

MERSHAM DURING THE 18th & EARLY 19th CENTURIES

by Jenny Mills Originally self-published locally in 1995 and re-edited 2013
including A Survey of Inhabitants by Edward Finn (1794 - 1873)

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
Preface	1
Acknowledgments	1
Parish boundaries	1
Agriculture and land ownership	2
Buildings	5
Population and employment	8
The Vestry meeting and Overseers of the poor	14
The Church	19
Schools in Mersham	22
Roads and footpaths	24
Law and order	28
Leisure	29
The Finn survey of Mersham's inhabitants	33
References	65

Preface

When I tried to find out when our house in Long Row was built, two of the sources I used were the census of 1841 and the tithe map of 1840 which together give a comprehensive list of the inhabitants of Mersham, where they lived, their occupations and ownership of land at that time. Inevitably I became curious about what it must have been like to live in Mersham those days. A book by John Douch (Ref. 1) about smuggling in the area revealed the existence of a survey of inhabitants dating from the early years of the 19th century written by Edward Finn (1794-1873), one of the children of James Finn (1756-1839), who was parish clerk and schoolmaster of Mersham for 20 years. Having located the manuscript in the Archives at Canterbury Cathedral and transcribed it, I went on to look at the parish records which are housed in the Kent History and Library Centre at Maidstone. Extracts and information from these and other sources are given in the first part of this booklet.

A transcript of Edward Finn's survey is given in the second part. The lively account of his family, friends and neighbours gives a more intimate view of our predecessors than can be gleaned from official documents and places them in a setting which we can still relate to the Mersham we know today.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank John Douch for his help in locating the Finn Survey and Mrs. Phyllis Wellard, a descendant of the Finn family, for her encouragement and information about her ancestors. I must also thank my family for allowing me time off to do the necessary research.

Parish Boundaries

"...then cross to an oak with an M at the stile; then down the meadow to a large oak by Barrow's house with M; then round Goodsole's land (the same being charged to Mersham many years) to an ash pollard near Goodwin's; then cross the road to an ash stock in the hedge, and by the south corner of Highstead's barn; cross over through the yard, by the barn; to an ash pollard marked M in the backside close, near the house; then into the field below to

an ash with an M on the left hand; then cross the same upwards to the comer, next the lane or high road: then down the middle of the said road to Stone Cross Bam and the little water course, and follow the said course on toward Bliby Wood, to the rails at the end of Kettle Field, where is an old stump with M; then follow the water course through Bliby Wood; then enter Ruckinge Lane (which all belongs to Ruckinge to mend) to the four Vents at the comer of which, in Foundered Lane, stands an oak with M. Follow the said lane to Cheeseman's Green, at the lower comer of which is an old beech with marks, then to the gate in Widow Swaffer's close, whereon is an M, and go through there on the right; turn to Bilham Lane, wherein are two marks to the right and left, and then to another mark on an old beech; then to Bilham House, of which the porch only is in Mersham; then to Mrs. Boy's Wood, by the hedge from the house, at the end of which hedge an oak with M, then round the wood to the east, go close by the wood on the right to a thorn with M; then straight across the field to another tree with M, and then over Holmwood's meadow, taking in one acre, and so through the gate to Sevington Bridges, near which an M on a willow tree ..."

This is part of a Perambulation, written in 1761 by the Rector, Dr. J. Chapman. The boundary it follows does not differ greatly from the borders of the parish shown on maps today and it may follow much the same route as it did a millennium or more ago. With all its modernities stripped away, Mersham would still be recognizable because its landscape, the position of most of its lanes, footpaths and some of its field boundaries are likely to be similar, if not identical, to those of Anglo-Saxon or Norman times. Until Ordnance Survey maps were first produced in the early 19th century, similar Perambulations, would have been handed down from each generation to the next and memories periodically jogged by beating the bounds.

It was very important to know where the boundary lay since each parish set rates to maintain its own poor and needy citizens, to mend its roads and maintain its church. Tithes on the crops grown within the parish had to be paid to the Rector. This practice originated as long ago as the 9th century and only ceased in 1936 when the Tithe Redemption Act was passed. Originally, tithes were paid in kind, but in 1836, they were commuted to a money payment adjusted each year according to the 7-year average price of cereal crops. To calculate these tithe rent-charges, each parish had to be surveyed and a map drawn showing the name and area of each field, dwellings, barns, yards and a list made of the landowners, lessees, acreages and land use. The maps and apportionments for Mersham date from 1840 and together with information from the 1841 census give a comprehensive view of the parish and its inhabitants at that time.

Agriculture and land ownership

J. Smith Woolley Jnr. was the Local Agent who negotiated the tithe redemption agreement with landowners in Mersham. He gave the following description of the parish in this report to the Tithe Commission:

"Mersham is a small village 4 miles from Ashford. The parish is naturally divided into three distinct portions. The northern part is all light land a great deal of it very kind and useful some exceedingly good, especially near the Village and much of course very inferior. All of it is well adapted for the cultivation of Turnips but for some reason or other Turnip Farming by no means flourishes in this part of Kent. Sir Edward Knatchbull's Park which is in this division and the Grass Land adjoining it is for the most part weak and poor. The second portion occupying the whole of the centre of the Parish is entirely low flat grass land partaking very much of the character of marsh, most of it is very good Sheep Land but nearly half of it is

always mown. The Southern extremity is all clay or nearly so - immediately adjoining the Grass Land it is not unuseful but as it approaches the Boundary of the Parish it becomes excessively cold heavy and sterile - the fact is a great part of the Land till within the last 2 or 3 years was all but inaccessible in Winter. Some of the roads have now been very greatly improved and there is an evident disposition on the part of several of the occupiers to farm with considerable spirit. As the roads continue to improve and underdraining and manuring to be more universally practised, this end of the Parish will be by no means unproductive. Much of the Grass Land in this division is very unsound - repeated losses have been suffered from rot in Sheep. Hops are not extensively grown, the quality being inferior, nor is there much fruit plantation. There are no Market Gardens and no Common Land. Many of the sheep are shorn out of the Parish".

According to the Tithe Commission's calculations, land in the parish was divided as follows: (measurements given in acres, roods and perches)

Total quantity of Titheable Land	A	R	P
Meadow & pasture exclusive of Glebeland	1321	1	25
Hop Grounds	29	2	9
Woodlands	226	3	33
Houses, gardens, outbounds, wastes, waters, roads	132	2	19
Glebelands not in the hands of the Owner	40	0	3
Arable (excl. of Hop Grounds and Glebelands)	926	1	0
Total acreage	2676	3	9

In addition there were about four acres of rectorial glebe which included the rectory (Glebe House) and its grounds, some cottage gardens and the church and churchyard.

Crops mentioned as growing on arable land were turnips, barley, wheat, beans, peas, clover and oats, with wheat, barley, oats and beans also being grown for straw and horsemeal. Mr. Smith Woolley estimated that there were 800 acres of low flat grassland and 521 acres of upland.

The major landowner, with 763 acres in this parish alone, was the Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Knatchbull Bart. of Mersham Hatch. About half of this he kept in his own hands, the rest was rented by ten lessees. The Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral owned the next largest area, 204 acres; Mersham Manor had been in the hands of Canterbury Cathedral Priory and later the Dean and Chapter since the Domesday Book was compiled, perhaps earlier. Most of the land was let to the tenant of Court Lodge Farm but there were 6 other lessees.

Twenty-two farmers and one grazier appear in the 1851 census, which in most cases also gives the acreages farmed, the largest being 280 and the smallest 12 acres. Most of the farmhouses are still in existence, but one, named variously on old maps as Gregory, Greadley or Gridley, on the Mersham-Aldington boundary north of Spring Hill, has disappeared.

No hops are now grown locally presumably because on soils unsuited to growing good quality hops, their cultivation became uneconomical. In 1840 it seems that acreages were already decreasing. In 1835 there were 48 acres, by 1840 it was down to 29 acres (Ref. 2). Finn says that "the hop grounds were extensive and gave employment to many hands about the

neighbourhood but I think they are now almost extinct". He also mentions a hop oast near the corner of Hatch Road and there is an Oast Field on the east side of the path leading to Hatch Park, which, in the days before the new turnpike (A20) was built across Mersham Heath, would have been a continuation of the road from the village, joining the old coach road close to the mansion in Hatch Park. The Tithe map shows an Old Hop Garden field and Hop Garden Plantation abutting the turnpike road opposite Bockhanger Wood, which together amounted to about 14 acres, but in 1840 they were used as pasture and woodland and are now bisected by the M20. The hop gardens still existing in 1840 were in Lower Mersham, the largest of about 10 acres was in Broad Oak field (on the south-eastern corner of the crossroads. There were smaller areas in the field beside Long Row, in Lower Coopers field, near Chequer Tree and Frith Gate Farm. There was also a field called Old Hop Garden behind the Denne, then used as arable.

Most of the woodland in 1840 was on the Knatchbull estate; this included long-established woodlands such as Quarrington and Bockhanger as well as plantations. In Lower Mersham there were Captain's Wood and Bliby, which still exist, although reduced in extent, and also areas of woodland such as Cornerwood and a plantation on the north-east corner of Bliby crossroads, Mays Wood, near Cheesemans Green and a further stretch of woodland adjacent to this in Featherbed Lane, indicated by the name Wood field and shown on earlier maps. There are still some woodland flowers and grasses on a tree-lined bank near here and at the sites of Coopers Wood at Coopers Comer and Gill Wood in Gill Lane, which mark the edges of former woodland. Field names also indicate woodland lost prior to 1840, for example, there are four Wood fields, Little Wood field and Rutton wood field. The latter still existed in 1761 as the perambulation directs the beaters to "enter into Rutton's Wood".

The acreages, use, names of the owners and lessees of fields and often the field names are given in the Tithe apportionments. There was a great variety in the size and shape of fields, the largest being The Rock, 59 acres, north of Spring Hill running towards Stone Green. Some of the smallest, called Spots, were hardly bigger than the space occupied by a house and garden, for example, Tun Spot, 33 perches. Many are probably very ancient dating back to the settlement of the area in Anglo-Saxon times. There is a mention of Burgate Field in the daybook of Prior Oxenden in 1336 when he noted that "there were 2 ½ acres of land at Mersham lying in our field called Burgatefield, which Geoffrey Mot our serjeant bought for our use at the command of William of Coventry who was then the Warden. (Ref. 3)

There are not likely to have been any open fields in the area as most of Kent was enclosed at an early date and was very little affected by the 18th and 19th century enclosures of common land and open fields. An exception to this were "certain Heaths or Commons and Waste Grounds, called Brabourne Lees, and Stonehill, Smeeth-hoth, and Mersham-hoth, containing altogether, by Estimation, Three Hundred Acres or thereabouts" which were enclosed by an Act of Parliament in 1822 because they yielded "but little Profit, and are in their present State, incapable of any considerable improvement". Commissioners were appointed to value, divide, allot and enclose the land and a surveyor, Thomas Thurston to map it. Another Act dated 1819 enclosed land at Aldington Fright (or Frith) which Hasted described in 1798 as "once a chace for deer and wildbeasts where they ranged at large as at a forest. This is now a large heath of a very uneven surface about 2 miles in length, and near as wide, but it is separated into two parts by some cottages and lands enclosed around them, which have been purloined from it." (Ref. 5)

Many fields are named according to their acreage, as in Four Acres, a pasture on the corner of the Forstal, which included the site of the present Village Hall and the bungalows, or their location, as in Broad Oak field, Chequer Tree field, Bliby field, and Street field. A few seem to be named after previous owners: Ransley field and Boys field in Kingsford Street; Jordan field, near Swanton Mill; Johnson field in Gill Lane; Goddard field, the Sports Ground opposite Little Stone Green; Guys Garden, near Bower Farm. Some are named after a crop that at one time was grown there or the type of animals which used it as pasture: there are several called Cow field, Calf field or Calves Meadow; Horse Lees near Quarrington; Clover field, north of Stone Green; Hemp Spot, north of Elm Tree Farm (hemp was formerly grown in small plots for weaving household linen). Others are named for a landmark or natural feature: Quarry field on Spring Hill, which contained a stone quarry and lime kiln; Kiln field and Kiln Wood between Newhouse and the A20; Mill field near Swanton; Pigeon House field* and Wall field at Newhouse; White Gate field near Cheesemans Green; Footway field near Long Row, Hoth field and Upper Hoth field, which refer to Mersham Hoth, Hoath or Heath near the Hatch across which the new turnpike (A20) was built. **A small, square building is shown on the 1840 map in Pigeon House field and a note in the Parish Registers mentions a pigeon house with the date of 1641 and the letters IS. x L. inscribed in a brick.*

Some fields get their names from their position in relation to a farm: Hill before the House, at the foot of Colliers Hill by the Roman Road; Further field near Little Stone Green; Left-hand field and Right-hand field, one on either side of Kingsford Street. The names of others are more cryptic, their meanings having been forgotten or the names corrupted beyond recognition: Besoms and Hughwells, west of Blind Lane; Hardilies, behind Bell House; Pillrags, between Elm Tree Farm and Little Stone Green; Parish Holes, near Woodhouse Farm.

Although the extension of the South Eastern Railway from Ashford to Folkestone was not opened until 1843, the cuttings and line are shown on the Tithe Map of 1840. Stranded on each side of the line are the remnants of bisected fields, given different identifying numbers on the map but retaining their original names. The greater part of First field, the pasture just below Court Lodge. is north of the line, its lower part to the south later became the site for Mersham School in 1877. Some of the other divided fields were Garden field near Conscience Farm, Little Hook field, Waterlakes, Greenland and Side Hills. The high speed rail link has made further inroads into these already divided acres, although the two parts of First field have been rejoined by the cut-and-cover tunnel over the new and old lines.

Buildings

On early maps, Mersham appears as a collection of hamlets and isolated farms. The Church and its barn are the oldest surviving buildings. There may perhaps have been other houses near here in the middle ages, but by the 18th century there were only a few buildings and the greatest number of houses were at Mersham Street which was separated from the Church and Court Lodge by Burgate field. Other ancient sites are the two mills at the Forstal and Swanton, which are presumably the ones mentioned in the Domesday Book, and Quarrington where the existing dwelling replaced a moated manor house. Court Lodge (Mersham Manor), Stonelees in Laws Lane and Swanton Mill house, built in the 15th century, and Bower Farmhouse, built about 1500, are the oldest surviving homes.

The largest house in the parish is Mersham-le-Hatch, which replaced an earlier house acquired by the Knatchbull family in the 15th century. The building, designed by

Robert Adam, was commenced by Sir Wyndham Knatchbull-Wyndham (6th Baronet) in 1762 and completed in 1767, after his death, by Sir Edward Knatchbull (7th Baronet). Its construction must have provided much work in the parish. Sir Edward wrote that "in this building it is my own bricks, lime, sand, wood for the kiln, my own teams draw all this and the straw to the brick kilns, which is a considerable saving". Finn mentions that John Clarke Senior was "when a young man employed at the building of the present House also at the taking down of the old one which was then in the Stable Yard". The Parish Register for 1765 records that one William Boulter, a vagrant, and his wife were being relieved at Hatch and the man was "employed in hard work about a new House then building". His wife gave birth to twins while they were staying in the parish. The area around the new house also underwent dramatic change. Finn recalls sadly:

"that the Bockham wood formerly was on the roadside and the Fir Toll and garden walls, stabling, coachhouses and shrubbery, also three large white gates leading to the yard and its appurtenances, the second to the front entrance to the House, the third by the Wheelers shop at the end of the Heath leading down the valley into the Park. An avenue of majestic trees extending the whole length adorned with a fine sandy promenade with several protectors or wirley gigs erected on the pathway. These now are all departed like a scrawl and the whole of these pleasant walks are now enclosed within the park and the Turnpike road removed lower down towards the Street, also another long avenue of fine elms with a sandy pathway leading to the village street is vanished so that the whole has undergone an entire change and the place thereof is known no more."

After his description of the forge at Hatch, Finn records that "Hatch and the whole was a very lovely village". He lists employees at the Hatch who seemed to have occupied houses nearby. The changes he deplored may well have been made by the 8th Baronet, also Sir Edward Knatchbull. Finn says "He had great alterations made on his domain, the walks removed, the trees cut down and the poor and their dwellings transplanted to another spot that they might not be offensive to him."

Newhouse, now the home of Countess Mountbatten (Lady Brabourne), dates from the early 18th century. Hasted mentions it as being a "large good mansion, which lately belonged to Mr. Turner Marshall". It was afterwards occupied by one of his daughters and her husband Edward Hughes, a farmer, grazier and hopgrower, who is described in glowing terms in the Finn Survey. His unmarried daughters continued to live in the house after their parents' death. Finn described it as a "fine noble house ... as fine a building to its size as any structure in Mersham. The premises in the neatest order and regularity, quite the model of cleanliness."

On his tour of the village, Hasted came next to the Church and Court Lodge, then, lower down the hill, to a "neat thatched house, late the Rev. Mr. Tournay's, but now belonging to Mr. Fox..."; this was probably Bell House. About one field distant westward stood "a great old house, called the Boys-house, inhabited for several generations by a branch of the Boys family, the last of whom, Mr. John Boys, was descended from Thomas Boys, of Bonnington, in Goodnestone, in King Henry the VIIIth's reign, a younger son of William Boys ... From Thomas above-mentioned, descended likewise those of Sevington and Willesborough" (Ref. 7)

Hasted says that John Boys died in 1767 and the house, then owned by his daughters, was occupied by the father of Dr. Cole, the rector, and his son-in-law. The house appears on the

Tithe map of 1840 as Boys Farm and is in roughly the same position as the present Jernmett Farm. Indeed, when Charles Igglesden sauntered through Mersham in 1913, the old building had already been re-named Jemmett Farm and was thought by him to be "the most picturesque of all houses in the village" (Ref. 8) Unfortunately, it has not survived.

Hasted also commented on "a good thatched house" in Lower Mersham "formerly belonging to the Mantells, and from them usually called the Mantell house", but which is now called Stone Green Hall. This was built in the 17th century or earlier and altered by the Mantell family who had it clad and extended in 1704 and 1712 according to dates carved in the brickwork.

Another ancient dwelling which did not survive was the 'Church House', which was situated in Church Lane near the Churchyard gate. Many parishes had a building thus named and used originally as a place for baking the holy bread and also for brewing and storing equipment used for 'Church Ales'. These were fund-raising gatherings held at or near Whitsuntide when ale was brewed and feasting went on for several days. By the early 17th century, these goings-on were frowned upon and the houses put to other uses, sometimes becoming the parish poorhouse. Finn implies that the Mersham Church House was inhabited by more than one family, indeed his own parents lived there for several years. He also mentions Mrs. Nower, a widow, who lived in one room called the 'Long Room' overlooking the road and church gate. Finn describes it as having "one long glazed window opening in the middle, two or three steps up into her room, a cellar beneath wherein were deposited her wood, few coals ... and her sundries spinning wheels and spinning jennies, tow and such articles as were required". The building was still in existence under multiple occupancy at the time the 1881 census was compiled.

Approximate dates of construction of listed buildings in Mersham are given below.
(All Grade II unless otherwise stated.) (Ref.9)

	<u>Century</u>
Church (Grade I)	12th, expanded 13th with later alterations
Mersham Manor (Grade I)	early/mid-14th, altered late 18th, extended mid 19th
Mersham Manor Barn (Grade II*)	early to mid-14th
Stonelees, Laws Lane (Grade II*)	15th, rebuilt 16th
Swanton Mill and Mill-House	15th to mid 19th
Bower Farmhouse (Grade II*)	circa 1500, altered 16th-18th
Loud House (<i>after John Loud 1552</i>) (now Shadoxhurst House)	mid 16th, clad 18th
Burgate	16th or earlier, clad & extended circa 1800
Longthome Farmhouse	16th or earlier
Kingsford Hall	16th or earlier, clad 18th
Redbur	16th or earlier, clad 17th/18th, extended 20th
Denne	16th or earlier, re-fronted late 18th
Mundy Manor	16th or earlier
Gains Cottage	16th or earlier, clad 16th/17th
Little Stonegreen	16th or earlier, clad & extended 18th
Mersham Stores	16th or earlier, extended early 19th
Royal Oak & bakery	16th or earlier, altered/extended 18th-mid 19th
Elm Tree Farm	mid 16th
Glebe House	16th, early 18th & late 19th
The Grange	16th, clad & altered 18th-20th

Ransley Cottage		16th
Winser Cottage		16th or earlier, clad 18th
Bell House		16th, clad & extended 18th
The Farriers Arms		16th, altered & extended 18th-19th
Bockham Farm Cottage		circa 1600, clad 19th/20th
Little Swanton		17th or earlier
Quarrington (replaced ancient manorial moated site)		c 1700
Munday Farmhouse		7th
Outbuilding (former brewhouse or maltings), Little Stone Green		17th
Bridge House		circa 17th
Chequer Tree Farm		17th
Stonegreen Hall (Grade II*)	17th or earlier, clad & extended 1704 & 1712	
Stonegreen Cottage		early 18th
Newhouse (Grade II*)		early 18th with 17th core
Brook Cottage		early 18th
Coachhouse, Burgate		18th or earlier/extended 19th
Hannover Mill	18th or earlier core, re-modelled & extended 1879	
Goodrich Cottage		1737, earlier core
Mersham-le-Hatch (Grade I)	1762-1766, interiors 1772, altered 1827 & 1872	
Little Gill Farmhouse		18th
Flanders House		18th
Gill Cottage		18th, extended 20th
Stables, Newhouse		18th
Long Row		late 18th
Collier Hill Cottage		late 18th
Bell House Cottage		late 18th
Little Hatch and Hatch Cottage		circa 18th-19th
18 The Street		circa 1800
16/16A The Street		circa 1800
1, 2, 3 Chestnut Villas		early 19th
1,2, 3 Bower Cottages		early 18th
Stable (in grounds of The Corner)		18th
Stables, Little Stonegreen		early 19th
Old Gate House		early 19th
Hatch Lodge		early 19th

Population and employment

<u>1801</u>	<u>1811</u>	<u>1821</u>	<u>1831</u>	<u>1841</u>	<u>1851</u>	<u>1861</u>	<u>1871</u>	<u>1881</u>
571	625	776	677	751	776	752	726	722

Population figures for Mersham from Victoria County History of Kent (Ref. 10)

Although population figures are known from 1801, the first house-to-house census was not held until 1841 when the names, ages and occupations of inhabitants were recorded. The next census in 1851 included the relationship of each person to the head of the family, exact ages (instead of rounding them down to the nearest 5 years as in 1841) and place of birth. The name or number of the house was sometimes given, but often only the name of the street or area.

After the mid-18th century, there was a marked growth in the general population mainly due to an increase in the number of marriages and a fall in the average age of brides. In Mersham the population rose from 571 in 1801 to 776 in 1821, an increase of 36%. This was not exceptional since the population also increased quickly in most other nearby villages; up to 46% in Aldington and over 40% in Brabourne and Bilsington. In the century prior to the 1841 census, the increasing number of baptisms recorded each year in the Mersham Parish Register seems to indicate a steady growth in population. Taking a 10 year average, baptisms rose from about 12 a year in the decade 1741-50 to 30 a year from 1841-50. These may not all have been newborn infants, however, since older children and adults were occasionally baptised. Up to 1821 Mersham had the largest population in the immediate area. Ashford had a population of 2773 at that time and Wye 1508. There is a surprising fall in Mersham's population between 1821 and 1831 before the figure increases again in the next two decades. This drop in numbers is not reflected in adjacent villages. Between 1821-30, 134 people were buried, a larger increase than might have been expected from the numbers recorded in previous decades and this may partly account for the fall in population. However, a note in the Churchwardens' Account Book says that in 1821 there were 176 families and only 89 houses so possibly poor housing and employment prospects may have induced some families to leave to seek better conditions elsewhere. The accuracy of these figures is questionable, however, as from the 1831 census it appears that there were 141 households in 137 dwellings plus 3 which were uninhabited. It is difficult to be accurate about this as houses are not often named or numbered in the census and more than one family might have been living in a dwelling. If these figures are correct, then up to 48 houses would have had to have been built between 1821 and 1841.

As might be expected, the number of burials recorded each year increases as the population rises. From 69 burials in the decade 1741-50 the number rose to 111 from 1831-40. The annual figure, which occasionally includes burials of non-residents and travellers who died in the parish, fluctuates greatly from year to year but 4 to 13 burials was the most frequent annual total between 1720 and 1850 with several leaps to over 20, probably due to outbreaks of contagious illness. The family of Joseph and Elizabeth Pryer who lived at Chequertree Farm, suffered grievously in 1829 when they lost four of their children, aged 5 months, 6, 7 and 14 years, within a few weeks of each other. They are commemorated by a headstone under one of the yews in the Churchyard. Nearly 1300 burials took place over this 130 year period alone. It is difficult to imagine how many have been buried in Mersham's originally small Churchyard since its foundation. It was extended to the east during the First World War.

In 1841 74% of the people living in Mersham were aged 30 or less, 38% being under 14. Only three people on the 1841 census were over 75 and only 17 (2%) between 66 and 75. The table below compares the figures for 1841 and 1881. The chances of living longer seems to have improved over the intervening 40 years, but there were still only 5 people aged over 75. However, these figures represent only those older folk still living in Mersham; some may have moved away to live with sons or daughters in other parishes or have been forced through poverty to move to the workhouse in Willesborough.

	<u>1841</u>	<u>1881</u>
	No. %	No. %
13 and under	287 (38.2)	264 (36.5)
14 - 30	269 (36.0)	180 (25.0)
31 - 50	105 (14.0)	143 (19.8)
51 - 65	70 (9.3)	90 (12.5)
66 - 75	17 (2.2)	40 (5.5)
Over 75	3 (0.3)	5 (0.7)

The extreme youth of over one third of the inhabitants is due to the large size of many families. For instance, it appears from the 1841 census that Thomas Bayley, a farmer at Frithgate had 8 children and Edward Carpenter, also a farmer, at Little Gains had 7, as did two other families at Broad Oak. At the Forstal, Stephen Wilson and his wife Mary had 9 children between the ages of 1 and 15 years, Robert and Elizabeth Blanch had 8. Another family there had 6 children and the Prebbles at the Farrier's Arms had 8. No lack of playfellows for fun and games by and in the river. Only the number of children living at home on census day was recorded, so these families may have been larger, with some older children working away.

The 1841 census only recorded whether a person was born in Kent or not; 25 came from outside the county. Analysing the place of birth for heads of families and their wives in 1851 shows that 30% were born in Mersham and another 30% came from the adjacent parishes of Aldington, Brabourne, Bonnington, Bilsington, Ruckinge, Hinxhill, Sevington, Smeeth, Kingsnorth, and Willesborough. A further 21% came from the vicinity of Ashford and 18% were from further afield, but still mostly from Kent. In 1881 the proportion from elsewhere had increased to 30% and that from the Ashford area decreased to 14%, probably due to the employment provided by the railway works and the availability of houses in Newtown, but the proportion born in Mersham or the adjacent parishes remained much the same at 29% and 27% respectively.

Farming was the main business of the area and therefore employed the largest number of people. The census calls them agricultural labourers, but this term covered many specialities. There were 119 'ag. labs.' in 1841 and 121 in 1851, including 12 farm servants living in, nearly 16% of the whole population. By 1881 this had been reduced to 85, 12% of the population. The Ashford railway works opened in 1847. By 1851, seven Mersham men were employed by the South Eastern Railway and 26 by 1881, accounting for most of the reduction in the number of agricultural labourers. There are sixteen farmers mentioned in the 1841 census; twenty-three in 1851. The 1851 census also gives the acreages of most farms and sometimes the number of labourers employed. These figures account for less than half of the ag. labs. mentioned in the census and presumably they were regular employees hired by the year. The rest were probably employed on a weekly or daily basis according to the season and would have been supplemented by women and children at the busiest times such as haymaking and harvest. Some may have worked on farms in neighbouring parishes or have done odd jobs wherever they could find them.

The largest farm mentioned was run by Joseph Pryor who farmed at Chequertree in 1841. By 1851, his name had disappeared and his wife Elizabeth was managing 280 acres, but

the number of labourers is not given. William Foord, also a grazier, had 256 acres, employing 5 labourers; Daniel Swaffer at Conscience Farm, 200 acres and 9 labourers, some of them still living in, although this practice had been in decline for some time. Four are named in the Swaffer household at the 1841 census and three at Chequertree; all young unmarried men. Two of the Rector's sons, John and Edward Norward were farming 200 acres employing 8 labourers. At the other end of the scale, James Bailey farmed only 12 acres. In 1841 the Hatch had 4 labourers living in properties at the Park and Quarrington, in addition there was a Bailiff and a Park-keeper, but others must also have been employed from the surrounding villages.

Female servants were the next largest group of employees; there were 32 of them. Twelve worked at the Hatch together with 2 male servants and a charwoman. The rest were employed in ones and twos by local farmers and the gentry at The Rectory, Bell House and Newhouse. Two were as young as 10 and one 12 years old.

In earlier times too the Knatchbull family provided much employment in the mansion at Hatch and on the Estate. The Revd. Joseph Price, Vicar of Brabourne from 1767 to 1786, listed those employed by Sir Edward, the 7th Baronet, as 1 butler, 2 gardeners, a gamekeeper or huntsman, a footman, and horse groom, a horsehelper, a horse coachman, a horse postillion, perhaps coachman's helper, perhaps waggoner, her (*Sir Edward's wife's*) maid, 3 children's maids, a housekeeper, her maid, 2 housemaids, 2 laundry maids, a dairy maid and 2 cooks. (Ref. 11) Finn also gives a list of "domestics in the establishment", presumably of Sir Edward, the 8th Baronet.

There was a good range of craftsmen in the village. In 1841, 3 blacksmiths; 7 bricklayers and an apprentice; 4 carpenters and an apprentice; 2 felmongers; a glover; a sawyer; 5 shoemakers and an apprentice; 1 tailor; 2 woolstaplers and an apprentice. The 1851 census shows that the number of carpenters had increased to 9, one of whom was also a wheelwright. Others offering their services were 2 bakers; 2 butchers, 4 charwomen; a dressmaker; 2 gardeners; 2 grocers; 3 millers; a publican; 2 schoolmasters and 2 schoolmistresses. By 1851, there was also an artist and linnner; a higgler and a lime-burner on the list. Additionally, there was the Rector and a Relieving Officer and several people with pensions or of independent means. In 1851 several men were also employed by the parish to mend the roads.

Because the taking of the 1841 census almost coincides with the drawing up of the tithe map and apportionments, the lay-out of the village, knowledge of who lived where and owned what is fairly comprehensive. There were 138 households in 1841; here are some Mersham families of this period.

In 1841 Elizabeth Parkes, in her seventies, and her son John owned and ran Swanton Mill. Another son, Stephen was a baker there and he had a wife and three children, one of whom, also Stephen, aged 3 in 1841, appears in the 1881 census as a baker and grocer in the premises next to the Royal Oak, which remained a baker's shop down to recent times.

At the corner of Laws Lane and Spring Hill, on the Roman Road to Aldington, were two almshouses or poorhouses owned by the Mersham Overseers and both were occupied by agricultural labourers. In one lived Edward Earl, his wife Martha and six children, the eldest also an 'ag. lab.' David Mitchell, an out-pauper (receiving parish relief) lived with them. Next

door were Robert Bayley, his wife Jane and their nine children, aged between 9 months and 15 years, a lodger and an elderly relative. The houses could not have been very large and so living conditions must have been extremely cramped and difficult. For many years and well into the 20th century, these houses, and possibly also those at Broad Oak and South Stour, obtained their water from the spring, which still runs down Spring Hill, when their wells dried up.

On part of the field between Long Row and Denne, George Prebble, aged 67, had a carpenter and wheelwright's shop and yard and presumably also lived there with his wife and 7 children since this is given as their place of residence in the 1841 census. The 1851 census shows that of their children, three of the four sons, followed their father into the family business, the other became a blacksmith's apprentice. One son, John, was still in business there in 1881. He was unmarried and lived with two spinster sisters and a young nephew, his apprentice. No trace of their premises exists today. Another family of Prebbles inhabited the Farriers Ams; William, eldest son of George, and his wife Elizabeth, their 8 children and a lodger.

Shearwin Wyman and his wife Elizabeth, a daughter and two servants lived at Denne. His occupation was given as woolstapler but in 1851 he is listed as a farmer of 150 acres employing four labourers. He was born in Mersham and an Ambrose Wyman, probably his father, lived in Long Row, which was owned by Shearwin, until his death at 95 in 1851. Of him and his wife, Finn wrote "Stout. Common stature. Woolstapler, close but just in their actions. Attentive to their religious duties." Thomas Wyman, also a woolstapler, occupied another house in the Row. At 29, compared to Shearwin's age of 54 in 1841 he was young enough to be his son; he was married but had no children at that time. He appears on the 1851 census as a farmer of 200 acres living at Court Lodge. Shearwin himself died in 1871 aged 86.

Behind Denne was a yard let out to Henry Ruck, a felrnonger. He lived at Goodrich Cottage which together with a barn and yard behind and to the side of the cottage, he leased from Jeremiah Goodrich, who owned several fields near the Forstal. At Hannover Mill, then called Handen Mill, lived Job Burch and his wife Elizabeth. By 1851 he was miller at Swanton Mill with 3 children and 3 workers. His wife was still at Swanton in 1881 with one of his sons, Frederick, 10 months old in 1851, who was by then a miller.

John Epps Junior, born in Mersham, was a blacksmith. In 1840 he owned Bridge House, a cottage and forge where Bridge Cottage and Rose Cottage now stand and the four small fields behind these properties. The Epps family seems to have been blessed with longevity, John Epps Jnr. died in 1863 aged 87 and his father, also John Epps and a blacksmith, for many years an overseer of the parish, died in 1834 age 90. Finn notes that Mr. Epps Senior was "very fond of his pipe and a very eccentric and jocular man".

A good variety of professions were represented in The Street. William Browning, a schoolmaster, and his wife Harriet lived there with their 7 children, who were graced with the names Lavinia, Bridget, Leonora, Julianna, Octavius, Arabella and Charles. Edward Simmons was a grocer and draper and was still in business in 1881, aged 65. The family owned the shop well into the 20th century. Also living in The Street were George Head, a shoemaker; William Swinerd a gardener; Sarah Nicholls, schoolmistress; Ann Hills, charwoman; William Broadfoot, tailor; James Vincer, bricklayer; Jesse Finn, shoemaker; and his brother, William Finn, parish clerk and schoolmaster with his wife Elizabeth, a schoolmistress.

In the Rectory, now Glebe House, lived the Rector, George Norwood, his wife Anne and 5 children, although there may have been others living away. Three servants lived in. Thomas Tournay, a bricklayer, and his 9 children lived in Kingsford Street. John Pryer was the butcher, living at Flanders House, attached to which were a yard and various outbuildings used as a slaughterhouse.

Earlier generations followed similar traditional occupations. Finn mentions farmers, graziers, labourers, carpenters, a shoemaker, a woolstapler, a fellmonger, a butcher, a baker, a miller, blacksmiths, bricklayers, and a tailor who was also a barber. Mrs. Nower, who lived in the old Church House, used to spin for Hatch house. Finn notes that "such industry was the principal employment of aged females".

James Clarke was the grocer and general dealer perhaps using the same shop which was owned later by the Simmons family and is known today as Wood's Stores. He was also a carpenter, joiner, coffin maker, oil merchant, colour merchant, brush, earthenware, linen draper, hatter and silk mercer. Finn says that he was "in a large way in business occasioned by the converting of the Rabbit Warren at Brabourne Lees and the building of the Barracks for the army". Unfortunately, after 1809 when the troops were withdrawn, his business must have suffered and he was declared insolvent.

Continued in Part 2