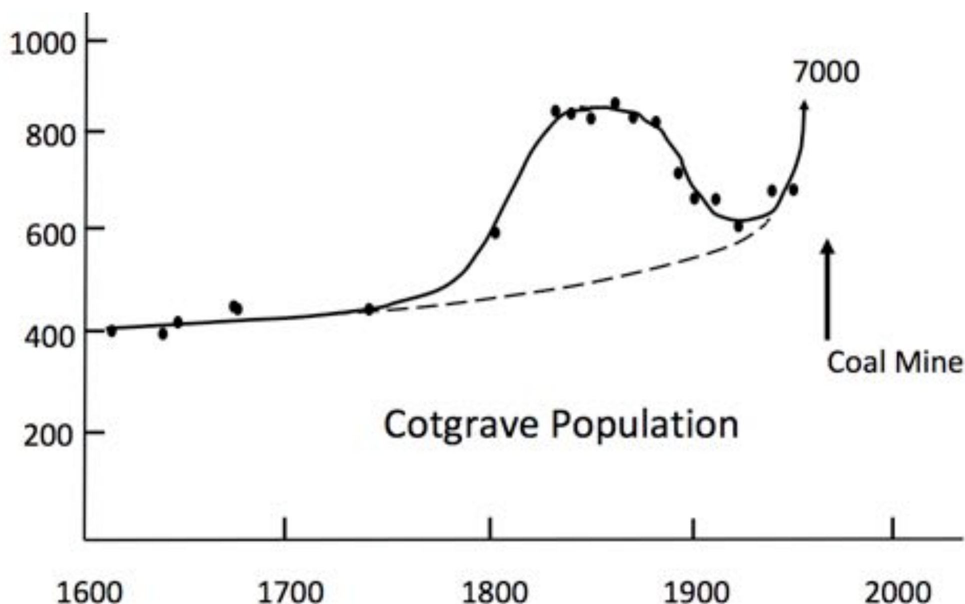
Cotgrave in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

An important aid to the understanding of life in nineteenth century Cotgrave is the data provided by the various Census Returns which contain information about every individual residing in the village on the night of the Census – that is: name, date of birth, place of birth, sex, marital status and occupation, but *not* address. It would appear that there was no official address system in the village even up to the beginning of the twentieth century. It was, nevertheless, possible in some cases to determine the general area in which a person lived: eg The Gripps, Main Road, Nottingham Road, Stragglethorpe, Cotgrave Place, etc. These Returns are available for the years 1841, 1851, ------ up to 1911. There is also a special Census for the year 1939. They are limited by the so-called 'hundred year' rule, based on the principle that personal information about any individual still alive should not be made public. We can, thus, expect the complete results of the 1921 Census to become available only in 2021. The original data is available from organisations such as Ancestry in the form of (often difficult to read!) hand-written documents and Steve Cockbill and I have worked hard to transcribe these into easily-read Excel format for each of the available decades. These provide much valuable information about village life which can be augmented by studying the various Trade Directories for Nottinghamshire, which cover much of the nineteenth century. Needless to say, they don't provide a complete picture – the lack of addresses and certain oddities in presentation, such as the rounding up (or down) of people's ages and a lack of consistency between the decades lead to a degree of frustration – but there is no doubt that one can learn quite a lot about nineteenth century Cotgrave, provided one exercises a degree of caution in analysing the raw data. In specific cases it is possible to learn personal details about individuals by using Ancestry and Carole Pimblett has been extremely helpful in this. What follows is a first attempt to make some kind of sense from the raw data.

Population Statistics

Figures for the village's population are available from the year 1600 to the present day. The early data can be found in the excellent 1987 WEA study 'Cotgrave – Aspects of Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', edited by Jocelyne Wood (The Yellow Book), while later years are covered by the above Census Returns and by others which appear on the website 'GENUKI: Cotgrave, Nott.'



This data can be summarised as follows: from 1600 to 1750 the population remained more or less constant at about 400-450, then in 1800 it had risen to 600, and again to 850 in 1850, remained constant until 1880, then fell to 600 in 1920, before rising again to 700 in 1940 and, finally, shooting up to 7000 in 1980. This latter surge was obviously a result of the opening of the Coal Mine and we shall ignore it (for the time-being). Our interest is in the strange ups and downs in the nineteenth century. Thus, the village population doubled between 1750 and 1850, then dropped by some 30% between 1880 and 1920. As a preliminary to understanding these figures, it is helpful to compare them with those for other towns and villages in the area. Nottingham's population, for example, showed a similar (though significantly greater percentage) rise in the early eighteen hundreds, and that is true of the country's population, as a whole. This is generally understood to result from the Industrial Revolution which burgeoned during the previous century. People could afford to marry earlier and to have more children, while improvements in medical science probably helped to some extent by keeping more people alive (though the country's child mortality rate was still as high as one-in-three deaths before the age of five). However, the significant difference between the figures for Nottingham and Cotgrave is that Nottingham's population continued to rise, showing no hint of any reduction at the end of the century. What of other places? Beeston's figures, for example, paralleled Nottingham's, while Beeston, similarly, followed Nottingham in building large lace factories during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A much closer behaviour to Cotgrave's is that of Cropwell Bishop whose population rose from 300 in 1800 to 650 in 1850, then fell somewhat, to 500 in 1900 (this being the latest year for which I could find data). We see, therefore, that this upping and downing is a feature of small agricultural communities, rather than of large towns and cities and, in the case of Nottingham, there is a particular factor which may well be of relevance to both these villages. As explained in John Beckett's 'Centenary History of Nottingham' (2006), the city was unable to expand, as it needed to, in the early nineteenth century because the city Burgesses refused permission for development of suitable land (such as 'The Meadows'). It was only about 1870 when such land became available, resulting in an influx of lace-workers from surrounding villages to occupy these new houses and join the expanding work-force in the Nottingham factories. We therefore have a picture of a lace industry which, up to the later nineteenth century, depended on a widespread community of workers toiling in their village homes, selling their production to Nottingham-based middle-men, followed, towards the end of the century, by a net migration of villagers into the big city. How does this compare with the evidence of our Census Returns? Any detailed analysis would involve a much deeper study but, if we lump together those individuals claiming to work in lace, hosiery, dressmaking, seaming and fringemaking, we see a picture of roughly 40 such Cotgrave workers from 1851 to 1881, followed by a reduction to 13 in 1911, this reduction coinciding reasonably well with the drop in Cotgrave's overall population. It would, of course, be naïve to suppose that only such people might join the flow into the Nottingham lace industry – no doubt many others saw an opportunity to make the move to a better-paid job in the city – but, at least, there is qualitative agreement with this general concept. I should add, as a kind of appendix, that my studies of Cotgrave births and deaths from Parish Records (held in the Nottingham Archives) prove beyond reasonable doubt that the population reduction between 1880 and 1920 cannot be explained in terms of a reduction in birth rate or an increase in death rate – it can only be explained in terms of people leaving the village. life, That they went into the Nottingham lace industry is, of course speculation – but, I would suggest, a *reasonable* speculation. Finally, I might make one further point – the numbers involved are not excessive. The overall drop in population of 250 people is spread over roughly 25 years – a mere ten people per year, only about 1.2% of the populace. Though it does represent an interesting and significant aspect of Cotgrave life, we should be careful not to overemphasise it!

Having looked in detail at the local scene, it is interesting to compare the Cotgrave data with that appropriate to the country as a whole. Several sources are relevant, including Wikipedia – 'Demography of England', Robert J Bennett 'SN 7154 – Urban Population Database (1801 – 1911), Eric Hobsbawm – 'Industry and Empire' – Penguin Books, 1999 and C Harvie and HCG Matthew – 'Nineteenth Century Britain, A Very Short Introduction' – OUP, 2000. From these we can obtain figures not only for the growth of the overall population of England but, more importantly, that fraction which remained in 'Rural', as compared to 'Urban' localities. Needless to say, there was a net flow of people from the former to the latter, a result of the rapidly developing 'Industrial Revolution' (which, by the way, was never a real revolution, rather a gradual, but inexorable, development of new technologies). The interesting outcome of such analysis shows that the rise and fall of the Cotgrave population is matched almost exactly by that of the rural population as a whole. In other words, Cotgrave's experience was quite typical of that of the overall English population – rather than being an interesting exception, Cotgrave represented a perfect example of the balance between the overall increase in population and the simultaneous movement into the rapidly growing urban conglomerations.

Farmers and Farming

Turning to the occupations of those who remained in the village, we must first, of course, consider the farmers. Cotgrave was obviously an agricultural community, as demonstrated by the Census Returns. The number of people claiming to be farmers remains sensibly constant over the decades. It was 15 in 1832, 17 in 1841 and 15 in 1911, rising to a peak of 21 in 1851 and falling to a minimum of 12 in 1881 (the time of the so-called 'Great Depression' in English agriculture – see below). I suspect that these fluctuations represent imperfections in Census recording methods, rather than real changes in village life but, in any case, the differences are not large. Similarly, the number of people claiming to work in farming (other than the farmers, themselves) is also more or less constant. It was 130 in 1841, peaked at 147 in 1851, was 132 in 1881 then fell slightly to 91 in 1911. This latter figure may well represent the beginnings of mechanisation. Steam engines were gradually introduced into agriculture during the nineteenth century and it seems reasonable to suppose that this might have penetrated the conservative Cotgrave farm community towards the end of the century. (We shall discuss this further under the heading of 'Mills and Millers'.) In addition to the 'Farmers' the Census Returns also record people who called themselves 'Cottagers'. As I understand it, we should refer to these people, today, as 'Market Gardeners' – they worked relatively small plots of land (typically about ten to twenty acres) and presumably sold some of their produce, as well as living on it themselves. The numbers involved were about fifteen, tailing off in the early nineteen hundreds to something like three. Presumably, the larger farmers gradually acquired as much land as they could lay hands on and squeezed out the poor cottagers. Perhaps some of them moved away to join the lace industry? The size of farms is of interest. Information about the amount of land under cultivation is provided by the Cotgrave Enclosure Act of 1790, which lists approximately 3600 acres, 555 acres belonging to the Rector, 2450 acres to Charles Pierrepont (later Lord Manvers), 250 acres to Lionella Clay and about 350 acres to a collection of fifteen small land holders. These latter probably correspond to our 'Cottagers', while the remaining 3250 acres would be let out to local tenant farmers. How many there were in 1790 I know not but presumably it was little different from the situation in 1841. Thus, the average 'large' farm would be about 200 – 300 acres in area, though there were obviously departures from the average, some farms consisting of as much as 400-500 acres. This is made clear in several Census Returns, where farmers specify both land area and number of workers employed.

However, before commenting further on the details thrown up by the Census Returns, it is worth trying to set the Cotgrave scene in context by summarising the ups and downs in agricultural fortunes in Great Britain as a whole. This is admirably described by Eric Hobsbawm in his classic book "Industry and Empire", published by Penguin Books in 1999 (Chaps 5, 10) and I freely acknowledge my indebtedness to his account. During the first half of the nineteenth century, agriculture was the principal arm of the British economy – in 1851 it employed three times as many people as all the textile industries put together, one quarter of all employed people. Even as late as 1891 it still employed more than any other trade and was only 'beaten' in 1901 by Transport and Metals. Nevertheless, its contribution to GDP fell dramatically, being one third in 1811, one fifth in 1851 but as little as one thirteenth in 1891. The key to understanding its standing in the country's political life is to note that land was largely owned by rich aristocratic landlords who leased it to tenant farmers and had an obvious vested interest in supporting efficient farmers who were quick to use 'modern' methods. Country-wide, there were some 0.25 million such farmers and 1.25 million farm labourers – a ratio of six to one (it was more like ten to one in Cotgrave!). These landlords controlled the country's social structure, being dominant in Parliament – indeed, up to 1885 they represented a majority of MPs and even up to 1914 'Counties' could still out-vote 'Boroughs' and thus maintain their controlling influence on affairs. It was largely due to their influence, for example, that agriculture was protected by the contentious Corn Laws from 1815 to 1846. It was only after 1914 that Landlords started to sell lands to their tenants – up to this date only 10% of land was owned by owner-occupiers, while by 1927 this fraction had risen to 36%. (In the case of Cotgrave, of course, the relevant landlords were the Earls Manvers and they hung on to their land until 1941, when most of the village was sold to locally-based owners in the big 'Manvers Sale'.) Agriculture flourished in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century because the ever-growing industrial masses had to be fed and transport costs were too high to allow significant imports of food. The middle years represented golden years because landlords were keen to invest, farmers were keen to employ scientific methods and wages were kept high by the trend for labourers to move away into manufacturing jobs in the big cities. However, the development of railways and steamships, together with enormous expansion of North American wheat fields combined to make imports commercially viable and, in the 1870s – 1880s, British agriculture met with financial disaster, a time frequently referred to as 'The Agricultural Depression'. There could be no tariff protection for agriculture because manufacturing industry felt it essential to operate under a 'Free Trade' regime. Once the Corn Laws were repealed by Robert Peel's Government in 1846, agriculture had to make the best of a difficult (if not impossible) position! An interesting result of these commercial pressures was the change in emphasis from cereal to dairy farming. Until the arrival of refrigeration round about the end of the century, locally produced milk and meat possessed a clear advantage over cereals and wool (with regard to competition against imported produce) so the nature of British agriculture changed markedly – we must presume that Cotgrave's farming scene changed accordingly – it might well be a factor in the reduction in the number of Cottagers referred to above.

Returning, now, to the Cotgrave Census Returns, we should note that the 1851 Census represents an important example in so far as the returning officers were asked to list, for the first time, not only the names of farmers but also the respective acreages and the number of labourers employed on each farm. The results for Cotgrave are of interest, showing a clear contrast between large and small farms. Of the 21 farms, eight fall into the 'large' category, characterised by acreages of order 200 or more, while there were thirteen small farms with acreages less than forty-five. With regard to the latter, it is significant that not one of them claimed to employ any labourers – they were run entirely by their owners (or tenants – it is not clear where ownership lay).

We should also note that there were fifteen cottagers, only one of whom stated the acreage involved – 11 acres. Adding together all the individual areas, we arrive at a total acreage of roughly 3300, about 300 acres less than that known to be available at the time of enclosure, some 60 years earlier. What this means is far from clear but it is hard to believe that it represents a decrease in land usage. Could it be that this difference was made up of woodland and other rough land, not suitable for farming? On the other hand, looking at total acreage from various sources, including the Trade Directories, we arrive at the following:

Year	1790	1832	1844	1851	1853	1855	1861	1864	1871	1881	1922
Acreage	3600	4000	3520	3300	3520	3520	3718	3742	2608	2269	3700

Thus, the 1851 Census result looks anomalous, while the other figures are consistent with the 1790 value. What may be of greater significance is the 30% reduction in 1871 and the further 13% reduction in 1881. As we saw above, this period in English agricultural history is known as 'The Great Depression', the result of widespread importing of cheap grain from abroad (largely from the United States). This resulted from a reduction in shipping costs due to the development of steam ships and railways, while Government policy was against the introduction of tariff barriers to protect English farming – once the Corn Laws had been repealed in 1846 that was that!

The nature of these Cotgrave farms was presumably little different from today's, being a mixture of arable and pasture. Census returns refer to both 'Cowmen' and 'Shepherds' and we know, from individual recollections, that in the mid-twentieth century cows were a common sight, being herded through the village – cow muck was, no doubt, a precious commodity for cottagers and small allotment holders and was very likely cleared immediately from the village streets! In addition to the farmers and farm workers, there were several other occupations which depended almost entirely on farming – such as veterinary surgeon, gamekeeper, blacksmith, wheelwright, waggoner and saddler. Adding all these into the mix, deducting the number of children still in school and dividing by two to remove the female half of the population one arrives at a rough estimate for the fraction of the male population actively engaged in farming – it shows a remarkable consistency over the decades from 1841 to 1911, working out at 80% (plus or minus 2%). This shows just how dominant was farming as a means of making a living in the village throughout the nineteenth century. By contrast, we might note, in passing, that, in the middle of the nineteenth century, farming occupied only about a quarter of the country's populace, the majority being employed in manufacturing. But in an agricultural village like Cotgrave things were very different. There were, of course, other occupations in the village, not directly concerned with farming, and several of these are of interest in themselves but they are clearly of only minor importance, numerically. We shall look at one or two of them in the following, though it represents no more than a personal selection. But what of the details of the type of farming undertaken? There seems to be rather little to go on but the University of Nottingham Manuscript and Special Collections archive does contain details of one particular farm in Stragglethorpe (not named) which reared sheep, while growing crops of barley, corn, wheat, oats, grass, hay, turnips, swedes, mangel wurzels, potatoes and beans. Clearly, several of these would be used as cattle fodder so we may reasonably assume that cows, as well as sheep were a normal part of the landscape.

The ‘agricultural revolution’ of the eighteenth century was well and truly established by this time and farming efficiency was relatively high – of vital importance in the first half of the nineteenth century when the Country’s rapidly increasing population had to be fed very largely on home-grown produce. Nevertheless, the strain on English farms was considerable and ‘Science’ only came to the rescue from about 1830 onwards, in the form of better drainage, use of superphosphates and guano. As noted above, steam-powered machinery also made its contribution toward the end of the century, when a noticeable reduction in agricultural manpower became apparent. We have no details of conditions in Cotgrave but it is reasonable to assume that they followed those known to apply elsewhere.

What of the farmers, themselves? Perhaps the first point to be made is that many of those running large farms were obviously rather well-off, as shown by their employing several house servants. Again, using Census records, we see that these larger farms tended to be run for long periods by the same families. Names such as Barlow, Marshall, Morley, Morris, Holmes, Parr, Mann, Caparn dominate the early years of the century. Later we see other names taking over, such as Brumpton, Thurman, Sheldon and Fletcher – though it is noteworthy that both the Holmes and the Mann families continued to feature right through to 1911. It is also noteworthy that in several instances these farmers were women. For example, a widowed lady, Catherine Morris farmed something like 200 acres for over thirty years (according to ‘The Yellow Book’ the Morris family were associated with Whitelands Farm for many years). She died in 1875 so her son Thomas had taken over by the time of the 1881 Census. Another interesting example concerns the Barlow family which is complicated by the fact that there were two Robert Barlows, both being married to women called Mary! In 1841 we meet with the first Robert Barlow (aged 55) who was farming 300 acres, together with the second one (aged 37) who was a veterinary surgeon. However, Robert 2 appeared to be living with a woman called Mary Dixon (aged 29) who was farming (probably 200 acres?). In 1851 they were man and wife, Robert still working as a vet, while in 1861 he was combining this with farming 200 acres. Or was it still Mary who looked after the farm? – we can reasonably ask the question because in 1871 she was widowed but still farming. Then, in 1881, she was living on an annuity while providing house room for a new vet by the name of William Marriott – things had come full circle. Marriott continued to act as Cotgrave’s vet until 1901 when he was 54 years old but in 1911 there was no record of such an occupation. Returning, now, to the elder Robert, in 1851 we find him a widower but still farming 300 acres, while his son George (married to Sarah) had taken over by 1861. Interestingly enough, however, in 1871 (at the age of 48) he was now a widower and was employed simply as an agricultural worker. He had apparently decided to retire from the stress and strain of actually running the farm! Finally, in 1881 (still only 58), he was fully retired and living in Scrimshire Lane, away from it all. (Perhaps this might be related to the serious downturn which afflicted English agriculture at the time?) The 400 acre farm associated with Cotgrave Place represents a special case in that it was run by the incumbent, generally a wealthy man who may have been a farmer himself or who employed a bailiff to do the job for him. We shall take a closer look at Cotgrave Place later.

Turning attention now to the hamlet of Stragglethorpe, two farming families stand out, those of Mann and Caparn. The Manns ran their farm in Stragglethorpe throughout the period 1832 to 1911 and, indeed, at first glance, it appeared that the same individual was in charge all this time! However, a more careful look reveals the fact that there were actually three Joshua Manns. Joshua Mann, the elder, who was in charge up to 1861 is recorded as being unmarried, so one may ask where the further two Joshuas came from.

At first thought, the explanation just might have been that he shared a house with a lady called Mary A Bosworth for a period of some thirty years. She was fifteen years his junior and is recorded as being his niece and housekeeper but one may possibly be forgiven for wondering if the relationship had been, perhaps, somewhat closer than that. However, the real explanation turns out to be that Joshua 2 was *not* the son of Joshua 1. His father was George Mann who ran a large farm in the Parish of Brodsworth, near Doncaster, which explains why Joshua 2 was born there (c 1840), rather than in Stragglethorpe. Then, again, we notice that the first Joshua was born in Cropwell Bishop, while George was born in Yorkshire so it seems that they may not even have been brothers – exactly what the relationship was remains to be clarified but it must be significant that George was executor to the will of Joshua (1) when the latter died in 1869. In fact, the later Joshuas were both born near Doncaster though there is no doubt that Joshua 3 was definitely the legitimate son of Joshua 2 – Joshua 2 having married Jane Mellows at High Mellton, near Doncaster in 1866 (they must have moved to Stragglethorpe in 1870 or thereabouts). Their son Joshua (3) was still managing the farm in 1911 at the age of 42 and presumably for some years afterwards. Yet another long-lived tenancy concerns the Caparn family who ran a second farm in Stragglethorpe. In 1841 the farm was being run by Thomas Smith, with the help of a young man called William Caparn (aged 20), who came from Newark (Caparn appears to be a common name in Newark). Then, in 1851 Thomas Smith has disappeared and the farm is now in the hands of this same young man, who, at the time, was unmarried and sharing the farmhouse with his aunt, Charlotte Smith. However, in 1861, he is now married to Charlotte (nee Smith) who hailed from Wymondham in Leicestershire and they have three young daughters, all born in Stragglethorpe. Charlotte's mother, Mary A Smith is living with them. 1871 sees William and Charlotte still farming together, while in 1881, Charlotte is a widow but keeping up the farm. However, she moved away during the 1880s, handing over the farm to a Harry Sheldon who was still in residence at the time of the 1911 Census. One cannot help wondering whether the hamlet of Stragglethorpe, with its isolated farms (and little else!) functioned quite independently of Cotgrave – and saw itself as being separate. The coupling of the two communities was no doubt convenient for the Census organisers (and Stragglethorpe does, of course, lie within the Cotgrave Parish boundary) but may well have had little basis in real life. Indeed, it could well have been that Clipston was more closely connected to Cotgrave, even though there was no connection in their respective Census returns. However, having said all that, we should note that in 1874 William Caparn was a Church Warden at All Saints Church in Cotgrave, a warning that one must never let one's imagination get out of hand when speculating on historical matters!

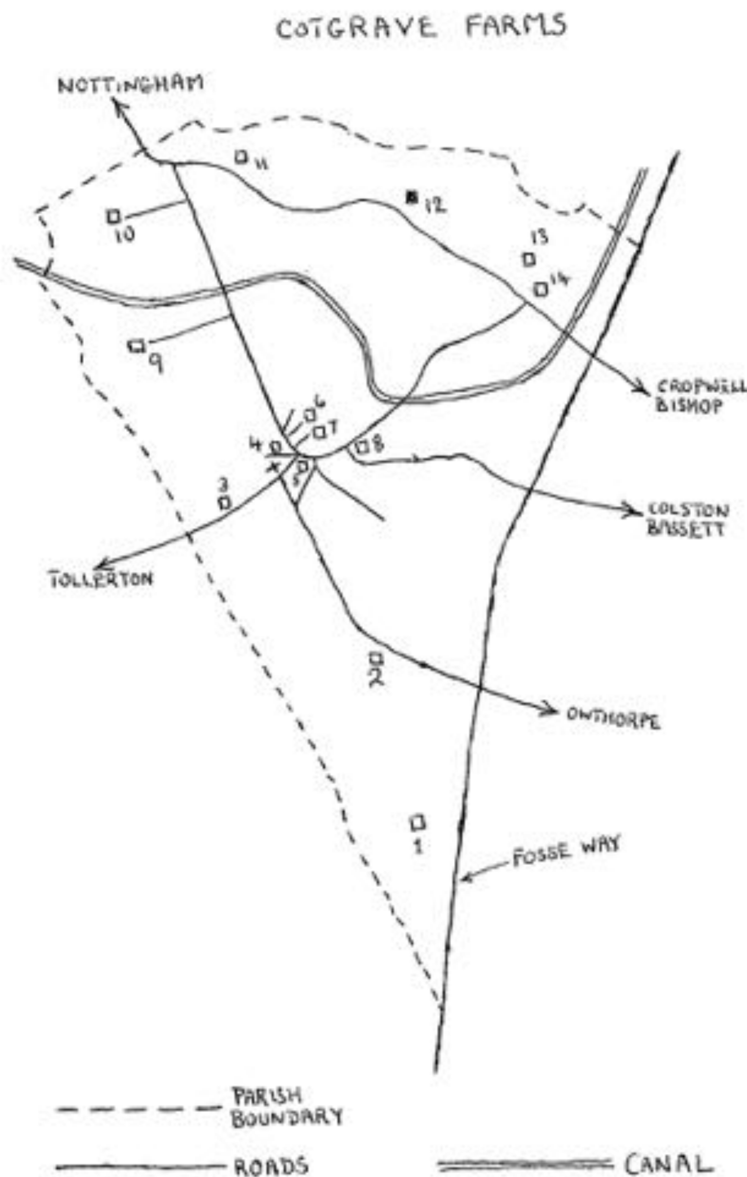
A final intriguing question concerns the identity of the various farms. As commented above, there appeared to be no system of addresses within the village, even in the 1911 Census (though one certainly did exist in the 1939 Census) so it is no easy matter to relate farmers to farms and this is made even more difficult because farm names were occasionally changed. However, we can make some progress by comparing Censuses, Trade Directories and the Manvers Sale document of 1941. Indeed, this latter provides us with the one and only sound basis for cataloguing the principal farms in terms of their acreage. As a starting point, therefore, we have the following (with the name of the 1941 tenant):

1 Wolds Farm	R W Shacklock	328 acres
2 Bell's Farm	W Wilkinson	123 acres
3 Parr's Farm	Cecil Brumpton	123 acres
4 Church Farm	Thomas Thurman	130 acres

5 Whitelands Farm	John Ward	160 acres
6 Holme Farm	Draycott Kelsall	122 acres
7 Vine Farm	Richard A Dalby	412 acres
8 Glebe Farm	John Swingler	93 acres
9 Peashill Farm	H Owen Wood	252 acres
10 Cotgrave Place	Hubert J James	303 acres
11 North Farm	George E Shelton	439 acres
13 Askham Farm	Joseph Temperton	310 acres
14 Hollygate Farm	William S Gadd	236 acres

The numbers correspond to those on the attached sketch map.

Together with three small farms, the total acreage sold amounted to 3091.



The next question concerns the identity of these various farms throughout the nineteenth century and to what extent can we match farms with farmers? In scanning through a Census there are a few identifiable points such as those of Cotgrave Place, The Rectory, the Manvers Arms, the Rose and Crown and (in some instances) Peashill Farm - for example, Parr's Farm is just next door to the Rectory. It is also straightforward to identify the Stragglethorpe farms and Holme Farm (because it was always run by a member of the Holme family) but, beyond that, we are reduced to guess work, farm names never being mentioned! One might hope to make progress on the basis that, once a farmer has been identified as living in a particular farmhouse, he or she would remain there over a number of years but, alas, the evidence suggests that this rarely happened – tenancies were exchanged on a regular basis. For example, we might look at the occupants of Parr's Farm (identified by its location next to the Rectory) – they turn out to be:

Parr's Farm

1841	Mary Dixon
1851	Catherine Morris
1861	Thomas Parr
1871	Thomas Morris
1881	No-one!
1891	Alfred Brumpton
1901	Alfred Brumpton
1911	A Brumpton

(Note: we have to reconcile these attributions with the account in 'the Yellow Book' which insists that the Morris family was for a long time associated with Whitelands Farm. The implication is that they farmed both Whitelands and Parr's Farms, moving between the two houses to suit their convenience.) The acreages claimed by different farmers varies correspondingly from decade to decade. What, therefore, can we conclude?

Firstly, it is convenient to look at Stragglethorpe. According to the booklet "Cotgrave – Aspects of life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (the Yellow Book!), four enclosed farms were carved out in 1742, named Guilmore Farm (now North Farm), Dove Acre Farm (now abandoned), Askerham Farm (now Askham Farm) and Fosse Farm (now Hollygate Farm). Indeed, the Whites Trade Directories of 1832 and 1844 refer to Stragglethorpe's being a hamlet with four farms and forty-seven inhabitants. Exactly when Guilmore Farm disappeared is not clear but it must have been fairly soon after these references were made. As we saw above, the three farms were all sold in the Manvers sale of 1941and all exist today.

Whitelands Farm

According to the Census Returns, North Farm appears to have been run by the Caparn family from 1841 until 1881, by a Harry Sheldon until 1911 and by George E Shelton in 1939. Askham Farm was run by the Mann family until 1911, then by Joseph Temperton in 1939. By contrast, Holygate farm had numerous tenants over the years, the latest being William S Gadd in 1939. Finally, we see that in 1941 almost a thousand acres of Cotgrave's farmland (out of just over three thousand) lay in Stragglethorpe.

Looking, now, at Cotgrave itself, we can feel a degree of confidence in the identification of Wolds Farm because, for some reason, it is usually named in the Census Returns. In the early years 1841 and 1851 its 200 acres were farmed by Henry Clater, then in 1861 and 1871 by Richard Hourd and Thomas Morley, respectively. There is no specific reference to it in 1881 and 1891, then from 1891 to 1939 the Fletcher family had taken over. On the other hand, Bell's Farm makes no appearance at all until 1939 and we can only guess that it was formed by taking a fraction of the Wolds Farm, probably round about 1901 when there is a reference to a Frank Powell being a farmer alongside the Fletchers. Moving into the village proper, we can make a reasonable guess that Glebe farm was run for many decades by the Marshall family, Holme Farm (in Morkinshire Lane) was run by the Holme family and Peashill Farm (from 1881 onwards) by the Brumpton family – but uncertainties abound. It is impossible to be totally confident of anything!

Finally, to complete this brief summary of Cotgrave farms, we should remind ourselves that there were numerous small farms and market gardens with areas varying from just a few acres to some twenty or more. For example, we know from the details of the Manvers sale in 1941 that D G Kelsall worked five acres along Mill Lane, S Skipworth fifteen acres around the Cotgrave brickyard and Frank Wyers ran a small dairy farm from the house where I now live in Scrimshire Lane. The 1881 Census records four active small farms along Scrimshire Lane in the names of Thomas Hickley (9 acres), George Hickling, George Baguley (8 acres) and John Scottorn (30 acres). Nor must we forget that Cotgrave was once known for the quantity and quality of its orchards – hence the lingering names such as Orchard Cottage and Cherry Orchard. Perhaps the highlight of its reputation dates from 1849 when Samuel Voce's apple trees produced such magnificent fruit that he took the liberty of sending some to Queen Victoria, herself. The Queen is recorded as responding not only with written thanks but also with an expression of pecuniary appreciation – in the form of two sovereigns. The fact that there are no longer any commercial orchards in the village may well be another consequence of the agricultural depression – imported fruit becoming cheaper than the home-grown variety.

Mills and Millers

We know that Cotgrave sported no less than three windmills up to the eighteenth century, the largest being the Gozen's Mill at the top of Mill Lane, while the other two were situated at Wolds Hill and at the outskirts of the village just off Plumtree Road. The Wolds Mill belonged to the White family who owned the Manor House at the corner of Risegate and Owthorpe Road, while the Gozen's Mill belonged to the Pierrepont family. Presumably, they were all used for grinding corn, a staple food in those days, and we have definite evidence for this in connection with the Gozen's Mill. A Timothy Hives was famous for carrying an 18 stone bag of corn from the barn next to the Church (where it was flailed) to this mill.

According to Pierrepont Estate maps, the Plum Tree Road mill had gone by 1731, while the Wolds Mill had also disappeared at the time of Enclosure (1790). We also know that the Gozen's Mill had to be rebuilt in 1795 (or there-about), this new mill being a Post Mill. There is clear evidence that it was in use as late as 1804, when a young man was killed when he was struck by one of the sails, and the mill seems to have survived until 1916, when it was blown down in a storm but whether it was still in active use is somewhat questionable, given Census evidence of a steam mill which existed at the Gripps Brick Yard. This is mentioned in both the 1851 and 1861 Census Returns and in 1861 a James Dixon is specifically referred to as 'Master Miller' and connected with the Gripps Steam Mill. There is confirmation that he occupied the Steam Mill and that he was a corn miller in Whites Trade Directory for 1864, which also tells us that the steam mill was established by a Mr Bagguley in 1847 and sold to James Dixon in 1849. (This Mr Bagguley was probably Samuel Bagguley, inn keeper of the Victoria – later the Rose and Crown - and it may be significant that in the 1851 Census his son – also Samuel – is described as an 'Engine Driver'. James Dixon was a young man, aged 19 in 1851, while his father, John Dixon, was a butcher in Cotgrave. One can only assume that it was the father who put up the money to buy the steam mill but it was certainly James who ran it.) In any case, there can be no doubt that corn milling in Cotgrave had become a steam-driven activity by the middle of the century and this is consistent with a general trend – 'Google' makes clear that steam-driven corn mills were in widespread use from about 1830 onwards and, coming a little closer to home, we might note that the famous 'Green's Mill' in Sneinton was abandoned round about 1860. However, corn milling gradually became centralised in large factory-type establishments and local activities, such as that in Cotgrave, disappeared well before the end of the century. In the 1881 and subsequent Censuses there is no mention of any miller. James Dixon continued to live in Cotgrave but his occupation is listed as that of 'Butcher' (having taken over his father's shop?). What happened to the steam mill, one wonders? As it was located in the brickyard, could it have been converted for brick-making? Possibly – though, as we shall see, the brickyard, itself, probably closed sometime between 1900 and 1915. An intriguing question concerns any other steam-driven activity. It is well known that steam power began to take over from horse power towards the end of the nineteenth century and one wonders to what extent this might have been the case in Cotgrave? The Census Returns include several references to 'Engine Cleaner', 'Engine Servicer', 'Engine Driver', etc, though there is no evidence as to the specific engines involved. The Brickyard steam engine is one obvious possibility but there are others, including steam ploughs, traction engines and (let us not forget) steam trains. These latter came to Nottingham from 1840 onwards and local railways were developed during the 1860s. Indeed, there is just one 1891 Census record of a Cotgrave man working as a 'Railway Porter'. There is also, in 1901, a reference to a Cotgrave-born 'Locomotive Engine Cleaner' but various other references fail to specify the nature of the engines involved so we are left to speculate.

Cotgrave Brick Makers

For much of the nineteenth century there was a small brickworks to the right of Owthorpe Road, as one ascends the hill, just above the Gripps, as evidenced by Census records from 1841 to 1891 (inclusive). There is also a brick maker listed in White's Directory for 1832 and in Kelly's Directory for 1904. We also know from OS maps that the brickyard was active in 1883 and 1889, while it was 'Disused' in 1915. That it was a small activity is clear from the fact that there were never more than three workers describing themselves as 'Brick Maker' in any one Census Return. Cotgrave was noted for supplying the world's cricket pitches with blue marl and there was also a ready supply of red clay. Again, reference to the OS maps suggests that this clay was dug out of the hillside immediately above the site of the brickworks.

It is significant that the brick workers, while living in Cotgrave, were generally speaking born elsewhere. In other words, this may not have been so much a ‘Cotgrave’ activity as simply a part of the more widespread brick making which went on in many parts of Nottinghamshire, particularly to the north and east of the city of Nottingham. The ‘Nottingham Patent Brick Company’ of Mapperley made a name for itself by supplying the facing bricks for the magnificent St Pancras Hotel in London while Nottingham itself is a splendid reminder of the glory of Victorian brick. The Cotgrave contribution to all this is obviously a very minor one but one important question we should very much like to answer is: “When did it all start?” There are several very old houses in the village, dating back to 1700 or earlier and one can’t help wondering whether these were built from local brick. Indeed, bricks were used to build the Holme Pierrepont House in the sixteenth century, though these were probably made on-site, rather than imported from elsewhere. The WEA booklet referred to above makes no specific mention of a brickyard but, on the other hand includes two maps showing the existence of ‘Brick Kiln Close’ in both 1731 and 1790 so we can be sure that bricks were being made fairly early in the eighteenth century, even though we have no evidence as to when brick-making first started in Cotgrave. One final thought concerns the technology of brick making. An important stage in the process is known as ‘puddling’ – ie mixing the clay with water to achieve an optimum consistency for the shaping of the bricks and this involves a good deal of mechanical effort. Originally it made use of a horse on the end of a wooden pole slogging its way round a vat filled with the clay mixture but the above-mentioned brick company introduced steam power in 1853 in order to speed up production and this takes us back to the interesting question of whether the Cotgrave Steam Mill might have been so-employed. Bear in mind that corn milling apparently came to an end in Cotgrave round about 1880, while the brickyard continued to operate until at least 1900. It’s tempting to speculate but we shall probably never know!

The Post Office

Cotgrave Post Office

A postal system of sorts existed prior to 1840 but it was only with the inauguration of the ‘Penny Post’ by William Hill in 1840 that letter-writing became a reliable, cost-effective means of correspondence. What, then, was the situation in Cotgrave? How did it work? The 1841 Census took place conveniently after 1840 so we naturally looked for some mention of a ‘Post Office’ in the village. None is to be found! The first mention of a PO is contained in Whites Directory for 1853 in the form of: “Post at William Hames – Letters arrive 10-30 am, despatched 4-45 pm”. In the 1851 Census, William Hames is described as a ‘Cordwainer’ (a top-of-the-range shoe-maker). It would appear that his shop was used as an informal PO. A similar entry appears in Kelly’s Directory for 1855, with the additional information: “Mrs Jane Hames – Receiver”. We also learn that the nearest Money Order Office was in Nottingham. Jane Hames was a retired school mistress – in the 1861 Census she is described as: ‘Post Mistress at Post Office’ and said to be widowed and 73 years of age. She was also William’s mother. Again, in 1871 (at the age of 83) she is designated ‘Post Mistress’. It seems that her son’s shop was still being used as an unofficial PO though, unfortunately, we cannot be sure of its location – the lack of specific addresses in the Census Returns leaves this hanging frustratingly in the Cotgrave air!

In 1881 the job of Post Mistress has probably been passed on to yet another elderly lady, Sarah Cupitt – Widow, aged 73 and occupation 'Shopkeeper Main Road'. (This could, of course, be the building which we know as our local Post Office today.) I say this because, in 1881 (again at the age of 83!), she is described as 'Post Mistress and Grocer. There has so far been no mention of a 'Postman' so we must assume that people made regular visits to the shop to leave and collect letters. However, in the 1901 Census, we find mention of a John Cupitt (aged 66) who served as: 'Postman Civ. S' (Civil Servant?). In 1911 there is recorded a White family – Walter, a Plumber/Painter and his wife Winifred, a Grocer – address Post Office. These two appear to have been responsible for postal arrangements right up to 1939 when, in that special Census, he is described as 'Plumber and Postmaster', she as 'Grocer and Post Office Assistant'. Even as late as this, the Post was still only a part-time activity. Finally, we note that, in the 1911 Census, there is a reference to a 'Telegraph Clerk', a young man named Arthur Denholm Crampton. The Post Office took over responsibility for the 'National Telegraph' in 1870 but this 1911 reference is the first mention of any specific activity in Cotgrave. Perhaps, as with the Money Order facility, the Cotgrave user was obliged to go to Nottingham, which raises the question of how they may have travelled. The answer can probably be found in the trade directories, where we find statements such as: "George Henstock to Nottingham – Wednesday and Saturday". It was obviously necessary to plan ones travel arrangements carefully!

Pubs and Publicans

We have come to accept that Cotgrave has two pubs, The Rose and Crown and The Manvers Arms and this has been true for at least the last two hundred years (apart from the brief and inglorious reign of The Black Diamond pub dedicated to the immigrant miners which flourished in the Owthorpe Road between 1978 and 2007, when it was pulled down to accommodate a new block of flats). What is, perhaps, less well known is the fact that the original pubs experienced several name-changes. In 1822 (the earliest date for which we have information) the Manvers Arms was known as the Royal Oak, changing to the Black Lion in 1825, then to the Manvers Arms in 1861. Similarly, the Rose and Crown was known as the Duke of Wellington in 1822, the Five Bells in 1825, the Victoria in 1853 and, finally, the Rose and Crown in 1861. Both pubs went under their present names in the 1939 Census. The names of the publicans seem to change even more frequently than those of the pubs. For instance, John Archer looked after the Royal Oak/Black Lion for just ten years, while Thomas Hickling presided over the Duke of Wellington for only four years. Samuel Timm was probably the longest incumbent, looking after the Black Lion/Manvers Arms for at least thirty years from 1841 to 1871 and his son John was in charge in 1881. Interestingly, Samuel described himself as Wheelwright/Victualler so running the pub was no more than a part-time job. After this, the names changed regularly from decade to decade, which suggests that no-one could quite make a living out of either place of refreshment (a situation which appears little different from that of today?).

The Grantham Canal

The Grantham Canal was formally opened by Act of Parliament in 1797 with the primary purpose of providing a commercially viable method of transporting coal from the Nottinghamshire coal field to Grantham. It started from the River Trent, covered 33 miles and climbed through no less than eighteen locks, four of which lay within the Cotgrave Parish boundary. The locks were 75 ft by 14 ft, the same size as those on the Nottingham Canal so as to allow the same boats to use them. In addition to coal, 'upward' traffic consisted of lime, bricks and groceries, while 'downward' traffic was largely agricultural produce. However, another important function (which was perhaps less frequently spoken of) was the carriage of 'night-soil' from Nottingham's slums to the fields lying either side of the canal – no doubt Cotgrave farmers accepted their share? The canal's profitability increased steadily until 1841, though in 1843 it was sold to a railway company and from that point onward (perhaps unsurprisingly) canal fortunes declined. It was finally closed in 1936 – though boat traffic had actually ceased by 1929. The closure act stipulated that water levels should be kept at 2 ft to support agricultural requirements so the line of the canal was maintained, though bridge lowering in the 1950s ensured that water-born traffic was then only possible over short stretches.

While not wishing to exaggerate the importance of the canal to Cotgrave's commercial life, it is clear that a small minority of inhabitants did, indeed, depend upon it for a living. Perhaps the most obvious example is represented by the lock-keeper's cottage near the point where the canal cuts across Nottingham Road. The 1851 Census records a certain John Skinner employed as 'Canal Lock Keeper', the lock adjacent to his house being designated 'Skinner's Lock'. In 1861, at the age of 62, he is still there, though his son William has taken over in 1871. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is no mention of this particular occupation in later censuses, the canal, itself, being already in decline, though there is reference to a 'Canal Labourer' (William Handley) in 1891. Exactly what the Skinners' responsibilities were is unclear. No doubt, the boatmen, themselves, took charge of opening and closing the lock gates so one is obliged to assume that their task was one of lock maintenance and this must have included the other three Cotgrave locks and, probably that at Gamston.

Skinners Lock

As far as barge ownership is concerned, several Cotgrave residents claimed to be 'Boat Owner' or 'Barge Owner' and others 'Boatman'. In 1841, when the canal was near its peak in profitability, there were no less than four 'Boatmen', Joseph Jackson, William Randall, John Randall and John Barratt. What is more, White's Directory of 1844 adds a further boat owner in the person of John Thraves. Here too we have an interesting link between two occupations – boating and coal carrying. It would hardly be surprising if some of the coal brought from Nottingham ended up being burned in and around Cotgrave, rather than being carried all the way to Grantham and this seems to be confirmed by both the census returns and by the trade directories. In 1841 there were three coal merchants as well as the four boatmen, while in 1851 there was one coal merchant together with three boatmen. What is more, we can follow the career of William Randall from 'Boatman' in 1841 through 'Boat Owner' in 1851 to 'Coal Merchant and Grocer' in 1861.

As the vitality of the canal declined, his emphasis changed, though one may take it that he had an interest all along in coal distribution. Indeed, this is confirmed by the White's Directory of 1844. Similarly, John Randall describes himself as 'Boatman' in 1851, 'Barge Owner' in 1861, 'Boat Owner' in 1871 and 'Farmer and Coal Merchant' in 1891. In 1881 he describes himself as a cottager, while the White's Directory of 1874 refers to him as a cottager and boat owner, and the Morris and Co Directory of 1877 describes him as 'Coal Merchant, Baker, Flour Seller and Grocer'! In both 1901 and 1911, though there is no reference to the canal, two Cotgrave men describe themselves as 'Coal Dealer', suggesting there may still have been a link between the canal and coal dealing. For example, the White's Directory of 1885 describes John Randall as 'Boat Owner, Coal merchant and Shop Keeper, while the Wright's Directory of 1893 confines his activities to those of 'Coal Merchant' alone. No matter, one thing we can be sure of is the clear correlation between the number of Cotgrave boatmen and the gradual decline in importance of the canal. It is just unfortunate that we have no data for the early years of the century which might demonstrate its rise.

Cotgrave's Elite

There can be little doubt that most of Cotgrave's inhabitants were, if not poor, at least far from well-off but there were one or two who lived well and we can take a brief look to see who they were. There were two obvious dwellings of relevance, the Rectory and Cotgrave Place. In its early

The Old Rectory

days Cotgrave was blessed with two Rectors (a throwback to the living's being divided between the two monasteries, Lenton Priory and Swineshead Abbey). However, following the Civil War, the two Medieties were combined so, during the nineteenth century, only one Rector remained. As we noted above, following the Enclosure Act of 1790, the Rector was given a significant allowance of land (555 acres) in lieu of tithes and this made him one of the wealthiest members of local society. Thus, in the 1841 Census John and Elizabeth Browne lived in the Old Rectory in Rectory Lane, together with their six children and three servants. In 1861 the incumbent was Evelyn Hardolph Harcourt Vernon who, together with his wife and seven children enjoyed the services of a Governess and seven other servants. In 1881 Alfred and Fanny Hensley and three children had a Governess and six servants. In 1901 John Percy Hales and Augusta recorded two children and six servants. This standard of living can be contrasted with that of the pre-Second World War Rector, Alan Chaplin who (according to the 1939 Census) was accompanied by his wife, one daughter and one Shorthand Typist! It is interesting to note that, while the vast majority of Cotgrave residents were born either in Cotgrave itself or in nearby villages, all these Rectors and their wives came from outside Nottinghamshire, another factor which distinguished them from the locals. So, indeed did the various Curates who achieve mention mainly in the Trade Directories. It is also significant that many Rectors were either related to or friendly with the Earls Manvers (who were, of course, Patrons of the Cotgrave living). Evelyn Hardolf Harcourt Vernon, for example, was the nephew of Charles Herbert, 2nd Earl Manvers and we see further evidence for this in the sad accident which took the life of Rector Nathan Haines in 1806 - he drowned as a result of falling through the ice while skating at Thoresby.

Another hint of the connection between the various elite families is the fact that in 1851 the Rector's twenty-five year old son Edward W Browne was responsible for running the large farm associated with Cotgrave Place. (At this time he was not living there though he did come to live in the Place in 1881 at the age of 56, having spent some years in the tiny village of Langton-by-Wragby, near Lincoln.)

Cotgrave Place

Cotgrave Place was owned by Earl Manvers but was let out to various rich tenants. It was certainly a grand Georgian house, though not, of course, on the scale of Holme Pierrepont or Thoresby. In fact, in the Whites Directory of 1832 we learn that its occupant, Robert Burgess acted as agent to Earl Manvers and in 1844 he is described as Steward to Earl Manvers. The 1841 Census lists him as a farmer. Indeed, there is evidence of his skill in this activity in the shape of national prizes for his innovative breeds of both sheep and cattle. There is no indication in 1841 of the acreage involved but the 1861 Census tells us that Charles John Hill (retired Lt Col) farmed 430 acres at Cotgrave Place, comparable in size to the Rector's holding. His wife Lady Frances Charlotte Arabella Hill (nee Lumley) came from Tickhill Castle in Yorkshire (her brother Richard George Lumley was 9th Earl of Scarborough) and, together, they employed no less than eight servants. Hill came from Westbury, near Bristol, though the couple had probably lived at Tickhill Castle, before moving to Cotgrave, because at least two of their four children were born there. In the 1851 Census Hill is listed as a Magistrate, not a farmer. So far as can be ascertained from the stated acreage of 400, the farm may have been run by a Thomas Parr, though (from the Census layout) Parr must have lived in the village, rather than at Cotgrave Place itself.

In 1864 (according to Whites Directory) Cotgrave Place was the 'Seat of Hon Henley Eden' but it tells us nothing of his origins. However, thanks to Carole Pimblett's investigation of the 1871 Census, we know that the family moved to Bramcote and lived at 36, Town Street, together with their four servants. The Hon Robert H Eden (then aged 30) was born in Battersea, Surrey and described his occupation as 'Peer's Son'! His wife, Jessie, E Eden (aged 28) came from Swannington in Norfolk (not far from Norwich). The couple were married on 5th December 1862 at Swannington by Robert's father, Lord Aukland, Bishop of Bath and Wells, Jessie being the daughter of the then Rector of Swannington, Rev Frederick Hilyard. They had four children, all of whom were born in Cotgrave over the period 1864 to 1869. Their youngest child, William, was born in April 1868, according to an entry in a Bristol newspaper. The internet provides further information on Robert's father. Robert Eden DD, 3rd Baron Aukland, born 1799, died 1870, was third son of William Eden, 1st Baron Aukland, Rector of Eyam, in Derbyshire, from 1823 to 1825 and married Mary Hurt of Alderwasley Hall (Derbyshire) in 1825. He became Bishop of Sodor and Man in 1847 and Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1854 to 1869.

Then, in 1871 Cotgrave Place was occupied by Lt. John L Hines from Derbyshire, his wife Elizabeth, who came from Brighton, and seven servants. Hines also claimed to farm 430 acres. Unlike the other residents, the 1881 occupier, Edward W Browne was born in Cotgrave (as we noted above, he was the son of the Cotgrave Rector, John H Browne) but he and his wife Edith, from Somerset, also employed eight servants. Oddly, we then come to a hiatus – there is no reference at all to Cotgrave Place in the 1891 Census, while in that of 1901 the place was occupied by a collection of workers and servants, all with local backgrounds.

Finally, in 1911, the occupiers were John and Frances James, together with their three children and five servants. In other words, normal service had been resumed - except that they were both born locally (Langar and Cropwell Butler, respectively). They were still there in 1939 though the farm was being run by their son Hubert. In addition to these worthy gentlemen, the Trade Directories mention one or two other 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' without offering any hint as to who they were. For example, Whites 1832 Directory lists a George Marriott – Gentleman, while in 1844 he is listed as a farmer. Then, again, in 1853 he appears in the guise of 'Gent'. Kelly's Directory of 1851 includes a Miss Hannah Baldock under the heading of 'Gentry'. She appears again in Whites of 1864, together with a Mrs Mary Parker. Who exactly these people were we may never know but they presumably constitute a sort of 'middle layer' in the Cotgrave hierarchy.

Education

Cotgrave seems to have been fortunate in so far as education of its young people was supported by public-minded people from an early age. Harold Scrimshire bought land and property in the village in the period 1550 – 1570 and on his death in 1610, left £20 for the maintenance of the schoolmaster "because I doo see that the towne of Cotgrave hath great need of a good schoolmaster". According to the 'Yellow Book' this money, together with several other charitable donations, was, in fact, put towards the *building* of a school on Church land, which opened in 1752. This, together with the village workhouse, was situated at the bottom of Mill Hill. We know nothing of the nature of the education provided, there being no national guidelines until the middle of the nineteenth century. However, education began to be taken more seriously in the 1800s and, in the 1860s, a new school was opened (paid for by Earl Manvers) in the centre of the village, now the Cotgrave C of E Primary School.

Old School

The old school (The Parish School) was referred to in the Whites Directory of 1832, the School Master being Thomas Brown, while the 1841 Census names three teachers, Thomas Brown (aged 61), Jane Hames (53) and John Geeson (18). Jane later turned her attention to running the Cotgrave Post Office but Brown and Geeson continued to run the old school, helped by a young woman, Dorothy Ann Goulden (aged 23 in 1851) and these three were still in charge in 1861, though Brown was now working part-time as a cottager and had also been appointed Parish Clerk. In both the 1851 and 1861 Census's they were assisted by a 'Pupil Teacher', Thomas Timm (aged 14) in 1851 and James Brown (16) in 1861. The new infants' school, referred to as 'The National School' was under construction in 1861. It was designed to accommodate a hundred children of both sexes and would include living quarters for a Master and Mistress. Exactly when it opened is unclear* but it was certainly functional by 1869, when the new teaching regime of Thomas Mensing, his wife Ellen and Miss Hannah Kirchen was in charge. In line with his predecessor, Thomas Brown, Mensing was also appointed Parish Clerk, a post that he continued to fill until his death in 1906. Indeed, in the 1901 Census, at the age of 64, he was still functioning as a 'Certificated' school master, together with his son, Harry W Mensing. Yet another of his children, Gertrude G Mensing, also became a school mistress so teaching was very much in the Mensing family genes. Incidentally, we also note that the practice of using pupil teachers continued in the new regime, reference being made to this in 1881 and 1891. Interestingly, in view of the design figure of 100, Kelly's 1904 Directory quotes an average attendance figure for the new school of 97, which represents 15% of the then population.

We might look in slightly more detail at the number of scholars and their ages over the second half of the nineteenth century. Sadly, there are no figures for the number of scholars in the 1841 and 1901 Census's, but we can summarise the available data as follows:

Year	No of Scholars	Population	Percentage	Birth Rate*
1851	154	833	18.5	180
1861	174	831	19.8	250
1871	192	831	23.1	230
1881	178	818	21.8	180
1891	116	702	16.5	120
1904	97	~650	14.8	130
1911	94	656	14.3	100

* NB Birth rate is measured in 'Births per Decade' and is actually 'Baptisms'

How can we understand these figures? Firstly, the birth rate rose rapidly between1840 and 1860 and this pushed up the number of school-age children between (say) 1845 and 1865. Then it dropped sharply again between 1860 and 1900 (remember again the agricultural downturn), which accounts for the reduction in the number of scholars towards the end of the century. However, this latter reduction was slightly less than the drop in birth rate because an increasing range of ages probably remained at school. Qualitatively, this makes sense – we can scarcely hope to understand the fine detail without more data. Perhaps the most significant feature of the above table is the large number of pupils in the period 1861 to 1881. We seem to have a situation with three teachers looking after 180 pupils -- sixty pupils per class! It also raises the question of why the new school was designed for only 100 pupils. Two factors appear relevant. Firstly, it seems likely that the old Parish School did not close immediately – we have reference to John Geeson acting as a school master at least until 1871 – and, secondly, we should take into account the existence of a Methodist school in the village which is referred to in several of the Trade Directories. The Wesleyans opened a chapel in 1839. It had seats for 400 people and the 1855 Kelly's Directory records that a 'Free School' was included in this provision. Morris's Directory of 1869 also refers to a Wesleyan school but there is no information as to its nature. Was it simply a 'Sunday School' or did it function during the week and who were the teachers? Were they, for instance, qualified in any way? It is significant that the 1836 Methodist Conference gave its blessing to the formation of 'Day Schools' and there are many references to such schools in other towns (eg Beeston - 1840) so we can reasonably assume that the Cotgrave school did, indeed, function as a day school, therefore helping to cope with the large number of village children in need of an education. There is no mention of its existence in the Directories after 1869 so we must assume that it closed sometime about 1870, possibly as a result of increasing Government provision for national education. Who, exactly, the teachers were remains a mystery – presumably the local Methodist Minister(s). Finally, we may ask: "Where was it located?" The Directories refer to it as a 'Wesleyan School' which strongly suggests it was held in the Wesleyan Chapel behind St Marys Church. This building bears the date 1852 which is consistent with the likely starting date for the school of 1855.

An interesting feature of the Cotgrave educational scene was the establishment of a Village Library in 1850. This was initially located in the Parish School at the bottom of Mill Lane and, in 1861, it contained 700 books. Apparently, there was a membership of eighty people (roughly 10% of the population), each paying a subscription of 1/2d (1/5p) per week. When the new school was completed in 1869, the library moved there and John Geeson (then aged 46) is recorded as being the Librarian, while still performing his duties as school master. By 1874 the complement of books had increased to 1100, by 1876 to 1300 and by 1877 to 1400. John Geeson remained Librarian at least until 1893 (when he would have been 70) and, in 1885 he was quoted as being, not only Librarian but also a cottager, a grazier and overseer of the poor. Presumably, he and Thomas Mensing worked together as general village officials.
* The building itself is dated 1863.

Religious Observance

Looked at from the perspective of the twenty-first century, perhaps the first thing to strike one is the important fact that a large fraction of the populace actually attended one or other of the three Cotgrave churches. Indeed, the very fact of there being three religious establishments is, in itself, a characteristic of nineteenth century Cotgrave. The present Anglican Church of All Saints began life in the 12th century and has continued to play the major role in Cotgrave's religious life though, as is well known, the 18th and 19th centuries saw a widespread growth of non-conformism. In the case of Cotgrave this took the form of Methodism. We shall look in detail at the growth of Methodism in the village in a moment but first it is appropriate to describe some of the nineteenth century happenings in the Anglican community.

All Saints Church

There were seven Rectors at All Saints in the nineteenth century: Nathan Haines (1797-1806), John Bristow (1806-?), William Saltren (?-1811), John Henry Browne (1811-1858), Evelyn Hardolph Harcourt Vernon (1858-1873), Alfred Hensley (1873-1897) and John Percy Hales (1897-1924). So, after a number of relatively short-lived incumbents, the nineteenth century saw the establishment of a trio of Rectors who were well able to stamp their authority on the Parish. Indeed, John Henry Browne was the longest serving Rector in the church's history. He was also Archdeacon of Ely from 1816 until his death in 1858. There is an interesting oddity in his early career – in 1803, at the age of 23 he was ordained Deacon and, at the same time, appointed Curate of Eakring (a small village near Rufford Country Park). The appointment was in the Jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York but the Patronage belonged to the Rector of Eakring, whose name was (would you believe?) John Henry Browne! I have no idea whether they were related. In 1811 he was appointed to a Curacy in Thrumpton (near the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station) then, in 1811 he became Rector of Cotgrave. The Archbishop of York at this time was Vernon Harcourt Edward Venables, grandfather to Evelyn Hardolf Harcourt Vernon who was to follow John Henry Browne as Rector of Cotgrave. (That was the way things were done in those days!) The Rev J H Browne seems to have been an active appointee, providing statistical details of the village and church. In 1832 the church had seats for 350 people, compared to a total population of 842, and two services were held each Sunday. He, himself lived in the Glebe House (on the site of the Old Rectory) and enjoyed an annual income of £709 7s 5d almost all of which came from land rent. As we noted earlier, his standard of living was much higher than most other residents of the village. In 1827 and again in 1843 he caused "extensive restorations to be carried out on the church". These included the removal of the parapet from the South and North aisles and the lowering of the chancel roof pitch. In 1851 the church was said to contain 450 'appropriated sittings'.

In 1859 the churchyard was expanded by the addition of one rood of land given by Earl Manvers, while in 1862 the Georgian box pews were replaced by open seats, at the expense of the Rector, E H H Vernon. (EHHV was quite a colourful character, apparently. William Lewin, in his “A Short Story of Cotgrave” (1944) tells us that he “was a rich man ----- and was very generous in his benevolences. He was also picturesque, always wearing his Oxford cap and robes in the street. His man of all work was named Stephen and I never knew any other.”) Further major restoration took place in the 1870s, when the west gallery was removed and a new pulpit and a carved octagonal font were added to the furnishings. The overall cost was £1500, of which Earl Manvers contributed £1000. He was clearly intent upon fulfilling his responsibility as Patron. The church is now blessed with a peal of eight bells which have been much improved since the early 1800s, when a visitor expressed his displeasure at the ring of five bells, “not in tune”. It is significant that all these nineteenth century Rectors employed Curates. No matter that William Lewin may have thought otherwise, in 1871, the Rev Harcourt Vernon actually had two Curates, Rev Michael Lewis and Rev Dashwood, while during the period 1881 - 1893 the Rev Alfred Hensley had three: Rev Alfred A Osbourne, Rev Arthur Thomas Page and Rev Harry Stanley Mercer. This is simply further evidence that the village Rector had a relatively easy life, based on his generous allocation of farm-land, while his Curates took up the onus of actually caring for the church community.

Returning, now, to Methodism, we might well begin by reminding ourselves that this was a breakaway movement from the Anglican Church, initiated by the brothers John and Charles Wesley and by George Whitefield. They never intended that their movement should result in schism and, indeed, the Wesley brothers remained members of the Anglican Church until their dying days. However the emphasis Methodists placed on an organisational structure based on the laity, rather than the ministry led inevitably to separation. This tendency was also driven by the Methodist emphasis on simplicity of dress and antipathy to alcohol, cards, gambling and theatre. What was more, Methodism aimed to appeal to the working classes, in contrast to the upper class bias long associated with Anglicanism and this latter factor even led, in 1810, to a split within Methodism in the shape of a breakaway group which became known as ‘Primitive Methodists’. This was obviously a response to the flow of mill workers from the countryside into the rapidly expanding towns and cities but it also had an appeal within rural communities such as Cotgrave. The new group offered a special welcome to the cottager, the agricultural labourer, the framework knitter and their like, while the ‘ordinary’ Methodist Church had more appeal to the artisan middle classes. In fact, Methodism saw numerous schisms during the first half of the 19th century, though, as we shall see below, these fractures were gradually repaired.

How, then, did Methodism arrive in Cotgrave? We are fortunate in having a well-researched presentation of this in ‘The Yellow Book’, gleaned from studies of the Earl Manvers papers in the University of Nottingham Archives. The first recorded Methodist service in Cotgrave came about as a result of visitations from groups of Methodists, first from Nottingham in 1799, then from Radcliffe, the following year. This led to a certain John Cooper (‘a labouring man’) opening his house for Methodist preaching, a move which met with considerable disfavour by both Lord Manvers and by the local Rector. Not only was the house right next door to All Saints Church but it happened to be rented from the Manvers Estate. Indeed, when the Methodists wished to build a chapel to accommodate their growing numbers, these two gentlemen did their best to put a stop to it. Permission to build on Estate land was refused and local artisan labour was strongly discouraged from participating, on pain of losing their Estate business. In the event, the chapel was built with Methodist help from other areas and on a parcel of land not owned by the Estate, in the locality of Chapel Yard.

No matter that it may have ruffled conservative feathers, the cause of Methodism flourished and in 1839 it was necessary for them to enlarge their facilities yet again. This larger building later became the Scout Hall which we know today. Finally, a much grander building was erected in the early 1900s, as can be seen from studying early OS maps of the village. Both the 1883 and 1889 maps show a “Methodist Chapel (Wesleyan)” on the site of the Scout Hall, while the 1915 version shows a “Wesleyan Methodist Chapel” on the site of the present building in Bingham Road.

So much for the Bingham Road site, but the OS maps also show, just behind All Saints Church, at the end of Church Lane, yet another building with a Wesleyan pedigree. In 1883 and 1889 this is described as a “Methodist Chapel (Free United)”, while in 1915 the designation is changed to “United Methodist Church”. According to a still-clearly-readable plaque, this building was opened in 1852 and it is noticeable how very much plainer in architectural style it is, when compared with its rival along the Bingham Road – this being characteristic of ‘Primitive Methodism’. Two comments are in order: firstly, it would seem that attitudes had softened somewhat since 1808 that such a chapel could to be erected so close to the Church and, secondly, there had obviously been some subtle change in allegiance between 1889 and 1915. In fact, this corresponds to a reconciliation between two Methodist factions which occurred in 1907, an observation which demands a somewhat more detailed delving into the overall history of Methodism.

Methodist Church

Without attempting to explain each and every nuance of Methodist doctrine, let us merely note that the original Wesleyan Methodist Church produced a series of offshoots during the early part of the nineteenth century. In 1797 came the Methodist New Connection, followed in 1810 by the Primitive Methodists, then, in 1815, by the Bible Christians, in 1836 by the Wesleyan Association and in 1849 by the Methodist Reform Church. Then, in 1857 these latter two bodies came together to form the United Methodist Free Churches and, in 1907 the Methodist New Connection, the Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Churches further combined to form the United Methodist Church of Great Britain. It is clearly this latter regrouping which accounted for the change in designation of the Church Lane building appearing on the OS maps. Finally, in 1932 the remaining branches joined to form the Methodist Church of Great Britain and this may also have significance in Cotgrave by leading to the consolidation of Methodist worship in the Bingham Road establishment. Indeed, this probably explains the abandonment of the Church Lane building which subsequently served a number of functions, including, interestingly enough, that of All Saints’ Church Hall.

Wesleyan Chapel

Can we learn anything further about the village’s Methodist affiliations from Parish Registers, Census Returns or Trade Directories? Well, “Yes, a little”. Going back to the identity of John Cooper, we note that a villager of this name (aged 70 in 1841), working as a baker, was living with William and Elizabeth Randall, Elizabeth being his daughter, as is clear from the 1851 Census.

John (aged 81) was a widower in 1851 and claimed to work as a Grocer. Being born in 1770, he would be aged 30 in 1800 when Methodism first arrived in the village, which seems eminently reasonable (though we cannot be certain, of course, that he is the same John Cooper referred to above). What is more, he appears to have had only the one child, a daughter, so the name 'Cooper' was destined to disappear from subsequent records. Finally, he died aged 83 in 1853.

The 'Southwell and Nottinghamshire Church History Project' states that "The Wesleyans opened a chapel at Cotgrave in 1839" (the 'Scout Hall' building in Chapel Yard). "It had seats for 258 people" Various Trade Directories then tell us that in 1851 and again in 1876 it had a capacity for 400 people (possibly an extension had been built?). The former source also tells us that Cotgrave had a 'Primitive Methodist Preaching Place' with seats for 100 and standing space for 40, which opened on 23 May 1850. What was more, on the evening of 'Census Sunday' (1851) all those places were filled. We also learn that in 1839 the 'Scout Hall' chapel had an afternoon attendance of 116, while the morning attendance at All Saints was 350. Taking these various figures at face value, suggests an overall church attendance in the region of 600 out of a population of 800 (roughly 75 %) – hence the remark with which we began this section. Its significance becomes even clearer when we compare it with national figures for church attendance. Harvie and Matthew 'Nineteenth Century Britain, A Very Short Introduction' quote the following (from the 1851 Census): total population (of England and Wales) 17.9 million, Church of England 5.3 million, Roman Catholics 0.4 million, Protestant Dissenters 4.5 million. Thus, of the overall population only 57% attended any kind of church service and nearly half of those were non-conformists. The contrast between rural and urban religiosity is even more striking – the fraction of those attending church services in urban environments amounted to just under 40%.

Other snippets of information include the fact that William Hames (the Boot Maker whose mother ran the Post Office) lived near All Saints Church for many years (could it possibly have been in the present Post Office building?) and combined his work with the role of 'Wesleyan Preacher'. His daughter, Lucy played the harmonium. Similarly, William Crampton, who lived next to the Wesleyan Chapel in Church Lane, combined tailoring with local preaching, confirming the Methodist emphasis on laity involvement. Finally, we know that in 1896 the Stewards at the 'Scout Hall' chapel were Messrs Hames and Henstock, while at Church Lane the Steward was William Lewin, these all being well-established Cotgrave names.

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