

## THE RURAL SCENE IN RINGMER BEFORE THE GREAT WAR

by

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A scrap of paper in my possession affords some interesting information about Ringmer in the age of the horse. It is a list, reproduced in the Table overleaf, compiled probably from memory by a former Ringmer farmer, Charles Carey (1896 - 1974), who was, in his later years, in the habit of writing down his recollections on pieces of paper that came to hand.

The list sets out the farmers (by name), their horses and farmworkers (by number), and local tradesmen and their horses. It was originally headed "Farm Horses in Ringmer, 1908", but the 1908 was then altered to 1914. It may well represent information collected for the military authorities under statutory powers connected with Haldane's reorganisation of the army in 1908 (1) or at the outbreak of war in 1914. The inclusion of the Walkers, who moved from Howells Bank Farm to Lion Cottage in 1907 and emigrated to Australia in 1912, would perhaps favour the earlier date. The accuracy of the information given here as far as horses and labourers are concerned is difficult to verify, but the list of farmers is substantially the same as in the Kelly's Directories of the period, from which the additional notes in column 4 of the reproduced list have been obtained. There are also a number of other farmers and cowkeepers listed in the directories who could very well be those in Mr. Carey's "very small farmers" category. Apart from war service in France in 1915-18, the whole of Mr Carey's life was spent at Broyleside Farm in Ringmer, where he was born. Being a member of a then large farming family he would have been in a position to know such details as are here recorded.

Of the 37 farmers mentioned in the list only four families are still engaged in farming in Ringmer today, Brinkhurst, Andrew, Turner and Foord.

Mr Arthur Brinkhurst and his son still farm the land his grandfather and father farmed and live in the house in which his family lived. George Andrew's son still farms near Clayhill. Mr. Alec Turner and his sons now farm his family land, but live at Highfield Farm. The Foords are no longer at Broyle Place Farm and left Upper Lodge in 1983, but members of the family are now at Upper Wellingham Farm and Barnfield Farm, Laughton Road.

These 37 farmers owned between them 188 horses and employed 169 formworkers. The biggest farmer, Mr. Porter of Ringmer Park and Wellingham, owned 40 horses and employed 30 men. Next in importance, Mr. Martin of Goat Farm owned 18 and employed 20 men. Mr. Page of Lodge Farm had 12 horses and 12 men.

Ringmer Farmers, Horses and Farmworkers

<u>Farmer</u>	<u>Horses</u>	<u>Farmworkers</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Samson	3	4	Richard King-Sampson, Elm Court (Ringmer Hotel)
Porter	40	30	John Porter, J.P., C.C. Ringmer Park etc
Martin	18	20	Thomas Martin, Goat Farm
Page	12	12	John Page, Lower Lodge Farm
Foord	7	6	James Foord, Upper Lodge Farm or Edward & Walter Foord, Broyle Place
Carey	5	5	George Carey, Broyleside Farm
Banister	10	8	Robert Bannister, Upper Stoneham Farm
Holford	6	6	Samual Holford, Norlington House & Upper Clayhill
Andrew	10	12	George Lovering Andrew, Clayhill & Plashett Farms
Stone	3	3	Ellen Stone, Arches Farm
Simmonds	4	6	Obediah Simmons, Moor Lane
Hollingdale	5	8	Thomas Hollingdale, miller, Old House Farm
Stacey	8	10	Michael Stacey, Lower Stoneham Farm
Walker	4	2	Charles Walker, Howells Bank Farm
Hooper	4	4	William R Hooper
Bean	2	1	Bean & Burton, Laughton Road
Fielder	3	1	Norlington
Fuewge	2	1	Henry Fuidge, Moor House Farm
Funnel	2	1	Robert Funnell, Wish Farm, Moor Lane
Verral	2	1	Abel Verrall, Black Gate Farm, Green Lane (Brickyard Farm)
Day	1	1	Thomas Day, Broyle Gate Farm
Hoad	1	1	David Hoad, East View, Harrisons Lane
Blunt	3	2	John Blunt, Shortgate Farm
Blunt, C	2	1	
Tompsett	1	1	Samuel Thom(p)set(t), Neaves Lane
Moon	3	3	
Martin (Wellingham)	5	4	James Martin, Wellingham Farm
Alwins (Glyndebourne)	10	8	David Aylwin, Glyndebourne Farm
Hutson ( " )	1	1	Henry Hutson, cowkeeper, Glyndebourne
Brinkurst	1	1	James Brinkhurst, Green Lane Farm
Ticehurst	2	1	George Ticehurst, Red Barn Farm
Bennet	1	-	Frank Charles Bennett, Old Barn Farm
Turner	1	1	Thomas Turner, Middle Broyle or Chapel Field Farm
Wickens	3	2	Samual Wickens, The Mount
Wickens	1	-	
Pockney	1	-	William Pockney, cowkeeper, Norlington
Wicks	1	1	
Very Small Farmers	<u>15</u>	<u>-</u>	
	203	169	

Trade and Miscellaneous Horses

Christie, timberyard	4
Bakers	4
Grocers	5
Butchers	2
Blacksmiths	2
Brewery (Wellingham)	2
Knackers (Diplock)	2

Footnote

Some minor changes have been made to Mr. Carey's list in this reproduction. In the original the farmers are listed in two batches, Samson-Moon and Martin(Wellingham)-Wickens, with Pockney and Wicks added below. The Trade and Miscellaneous list appears

Trade and Miscellaneous Horses

(continued)

Undertaker	1
Health Service	1
Kenward's Mill	2
Carrier (Turner)	5
Dealer (Wicks)	1
Carriages for Hire	2
Day (Corn merchant)	2
Christie's Carriage	2
Hunters	30
Gypsies	<u>8</u>
	75

as several sub-groups, apparently random. Christie's timberyard appears at the head of the farmers, and the entry 'Very Small Farmers' was with the tradesmen. The 'Notes' added are mainly from the 1909 Kelly's Directory, but the 1915 Directory and the 1903 Land Tax were also consulted.

TOTALS

Horses	278
Farmworkers	169
Farmers (excluding very small farmers)	37

These three farmers, together with George Andrew and Michael Stacey, were responsible for the employment of half the total farmworkers in Ringmer at that time. It may seem surprising that horses outnumbered the farmworkers, but the latter were probably the regular workers, such as carters and cowmen. There would also have been casual labourers employed in haying, harvesting, hedging, ditching and other farm maintenance, and skilled workers such as thatchers who went from farm to farm.

The men who worked with the big cart-horses - the carters and undercarters - took great pride in their teams. Theirs was a seven day week, for even on Sundays the carters were required to groom and feed their charges. In the winter the great beasts spent their nights and rest days in the stables, patiently standing in their stalls, sometimes shaking their magnificent heads and sending forth a loud "whinny" or stamping with their great feathered hooves on the stone floor. The summer months were easier for both men and horses, when the field or paddock near the farm made a welcome change on days of rest. As befitted their size and strength, the cart-horses were given names of a noble character - Duke, King, Prince, Admiral, Captain were favourites.

The proud beasts with their carters were a magnificent sight on the way to the Ploughing Matches. There would be one team after another on the roads leading to the Match, their manes plaited, tails braided, brasses flashing, harness polished, led by their carters who were equally well groomed for the occasion.

The men who worked with the horses laboured quite as hard as their charges. Ploughing must have been very tiring work, for it meant walking behind the plough in the rough, heavy earth from early morning until the day's work was finished. Even then, after stabling his team, the ploughman could face a long walk home to his cottage, and all for an average wage of 15s Od a week. Haying and harvesting too were hard work. Although the horse-drawn binders and mowing machines were beginning to take over on the larger farms there was still a great deal of work for the labourers in the field, the loading of the wagons with hay and harvest and, back at the farm, the unloading of the wagons and making of stacks in the rickyard. No wonder the brewery at Wellingham did a roaring trade at such times in beer at 8d a gallon and stout at 1s Od a gallon stone jar, delivered to the farms. Mr. Carey recalled that when he was asked to sign the temperance pledge as a young man he refused, because "he would be sure to break it in the harvest".

The fields and country lanes linking the farms and fields must have been very busy with the great horse-drawn wagons loaded with hay or sheaves of corn making their journeys too and fro. Carting of root crops, of manure to the fields, grain to the mill and animals to market all contributed to a scene in which horses played their part. Not all the horses employed on farms were heavy cart-horses. There were also lighter horses for lighter work, and on Sundays these would draw the traps and small carts in which the farmer and his family rode to church or chapel, or to visit relatives on nearby farms. It was the custom too for a farmer to be conveyed to his funeral in one of his farm wagons. A more joyous occasion, the marriage of a young farmer or farmer's daughter, would see the happy party returning from church in a gaily decorated wagon, drawn by a team of horses with festive regalia.

A rather different scene at a village forge presented itself in those days, with so many horses needing to be shod several times a year. As late as the 1930s the forge opposite the school was an exciting place to call on the way home, to stand on tiptoe to look over the stable-type door at the great furnace, red and glowing, and Mr. Frank Clark the blacksmith at his anvil shaping the new shoes for the patient horses, the clanging of the hammer and the efforts of the blacksmith's boy with his bellows, whose job it was to keep the fire burning. There were usually horses outside too, waiting their turn to go into the forge.

According to the list the traders of the village were the next biggest employers of horses. There were two bakers in Ringmer at that time, Rhoda Seal, whose

bakery was probably at the corner of what is now Little Paddock, and L.A.Geering. His bakery was pulled down to make room for the main road entrance to Springett Avenue in the 1960s. Adjoining Geerings was the butchers shop, Hoopers. The grocers were Wilmshurst at the Post Office, Goldsmiths opposite the present Scout Hall and Alcorne where the Amoco garage now stands. The health service employed one horse and the local undertaker another. Mr. Turner's carrier service made the journey to Lewes twice a day and he also used horses for his wood carting trade.

An interesting group are the gypsies with 8 horses. These gypsies must have had a more or less permanent site or sites in the village, and came and went with the seasonal work available to them. Mr. Carey told me that until the early 1920s a family of gypsies called Lee camped occasionally in his field behind what is now the childrens' playground in Broyle Lane. He recalled the colourful horse-drawn caravans, crowded with large families and the usual dogs. On one of these occasions the District Nurse was called in to attend the birth of yet another little Lee. This must have been the last visit, and no more was seen of the gypsies.

With 32 hunters and private carriage horses and another 15 of unspecified ownership the list puts the total of horses in Ringmer at 278. This total was almost twice as many as in a previous census carried out a century earlier during the Napoleonic wars (2). At least part of the reason for this increase was that at the earlier date there were over 150 draught oxen kept on Ringmer's farms whose functions had been taken over by horses by the beginning of the present century. Within 12 days of mobilisation on 4th August 1914 the military authorities had collected 120,000 horses and the British Expeditionary Force took 53,000 to France that year (3), but I have been unable to find anybody in Ringmer who can tell me whether any of these horses were ever called for military service.

#### References

- (1) Brigadier-General J.E. Edmonds, 'The History of the Great War Based On Official Documents: Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914', Vol. I, p. 5 (MacMillan, London, 1922)
- (2) ESRO/LCG/3/EW2
- (3) Edmonds, op. cit., p. 30