

# WHEN THE FARMERS SOWED THEIR OATS (& RYE) OVER OLD WOKING, KINGFIELD & WESTFIELD

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I thought it would be easy to find information about the crops grown in Woking's fields in medieval times – after all, as I said last week, Woking was always a mixed farming community and it is known to have operated the 'three field system' – but finding firm facts has proved harder than I thought.



A note written on the back of this photograph of the field at Barnsbury Farm before the First World War reads 'Oats too high to be cut and tied by binder'. Oats had obviously not gone completely out of fashion in Woking at that stage.

The evidence for the three open fields in which each local farmer had strips of land comes mainly from place-name evidence. To the north of Old Woking High Street (where Rydens Way and its associated side roads are now) was the 'Town Field'; following on from that (where the Elmbridge Estate and the Sixth Form College & SJB School are) was the 'King's Field'; with the 'Westfield' naturally enough to the west of that. Actually the West-Field was divided into two by the main road from Old Woking to Mayford and on to Guildford, so that you had the Lower Westfield where Woking Football Club, Westfield Avenue and the Loop Road Playing Fields are, and the Upper Westfield to the south of Westfield Road.

The idea was that each farmer had a number of strips in each field, allowing everyone the chance to have some of the good farmland as well as the bad. At a meeting each year it was decided which crops would be grown in which field - one of the three fields being left fallow (in

order to recover), whilst one grew root crops and the other the cereals. But what cereals and root crops did they grow?

Again the probate inventories looked at last week provide some information, although obviously what time of year a person died does dictate the evidence to a certain extent.

In April 1573 Robert Hardewyn, a yeoman farmer in Byfleet, died and an inventory was made of his goods. Amongst the items recorded were sixteen bushels of 'rie' (valued at £1.12s), eight bushels of 'otes' (4s) and 'haie' to the value of 10 shillings. There were also twelve acres of 'rie upon the grownd' (worth £6 – the most valuable single item in the entire inventory) and four acres of oats (£1), but would there have been more or other crops in the fields (and the barns) had the inventory been made later on in the year?

John Shaddatt (or Sherratt) senior, of Woking

died in May 1581 leaving half a quarter of rye worth eight shillings; seven shillings-worth 'in oatmalt'; one shilling of 'smale oates'; and rye and oats 'in the feyld' worth £3.6.8d and £1 respectively (although we have no idea of how many acres of each were growing). Three years later, in May 1584, Henry Lee, a husbandman at Sutton, died leaving in his barn twelve bushels of rye worth £1, a bushel of barley (worth 1s 4d) and 'ten hell a rye strawe' worth one shilling and eight pence. But there was also four acres of 'smale woots an a acre of pese' (£1.11.8d), and 'four acres a rye and a half and an acres a wheat and a halfe' worth £4 in total.

From the above it seems that rye was one of this area's main grain crops, with probably oats in second place, but as interesting as these records are, they cannot give us a proper statistical analysis of the local crops at that time. For that we need to go forward to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the Crop Returns that

were carried out by the local clergy not just in Woking, but throughout the country.

From these we can see that in 1801 there were 1,562 acres under cultivation in the parish of Woking, of which 469 acres were wheat, 449 acres were barley, 131 acres were oats and 60 acres were rye (altogether 1,109 acres of cereal, or 71% of the cultivated land) – so oats

and rye appear to have really gone out of favour by then.

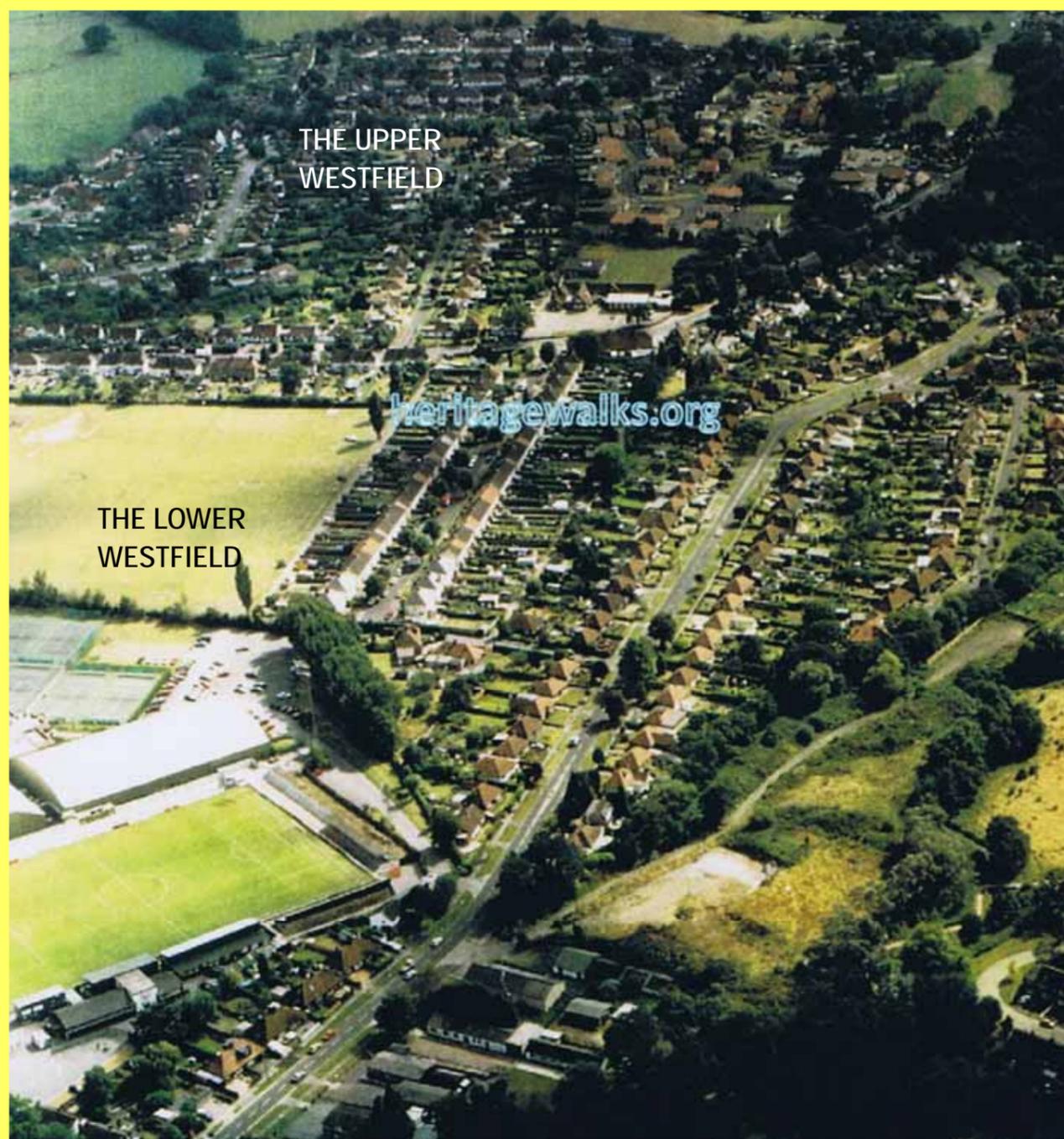
Unfortunately the crop returns are a little unclear when it comes to the growing of root crops as the figures for turnips was mixed in with rape (309 acres or 20% of the land), presumably because both were usually grown as a fodder crop. That may also account for

some of the 111 acres of peas that were grown in Woking (7% of the crops), when compared to the returns for Byfleet (26 acres of peas) and Pyrford (6 acres of peas). Of course you have to be careful when comparing one area with another as Byfleet's 26 acres of peas still accounted for about 5% of its crops.

One historian looked at Woking's tithe map from 1841 and calculated that of the total acreage of Woking (6,830 acres), over a third was 'waste' or commonland, with 29% grass and meadow, 18% dedicated to cereal growing and 10% what he noted as 'other' arable (the remaining 9% being roads, streams, houses etc).

Of course it is difficult to compare one set of figures with another (and a great amount of caution should be taken from drawing false conclusions), but that would mean that in the forty years between the recording of the crop returns in 1801 and the drawing up of the tithe map in 1841, just over 330 acres of land growing cereals had been lost. On the other hand the amount of land dedicated to rape, turnips and other vegetables had possibly increased by about 230 acres.

Today I suspect that there are very few crops of any sort being grown in Woking, apart from the corn that is normally grown off Carters Lane in Old Woking and in the fields of Lady Place Farm at Pyrford – the rest is mainly grazing for horses (or golf courses and gardens). So much for progress.



Left: The Lower West Field would have been at the base of this aerial view (Westfield Avenue and the football ground), with the houses to the south of Westfield Road (at the top of this picture) occupying the site of the Upper West Field.

Below: In the 1950's the houses of the Elmbridge Estate (below) replaced part of the medieval 'Kingfield' open field.



## THE ENCLOSURE OF THE COMMON FIELDS



In Woking the 'Town Field' (seen here in the distance from the footpath to Old Woking from White Rose Lane) covered 51½ acres which in 1841 (according to Woking's Tithe Map) was divided into forty plots most of which were between ¼ and 4½ acres in size. Forty different smallholders may originally have farmed those plots, but by the 1840s they had been consolidated into the ownership of just six people (although thirteen different occupiers were still listed).

This appears to have been a hangover from the medieval 'open-field' system ensuring that everyone had a fair share of the good and bad soils of the area. Of course some had a fairer share than others, but the system was also inefficient and in most places was abandoned long before the enclosures of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In Byfleet when some 750 acres were enclosed in 1800 (together with the Manor of Weybridge), the King (as Lord of the Manor) and his son, the Duke of York (as his tenant) received about 36% of the common land out of

the enclosure award. Fifteen percent went to the church and 8% to the Parish, with just 29% of the newly enclosed farmland being distributed amongst the farmers of the area. The remaining 12% was sold to help pay for the



enclosure commissioners (at about £20 per acre), most of which was probably bought by the major landowners to add to their not inconsiderable landholding.

It is estimated that about 36% of the land at Byfleet had been 'waste' (or common) with 21% of the manorial lands used to grow cereals, 23% grass (for grazing) and 16% other arable.

Again, at the time of Byfleet's Tithe Map (1846), some strips of land (each described as a 'piece of Bennetts Corner') were owned or occupied by a number of local farmers, possibly indicating the location of one of Byfleet's former open fields in the area to the south and east of St Mary's Church.

## MEDIEVAL MONKS MAKE THEIR MARK

Brook Place, Chobham.



**F**or the early medieval period the cartularies of Chertsey and Westminster Abbey's throw an interesting light onto local agricultural practices.

In 1332 William de Brok (who presumably lived in the area of Brook Place), had his smallholding confiscated by Chertsey Abbey as according to his neighbours he had let his

holding deteriorate to the damage of the Abbot. Later he was given the land back, but in the inventory taken at the time we know that he was growing two and half quarters of winter wheat valued at ten shillings and five quarters of oats worth half a mark (6s.8d).

According to Peter Brandon in his History of Surrey, 'at Pyrford the Abbot of Westminster had between 160 and 170 tenants in 1330,

seventy of them cottagers and smallholders' who 'cultivated their tiny plots more like kitchen gardens than farms, sowing a little winter and summer corn in regular succession'.

He goes on to note that 'it is unlikely that the soil could have borne good crops for more than a few years at a time with the little manure available', which probably explains the numerous assarts noted in the area at this time.

## SO WHO WAS THE 'STANLEY' OF STANLEY FARM, KNAPHILL?

**A** couple of weeks ago I mentioned that somewhere should be named after Thomas Stanley, who decisively

switched sides at the Battle of Bosworth in favour of Henry VII. Someone rang to suggest that as Fisher's Farm at Old Woking was supposedly named after Lady Margaret Beaufort's confessor priest, then perhaps Stanley Farm at Knaphill was named after her third husband.

I don't know for certain, but I suspect that the farm is really named after some later Stanley who farmed the area, rather than the 15<sup>th</sup> century Lord. Knaphill at that time was a small squatter settlement (more of which next week) and any farm in that area would have been quite poor.

