

Chapter 13

Changing Communities

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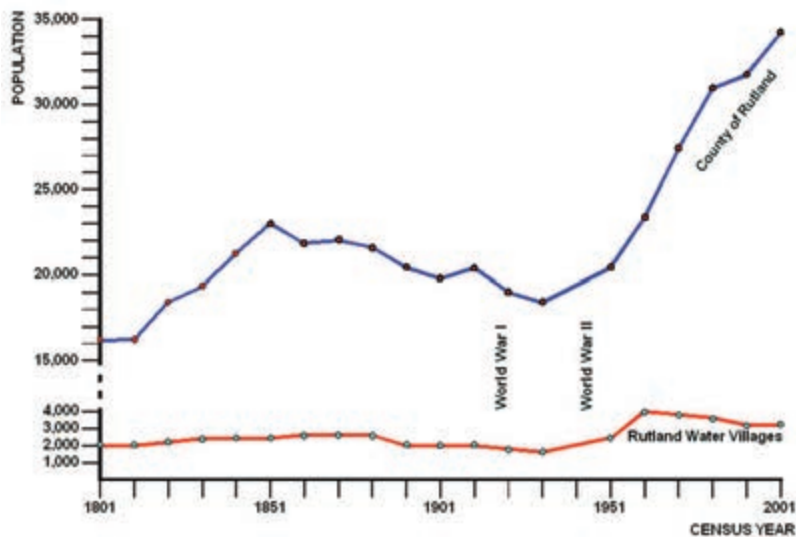
This chapter takes a brief look at the way life has changed in the villages close to Rutland Water: Burley, Edith Weston, Eggleton, Empingham, Gunthorpe, The Hambletons, Lyndon, Manton, Normanton and Whitwell.



*Church Street,
Manton, in 1905
(Hart)*

Rutland's population has more than doubled over the last two hundred years, from just over 16,000 in 1801 to 34,563 at the 2001 Census. However, for the villages around Rutland Water, population has grown more slowly. At 2,069 their 1901 population was little changed from the 2,132 of 1801. The increase in the first half of the nineteenth century was offset by stagnation in the 1850s and 1860s and by a decline in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. Rutland's agriculture in these final decades of the nineteenth century was affected by a combination of low prices, a shift in emphasis from arable to pasture, and a big decline in the number of small farms.

By 2001 the population for these same villages was only 3,183. But for service personnel living at Edith Weston and the resident population of Ashwell Prison in the far corner of Burley parish, the figure would be even lower.



The variation in population of the Rutland Water villages between 1801 and 2001 compared to that of the whole of Rutland (RO)

The creation of Rutland Water displaced approximately twenty families, as recorded by the *Stamford Mercury* of 19th June 1970. Subsequent building on land within the reservoir planning area has been subject to strict control and this has helped to contain population growth.

Families looking for new homes

THE EXODUS of 20 Rutland families, whose homes will be submerged under 27 million gallons of water in the Empingham reservoir, is underway.

Above: Headlines from the Stamford Mercury of 19th June 1970

At the close of the nineteenth century these villages evoked a world more traditional than modern. True, the railway at Manton gave access to the national network and more than twenty people from Manton were employed in connection with the railway. Telegraph wires had reached Empingham as early as 1871 and from 1898 cables could also be sent from Upper Hambleton. But overwhelmingly these were small agricultural communities, self-sufficient in many ways. The majority of those working had been born within the county.

More than 40 per cent of those employed worked in agriculture or related occupations, as labourers, horsemen, cowmen, shepherds, graziers and

Right: Manton Station in 1905. More than twenty people from the village were employed on the railway at this time (Hart)



gardeners. More than a quarter of the total were in domestic or family service, from boot boys and grooms to cooks and housekeepers, to butlers and governesses. Many more affluent families and households would have had more than one servant. The larger halls carried sizeable domestic staffs, ten, twenty and sometimes more.

Beyond this, there were all the trades to support the rural economy, from carpenters to blacksmiths, from wheelwrights to harness makers. Others worked as cobblers, in village shops – particularly as grocers, bakers and butchers – on the railway and as labourers. Teachers, men of the Church, clerks and other professionals help to complete the picture. For young girls and women looking for work, domestic service beckoned, alongside dress-maker, tailoress, laundress or charwoman.

Bringing in the harvest – a postcard of 1911 by S Cooke of Upper Hambleton (Hart)



The Old Bakehouse, Egleton

Visitors to Egleton today may notice the house called The Old Bakehouse and draw the obvious conclusion. Looking more closely, they can see that the house nameplate was formerly the door to a baking oven. Further research would reveal that Egleton was one of several villages in the area where residents could take their Sunday joints to the baker for roasting in his oven.

The nameplate to The Old Bakehouse, Egleton, was taken from a former baking oven (RO)



It was quite common for boys to start work at thirteen. Girls would start work a year or two later but there were exceptions. Mabel Baines, aged thirteen, was living away from home in 1901 and working as a domestic servant in Manton. She was one of thirteen or more children, with eight brothers and sisters still living at home with her parents in Hambleton. It is understandable that she was working away while so young.

The blacksmith's forge at Burley in 1908. At this time William Chambers was the blacksmith (Hart)

There was no state pension at this time and many breadwinners would continue to work for as long as they were physically able. The 1901 Census gives many examples of men continuing with labouring or other manual work into their late sixties, seventies and even their eighties. John Chamberlain of Burley was a wood faggot maker at the age of 79 and Thomas Whitehouse of Empingham was an agricultural labourer, aged 81. For men in their seventies and beyond, unable to find other employment, work on the parish roads and in all weathers was one of the last refuges. John Berridge of Empingham, aged 81, is recorded as a road labourer.

Not all lived to these ages. Shortly after arriving in 1889 the Rector of Lyndon reviewed the church records for his village. For the period 1814-91 he calculated the average age at death as just below 50.

If all else failed, including family help, there remained the workhouse. The Union Workhouse at Oakham, opened in 1837, did not close until after the First World War. Its 1901 residents included a number of older poor born in Edith Weston, Empingham and Hambleton, aged from their late fifties to their eighties. George Topps was also there. He was born in Burley and only 12 years old.



The Oakham Union Workhouse taken from the OS 2nd ed 25" map 1904

At this time there were great concentrations of landownership and wealth. In the 1870s the Earl of Derby promoted a government report on landownership, *Return of Owners of Land 1873*. For Rutland this established that around half the county was owned by just four landowners, including Lord Aveland of Normanton Park with 13,633 acres and Mr G H Finch of Burley on the Hill with 9,181 acres. This landownership and wealth entailed considerable power and influence. The landowner could expect and receive deference from those who worked on or dealt with his estates but he could also enjoy power and influence within the county. In 1900 Mr Finch was a long serving Member of Parliament, magistrate and Rutland County Councillor, holding many other civic positions. His kinsman Henry Randolph Finch chaired Oakham Rural District Council.



The former Oakham Workhouse is now The Schanschieff Site, providing boarding accommodation for Oakham School (RO)



Edward Nathaniel Conant of Lyndon Hall owned 1,471 acres in Rutland in the 1870s and was not in the same landowning league as Mr Finch or Lord Aveland. Nevertheless, after he died in 1901 his gross estate was in excess of £450,000. The *Victoria County History* estimated the average wages of a Rutland worker in 1901 as about fifteen shillings per week. On this basis, it would have taken him over 10,000 years to earn an equivalent sum.

A wealthy landowner or squire had obvious power over the working lives of tenants, workers and the local community but this power could also extend to their private lives. Unmarried girls working in domestic service could lose their positions if they became pregnant. Without family or other help, they might find themselves in the workhouse. Offending behaviour could deprive a labourer of both employment and the house provided with it. Even the estate steward had great authority. In his book *Empingham Remembered* Ernest Mills recounts how his father was forced to leave the village. His father and a friend met two girls outside Empingham Church after Sunday evening service and walked along the road with them. They were seen by the Steward of the Ancaster Estate who employed the girls as maids and was unhappy at the possibility of losing them. The Steward let it be known that the two men should 'leave the village immediately or he would turn their parents on to the street'. Unwilling to cause difficulty in the village for his family, Ernest Mills' father left Empingham and set out to find work in Leicester.

To point out the disparity between the wealth of the few and the earnings of the many is not to deny the recurring generosity of squires to their local communities. The village hall in Eggleton, originally erected as a school

Normanton Hall in 1905, the home of Gilbert Henry Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby (1830-1910), 2nd Lord Aveland, created Earl of Ancaster in 1892 (Hart)



*Mr G H Finch
(centre) of
Burley on the
Hill (private
collection)*

in 1867, is visible testimony to the benevolence of the Finch family. The old school in Empingham, now a private residence, was erected by Sir Gilbert Heathcote in 1838 and enlarged by Lord Aveland in 1872. The village hall in Lyndon was given by Mrs Conant in 1922 in memory of Mr E W P Conant, her late husband.

This nostalgic view of rural life has a less happy side. These were also times when people trapped blackbirds and thrushes for food, when they collected the eggs of wild birds, when poaching was not uncommon, and when women and children gleaned in the fields.

By their very nature, these informal activities leave few written records but they are occasionally recorded in some detail. The *Stamford Mercury* of Friday 14th November 1884 devoted a lengthy



article on page four to a 'Fatal Poaching Affray'. The previous Saturday night a group of poachers had been on land adjacent to Burley Wood, on the estate of Mr G H Finch. From within the wood they were spotted by the head gamekeeper and six others who had been warned to expect poachers. A fracas ensued and one of the poachers, Robert Baker of Melton Mowbray, was struck on the head with a stick by William Collier and collapsed. He was carried to the head gamekeeper's house and died there. Mr Norman, medical practitioner from Oakham, was called and confirmed death shortly after 1.00 on Sunday morning. Two other poachers were apprehended.

*The village hall
in Egleton,
originally
erected in 1867
as the
village school
(RO)*



*The old school
in Empingham,
now a private
residence (RO)*

The next day, Monday, the Coroner held an inquest at the gamekeeper's house. There was disagreement about the number of poachers involved, one side saying three and the other six or seven. William Collier was represented by a Stamford solicitor, Mr Atter. Collier stated that he had struck back at Robert Baker after himself receiving a heavy blow to the head. The poachers were also said to have thrown large pieces of ironstone at the gamekeepers. The solicitor argued reasonable self-defence and the jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide.

Two days later, on Wednesday, the two arrested poachers were tried at Oakham Castle. They had been found with 300 yards of netting and 54 rabbits so there was no easy defence to the charge that they had taken and destroyed a quantity of rabbits which belonged to George H Finch of Burley. Richard Tallis of Oakham and James Elenor of Upper Broughton, Nottinghamshire, pleaded guilty and were sentenced to three months imprisonment. They also had to find a surety of five shillings each not to offend again for one year.

Gleaning, the gathering of corn left by reapers, was a more legitimate activity, normally involving women and children. In some villages a Gleaning Bell would be rung, indicating the allowed time for gleaning, usually between 8am and 6pm. In 1880 the Gleaning Bell was being rung in Hambleton, Egleton, Empingham and Whitwell. It continued to be rung at Empingham into the early twentieth century.



The former gamekeeper's house to the Burley Estate on the old road from Oakham to Stamford (RO)

Not all was dearth and deference in the villages around Rutland Water at the end of the nineteenth century. Several villages kept on until the early 1900s the tradition of the annual Village Feast. This was a day for celebration, for former residents to visit friends and family, and for itinerant traders to come to the village. However by this time, the annual celebration of Plough Monday, on the first Monday after Epiphany, was dying out.

For small villages, it is not clear that these traditional village celebrations had survived so long. The Rector of Lyndon from 1889-1909, the Rev T K B Nevinson, kept a notebook and scrapbook covering that period (ROLLR DE 5163/4/1). With little over one hundred souls to care for, he took a keen interest in village life. He records for 16th November 1890 a special ringing of the church bells, 'this being Lyndon Feast', but does not mention any accompanying fête or gala. Ringing the bells on the first Sunday after 11th November, Martinmas or St Martin's Day, had a special resonance for the church of St Martin at Lyndon.

Lyndon village hall was given by Mrs Conant to the village in 1922 (RO)

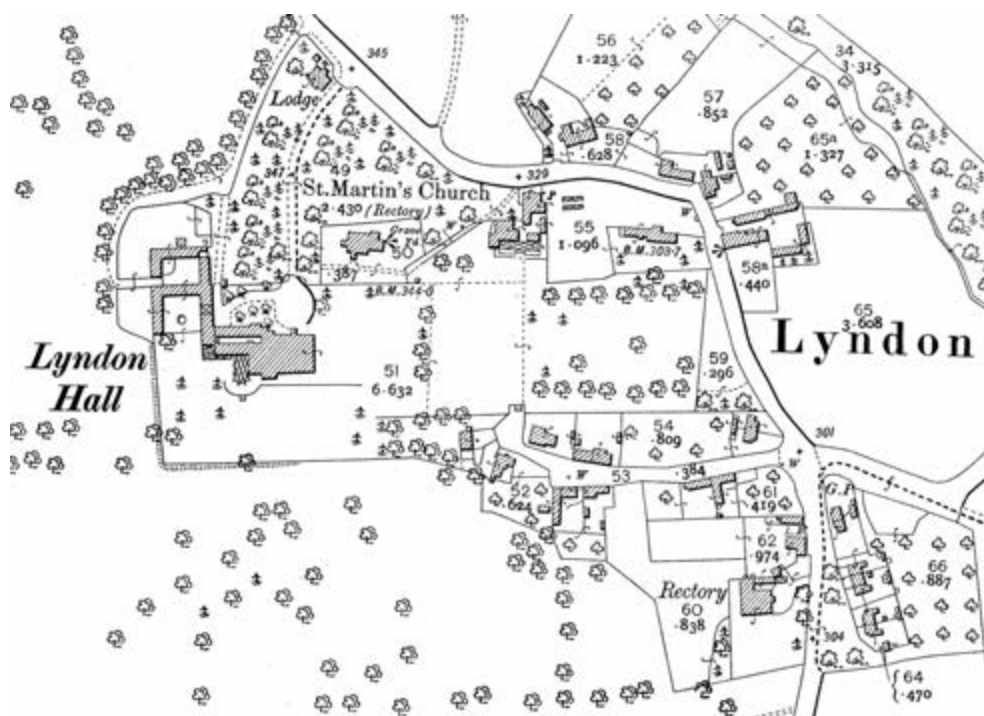
At that time, there was no public house in the village – nor is there now! – and no village hall. Concerts and meetings could take place in the laundry of Lyndon Hall. It must have been a sizeable laundry as more than 50 people came to a lecture in 1895 and 92 attended a concert in 1904. When the Peterborough No 1 Church Army Van visited the village and held several meetings in 1903, the average attendance was 48.



Mr Nevinson recorded the start of a choral society and a Mothers' Union branch. He opened a Reading Room in the Old Rectory which closed after four years for lack of demand. He noted a jumble sale and fête with an excellent tea in the Rectory garden and evening dancing to the Collyweston Band, on payment of a modest charge. He reported occasional celebrations and anniversaries where the squire entertained a combination of parishioners, tenants and tradesmen. These might include cricket and other games, fire-works and dancing.

The quiet pace of rural life was interrupted by a slight earthquake in the winter of 1896. Four years later there was a partial eclipse of the sun, when the Rector and his son carried pieces of smoked glass around the village. International affairs forced themselves on the village the same year when Church Lads' Brigade forces advanced on Lyndon from the direction of Oakham and Stamford. They fought the engagement of 'Lyndonsmith', recalling the recent Siege and Relief of Ladysmith in the Second Boer War. They adjourned for what was described as a 'sumptuous tea' provided by the Rector and his wife. Eventually, they fell in on the Rectory lawn and left in a procession, headed by the 'Stamford drum and fife band' and the 'Oakham bugle band'. A humorous article in *The Stamford Post* of 20th April 1900 reported on the military activities.

Events took a more sober turn when news reached the village in the summer of 1902 that Mr Frederick L Wright had died in South Africa after falling from his horse. He was accidentally killed while on duty with the South African Constabulary. Like his father and grandfather, he had been born in the village where his father was employed as head gardener. In 1889, shortly after the Rector's arrival, he had travelled from Lyndon to the



*Lyndon from the
OS 2nd ed 25"
map 1904*

An extract from
Lyndon
Churchwardens'
Accounts for 1899
(ROLLR DE
1938/14)

Expenditure.				
1899	Olwidney Churchwarden	£	1	9.
April 14	Visitation & Expenses	1	4	
May 15	Leos. Sweeping Wall. etc.		3	6
Oct 7	Medwell putting coal in		1	
10	J. Smiths salary -		15	
	Coal. Bill	1	14	3
02 Jan 14	Sweeping Flues		4	
	Coltmans Bill.	1	17	6
April 6	V. Foster Washing Surplices		10	
10	Medwells salary	2	10	
11	Smiths J. "	2	12	
	Smiths. J. "		15	
		£	12	6.3
Examined & allowed				
17 April 1900.				
Thos H. B. Newman				
(Chairman)				

neighbouring village of Wing for Confirmation at the age of fourteen. A tablet was erected in the church in his memory.

The Churchwardens' Accounts are a more local affair, simple and meticulous. They itemize regular purchases of coal and kindling, payments for washing surplices, cleaning windows and sweeping flues. Beeswax and turpentine were ordered. Spoutings were cleared and gutters tarred. Annual expenses are totalled and set against contributions and subscriptions. Frequently, there was not enough money to pay the expenses in full. Mr Conant of Lyndon Hall and other members of the family regularly made good the difference.

A record was kept of proceeds from collections at church services and of how they were used each year. Although a small village, Lyndon made regular gifts to worthy causes: Stamford Infirmary, Lincolnshire; St Mary's Church, Plaistow, London; The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution; The Church Missionary Society and similar organisations. Gifts were made to the local Coal Club and to the sick and needy but also in 1897 for the relief of famine in India.

In 1891 the Rector married in Stamford and brought his bride home to Lyndon. The carriage was met on the edge of the village where local men took over the task of pulling it to the Rectory. When he left the village, the *Stamford Mercury* of 6th August 1909 described a Farewell Party on the Rectory lawn. Guests enjoyed a meat tea. There were games and dancing to Mr Barnett's band. How times have changed!