

NOTES FROM THORNHAM

In the 1830s and 1840s the life of farmworkers became increasingly desperate. As the population boomed, wages were cut and employment became casual. Threshing, the main winter work, was mechanised, single employees 'living in' with the farmer declined, cottage crafts such as spinning and knitting moved to factories elsewhere and land enclosure took in the 'waste' where the poor had foraged and kept livestock.

Meanwhile the Corn Laws made bread expensive and poor relief became harsher. Lacking a voice and any hope, some

reckless individuals protested by setting fire to the property of unpopular farmers, causing considerable consternation in the district.

The announcement above refers to one such fire which was reported, along with ten others in just one edition of the *Bury and Ipswich Journal*:

'On Tuesday morning, about five o'clock, a fire broke out at Swattisfield Hall, Gislingham, the property of Lord Henniker, M.P., in the occupation of Mr. Chas. Cracknell and in less than an hour a large barn, containing 17½ coombs of barley, a great quantity of straw and baulm, a large stable, with the harness for ten horses, a mill house, neat house, a waggon loaded with straw, a chaff engine and two gigs, were consumed. But for the arrival of Lord Henniker's fire-engine, and the praiseworthy exertions of the neighbours and labourers, the destruction of property would have been much greater, as six stacks, with other buildings, were very near the barn, and in the direction of the wind. Mr. Cracknell is insured to the full amount of his loss, but the landlord is not insured, which being made known, the general cry from the labourers was, "Let us do all we can to save his Lordship's property, who has given us employment during the winter, and kept us from the Union-house." The two horse-keepers were in the stable when they first discovered the fire, but both men who bear excellent characters, declare they did not go into the place where the fire originated.'

Great changes came in the next few years. The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 and the arrival of the railway in 1849 widened people's horizons making it possible to seek a better life far from home.

You can read all my Notes from Thornham on www.thornhams.org. Keep well and please let me know about your research. Stephen Schwarz

FIRE AT GISLINGHAM,

MR. C. CRACKNELL

BEGS to return his sincere thanks to his numerous Friends, & to all present, particularly to the Labourers, for their kind and strenuous exertion; and to Lord Henniker, Mr. French, and Dr. Day, by whose united exertions, with the assistance of the Engines from Thornham and Eye, the Fire was extinguished.
Swattisfield Hall, March 20th, 1844.