

THE OBT-INFLATED PRICE OF PIGS (and other animals)

Iain Wakeford 2014

The Woking area was always a mixed farming economy. As well as the fields of corn, animals played an important part in the daily lives of the local farmers, with cattle in the meadows, sheep grazing the commons and pigs in the orchards and woods.

Pigs at times appear to have out-numbered the human population (if the Domesday Book is to be believed), with even the poorest family managing to keep a pig or two. Pigs will eat almost anything, so were remarkably easy to keep, and practically every part of the pig could then be eaten, making them ideal for the poor tenants of the area.

In 1573 John Maydman had six pigs in the wood at Brookwood – that is until the 28th June when John Mylles, a labourer from Woking stole them! He was indicted at the County Assizes the following March for 'grand larceny' (the pigs being valued at £1), but appears on this occasion to have escaped justice as he was described as being 'at large'.

At three shillings and four pence each, the value put on John Maydman's pigs does seem to be remarkably high. In the same year Edward Mattheue of Woking died and in the inventory taken upon his death (exactly two months prior to Myles' crime), he had 'one small hogge' worth just one shilling and four pence, although perhaps John Maydman's pigs had fattened up by June!

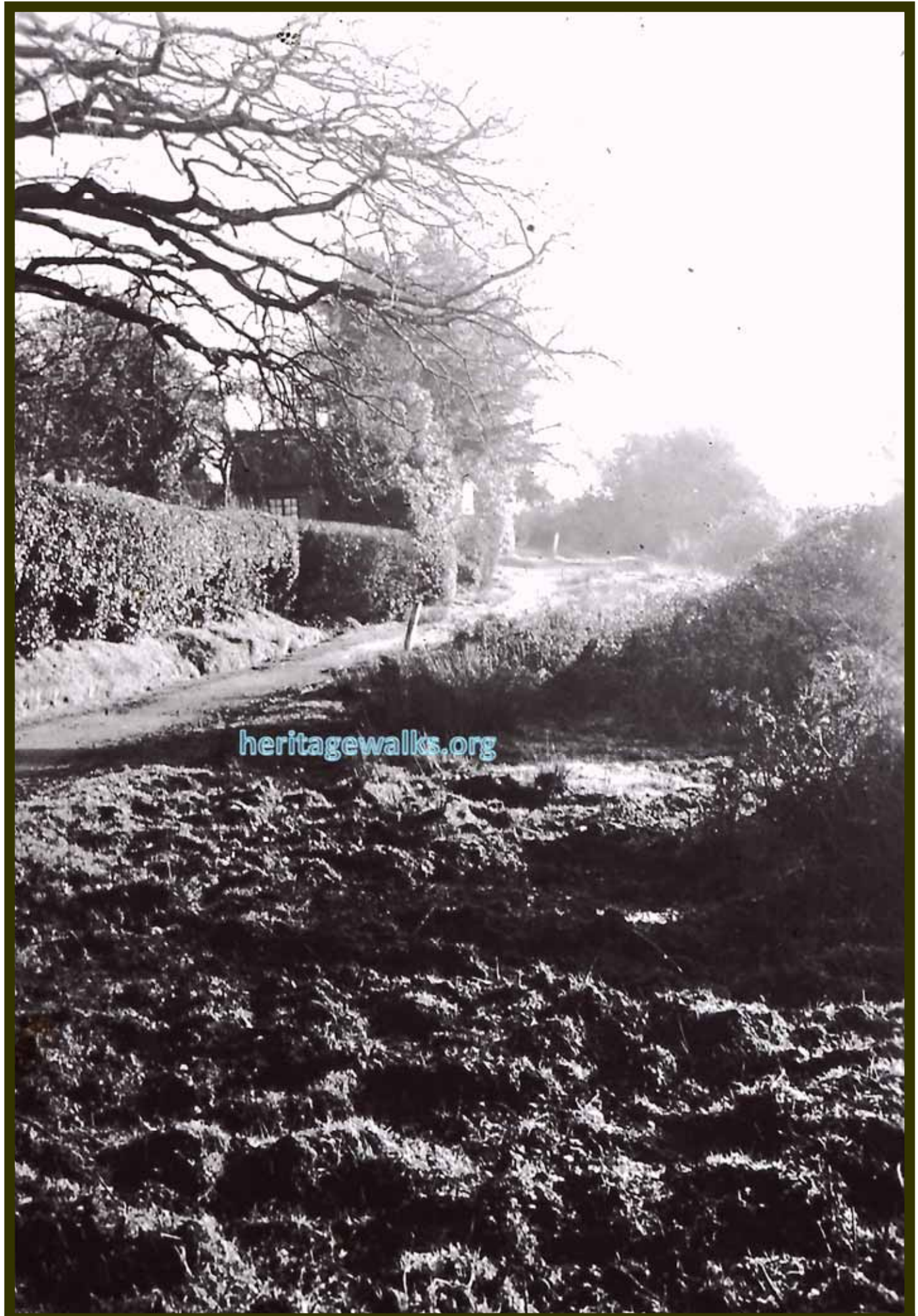
Inventories taken upon the death of local farmers prove that most kept a number of animals. Mattheues also had 'four skrubde oxen' worth £6 13s 4d; 'three toudde mares' (£1 10s); three kyne, one bulloke and a wenyng calfe (altogether worth £3 3s 4d); one gousse and a gander (1s); and 'five henes and a coke' (2s).

It is interesting to note that Mattheue's scrubbed oxen (obviously well looked after and presumably still used to pull the plough) were each worth three shillings and four pence more than his three old mares, and even his bull, three cows and weaning calf were worth on average two shillings and eight pence more than the poor old horses!

Going back to the assize records, you cannot help wonder whether the values placed on livestock (and presumably other items) are sometimes over-estimated by the plaintiffs in order to emphasise their case.

In 1591 William Westbroke's ox died, valued at £3, which he claimed had been 'bewitched to death' by Margery Collyns, wife of William Collyns of Woking. Fortunately for her the court found her not guilty, but was the ox really worth that much in the first place? The inventories of other local farmers about this time suggest not.

Another court case in the 17th century throws a different light onto local farming practice when Thomas Webb, the incumbent of Horsell, took Arthur Seares and Richard Bonsey (two parishioners) to court over the small tithes of the village. The case (in 1664) heard from several witnesses about the tithes due to the vicar, which they stated had been 'so for the previous seventy years'. They included 'whitage' (relating to milk cows), weaned cows (either sold or killed), colts, pigs, lambs (and their wool), as well as produce from the orchard, some root crops, beans and 'other



herbs', although the 'tithing of honey and beeswax' was not proved.

In medieval times sheep appear to have been an important part of the local economy in Surrey, with Farnham, Godalming and Guildford being famed for their woollen cloth. But the farmers of the Woking area undoubtedly helped provide some of the raw materials (possibly spinning the wool as well), even if they were not allowed to weave it themselves.

As late as the 19th century, woollen cloth was still being produced in the area. In the Surrey

Even in relatively recent times people maintained their 'common rights' by letting animals out onto the commons. This is the damage caused by pigs rooting for acorns at St Johns Lye in the early 20th century.

Archaeological Collection of 1899 there is a note about the 'Blankett Mill' at Goose Rye, Worplesdon, which at that stage was just about remembered by 'an old inhabitant of Worplesdon now nearly ninety years old' when the water-wheel was 'even then falling to pieces'. The blankets produced were apparently 'very thick and warm' and still in use until about 1838.

Other local people are known to have kept goats on St Johns Lye, Westfield Common and here at Smarts Heath in Mayford, where like the Belted Galloway's they were being used to keep down the heathland vegetation.



Nowadays most of the fields in the area (if not built on by developers), are grazed by horses and the only horses to be seen on Horsell Common are rode for pleasure, but in the past the plough horse and the cart horse would probably have been the most valuable piece of livestock on the local farms, and seldom let out to graze on the common.



WHEN FARMERS 'FLOCKED' TO WOKING COMMON



From evidence given to Parliament upon the enclosure of Woking Common for the Necropolis Company in the 1850's we can get a fair idea of how many sheep were being farmed in the Woking area at that time. The figures are obviously an estimate and are probably rounded up (in order to get more compensation), but are nevertheless a good indication of the number of animals that could have been turned out onto Woking Common each year. The largest flock belonged to Edward Hilder, a tenant of Lord Onslow at Hoebridge Farm (unless you count the sheep of George and William Smallpiece as one flock). He was claiming for about 500 sheep. His near neighbour James Carter at Woking Park Farm (after whom Carters Lane is named) had 200 sheep, as did Alexander Robertson of Hoe Place. All would no doubt have used the 'Sheepwalk' (shown here) that still exists, crossing what is now the Hoe Bridge Golf Course from Stone Farm at Pyrford to Hoe Bridge in Old Woking.

In all about 5,130 sheep, owned by 34 farmers, with flocks ranging from 30 to 500 are recorded, although frustratingly not everyone's full name or landholdings are noted. Only five claimed to have regularly turned their sheep out onto the common however – George Carman's 30 sheep, John Chitty's 60 (of Inwoods, Lower Knaphill), William Trigg (of Royal Oak Farm), who had 50 sheep and two gentlemen called Chandler and Lodwick who also regularly turned out 50 and 100 sheep respectively.

But it is clear that at Hilder's Hoe Bridge Farm sheep had previously been sent onto the nearby heath as John Baker junior gave evidence that from 1815 to 1831 (when he took over Woking Park Farm) he used to help his father (John Baker senior) at 'Hoe Bridge, Round Bridge and Winderness Brook Farms' and that he 'knows as a fact that the cattle and sheep were turned out occasionally from time to time during the whole of the time of his assisting his father'.

The list of local farmers and the numbers of sheep they owned is as follows.

Edward Hilder of Hoe Bridge Farm (a tenant of Lord Onslow) - about 500.

James Lee (possibly of Anchor Hill) - 400.

Richard Hodd of Shackleford Farm - 300.

George Smallpiece (who in 1841 occupied Kingfield House) - 300.

William Smallpiece (who in 1841 owned Kingfield House) - 300.

James Carter of Woking Park Farm - 200.

Eldred Nunns of Oaks Farm - 200.

G. Fladgate - 200.

Alexander Robertson of Hoe Place - 200.

Thomas Cooper of Lady Grove Farm - 200.

James Hodd of Frog Lane Farm - 200.

Snuggs - 200.

William Woodhatch of Moor Lane Farm - 200.

Richard Dover of Whitfield Court - 150.

Ricahrd Mason of Whitmoor House - 150.

Lodwick (who regularly turned sheep out onto the common) - 100.

Wilson - 100.

Casar - 100.

John Davies of Crastock Farm - 100.

William Fladgate (who in 1841 farmed Blackness & Cross Lanes Farm) - 100.

James Fladgate (who in 1841 owned Blackness & Cross Lanes Farm) - 100.

Barnabus Hall of Wetherall Farm - 100.

James or John Lee of Oak House, Sutton Green - 100.

Elisha Smith of Runtley Wood Farm - 100

John Whittington of Coziers - 100.

John Chitty of Inwoods (who regularly turned sheep out onto the common) - 60.

William Trigg of Royal Oak Farm (who regularly turned sheep out onto the common) - about 50.

Chandler (who regularly turned sheep out onto the common) - about 50.

Thomas Drewitt (who in 1841 owned a property on Anchor Hill) - 50

William Chandler - 50.

Thomas Howard of Sutton Green House - 50.

James Fenn - 50.

William Chapman - 40.

George Carman (who regularly turned sheep out onto the common and in 1841 had a house in Old Woking High Street) - 30.

THE CONTINUING CASE OF CATTLE ON THE COMMON



As we can see from John Baker's testimony in the 1850's, cattle were also regularly turned out onto the common, but the cows would have undoubtedly looked quite different from those pictured above in the early 20th century at Millbrook Farm on the border of Horsell and Chobham (where the R.S.P.C.A Centre is today).

Having said that they probably wouldn't have looked much like the Belted Galloways (below) that are currently favoured by the Surrey Wildlife Trust to keep the vegetation down on the heath land of north and west Surrey – although they must have been just as hardy.

The medieval cattle would have been much thinner and poorly looked after by modern

standards, with probably only the milk cow being kept closer to home. The young bullocks and older cattle were probably the ones allowed to graze on the common, before being slaughtered for salted meat for over the winter, or being sent to market - following in the footsteps of the sheep on the Sheep Walk, as they went via Pyrford and Byfleet towards Kingston.

