



**N**otes on Farming  
in Harefield

M Evans



arming was the very beginning of Harefield. Saxon tribes came in about 450 A.D., probably up the Colne, decided to settle, and set about clearing a space in the forest.

At the time of Domesday Harefield consisted of land for seven ploughs, two being on the demesne of Richard Fitz-Gilbert, Lord of the Manor; woodland for 1200 pigs, and the value of the whole was £12.

The ten villeins or farmers had to work part-time for the Lord. They farmed open fields North and South of the village, one under crops, the other fallow. All were subsistence crops.

In 1180 the Knights Hospitallers were given Moorhall, being 40 acres. By 1376 two London Merchants had moved in - Thomas Brackenbury and William Breakspeare.

At the end of the thirteenth century there were 44 freeholders. In 1316 a

farmer of Knightscote tried to enclose part of the Common, and was taken to court by the other freeholders.

The Black Death in 1483 caused changes in agriculture - shortage of labour meant less arable land. Sheep farming grew. The Lord was forced by lack of labour to lease out some land.

By the sixteenth century farmers were prosperous while the landless remained poor. After the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 villeins could become copyholders, paying rent instead of work.

The Newdegates came about 1440. Conduit Farm (Manor Court) was the home Farm. Houses were mainly of wood, flint and thatch.

A new class of yeoman farmers added to their land. In 1813 the remainder of the common land was enclosed, leaving only the Green.

Hay was grown to feed London's horses and cows. Some was shipped down the canal, some was taken in carts driven by young men and teenagers known as hay jockeys. They would set off at night, and all the pubs on the way would be open. After unloading they would take on stable manure, and drive back. Sometimes they fell asleep while driving, and this led to at least one fatal accident.

Every road out of the village had a ford. The roads were in dreadful condition. When people had to walk they used field paths. The canal was built in 1798, and the nearest station in 1830 was West Drayton.

In the nineteenth century the custom of having farm servants living in with the family was dying out and wages were paid instead, and often a cottage and garden would be provided. Pairs of cottages were being

built. The house at the entrance to Park Lodge Farm was once a pair.

In the nineteenth century cheap grain began to be imported, and farmers suffered. George Cooke was at this time buying up small farms. There were then no lakes in the valley. All was rich water-meadow which was flooded every Spring in order to provide three crops. It was said that there was hay from Breakspear to Highway, and corn from Breakspear to Ducks Hill.

Examples of what might be earned are ~

1881 ~ Carter, able to plough. Cottage and garden free ~ 15s. week.

1883 ~ Man to milk and do farm work - house and garden free 10s. week, Winter, 22s. week, Summer. These would be skilled, experienced men. Labourers would earn less, and would not be needed all the year.

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