

## Cotgrave History Overview

The recorded history of the village of Cotgrave dates back to Anglo-Saxon times in the shape of a burial site on Windmill Hill discovered in 1983, some 74 adult and 13 child skeletons being found. There is also evidence of an Anglo-Saxon church having existed prior to the building of the present 12th century church. Though the important Roman road, the Fosse Way (now the A46) passes close to the village and the graves of two Roman soldiers were discovered adjacent to it, there is no evidence of Roman occupation of the village itself.

The name 'Cotgrave' is thought to refer to a person 'Cotta', though there has been disagreement concerning the second syllable. Perhaps the more likely interpretation is 'Cotta's grove' or 'coppice' but the presence of the Anglo-Saxon burial site might be taken as support for the alternative version 'Cotta's grave'. The name of the adjacent hamlet of Stragglethorpe (which has always been regarded as an intrinsic part of Cotgrave) suggests a Viking origin.

The first written record of Cotgrave occurs shortly before the Norman Conquest when the village was said to be divided between three landowners, all having Viking-sounding names. However, in the Domesday Survey of 1086 Cotgrave was split between just two of William the Conqueror's Norman knights, Ralph de Buron (an ancestor of Lord Byron) and Roger de Poitou. They were presumably being rewarded for supporting William in his 1066 invasion.

This division led to the occurrence of a corresponding division in the church, the Domesday survey referring to 'half a church' in Cotgrave. Because the two landowners were Church Patrons this implied that there were two 'Medieties' (ie two half-churches), each with its own Rector and Rectory. It was not until the end of the Civil War that this arrangement was rationalised, 'Consolidation' occurring in 1662, though the Advowson of both Rectories had already been acquired by George Pierrepont. The Pierrepont family (later Lord Manvers) gradually amassed large areas of land in the vicinity of their original base at Holme Pierrepont, eventually securing the vast majority of Cotgrave, as from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

As far as land ownership was concerned, the division lasted somewhat longer. In 1144 Hugo de Buron gave his share of Cotgrave to Lenton Priory, while the other half was made over to Swineshead Abbey (near Boston, in Lincolnshire), an arrangement maintained until Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in 1536. Henry then sold the Swineshead Abbey portion to Harold Rossel and George Pierrepont, while retaining the Lenton portion for his own betterment. Circa 1560, Harold Scrimshire purchased both Cotgrave Place and Rempstone Hall (just off Scrimshire Lane) from Rossel and established his family in Cotgrave, where they remained until the middle of the Eighteenth century. This closely coincided with the arrival of the White family in the village when, in 1556, Queen Mary rewarded Thomas White for his support during the 1553 Dudley rebellion which aimed to put Lady Jane Grey on the throne in her stead. The White family thus became owners of the 'Manor House' (at the corner of Risegate and Owthorpe Road), though maintaining their base in Tuxford to the north of Nottingham. The Whites eventually sold their Cotgrave land to Earl Manvers in 1741, only a very few years before the Scrimshire family also sold out.

The Manvers influence became ever more prominent with their sponsorship of the Cotgrave Inclosure Act in 1791. The idea of Enclosure (to use the modern spelling) was widely accepted towards the end of the eighteenth century, the idea being to do away with the ancient strip-field system of agriculture and replace it with large open fields each devoted to some specific function – pasture, corn, turnips, etc. The result was a marked improvement in agricultural efficiency, as demanded by a rapidly increasing national population (following the development of the industrial revolution). Though benefitting the land owning classes, it had unfortunate implications for the less well off – peasants who had previously relied on keeping a pig or a few hens on waste land found themselves excluded from these scraps of land under the new regime and were obliged to seek employment at meagre rates of pay from the better-off farmers, wealthy enough to own a parcel of land or to rent it from large land owners such as the Manvers family. Though many small villages contrived to agree on a detailed Enclosure plan by means of local discussion, Cotgrave was an exception in so far as it required an Act of Parliament, which specified the precise distribution of land between some dozen or so landowners. By far the largest was Earl Manvers, while the second largest was the Rector, who was allocated land as a replacement for giving up his previous source of income, that of tythes.

The nineteenth century saw various ups and downs in prosperity for English agriculture, the well-known repeal of the corn laws in 1846 having particularly serious consequences. The price of corn plummeted as a result of tariff-free imports of American corn and many smaller farmers were forced out of business. In the case of Cotgrave it led to the Earls Manvers acquiring more and more land, as smaller landowners were obliged to sell out. As we have already noted, both the Scrimshire and White families had already left the village, all their land eventually being purchased by Earl Manvers. Only the Rector remained as a significant holder of Cotgrave land and even he was dependent on Manvers good will, as they owned the Advowson – that is they appointed him in the first place. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, Cotgrave farming was based almost entirely on tenant farmers who payed rent to the Manvers family, though this situation came to an abrupt end in 1941 when the latter found themselves facing serious financial problems and decided to sell all their land and possessions in Cotgrave in a grand sale.

During the nineteenth century, the village remained a largely agricultural community with some fifteen farms employing just over a hundred labourers. There were also a number of associated occupations such as miller (there were three windmills in Cotgrave), wheelwright, blacksmith, gamekeeper, vet, bootmaker, etc. An interesting indicator of the isolation of the village is provided by entries in various Trade Directories, such as the following from White's Directory of 1832: "Carter to Nottingham – Samuel Upton – Once per week". To large extent, therefore, the village had to be self-sufficient and National Census Returns list several women who acted as village dressmakers, suppliers of hosiery, etc, while several worked as charwomen. There were also several males working as tailors. Various shops existed, selling meat and groceries, one of which acted as an unofficial post office. The one occupation which was not village-centred was that of framework knitter. In the early part of the century there were as many as twenty villagers employed in this trade, their output being taken to a centre in Nottingham. However, the lace trade gradually became concentrated in large mills in Nottingham and Beeston, for example, forcing Cotgrave villagers to move out

of the village to find employment in these centres. Census Returns show a significant reduction in Cotgrave's population towards the end of the century.

The Grantham Canal, which cuts through a portion of Cotgrave land was opened in 1797 with the principal objective of transporting coal from the Nottingham coalfields into Lincolnshire and it flourished until 1843 when it was sold to a railway company. Traffic had ceased by 1929 and the canal was officially closed in 1936. During its heyday it provided employment for a modest number of Cotgrave men, chiefly as boat-owners and as coal merchants.

The twentieth century saw, perhaps, the most important and transformative happening that the village had ever experienced – a very modern and highly mechanised coal mine was opened by the National Coal Board in 1963 on land which is now occupied partly by the Country Park and partly by the Holygate housing estate. This was one of the largest mines in Nottinghamshire, employing, in its prime, as many as two thousand workers, compared to a figure of no more than five hundred, typical of earlier Nottinghamshire pits. Such a development inevitably required the import of large numbers of outside workers, firstly some five hundred from other Nottinghamshire mines which were closing down and, a little later, considerably more from further afield, mainly from Durham coalfields. In order to attract these outside workers, the NCB built a large housing estate on the edge of the village, which changed the shape of Cotgrave dramatically. In particular, the population of the village increased from approximately seven hundred to over seven thousand during a period of just a few years. Social stress was an inevitable consequence but the village (which now became a town!) appeared to survive remarkably well, as new facilities such as shops and medical centre made their appearance on the Precinct. The opening of the Miners' Welfare (now known as the Cotgrave Welfare) in Candleby Lane also provided entertainment, much appreciated by newcomers and locals, alike.

Two unhappy developments tended to sour the early success of this remarkable social experiment. In 1984/5 the national miners' strike, championed by Arthur Scargill, in an attempt to bring down the Thatcher Government, caused bitter divisions between strikers (some few percent) and non-strikers (the majority). Friends and families were riven by strongly felt political differences and the subject is still a very sensitive one in Cotgrave, even today. Finally, and perhaps more widely experienced, the Cotgrave mine was closed in 1993 as a result of seriously declining profitability – over the thirty years of its working life, the pit was actually run at a loss. This was certainly a disappointment to the NCB but, far more significantly, a personal disaster for many of the miners who lost their jobs. Made redundant in their fifties, they were unable to find alternative employment - English coal mines were closing rapidly and other job opportunities were few and far between. Cotgrave became a seriously unhappy place and has taken some time to recover to its present relatively flourishing state.

This latter is, perhaps, best illustrated by the recent restructuring of the Precinct. Newly styled shop-frontages, a new Library and Medical Centre, new and impressive play facilities for Cotgrave's younger populace and a more open outlook typify the forward-looking attitudes which characterise the town today. Cotgrave is, without doubt, a desirable place in which to live, as is well illustrated by the rapid sale of the 450-plus houses recently built on the Holygate estate.