

## The 19th Century

The new landscape of enclosed fields, with fences and hedgerows, must have seemed strange to all who had lived in the era of open-field strip-farming. The social effects of 'Inclosure' would be strange too. It was the death of cooperative, communal production, and the start of the competitive cash economy.

However, in contrast to the experience of many parishes, Willoughby seems to have benefited generally. In 1815, for example, 12 of the original 13 owners were still in occupation of their land. Many others, formerly tenants, had bought their land, creating an owner-occupier class of 39, of whom only 7 were new to the village. Absentee landlords were down from 47 to 31. Chief amongst those who had "cashed-in" was the Duke of Portland, the principal beneficiary of the Inclosure Awards.

Still, there was an economic depression following the Napoleonic Wars and, by 1832, land owners in Willoughby were down to 32, with absentee owners rising to 37. The 1841 Census shows that there were 48 labourers - a huge increase over the figure of 19 in 1799. This was not so much due to small land owners having to sell as to a big increase in the population: up from 355 in 1801 to 569 in 1841.

Households were up from 70 to 105. Poverty was rife, generally, in the early part of the century, to such an extent that Parliament had to pass a new Poor Law Act in 1834, when Willoughby became part of the Loughborough Poor Law Union. By 1841, though, only 4 men in Willoughby had turned to framework knitting to make a living. There had been no significant exodus and the increase in households suggests that, locally, there was work available at an adequate level. The 1841 Census shows a balanced, self-supporting community of: 48 labourers, 31 farmers, 4 framework knitters, 3 tailors, 3 cordwainers, 2 grocers, and 1 each of these trades: publican, butcher, miller, sawyer, cooper, bricklayer, blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter, joiner, dressmaker, sieve-maker, grazier, and castrator.

It seems likely that the community was closely knit. There was no Lord of the Manor and no gentry to emphasise major class divisions; local families were mixed and bonded together by marriages. This pattern of rural life continued through the century, though population did decline in the second half – possibly due to the conversion of much arable land to pasture (for sheep), thus reducing the need for farm labourers.

Alongside all this, interest developed in education. A school was built in 1863, costing £305, which sum was raised by public subscription and by grants from the National Society and the Privy Council. A School Board was formed in 1873, taking charge of the School, controversially, from the Vicar. Though extended recently, the School's original four walls remain, housing the two main classrooms and, high up, in one of them, hangs a painted board showing the benefactors' names and the sums they contributed.