REMENHAM FARMHOUSE

A HISTORY

by

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PART ONE: THE OWNERS

THE PARISH OF REMENHAM is situated in a bend of the River Thames on the slope of the chalk hills running down to the river and immediately opposite to Henley on the other side. The two parishes are connected by a river bridge constructed in 1786. An earlier bridge here is mentioned in the 13th century. It was destroyed in 1642, during the Civil War. After being partially restored, it was finally swept away by a flood in 1774. The parish was inclosed by an Act of Parliament in 1799.

Traditionally, the village of Remenham has consisted of little more than the church, the rectory school and Remenham Farm. Although there has been speculation that Remenham Farm might be the old Manor House, the original Manor House has its site to the left of the Farm.

The site of Remenham Farm was held in the reign of Edward the Confessor by his estranged consort, Queen Eadgyth [or Edith] [d.1075] a lady who led a turbulent life. Following her divorce from the King in 1051 she was immured either in Wilton or in Wherwell Nunnery. The year following she was allowed to return to Court. It was Edith who obtained the abolition of the ancient custom which empowered bishops and abbots to receive kisses from ladies. Although she was commended by the dying Edward to the care of his successor, Harold, she deserted his cause. This was especially treacherous as Harold was her brother.

The site of Remenham Farm is among the lands mentioned as being held in person by Harold's successor, William the Conqueror, at the taking of the Domesday Survey in 1086. It was granted by the Crown at an early date to one of the Earls of Warwick, probably to Henry de Newburgh. Created Earl of Warwick by William II [Rufus] he was Keeper of Warwick Castle.

The Earls of Warwick sub-let this land to the family of de Montfort. Thurstan de Montfort was holding fees of the old feoffment under William de Newburgh in 1166, and about this time made payment at the Exchequer in regard of his lands at Remenham.

The next tenant of the land of Remenham Farm, including the site of the Farmhouse, was Thurstan de Montfort, the grandson [according to Dugdale] of the first Thurstan. His lands were back in the hands of the

Crown in 1216, possibly as a result of the dispute between King John and his barons which had culminated the year previously in the signing of Magna Carta.

In the course of time the site of Remenham Farm was reinvested in the de Montfort family and Peter, son of Thurstan held it in the middle of the 13th century. Peter de Montfort's family led the baronial opposition to Henry III's misrule during the second Barons' war; and in 1264 defeated and captured the King at Lewes in Sussex. He was killed at the battle of Evesham in 1265, during the last of the Barons' wars, fighting for parliamentary freedom alongside his better-known kinsman, Simon de Montfort [1208-1265], who was also slain.

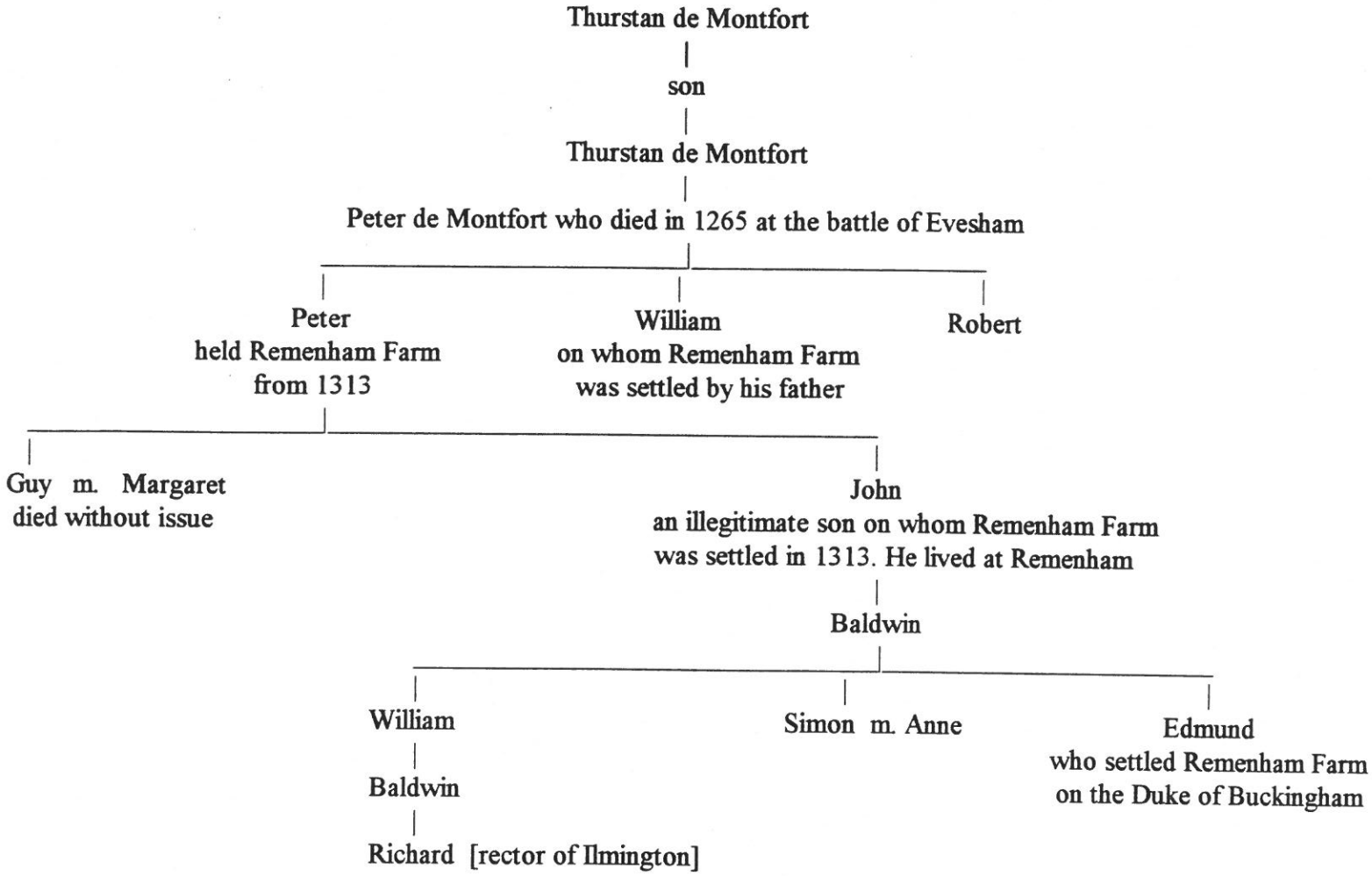
Peter de Montfort left three sons: Peter, William and Robert. Remenham Farm appears to have been settled on the second son, William. He was still holding it in 1308. By 1313 it was held with other manorial land in the parish of Remenham, by his older brother, Peter, who in that year settled an annuity of £50 'issuing from his manor of Remenham' on his illegitimate son, John, and John's companion, Thomas de Ilmington, on condition that they resided at Remenham, possibly in an earlier house which by 1313 stood on the site of Remenham Farm.

In 1349 Peter de Montfort granted Remenham Farm to John for life, with a reversion to his legitimate brother, Guy, who was Peter de Montfort's son and heir. The father additionally instructed that on Guy's death it was to pass to Guy's wife, Margaret, a daughter of the Earl of Warwick. On the death of Margaret, Remenham Farm was to revert to the Earls of Warwick who had the freedom either to let it or to sell it.

Unfortunately, all these plans came to nothing because Guy predeceased both his father, Peter, and his illegitimate half-brother, John, who actually physically occupied the dwelling which is then thought to have stood on the site of Remenham Farm. John's son, Baldwin, was holding this land in 1408; and in 1425 was the defendant in a suit concerning the unauthorised diversion of a water-course.

The estate now became embroiled in an extremely complicated dispute which it is difficult to follow without recourse to the family tree reproduced overleaf. It arose - as such disputes nearly always arise - from various family members believing that their own claims to Remenham and its farm were paramount. The issue came to a head about 1450 when, finding himself without a son, Edmund de Montfort settled Remenham

EARLY OWNERS OF REMENHAM FARM



Farm on his distant kinsman, Humphrey, 1st Duke of Buckingham [1402-1460]. Naturally enough, this settlement enraged Edmund's brother, Simon, as well as his father, Baldwin. However, it was Edmund's to dispose of as he wished. This was an age when might was right and ascendancy depended less on the letter of the law than strength of sinew and a mighty sword arm.

The Duke of Buckingham had both. He was a powerful noble with influence at Court. He had accompanied Henry VI abroad in 1430 and in 1442 was captain of Calais. He was created Duke of Buckingham in 1444. When trouble arose over his inheritance of Remenham Farm, he responded by seizing both Baldwin and Simon de Montfort, imprisoning the one at Coventry and the other at Gloucester, compelling them by means of threats to agree to his entitlement to Remenham and its farm.

In 1450 His Grace the Duke of Buckingham was appointed Warden of the Cinque Ports. He opposed the Duke of York but subsequently sought to reconcile Queen Margaret with the Yorkist faction. He was killed at the battle of Northampton in July 1460, which saw the capture of Henry VI.

After the death of the Duke of Buckingham, Baldwin de Montfort gained revenge for the unjust imprisonment inflicted upon him by contriving to have a clause inserted into the Duke's posthumous attainder safeguarding the rights of his son, Simon, and his heirs, to Remenham Farm and other manorial landholdings. In 1471 Baldwin executed a document in which he set out the pressure which had been brought to bear on him to renounce his interest. For all this, it was Baldwin's other, detested, son, Edmund - who had originally sold the estate to Duke Humphrey - not Baldwin or Simon, who was still in physical possession of Remenham and its farm and manor in 1479.

Quite what happened next is not clear, documents either being non-existent or ambiguous on the subject. As far as can be ascertained, Baldwin appears to have given up the unequal struggle with his son, Edmund. He entered Holy Orders and died in a monastery in 1493. His other son, Simon, was attainted in 1496. Simon's widow, Anne, married one John Preston and through her Remenham Farm descended in the course of time to Sir Reynold Bray [d.1503] the statesman and architect.

Like the Duke of Buckingham before him, Bray was a powerful courtier. He was Receiver-General and Steward of the Household to Sir Henry Stafford, the step-father of Henry VII, and he was actively engaged in

bringing about Henry's marriage with the Princess Elizabeth. He was knighted at Henry VII's coronation. He is generally credited with having designed the magnificent Henry VII's Chapel in Westminster Abbey.

Remenham Farm passed from Sir Reynold Bray to his niece and heir, Margery, who married Sir William Sandys, afterwards Baron Sandys of 'The Vyne' [d.1540] a knight of the body of Henry VII. Sir William, who took a leading part in the festivities at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, was created a baron in 1523. In 1612 his descendant, William de Sandys, conveyed Remenham to Sir Richard Lovelace, afterwards Lord Lovelace of Hurley. Remenham Farm followed the descent of Hurley until the death of John, 3rd Lord Lovelace in 1693. The third Lord Lovelace was arrested in 1683 on suspicion of complicity in the Rye House Plot, a Whig conspiracy to assassinate Charles II and his brother, the Duke of York [afterwards James II]. The plot was betrayed and Lord William Russell and Algernon Sidney were both executed. Lord Lovelace escaped with his life but afterwards espoused the cause of William of Orange by whom, in 1689, he was appointed Captain of the Gentlemen Pensioners.

The third Lord Lovelace died in 1693, heavily in debt. Remenham Farm was sold in 1723 by his heirs to Bulstrode Whitelocke [1605-1675] the Keeper of the Great Seal, 'and as great a keeper of great secrets', who sat as member of parliament for Marlow in the famous Long Parliament. Whitelocke lived at Phyllis Court, Henley. During the *inter-regnum* in England he moved in the highest circles. According to one source, he had one winter's morning in 1652 'some private discourse' with Oliver Cromwell. The two men were strolling - out of range of other men's ears - in St. James's Park when Cromwell said: 'What if a man should take upon himself to be King?' Whitelocke replied: 'I think that remedy would be worse than the disease'. He seems to have changed his mind because he was later appointed chairman of the committee formed to urge Cromwell to accept the Crown.

Whitelocke was by profession a lawyer, having been called to the bar of the Middle Temple in 1626. Although he acted as Parliamentarian Governor of Henley, his loyalty to Cromwell was never more than half-hearted. He was a member of the committee appointed to draw up charges against Charles I and to consider the method of the King's trial, but subsequently refused to take any part in the proceedings. In 1652, in order to have him out of the way, Cromwell sent him as Ambassador to Sweden. At the Restoration, due almost entirely to his refusal to aid in the execution

of Charles I, he escaped punishment. He lived thereafter quietly in retirement. He died at Chilton in Wiltshire.

In 1724 Bulstrode Whitelocke conveyed Remenham Farm to one Gislingham Cooper. It descended through this gentleman to one Dr Cooper who, according to Lysons, sold it about 1760 to the uncle of Strickland Freeman of Fawley Court, who still held it in 1813. Strickland Freeman's heir was William Peere Williams [1742-1832] who joined the Royal Navy in 1757 as a fourteen-year-old midshipman. Although he saw action at the second relief of Gibraltar in 1757, he lived through a time of little real conflict and spent much of his life languishing on half-pay. In 1830 he was appointed Admiral of the Fleet. He took the additional name of Freeman on inheriting Fawley Court. His grandson and heir, William Peere Williams Freeman, was dealing with the manor and with Remenham Farm, of which it formed a part, in 1835. He ultimately sold Remenham Farm to Sir Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks, baronet, of Guisachan, Inverness-shire.

The second surviving son of Edward Marjoribanks of Greenlands Park by his wife, Georgiana, the third daughter of Joseph Latour Esquire of Hexton House, Hertfordshire, Sir Dudley was Member of Parliament for Berwick 1853-1868. He resided in summer at Greenlands, Hambleden, spending his winters on his Scottish estates. Apart from those duties which he discharged in accordance with the code of *noblesse oblige* - as a magistrate and as a deputy lieutenant for London and Inverness-shire - he followed no other occupation, living on inherited wealth.

Sir Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks sold Remenham Farm in 1871 to the Rt. Hon. William Henry Smith [1825-1891], stationer and statesman. Smith entered his father's news agency business in the Strand in 1841, aged sixteen. His acumen for business was pronounced and five years later, in 1846, aged twenty-one, he was made a junior partner. By securing the monopoly of station bookstalls on the newly emergent railway system he increased the firm's profits enormously. He also devised a highly profitable circulating library. He sat as member of parliament for Westminster from 1868 until his death twenty-three years later. In 1877 he joined Disraeli's cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty. When Lord Salisbury succeeded as prime minister in 1886, W. H. Smith was appointed First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons. His widow, Emily [1828-1913] was created Viscountess Hambleden in 1891, after his death, as a form of posthumous recognition of his services to the nation.

When Lady Smith died in 1913 Remenham Farm, together with the family's other manorial landholdings in the parish, passed to her son, William, a partner in the firm of W. H. Smith & Son, who succeeded her as 2nd Viscount Hambleden [1868-1928]. Following his death in 1928, Remenham Farm passed to his eldest son, William, 3rd Viscount Hambleden [1903-1948] who in addition to being a governing director of W. H. Smith & Son was also for many years the Chairman of the Council of the Royal College of Art and President of the Sadlers' Wells Foundation.

PART TWO: THE OCCUPIERS

As we have seen, Remenham Farm was run for several centuries as the Home Farm of the Manorial Estate. The first property on this site was in existence by 1313 when it is mentioned as part of the holding of the de Montfort family. It will be remembered from Part One of this report that Peter de Montfort left three sons: Peter, William and Robert. Remenham Farm appears to have been settled on the second son, William. By 1313 it was held with other manorial land in the parish of Remenham, by his older brother, Peter, who in that year settled an annuity of £50 'issuing from his manor of Remenham' on his illegitimate son, John, and John's companion, Thomas de Ilmington, on condition that they resided at Remenham, probably at Remenham Farm. This would indicate that the original property was a cut above ordinary 14th century farms.

The dwelling disappears from all records until 1644 when it was occupied not as a farm but as a sort of grace-and-favour residence in the gift of the Lord of the Manor, Lord Lovelace of Hurley. Lord Lovelace placed the house at the disposal of his friend, Arthur Duck [1580-1648], who was then in failing health and may have come to Remenham in order to benefit from country air. Quite how the invalid responded to being situated so close to the River Thames, with its attendant mists and dampness, is not known.

Dr Duck [spelled 'Ducke' in some ecclesiastical records] is credited by the *Dictionary of National Biography* with a knighthood, but there appears to be no evidence to support this. The son of Richard Duck of Heavitree, County Devon, he was educated at Exeter College, Oxford. In 1604 he was made a Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford. In 1614 he was admitted an advocate at Doctors' Commons, the colloquial name for the College of Advocates and Doctors of Law situated near St. Paul's Cathedral. These advocates - a wholly separate body from the barristers of the time - enjoyed a monopoly of practice and were required to hold doctorates in the civil [i.e. Roman] law before being admitted by the Archbishop of Canterbury to practise in the Court of Arches, which sat originally in the crypt of the church of St. Mary-le-Bow in Cheapside. A

description both of the premises and the court at work is given by Dickens in Chapter 23 of *David Copperfield*. The court ceased to function in 1857.

In 1624 and again in 1640, Doctor Duck sat as Member of Parliament for Minehead. About 1628 he was appointed Chancellor of the Diocese of London. In 1635 he was made Chancellor of Bath and Wells. In 1645 he was made a Master in Chancery, an appointment which was then almost a licence to print money. The Court of Chancery was the most long-winded of the three divisions of the High Court of Justice. Indeed, cases here took so long to resolve that the phrase 'to get a man's head into Chancery' became a popular Victorian saying and meant that once a person was so situated the lawyers 'might pummel him as much and as long as they choose'. Dickens alluded to the exhausting nature of Chancery proceedings in *Bleak House*, citing the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, based on a true dispute which lasted eighty years. If Doctor Duck was able to protract his dealings for even one tenth of this time he almost certainly died a rich man.

Remenham Farmhouse appears to have been entirely rebuilt - or at the very least substantially altered - in the early Georgian period, probably in the 1720s. No firm evidence survives to support the theory but the balance of probabilities suggests that the house as we see it today came into existence at some point after 1724, the year in which, it will be remembered, Bulstrode Whitelocke's heirs conveyed it to Gislingham Cooper.

When the inspectors of the Department of the Environment re-inspected the property in the mid-1980s they described it thus:

Farmhouse. Late 18th century, altered brick, hipped old tile roof, two storeys. East Front: 3 bays sash windows with glazing bars, two 19th century angular bays on ground floor flanking a 19th century gabled wood porch.

Although one hesitates to challenge the Department of the Environment, the writer of this report doubts the description of the property as 'late 18th century'. The bonding of the brickwork - known as 'Header Bond', consisting of rows of alternating headers [bricks laid end on] and stretchers [bricks laid lengthways] was at its most popular in the early part of the 18th century, rather than the late 18th century.

In its present incarnation, Remenham Farm has been chiefly - but not exclusively - occupied as the Home Farm of the manor. As such it accommodated a succession of manorial bailiffs and farmworkers. The most notable exception to this pattern was between about 1790 and 1858, when it was farmed on a lease from the Lord of the Manor by a family of independent farmers named Sharp.

When the Census enumerator called at Remenham Farm in 1841 the head of this family was James Sharp 36, the third generation of his family to farm here. Sharp was still farming at Remenham ten years later, in 1851, by which date there were no less than sixteen people living in this house. In addition to Sharp there was his wife, Susanna 41, and their son, James 5. Sharp appears to have been looked upon as something of a master farmer because the Census enumerator noted that he was lodging Richard Hamer 20 and Arthur Cole 16, who are described in the returns as 'Farmer's pupils'.

The Sharps were prosperous and lived well. They kept two live-in domestics, Charlotte Walker 25, and her fourteen-year-old sister, Elizabeth. The Walker girls were the daughters of Fowler and Mary Walker, who lived in Remenham all their lives. Mary Walker died in 1851 and Fowler in 1863, as their tombstone in the churchyard attests.

If he was well-breeched, James Sharp was not a man to waste money on unnecessary lodgings for his farmworkers and in accordance with standard practice was in 1851 boarding no less than ten of the young unmarried labourers who worked for him. These were: James Neil 23, Thomas Irving 20, Thomas's younger brother, James, who was a mere twelve years of age, William Neville 19, James Tucker 19, William Sadler 17, Joseph Bowler 16, George Strong 18 and the seventeen-year-old James Pain.

At the taking of the 1851 Census, James Sharp described himself as 'farmer of 1,000 acres employing fourteen labourers and ten boys'. By the standards of the time this was a large farm. The farming community of Victorian England was very diverse. It ranged from gentlemen farmers such as the Prince Consort at one end of the spectrum, to smallholders scraping a living from as little as five acres at the other. James Sharp, with 1,000, had a landholding well above average for that period. The total number of farmers remained more or less static at 250,000 throughout the reign of Queen Victoria - from 1837 to 1901.

For James Sharp, farming would have been less an occupation, more a way of life - a family enterprise which inextricably bound work with the home. In 1838 William Howitt had likened farmers such as Sharp to 'little kings', enjoying a healthier environment and exercising greater control over their surroundings than the tradesmen cramped in the towns and cities. Their home life was also much praised.

Remenham Farm is unlikely to have been short on creature comforts, but one suspects there was no false show. William Cobbett summed it up in 1830: - 'Plain manners and plentiful living'.

If he was typical of the breed, James Sharp would probably have been slow to adopt new ideas. His life was in some respects traditional and unchanging. But due to the second agricultural revolution, which followed in the wake of large-scale mechanisation and the greater use of scientific methods - allied to the spread of the railways and of newspapers - even Remenham, tucked away at the bottom of a Berkshire lane - would not have escaped the need to change entirely.

We know that James Sharp was solidly based - both in the community and within the freemasonry of agriculture. Evidence suggests that he was probably a gentleman farmer - hardly distinguishable from the local gentry and sharing with them the pleasures of the hunt. Given that he employed such a large workforce, one suspects that he was not the kind of farmer who worked alongside his labourers in the fields, in his smock-coat. Nor did he share their problems: 'going on' - in the words of Fowler - 'from cherry time to cherry time and getting no forwarder'.

Because it was built to no architectural rules and before the era of preservation orders [evolved according to requirement and vernacular tradition] Remenham Farmhouse would have been a rambling, somewhat inconvenient, but essentially comfortable place. Sharp and his family lived cheek-by-jowl with the sights, sounds and smells of the farmyard. Like all farmhouses, it would have been divided into two areas - one for service, one for living. The former would have included rooms for brewing, dairying and laundering. At the very least, the latter would have been represented by a parlour - used on high days and holidays, and for funerals.

Bridging the two and serving as the chief focus for the house would have been the kitchen where, sooner or later, all occupants met. The furniture here would have embodied the spirit of Cobbett's 'plain manners' - simple and functional, the product of the village joiner, working to local traditions. Styles scarcely changed. Only the increased use of imported deal in place of native oak, ash and elm distinguished newer articles.

Certain items were basic to all farmhouse kitchens: a robust long table, for example, large enough to seat all the household. Chairs of ladderback or spindle back were common, as were Windsor chairs. Alternative seating was provided by the settle, which was invariably placed beside the kitchen fire, where its back served as a screen against the scything draughts drawn up the chimney. Another essential item was the kitchen dresser, loaded with cheap earthenware such as Staffordshire, which by James Sharp's day had replaced the pewter of an earlier age.

If you had asked James Sharp for a glass of water in the middle years of the 19th century he would almost certainly have drawn it for you from a well. It would have been good fresh sparkling water, but there was of course no mains supply and no taps to turn on. At night the farmhouse would have been lit by candles, and from about 1850 by paraffin lamps. The candle provided a beautiful mellow light, soft and golden, but not by modern standards a very bright one. Consequently the Sharps would have tended to go to bed soon after it got dark. This practice probably accounted for the large number of children in rural families.

Susanna Sharp was responsible for the making of butter, cheese and clotted cream, and for the smoking and curing of meats. In what little spare time he enjoyed, her husband would have set his rabbit traps or gone after duck, partridge or pheasant - anything for the pot.

James Sharp's life was a busy one. We know he employed a carter, who was responsible for looking after the horses, and a cowman to tend the cattle. The cowman took the animals to pasture, brought them in for milking at 5.30 a.m. and again at 2 p.m., milking them by hand.

Sharp's life at Remenham Farm was ruled by the seasons - the measured procession from one harvest to the next which determined the farm's routine. Once the autumn harvest was gathered in - later then than now - ploughing would begin. By the middle of October, Sharp would have sown his winter corn. In January his men would have spread manure on the unploughed fields, and the corn of the autumn harvest would have been threshed - a great event. February was a quiet month, known locally as 'February Fill-Dyke' on account of the high rainfall. It was also the month for hedging and ditching, when the men were kept busy trimming, cutting and burning. In March grain was sown, and in April root crops for cattle-food.

With the coming of the warmer weather, and the luscious grass of May and June, the happy and fragrant days of hay-making began, the most evocative of the year. During hay-time the fields smelled delicious and the village children who were sent out to deliver their fathers' 'fourses' - or

tea - would stay to play in the hay, hiding in it, tossing it about and enjoying its warmth and smell. In June, when the hedges began to sprout new, tall green growth, the men were put on hedge-trimming again; and in July James Sharp's mind would have turned once more to the corn harvest and the likely success of his crops. Soon August came and all hands were in the fields. There was extra money then both for Sharp's regular workers and those he borrowed from other farmers, all of whom worked until the day-light faded. The corn harvest would have been cut by scythe or perhaps with the aid of a horse-drawn machine. Labour was cheap and three good men using scythes could cut ten acres of wheat if they worked from dawn to dusk.

The days of harvest were in some respects the most memorable of the year. The work was hard and had to be done quickly; but there were rest times at 'elevenses' and at 'fourses', when the men would lie in the shade of the trees and quench great thirsts with cold tea or beer, and eat heartily to 'stoke up' for the next spell of work. When all was gathered in, James Sharp would have provided his workers with a harvest supper by way of thanks. He would have rendered up his thanks to God in the church - the church he served many years as a churchwarden.

Sharp was not only a farmer. He had also to be his own salesman. Most of what he produced found its way to the local markets. He would have taken a sample of his grain in a small cloth bag to show the dealers and the factors of the Corn Exchange - the middle men of the agricultural world. On the strength of that sample the factors would have offered a price for the entire crop lying in sacks back at the farm. The first price was never accepted and some hard bargaining would have ensued. Corn was sold on to the miller, barley to the brewers, oats to the porridge-makers and manufacturers of cattle-feed. Livestock went to market on a separate day.

The Sharp family left Remenham Farm about 1875, when the property reverted to use as the manorial Home Farm. In 1883 it was occupied by Emanuel Trim, described in the Kelly's *Directory of Berkshire* as 'farm bailiff to John Noble Esquire'. About 1888 - the year Jack the Ripper was stalking the fog-bound streets of London's Whitechapel - the house became the home of Colin Trophimus Holloway , who was then aged thirty and came here with his Welsh-born wife, Mary 30, a native of Glamorgan. The 1891 Census lists the Holloways occupying Remenham Farm with their son, Colin 6, and their daughter, Rosamund, who at the time of the enumerator's visit in the April was only a matter of days old. The Holloways shared the house with their servants: Eva Cousin 21, who gave her place of birth as Hornsey in London, and Rosa Holland 18, who hailed from Watlington in Oxfordshire.

The Holloways occupied Remenham Farmhouse until Colin Holloway's death, which occurred 4 May 1936. His wife, Mary, had predeceased him, having died 27 April 1932, aged 75. Colin was laid to rest beside her in the churchyard, in a grave situated directly inside the gate, close to the left hand side of the path as one walks towards the church. They are thus as close to the house which they occupied for so long as it is physically possible to be.

With the passing of Colin Holloway, Viscount Hambleden put a new farm bailiff into Remenham Farm, F.E. Lewis Lamb. But in 1932 the property was taken by John Harrison Cridland. Cridland's father had wanted him to become an engineer. Being a dutiful son he qualified as such. He then told his father: 'I've done what you asked of me. Now I'm going farming'. He began in his grandfather's farming business but the two men found it difficult to get along. When he heard the Hambledens were looking to rent Remenham Farm, Cridland grasped the opportunity. He farmed it independently and ultimately purchased it. On his marriage in 1936 he was joined here by his wife, Clare.

In the 1950s John Cridland inherited family estates including a herd of world-famous Aberdeen Angus cattle, which he transferred here from the family home near Gloucester. He lived and farmed at Remenham until his death in 1989. As he lay dying, his wife, Clare, heard the sound of footsteps outside her bedroom door, creaking the floorboards as they moved. There was no one there. Clare has subsequently been unable to get 'even so much as a squeak' out of those same floorboards - although she has seen a very interesting apparition, which materialises at the foot of her bed. Dressed in clothes of the late Georgian or early Victorian era, including a pair of baggy trousers and a smock-shirt, the figure is that of a man, grave of countenance, who stares in front of him before slowly fading away. On one occasion he walked towards the window and was heard to mutter: 'Bella, Bella, dear Bella'. Clare doesn't find him at all frightening. She says: 'I miss him. I haven't seen him for ages'.

A second psychic phenomenon attached to Remenham Farmhouse is the sound of the door knocker being rapped, usually about four o'clock in the morning. Clare Cridland, whose home this has been for sixty years, has been woken by it many times.

If Remenham House has its shadows, they appear to be harmless enough. They are, anyway, no more than would expect of a house of such antiquity

- the unavoidable baggage of memory which has attached itself to the dwelling down the centuries.

Is that rapping door-knocker the sound of the wind, or the imprint left on time and space by some long-dead farmworker seeking to raise the bailiff to attend a dawn ewing or foaling? Many people would dismiss such talk as nonsense, but it would be a brave man who dismissed such ideas out of hand.

Buildings are more than bricks and mortar, timber and thatch. They are a palimpsest on which every occupant has left an imprint. To that degree the past and those who occupied it still exist ... are still with us.