOHN BECKETT, UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

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 and both received long service awards subsequently. Finally, Laxton did its bit for the war, including taking in a Belgium 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 MODERN AGE HAS BECOME SO USED TO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION, TELEPHONE AND ALL FORMS OF MEDIA THAT A TIME WHEN ALL OF THIS WAS UNHEARD OF IS HARD FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED IT TO IMAGINE

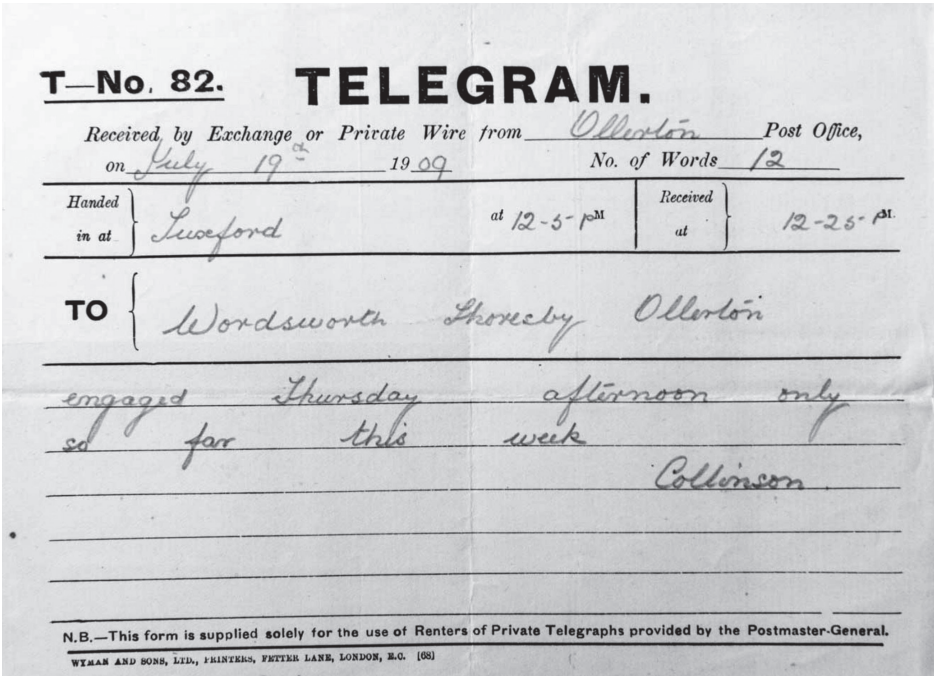
LETTERS & CORRESPONDENCE

THE LETTERS REVEAL THE VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE DAY

What very soon became apparent as we read the Manvers' correspondence was that the very pages we were reading were themselves part of the story. They revealed a very different time. The modern age has become so used to electronic communication, telephone and all forms of media that a time when all of this was unheard of is hard for those who have not experienced it to imagine.

The incoming correspondence files – letters from the tenants, businesses, people looking for work or accommodation, other landed Estates etc. - sadly only begin in 1906. Those from earlier in our period of interest and for over fifty years before that were not deposited into the collection. The incoming letters we studied are all original documents.

Communication at the turn of the century relied very heavily on the written word. The Estate wrote to



T—No. 82. **TELEGRAM.**

Received by Exchange or Private Wire from Ollerton Post Office,
on July 19th 1909 No. of Words 12

Handed in at Tuxford at 12-5-PM | Received at 12-25-PM

TO Wordsworth Thoresby Ollerton

engaged Thursday afternoon only
so far this week
Collinson

N.B.—This form is supplied solely for the use of Renters of Private Telegraphs provided by the Postmaster-General.

WYMAN AND SONS, LTD., PRINTERS, FETTER LANE, LONDON, E.C. [63]

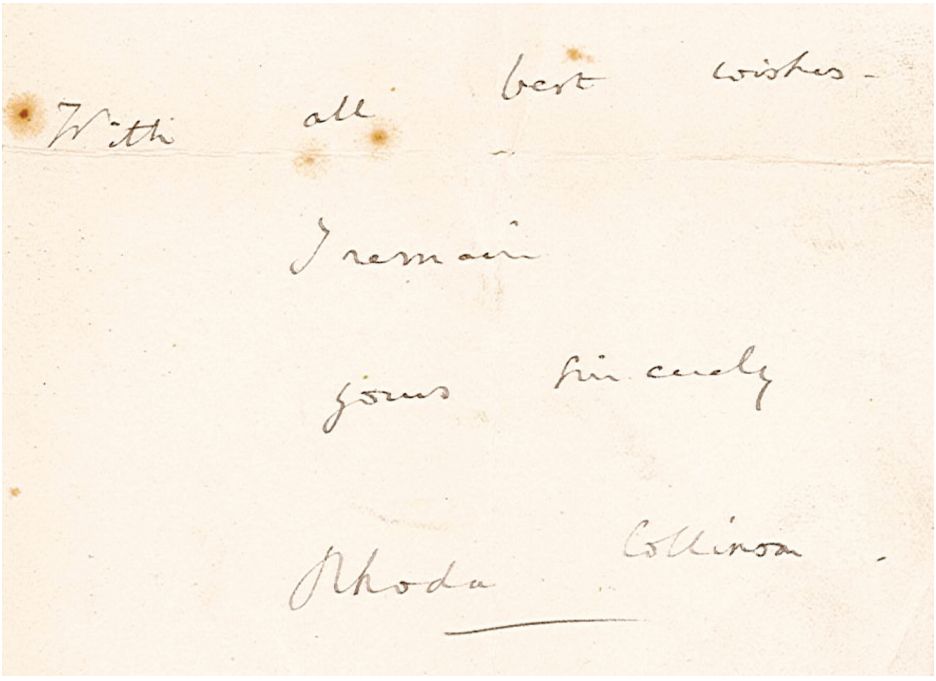
Pictured

A telegram form
Ma 2C 17-459

the tenants and they wrote to the Estate. Exchanges of correspondence took place very quickly. It was the norm to write by return if at all possible and if this didn't happen, the reply would include an apology and the reason. When John Dewick was asked to say if the proposed date for the 1919 Court Leet was satisfactory, he answered the following day, adding *'I did not get home from work until our Post had gone'.*

Mr Argles was incensed when a messenger failed to deliver a message he had written to Revd. Collinson promptly, writing:

> *'… Owing to the stupidity of a messenger, I find that a letter which I wrote to you on Saturday morning was not delivered at Laxton the same day, and the same messenger neglected to post it till Monday evening. I much regret this.'*



Pictured

Rhoda Collinson's handwriting

If a reply was seen to be urgent even return of post was not thought sufficient and a telegram might be sent.

Revd. and Mrs Collinson's letters were on paper embossed with the address *'Laxton Vicarage, Nr. Newark'*. For most of our period, they used a heavy cream embossed paper which might have been purchased from a commercial stationer or could be achieved with a hand operated personalised die press. By 1916 their paper was printed. Mrs Collinson's in particular was a distinctive hand with long tall, spidery letters, the words widely spaced – typically only four words to a line - and very few lines to the page. It is obvious that she had no concern for the amount of paper used.

This contrasts sharply with many of the letters from tenants. There is no pattern to the paper or the

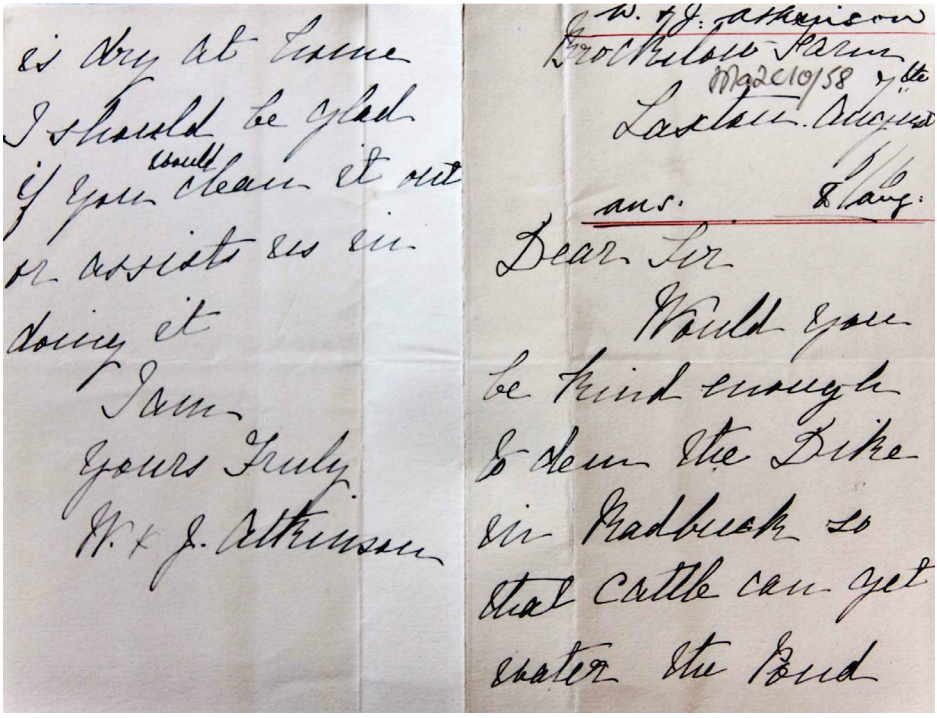
colour used. Many of the sheets are very small by modern standards - approximately 15 x 10cm when folded.

Tenants used the paper sparingly and wrote in ink. After a short time studying the letters we became familiar with the writing of individuals - be it they or their scribe who actually put pen to paper. John Frow's hand was particularly distinctive. He wrote a lot of letters from Copthorne Farm, Moorhouse early in the 1900s.

A few letters were sent anonymously airing some grievance or other - but they might as well have been signed. If our researchers recognised the writing after a few months, it is certain the office staff who saw it over a period of years would have easily identified the writers.

The content was short and to the point except where, very occasionally, a tenant was giving vent to strong feelings. In such cases the long letter was normally followed swiftly by another full of contrition. A tenant who had engaged in an exchange of letters with Mr Argles about the rent of their property compared to neighbours had taken a bullish stance initially. This was retracted entirely when Argles responded quite sharply, saying the couple should come to the office. A long letter contained several abject apologies and the explanation:

> *'I realise now that I have gone a bit too far and I'm very sorry, but as times are [in 1920] you will understand we have got to make a fight for it sometimes not exactly with you but with other businesses as well. It takes us all our time to make ends meet sometimes. … Your letter this morning has bothered me a lot and I ask you as a special favour to look over my mistake and say no more about it.'*



Pictured

Typical letter from a tenant (Ma 2C 10-58 A)

Argles was apparently mollified as he annotated the letter in pencil: *'Please reply – very pleased to let this matter drop'.*

The smallest sheets were used on both sides much as we would now. Slightly larger sheets were folded through the middle and written like a booklet. If this proved insufficient, rather than using a second sheet, the additional content would be squeezed into the margins. From this we inferred that paper was not a commodity to be wasted.

Pictured

Headed notepaper
Ma 2C 17-602

WHAT HEADED STATIONERY, ADDRESSES AND PHONE NUMBERS REVEAL ABOUT THE TIME?

Some companies wrote to the Estate on elaborately designed headed paper - some so elaborate that there was very little room left for the actual message.

Evidence of the times also appears in what was not on the commercially produced page - telephone numbers, fax or email contacts.

In 1900 even a land line telephone was not commonly used. In 1911 the Collinsons' embossed papers simply said *'Telegrams Laxton, Tuxford'*, and in 1916 after they adopted printed paper, the header said *'Telegrams and Station, Tuxford'*.

For the most part the factual content of commercial and official letterheads was limited to an address and the sender's name. In 1908 the Inland Revenue's Surveyor of Taxes in Retford wrote on paper printed with a crest and the address *'Coronation Chambers, Retford'*, with no other contact information.

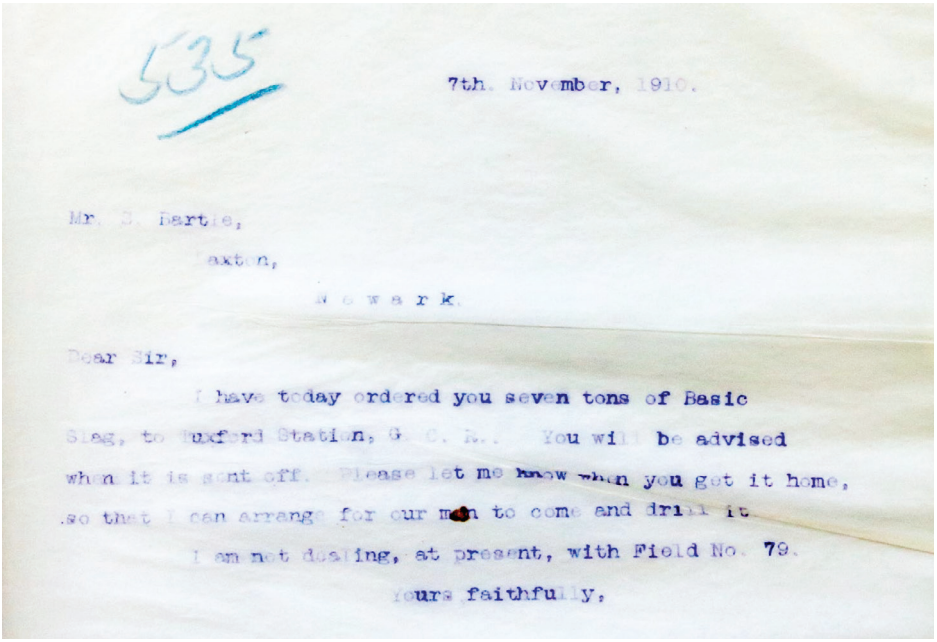
An exception was one from John Howitt & Sons from 1906.

This elaborate letterhead was full of information, gave the address of the offices and showrooms in Stodman Street, Newark as well as the works, and the telephone number 'No.8'. Another decorative headed paper was used by James Hole & Co. Ltd. of Castle Brewery, Newark, who quoted the *'National Telephone No.7'.*

A number of enquiries relating to family history were received by the Estate and one, quoting simply *'Herald's College, London, E.C.'* bore the telephone number *'1686 Central'*.

Pictured

John Howitt & Sons letterhead Ma 2 C-9-258-1



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7th. November, 1910.

Mr. S. Bartle,

axton,

N e w a r k.

Dear Sir,

I have today ordered you seven tons of Basic Slag, to Uxford Station, G. C. R.. You will be advised when it is sent off. Please let me know when you get it home, so that I can arrange for our men to come and drill it

I am not dealing, at present, with Field No. 79.

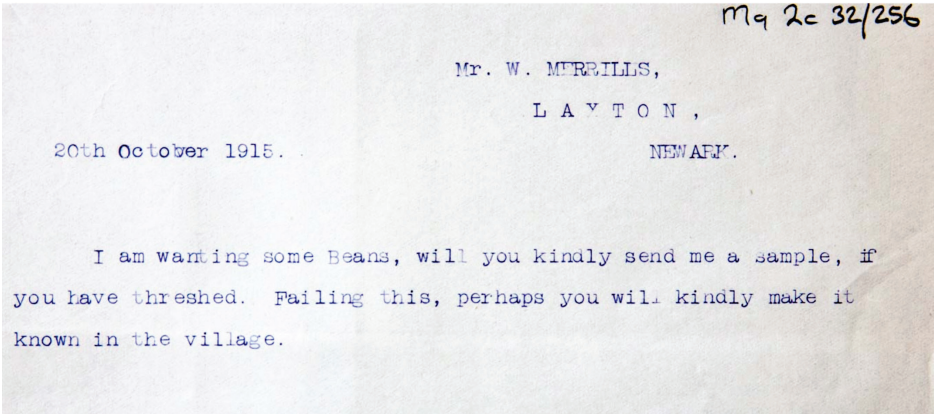
Yours faithfully,

Pictured

The first typed letter from Thoresby Ma 2C 164 545

The outgoing correspondence from the Estate relating to 1900 - 1920 which we studied was on the thinnest of paper, barely more than tissue. Fortunately these were all in the Manvers Collection and to ensure we covered our whole period we looked from the end of 1899 to the end of 1922. These were copies of the originals which had been sent to the recipient and at the start of the period they were individually written. Later there were carbon copies of typed letters. All were bound into year books, usually two letters per page, with an index of correspondents; approximately 1000 sheets per book. Individual letters were marked in these books in wax pencil with numbers which relate to the chain of correspondence.

It might have helped if the originals, which we were not able to view, had also been on such thin paper since in August 1910 the Estate received a reprimand from the Post Office, which itself had only a simple embossed crest, saying:



Ma 2c 32/256

Mr. W. MERRILLS,

L A Y T O N ,

20th October 1915. NEWARK.

I am wanting some Beans, will you kindly send me a sample, if you have threshed. Failing this, perhaps you will kindly make it known in the village.

Pictured

The first typed letter from Laxton Ma 2C 32 256

'I am requested to inform you that your private letter bag (weighing 4lb 4½oz.) exceeds the weight allowance to be carried by a Cycling Postman and I shall therefore be glad if you will kindly provide a bag weighing not more than 2½ pounds.'

Some things never change and the letter has a footnote drawing Mr Wordsworth's attention to Paragraph 2, page 46 of the current P.O. Guides.

In 1910 typed correspondence from the Estate began to appear. The first we recorded addressed to Laxton was to Mr S G Bartle, dated 7th November 1910.

This letter is a carbon copy. We have no way of telling if typed letters might have been copied by hand for the files, but it seems likely that, as carbon paper existed before the invention and standardisation of the typewriter, it would have been adopted to produce copies very quickly.

Very few of the tenants were able to produce typewritten letters throughout our study period and only a minimal number are typed. The first we noted was from Mr William Merrills on 20th October 1915.

Later examples were recorded from Samuel Whitworth, John Dewick and Sidney Johnson, though

IF NORMAL METHODS SEEMED INADEQUATE, THE METHOD FOR IDENTIFYING THE PROPERTY COULD BE QUITE IMAGINATIVE

we have no way of knowing whether they asked someone with a typewriter to produce the letter for them.

The Estate gave what we would recognise today as a postal address: *'Estates Office, Thoresby Park, Ollerton, Newark'*. Mr Wordsworth, when he gave his home address, wrote it simply as *'Whitemoor, Ollerton'*. Invariably the tenants would refer to their address as *'Laxton'* when writing to the Estate. Doubtless then as now the delivery agent, be that postal service or messenger, would have known where everyone lived. Indeed the property was identified by the name of the tenant to the extent that this was how properties were identified during the tenancy transfer process e.g. *' … the house formerly in the occupation of Old Mr Rose'*.

Occasionally if this method seemed inadequate, the method for identifying the property could be quite imaginative. Indeed on one occasion while writing to Mrs Alice Moody - wife of the mole catcher who lived at what is now known as Kneesall Cottage - her address is written as *'next Mr Cocking, Laxton'*.

Addresses were shown in a more random manner than today. In some cases senders would place their name above their address, e.g. *'R Clarke, Farmer, Laxton'*. On a memo from the Estate the addressee might be identified in just the same way. Writers would sometimes put the addressee at the end of the letter, sometimes above the content and sometimes the addressee must have been only on the envelope as there appears to be neither name nor address on the letter itself. Only a few were undated.

WHAT THE WRITING STYLE REVEALS ABOUT THE TIME

The style of correspondence was much more formal than today. The usual form from the tenants was simply to begin *'Sir'*, while the Estate would often address them as *'Dear Sir'* or *'Dear Madam'*. Memo style communications from the Estate Office usually had nothing before the message began.

The Agents wrote to the vicar in slightly more personal terms and the tone of their content implied they were well acquainted. Despite this, first names never appeared. It was the norm to begin *'Dear Collinson'* or *'Dear Argles'*. It was a surprise to find Mr Wordsworth addressing the recently retired Revd. Martin as *'My Dear Martin'* and signing off *'Ever yours'*. However close the relationship, Mr Wordsworth never wrote his first name and always signed himself R W Wordsworth.

HOWEVER CLOSE THE RELATIONSHIP, MR WORDSWORTH NEVER WROTE HIS FIRST NAME

He allowed himself moments of humour. In April 1905 he was making preparations for the reorganisation of the East (Little) Field and Revd. Collinson had sent him a report of a meeting of tenants, which he found *'more satisfactory than I could have hoped for'*. Remarking on a comment made he added:

> *'It is really too amusing to think of old Tom Bennett having something to say - he has only two acres in the field scattered in six different places - but then he is of course one of the very old order.'*

When writing to Revd. Collinson in October 1913 responding to a comment about pigstyes. It is easy to imagine him smiling as he wrote:

'With regard to the Pig styes for new cottages, your letter was the first intimation that I had received that we were not going to provide any, but I find I am generally the last person to know what I propose building for Lord Manvers!'

In 1907 he wrote to William Merrills, following up on a promise to pay rent in two weeks which had long passed, asking when he could expect the balance of that half years rent. He added: *'Laxton fortnights are rather long ones!'* He was not given to adopting a jocular tone when writing to most of the tenants.

MR ARGLES GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF BEING A VERY FORMAL INDIVIDUAL AND SELDOM ALLOWED HIMSELF ANY FREEDOM TO SHOW FAMILIARITY OR HUMOUR

Merrills, a Parish Councillor and Foreman of West Field, must have been viewed somewhat differently. The Newark Advertiser for 6th October 1914 reported that he hosted 150 people on his lawn on the Monday following the sermons for an anniversary celebration at the Primitive Methodist Chapel. Merrills was also the recipient when Mr Wordsworth wrote that he hoped to call with the plan of what the Estate hoped to do at his house, concluding: *'but I fancy that if your wife and daughters are at home that will be sufficient!'*

Mr Argles gives the impression of being a very formal individual and seldom allowed himself any freedom to show familiarity or humour, although he demonstrated compassion for animals as we shall see later in this volume. It was therefore very surprising to come across a letter from him beginning *'My Dear Cecil'*. The explanation was in the concluding words, *'Your affectionate brother'* although he still signed himself *'Hubert Argles'*.

The concluding words could be telling. While the Estate invariably concluded *'Yours sincerely'*, *'Yours faithfully'* or occasionally *'Yours truly'*, these were deferential times when the tenants knew their place. They frequently ended a letter with an apology for writing at all or saying they hoped not to have given offence or trouble by doing so; sign-offs such as: *'I remain your humble (or obedient) servant'* appeared frequently as did *'Yours obediently'*, *'Yours respectfully'* and *'Your obedient servant'*.

THEY FREQUENTLY ENDED A LETTER WITH AN APOLOGY FOR WRITING AT ALL

A rare example of a tenant signing off in a less than deferential manner was noted in an exchange, reported elsewhere in *"Laxton Stories Volume 1 – Laxton Folk"* where Sam Whitworth, challenging the dismissal of his son, Charles, signed: *'Awaiting your reply. I remain Yours etc.'*

A simple *'Yours'* appeared occasionally between vicar and Estate, often in apparent haste, an example being Revd. Collinson's letters about Miss Pinder's troubles.

Mr Willis, the schoolmaster, occupied the middle ground as both one of the more literate and respected

members of the community, consulted on various matters by the Estate, and also a tenant. When replying to an enquiry or in his capacity as Secretary to the Parish Council or PCC, he would begin *'Dear Sir'* and would sign *'Yours faithfully'*. When engaged in a tense dialogue with Mr Wordsworth about alterations to his tenanted home he began *'Dear Sir'* as usual, but signed *'Yours obediently'*. When he finally admitted defeat, he used the same expressions but also added *'Again apologising for causing so much trouble'.*

WHEN ENGAGED IN A TENSE DIALOGUE WITH MR WORDSWORTH ABOUT ALTERATIONS TO HIS TENANTED HOME HE BEGAN 'DEAR SIR' AS USUAL, BUT SIGNED 'YOURS OBEDIENTLY'.

A particularly vivid example of how much the tenants wanted to avoid offence to their landlord at all costs was noted in November 1908 when George E Pye wrote to Mr Wordsworth from Eakring Field Farm regarding a meeting held to progress plans for a Ploughing Match for the Estate tenants in a group of parishes including Laxton. This had apparently been arranged in haste for fear of frost setting in and neither Lord Manvers nor Mr Wordsworth had been consulted. Pye is at pains to explain that such an event had been thought likely to *'cause those in our employ to take greater interest in their work'.*

He expressed regret that, though they had visited Thoresby, they had not seen Wordsworth, although they anticipated he would have supported their idea.

The report noted that Lord Manvers would be asked to be President and Wordsworth Vice President.

The conclusion of this long letter sought to avoid censure for taking the initiative and read:

> *'We were all activated by the best and purest of motives. Anything in shape of discourtesy either towards Lord Manvers or yourself never entered any of our minds. We do sincerely trust that this explanation will put the matter right. As tenants we don't wish to do anything that would incur your displeasure or that of Lord Manvers and next year if you wish the Society to be continued it shall be drafted according to your instructions. I am dear Sir your respectful tenant'*

WHAT CORRESPONDENCE ABOUT PLOUGHING AND PUPPIES REVEALS ABOUT THE TIME

Ploughing matches seemed to generate correspondence of this type and they were also central to the only letter we identified to have been written by a farm worker rather than a tenant. On 11th July 1914 Frank Marshall wrote to Mr Argles at length from Westwood Farm referring to his thoughts for the Estate Ploughing Match meeting the following week:

> *'I am writing to you as a ploughman to ask if you couldn't form some more classes.'*

He explained at length why he thought this should happen, endorsing Pye's point about improving standards saying *'What I want is to get more experience'* with a view to progressing to All-England standard.

In familiar style he ended: *'Hoping I have done nothing wrong … I am Sir yours etc. Frank Marshall'.*

Covering himself in case the matter is raised with his employer, Mr Marrison and caused him any problems, he added the post script: *'I can assure you Mr Marrison knows nothing about this letter. I am myself writing because I love this job.'*

He would have been relieved as well as pleased to receive a reply from Mr Argles by return addressed to him c/o Mr Marrison saying:

> *'I am very glad you wrote to me, and I am always pleased to receive any suggestions from ploughmen or farmers with a view to improving the Thoresby Ploughing Matches. Your letter shall have my careful consideration, and if it can be arranged to have a special class for all prize winners of last year I think it would be a great improvement.'*

Ploughing matches were very popular in these times and had become traditions, which continue to the current day. They are reported at greater length in *'Living in Laxton' (p89–93)*. Current villagers still own trophies won there with pride.

Pictured

1923 cup for tenants' class in Thoresby Ploughing Match

Thoresby held two events each year divided by the nature of the land and referred to as the sand lands - nearer Ollerton - and the clay lands of which Laxton was a part.

The great village event in Laxton during 1910 was the Ploughing Match at Mr Merrills' Farm on 10th November and attended by Lord Manvers. It was the only event mentioned

in the 1911 Parish Almanack, following after the death of King Edward and was declared *'a great success in every way'.*

Another tradition of long standing which has recently returned to Laxton is puppy walking. Press reports and trophies from around the period of our 'snapshot' have been preserved, showing Laxton people to have been actively involved then.

Farmers in the village regularly took puppies from the Rufford Hunt whose kennels were at Wellow, adjacent to Jordan Castle Farm, not far across the fields from Laxton Common. They have now moved to Barnby Moor, near Retford.

THE GREAT VILLAGE EVENT IN LAXTON DURING 1910 WAS THE PLOUGHING MATCH AT MR MERRILL'S FARM ON 10TH NOVEMBER, ATTENDED BY LORD MANVERS

One pup which had been walked in Laxton before going to begin his career with the hunt clearly preferred Laxton. He regularly escaped and came *'home'*. He was coupled to another dog to keep him in but it seemed he had the greater influence and somehow, to everyone's amazement, they jumped out over a fence together and turned up, still tied together, here in Laxton!

Since 2010 Faye Wilson, granddaughter of Colin and Dorothy Cree, has been walking hound puppies for the Grove & Rufford Hunt. It is good to have a first-hand view of a practice which appears to have changed little in a century. She described what is involved in her own words:

IN THE DAYS OF OUR 'SNAPSHOT' THE COMPETITIONS FOR THE WALKERS AND PUPPIES WERE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR WHICH RECEIVED SIGNIFICANT COVERAGE IN THE PRESS

'Nothing of value should ever be left unattended or it will be eaten or buried! It is a seven day a week commitment - they need a lot of exercise and lots of socialisation. The more situations you can introduce them to, the better. It is important for them to meet livestock, domestic dogs, cats, poultry and people, including children. If you can get them accustomed to walking on the lead it makes the huntsman's job a lot easier later on.

Hound puppies usually stay out on walk until they have exhausted their welcome. They aren't domesticated animals; they are members of a pack and for the last three hundred years they have been bred to do one thing, and that is hunt.

Pictured

Top: Harriet, winner Rufford Hunt Puppy Show at Wellow June 1928

Bottom: Janet Cooke's Puppy Walking Trophies

When 'unentered' puppies – those which have not yet done a season's hunting - go back to the kennels, they must go first to the Puppy Show, a very important social occasion for the hunt where the puppy walkers are thanked for their efforts and the 'young entry' (the puppies) are judged on their conformation, it is important that the puppies have been well socialised by their walkers.'

In the days of our 'snapshot' the competitions for the walkers and puppies were highlights of the year which received significant coverage in the press. Families still care for the trophies and spoons their ancestors were awarded with pride.

HOWARD BARRETT. *Thrice Patronized by His Late Majesty King Edward VII. Also by T.R.H. The Prince of Wales, Princess Mary-Viscountess Lascelles, and Duke of York.* SOUTHWELL.

LOCAL FARMERS TURNED OUT IN FORCE TO A MEETING ABOUT THE VIRTUES OF THE LINCOLNSHIRE FARMERS UNION

CHANGES IN SOCIETY AT THE TIME

Things were changing rapidly in the world at large and in the immediate area in this period. Local Farmers turned out in force to a meeting about the virtues of the Lincolnshire Farmers Union held in Laxton on 28th March 1908. This was a time when Unions were forming. On December 10th that year a meeting was held in an ante-room at the Smithfield Show which resulted in the formation of the National Farmers Union.

Medical care was beginning to benefit from recent discoveries. The first midwives were formally trained in 1902 in the wake of the Midwives Act (1902), which set about regulating the practice of women calling themselves midwives and required training and formal certification. At least initially the theory was not borne out by great changes in practice, and very likely change came slowly to Laxton. This community benefited from the services of Mrs Dolby who both brought people into the world as the midwife and helped them to leave by laying out the bodies.

It is not clear if she received formal midwifery training, but it seems likely that she was an example of the village woman who traditionally performed these roles and gained her expertise as she worked, possibly under a measure of supervision from the doctor. She is noted as a *'Monthly Nurse'* in the 1901 Census.

Running water was being introduced widely - Boughton Pumping Station was built in 1901 and the collieries in Rufford and Ollerton were sunk in 1911 and 1926 respectively. These buildings and the employment offered constructing them and within them would have been known in Laxton, but neither seems to have produced a move to work away from the land.

When water reached the village in 1912/13 it was welcomed, but progress also brought new problems. Nobody seems to have thought about the effect of cold winters on water in exposed pipes, doubtless because water in wells was not given to freezing. It soon became apparent that the pipes froze up in winter. People wrote to the Estate missing their water indoors. After experiencing this modern luxury, it must have been hard to return to relying on the well in the coldest of weather to get water for the household as well as the stock.

Pictured

Boughton Pumping Station

It was not only the frost cutting off the water. Mr Wordsworth found cause to write to George Favill at Saywood in March 1912, not long after water began being piped from Kneesall:

Pictured

Saywood Cottages courtesy of David Brown

'I am very much annoyed to hear that you are in the habit of turning off the water from Mainwood and Laxton Lodge. Please understand that this is never to be done again. The ram sends up ample water for you all and it causes us both trouble and expense to get air out of the pipes. You have no right whatever to touch the supply.'

Farmers soon realised running water could help in providing for stock and crops. Some were quick to ask for it to be piped to their fields, but early enthusiasm was dampened by letters such as that to William Bennett:

'I cannot at the present moment undertake to supply any grass fields with water. I must wait and see how far my supply is sufficient for the houses.'

Richard Clark at Town End Farm had a more favourable reply in 1915, although he was not seeking

Pictured

Laxton, with Town End lower centre

to have water for stock from the piped domestic supply. Mr Argles wrote:

> *'I have made some trial holes and gone carefully into the question of a water supply for your fields. The spring in Mr Merrills' field is too deep, and cannot be used. I must therefore arrange to sink a stone trough in the deep dyke, and put a pump down, to enable you to pump up water into your fields. This is the most convenient plan I can suggest for you, and I shall endeavour to put the work in hand with as little delay as possible.'*

The Education Act of 1870 sought to get youngsters out of the fields and into school, but this was still settling in as parents gradually accepted their children had to attend regularly. As Joan Cottee describes in more detail in *'The Village Schoolmaster'*, it was during this period that parents finally accepted that attendance at school and education was more important than helping on the farm.

CHANGES IN HEALTH CARE AT THAT TIME

Our snapshot of Laxton begins almost fifty years before the National Health Service. Facilities for treating the many illnesses which afflicted people were limited. Looking back from this time when we expect to be well; when antibacterial spray; free access to GPs and specialists; prescribed medication and every kind of over the counter medicine is the norm, it is hard to realise fully how serious even commonplace conditions could be.

Joan Cottee in *'The Village Schoolmaster'* and Cynthia Bartle in *'Living in Laxton'* look at childhood illnesses and accidents respectively. The everyday life and events of the village were also affected by adult illness. An example in the early days of our study is the bout of influenza which prevented Revd. Collinson representing the villagers at the funeral of Lord Manvers. He seems to have been somewhat prone to illness as the 1902 Almanack was not published as he was ill. He was confined to bed again in February 1906 when he wrote to tell Mr Wordsworth he could not get to see any of the farmers who needed a visit. Mr Wordsworth sympathised with him, ending a letter: *'very trying weather for rheumatism, but I hope you are better'*.

Lord Manvers had his fair share of problems arising from accidents. In November 1907 he was sufficiently indisposed due to an accident of unspecified nature that Mr Wordsworth was unable to see him to discuss John Atkinson's situation as he had promised. In mid-September ten years later he succumbed to a hunting accident in which he broke a collar bone. Fortunately he was soon on the mend and anticipated being back in the saddle a month or so later.

Pictured

Moorhouse

When the Agents were confined to the house or to bed, it appears they still worked. Mr Spink was indisposed when he was dealing with the urgent matters of organising ploughing up land designated by the War Agricultural Committee. While writing to G Wardell of Moorhouse on this matter he explained that he:

'would come to Laxton, but am at present confined to the house with a chill. It is highly important to at once consider the best means of getting the ploughing done…'

Mr Argles had hurt his knee and was ordered to rest it at home during the week of 6th February 1915. He was dealing with plans to put in drainage for Sidney Johnson and suggested Johnson might visit him at home at White Lodge if he wanted to discuss it.

In written exchanges such as this between the Agent and tenants references were often made to the health or recovery of the parties concerned. Mr Argles declared himself *'very pleased indeed'* to hear that George Cocking was better. Unfortunately this recovery was temporary as a week later Mr Cocking died. When corresponding with Revd. Collinson in March 1905, Mr Wordsworth said: *'Poor old W Horton's illness grieves me much. There seems so little hope for him.'* Even when under threat of notice to quit, William Atkinson apologised for not knowing Mr Wordsworth had returned home and hoped he was better.

There was no Carers' Allowance or relief sitting service, and if you had a relation in need of care, you had to rely on family or provide it yourself. Edward Savage aged 61 of Moorhouse felt obliged to give up his farm on account of his second wife, Sarah's illness. At 74, she was some years older than him.

Mr Mirfin, a pensioner from Moorhouse, whose children were grown up and gone, asked for a house in Laxton as their present house got very damp. They wanted to move to avoid getting *'rheumatics'*, and were are pleased to take a property they were offered, saying Laxton had the advantage of sitting on higher ground and the property had a sink with running water.

For tenants suffering from more severe conditions the only place they could turn if their needs were beyond their means was the Estate. In 1899 Mr Wordsworth related to Revd. Collinson, who at that date was the newly appointed vicar at Laxton:

> *'Mrs Preston is much better. We got a specialist from Nottingham to hold a consultation with Whitington (the doctor in Tuxford) about her eyes and he was most hopeful she would recover her sight.'*

Six years before the reference to him above, the Estate was involved in helping William Horton. Mr Wordsworth wrote in January 1899: *'I think we have saved one eye for William Horton but the other is totally gone'.* George Burkitt had lost an eye in an accident at school. A successful outcome from eye problems was by no means assured.

In 1910 Mrs Collinson wrote possibly her longest letter to Mr Wordsworth, describing in detail the difficulty faced by Mrs Maddison, who had been to see her. The opportunity to move house could not have come at a worse time for her as she was

'nursing old Pinder, who is dying by slow degrees'. In addition their daughter, Susan, was planning to visit for a fortnight and she had been so very ill that her mother had wanted nothing else to do while she was home. *'Flitting'* would have been particularly difficult as Susan had just been ill again.

Mrs Collinson always did her best to think of ways to help people and came up with quite a plan on this occasion and sought to involve Mr Wordsworth in it. She asked that he might leave the property empty for May to enable Susan to visit and then make her mother a formal offer on June 1st. She explained that *'if George Bagshaw got to know a word about it they will be turned out into the street with a week's notice or even less'.* She suggested that deferring the offer would allow Mrs Maddison to *'truthfully say that she had not heard formally before!!'*

Mrs Collinson probably wondered quite how Wordsworth would respond to the description she went on to give of the proposed house and, in contrast to happily suggesting he follow her plan, seemed to feel she should tread carefully. She wrote:

> *'I do not know if I ought to say, so you must forgive me if I am wrong – but my information of the house is that it is very dirty and no wall papers on – unless Mrs Rose Number II has done it up since I saw her last!'*

Back on what she seemed to feel was firmer ground, she further suggested that the need to do something about the property would explain the delay in re-letting it.

Returning to Mrs Maddison's situation, she continued:

> *'Susan Maddison was so ill last week that I quite understand her mother feeling she cannot be*

flitting into a dirty house when she comes home.'

Mrs Maddison regrets that if nothing can be done to delay the let, she will have to wait for another opportunity of a house.

Ending on a familiar note, she signed off: *'… hoping you will not think I have said too much …'*. The story had a happy ending as Susan Maddison recovered and went on to marry Harold Bagshaw. Our current member, Brenda Chambers is her granddaughter.

Pictured

Susan Maddison

Recognising the need to maximise food production in 1917, Mr Argles wrote to Mr Quibell at Copthorne Farm, Moorhouse, after news reached him late the previous evening that one of Quibell's men had been taken to hospital. He suggested that this would leave Quibell shorthanded during the critical harvest period. The Estate's woodsmen were already loaned to help other farmers, and Argles suggested arranging for one or two men from the Brigade at Thoresby to help out rather than risking the delay of going through formal channels for military help.

With the cold and draughty houses as well as the hard life most of the villagers led, rheumatism was a widespread condition. Askern, a village seven miles north of Doncaster and nine miles south of Pontefract was known for its waters. A Bath Charity was established in 1825 to enable *'poor persons to avail themselves of the benefit of the waters'.* The water is described as having a sulphurous smell and

both drinking the water and using it in baths was deemed *'very efficacious'* in rheumatism, gout, and a range of other conditions. The Estate helped villagers by arranging for them to go there for treatment. Mrs Cree was very grateful for being able to go for a second visit in September 1910 to set her up for the winter.

DRINKING THE WATER AND USING IT IN BATHS WAS DEEMED 'VERY EFFICACIOUS' IN RHEUMATISM, GOUT, AND A RANGE OF OTHER CONDITIONS

In July 1921 Mr Argles followed up on a recommendation from Dr Whitington that, although Lacey was a good deal better, it could help to send him away for treatment. He decided to try to get him a ticket for Askern. Having been successful, he informed Dr. Whitington in Tuxford that *'Lord Manvers has got some tickets for the Askern Bath Charity … Lacey will then be able to go immediately to Askern'.* Whitington was asked to provide a certificate stating the condition of Lacey's heart and kidneys, which the charity required the patient to bring with them.

Mr Argles took responsibility for arranging the details of the visit, writing first to Lacey's sister, Mrs Birtwhistle, in Belton, Doncaster, giving her details and suggesting she met her brother's train on arrival. Argles' arrangements extended to providing accommodation and some financial assistance:

> *'I have arranged lodgings for him at Mrs Bradley's. Mrs Cree, Laxton, informs me that she also stayed at Mrs Bradley's and I hope he will be very*

comfortable there. I will pay for the lodging direct from the Thoresby Estate Office and I gave your brother money yesterday for railway expenses and something towards the cost of his board.'

Unlike the present day, when even family and close friends are not told the most basic information about a patient because of confidentiality, Mr Argles asked Mrs Cree to let Lacey know the arrangements:

'Will you kindly tell Lacey … to go to Askern on Friday next, and I have obtained suitable rooms for him at Mrs Bradley's, Matlock House, High St., Askern.'

Finally Mr Argles wrote to The Secretary, Askern Bath Charity, High Street, Askern confirming the arrangements:

'Mr W Lacey, Laxton, Newark, who is being sent by Lord Manvers for treatment, will … bring with him the three tickets you kindly sent me a short time ago, and for which I enclose the sum of 20/-.'

This was not the only occasion when money was offered to help. In 1914 Mr Clipson Jnr. at Kneesall was sent £5 to help with labour costs. This was at the direct request of Lord Manvers who recognised that his father's illness was such a serious expense.

The Estate was also supporting Walter Moody at this time by arranging for him to be seen at hospital in Nottingham. Mr Argles did all he could for another family facing difficulties of a different nature. 24 year old 482309 Driver T Wardle wrote an undated letter from 'C' Coy 'A' Signal Depot, Rye Close House, Bedford at his wife's suggestion asking Mr Argles for a job on the Estate. He had married Mary, second

daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Walker who lived in the house now known as West Lea on 2nd October 1918. The couple were living with the bride's family and wanted to make their permanent home in the village. The young soldier was anxious to leave the Army and was prepared to take any kind of work, stating that he was slightly familiar with farm work and typing but would do anything, including labouring, to start with.

He subsequently found work with the railways at Tuxford and applied for the tenancy of the cottage in Laxton formerly occupied by old Mr Rose, possibly one near Top Farm. Despite Mr Argles remarking that he had *'no claim on Lord Manvers'* and that the *'Railway Company should provide cottages for these men'* he was successful. His tenancy began on 5th May 1919. Frank Sampson was asked to clear any property of Rose's in readiness and hand over the key.

Unfortunately Mary Wardle was seriously ill with TB, which had become a notifiable disease in 1906. This was a matter of concern to the Estate as well as to her family. Tuberculosis was a disease to be feared and therapies in this period sound to modern ears more likely to kill than cure. What was recommended for her treatment was revealed in a letter from Mr Argles on 27th May 1919 addressed to Dr P B Whitington of Tuxford:

> *'… Mrs Walker told me her daughter … has been ordered to live almost entirely out of doors. I feel that it is hardly right to let the house to such a delicate woman. Perhaps you will let me know what you advise. I should like to oblige them if I can, and am prepared to carry out a few small repairs, but it is impossible to make the cottage a good one, and I have nothing else to offer them. ...'*

On 12th June that year Mr Argles also consulted Revd. Tunbridge, who had succeeded Revd. Collinson as vicar at Laxton:

'The case of Mrs Wardle, Mrs Walker's daughter, seems a very sad one, and I understand she ought to go to a sanatorium for open air treatment. I mentioned the matter to Lord Manvers this morning, and have written to see whether she can be received into the County Sanatorium near Mansfield. Have you any other suggestion to make for her benefit? The small cottage which they have begged me to let them is not ideal, but they seem to think they will be quite comfortable there.'

By June 14th the couple had asked to give up the cottage. Another letter to Revd. Tunbridge that day revealed Mr Argles trying his hardest to do what he could for them. Fresh air was thought to be the best treatment for the disease, although Argles' next suggestion would seem at best bizarre in the 21st century. He commented:

'I am sorry to say that there is no tent at Thoresby. What Mrs Wardle really wants, I suppose, is a wooden shelter which can be turned round easily, but I regret that to say that there is nothing suitable here.'

Mr Argles wrote to Mrs Walker about treatment for her daughter:

'Lord Manvers instructed me to make some enquiries and I find that your daughter could probably go into the Ransom Sanatorium, which has now been acquired by Notts. County Council. If you will kindly send me your daughter's full name and age, and state whether she is insured or non-insured

Pictured

Boy with TB in a Bath Chair Outside a Wooden Shed with a Bed Inside
© Wellcome Images
L0038310

under the National Health Insurance Act, I will then send these particulars to the County Council, and one of their Health Visitors will call and see her.'

Did he address the correspondence to her mother because at 20 years of age Mary was still legally a minor? In the 21st century the patient would expect to be to be consulted herself, and if she was in no position to speak for herself it would seem appropriate to consult her husband. Experience of *'patient confidentiality'* suggests that today a mother would have difficulty finding out anything rather than finding herself the first to be consulted.

Mr Argles' enquiries revealed that a visit from the Tuberculosis Officer was required to confirm the possibility of admission to the sanatorium. Despite acknowledging that they wanted to give up the cottage, Mr Argles still wondered if the repairs planned for the couple should be carried out. There was the added complication that Mr Wardle had already planted the garden. It seems equally strange, if not more so, that this correspondence was also addressed to Mrs Walker, the tenant's mother in law. Mrs Walker was assured that *'… if anyone else takes over the cottage and garden, he would, of course, be paid for all garden produce and labour'.*

Then, as now, there was a wait for the admission date to be announced. Mary Wardle's turn came on

2nd August 1919. Very sadly the next communication with Revd. Tunbridge revealed that Mary died in January 1920. Mr Argles wrote again to her mother a few days later, concerned that infection may remain in the house:

"I was extremely sorry to hear of the death of your daughter, Mrs Wardle, last Saturday, and I write to suggest that whenever you consider it convenient, your cottage should now be cleaned through and redecorated by Mr Kimber. On hearing from you when you would like the work to start, I could arrange this. As your daughter has been so seriously ill here for some considerable time, I think you will approve of this proposal.'

Wishing to ensure that the property is disinfected satisfactorily, Mr Argles wrote to the Medical Officer of Health for advice:

'At this cottage, the property of Lord Manvers, Mrs Wardle died a week ago. She underwent Sanatorium Treatment during the last summer, and no doubt you will think it advisable that the cottage should be thoroughly stoved and cleaned through. Kindly let me hear from you the very best method of doing this, in your opinion, and I will endeavour to have the work put in hand as soon as possible. Do you wish this cottage to be stoved before the decorators begin work, and again after they have stripped off all the paper? I propose to have the cottage papered and walls distempered throughout.'

He arranged to get Mr Kimber's men to follow the advice he received. The work was expected to take a fortnight to three weeks and Mrs Walker was

asked when it would be convenient to begin. This was potentially a little premature as in March Dr Whitington declared the infection period would be over in three weeks and it would then be safe for the workmen to come in.

Mr Wardle remained living with his in-laws and they still had the use of the old cottage where Mr Argles suggested that he and one of his brothers in law should sleep in the summer months.

ARTHUR GRUNDY SERVED AS A SPECIAL CONSTABLE AND ERNEST JONES, UPON HIS RETURN FROM THE WAR, ALSO SERVED AND EARNED TWO LONG SERVICE AWARDS

CHANGE AND KEEPING ORDER IN THE VILLAGE AT THE TIME

Arthur Grundy served as a Special Constable for the duration of the war and Ernest Jones, upon his return from the war, also served and earned two long service awards.

Mr Argles had left to join the war effort and Alfred Spink ran the Thoresby Estate Office in his absence. Mr Spink shed light on the situation once the war had begun when he replied to an enquiry from A B Elliott Esq. from the Worksop Petty Sessional Division, Emergency Division based at the Newcastle Estate Office in Worksop:

'I hardly feel in a position to reply to the enquiries sent out by Nottingham. I am pretty certain that nothing at all has been done in this Division since the Emergency Committee was appointed in November,

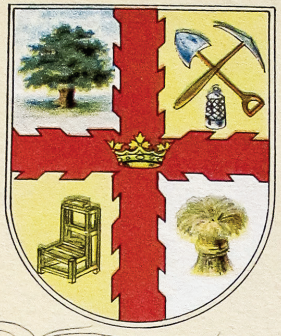
1917, and should the necessity arise now, everything would not be in working order I am confident.

A good many men appointed as Specials have joined up, and I have spoken to one or two men who are left, and they do not appear to know what their duties are, beyond taking instructions from the police. I certainly think someone should be appointed immediately in Mr Argles' place, and if either Mr Naish or Mr Dixon of Edwinstowe would agree to act a suitable successor would be found. I send you … for reference, a letter Mr Argles wrote to you in February 1916.'

Mr Spink found it difficult to help when asked for information as he and Mr Argles do not appear to have discussed it. He received enquiries from others, also looking for answers regarding what was left of the structure of the service once men had enlisted and gone to war. He received an enquiry from C Wood of Ollerton, to which he could offer very little in reply. It would appear he chose not to, or was unable to, speak to Lord Manvers on the subject despite listing him as a Special Constable.

Most of the questions appear, from the very brief comments recorded, to ask for information about specific posts and their holders. Only the first question received a full answer in a letter dated 10th December 1917 which began:

'Mr Willows handed me the enclosed. I hardly know why. I will take the questions on the paper in rotation. The present Special Constables I believe are: Lord Manvers, The Revd W S Cardew, J C Mellors, J Nuttall, J Thomson, F Taylor, J Tebb, A W Willows, J Haywood.'



Nottingham County Constabulary

FOR KING AND COUNTRY

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Presented to

Arthur Grundy.

By the Police Authority of Nottinghamshire as a token of their thanks and appreciation for the valuable and efficient services rendered by him to the County as a Special Constable during the Great War 1914 to 1919.

Chief Constable.

The reply concluded:

'Probably it might be better for you to call a meeting of everybody concerned in your district. You must, of course, take your instructions from Mr Elliott, and I am not writing in any official capacity, as I do not hold any.'

The force proved its value and in December 1919, after the end of hostilities, W H Tomasson, Chief Constable, sent out a circular letter which was received by Thoresby Estate Office. It explained that the Government had decided to *'reconstitute and strengthen'* the organisation *'as a permanent Police Reserve to assist the Authorities in an emergency'.*

He set out plans to allow those who wished to leave to be disbanded, whilst hoping that the younger, fit men who had served in the forces would respond to inducements to stay. The letter concluded with sincere thanks for, often voluntary, service and indicated that Special Constables are to be thanked.

In October 1919 a memorandum from W H Tomasson, Chief Constable, attached, gave an outline for the new service and mentioned that men who joined then would receive the Special Constabulary Medal after nine years. The medal awarded to Ernest Jones is in the keeping of Brenda Chambers.

Pictured

Opposite: Arthur Grundy's Special Constable Certificate

Above: Ernest Jones' Special Constable Medal and Badge with Long Service Awards

WE ARE USED TO LAXTON BEING IN THE MEDIA TODAY, BUT IT MUST HAVE FELT SIMILAR IN THE MID-1930S

CHANGES IN ROADS AND TRANSPORT

GATES ON THE ESTATE

The gated entrances to Thoresby Park were staffed and on 25th April 1904 Mr Wordsworth wrote to Mr Woombill the staff member at Buck Gates (which now stand beside the A614), Thoresby Park informing him that Lord Manvers had instructed him to ensure Woombill understood that:

> *'… no motors are to be admitted through Thoresby Park on any pretence whatever except those belonging to the Dukes of Portland and Newcastle, Lord Savile, Mr Knowles of Colston Bassett and Mr C Tylden Wright. Numbers will be forwarded shortly to enable these motors to be identified.'*

In June 1908 a request was received asking if a Mr A Baker could cycle through Thoresby Park. He enclosed his card to prove he held a responsible

position while in 1917 a J Gibson of Nottingham and his friend were informed that it would be quite in order for them to walk though Thoresby Park.

Visitors came from a variety of places, some slightly unexpected, such as when on 1st June 1914 Kate M Herring wrote to the Estate from the Head Teachers Conference, Lincoln requesting permission to visit Thoresby. At pains to stress the august nature of the delegates, she described them as:

'… the leading head teachers, both primary and secondary, … from all parts of England, from Newcastle in the N, Bournemouth in the S and Cardiff in the W.'

She thought some of these delegates would like to visit The Dukeries on their free day and similar permission had been sought to visit Clumber and Welbeck. A telegram form was enclosed for the reply. A further telegram confirmed 25 teachers would arrive as agreed.

More locally, in September 1919 Allison Clark of Clarks Motors, Retford wrote to Mr Argles:

'We are giving the inmates of the Retford Workhouse a trip round the Dukeries by Motor Char-a-banc … and should be grateful if you could give permission to run the old people through the Buck Gates, pass the house and out into Clumber.'

The entrances to Laxton were also marked by gates. Queenie Sampson depicted the gate at the point where Toad Lane joins High Street in her embroidery. Edith Hickson speaks about Bar Farm having the five barred bar-gate attached to the posts by the croft. This stood on the corner of what she knew

Pictured

Toad Lane Gate

as Shadow Lane and cut off access to Egmanton at night. That gate, she recalled, was disused but others were still in use.

We are used to Laxton being in the media today, but it must have felt similar in the mid-1930s. A film about Laxton made in 1935 draws attention to the gate at the end of the Common by Westwood Farm. The new phenomenon of motorists had an *'unfortunate habit of leaving the gates open'*. Edith Hickson described how they unhinged them and threw them aside with total disregard for the animals. The poor Pinder *'had enough of a spare time job without a constant stream of beasts [cattle] from the Common'* as the film commentary says.

Richard Clark, speaking in a broadcast on the radio by the BBC on 16th November 1936 in a programme entitled *'Manor to Mine',* recalled:

'… years ago you couldn't come into Laxton without opening a gate. I can remember as many as eleven gates on four roads. The sheep used to be very fond of lying on the roads at night. I know a man who ran into one on a bicycle and broke his arm! So when motor traffic came, it got too dangerous, so we had to fence off the roads from the open fields.'

So the gates were done away with in the name of progress. Sheep and cattle could no longer graze freely on the Common.

OUT AND ABOUT

In the days before the car and on sometimes what were poorly maintained roads the journey from the village to the market towns of Retford and Newark could take two or three hours. Even shopping in Tuxford required some planning and those without a horse or a pony and trap may well have had to walk unless a passing cart was prepared to pick them up.

There were a variety of horse drawn vehicles which used the village roads. Most of the farmers had pony carts and floats, the little gigs could have either two or four wheels. Much larger carts, pulled by working horses, were used for haulage. At the turn of the century and certainly until after the First World War, the aristocracy would arrive in the village in fine carriages with coachmen and grooms.

Edith Hickson remembers seeing members of the Manvers Family at the hunt meet on Cross Hill:

"Lady Mary and her sister would descend from their carriage, groom at hand to help them reach the ground."

Pictured:

Lady Manvers' coach and coachman at the planting of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee tree on the green

According to the 1901 census living in Laxton at the time and working on the farms were six carters and three waggoners. There was also a carrier, John Henry Newbert, who would transport the villagers to nearby towns. The Duckmanton brothers, John and William, were both wheelwrights, though they worked separately as mentioned in *"Laxton Stories Volume 1 – Village Folk"*. John had married and left home, whilst William lived with his mother, Mary.

Travelling by horse drawn vehicle could occasionally be hazardous. In 1901 Mr. and Mrs. John Cook were at Carburton, returning in their trap from Worksop market. It was pouring with rain and a man, who had been sheltering under the hedge, suddenly stood up and raised his umbrella which scared their horse. The horse shied and jumped the hedge which was on an embankment on the opposite side of the road and took the cart with him.

The drop into the field below was about six feet. Mr. and Mrs. Cook were thrown out of the cart and the cart seat fell across Mrs. Cook and broke two of her ribs. When help finally arrived Mrs Cook was taken to Dr. Wright at Ollerton.

Mrs Cook seems to have been particularly unfortunate as in 1910 she fell whilst getting into a cart at Tuxford, her foot slipped off the step. On that occasion she broke her arm. Fortunately this was near the house of a Laxton doctor, Dr. Whitington, and he attended to her.

MR. AND MRS. COOK WERE THROWN OUT OF THE CART AND THE CART SEAT FELL ACROSS MRS. COOK AND BROKE TWO OF HER RIBS

In 1900 William Little of Winkburn was driving a cart to Retford market with George Cocking of Laxton, when a dog rushed at the horse's legs which caused the horse to bolt. Both men were thrown out of the cart onto the carriage way. Mr. Cocking received chest injuries but was able to go home. Mr Little, however, received head injuries and was immediately sent to Retford Cottage Hospital where he died later that evening.

In 1907 John Rose, a farmer, had one of the wheels of his cart go over him when his horse shied. Dr Bruce Whitington found that he had dislocated his shoulder.

In the same year William Scrimshawe from Edwinstowe was actually killed in the street outside the Dovecote Inn. The wheel of his cart went over his head as he lay in the road after being thrown from the cart when his horse's belly band broke.

Mr Ball, who brought his swing boats to Laxton for Feast Week in 1913, was run over by one of his

own horses and caravans. Dr Whitington thought the accident was serious but the showman's family removed him from Laxton the very next day.

In 1915 Mr. W. Knight, butcher at Muskham, was going his rounds at Laxton when the horse slipped its bridle and galloped up the village. Fortunately it turned into the vicarage drive where the wheel of the trap got entangled in the thick shrubs. On that occasion no one was hurt; the children had left the school for dinner and there was no one in the road.

Frank Willis, the schoolmaster, was not so fortunate in 1912 when he had a bad fall from Rev. Collinson's trap which resulted in him having concussion and breaking his collar bone. Mary Moody had to help out in school until he was well enough to return to his duties.

Travelling to market was perhaps as far as some villagers went in those days, the farmers to the cattle market and their wives to the butter market.

TRAVELLING TO MARKET WAS PERHAPS AS FAR AS SOME VILLAGERS WENT IN THOSE DAYS

The women of the village went to market each week to sell their eggs and butter which they carried in large, flat baskets. They rented a place on a bench behind a trestle table in the butter markets of the towns, either Newark on Wednesday or Retford on Saturday. Laxton women tended to favour Retford, whilst the farmers' wives from Moorhouse went to Newark, through Ossington and down the Old Great North Road. Tuxford cattle market was held on Mondays but the butter market had ceased to exist by 1900, though occasionally a farmer's wife with eggs to spare would accompany her husband to the cattle market and try to sell them in Tuxford.

The women sat in the same place each week.

Pictured:

Cart horse in shafts.

Sometimes their mothers and grandmothers had rented that exact spot before them and the customers knew where each farmer's wife would be and what the quality that farm's produce would be.

The women waited for their regular customers and any others who came along and wanted to try their home made butter, jam or pickles. They would sometimes sell a pre-ordered chicken to a regular customer. Occasionally they would have a small trug of mushrooms or a bunch of flowers to sell, gathered from the fields around the farm. At Christmas they sold pre-ordered turkeys – that is if they had managed to rear any that year.

The money taken at the market was then used in the town shops or the market place to buy essentials for the family and very occasionally luxuries which were not available in the Laxton village shops.

The Laxton women usually travelled to market by carrier to Retford Town Hall where the butter market was held. A small working horse, a cross between a

Shire and a pony, called a half-legged horse, pulled the covered cart. These horses were very strong and cheaper to feed than Shires. The horse walked at its own pace along the narrow lanes, whilst the women sat on benches at either side of the cart gossiping and talking. Edith Hickson in her memoirs, *'Life at Laxton',* names Sam Whitworth, farmer and part time coachman to Rev. Martin, as the carrier in the village.

If there were beasts or sheep to be taken to market frequently the children were used to drive them to the nearest railway station. On September 24th 1900, in the school log book Frank Willis records that a girl was absent helping a farmer to drive sheep to Tuxford, since it was a Monday it is safe to assume that she was taking them to Tuxford Cattle Market.

THE RAILWAYS

The nearest railway stations were at Tuxford, which was actually served by three stations, Tuxford North, the Dukeries Junction and Tuxford Central. Tuxford Central served the local line between Newark and Retford, so it would have been possible, but expensive, on market days to travel by train between Tuxford and Retford. It also ran between Sheffield and Lincoln, a very great distance in those days. Tuxford North served the line between Kings Cross and Doncaster.

Laxton villagers out for an adventure, or seeking work, could travel the length and breadth of the country by rail, provided they had the money and were prepared to change trains and lines.

The annual choir outing was always taken by train from Tuxford Station, the villagers travelled as far as Skegness or Cleethorpes. These were joyful occasions. In 1913 they went to Skegness, leaving at 6am and returning at 10.30pm. For most of the

Pictured:

Steam Train c.1900 courtesy of Alan Burkwood

villagers this was as far as they ever travelled from home and the journey on the train would have been a great adventure. The noise of the steam train on the rails, the train's whistle, and the motion of the carriages would all add to the excitement of the day out away from the village.

The trains also delivered goods to Tuxford and the carters brought them from the station to the village. Sheep and cattle were moved by train, though Edith Hickson could also remember drovers driving large herds down the Old Great North Road.

However people, animals or goods travelled at that time one thing is for certain journeys took much longer and were limited by the transport available. The days of travelling by horse drawn vehicles were however coming to an end.

Henry Ford had already begun to mass produce motor vehicles making them practical and affordable. After the First World War more and more cars were seen on the roads of Britain and Ford even began to manufacture tractors in Ireland in 1919.

The age of the internal combustion engine had well and truly begun by 1920, though it would be somewhat slower in arriving at Laxton.

The railways were of great assistance in bringing supplies for the Estate. Laxton farmers were often asked to go to Tuxford to collect basic slag, pipes and other materials. There was a station at Boughton and supplies for Westwood Farm were directed there.

Passenger rail travel was also important, but timetables were still developing in response to need. Mr Wordsworth heard from the Great Central Railway in August 1909 declaring an intention to stop running a service from Heath to Ollerton in connection with the 12.15 train from Marylebone as it carried few, and on occasions no, passengers.

Four days later, presumably replying to a less than favourable response from Thoresby, the decision was rescinded with a hope that the usage would increase and a request to make the service known to friends travelling to and from Nottingham, Leicester and London.

SHEEP AND CATTLE WERE MOVED BY TRAIN, THOUGH EDITH HICKSON COULD ALSO REMEMBER DROVERS DRIVING LARGE HERDS DOWN THE OLD GREAT NORTH ROAD

FOR THOSE LOOKING FOR A FARM OR HOUSE IN LAXTON, THE PROCESS DEPENDED LESS ON POLITICS BUT, IT APPEARED POLITIC TO KEEP AN EAR TO THE GROUND OR TO DELEGATE A FRIEND OR RELATIVE HERE TO DO IT FOR YOU

POLITICS

HOW THE POLITICS OF THE RULING CLASSES AFFECTED THE VILLAGE

The politics of the ruling classes reached into many areas of life, including housing. Mr Lockwood, a partner in a firm of auctioneers in Sheffield and an applicant for Edwinstowe House, felt compelled to admit to not being conservative in his politics and asked if this would be an *'effective bar'* to him becoming a tenant. More sure of his ground, Col C D Learoyd wrote for the same property, stating that he was soon retiring from the Army, was *'a conservative and a hunting man'.*

For those looking for a farm or house in Laxton, the process depended less on politics but, it appeared politic to keep an ear to the ground or to delegate a friend or relative here to do it for you. You could then apply for a property the minute it seemed to be coming available.

Throughout this study such letters appear, often several seeking one tenancy, each stating their claim. The death of a tenant was often the trigger for

such applications and occasionally an application would be submitted just in case a property should be vacated. Mr Wordsworth frequently described a vacant property as *'at liberty'*. F Walton wrote to Mr Argles after his father, Mr W Moody of Laxton, had asked about a house on his behalf. The one available was too small so, as he wanted to keep a couple of cows, he asked if he could be given the offer of it if Mr Cree's house became available in the future.

Even more direct was the request made by William Merrills in March 1907:

'Dear Sir, Mr J Bennett is dead and will not need his cottage. Could you let me it to put a labourer in, as I want one regularly.'

WARTIME POLITICS AND THORESBY

The advent of war brought change to Thoresby as much as anywhere else, and in some ways more. On 1st March 1915 Mr Argles apologised for a delay in getting a delivery to Revd. Collinson explaining that *'all the men have been rather busy preparing for 60 soldiers and horses at Whitemoor'* [The late Mr Wordsworth's former home].

Having so many men, not under the Land Agents' direct control appeared to create uncomfortable situations and all concerned had to come to terms with what was appropriate in these situations. A fortnight later Mr Argles wrote to F W Colley Esq., South Notts Hussars, Whitemoor House, Ollerton, who appeared to have been in charge of the recently arrived soldiers:

'I hope you will excuse me for troubling you, but as I am responsible for the management of the Pavilion in

Thoresby Park, in which are Belgian soldiers, I shall be much obliged if you will kindly notify the troopers that the building is strictly private, and no one is allowed there without special permission. My reason for asking this is that on Sunday evening (it is reported to me) four men belonging to your troop walked straight in, without knocking, whilst the Belgians were at supper, and without any authority whatsoever for doing so.'

THE WORKLOAD INCREASED TO DEAL WITH THE ADDITIONAL CORRESPONDENCE AND ADMINISTRATION OF MILITARY MATTERS

There is no doubt that the workload increased to deal with the additional correspondence and administration of military matters. Estate workers and their families sought the assistance of the Agents in dealing with their own situations. A case unrelated to Laxton was an example. Mr Spink wrote to the Recruiting Office at Retford on behalf of William Cobb, who had been told to join the colours on 8th April. The purpose of Mr Spink's letter was to point out that:

'Cobb is practically blind, and if he has to appear at Retford it would be necessary for him to be escorted there.'

We can only hope Spink's suggestion of a doctor's letter to this effect ended the matter.

As the war progressed, the lack of men at home for specific tasks became problematic and occasionally the Agents wrote asking for their release. In April 1917 Mr Spink wrote to the Hon Secretary of English Forestry Association in Slough, Bucks asking for a man required for timber hauling work to be released from military duties or alternatively that another man whose exemption was about to expire might be allowed to remain. He explained that Lord Manvers sold a considerable amount of timber for pit props and with a small staff it was hard to get the work done.

AS THE WAR PROGRESSED, THE LACK OF MEN AT HOME FOR SPECIFIC TASKS BECAME PROBLEMATIC AND OCCASIONALLY THE AGENTS WROTE ASKING FOR THEIR RELEASE

Mr Argles returned soon after the war had ended. Things began to return to normal and he was keen to get soldiers from the Estate demobilised. He wrote asking for one, who was on leave, to be allowed to remain and also to speed up the demobilisation of a Pte. Wentworth who was urgently required to look after agricultural horses.

Probably thinking Mr Argles' intervention might be more successful than a letter from herself, Mrs C A Bartle wrote from Kneesall about the release of her husband, Sgt H Bartle, (4th Platoon, 2nd Sherwood Foresters, France) on the basis that even if he was not required at Thoresby, he had joined up in August 1914 when Mr Argles asked for volunteers and had three children.

A more detailed correspondence relating to a tenant family who left Laxton in 1902 indicated the difficulty for families with farms to work under the watchful eye of the War Agricultural Committee when key members were away fighting, and they were short of labour.

On 2nd September 1916 Mr Argles wrote to Mrs Weatherall at Scarthingmoor Farm, which was within the Thoresby Estate:

'I have your letter of yesterday's date , and trust that you will be able to get your son back to work the farm for you during the coming winter. I note your son will go before the Nottingham Tribunal, and Lord Manvers will give the matter special attention.'

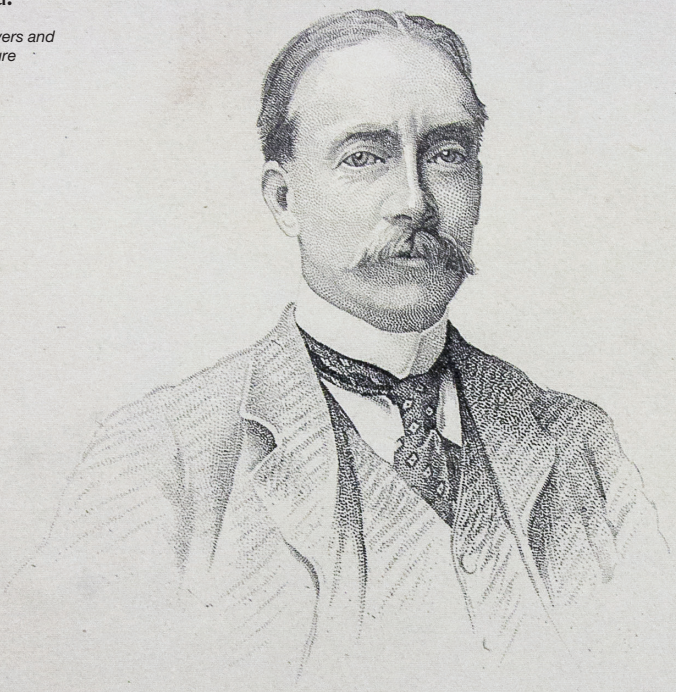
On 11th September 1916 a letter personally signed by Lord Manvers was sent to The Secretary, The Labour Exchange, Newark:

'My agent, Mr Argles, wrote on Friday last asking you to send to Mrs Weatherall, Scarthingmoor Farm, Weston, the usual forms for obtaining release of her son from military duties for a few months, owing to shortage of labour. I shall be much obliged if you will give this matter special attention and call to your attention the following facts which show that it is an urgent case, and unless the son returns, I fear that Mrs Weatherall will be unable to carry on the farm.

The size of the farm is 245 acres, half arable and half grass and six horses are kept to work the land. During the winter the following labour only is available to work the land. One son (15 years old) who will work one pair of horses and one labourer (named Coe) who will work another pair. This man is 56 years old.

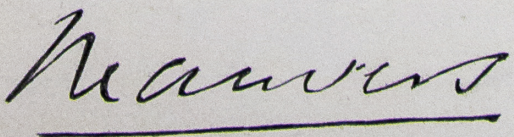
Pictured:

Lord Manvers and his signature



Window & Grove photo

W. Allingham sc.



L.Cpl. William Weatherall, 3/1st Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry. Aldershot, is, therefore urgently needed to supervise the whole working of the farm, and feed and attend to all cattle and work the third pair of horses whenever possible. The farm Foreman, R. Bush, has been ill for many weeks and the doctor certifies him to be quite unfit for work until January 1st next, owing, I understand, to heart trouble.

P.S. Unless the son returns the management of this farm is left to a boy of only 15 years of age.'

The letter was acknowledged but does not appear to have succeeded as over a year later Mrs Weatherall was still at the farm and on 1st January 1918 Mr Spink wrote to her again saying he would see what could be done to get her son released. He added: *'but when once in the Army it is a very difficult matter to do anything in that direction'*. He suggested it might be possible for her to get a ploughman.

The next day Lord Manvers intervened in writing for a second time to the Notts War Agricultural Committee re 269346 Pt W Weatherall. He enclosed Mrs Weatherall's letter and said:

' … you can see from what she says that it must be impossible for her to continue unless she has immediate help of the right sort, especially in the face of having grassland to plough up. I shall be very much obliged if you can assist me to get this man released, and give the matter special attention. He is at present in a Convalescent Camp at Ripon.'

Mr Spink followed up the Ploughing Up instruction on 7th January with J Gibbon, Swinderby, Lincoln regarding 2 fields of her grassland. He noted that:

'Lord Manvers has no objection to this being done, but … it is impossible for her to get her arable land ploughed without help, and Lord Manvers is trying to get her son released, and until some help is forthcoming I hope the matter will not be pressed.'

The next day the Nottinghamshire War Agricultural Committee told Mr Spink that Pte. Weatherall had suffered some disability from military service. He was being recategorised and would be transferred to the Labour Company if suitable. By 19th January 1918 and accepting help was urgently needed, Alfred Spink repeated the offer of a ploughman. As no ploughman appeared, he was forced to chase this up and one finally arrived. There is no indication that Mrs Weatherall's son returned before the end of hostilities.

IT IS CLEAR THAT ARGLES TRAVELLED BETWEEN HIS MILITARY DUTIES AND THE ESTATE, RESUMING THE ROLE OF AGENT WHEN HE WAS HOME

MR ARGLES' SERVICE

Mr Argles joined the Army, leaving on the evening of 9th February 1916 to join his Regiment in Norfolk. It is clear that he travelled between his military duties and the Estate, resuming the role of Agent when he was home. He would tell people he was dealing with to *'direct further correspondence to Mr Spink as I return to my regiment tomorrow'.* He may even have been able to keep his finger on the Estate's pulse while he was absent as in one letter he said: *'If you write to Mr Spink on any matter of business it will have immediate attention'.*

Mr Argles spent the summer of 1917 in Norfolk with his Regiment, returning for three weeks in mid-July. He was dealing with an order for basic slag for Sidney Johnson at Knapeney Farm the day before he was due to return to France, once again leaving Mr Spink in temporary charge. He was there in September 1918 and finally returned, after the signing of the Armistice. It seemed to be business as usual when he was home. Was a change as good as a rest, or did he not get a break at all during the war years?

MILITARY LABOUR

MR ARGLES SPENT THE SUMMER OF 1917 IN NORFOLK WITH HIS REGIMENT, RETURNING FOR THREE WEEKS IN MID-JULY

The Army designated some experienced agricultural workers to be called upon to assist farmers whose workforce had been depleted when they most needed them. In August 1915 Mr Richardson of Hill Farm, Egmanton needed help in his harvest fields and was advised that there was a Division encamped in the neighbourhood *'to send out to farmers certain selected soldiers who are accustomed to all kinds of agricultural work'*. These men would stay on the farms for a month and Mr Argles offered to apply for one for him if he was prepared to pay the man up to 35/- a week, with the usual deduction for board and lodging, which had to be provided at his farm house.

That October 60 farmers received a copy of a notice from the Estate that the Military Authorities planned to send soldiers out to help with the autumn ploughing, wheat sowing etc. where they were needed.

By February 1916 Mr Spink had taken over as acting Agent while Mr Argles was with the Army. Soldiers had camped in Thoresby Park In 1915, but this year Lord Manvers had asked that, without Argles to organise it and being so shorthanded on the Estate, his Park should not be used for Military Camping purposes that year. A bone of contention from the previous year was the question of the roads, damaged by the troops during the last camp. His Lordship felt that the roads should be made good and allowed to consolidate before any heavy traffic used them again. There is nothing to indicate that troops came that year, but they were back in 1917 when Mr Spink commented in May that: *'We are quite Military here. About 5,000 in the Park near White Lodge'.*

THE ESTATE SOLD MOST OF ITS TIMBER TO THE GOVERNMENT DURING THE WAR, WHEN IT WAS IN GREAT DEMAND

The Estate sold most of its timber to the Government during the war, when it was in great demand. The associated labour requirements generated much correspondence, although Mr Argles made it clear that His Lordship *'could not consider the employment of German prisoners'*. He requested a dozen soldiers for about six weeks to help plant young trees.

He filled in Form FP 71 and returned it with a covering note asking that if possible they should be gardeners, woodmen accustomed to planting trees or used to any kind of farm work. Mr Spink, in charge again, followed up to check the men would be available when expected. They arrived and were set to work before a request was submitted to *'retain them for two or three months if they can be spared'.*

By the following year the use of soldiers for such work was less forthcoming and a similar request was met with a suggestion that Land Army Women would be more appropriate for this work and the Women's Department of the Board of Agriculture had been asked to communicate with Lord Manvers on the subject.

PLOUGHING UP

It is well remembered that the Government recognised the need to maximise home food production as the war took hold. Local War Agricultural Committees were formed and ensured farmers farmed efficiently and grew as much as they could. Even Laxton farmers were not exempt from their watchful eye and Mr Argles was eventually forced to end Samuel Lacey's tenancy of Primrose Farm because of his poor practice as Mary Haigh described in *'Open Field Farming in Laxton'*.

MR SPINK DISCUSSED DEMANDS FOR VARIOUS FARMERS ON THE ESTATE TO PLOUGH UP GRASSLAND TO INCREASE THE ACREAGE OF FOOD CROPS

Mr Spink discussed demands for various farmers on the Estate to plough up grassland to increase the acreage of food crops. While assuring the Committee of the tenants' willingness to do all they could, he pointed out that with labour shortages, they had more arable land than they could cultivate already. This was worst on the *'isolated farms'* such as Copthorne and Brockilow, where labour was most difficult to retain.

He pressed his case saying:

'Anyone who knows Laxton is aware that suitable tenants for the farms there are not easy to find. Under the circumstances it might be wise not to press for the fields in question to be ploughed up.'

He asked the Committee to consider meeting the tenants with Mr Argles before a final decision was made. Mr Argles returned on a few days' leave from France and was able to meet the tenants. They went over the scheduled land before Argles put the case against ploughing up to the District Committee, who agreed in the case of the land held by Peatfield (Ide Farm), Quibell (Copthorne) and Taylor (Brockilow).

THE SCHEDULES WERE NOT ALWAYS CLEAR OR CORRECT AND SIGNIFICANT WORK WAS GENERATED ENSURING THE FIELDS TO BE PLOUGHED WERE IDENTIFIED CORRECTLY

In early 1918 further schedules for ploughing up were issued but before they were acted upon Lord Manvers met the Committee and they were put on hold. A circular letter was sent to W Bennett, T Bailey, C Gilbert, G Newboult, G Cocking, SW Johnson, S Peatfield, J Cook, J Laughton, W Quibell, W Foster, S Laughton, F Sampson, S Sampson, W Sampson, J Taylor, G Wardell, R Clark, J Merrills, T Marrison, F Merrills, W Moody, J W Price, WH Rayner, and W Newboult stating that no grassland at Laxton was to be ploughed up until further instructions were issued.

The schedules were not always clear or correct and significant work was generated ensuring the fields to be ploughed were identified correctly and that instructions were sent to the right farmer. Then as now Laxton's strips seemed to confuse officialdom! Once again, the final decisions awaited Mr Argles' return.

Discussions on which grass fields were to be ploughed continued through 1918 and into early 1919 with lack of fencing to enclose the resulting arable land now given as another reason not to plough. When the orders were cancelled after war ended, it was no doubt much to the relief of the farmers, some of whom were becoming short of pasture.

DISCUSSIONS ON WHICH GRASS FIELDS WERE TO BE PLOUGHED CONTINUED THROUGH 1918 AND INTO EARLY 1919 WITH LACK OF FENCING TO ENCLOSE THE RESULTING ARABLE LAND NOW GIVEN AS ANOTHER REASON NOT TO PLOUGH

IN THE PRECEDING 50 YEARS UNDERSTANDING HAD GROWN THAT WITH STRONG LEGS AND FEET, DEEP SHOULDERS AND POWERFUL HIND QUARTERS, A HORSE WAS MOST EFFECTIVE PULLING A PLOUGH

FARM ANIMALS AND WILDLIFE

STALLIONS

With farm implements being horse drawn farmers had to ensure they always had an animal fit to work their land. In Laxton farmers would breed their own heavy horses where possible.

This was a question of whether you had access to a stallion, had a suitable mare and could afford the land and fodder to keep a young horse until it was mature enough to be put to the plough. They bought unknown animals at their peril as investing in a horse which subsequently proved to be lame or not up to the work could be disastrous.

More enlightened owners in the countryside who could afford to do so began to selectively breed their mares with pedigree stallions. Better quality animals were emerging from the developments which led from the founding of the British Cart Horse Society on 1st April 1878. In the preceding 50 years understanding had grown that with strong legs and feet, deep shoulders and powerful hind quarters, a horse was

Pictured

John Cree with his mare and foal by Forshaws stallion courtesy of Colin Cree

most effective pulling a plough, and all the more so on the heavier clay lands such as at Laxton and the surrounding area.

The Society introduced breed shows which gathered great momentum and became an essential part of both the annual calendar and the marketing process for the services of stallions. James Forshaw had grown up with horses and had both a natural affinity for them and a great ability to remember pedigrees and characteristics. From the age of 8 his father had him working with his own horses and later doing a man's job with the horses morning and night while still at school. He had followed his passion and left home to work in a variety of stables before marrying and moving to a place of their own.

It was then that he was able to invest the *'considerable sum'* they had saved in the first horse he ever owned. Recounting the purchase in his

memoirs, now privately owned and unpublished, he said:

> *'I felt it was the start and before I died my name in connection with horses would be known all over the world, and men should come to me for shire horses from every country. You may smile at this confidence, and say this was a very ambitious speech for a young man to make, but it was what I felt. I am proud and happy to say that every word of it came true.'*

Pictured

Shires today

James Forshaw's horse, Bar None, had been found working on a farm in Doncaster. By chance he was uncastrated and Forshaw, living up to his ambition, brought him on to such a degree that he became Supreme Champion at the annual Show. He had decided *'to get before the public as a horseman, and I thought showing would be the best way to achieve that end'.*

He reaped the benefits of showing to get his name and his horses known with that very first horse and his experience and determination was a keystone in the development of the Shire horse we know today.

Many years of Forshaw and others passing on better physical characteristics resulted in the development of the Shire horse as a distinct breed with its own stud book. James Forshaw was consulted about the proposal to develop the stud book and became pivotal in its success. His excellent memory for anything horse-related and encyclopaedic knowledge of pedigrees enabled him to become the foremost member of the group compiling the register:

Pictured

A Forshaw horse being shown off courtesy of Janet Cooke

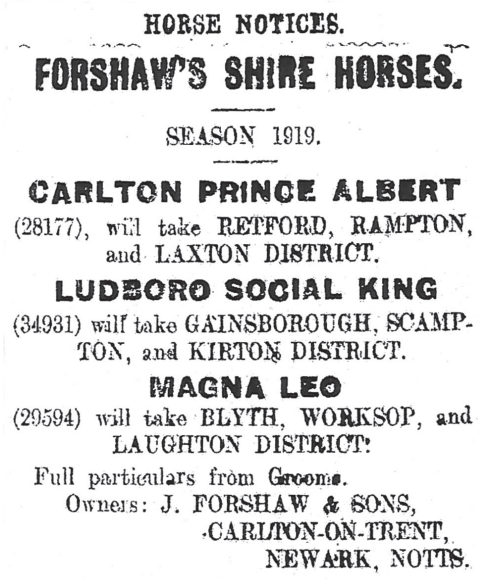
'I travelled all over the country for weeks … hunting up all the information I possibly could. I used to go home and write it all down … many a morning at 2 and 3 o'clock I have found myself at my desk.'

In 1884 the Cart Horse Society was renamed The Shire Horse Society and its Shows in Islington attracted extensive coverage in the press. The Newark Advertiser carried a lengthy report of the 1901 Show, where the success of the Forshaw horses filled numerous column inches and showed the extent of their success. The article details the quality of the breeding and describes one of their winners, nine year old, 17 hands Stroxton Tom as practically in his prime. He won a gold medal for placing reserved in the Championship and the £20 Cup as the best in the senior classes.

'The Four Oaks' by Keith Chivers, recounts the story of the Forshaw family and their leading role in the development of the Shire horse. By the time of our study James Forshaw was a leading hirer of stallions.

By 1887 he had bought suitable land only a few miles from Laxton, near the railway at Carlton-on-Trent. Here he built the first and only purpose-built commercial Shire stallion headquarters.

He thought out every detail of the design and created room for 70 horses, with large, airy loose boxes, yards and long corridors for exercising in poor weather. He also had the foresight to create a couple of boxes, at several fields' distance from the boxes, for use as a horse hospital.



HORSE NOTICES.

FORSHAW'S SHIRE HORSES.

SEASON 1919.

CARLTON PRINCE ALBERT

(28177), will take RETFORD, RAMPTON, and LAXTON DISTRICT.

LUDBORO SOCIAL KING

(34931) will take GAINSBOROUGH, SCAMPTON, and KIRTON DISTRICT.

MAGNA LEO

(29594) will take BLYTH, WORKSOP, and LAUGHTON DISTRICT.

Full particulars from Grooms.

Owners: J. FORSHAW & SONS,
CARLTON-ON-TRENT,
NEWARK, NOTTS.

Pictured

An advertisement for Forshaw's stallions

These could accommodate any horse appearing to be suffering from one of many infectious diseases which could sweep through a stable. He also built a nine bedroomed house, which often rang with the noise of their own large family and many visitors.

The proximity to the railway line was perfect as by now his stallions travelled all over the country in the serving season. Forshaw negotiated a loop of the line into his land to enable a private loading area for his animals to be created. In exchange for allowing GNR to run track over his land, the Forshaw stud obtained the right to ask for any express to be halted at this station. Soon afterwards the Newark Advertiser reported on the Shire Horse Parade at Newark, with a shorter report on one held at Retford.

The article drew attention to the impetus the Forshaw Stud had given to horse breeding in the district. The report makes clear that they sent some of their best animals to the parade, which took place

on Castlegate, Newark. The enthusiastic descriptions of the stallions can only have provided this successful venture with even more kudos and publicity.

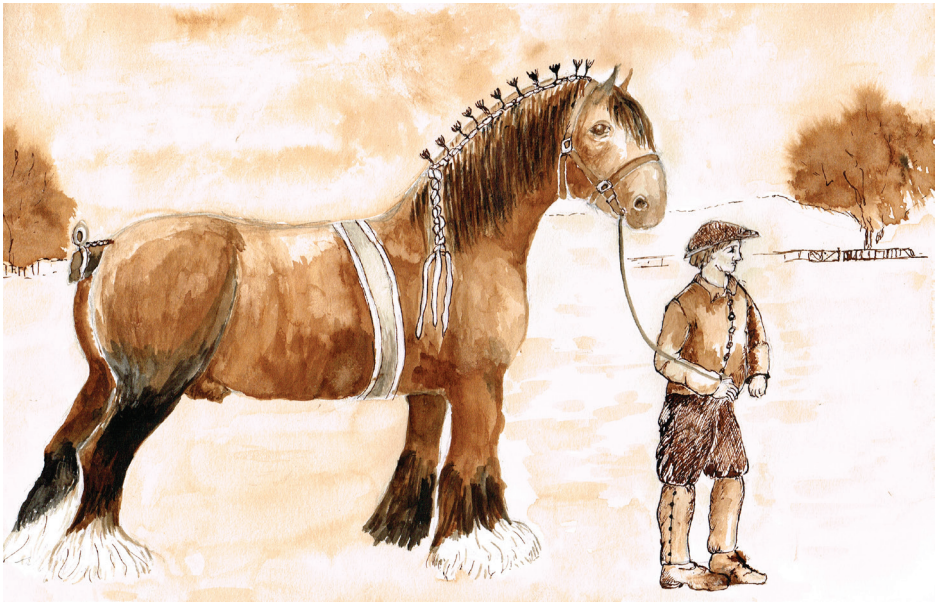
Their stallions were of such value that they travelled with their own groom, referred to throughout his book by Chivers as a *'leader'*. The current Laxton term for this role is *'walker'* and at least two Laxton men are known to have served in this capacity. These men's granddaughters are members of our research team, and although Janet Cooke tells us that her grandfather Mark Bailey used the term *'travelling stallions'* her preferred term *'walker'* will be used here.

It was the walker's responsibility to ensure the stallion was cared for in every respect, turned out to his magnificent best and walked around his route weekly as published. His mane and docked tail would be plaited and bound with ribbons.

It was he who decided if a mare was fit to be tried and served and he also had to ensure the stallion was washed after each service. A picture of Mark Bailey in his overall may suggest that they wore protective clothing over their best outfit while managing services.

Edith Hickson describes how the horse would never be ridden, nor was it allowed to get wet. A waterproof sheet or rug was rolled and strapped to its withers so its coat could be covered if the weather turned.

Harold Bagshaw of Laxton was a stallion walker for Forshaws. In 1923, James Price referred to his employment in that capacity stating that Harold Bagshaw worked for him when he needed him and *'in the 'Shire Horse Season leads a stallion for Forhaws'*. Price declared that as well as being a very good horseman Mr Bagshaw was *'presently killing pigs'*. He was also employed in this capacity by Forshaws and was known in the district as a man who undertook a variety of other jobs including harvesting.



He walked stallions for some sixteen years on routes around Retford, including the Laxton, Egmanton, Tuxford area. It appears that the younger Mark Bailey walked a very similar route some decade later.

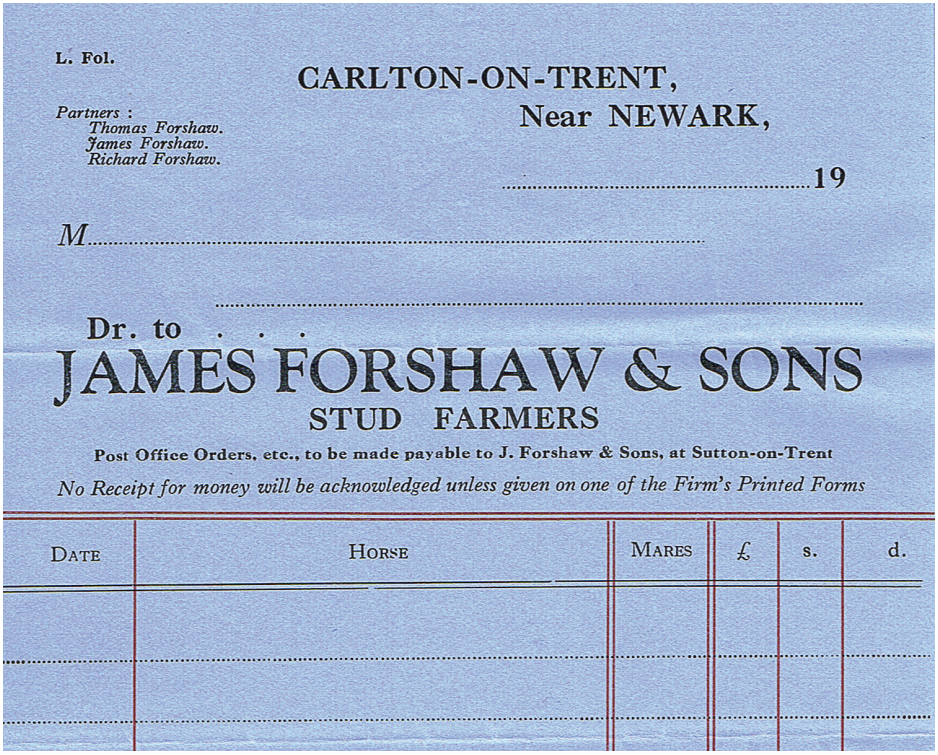
Bagshaw's granddaughter, Brenda Chambers describes him as *'not a big man'* who was proud of his ability to turn a horse out well. One of the horses he led, and which was stabled at weekends with Mr Percy Maddison at Laxton during the 1932 season, was Field Marshal 6th. The horse was six years old at that time, stood 17 hands 2½ inches and commanded a fee of £2.10.0. per mare, with a fee of 3/- payable to Bagshaw at the time of service.

Occasionally Bagshaw was asked to prepare a Forshaws horse to show at a farm sale and this duty included trotting

Pictured

Above: Shire Horse and Walker by Lesley Booth

Below: Harold Bagshaw



L. Fol.

CARLTON-ON-TRENT,
Near NEWARK,

Partners :
Thomas Forshaw.
James Forshaw.
Richard Forshaw.

.....19

M.....

.....

Dr. to . . .

JAMES FORSHAW & SONS

STUD FARMERS

Post Office Orders, etc., to be made payable to J. Forshaw & Sons, at Sutton-on-Trent

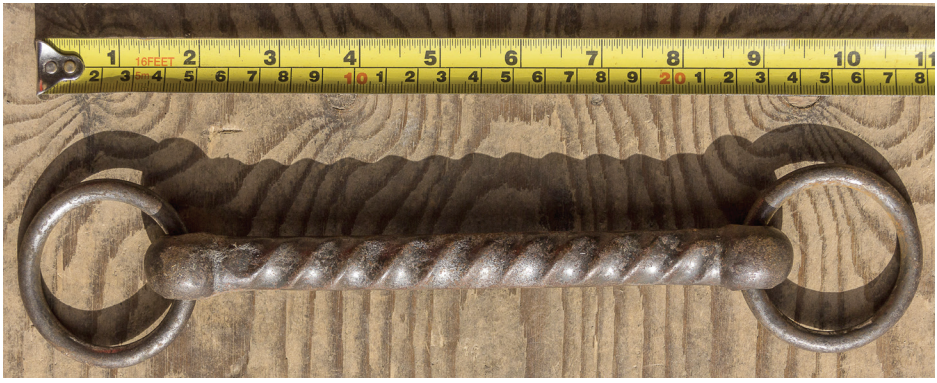
No Receipt for money will be acknowledged unless given on one of the Firm's Printed Forms

DATE	HORSE	MARES	£	s.	d.

Pictured

A Forshaw bill for Stallion Services courtesy of Janet Cooke

the horse up and down to demonstrate how well it moved. He liked to do this as it also showed off his skill in preparing it. Unfortunately it was his undoing at a sale held at Floss House Farm, Cottam on 28th March 1933. He was leading up Field Marshal 6th when a small dog spooked the massive animal, which at 1.79m, (5ft 10½) at the shoulder would have towered above him even when standing level. The horse reared up and lashed out with a hoof which came down on Bagshaw. He was promptly taken to Retford Hospital, arriving at 4pm as recorded in his daughter Lucy's note book. He was too severely injured to survive and his untimely death came the following day at the early age of 41. Harold was buried in Laxton churchyard on 1st April and his gravestone bears the date 29th March 1933.



Pictured

A Forshaw Stallion Bit

Mark Bailey lived at Town End Farm when he was walking stallions. Janet Cooke has memorabilia relating to the practice over a long period of time including a collection of stallion cards, the earliest of which is dated 1875 and the latest 1945. Two of the cards, those for Lincoln Grey Lad's 1943 season and Crossfields Matchless' 1945 season were horses Mark Bailey led. The cards were individual to the horse and carried his photograph. His pedigree was given and the card set out the round the horse would work each week during the thirteen week season, specifying the calls it would make and its overnight stops. The horse and walker would return home briefly at the weekend if he was working locally.

Chivers tells us that:

'…the stallion set out on Monday mornings and walked a more or less circular route of anything up to seventy miles, returning to his headquarters about mid-day on Saturdays. His stopping places were advertised on posters nailed to trees and increasingly on cards handed out at markets or even printed in the local newspapers. This publicity also stated the fee for service and included a highly – coloured eulogy of the horse's talents and pedigree.

ROUTE OF 'LINCOLN GREY LAD'
(as near as possible)

MONDAY. Leave Laxton 8 a.m., Capthorne, Moorhouse, Ladywood, Weston, Skegby, Fledboro', Ragnall, Dunham, Darlton, East Drayton, to Mr. G. Moody's for night.

TUESDAY. Leave 8 a.m., Stokeham, Laneham, Rampton, Woodbeck, Treswell, West Brecks, South Leverton, North Leverton, Fenton, Sturton to Mr. H. Barlow's for night.

WEDNESDAY. Leave 8 a.m., Wheatley, Clayworth Hayton, Clarboro', Hayton Smeath, Bolham, Retford, Lound, Sutton-cum-Lound to Mr. E. W. Kent's for night.

THURSDAY. Leave 8 a.m., Babworth, Ordsall, Eaton, Dog Kennel, Grove, Headon, Upton, Askham, East Markham to Mr. F. Littlewood's for night.

FRIDAY. Leave 8 a.m., Rockley, Gamston, West Drayton, Milton, West Markham, Farley's House, Bevercotes to Mr. Girkin's for night.

SATURDAY. Leave 8 a.m., Walesby, Boughton, Kirton, Laxton, to Mr. Sayer's until Monday morning.

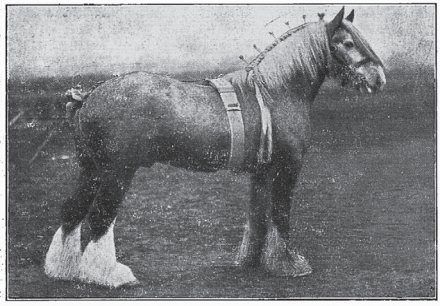
GOOD FRIESIAN BULL CALVES by the famous Bull 'Herrington Ardent' (from great Milking Cows) USUALLY FOR SALE at Farmers' Prices.

JAMES FORSHAW & SONS,
CARLTON-ON-TRENT, Newark

Forshaws' Shire Horses

SEASON 1943

BREEDING TELLS



The Exceptionally well-bred Grey Stallion

'LINCOLN GREY LAD'

42962

This Horse has Government Licence for 1943

Owners—JAS. FORSHAW & SONS,
CARLTON-ON-TRENT, Newark

Telegrams: *Sutton-on-Trent*
Telephone: 203 *Sutton-on-Trent*
Station: *Carlton-on-Trent*

WHARTONS LTD., STUD PRINTERS, RETFORD

Forshaws' Shire Horses

'LINCOLN GREY LAD'

GREY 42962 FOALED 1935

The handsome stallion has the **short back** and **well-made barrel, stallion crest** and the general appearance of a **sire, hard-boned, good feet** and he is **full of muscle.** Whilst he is up to the **latest** in the **popular 'March King'** and **'Lincoln What's Wanted' strains of blood.**

And Blood will tell.
Note this Breeding—
it is popular and exceptional:

Sire, 'Frithville What's Wanted', 40919. He was by *Forshaws'* **'Key Industry'** and he by **'Lincoln What's Wanted'.** London Champion and sire of London Champions, and out of **'Blechford March Blossom'** by the famous **'March King'** where **'Lincoln Grey' gets his colour.**

Dam, 123419 'Swinderby Highland Gem' by **'Belvedere Tut',** 39098, a very handsome horse by **'Horning Mimic'** 34048, the sire of **'Kirkland Mimic',** the noted sire.

g **Dam,** 99939 'Roseville Royal Diamond' by **'Nolands Monarch'** 33417.

g g **Dam,** 95286 'Roseville Mettle' by **'Barn Forester'** 27006, by **'Lockinge Forest King'.** etc.

'Lincoln Grey Lad' has **followed** the **famous 'March King'** in **build** and **colour** and having as he has also the strains of **'Lockinge Forest King'** and **'Horning Mimic'** he does leave **good stock,** which he has already done for **Rotherham S.H.S.** where he was in 1939, and around Newark 1940.

Now is the time to get a grey
—and a good bred grey.

— *Winners since 1850*

GROOM—MARK BAILEY

TERMS AND CONDITIONS on which Mares are accepted to this horse or substitute—

SERVICE FEE, Single Mares....£2 12s 6d each
Two or more Mares.....£2 5s 0d each

Mares barren to our horses from 1942 whose 1942 service fees are paid, will be charged for 1943 service for such mares, £1 10s 0d each, if still in same owner's hands.

All mares tried to be paid for.

All Fees to be paid by June 24th, 1943, to Groom who will give a printed receipt.

Groom's Fee: 3/- at time of service.

No Mare served twice within 11 days.

Groom to decide when mares are fit for service.

NOTICE.—J. F. & Sons will not be responsible for any accident to Mares being tried or served, or from any other cause, and upon *these conditions only* are mares accepted to this horse; therefore they are *at their owner's risk.*

Should this horse become incapacitated a substitute will be provided and must be accepted.

No business on Sundays.

The Groom is not in authority to alter these terms

Mares at the farms actually on the route could be served by appointment at home, but all within the circle or not far outside it had only to be walked to the nearest point of the horse's passing. There was only one rule, unfailingly advertised: 'No business on Sundays'."

Pictured

Opposite: Lincoln Grey Lad card 1943 courtesy of Janet Cooke

Above: Foreshaw ribbons courtesy of Janet Cooke

Janet also owns some of the blue and white ribbons used to plait the manes and tails of the stallions. Not only did these add to the impression created by this superb animal as he walked along, but the colours of the ribbons advertised where he was from.

It appears that the Thoresby Estate used the services of a stallion by the name of 'Indian Runner', although the breed and stud are not mentioned. Mr Argles corresponded about him first with W Bradwell Esq. of Thurland Street, Nottingham, asking if it would be possible to change the horse's route.

He then wrote immediately to Mr C B Popple, Weston, Newark, also regarding Indian Runner:

'I am told there are no mares for this horse on the route arranged for him every Thursday through Weston, Sutton-on-Trent, Norwell, Norwell

Woodhouse and Kneesall. Will you kindly tell me whether it would cause any disappointment or inconvenience in your district if the horse travelled on Thursdays from Tuxford, through Walesby, Boughton and Wellow to Ollerton. I understand there are mares for him at Walesby and Boughton.'

This was the heyday of the heavy horse. The benefits of a strong, purpose bred working type had been recognised and even though small tenant farmers could not afford to use their services, over a period of years the heavy and light draught horse types emerged for general use. At the outbreak of World War I and the Army's urgent need for horses to mount the troops and carry supplies, the stock of such animals it owned was increased from 25,000 to 140,000 in under a two weeks. They were taken by all necessary means from all quarters. Suddenly heavy and draught horses were in great demand – for the war effort, to maintain transport in both town and country and not only to keep the agricultural machine working, but to plough up new land for cultivation as efforts were stepped up to increase home grown food production.

THE SHORTAGE OF HORSES GAVE AN URGENCY TO IMPORTING TRACTORS FROM AMERICA TO ENSURE FOOD PRODUCTION INCREASED WITH THE REDUCED WORKFORCE

It appears efforts were made to ensure breeding continued as in 1916 stallion walkers began to be released from active service during the breeding season. Indeed, although any thought of breeding specifically for the war would have been impracticable

as such a horse is not grown enough to consider working it hard before 4 or 5 years of age, horses which should have been retired had to be kept working for lack of replacements. It took the best part of the 1920s to restore a balance after the War ended.

The shortage of horses gave an urgency to importing tractors from America to ensure food production increased with the reduced workforce. By the time of World War II horses were seen as unnecessary consumers of food which could be used for people and the numbers of heavy horses declined rapidly leading ultimately to the closure of the Carlton Stud.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HORSES IN THE VILLAGE

Agriculture and horses were inseparable during this period. Indeed, prospective tenants would sometimes describe the type of property they were looking for as *'a two horse place'*.

Frank Moody, in his *'Lifetime Memories of Laxton'* remembers:

> *'… the strong and willing horses to pull the machines, and the task of the farm worker to drive the horses and operate the machine made it a much different sight from the one nowadays.'*

Edith Hickson's memoirs *'Life at Laxton'* fondly recount the horses which populated daily life. She describes how they and their work brought pride to the owners and so they fared rather better than the rest of the farm stock. They were tended by the men and lads whose days were intertwined with theirs. As well as their heavy draught horse(s), families would often have a fit little pony, which Hickson referred to

Pictured

Uncle Tom, Edie Hutchinson, Mabel Rushby, Sybil and Marian Rushby on Diamond

as a nag - now a term for a worn out, poor horse. This animal served a multitude of domestic purposes including pulling the *'gig cart'* as well as the lighter jobs of the farm. Vernon Bartle remembered his grandfathers having ponies and traps which they used for a variety of purposes. His father, Sam Bartle, was charged with using his pony and trap on behalf of Revd. Martin to go to Boughton Station to collect the pine trees which had been sent from Scotland to line the recently built Vicarage's driveway.

Hickson describes with affection their home bred foals, born of Bonny who was blessed with good qualities of character as well as physique. Bonny served them over many a year in many ways and was fondly remembered. She was sold towards the end of her life which was clearly a matter of great sadness and regret.

Horses and carts were hired for specific purposes and in 1903, George Bennett of Step Farm benefitted

to the sum of £19 10s 6d, received from the Estate for carting for them. Mr Wordsworth set out his calculations regarding the rates in what sounds like the sort of arithmetic exercise many will recognise from school days:

'If 3 carts and 3 horses are charged at 18/- [90p] and 4 carts and 4 horses are £1 4s 0d [£1.20] which are both the right amounts, I must ask you to make 2 carts and 3 horses 15/6 [77½p] and 3 carts and 4 horses 21/6 [£1.07½].'

Some cottages had Common Rights and farmers were keen to use their rights to turn out their cart horse to graze along with stock. Benjamin Moody was asked for a fee of £1 per annum for the privilege of grazing one horse on the Common. George Burkitt was offered a similar arrangement and told he could graze two beasts as an alternative.

The Thoresby Agents sometimes made arrangements to come over to Laxton on horseback. They needed their horse looked after while they went about their business. Mr Wordsworth would ask a tenant to oblige, writing on one occasion to John Price, the landlord of the Dovecote Inn. He said he hoped to come to Laxton the following day, weather permitting, concluding: *'Please be at the gate, near John Bagshaw's Cottages, a little before eleven to take my mare'.* The cottages referred to were beside Town End Farm and have since been pulled down.

In March 1920 Mr Argles wrote to Thomas Bailey:

'I hope to call and see you on Monday morning next. If you are out on the farm, please leave word where I can find you, and I will ride across the fields to meet you.'

Mr Argles is still remembered by those who saw him riding his bicycle. During an interview a member described her memories of him from a period somewhat after our 'snapshot' as *'riding over on a grey charger on Rent Day'* – doubtless an impressive, and possibly daunting, sight depending on whether the rent money was to hand or not.

Laxton tenants frequently tried to borrow or buy horses from the Thoresby stables. One letter mentions the expense of hiring horses, so it may be that *'borrow'* did not quite tell the full story.

In 1905 John Price received a reply to his enquiry about the possibility of a horse from the stables from William Brooks, a clerk in the Estate Office at Thoresby. There was a useful horse which was no longer fit for road work but which would be fit for work on the land for some time to come. It was offered to Price:

> *'for a low figure if you think it worthwhile on the understanding that you must work him only on the land, give him no road work at all and not part with him except to the kennels when he is quite done for'.*

The Hunt kennels were a key part of the Estate infrastructure. Hunting and shooting were not questioned as country pursuits for those who could afford it. The kennels took dead stock and old horses to feed the hounds, serving the dual purposes of ensuring the hounds were well fed and solving what could otherwise have been a difficult problem.

On another occasion Price was offered a horse on similar conditions except that it was *'not to be parted with without Lord Manvers' permission'.* A Mr Cosier was to deliver the horse to Price, and Mr Spink advised that he *'will bring the horse to your house at 11 o'clock on Thursday…'*

Pictured

Showing Shire mare and foal courtesy of Janet Cooke

This arrangement did not last long, for a week later Mr Spink wrote again saying:

> *'I am sorry to hear that you have been unable to make the horse Lord Manvers gave you work the land. If you will be at the bottom of Cocking Hill on Saturday morning at 10.30, Mr Cosier will send for him back again.'*

Occasionally the trade worked the other way and might have similar results. In 1911 Mr Marrison received notice that Mr Argles was returning his horse which had been found unsuitable after a week's trial.

Sometimes the arrangement might go further as when, in 1923, John Turner of Brecks Farm, Moorhouse, wrote to Mr Argles:

> *'re: roan mare I should be very pleased to have her: she appears to be the sort I like. The old horse has been a godsend to me'.*

Pictured
Ploughing

He clearly liked the horse and within a week saw a longer term future for her, writing:

'I find her very timid but not as bad as she was at first. I have had her in harness … and she went well. … I shall get her in chains this week. … Will write you again in a few days when I have worked her more. If I get her settled to work, with your permission, I should like to breed with her by cart horse. Thanking you for Favour'.

The Estate was able to look further afield for horses and in all likelihood, with the effects of the war being felt in all areas, they had no choice. In 1917 Mr Argles wrote to a Mr Brett, at The Manor House, Bleasby:

'I have your letter re chestnut mare rising five years old which Mr Littler has passed sound. I have just wired you asking you to forward it to Ollerton Station early tomorrow. A cheque in payment will be sent to you in the course of a post or two from this office. I note what you say, and if not suitable for the farm bailiff I shall put the mare to other work.'

Lord Manvers looked further still for his own purposes, but was also unlucky. Writing from the War Office on 5th August 1919, Major General Birkbeck, Director of Remounts replied to Mr Argles:

> *'With reference to your letter of May 26th to Captain Fairholm, Chief Secretary R.S.P.C.A., intimating that Lord Manvers is anxious to purchase a horse called 'Planet' which is now in Egypt or Palestine, I am directed to inform you that owing to the shortage of good chargers in the Army [in] this theatre of War, the horse is not for sale'.*

The fact that he had approached the RSPCA suggests he was trying to get back a favourite mount which had been taken for the war effort and he may not have realised it was still working abroad. It appears surprising that a horse can be located by name, but the daily returns from the Front included numbers of horses killed and injured as well as their human equivalents so they must have been tracked in some way.

There was seldom a spare fit horse on the farm and when accident or injury befell, tenants also turned to Thoresby for help. Sam Whitworth lost 2 horses and his breeding mare was very lame, leaving him in difficulty with getting his land work done. He hoped to borrow a horse to help him out. There are many such references in the Manvers Collection to requests for a horse or the crisis caused by the loss of one, and none more graphic than that from George Cocking to Thoresby in May 1910 quoted by Mary Haigh in *'Open Field Farming in Laxton'*. His losses reduced him to despair and thoughts of leaving the farm for a house.

Fortunately few farmers experienced a series of such serious setbacks and often the loan of an animal

Pictured

Shire feet in furrow

for a particular task would help them out. Sidney Johnson had moved to Knapeney Farm at Moorhouse in 1917 and in 1919 had a horse on loan / hire from the Estate. This is known to be heavy land even now and Johnson asked Mr Spink for the use of the old horse for a further 1-2 weeks as he needed two to plough so he could sow wheat. He also mentioned using Stockholm tar and lard on the horses' legs to keep the flies away.

Ploughing was probably the heaviest job the horses had to do and this was a time when it could be necessary to find additional horse power. In April 1920 George Moody asked for help. Mr Argles replied:

> *'You mentioned to me that you wanted another horse to enable you to plough with three horses this summer. There is a mule here which Lord Manvers is prepared to lend you, if you like to consider it. I think you would find the mule very useful, and a good worker, and I shall be pleased to send it over to you on trial. It would, I think, work very well beside your two horses, and would probably help you out of a difficulty this coming summer. Please think the matter over, and I will see you in the course of a day or two.'*

Richard Wilkinson at Lilac Farm asked for a horse to help him get his seed sown in 1910 but he was unlucky as Mr Argles had none he could offer. Also unlucky was George Burkitt, who in 1911 lived at what is now known as Moorgate Farm. In 1922 Mr Argles offered a quite different solution to Burkitt's problem when he lost a mare after foaling. He had asked for a horse or alternatively a tractor plough.

Declining both, Mr Argles replied:

'… Possibly you may desire to give up your arable land and buildings and merely retain the house you now occupy. I am sorry to say I have been quite disgusted for many years with the way you cultivate your arable land.'

Mr Argles appears to have been an observant man, taking tenants to task where he saw cause or occasionally offering a compliment on things he noticed on his travels. Sam Bartle was the subject of his displeasure in 1915 when Mr Argles wrote:

'I saw a calf in your field next Ossington Lane yesterday, which is apparently suffering from bad ringworm. I hope you will get the advice of your Veterinary Surgeon, as I think all places on the ribs should be dressed with ointment to keep the flies away. At present it looks in a very bad state. I think it would pay you well to bring it nearer home where it can have more attention.'

POSSIBLY YOU MAY DESIRE TO GIVE UP YOUR ARABLE LAND AND BUILDINGS AND MERELY RETAIN THE HOUSE YOU NOW OCCUPY

His observations extended beyond the Estate and he demonstrated compassion and concern for animal welfare, taking up the issue with external bodies where he thought necessary. In September 1917 he wrote to the Secretary of the RSPCA at Nottingham:

'I shall be much obliged if you will ask your Mansfield Inspector to find and inspect a chestnut horse which I saw tied to a peg in a field about 200yd north of Mansfield Station GCR on the west of the railway.

As far as I could see from the train in a falling light on Monday evening, this horse is in an emaciated condition and requires some urgent attention.

I was at Warsop yesterday evening, and saw in a field near the centre of the village, a big roan horse, which I understand is 17 years old, in a shocking condition. This horse is, I believe, the property of a Mr Foster. If your inspector would kindly look into this immediately too I should be much obliged. I understand there is a cruelty case pending in the Police Court about this animal, but this information may not be correct.'

Only days later he wrote to Mr A Noble, Kneesall, where it appears a horse was not up to the work or possibly unwell:

'Lord Manvers wishes to have the black mare "Bella" returned to the Perlethorpe Home Farm, and I am sending a man through for her tomorrow. She will be turned out in a paddock and have every comfort, and if the mare produces a foal, at weaning time it will be sent to you. I hope she will breed something good and am very sorry to see such a beautiful mare in her present condition. It is one of the best animals that ever went to Rufford Kennels. If I hear of any other stronger horse suitable for you I will immediately advise you.'

With horses came the need to provide facilities for them and, if work was needed, again the Estate was called upon. In 1909, while living at Holme View Farm, Sidney Johnson learned that Mr Argles had agreed to *'try to alter the horse standing as soon as possible'.*

Where the work was chargeable to the tenant, a rate of interest on the cost was always stipulated at the outset. Richard Clarke at Town End had hoped for alterations to the farm in 1916, but the Estate was

Pictured

Colin Taylor Ploughing at Laxton

feeling the loss of men to the War and their ability to take on optional jobs was much reduced from the pre-war period. Mr Argles replied to Clarke that: *'I therefore propose to repair the standings in the horse stables, and trust you will be quite satisfied'.*

In 1920 Sidney Johnson had taken over at Brockilow Farm and he requested work to turn the stable into simple standings to stop horses kicking one another, which took the value off them.

The shortage of horses at home had given a boost to the import and construction of tractors, but it would be some time before the open fields of Laxton resonated to the chug of their engines.

WILD ANIMALS

As long as man has tried to harness the land for his own purposes, wild creatures have seen the opportunity in food conveniently gathered together in one place or soil carefully tilled to make their lives easier. As a consequence it is not surprising that during our 'snapshot' there was a theme running through the whole period of the need to ensure that the farmers reaped at least the majority of what they sowed.

A number of wild creatures featured. The humble mole was one and, much as our parish magazine today carries an advertisement for a mole catcher, this country skill was called upon then. Mole catching was long established and in May 1899 Mr Wordsworth asked Revd. Collinson to make known that he would collect the 'Mole Rate' next Rent Day.

THE VICAR CONSULTED ALL THE FARMERS AND SMALLHOLDERS AND DECLARED THEM 'WILLING AND DESIROUS' THAT MOODY SHOULD BECOME A MOLE CATCHER

Many of the exchanges were between Revd. Collinson and Mr Wordsworth or his successor, Mr Argles. It was very evident that Revd. Collinson was as keen on recreational shooting as anyone. He was invited to a rabbit shoot in 1910 and to various other shoots during the period before his retirement. He organised a shoot in East Park Wood between Laxton and Moorhouse and arranged the luncheon. It appears he did some of this as a participant and some under instruction from the Estate. In October 1915 Mr Argles thanked him:

'…for particulars of game killed yesterday. You did very well indeed. I will arrange to call for the game as soon as possible, (eight brace of partridges and nine pheasants). Many thanks for arranging to give the game to the guns and also to the tenants. Kindly see Preston and arrange another shoot as soon as convenient. Whenever you have an opportunity, please walk over Mr Farrow's farm at Norwell Woodhouse and kindly give to him all the game shot on his farm.'

In December 1908 new arrangements were needed for mole catching and they discussed whether Moody could manage this *'despite his infirmity'* and make a living at it. The vicar consulted all the farmers and smallholders and declared them *'willing and desirous'* that Moody should become a mole catcher at 1d per acre [12d = 5p]. He also consulted with the farmers in Moorhouse but discovered that they caught their own. An underlined aside declared that *'Fox likes them'.*

Moody agreed to the suggestion and estimated he could keep around 150 traps going. Several letters later it had been agreed that the Estate would help set him up with traps.

The following March Revd. Collinson contributed £1 towards the traps himself and the plan was put into action. The Estate paid the balance. Mr Wordsworth remarked at the time: *'Not much weather for catching moles or anything else – except cold!'*

The subject of moles made its way into the Newark Advertiser in the issue dated 29th April 1914 where the Laxton Parish Council report stated that they *'agreed to reduce payment for mole catching to a halfpenny per acre from a penny'.*

Unfortunately the Parish Council minutes could not be traced for the period we studied. From the very brief newspaper report, this meeting sheds light on a very different age. It noted that the Sparrow Club's accounts stood at £4, sufficient to continue its work. On 28th May 1915 the Newark Advertiser carried a report of the Parish Meeting when Mr Bartle reported the sparrow catching fund then stood at £1 16s 0d. At this time the Board of Agriculture gave financial rewards to clubs dedicated to eradicating pests. Both Rat and Sparrow clubs received funds and although no mention of rat catching was found in our study, it

appears a bounty was paid for killing sparrows which would have feasted on the crops.

The village poor seldom feasted. They benefited from a charity which distributed bread to those deemed deserving. The same newspaper report tells of a discussion brought up by George Burkitt who *'thought a man who killed two fat pigs and milked two cows was not in need of it [bread] but the Chairman said that it was very difficult to draw the line at the deserving poor'.*

IN A COMMUNITY WHERE HUNTING OR SHOOTING WILDLIFE TO PROTECT VALUABLE FOOD RESOURCES AND CROPS WERE THE NORM, FOXES WERE SELDOM MENTIONED DIRECTLY AS PESTS

It was another five years before moles again became an issue and this time the work was outsourced. Mr Willis, presumably as Secretary to the Parish Council, was informed in October 1919 that a man who had approached the Estate about mole catching in Laxton Parish was to be paid *'30/- year for catching the moles in Lord Manvers' Woodlands in the Parish'.* His remit didn't extend to the sykes, written here *'Sycks'*, and Willis was told he should *'arrange with the tenant farmers about catching these'.*

Perhaps surprisingly in a community where wildlife was ever present and hunting or shooting it to protect valuable food resources and crops or for pleasure were the norm, foxes were seldom mentioned directly as pests. They did cause Mrs Price, wife of the Landlord at The Dove Cote Inn to ask in 1914 if she could have a *'proper fowl house'* built, having lost 30 *'chickings'* and 9 ducks that year.

SHOOTING

Ensuring there was sport to be had, in 1919, Mr Argles instructed John Turner at Brecks Farm, Moorhouse to *'…repair the drain which we took up yesterday … Please do not put any iron gratings at the ends of the drain, as it is a very convenient place for bolting a fox'.*

It was the humble rabbit along with wood pigeons, which then as now, could do much damage to crops and both had the misfortune to be useful to supplement the cooking pot. As with moles, dealing with rabbits was not new and as our period began Mr Wordsworth was writing to G Preston at Saywood instructing him to deal with rabbits reported on the Kneesall Estate using traps, snares, ferret etc. They may have been killed as pests – quite clearly by any means available – but a valuable food resource was not to be wasted and he was instructed how to distribute what he killed. On 5th January 1911 CH Bramford of Smithy Farm wrote offering thanks for a couple of rabbits sent before Christmas.

RABBITS MAY HAVE BEEN KILLED AS PESTS BY ANY MEANS AVAILABLE, BUT A VALUABLE FOOD RESOURCE WAS NOT TO BE WASTED

The effects of the war began to be noticed quite early and in December 1914 Lady Manvers issued instructions for a couple of rabbits to be sent every Wednesday to the Belgian soldiers in the Cricket Pavilion *'til further notice'.*

Another letter to Preston at Saywood in January 1915 read: *'No doubt you are now killing down as many rabbits as possible. This is most important. They will do serious damage to trees, unless they are reduced'.*

The paper on which the copy letters were written was quite porous and over time the ink has both spread and stained the adjacent sheets. On this letter it is quite easy to read that the letter on the following page was issuing instructions for rabbits which had been shot to be hung up in a shed.

Preston received yet another letter that May expressing concern about rabbits: *'… to avoid damage to trees, it is important that the rabbits should not be too numerous'.*

TWO YEARS LATER THE SITUATION WAS VERY DIFFERENT: THE ISSUE WITH RABBITS AND WOOD PIGEONS WAS SCARCITY RATHER THAN EXCESS

Two years later the situation was very different and the issue with both rabbits and wood pigeons was scarcity rather than excess. In August 1917 Mr Argles told Revd. Tunbridge, who had succeeded Revd. Collinson:

'… rabbits are at present very scarce, and I am afraid it is not possible to send you a couple each week just now.'

The Army had no better success with a request to shoot. On 2nd November 1917 Captain J Rolls, Brigade Major, 7th Training Reserve Brigade, wrote from Clipstone Camp to ask if there might be shooting rights to let or if permission could be given for the officers to shoot rabbits and pigeons as relaxation in spare time from military duties. The reply by return from Mr Spink informed him that Lord Manvers:

'would not entertain any offer for letting shooting. … His Lordship feels that as there are hardly any rabbits and wood pigeons are difficult to get he would prefer to have covers left, much as he would like to oblige you'.

The previous year's scarcity was not repeated in 1918, and again rabbits seem to have become pests suggesting that the reduced numbers in 1917 may have been due unfavourable conditions for breeding rather than increased killing for food. Myxomatosis, which can greatly reduce populations was not observed here until 1952, far too late to be responsible for the shortage.

Food production was much on the minds of the farmers. Their performance was being monitored by the War Agricultural Committees who had ordered grassland ploughed up to increase grain production. John Taylor, farming at Brockilow Farm to the south of Mill Field, quite close to Preston's home at Saywood, was feeling frustrated by rabbit damage. In November 1918 Mr Spink wrote on his behalf to the Secretary of the War Agricultural Committee, Retford:

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

It is no surprise then that at a similar time Revd. Tunbridge thanked Lord Manvers through Mr Argles for four rabbits for the Choir Supper and the hare for themselves. Remembering this welcome donation, the vicar wrote successfully the next year asking if a similar contribution might be made to their festivities and the enjoyment of them was acknowledged in due course. It seemed to be a developing tradition as Revd. Bleau, who succeeded Revd. Tunbridge as vicar made the same request in 1922.

With the 1918 / 19 season in full swing 60 rabbits were shot at South Collingham along with 11 partridges and 10 pheasants. John Wigram, the organiser and one of the Valuers used by the Estate, invited Mr Argles to join them on *'a day's partridge driving, as there are any quantity of birds'.* Partridge were managed, along with pheasants, which also merited a mention.

A reception was held for the returning soldiers in Laxton and Mr Willis wrote asking for game for the event on 26th Dec. His request was annotated by hand *'4 pheasants'*, which were enjoyed and acknowledged in due course.

THISTLES

Thistles seemed to be the major inanimate nuisance in a day when weed killers were not available and more labour intensive solutions were employed. A total of 31 letters discovered by our researchers deal with this issue. Joan Cottee recounted in *'The Village Schoolmaster'* how head teacher Frank Willis rounded up a party of boys to deal with the thistles on the Moor. This area was common land at the southern side of the village while to the North West was the larger area of common land known as The Common.

In 1908 Thomas Marrison negotiated his tenancy of Westwood Farm, which adjoins The Common. It is clear Marrison had concerns about thistles there but just what was 'common' caused him to step out of line in 1909, doubtless not yet fully understanding the Laxton system. Mr Wordsworth pointed out to him that *'Little Beck'* is a common and not part of his farm. He was asked to pay for the grass he had cut as did *'W Moody and Atkinson of Brockilow for small common within their farms'.*

When he signed his Agreement, Mr Wordsworth referred to his concern over thistles, saying he would try to get the thistles on the common cut. The Estate took this job on for a number of years. In 1920 Mr Willis was directed to speak William Merrills from Crosshill Farm about mowing the Common after Mr Argles wrote to John Cook apologising for being unable to provide help with the mowing that year. When the first request produced no results, a further letter was sent stressing the importance of the job being completed in the next week, doubtless before seeds began to spread.

In 1908, at the same time as wondering if Moody could manage to catch moles, and in the absence of any other jobs to give him an income at that time, *'Old Tom Bagshaw'* at the age of 86 was given the task of mowing the thistles on the Moor, for which Revd. Collinson volunteered to pay himself to help him.

Bagshaw's 90th birthday on 4th December 1913 was later reported in the Newark Advertiser and accorded the privilege of a photograph. His friends gathered at his home for a party and presented him with a *'purse of money'* – the result of a collection from among others Revd. Collinson and the Wordsworths. Both the church and hand bells were rung in his honour.

It seems many people were censured about thistles over the period. George Burkitt, J Merrills, HL Marrison, Mr Howe and John Sampson received individual letters. John Cook and William Merrills were written to in their roles as a Field Foreman. George Cocking, having the problem drawn to his attention for a second time was told *'… the field of yours called Justin Close Corner … was a part of it very foul with thistles'.*

Mr Argles pulled no punches writing on 12th August 1914 to Samuel Bartle not long after he had succeeded Mr Wordsworth as Agent and possibly intending to make his standards clear at the outset:

Pictured

Tom Bagshaw, aged 90

'I fully realise that at present you are extremely busy in the harvest fields, but there is another matter which needs prompt attention on your farm. I refer to the thistles on your grass land near Kneesall Wood. These fields are in a shocking condition, and I must ask you to send the mowing machine there on the first wet day, when you are stopped in the corn fields.

I dislike intensely having to write letters of this description to Lord Manvers' tenants, and I hope I shall never have occasion to write to you again in this way. I expect you to look after your own farm yourself, and see that both arable and grass land is kept in good condition.'

Doubtless to ensure the problem did not arise again, Bartle was also reminded to make sure they were attended to in 1915.

Even in living memory, weeds were dealt with through hard labour. Roy Hennell, recalls how the fallow field would be ploughed four times, each time after weeds began to show through again. The roots of twitch, also called couch grass, were a particular nuisance and were propagated rather than killed by ploughing. The land would be harrowed to rake up the roots which were gathered into piles and burned for lack of any more efficient way of killing them.

It is said that, in ploughing an acre with a single furrow plough, man and horse walked 11 miles. That takes no account of the walk to the field and back. The work involved for the men in good husbandry of their land during our 'snapshot' was more we can imagine, yet this was still only a small part of what they had to do. Obesity was unlikely to have been heard of in such times, nor exercise suggested as a cure for ills.

REVD. COLLINSON WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN BRINGING THE BELGIAN REFUGEES HERE. HIS WIFE RHODA BECAME VERY INVOLVED AND ADVOCATED FOR THEM THROUGHOUT THEIR STAY, EVEN IF HERMAN DID TRY HER PATIENCE AT TIMES

BELGIAN REFUGEES IN LAXTON

Our research has highlighted the presence in Laxton of Belgian refugees between late 1914 and late 1918. The family are referred to in *'The Village Schoolmaster'* (page 73 onwards) and *'Living in Laxton'* (page 96 onwards). What has not been told is the story of how the vicar, Revd. Collinson, was instrumental in bringing them here. His wife Rhoda became very involved and advocated for them throughout their stay even if, as Joan Cottee mentions, Herman did try her patience at times.

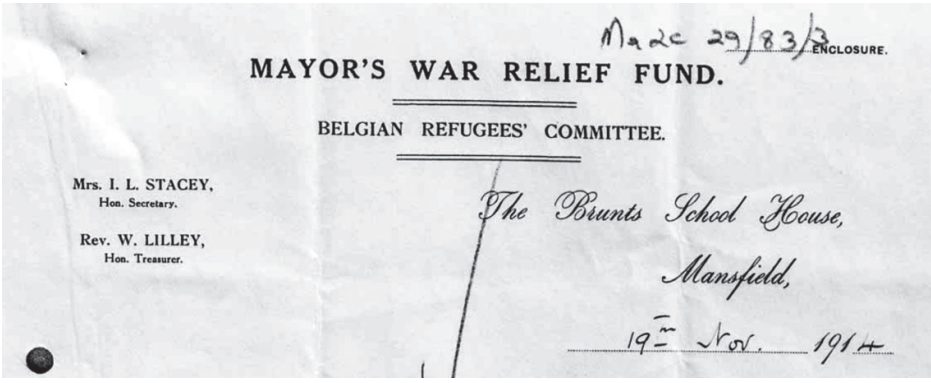
The first references to them we found came in the middle of October 1914, when it appeared that accommodation had been earmarked for them. Mary Haigh's work on the censuses and Inland Revenue Tithe Survey maps indicates that they were, very generously, accommodated in Woodcutters Cottage, one of two built by the Estate in Town End in 1912. Stocks of potatoes were being laid in for them, to be covered by straw provided by Joe Merrills, once they had been dug from the garden of a cottage previously occupied by *'the Collinson's man'*. The smaller ones could be sold, Mr Argles suggested, to raise money to buy them things they would need.

On 24th October plans continued to be made for them and Mr Argles referred to anticipating Favill, the Woodman, will have delivered a load of faggots to the *'Belgian Refugee cottage'*. He also alluded to difficulties in obtaining refugees through Nottingham agents, continuing:

> *'I have heard nothing more from Nottingham. I trust you have received a letter from Mr North [of the Nottingham Belgian Refugee Committee] today. If you do not hear from him in the course of a day or two, I think it would be well to get into communication with Mr Ellis of Debdale Hall, Mansfield. He has arranged about placing several Belgian families in the district. Bond of Edwinstowe (two families arrived there yesterday) told me that he had failed to get any reply from Nottingham, so went to see Ellis and Houston at Mansfield, and soon got matters settled.'*

Two days later, in the light of this, there was clearly anxiety at the lack of news of anyone coming and Mr Argles again suggested to Revd. Collinson that, having still had no reply from Mr North, he should see Mr Ellis, Manager of the Sherwood Colliery, near Mansfield Woodhouse Station. This proved helpful as Revd. Collinson wrote next day to say he had seen Ellis and Stacey, the Secretary to the Committee, who intended to start work at once and promised a family very soon.

Mrs Collinson picked up the correspondence with Mr Argles on 1st November, describing how she had heard from a Mrs Constable-Curtis that they had a *'very nice'* family of Belgian refugees - news which she had passed on to Mrs Stacey. Mrs Collinson was clearly shocked at the reply from Mrs Stacey, which she enclosed, and which was one of very few enclosures we found filed with the original correspondence.



Ma 2C 29/83/3 ENCLOSURE.

MAYOR'S WAR RELIEF FUND.

BELGIAN REFUGEES' COMMITTEE.

Mrs. I. L. STACEY,
Hon. Secretary.

Rev. W. LILLEY,
Hon. Treasurer.

The Brunts School House,
Mansfield,
19th Nov. 1914

Pictured

Belgian Refugee Committee headed paper Ma 2C-29-83-3

Mrs I L Stacey, wrote on 19th November 1914 on the headed notepaper of the Mayor's War Relief Fund, Belgian Refugee Committee with the return address *'The Brunt's School House, Mansfield'*. She commented on the *'dearth'* of refugees at the time and said she would write to Mons. (unreadable) *'to get refugees for you from him'*.

Her Committee's Hon. Treasurer, Rev. W Lilley, had attended a conference in Sheffield where he had learned from the Belgian Consul at that, as Germany had annexed Belgium, it had announced that were Holland to send Belgian refugees to England, this would constitute war and place Holland at threat of similar treatment to that given to Belgium.

The Consul drew attention to the great numbers of Belgian soldiers at Folkestone who were homeless. These men had been discharged from hospital but were not then, and may never have been, fit enough to fight again. He hoped some of the kind offers to take families might be extended to these men. It was Mrs Stacey's suggestion that Laxton might consider taking some of them which had shocked Mrs Collinson.

Mrs Collinson wrote:

'I do not know how we could possibly take Belgian soldiers – as we have no one who could wait on them – unless we could find a village who was willing to take the soldiers and give us their refugees?'

On 23rd November Mr Argles replied at some length to Mrs Collinson, having brought the matter to the attention of Lady Manvers. This was the first indication we noted that they were thinking about the potential difficulties of a rural community welcoming people who did not speak English as their first language, if at all:

'As you say, I do not see how you can very well undertake wounded Belgian soldiers at Laxton. I am today writing to the Belgian Consul at Sheffield, and Lady Manvers is going to take some in at Thoresby, I think. She proposes that you should now write to Mr W H P Norris, Estate Office, Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham, and ask him whether he knows of any suitable refugees for Laxton. Mr Norris told Lady Manvers a short time ago that a large number of women and children were now housed in some large buildings in Sneinton, and it is quite possible that some of these would be delighted to get away into the country. In writing to Mr Norris perhaps you will mention that Lady Manvers has suggested that he may be able to assist you in selecting a suitable family. It might be well to tell him that you want a family, if possible who can speak French. It is most difficult if they can speak only Flemish.'

Mrs Collinson was absent from home on 24th November when her husband responded to this letter from Mr Argles. He reported that an enquiry had been

received from Mansfield about their accommodation saying it may be needed soon. On a second sheet, sent with the first, or possibly later, Revd. Collinson reported a visit from Mrs Stacey, who expected to have suitable refugees that Thursday. He planned to *'sound them out'* and if suitable and bring them as a family on Friday.

Our other authors record the arrival of the van Batenburg family, the entry of the children into Laxton School and something of the difficulties for an agricultural community in finding suitable employment for a man who spoke several languages and was lawyer with qualifications he could not use here. In May 1915 Mr Argles had *'already written to some big firms enquiring whether there is an opening in Yorkshire and Derbyshire for such a man'.*

Their life in the village seems unremarkable except that they struggled to make ends meet with the money from villagers' subscriptions and what Herman Snr. could earn doing casual labour on the farms. He could not have been experienced in this kind of work and various letters allude to him not being equal to the manual labour which was available to him. Mrs Collinson did, though, remark that he got *'good references for willingness to work'.*

Mr Argles referred to van Batenburg's employment difficulties again in September 1915, noting then that he was working in Ossington Gardens, although the Agent there, Mr Morris, wrote about him only a week later from Ossington Estate Office. It appears his employment there must have been about to come to an end as the following correspondence related once more to finding work for him.

Mr Argles had earlier said:

' … I am afraid it will be impossible to arrange any work for him at Thoresby. The distance is great, and,

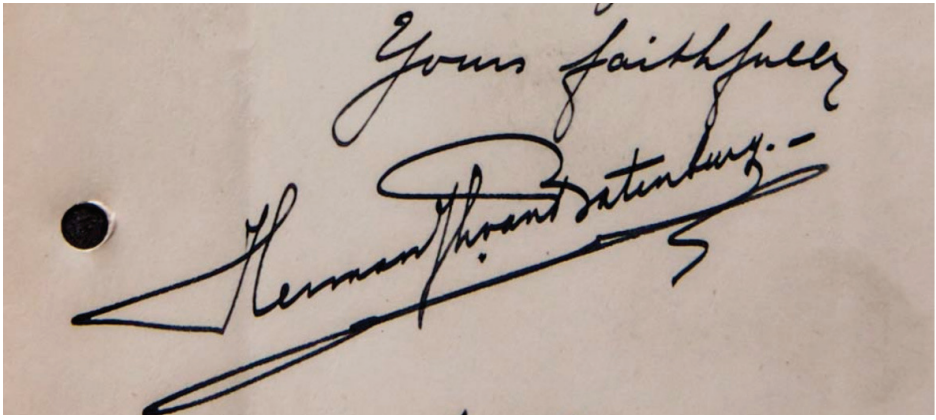
if he lodged, payment for this would swamp nearly all his earnings, and, as you know, there is really no suitable light work on your side of the Estate for him.'

On 16th October 1915 Mr Argles made clear to Mrs Collinson his terms for van Batenburg working for the Estate and the extent of the allowances he was prepared to make for him, despite the man's expressed fears that work in the woods would involve felling trees and be too hard for him:

'It is proposed to give him a trial in the Woods Department Laxton, Kneesall etc. next week. Mr Whellans (The Forester) has made arrangements about this with Favill. I have given orders that special kinds of work are to be selected for him, which he is capable of doing. Of course he would never be asked to use an axe and cut down trees etc. I will talk the matter over with Mr Collinson on Saturday.

If you think well, he need not work regularly in the Woods Department, but only when there is no work available for him on the Laxton farms. One thing must be clearly understood. He must keep Estate hours (6.30 am till 5pm with 1½ hours for meals. During the dark winter days of course these hours are shortened.) No smoking is allowed during working hours, and he must work not less than a whole day.'

We learn soon after from Mrs Collinson that *'He has seen Favill and is happy with the work, and being much easier he will be able to work every day and doesn't mind the early hours'.* This arrangement seems to have worked for a couple of years. The next letter we found is dated 20th January 1917, when van Batenburg wrote in his own hand asking if the free firewood previously provided to him could continue.



Pictured

H J van Batenberg's signature
Ma2C 35 49

Later the same year he asked for a pay rise from £1 as the cost of living made it hard to manage and he was more used to the work.

On 24th April 1918 the Estate began to raise the subject of needing the house the van Batenburg family occupy and to suggest he should seek other employment. Mr Spink wrote:

> *'Lord Manvers suggested to me this morning that now homes are so scarce, if you could find employment elsewhere you should do so, as he feels that a man of your capabilities ought to be using them to better advantage than working in the woods. I therefore give you notice that as of June 1st your services will be dispensed with and your house will be required on that date. If you are unable to find another cottage elsewhere within the time, His Lordship will allow you to remain there until the middle of June.'*

On 29th Mr Spink replied again saying that Lord Manvers was prepared to allow him to stay in the house until 1st October to allow time for the crops in the garden to be gathered. He sent His Lordship's good wishes for success in finding suitable employment but reiterated that his notice as of June 1st stood.


LAXTON
H. J. VAN BATENBURG

Several villagers still own original paintings done by Herman van Batenburg, which it appears he may have done from photographs as some closely match images surviving from the time. This prompted the observation by Mr Argles to Revd. Collinson in May 1915 that *'he can draw a bit too'*.

Painting in colour, van Batenburg left a record which the technology of the day could not. We know some of his paintings were carried out as commissions. It seems possible that others were executed on a similar basis and that he used his skills to supplement the family income.

Pictured

Opposite Top: Sarah Rose's cottage

Bottom: H J van Batenburg's painting of Sarah Rose's Cottage

SEVERAL VILLAGERS STILL OWN ORIGINAL PAINTINGS DONE BY HERMAN VAN BATENBURG, WHICH IT APPEARS HE MAY HAVE DONE FROM PHOTOGRAPHS AS SOME CLOSELY MATCH IMAGES SURVIVING FROM THE TIME

IN 1900 THERE WAS NO NATIONAL PROVISION TO SUPPORT OLDER PEOPLE AND TO ALLOW THEM TO RETIRE – AND THIS CHANGED LITTLE IN PRACTICE THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD WE STUDIED

THE END OF THE STORY

THE END OF A WORKING LIFE, PENSION

In 1900 there was no national provision to support older people and to allow them to retire – and this changed little in practice throughout the period we studied. The vicar was helping him by paying *'Old Bagshaw'* to mow thistles on the Moor at the age of 86. This indicates the difficulties facing someone with no means of financial support in old age. The Workhouse was their last resort.

In 1902 George Barnes, General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, formed the National Committee of Organised Labour for Old Age Pension. David Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer wanted to *'lift the shadow of the workhouse from the homes of the poor'*.

While the debate continued nationally, it seems that the Thoresby Estate was engaged in a debate of its own with its counterparts at Welbeck. A letter written on the notepaper of the Portland Estate Office read:

'My dear Wordsworth,

I am going out shooting with the Duke today when I will take the opportunity of speaking to him in reference to your letter received this morning as to the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution. Personally, whilst I sympathise with you in your anxiety to get the old man you refer to to participate in the Institution funds I can quite see the difficulty the Secretary points out.

It is true that there may be many more cases of distress amongst old farmers who have occupied land of less than 100 acres, but I do not think that the funds at the disposal of the Institution would enable them to deal with the increased number of applicants who would be eligible if your way of thinking were adopted. As a rule, men farming less than 100 acres are of a poorer class and different class altogether and some different means of helping them will, I am afraid, have to be thought of, as it seems to me the Workhouse is the only place at present to draw on if landlords don't support their old worthy tenants.'

This had the hand written PS:

'Since dictating this I have seen the Duke and he has suggested me to send your letter to the Secy. with a request that he is to specifically bring the matter forward at their next meeting.'

The Old Age Pensions Act was introduced in 1908 and established the principle of supporting older people financially, although the first proposals could not be described as generous. No doubt then as now politicians were looking at the impact on votes when

they inevitably had to raise taxes on the better off to find the funds.

Pensions were to be paid at the rate of 5s. [25p] a week to people over 70 years of age who could prove that they had no other income exceeding £31 a year. Two pensioners living together would receive 7s. 6d. [37½p] between them. Eligible people had to apply to the local council and meet strict criteria.

There is only one mention in our research of such pensions being sought or received. On 2nd March 1918 Mr Spink wrote to J J Adamson at Kneesall when a Mrs Kelk, housekeeper to a Mr Williamson was trying to prove her eligibility. She *'… is waiting for her birth certificate, which, I understand, you are procuring for her. Her Old Age Pension is hung up for this. Kindly attend to the matter. I understand she wrote to you a month ago'.*

Mr Norris, Mr Wordsworth's counterpart at the Pierrepont Estate, wrote in 1906 remarking that they had only one [widow] left as a pensioner. He must have been referring to a specific case and asked Wordsworth to agree with Lord Manvers what arrangements would be made for a widow on the Estate. His suggestion was that the usual rate of 1/- [5p] a day would be ample.

A few records do show a measure of support for those deemed in need. It seems that Mrs Alice Moody, widow of the mole catcher, must have been seeking a widow's pension from the War Pensions Committee in 1918. Mr Spink wrote:

> *'I am very glad to hear what you say about the pension, and I sincerely hope that you will be allowed one. I quite agree that your husband's health broke down through being in the Army.'*

In 1915 pension correspondence referred to what might be paid to Mr Campbell, a clergyman at Fledborough, who had resigned his living. Revd. Collinson was representing the Estate on the Commission enquiring into this situation. Mr Argles briefed him that:

WHEN MEN WERE TAKEN FOR THE WAR, WAYS HAD TO BE FOUND OF PAYING THEM AND ENSURING THEIR FAMILIES HAD SOMETHING TO LIVE ON

'Between ourselves I know that Mr Campbell is not at all well off and he will require a retiring pension. Whatever you think is fair and right will I am sure meet with Lord Manvers' approval'.

The matter was resolved with £60 per annum 'retiring pension' being agreed. When men were taken for the war, ways had to be found of paying them and ensuring their families had something to live on. A letter on 19th August 1914 from Mr Argles to A E Elliott Esq, Newcastle Estate Office, Worksop, headed *'Estate Allowances to Men Joining the Colours'* demonstrated how complex this became. They were clearly grappling with what was payable. There was the question of pay for the regulars and also for the territorials. Argles had resorted to the Nottingham Guardian to try to discover the figures. It appears Mr Elliott had a circular on the subject which Argles asked him to send.

A further complication was the situation for an unmarried soldier or widower, who needed to complete a declaration on the appropriate Government form to apply for Separation Allowance for a dependant. A filed copy of a cutting from the Daily Mail appeared to be a reference document in this context.

Mr Argles wrote again to Mr Elliott Esq on 28th January 1916 regarding payment of a War Bonus. Welbeck employees were promised such a bonus but Thoresby staff were not. Argles reported that the labourers have had some free coal supplied for which they would normally have paid.

For himself, he said *'I expect to join some Yeomanry in course of a day or two'.* Lord Derby brought in a scheme whereby men were spoken to to persuade them to join up forthwith. Argles ended his letter saying that no allowance was being paid at Thoresby to men who joined the Colours under Lord Derby's scheme. The allowance was only given to men who joined in the first few weeks of the War. All the Thoresby men had been affected, but there were no plans to make up the balance of wages to the Derby recruits.

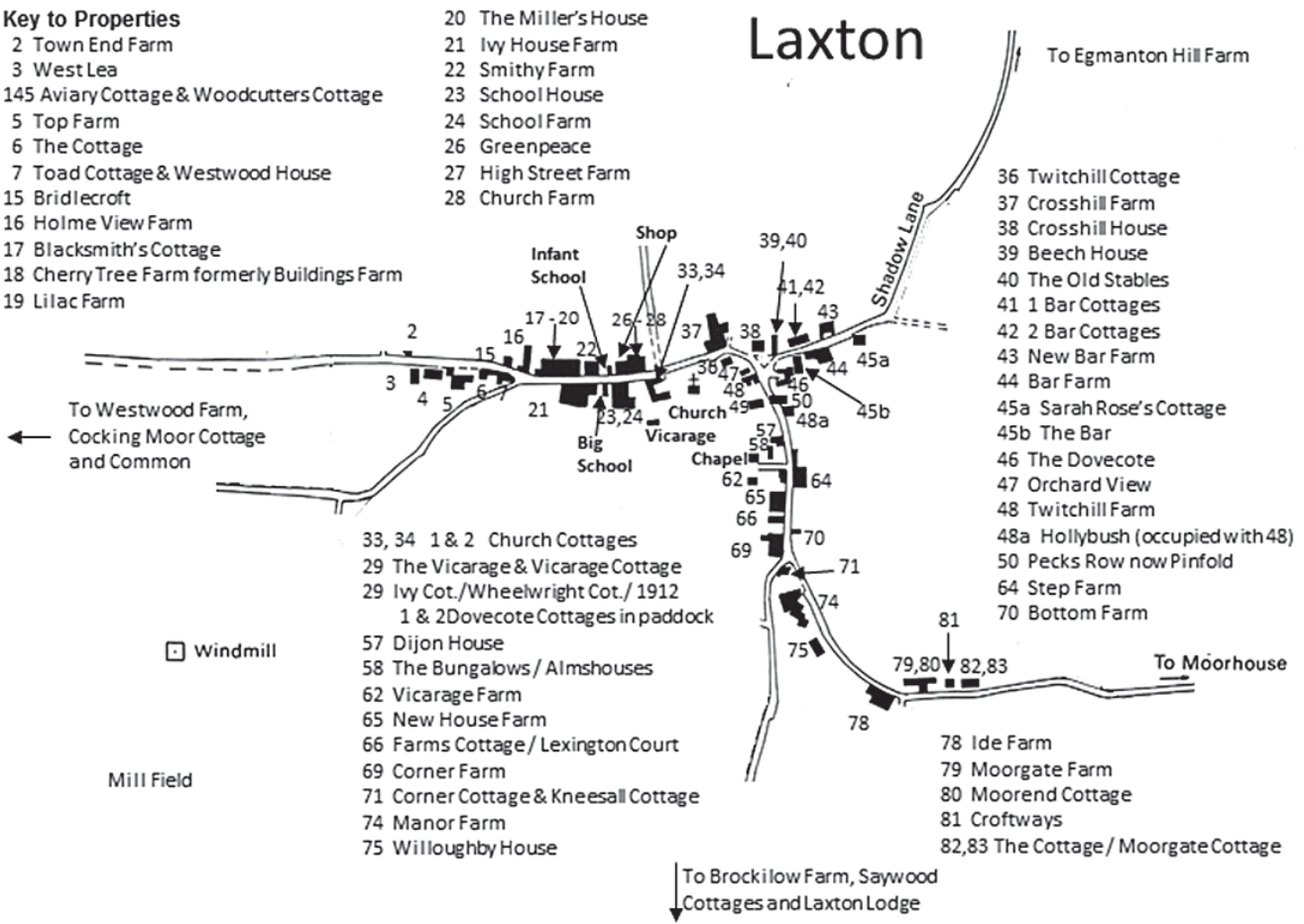
THE PICTURE OF THE VILLAGE BY 1920

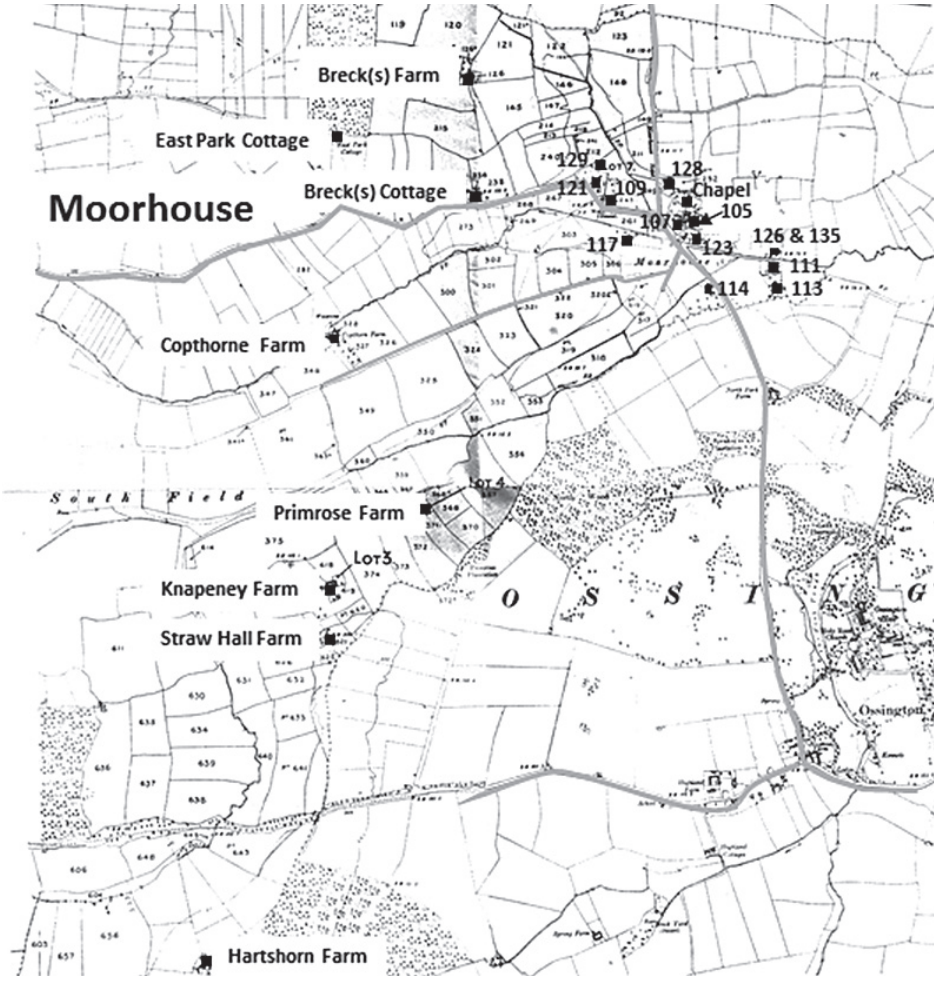
As we have seen by 1920 life in the village had undergone considerable change. Laxton remained a farming village still part of the Thorsby Estate but the strips in the three fields had been reorganised, the Great War had brought about changes in agriculture and steam and motorised vehicles were taking the place of horses on the farms and on the roads. Social attitudes were changing towards what had been a fixed and immobile hierarchy in society. This was being helped along by education for all which by 1920 was taken for granted. The government were taking an interest in the health of the nation. School doctors and dentists visited regularly, which changed the attitudes and understandings of the parents. The variety of life in Laxton, the activities which took place and the sense of community remained but the twentieth century was well on its way and life in Laxton would never be the same again.

APPENDIX 1

MAPS OF LAXTON AND MOORHOUSE

Based on the 1910 Inland Revenue Survey and the 1911 Census


Laxton
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
To Egmanton 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
Shadow Lane
Infant School
Shop
Church
Vicarage
Chapel
Big School
To Westwood Farm, Cocking Moor Cottage and Common
Windmill
Mill Field
33, 34 1 & 2 Church Cottages
29 The Vicarage & Vicarage Cottage
29 Ivy Cot./Wheelwright Cot./ 1912
1 & 2Dovecote Cottages in paddock
57 Dijon House
58 The Bungalows / 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
78 Ide Farm
79 Moorgate Farm
80 Moorend Cottage
81 Croftways
82,83 The Cottage / Moorgate Cottage
To Moorhouse
To Brockilow Farm, Saywood Cottages and Laxton Lodge



Key to Properties

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

All properties are numbered as on the 1910 Inland Revenue Valuation Office Survey

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