

The Witleys' Farms and Farming

Ruth Butler and Judith Henshaw are members of Witleys Oral History Group. They investigated both church records and the local press and have written about the occupancy of the local farms in the Witleys from the 17th century to the present day. Judith came to live in the village in 1943 with her parents Edward Robert and Muriel Forty and brother John. They bought the local post office. Little Witley was part of the parish of Holt Manor known as Holt Castle in the twentieth century. Great Witley had 4 manors, Witley by the Court, Redmarley Adam and Redmarley Thrupton, or Structons Heath and Hill Hampton which was part of Martley Parish. Little Witley and Great Witley were owned by the Foley family and later by the Ward family and Earls of Dudley. Lady Margaret Foley petitioned the Bishop to rebuild the church in the 17th Century and at that time 23 farms were named.

Dingle Farm Little Witley

31ST March 1900 The farm was owned by Mr Adkins who was a tenant farmer. Early on Wednesday morning a fire broke out at Dingle Farm Little Witley. Witley Court Fire Brigade and the Stourport Fire Brigade attended. The fire was in a large barn containing oats straw and implements. The house was out of reach but the Stourport firemen used the horses of N Butler a local undertaker. No doubt the horses galloped to Hillhampton and didn't go at a funeral pace this time!

In 1894 Witley & District Farmers Club held a hedging competition run by the County council, stewards John Adkins & Beville Stanier, Judge Thomas Hogg, Head Forester.

1899 William Brown was elected to Hillhampton Parish Council.

1916 Richard Colwill and Mrs Colwill and her daughter Joan occupied Dingle Farm. It is still farmed by the family in 2015. Mrs Colwill's son Richard and Phyllis his wife, lived at White House Farm Little Witley. The family are still at Puddle Edge, Hazelhurst Farm.

Old Butchers/Dairy Farm Worcester Road

Old Butchers then Dairy Farm on the Worcester Road was 12.5 acres .It had 2 orchards, 1 damson meadow, and a brew house.

The first records refer to 1788 Joseph Hill a butcher followed by 1843 Richard & Elizabeth Kenrick in 1843 also butchers. The next occupant was Mr Beeson in 1855. He was both a butcher and a farmer. In 1860 Mrs Beeson was still living there. She married Charles Goode when he was 52, and she was 75. His step-daughter Emily Beeson 41, was a dairymaid. In 1904 he was working both as a dairy farmer & tax inspector. He died in 1921.

Thomas Quarterman was the next known occupant. He was born 1907, and married Molly in 1939. They had 3 children, Tony, Richard and Angela. Tony and Richard still live in the village today Tom had always supported the village. He was a Parish Councillor for 48 years, and a member of the Village Hall Committee for over 50 years. He was in the following clubs; Isaac Walton Fishing, Lord Ednam Air Rifle, British Legion, and Vice President of the Abberley and District YFC. Tom gave a piece of land behind the Village Hall for sports, known now as the Quartergreen and named so in his honour.

Easthope Farm,

Easthope Farm dates from the late 16th or early 17th century. The name may have come from a family called Eastop or Eastub. In 1734, a George and Margaret Eastop lived there followed by James Edwards in 1884. In 1901 Sarah Tolley aged 63 is recorded as having lived there and had 2 sons and 2 daughters. In 1940's Mr and Mrs Colin Randal & son Harry owned the farm. They ran a dairy & mixed farm with cherry orchard and lots of cats. I often delivered telegrams. 6d was good pay in those days! Mrs Randall always gave me a cup of tea & some cake and something to take home like a duck egg, or cherries, but I always brought some fleas home as well! When it was wet they wore hessian sacks tied over their shoulders. They had no wellingtons or waterproof clothing and neither was there any electricity. Electricity wasn't installed on Woodbury Hill until the 1950's

Heath Farm,

Heath Farm was 45 acres. There were apple & cherry orchards there. Samuel Hill lived there in 1900 followed by Joseph Moss in 1904 and Alex Farquharson from 1912-20. The Fidoe's and Gwilliam families also lived there. Ann & Nick Birkmyer live there today.

Hill House Farm

Hill House Farm dates from the late 17th century. There were remains of an earlier Elizabethan brick house on the site. There is still an old cherry orchard but also fruit and hops were then the main crops. Two large walled gardens are in place. In 1733 Joseph White occupied the house. He was a prominent farmer who also farmed the farm below the church. There is no evidence of this farm today. In 1840 Mrs Elizabeth White, lived at Hill House Farm. She was possibly a family member. By 1873-79 Thomas Hillman occupied the farm and from 1900-1916 Robert Proudman & Sarah and son Robert aged 21 lived there. G Herbert Banks, auctioneer and farmer bought the house in 1920, when the Witley Court estate was sold by Lord Dudley. It remained in family ownership for the next century as home for Mrs Banks, Joan, Honour, Isabel, and Tony. David Banks the local estate agent sold the house in 2015 but still runs the family estate agent business from there today.

Hillhampton Farm

Hill Hampton Farm had a cherry orchard and was farmed by William de Winton in 1884. He sold his Pedigree Hereford herd in 1888. In 1896 Beville Stanier lived there followed by Edward Blackwell. He was a golfer and sportsman. By the 1940's Mr Malton was a farm bailiff there. Mr & Mrs Cotton owned the farm in the 1950s.

Hill Farm/Home Farm

Home Farm was not called Home Farm until 1843. Previously it was in the estate of Red Marley Adam. It was an old manor house with a great hall which was later divided into 2 rooms with a passageway in the middle and a solar. This had a ceiling added and the end cut off when the outside was rebuilt of brick. There is also evidence of a 17th century stair well, a 15th century crook beam barn & a moat fed by a pond. There may have been a gatehouse built over an outside cellar. There were numerous Victorian additions. The kitchens were to the west of the house.

George Hodinott occupied the house in 1873.

A fatal accident took place during this period when Thomas Tyler aged 46 of Wichford was working at Home Farm repairing a traction engine. It needed a large wheel weighing about 1 ton and 6' diameter. He slipped in the mud and crushed his head. William Hankins said that they got the wheel off him but he died soon after. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

John Cotton lived there between 1879-1900 and Thomas Ratcliffe in 1904. In 1914 Leonard Averil who was the farm Baliff lived there. He had two sons one of them was killed in the First World War.

Dr Goodwin's sister in law Mrs Lees bought Walsgrove Farm in 1920 plus part of deer farm covert. During WW2 the house was used by the Women's Land Army. It was farmed on behalf of The Ministry of Agriculture (War Ag) overseen by Wilfred and Howard Owen local brothers The War AG ensured that all farms produced the correct crops for food in the war effort.

In 1944 the house was empty. When Norman Lees came home from the Canadian Air Force he moved in and started mixed farming there with sheep at Walsgrove Farm and dairy at Home Farm. He married his dairy maid and then employed Pam Jones. She and other girls lived at the east side of Home Farm. There was also a Youth Hostel there for a short time run by Len Baggot. The building now pulled down. Walsgrove later housed two young men, Phillip and Frank King and others with a housekeeper. I spent a lot of time with them at Young Farmers, church and village events. They used an old Palethorpe's sausage van like in "Dad's Army". Pam later married Phillip King.

Norman Lees employed Mr Pound. He was an artist at hedging and ditching. The cattle never escaped from his fields and all was done with a bill hook and shovel. Jim Rawlings and Kippy also worked with MR Pound. Norman made a caterpillar tractor and ploughed inside the hill fort on Woodbury Hill to grow potatoes. He was really a boffin and finally sold the farm and went to work at R.S.R.E in Malvern.

The farms were auctioned by G Herbert Banks in 1956 at The Lion in Kidderminster. John Brinton bought Woodbury Hill and Mr Goodman Walsgrove Farm and the Blything Brothers Len & Bert. Home Farm. It was sold with as 123 acres, 2 rods and 3 perches. They grew wheat, oats, barley and potatoes. Len Blything's passion was pure bred Arab horses. They lived on the east side of the house and mainly left the rest empty, the solar had several cast iron baths with flimsy partitions. At one time they had a palamino pony called Cracker. Children from the village often walked to see it. Ben was the more talkative of the two, Len was quiet. He died in 1983, Ben was alone at the farm but sold it in 1984 and went to live with his sister. He died in 1986. Both brothers are buried in Great Witley. Their nephew wrote a small book (Reference)

George Justicz a Hungarian who became an English businessman was the next owner. He started a health food shops with Mr Birkmyer in 1960's. When he bought the farm he turned it into a private house. He renovated and restored the plasterwork, woodwork and removed the Victorian additions. The family stayed for a few years and sold it. The next owners sold the barns for conversion into houses.

Lippets Farm,

The name may have come from a family of Lippets living in the village in 17/19th century. From 1884-1900 William Evans lived at Lippets Farm. In 1912-1920 there were 96 acres & a quarry let to local authority by George Hayward.

Park Farm,

According to the church record John Stinton a farm bailiff and in 1904 Leonard Averil Farm Bailiff, were associated with Park Farm. However from 1912 – 1920 J&J Colwill farmed 217 acres. There was engine house and 2 apple orchards .In 1944 a Mr and Mrs Richards lived at Park Farm

Redmartley Farm

It seems that Redmartley Farm site existed in 17thC or earlier.In 1598. Margaret Russell was buried and recorded in church records and as the wife of John of Redmarley Olyver, which was a different estate. It was reputedly 120 acres. There was 13 acre orchard and cider house including the mill which had fallen into disused by 1920. During this period J Griffiths in 1840. Sarah Horton 1855. William Morris 1873 lived there followed by John Hodinott, lived there from 1884-1896.

Mr Proudman is named in church records as living in the area from 1898 – 1926.He was both a farmer and a hop grower living at Redmarley. It was later turned into a private House John Brinton of Brinton carpets Kidderminster.

Redmarley Orchards.

In the 1920's Red Marley Orchards was farmed by Billy Austen, who ploughed the hill with horses which he kept in John Brinton's yards at Redmarley. This way he was able to cultivate the top of the hill, above the old Hill Climb which was far too steep for tractors. The lower fields had been hop yards. In the late 20's or early 30's the land was bought by Dr Wynn an E.N.T specialist from Birmingham, as a country retreat for himself his family. He built a wooden cabin up behind the Hundred House, now rebuilt. There was one small cottage on this part of the hill called The Pleck, where Ginger Smallman and his family lived. They got water from the spring that supplied the old Rectory. It was condemned and the family moved to a council house.

During WW2 Major Frederick Talbut met and married Gwendolyn Wynn. She was a Queen Alexander nurse. After the war they became fruit farmers at Redmarley and moved to a caravan until their house was built. Fred bought some land off Mr Ricketts, 1 Stourport Rd, to make a drive. Fred started by planting apple trees, blackcurrants and gooseberries to bring in some cash. He kept large pigs to clear the ground, and raised strawberries plants by the Pleck. Gwen kept bees she soon met my Father, a beekeeper .Our families became good friends. Fred had an early Landrover called JOB. They became involved in the village. He joined the choir and Farmers Discussion Group. His niece was Petula Clarke's standin for films. Gwen joined the W.I. Her brother ran the Coal Board and wrote speeches for Wedgewood Ben. Gwen taught me French when I became a mothers help in Paris. Fred soon had a jolly band of workers, Alan Tuffley, Dolly Fullard, Betty Ricketts, and Audrey Francis etc. Fred suffered a heart attack so the farm was sold to Colonel Hildick Smith who carried on with the tradition of fruit farming, and planted apple trees. He was assisted by Peter Van Tongeran who is now the present owner of Mill Orchards farm and grows cherries as well as apples and grapes to make wine. He supports the Village Hall.

Vauxhall Farm

Sarah Potter occupied the farm in 1855. In 1901 Tomas Bank aged 59 farmed there with Eliza aged 55. In 1920 George Herbert an auctioneer aged 22 occupied the farm with John Reginald 21, Geoffrey 17 who was a bank clerk, Alexander 16 a clerk, Madeleine 19, Blanch 31. There were 51 acres of arable land and an orchard.

Walsgrove Farm,

Walsgrove Farm stems from the late 17c. In 1733 it was owned by William Ward and farmed by John & Margaret Southall later bought by Foley family. In 1840-55 it was farmed by Thomas & Marianne Southall, both men were church wardens so were literate. John Twinberrow lived there in 1873. By October 1891, the Headmaster had complained in a letter that 14 children were still working in hop yard and not at school.

Between 1900-1909 Mr Bache farmer & hop grower had financial difficulties. In 1909 March 10th at a meeting of his creditors, J Bache owed £1,868-8-1d. He had assets but owed £1309-9-9d. He had an annual tenancy of £300 and admitted that he kept no accounts and that the figures were estimates. He said the loss was due to hop growing. There was a new occupant in 1912 a Mr Hodgets and by 1916 George Tottenham. He was the last farmer in the village to grow hops.

By 1920 the crops were also damson and cherry orchards and a quarry had been let to local authority for limestone at 6d per yard.

At the start of the war 1939 – 40's Mr & Mrs Rutter had established a mixed dairy herd and employed a dairy maid Mable Edwards. They had two sons Fred and George and their daughter Sue. David Jones, an evacuee also stayed with them.

George married Miss Beeston. Her father owned the saw mill behind the old Walsgrove Cottages. In 1945-6 they employed Italian and German prisoners of war. They were always fighting. They made wicker baskets from the willows for a little money. Mother and I had one that lasted for years.

At that time only Germans worked there. William Eulencamp was one of the German prisoners of war. He didn't go back to Germany and married the Rutter's daughter Sue instead. She taught deaf pupils. They established a school together in the 2 cottages with 4 teenage profoundly deaf pupils who could not communicate. Helen Pyatt and I were encouraged to visit. They made huge progress and were so happy when Helen asked them to be her bridesmaids. The school grew and moved to Malvern with Mable Edwards, the dairy maid.

The next occupants were Mrs Lees and later Norman. Mr Geoffrey Goodman and Lucy were the next residents and concentrated on mixed farming and dairy. They built 2 cottages for the dairy manager and their son Geoffrey and who married Judy. The Goodman brothers then took over the farm. They moved the cattle to Abberley and started Goodman's Geese & Turkeys. They grew asparagus, good for the birds. Recently they sold the old barns and hops kiln, for conversion to houses.

Woodbury Hill Farm

Woodbury Hill farm dates from 17thC. Benjamin Mills lived there in 1840, John Leylan in 1873 and William Martin in 1879. In 1904 Elizabeth Martin was resident and William & Edwin Martin 1912-16 and William Clarke in 1938 followed by Thomas & Sarah Clarke.

More recently in the in the 1940's Cyril and Edith Owen lived there with their four children Bernard, Tony, Shirley, Rosemary. He was a farmer and cattle dealer. The back kitchen had a public footpath running through the house. Mrs Pound the post woman always walked through even though there was a path round the outside. It was her country humour. Ruby Clarke, Edith's sister and her daughter Sally also lived there.

Mr & Mrs Green were the next owners of Woodbury Hill Farm they had the footpath officially changed.

83 Woodbury Hill Cottage

Nell Pain who was also a Clarke and sister to Ruby and Edith occupied 83 Woodbury Hill Cottage. Nell and David Pain brought up their family at 83 Woodbury Hill Cottage. They had 3 children Jim, Hazel and Patrick. They used a ladder to reach the upper floor. There was no electricity in this area. Patrick is the sole surviving member of his generation of this very successful farming family.

Both Shirley Owen and Pat Pain have given interesting accounts of their memories on the hill.

In the late 40's Mr & Mrs Heart who had 2 daughters came to live at 83 Woodbury Hill Cottage. He had been in the armed force. They built the stairs. They kept hens. One night he was woken up by a commotion in the hen house and went to investigate thinking it was foxes. He clearly saw a Roman soldier walking across the grass. No explanation has been found. Mr & Mrs Chris Jones were the next occupants of Woodbury Hill Cottage.

Woodbury Hill

An ancient British Camp of 20 acres and well developed forest are cited on Woodbury Hill. In the 1850's Rev Thomas Pearson reported the finding of some cannon balls inside the hill fort as heavy as 7lbs, probably from the Civil War.

Lord Dudley planted Scots pines on the top to mark the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

John Brinton cleared the Woodbury Hill of rubbish when he owned the Hill. Mr Bede Howell a young forester planted it aided by Jim Rawlings. They were planted so that they would be felled at different times, making space for others to grow. I believe Mr Bede Howell won an award for this. He still lives in the village. When John Brinton died a cairn of stones was placed in his memory near to the camp. David Banks now owns Woodbury Hill Farm and the bluebells still flourish.

Research Local Press Ruth Butler and Judith Henshaw.