

Cattle suffered from many, at that time, incurable diseases. You may be surprised to learn that Foot and Mouth disease was endemic in many parts of the country. During an outbreak in the Hodder Valley, one of my ancestors received the gratitude of the farmers by selling affected animals to Preston Barracks for consumption by the soldiers. He was given a pewter tea service for his efforts.

Other diseases such as husk (infection of lungs), liver fluke (parasite in the liver), bovine tuberculosis, contagious abortion were only controlled in the 1950's. At Wood Farm 13 heifers died of husk and were buried in one grave. Infertility and inadequate nutrition after a bad summer also reduced production. During the last 25 years some of these diseases have been replaced by others such as BSE, DVD etc. Lack of production records also hindered improved breeding and feeding. What I have written above also applied to sheep and pigs to a greater or lesser extent.

Mechanisation was also very slow, obstructed in part by farm workers who were frightened of losing their jobs, and by the cost. Primitive tractors invented during the early 1900's (boosted by Fordsons during the First World War) did not become common on the local farms until after the Second World War.

The scythe was the most important tool in the corn and hay harvest, worked by teams of men who took a great deal of pride in the tool and speed with which they could cut the crop. The scythe did not begin to disappear until the horse drawn mowing machine was invented in the 1840's in America.

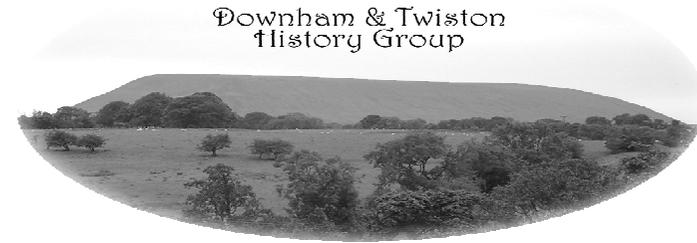
Whilst the cutter bar was invented for the mowing machine this was applied to a self binder which cut the corn and bound the sheaves with string. Combine harvesters did not appear until the 1920's.

The other problem was finance, I doubt if many farmers even knew their Bank Manager let alone had an overdraft. Nowadays the cost of establishing a farm has escalated enormously and if you look at the farming press you will see the prices of cattle and sheep and also the prices of land and machinery.

You can then appreciate that 90% of farmers in the 1900's did not have an overdraft and now it is the other way round and 90% probably have an overdraft.

The cost nowadays hinders young farmers applying to rent a farm, let alone buying one. The only reason many farmers are able to start farming on their own account is by inheriting a business or marrying a farmer's daughter.

*Norman Lund*



## NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2010

### DATES & SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR MEETINGS

<u>Wednesday</u> 1 December 2010	The History of My House – Judith Nixon
Monday 10 January 2011	Twiston Mill [part 2] – Jenny Palmer
Monday 14 February 2011	Memories – several friends talking about memories of life in Downham
<u>Wednesday</u> 23 March 2011	Speaker ‘Vernacular Buildings’
Monday 9 May 2011	2 stories about a local man's life & family [Colin Wiseman]

**£1 subs per meeting**

The topics may be re-arranged depending on availability of speakers/material

SINCE our last newsletter we have had 3 meetings with some interesting talks. At our August meeting Norman Lund gave a talk on ‘A History of Farming’ which is the main feature of this newsletter. We also had a short talk on the history of Downham Post Office. In October we watched a film made by the Mormons in 2008 about their history in Lancashire. Downham featured in this story with some good film shots of the village. [This DVD is available on loan from Elizabeth Wrigley]. In November we looked at the family history of the Smithies and Lonsdale families. We had been loaned some lovely old family photographs of Francis and Mary Smithies [nee Lonsdale] who lived at Lyndene following their marriage in 1919. Both families have a long history in the parish – some of the Lonsdales settling in Chatburn with relatives still there. The earliest Smithies record in Downham is 1606 and it is likely that there was always a Smithies in the parish from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century until Florence died almost two years ago. Like the Lonsdales the Smithies were originally farmers, both families diversifying in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when many farmers also became hand loom weavers.

## A HISTORY OF FARMING

A few months ago Jenny Palmer gave me a 1943 Farm Survey of Lower Smithy Fold Farm which Brenda & I tenanted in 1953.

The figures in that survey caused me to wonder and to puzzle how little progress had been made in increasing production over many years. My father had started farming in 1930 on a 30 acre farm near Clitheroe, the income then was very low until he started retailing milk, from a handful of cows, in the town.

He had a horse, a few cows, sheep and poultry not much different to the number in 1953. Numbers and production which would be little different to hundreds of farms in Downham and East Lancashire. Had there been any attempt to modernise, increase production and income?

Reading history took me back to the early 1800's when an Act called the Corn Laws was passed through Parliament mainly by MP's representing landowners (the vast majority of farms were tenanted).

When the Napoleonic wars ended food should have been cheaper, however, the effect of the Corn Laws was that foreign food could only be imported when home prices hit a designated ceiling. The result was the price of food became artificially high. Great for landowners and eventually creating chaos for everyone else. Increased prices for food did not increase production or filter down to the farmers because landowners increased the rents and the larger income ended up in the mansions and luxury spending by the gentry.

Increasing demands by industry (in Lancashire & Yorkshire) denuded the farms of labour, it must be remembered that every aspect of food production depended on hand labour or horsepower. The benefits of steam power did not and could not be used in harvesting corn or haymaking, milking cows or producing meat.

The combination of dearer food and the demand for and supply of cheap labour led the working people in the towns and cities into the trap of poverty. Great unrest and riots followed, compounded by the potato famine which affected not only Ireland but Scotland and parts of Northern England.

Nowadays demand for famine relief is centred in other countries not the British Isles. During the 1830's demand for help to save the starving was prominent – Queen Victoria contributed £2000 – one person among many from the well to do.

In 1846 the Corn Laws were repealed and over the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cheaper food began to flow in from the colonies, brought by steam ships. Not from British farms who could not cope with providing food for an increasing population which had doubled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In Downham the two William Asshetons started to rebuild farmhouses and houses in the village including barns and cattle accommodation. Farmers benefited by hiring themselves and horses and carts to the estate helping in the building. Small farms

did not suffer as much as the urban poor. They had food in the fields and, if they were short of cash, could barter with neighbours. The village had its own butcher and there was a slaughterhouse near the railway below Green Lane farm.

I do not know of much legislation affecting farming until 1932 when a statute was passed and the Milk Marketing Board (MMB) was formed. Raw milk is a very delicate product and as the railways developed was sent from market towns to the city dairies in churns by rail. I have a photograph showing farmers congregating outside Clitheroe Station with horses and traps loading these churns on the 7.30 am train destined for dairies in Manchester etc. to be delivered to customers the same morning. Full churns were exchanged for empty ones.



A large number of farmers supplying milk in small quantities (20-30 gallons) to dairies far away with little direct contact eventually had to lead to chaos. Many farmers were not paid, the dairies saying the milk was sour or unclean (sometimes they were right!).

The MMB sorted this by collecting the milk from farms by wagons and delivering direct to the dairies - checking the milk for quality and quantity, paying the farmer a fixed price and charging the dairy. Some farmers adjacent to the towns of course retailed direct to customers who were ever critical of quality.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century progress in curing and containment of animal health problems was slow. As the horse was the most valuable animal in the towns as well as on the farms, more attention was given to their problems than any other animal.