

COMMUNITIES CONTRASTED

COUNTESTHORPE AND FOSTON THROUGH THE AGES

[A modified version of a talk given to the Heritage Group in April 2009]

I'm going to start with a modern contrast. Here we see today's communities side by side divided by the meandering brook which joins the River Sence at Crow Mills just a little north of the sewage farm that you can see at the top of the frame.



AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF COUNTESTHORPE & FOSTON c. 2007

I suggest that the contrast is striking and in it we see the product of centuries of history during which the two villages evolved in very different ways. Foston, the more ancient and grand, being reduced to little more than an isolated church and a name on the map (no longer a parish having been eaten up by Kilby in 1935), while the other grew from a mere chapelry of Blaby, to its present position as one of the most populous villages in the county.

Apart from bricks and mortar the main difference between Foston and Countesthorpe is seen in the field patterns. Those of Foston being larger with a tendency towards curved outlines, as opposed to the numerous smaller rectangular fields in Countesthorpe typical of parliamentary enclosure. These patterns stem from the heart of the reason why Foston today, and for four hundred years past, has been a much shrunken village, while Countesthorpe

has grown and grown. Before then things were very different and Foston was the dominant community.

The reason for the differences in the fields (and the fate of the villagers) is that Foston was enclosed for sheep pasture by the resident lords of the manor – the Faunts – between 1575 and 1620. W G Hoskins described the result in inimitable fashion, as those of us who knew Foston's fields thirty or more years ago will remember, I quote:

'Today even the Faunt's fine house has gone- it probably stood where the Hall farm stands today - and the site of "the town of Foston" as I saw it on an Autumn morning is an empty field with many long banks and hollows and traces of a long depressed causeway that was probably the old village street. The field lies immediately to the east of the long, narrow spinney by Hall farm, and on the south side of the by-road that leads in from the Welford road. Close by are one or two fields of great size, as at Knaptoft, which owe their origin to these Tudor enclosures for pasture.'

HALL FARM, FOSTON

BUILT CLOSE TO THE SITE OF THE FAUNTS' MANOR HOUSE, THE LAST REMNANTS OF WHICH WERE DEMOLISHED c1835



In fact Hoskins overlooked the many signs of occupation on the north side of Foston Road as this plan of the earthworks shows. Note the paled and walled parks. There are still people in Countesthorpe today who refer to the bear pit at Foston and it may be that this preserves the memory of a private menagerie of the Faunts, or their successors, the Skrymsher Boothbys who bought the manor from William Faunt in 1697. Menageries, like parks themselves, were a fashionable adjunct to a gentleman's residence in the late 17th and 18th centuries.



The first thing that illustrates Foston's early seniority over its neighbour is its name. *Fotr's tun*, meaning *Fotr's* enclosure or farmstead, is what is known as a Grimston hybrid - that is a compound of an Anglo-Saxon word, in this case '*tun*', one of the most common, and amongst the earliest, of OE settlement names - and a Danish personal name *Fotr*. The Danes settled – it is now thought more or less peaceably - in these parts from the late 9th century. *Fotr* was one of these newcomers perhaps taking over the settlement from an English predecessor. The earliest documentary record of Foston is, as with so many places, Domesday Book (1086).

Countesthorpe gets no mention in this great land register but would almost certainly have existed as a dependent settlement of Blaby, of which village it remained a chapelry until recent times. The first records of Countesthorpe do date from the late 11th and early 12th centuries when it is referred to simply as '*torp*' or '*thorp(e)*', i.e. a Danish term for a secondary settlement or outlying farmstead and in 1276 it was referred to as '*thorpcontasse*'.

The '*countes-*' element is said to derive from the Countess Judith, niece of William the Conqueror, who was a major landowner in Leicestershire (and elsewhere) at Domesday. The first record of the prefix '*countes-*' dates from 1242 and we first find the modern spelling in a record of 1395. Variations in spelling continued into the 17th century. There is no evidence that Judith ever visited, let alone lived, in Countesthorpe.

As we have seen there was ample visual evidence (now mostly ploughed out) that many ordinary folk thrived in Foston until the early 17th century, and although the documentary record is a bit thin, we can make reasonably reliable estimates of the size and relative wealth of its population alongside that of Countesthorpe's.

By 1086 William the Conqueror had settled Foston on his bastard son William Peveril and Domesday Book tells us that there was land for five village ploughs in the hands of the 11 freemen (*sokemen*), 8 villeins and 4 cottagers (*bordars*). In addition there were two ploughs operated by the lord's slaves (there were 3 slaves or *servi*, 2 males who would have been ploughmen and one female who would also have worked on the lord's demesne). There was also 16 acres of meadow.

The listed heads of households total 26 and assuming that the slaves had families, we find that this equates to some 110-120 people. A sizeable community at a time when the total population of England was probably no more than 1.5 million.

From the later records we can see that Foston supported this number of people as a minimum for the next 500 years or so, and in the early part of the 14th century leading up to the Black Death of 1348/9, probably many more.

In 1327 and 1332, 14 of the heads of household were assessed for tax, and as those with moveable/saleable goods worth less than 10 shillings were exempt (perhaps up to two-thirds of households), this suggests that overall numbers were well in excess of 100. This number was, however, probably below the high point of population, which could have reached around 200 by 1300, as famine swept across England in 1315/16 and was followed by disastrous cattle murrain (diseases leading to deaths) in the early 1320s.

1332 LAY SUBSIDY TAXPAYERS OF COUNTSTHORPE and FOSTON

COUNTSTHORPE

- Hugh de Lodebroke 4 shillings
- William de Tilton 3 s.
- Richard Allbold 2 s.
- Roger Walshmann 2 s.
- William de Foston 2 s.
- Robert son of William 2 s.
- John Frenkysh 2 s.
- Walter Ernald 3 s.
- Alan son of Ralph 3 s.
- John s. of Philip 3 s.
- Thomas Aleyn 2 s.

FOSTON

- Henry Percy 25 shillings
- William Heyn 2s. 4d.
- Robert Osgod 2s.
- Alice Monowes 4s.
- John le Reve 3s. 4d.
- Matthew Thurkell 3s. 4d.
- John Astel 3s. 4d.
- Adam Gwlmyn 2s.
- William Monwes 2s.
- Reginald Maheu 2s. 8d.
- Richard Rowel 2s. 8d.
- John Beale 1s. 8d.
- John Osgod 1s. 8d.
- William s. of Ralph 4s.

In Countesthorpe in 1332, 11 taxpayers meant that the population was probably around 100. Names to note include those of Walshman and Frenkysh which indicate Welsh and Norman-French ancestry respectively.

Although the Lodebroke (of Ladbroke, near Southam in Warwickshire) were the lords of the manor of Countesthorpe in 1332 it is unlikely that Hugh de Lodebroke was a family member. Although the wealthiest resident, his tax of 4 shillings compares with the 25 shillings of Henry Percy, Lord of Foston. More probably he was the reeve or bailiff, like John le Reve at Foston, looking after the Lodebroke's estate interests in Countesthorpe.

Therein lies the main reason why the two villages evolved in different ways. Foston, for 600 years or more after DD usually had a resident lord of the manor, or was in the grip of a single family, while it is likely that Countesthorpe never did, or was. In short Foston was a 'close' community tightly controlled by one family while Countesthorpe was an 'open' village where the rule of lordship was attenuated and the peasant classes had a freer hand to determine their own affairs

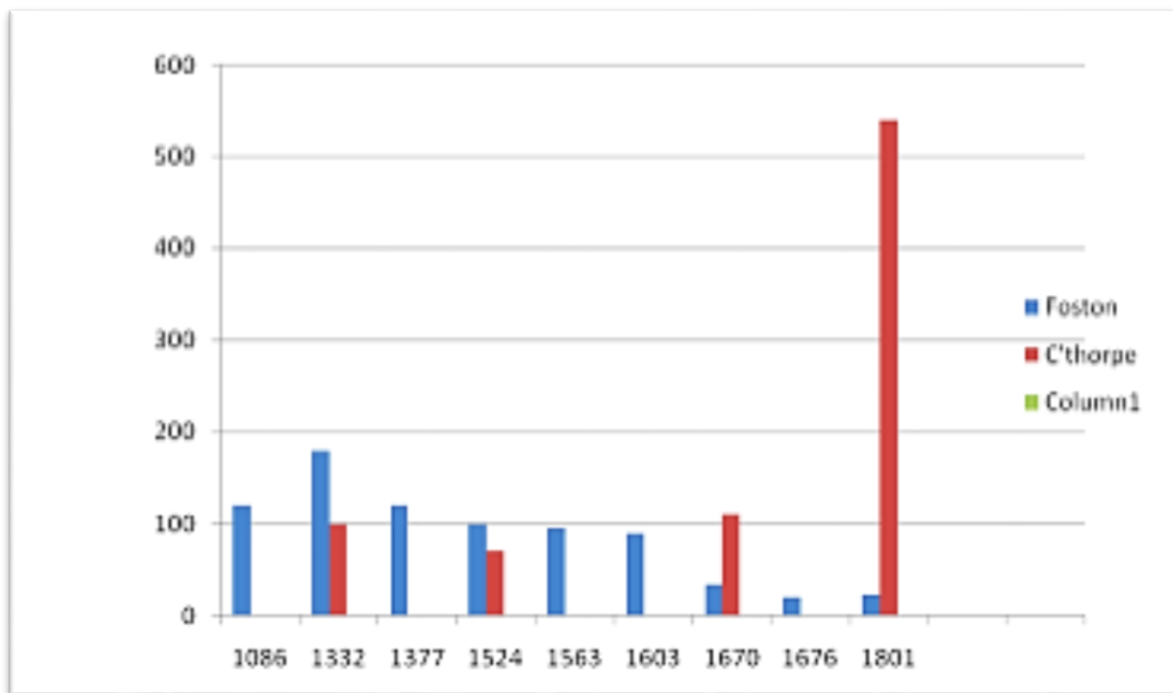
One of the most interesting records is that of the 1334 lay subsidy for which we have the amounts paid by the other village communities to compare with Foston and Countesthorpe. This shows that in the old hundred of Guthlaxton, Foston was the eighth most prosperous of some 120 villages. Its inhabitants paid a total of £3-5-0 in tax equalling Narborough (Northborough), more than twice as much as Countesthorpe (£1-10-6d), slightly less than Peatling Parva and more than Blaby (£2-16-4d) Cosby (£2-9-0) and Enderby (£3-0-0). Much of this wealth lay with Henry Percy who paid the huge sum of 25s in 1332.

The Black Death of 1349 carried off between a third and a half of virtually every community in the country and Foston was no exception. We find that in the poll tax of 1377, there were 99 taxpayers (that is all lay male and female inhabitants over 14 years of age), against 117 taxed in Arnesby and 111 in Peatling Magna (the return for Countesthorpe has been lost). However even these numbers suggest a total population in excess of a 100 allowing for the under 14s and an early 14th-century population of around 200.

From this mid 14th century calamity there was never complete recovery. In 1524 there were 20 taxpayers and as only paupers were exempt this means about 100 people. A diocesan return of 1563 just before the first phase of enclosure, records 21 families against Countesthorpe's 18 – probably, i.e. about the same number. It seems likely that the community was still a lively one at this time for, there is a record of 1561 in the accounts of St Martin's church in Leicester, which reads, '*received for serten stuff lent to the players of Fosson ... vjd*'. This 'stuff' was almost certainly costume material used in the production of miracle or mummers plays. As late as 1603 after the first phase of enclosure another diocesan return records 90 communicants. Unfortunately there is no comparable figure for Countesthorpe which was engrossed with Blaby in the record at 300.

COUNTESTHORPE AND FOSTON POPULATIONS COMPARED

Estimated populations assuming an average family size of 4.5 persons



In 1524 Foston remained more populous than Countesthorpe with 20 taxpayers against 15, although the average tax paid was the same at 1s 9d. Exceptionally at this time there was no resident manorial lord at Foston. This state of affairs was not to last for long. Towards the end of Henry VIII's reign in 1547 the manor came into the hands of the Faunt family.

1524 LAY SUBSIDY TAXPAYERS OF COUNTTESTHORPE AND FOSTON

COUNTTESTHORPE

• Robert Jocam (constable)	1 shilling
• Thomas Rygeley	5 s.
• Thomas Jacson	5 s.
• John Carre	4 s.
• Richard Byron	2 s.
• Thomas Venabuls	2s. 6d.
• John Gylford	1 s.
• Thomas Byron	1 s. 6d.
• Thomas Boneham	1 s.
• William Howdd	4 d.
• John Bentt	1 s
• John Dawe	1 s.
• Richard Weston	4 d.
• Richard Wryght	4 d.
• Thomas Malton	4 d.

FOSTON

Thomas Mervyn	4 shillings
William Palmer	4 s.
Henry Rygeley	4 s.
Richard Large	3 s. 6d.
William Forster	3 s.
William Webster	2 s. 6d.
William Veyse	3 s.
Richard Mervyn	2 s.
John Calton	2 s.
John Thornton	1 s. 6d.
John Danford	1 s.
William Heyws	1 s.
Ralph Grange	1 s.
John Pratte	4 d.
Thomas Alys	4 d.
Thomas Veyse	4 d.
Robert Marshall	1 s.
John Bayle	1 s.
Robert Barton	4 d.
William Kynbee	4 d.

William Faunt who acquired Foston by purchase was '*a respectable lawyer of the Inner Temple*' who died in 1559. His son William inherited but died without issue and so the manor passed to his brother Anthony. Anthony was a very high-profile figure being a JP, High Sheriff of the county of Leicester in 1587, and in the year of the Armada -1588 - was chosen to be Lieutenant-general of the Forces of the Shire. Unfortunately he died in that year. An inquisition *post mortem* found that at his death he held the manor of Foston containing 24 messuages and 6 cottages 12 tofts, 1,000 acres of arable land, 300 acres of meadow, 600 acres of pasture and 10 acres of wood (perhaps around the Reedpool). He also had the right of presentation to the vicarage and church of Foston; substantial holdings in Cold Newton, Lowesby, Kilby, the rectory of Wistow and Newton Harcourt, of which he had the advowson, and also the right of presentation and nomination to the vicarages of Kilby and Arnesby. Countesthorpe never had such powerful people in its midst.

Anthony was the first encloser and thus the man largely responsible for the downturn in Foston's demographic fortunes. He was one of a number of such landlords of Leicestershire all known to each other. Several of them were ultimately responsible for the eradication of village life. Such were the Villiers

family of Brooksby and the Turpins of nearby Knaptoft. The Villiers are best known as the family that later became ennobled through George Villiers, created Duke of Buckingham by James I. But it was George's father William who was the particular friend of Anthony Faunt. They went hawking together and Hoskins tells how, in his will, Anthony left his favourite hawk – Ringbell- to 'Mr Villers of Brooksby' in happy memory of lovely summer mornings together when, *'they fleeted it carelessly as they did in the golden world'*. In another piece of prose poetry, Hoskins speaks of this gilded pair out with Ringbell, *'soaring on a blue-and-white morning in May high over the green pastures of south Leicestershire in the year before the Armada'*. Anthony's son William inherited the manor at the age of nine and was knighted at the age of 21 at Belvoir Castle in 1603. He was very much the sportsman - an inquiry into trespass in Leicester Forest of 1623 notes that *'Sir William Faunt of Foston is called on to forbear shooting the Forest deer when they stray out of it. This in spite of his protestation that the deer he shot was only "a little one"'*.

It was Anthony's second son – Henry and his wife who are the couple memorialised by the tomb in Foston Church.



HENRY FAUNT'S TOMB IN FOSTON CHURCH

When the first phase of enclosure took place c. 1575, Anthony had to make exchange with the parson (the next most powerful landowner) for his glebe when the latter got pasture for 8 cattle and 80 sheep which had previously been stinted in Foston's open fields and pastures. The second phase of enclosure took place in 1621 and with it came rapid depopulation. Anthony had a flock of 1300 sheep when he died in 1588, and the family was undoubtedly made rich by this scale of pastoral farming. In addition they drew substantial revenues from the various churches in their gift. For instance Sir William Faunt drew £130 a year from the appropriation of Lowesby, out of which he allowed his vicar there just £6-13-4d!

Until this time there was probably not much difference between the lives of the ordinary folk of our two villages and Foston's small peasant farmers ploughed their strips and grew their crops in open fields just like their neighbours. However, there is some evidence that sheep farming also benefitted some of the remaining farmers of Foston before wholesale enclosure. One of these was John Rowte who died in 1579. Except for the Faunts he was the wealthiest person to leave a will. This reveals that he left £463 (several hundred thousand pounds at today's values). His inventory shows that in addition to various cattle he had 360 sheep at Foston, another 318 elsewhere (possibly at Cosby) and 84 lambs at Claybrook, together worth £166. His house reflected this wealth, his inventory showing that it consisted of a hall, bed-chamber, three '*parlers*' and a kitchen. The parlours were fitted out as bedrooms presumably for his three sons to each of whom he left £60, and three daughters each of whom was left just '*halfe a marke*' (6s8d) or only half of this if they married against their mother's wishes.

JOHN ROWTE'S WILL OF 1579

<i>Testame tum Johannis Rowte dec of Foston</i>	<i>In the name of God Amen the xvjth daie of June in the year of our Lord god one thousand fyve hundrethe seventie nyne I John Rowte of Foston whole of mynde and perfytt of memorie make this my laste wyll and Testament in manner and forme followinge Fyrstte I bequethe my soule to allmygtie god my bodye to the earthe Item I bequethe to ye mother Summa Invent' cccclxij^{li} church of Lincoln vj d Item to the poore mans boxe of Fostonne a xij d Item I bequethe to Anthonie Rowte my seconde sonne lx^{li} Item I bequethe to Edmond Rowte my youngeste sonne lx^{li} Item I bequethe to Jane Rowte my daughter one D marke Item I bequethe to Marie Rowte my daughter one other D marke Item I bequethe to Freyswyde Rowte my dau ghter one other D marke The Resy dew of my goods above not bequethed my wyll performed and my detts payde I geve and bequethe to Johanne Rowte my wyfe and Raphe Rowte my eldeste sonne whom I ordaine and make my full Executors to order and dyspose as they two Shall thinke conveynyent: and yf Johanne my wyfe doe fortune to marie hereafter then she to have xl^{li} and soe get her monies again e yf yt fortune anie of my daughter above named doe marie contrawise to their mothers mynde and wyll not be ordered by her then she to have for her portion a chylde parte iij s iiij d and no more. Wytnesses herof John Savage parson of Foston George Rydgeley Thomas Topper and William Palmer of Foston</i>
---	--

Another relatively wealthy man was John Ramshawe (d. 1566). This one-time parson of Foston was a most generous benefactor. He left a shilling to the mother church of Lincoln, 10d to Foston church, 6d to All Saints Church in Wigston, another shilling to the poor men's box at Wigston, and 4d each to every householder in both Wigston and Foston. Against this display of charity William

Faunt's bequest of twenty shillings to 'the poore people of Countesthorpe, given his much greater wealth, seems almost paltry.

So, after 1620 Foston was largely enclosed for the pasturage of sheep. Writing at about that time William Burton, a relation of the Faunts and a notable antiquary, described the land of Foston in the following terms, '*a most fertile, rich, and fruitful soil, as any in the whole country, affording and yielding great and large sheep-pastures, which sheep do yield an extraordinary increase of wool and other property there.*'

Such evidence as we have for Countesthorpe suggests that arable farming remained more important. The earliest inventory we have is for William Rydyngs who died in 1540 a much poorer man than John Rowte. He had just 2 sheep with 2 lambs together worth 3s together with a pound's worth of corn he had in store, in addition to that in the fields.

INVENTORY OF WILLIAM RYDING'S OF COUNTSTHORPE c1540

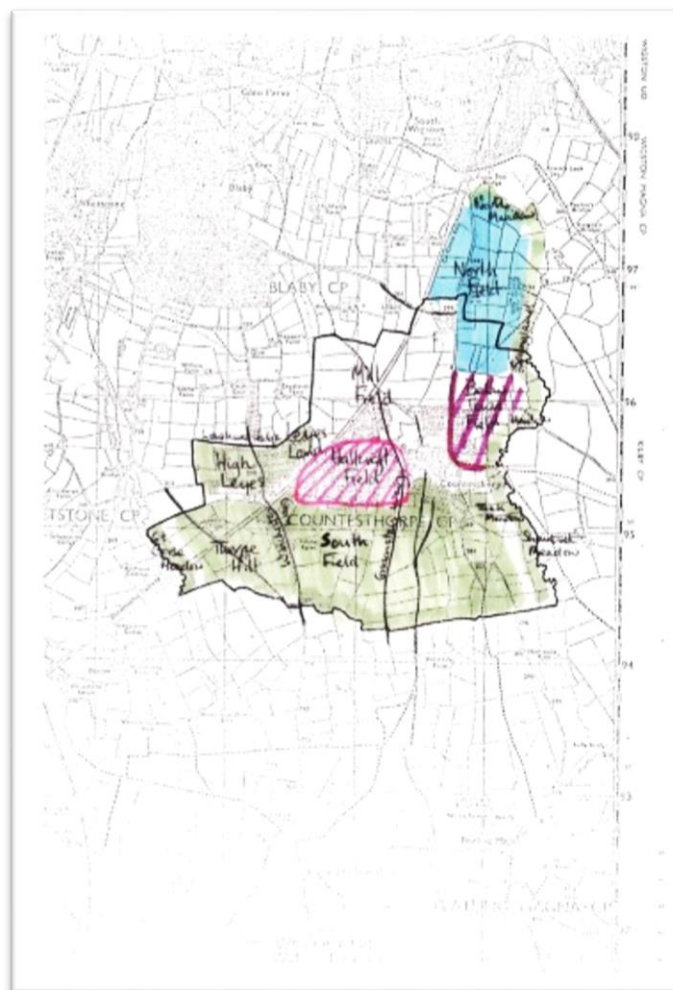
Thys hys the Invytory of all the goods moveable and unmoveable of William Rydyngs of countisthorpe lately deceased prised by John Parke, Thomas Rygealay, Rychard Jacson, John Bousworthe.

<i>Imprimis a dosre with bords forames stols cherys coseys</i>	<i>pr'sed at 4s</i>
<i>Item pots and panys comys & paylls with other smale ????</i>	<i>pr'sed at 8s 4d</i>
<i>Item viii pesys of puter iiij Candilstecks</i>	<i>3s4d</i>
<i>Item a leade and payre of quearns</i>	<i>pr'sed at 5s</i>
<i>Item shets bourclothes & toylles</i>	<i>pr'sed at 6s 4d</i>
<i>Item dyshes and spones</i>	<i>2d</i>
<i>Item a matres & iiij coverlets</i>	<i>4s</i>
<i>Item the corne in the felde</i>	<i>3s</i>
<i>Item all the corne a boutt the housse</i>	<i>pr'sed at 20s</i>
<i>Item iiij bests</i>	<i>pr'sed at 26s 8d</i>
<i>Item iiij mares and a foyll</i>	<i>20s</i>
<i>Item ij ewes and ij lambys</i>	<i>3s</i>
<i>Item ij shots [young hogs]</i>	<i>ijs</i>
<i>Item a carte & the plough 7 all therto belonging with harowes</i>	<i>12s</i>
<i>Item geys ducks & hens</i>	<i>pr'sed at 20d</i>
<i>Item hys Reament</i>	<i>pr'sed at 6s 4d</i>
	<i>Total £6 11s 6d</i>

The Countesthorpe community was still farming in the old way. That is to say in an open field system in which individual farmers held their land in strips (today's ridge and furrow) scattered throughout large open fields. In Leicestershire this usually meant two or three large fields with one lying fallow each year. This would be in addition to meadow and sometimes permanent pasture ground and so-called waste.

In Countesthorpe's case there was a variation on the three-field system as illustrated in the map. This is based upon the research carried out by Hettie Schultka and Sheila Knight some 20 years ago. You will see that the three main fields: Mill Field; Hallcroft or Middle Field and South Field, had two subdivisions in 'The Field below town', and North Field. The management of these fields and the rules relating to rights of pasturage; sanctions against encroachment upon the common pasture; and other such matters, were in the hands of the community of the vill rather than one or two powerful landowners.

COUNTESTHORPE'S OPEN FIELDS PRIOR TO ENCLOSURE OF 1766 *(based on work by H Schultka and S Knight)*



The following extract from a schedule (terrier) of Thomas Carr's land made in 1721, illustrates how his lands (strips) were intermingled with those of others and also gives us information about old field and furlong names.

- In the South Field
- Three 'half acre Lands [strips] shooting thro' *Green-Stay Way* the Land of John Young and William Hitch lying on the south side thereof, One hedge and half ley in the same place ...
- Two half acre Lands butting into *Peotling Way*
- One rood Land Mr Jackson's Hadland lying on the North side ...
- Grasse ground
- One rood Ley beyond the dale next to Mr Hardy's close ...
- A piece of grass ground in *Thick Meadow*. One Ley containing four Swathes at *Thick Meadow* end.
- In the Mill Field
- One half rood Land butting upon *Thick Meadow* ...
- Two rood Lands shooting into *Leicester Way* ...
- One close called *Leys Lands* containing one acre and a half ...
- In the Middle Field
- ... The Home-close containing two acres across the *Gleabe Close* lying on the North side thereof ...
- Three rood Lands lying upon *Stoilsburrough* ...'

There is much more land described in the terrier which listed some 50 or 60 acres of arable belonging to Carr and which concluded with a 'stint', i.e. the number of cattle and sheep that farmer Carr was allowed to graze on the fallow field and other common pasture by agreement amongst the village community:

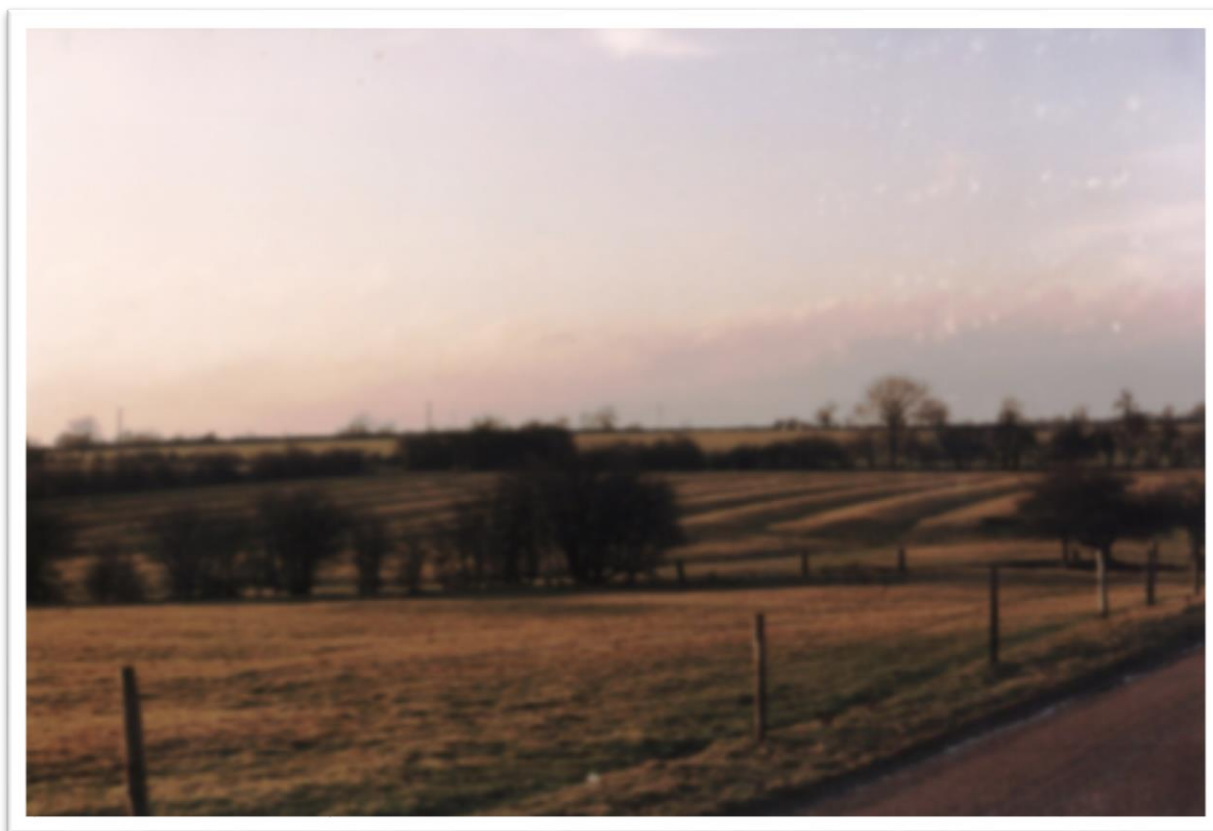
'Stint

Upon the old Stint was seven cow pastures and an half and seventy five sheep commons for a yard land and a half [i.e. the totality of Carr's holding]. Upon the new Stint there is four cow pastures and an half and thirty seven sheepe commons and a half for a yeard land and an half.'

This indicated a drastic reduction in entitlement to grazing rights and was due to encroachment upon old common pasture, and over-grazing, in the early years of the 18th century following population growth.

OLD RIDGE AND FURROW AT PEATLING MAGNA

Peatling Magna's fields, like Foston's, were enclosed early, well before the parliamentary enclosures of the 18th century.



The reversal of demographic fortune as between Countesthorpe and Foston is very clearly illustrated by the Hearth Tax returns of 1666. In 1641, twenty years after Foston's enclosure was complete, only George Faunt and his mother paid taxes, and by the time of the Hearth Tax there were only five paying households – including the Faunts' (where Hall Farm stands today) with 13 hearths, the rectory, a substantial farmhouse, and two cottages, and none were listed as exempt. This suggests that the population had fallen below 50 persons. In Countesthorpe by contrast, 25 houses had hearths; Benjamin Jackson, who was the village schoolmaster and a small farmer living in what had been the Lodebrokes' manorial property, had by far the most. His inventory, compiled after his death in 1681, shows that his house contained six rooms (three up and three down) in addition to a buttery, dairy and brewhouse. In spite of his abundance of fireplaces, he was by no means the wealthiest of Countesthorpe's 17th-century residents, leaving just £49-18s-3d worth of goods and chattels.

1666 HEARTH TAX

COUNTESTHORPE

• Robert Jackson	2 hearths
• Jonathan Wood	1 hearth
• Hugh Burnaby	2 hearths
• William Carr	3 hearths
• ? Gillam (widow)	3 hearths
• Edward Gillam	1 hearth
• Robert Gillam	2 hearths
• Edward Wood	2 hearths
• William Fryer	1 hearth
• John Bent	2 hearths
• Anthony Elliot	1 hearth
• William Lord	2 hearths
• Richard Frost	1 hearth
• John Stevens	2 hearths
• Thomas Neale	2 hearths
• Thomas Lord	3 hearths
• Robert Hastings	2 hearths
• Thomas Wood	2 hearths
• Thomas Burridge	1 hearth
• John Wyers	2 hearths
• John Gumley	1 hearth
• John Elliott	2 hearths
• Robert Spencer	2 hearths
• Benjamin Jackson (capt)	6 hearths
• Thomas Bent (junior)	1 hearth

FOSTON

Colonel Faunt	13 hearths
Mr Mawson	4 hearths
The parsonage	3 hearths
Robert Staine	1 hearth
Francis Simson	1 hearth

WILL OF WILLIAM COX (1713)

*In the name of God Amen I William Cox of Foston In the County
of Leicester Shephard being of perfect mind and memory doe make
This my last Will and Testament in manner and forme following
That is to say, first I give and bequeath unto my wife Ann Cox
The sume of fourtye pounds to be paid to her by my Exectior within
Six months after my decease with intrest for the same from my death
Also I give unto her the Best bed and beding four pair of sheets three pair
of pillow bears one coffer standing at the best Beds head one Box in the same
Rome the least porridge pot and the least kettle two of the middling putor
Dishes the least Barrell a middling peal one of the least Tubbs
Half a doisine of Trenchers six putor spoons one Lienen Wheel & one
Chair; I give unto my son John Cox one shilling, all the rest of my goods
Cattle or Cattles housould goods or of what kind so ever they be I give unto
My son William Cox whom I make sole exectior of this my Last will
And Testament and Revoke all wills made before with paying my Depts
Legacies and Funeral expences discharged In witness whereof I have hereunto
Set my hand and seal the sixt day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand
Seven Hundred and Twelve signed sealed Read published and declared to
Be the last Will and Testament of the said William Cox in the
presance of us*

<i>John Walker</i>	<i>the mark of</i>
<i>Edward Langham</i>	<i>William Cox</i>
<i>George Tilley</i>	

These two wills of the early eighteenth century illustrate the continuing importance of sheep farming for the few surviving families in Foston . William Cox (d. 1713) was described as a 'shephard' in his will and had 20 sheep of his own. His son, John Cox (d.1719), although described as an innkeeper, had 24 sheep when he died.

The inn that John kept was almost certainly the house that once stood on the Foston (turnpike) road in the dip just after the Foston turn from Countesthorpe. Until a few years ago there were many older folk in the village who still remembered the old lady who sold sweets and 'pop' from this cottage

WILL OF JOHN COX (1719)

In the name of god Amen I John Cox of
 of Jamaica Inhabitant being ~~very~~ sick of body but of a
 perfect mind & contrary grace do give & obligingly give to make
 and confirm this my present last will & testament in witness & force
 following) that is to say) First and principally I bequeath my
 soul into the hands of almighty god hoping through the merits
 death & passion of my saviour Jesus Christ to have full and free
 pardon and forgiveness of all my sins & to inherit everlasting life
 and my body I bequeath to the church to be decently buried at the
 discretion of my executor hereafter named. And as touching
 the disposition of all such temporal estate as is held persons almighty
 god to leave you me I give & bequeath through as follows
 first I will that my debts and funeral charges shall be paid and
 discharged
 Then I give & bequeath unto my son John Cox the sum of one
 hundred pounds I give to my son William Cox my great coat
 I give to my son Joseph Cox my coat and plate cutting
 I give to my son George Cox the sum of one hundred
 I give to my daughter Alice the sum of one hundred

All the rest & residue of my present estate goods & chattels
 whatsoever I do give and bequeath unto my loving wife Alice Cox
 and do make her full and sole executrix of this my last will &
 testament. And I do hereby revoke former and make void
 all former wills and testaments by me heretofore made and
 I the said John Cox do set my hand & seal to this my last
 will & testament the twenty fifth day of November in the year
 of our Lord god 1719

And if my wife Alice be living again when my will is set of said
 Alice Cox shall pay to my son Joseph & George & Alice my daughter
 & one of twenty pounds a piece to each & every one of my children
 & George & Alice a debt & delivery belonging to me to be paid on demand
 by & if any of them shall be dead before that be bequeathed to said

**POSSIBLE SITE OF JOHN COX'S EARLY 18TH CENTURY INN
(on the Osbaston to Foston turnpike road)**



Photographs of the Cox tombstones in Foston churchyard, including those of innkeeper John's first wife, Mary, who died in 1697 and his second wife Alice, the main beneficiary of his will. Alice outlived John by 30 years, dying in 1749 at the age of 70.





Mary Cox d 1697



Alice Cox d 1748/9

Cox was the predominant name amongst the remaining ordinary folk at Foston through the 17th and 18th centuries. Their descendants are still to be found in Countesthorpe today. The oldest tombstone in the churchyard is that of Mary Cox who died in 1697. Note the difference in style and execution of the gravestones.

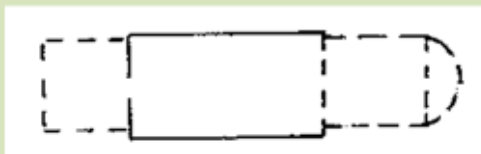
An ecclesiastical census of 1676 listing all residents as either Anglicans, papists or protestant non-conformists gives a number of 21 people in Foston. Population-wise little then changed until the time of the first National census in 1801 when 24 men, women and children were listed. Surprisingly numbers then grew in the middle years of the 19th century when, in spite of a dip in 1861 to 27, 41 people in 1841 rose to reach a peak of 56 in 1891. This was almost certainly because of large staffs of servants and agricultural labourers employed on the farms and in the rectory. By 1931 - the last census year for Foston as a separate parish - numbers were down to 36. No doubt that the household servants enjoyed the spectacle of the hunt that would often have met in the neighbourhood of Foston. Great Peatling Cover just down the lane, being a favourite place from which to 'draw' foxes.

DRAWINGS BY CHARLIE HAMMOND OF HALL FARM, FOSTON – DATED 1889



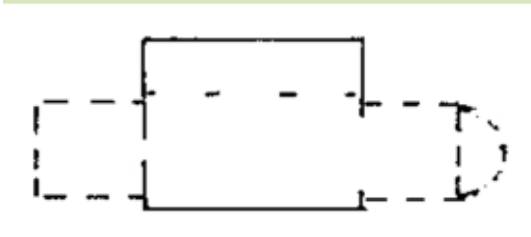
Traces and records of Foston's demographic rise and fall are not only to be found in documents and earthworks. The remaining fabric of St Bartholomew's church also reflects these changes. I am grateful to Jane for the following diagrams and photographs.

BEFORE THE NORMAN CONQUEST?



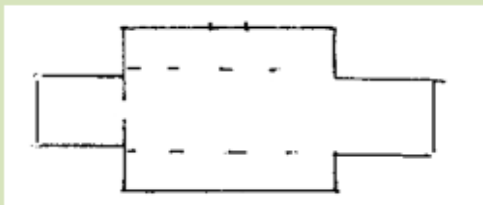
- A single-celled Anglo-Saxon structure serving a population of up to a hundred is postulated

AFTER THE NORMAN CONQUEST



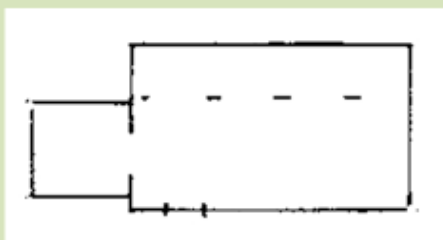
- Population growth in the 12th century to above 100 people led to the building of the north aisle

THE EARLY ENGLISH EXTENSIONS



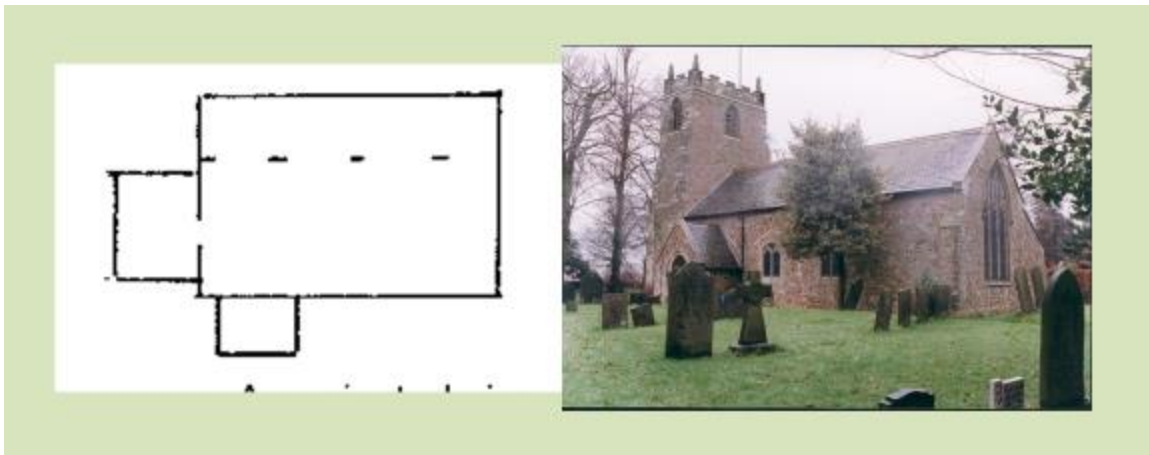
- In the 13th century rapid population growth, up to perhaps 200 people, led to the building of the tower, south aisle and a chancel.

AFTER THE 18TH CENTURY FACULTY



- The church being in a ruinous state and for the previous 200 years having served a much reduced population has the chancel and south aisle removed

THE 19TH CENTURY PICTURE



AN ANGLO-SAXON WINDOW



W G Hoskins, who lived in Wigston and knew Foston well, certainly started something when in 1946 in *The Heritage of Leicestershire* he wrote that, 'at Foston, a tenth-century window in the north wall of the nave is partly cut by the early Norman arcade below it ...'. Nicholas Pevsner in his *Buildings of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1960) also lent weight to the view of Anglo-Saxon origins of the building. Since then, however, more recent historians have cast doubt on their views. In particular David Parsons in 'Before the Parish: the Church in Anglo-Saxon Leicestershire' (1996) says of the intersecting window, 'this is a classic piece of 'vertical archaeology', and clearly demonstrates that the

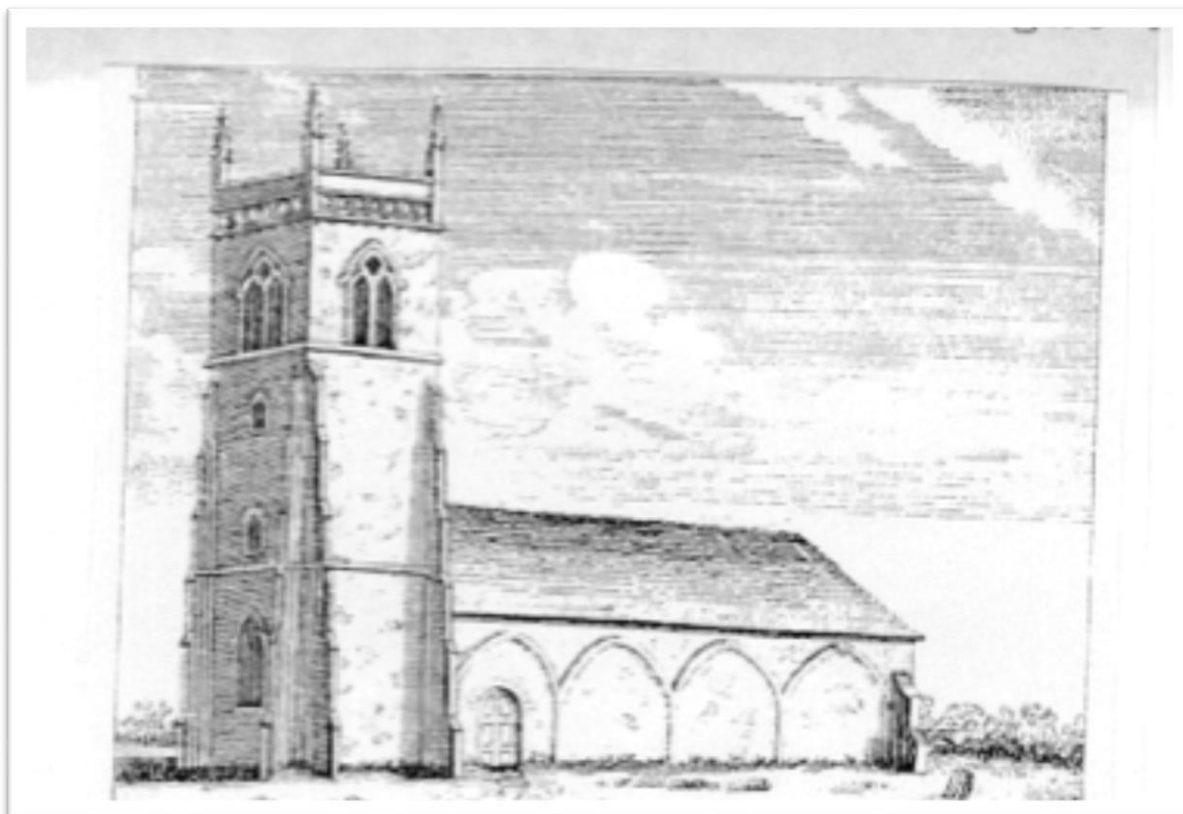
church was originally aisleless, but that is far from proving that the window and the walling in which it is set are of Anglo-Saxon date'.

Whatever the true dating of the first building there is clear evidence of the church's early extension to hold a growing congregation followed by shrinkage and delapidation consequent upon enclosure followed by depopulation. I can do no better than to reveal what we definitely know from documentary evidence in addition to that of our own eyes. A church brief of 1763, giving the church the right to raise money for restoration, and the associated faculty of 1766 (the very year of enclosure in Countesthorpe) which was drawn up after the £1150 target figure had been reached, provide the main clues. They make plain that the church was in a ruinous state, and that, *'parishioners dare not assemble therein without manifest danger of their lives'*. Further that, *'... ye chancel is entirely unroofed and part of ye wall falling down'*. The faculty itself is especially revealing. It grants a licence to Charles Skrymsher Boothby, the lord of the manor with the right of presentation to the living (advowson) and permits him to:

'... wholly to take down and take away ye said south isle ... and entirely to take away ye said chancel and not to rebuild ye same and also to take off the roof of ye said isle and north isle... and to take down or lower ye walls of ye said middle isle even with ye water table of ye said steeple and to rebuild and cover ye roof ... with lead slate and tiles and to brick or wall up ye arches in ye south wall of ye middle isle and also the door in ye north isle and to make a door in ye south wall of ye middle isle ... and also to build a wall at ye east end of ye middle isle with a window therein to be twelve foot high and eight foot wide and to place ye communion table at ye east end of ye said middle isle under ye said window the first bay of ... the middle isle twelve foot or thereabouts to be hereafter for ever considered as ye chancel and as such to be repaired by ye rector for ye time being ...'. And so it goes on, with references to the repositioning of desk, pulpit and pews; the taking up of the floor of the aisle, and the making of a vault under the floor of the north isle, 'in such part and in such dimensions ... as the said Charles Skrymsher Boothby ... shall advise', for him and his family to be buried therein (Leicester, 15th May 1766).

Sure enough you may still see the inscribed slabs marking the place where Charles and his wife, Ann, lie together in the aisle close to the Faunt tomb.

FOSTON CHURCH (Nichols – 1792)
(Showing the blocked arcade which had once opened onto a south aisle)



These reductions would then have given us the church as illustrated in Nichols in 1792 (above) and, as far as the interior is concerned, as shown in the photograph of c. 1860 (below)



It was a later restoration of 1874 which, amongst other things, essentially gave us the church we see today although the east window was not in place until 1898?. This further rejigging cost £880.8.6 and was carried out during the incumbency of the Rev. Charles Wing BA who personally gave £100 to the appeal fund. He must have had private means as his stipend was just £240 p.a., which was below the average income of clerical incumbents at the time which was some £370 (Rimmington, *Local Historian*, Feb 2005). He also extended the rectory some time before 1876 and, after his retirement from Foston, he headed the list of subscribers to the fund for the restoration of St Andrew's, Countesthorpe in 1907 with a donation of £60.

There is no such story revealed by St Andrew's in Countesthorpe. Although the original building (a chapel of Blaby) probably dated from the late 13th or 14th century it was remodelled and possibly enlarged a little in 1841 and then almost entirely rebuilt (and ruined architecturally and as an historic record) in 1907.

Rather than the parish church reflecting demographic change we have instead the rise of non-conformity. This in itself emphasised the 'openness' of Countesthorpe and the independence associated with the long freedom from manorial rule. The Baptist Chapel (now the Baptist schoolroom) was built in 1829. This may have succeeded an earlier structure and it was followed by the Methodists in 1841. But the non-conformist tradition dates back well into the 18th century and probably much earlier.

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH, COUNTTESTHORPE c 1930



BAPTIST CHAPEL

(The building on the left was the chapel built in 1829, it was succeeded by the one on the right in 1863)



The first recorded Baptist in Countesthorpe was John Gumley, who was first a member, and then deacon, of Arnesby Baptist chapel from around 1737 until his death in 1790. He was also an itinerant preacher and used to walk to Lutterworth to preach to a small group of baptists living there. John was just one of several people from Countesthorpe who wended their footpath way to Arnesby each Sunday. Another was Mary Burley who, like John, is buried in Arnesby behind the chapel. It was Mary who first hosted Baptist meetings in her own house in Countesthorpe. These gatherings eventually led to the first chapel building which was pulled down and rebuilt by William Christian in 1829. Other notable Baptist families in the village included the Bassetts and Iliffes.

The difference between the two parishes in religious as well as more earthly matters is exemplified by the contrasting histories of two men - one born into the lordly family of the Faunts, the other a self-taught man of humble stock.

Laurence Arthur Faunt was the third son of William, our first Faunt of Foston. Born at Foston in 1554, he entered Merton College at Oxford when he was 14 in 1568 (before that it is possible that he attended school in Wigston at St Wistans, as did later Faunts). He was placed in the Jesuit College at Louvain, Belgium, in 1570 and went on to take his MA in Munich. He studied Divinity at the English College in Rome in 1575, and became the first rector of moral theology and controversy at Posen in Poland where he was held in high esteem by the church and aristocracy. He published theological and philosophical works in Latin and wrote on Polish secular and ecclesiastical matters and died at Vilna in Lithuania in February 1591. Type his name into Google and you will find that he is still venerated today as a Catholic theologian.

Contrast this with the life of Isaac Gumley, nephew of Baptist John Gumley. Isaac was a relatively humble framework knitter and smallholder/proprietor (he paid 1s 11d land tax in 1780). Born in 1754 of typical small husbandman stock, like so many in the village, and dying in 1824. He was befriended by John Mastin, son of William, a tenant of the rectorial tithe land, and later owner of land in Countesthorpe. Isaac is described in the biography of this man, who later became vicar of Naseby, as a *'self-taught genius, a good poet and mathematician. Fond of books, and a good English scholar.'*

Their acquaintance began over a little disagreement about the mensuration of a maypole, set up at Countesthorpe in celebration of a parliamentary election victory in 1768 by candidates favoured by the community and backed by James Winstanley Esq of Braunstone. Winstanley paid for the celebrations and so much ale that it lasted for four days' of drinking. But I digress. At Gumley's death Mastin recalled that his old friend was . . .

' . . . a pleasing poet and eminent mathematician . . . In 1797 countenanced by a numerous list of subscribers he published a volume of poems entitled "Mental Recreations". He had been a contributor to magazines, diaries &c for more than half a century: his productions always had a good tendency: they were not inimical to religion or inconsistent to virtue.'

I have read Isaac's poetry, to be found in a Record Office copy of the book. For today's taste it's a little sweet. Here is an example of his tribute to a local beauty:

*'Of all the girls that e'er were seen
To walk the town, or trip the green,
There's none has such a charming mien
As lovely Polly Jordan;
She wounds the hearts of all the swains,
Who, when the night and silence reigns,
Walk o'er the fields and tell what pains
They feel for Polly Jordan.'*



**GRAVESTONES OF ISAAC AND BATHSHEEBA GUMLEY'S DAUGHTERS
IN ST ANDREW'S CHURCHYARD**

(These young girls were cousins to our later Isaac – self-taught genius)

ELIZABETH GUMLEY d. 1750 aged 2 yrs



GRACE GUMLEY d. ????



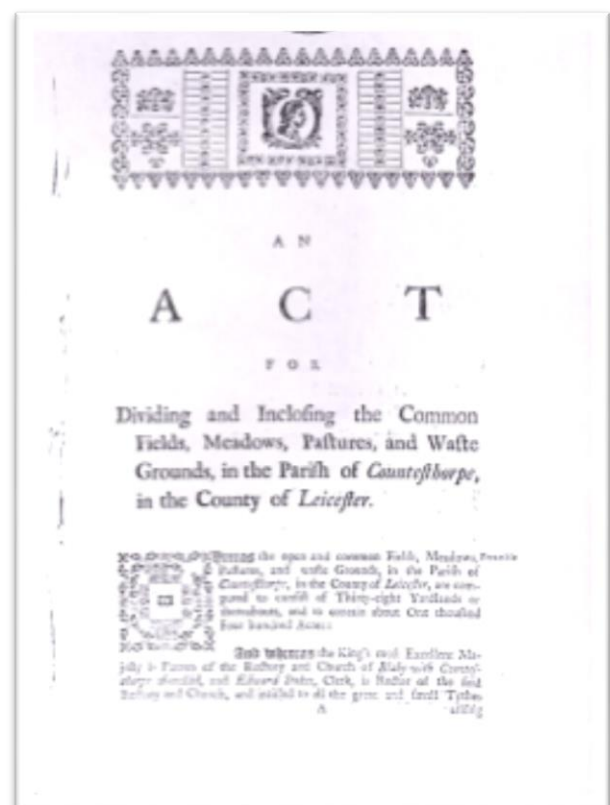
THE TOMBSTONES IN THE BAPTIST CHAPEL GROUNDS



Bassetts, Christians, Iliffes and ?Elliotts are among the notable village dissenters commemorated here.

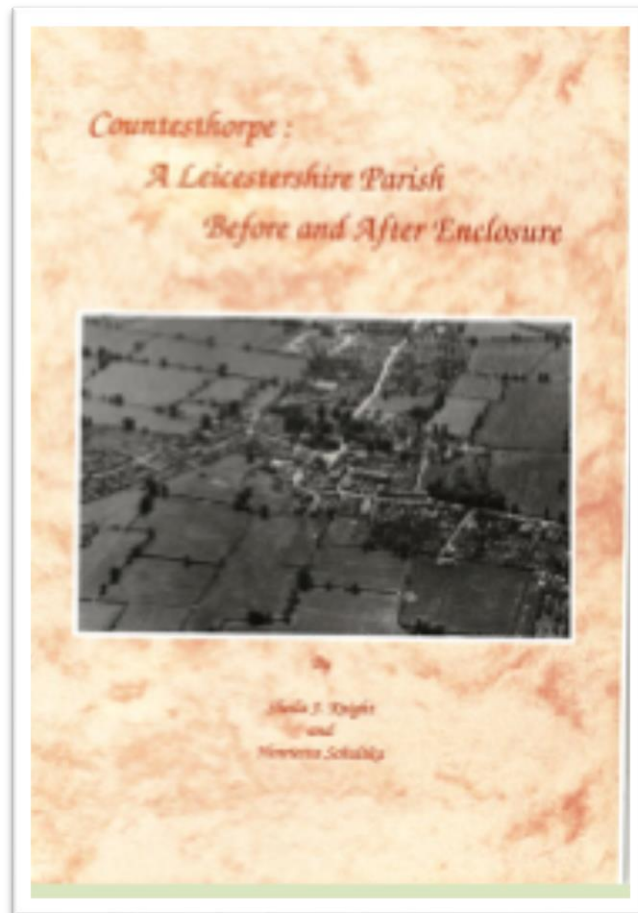
There is no time here to describe in detail the reasons for and the effects of enclosure in Countesthorpe. For that you must turn to Hettie and Sheila's book.

TITLE PAGE OF THE ACT FOR THE ENCLOSURE OF COUNTSTHORPE 1766



THE DEFINITIVE WORK ON COUNTTESTHORPE'S ENCLOSURE OF 1766-7

By H Schultka and S Knight

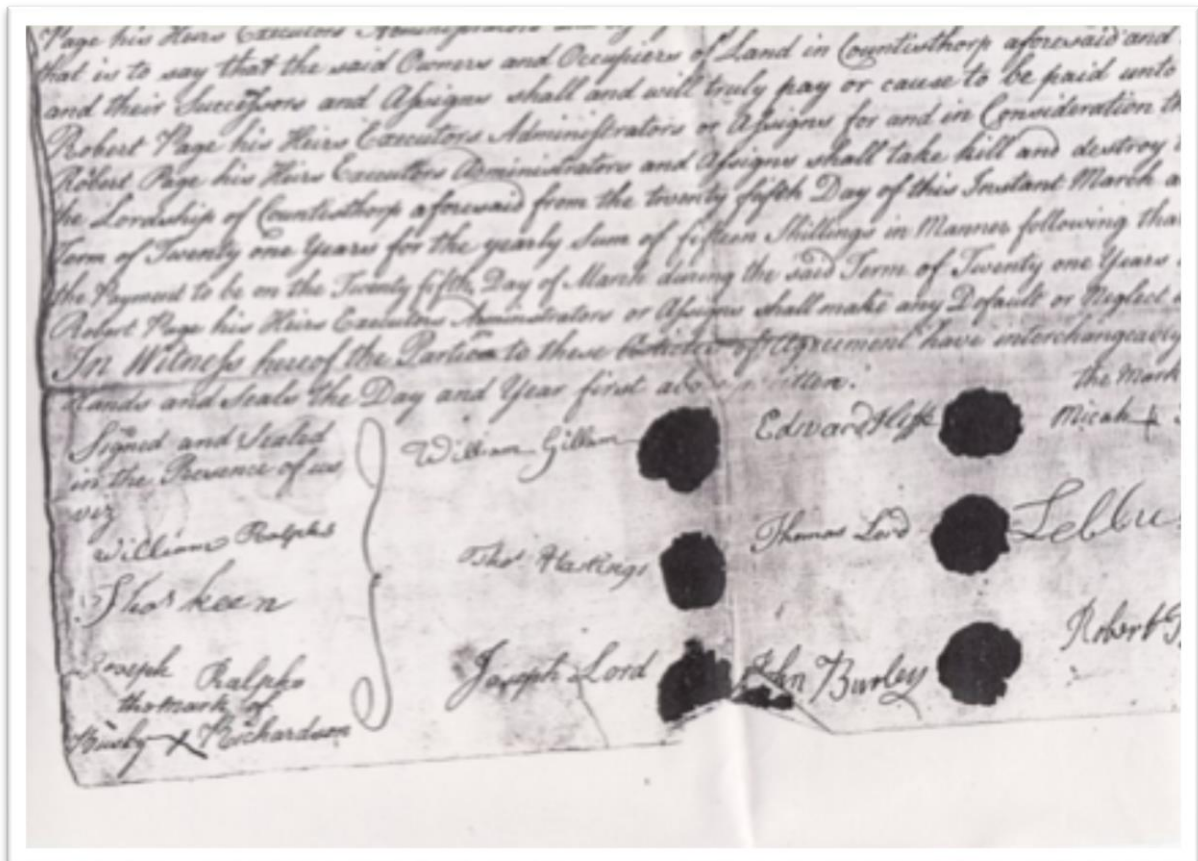


Instigated by the larger landowners and opposed by few, at first sight the statistics of Enclosure are surprising. Only 34 landowners (excluding the Surveyor of Highways) were granted allotments of land and the Rector of Blaby with Countesthorpe, Edward Stokes was the main recipient with a total of 219 acres 3 roods and 14 perches in lieu of tithes and glebe land. This was equivalent to two out of every fifteen acres, or 18% of all the land in the parish. The rest of the land was distributed between just 33 other proprietors whose allotments varied from just over 140 acres awarded to John Benskin, down to the single rood (quarter acre) of John Hall. Only 8 proprietors received more than 50 acres, approximately 57% of the land available while the remaining 24% was shared between 25 proprietors. More surprisingly nearly half the land (47%) went to absentee landlords leaving just 18 resident proprietors. Of course some of the land owned by the non-resident landlords was farmed by tenant farmers who did not own land themselves.

Some idea of their numbers can be obtained from the Land Tax record of 1780 which lists both proprietors and occupiers. From the return for Countesthorpe

we find that there are 53 names, each indicating a separate holding whether owned or tenanted. Most of these (32) were small holdings paying less than 10 shillings in tax. Of these 32, 23 were owner occupiers but sometimes letting part of their small holding to others unnamed.

CONTRACT OF 1772 BETWEEN ROBERT PAGE – MOLECATCHER AND THE OVERSEERS OF THE POOR IN COUNTTESTHORPE



Foot of an agreement of 1772 between the overseers of the poor on behalf of landowners and occupiers in Countesthorpe and Robert Page of Ullesthorpe, a molecatcher.

In the agreement Robert undertakes to catch and kill moles in Countesthorpe for the yearly sum of 15 shillings – the agreement to be binding for 21 years. It is noteworthy that of the signatories only Thomas Hastings was a major landowner at enclosure just six years before, while Joseph Lord received under 2 acres. The Gillam family were however significant landowners and by 1773 William had inherited the family farm and was the third highest payer of land tax. Edward Iliffe had also become a significant landowner by this time. Lebbus Humphrey had acquired land after enclosure and paid land tax of 3s 1½d in 1773 and 9s 4d in 1780

Of the witnesses William Ralphs was the village blacksmith and the illiterate Busby Richardson a framework knitter and smallholder, paying 2s 6d in land tax in 1773 and 1s 11d in 1780 was my four-time great grandfather. The agreement typifies the nature of society in an open village community and is suggestive of a kind of limited democracy, which would have been quite unknown in villages like Foston where one or two families held sway.

So - as Foston declined as a viable community Countesthorpe's grew apace.

COUNTESTHORPE CENSUSES OF 1801-1821

		<u>1801</u>	<u>1811</u>	<u>1821</u>
•	Houses	78	116	142
•				
•	Persons			
•	Males	271	286	367
•	Females	269	307	374
•	Occupations			
•	In agriculture	94		
•	In trade, manufacture			
•	or handicrafts	301		
•				
•	TOTAL PERSONS	540	593	741

The enclosure of the open fields marked an important stage in the transition from a largely agricultural community to one in which industry, and particularly framework knitting, became the dominant factors in the rural economy. This, and associated population growth, is well illustrated in the statistics taken from the early censuses. As you can see by 1801, just 35 years after enclosure only 94 persons were employed in agriculture as opposed to 301 in trade, manufacture or handicrafts.

By 1851 around 42% of the population was involved with the stocking industry; 248 were framework knitters while 146 worked as seamers, winders or framesmiths. Some of the employed were children as young as six. Framework knitting had been established in the village from the early 18th century at least and it is probable that long before enclosure many villagers, including farmers, earned part of their living in this way. Later those of a more

entrepreneurial bent set up frame-shops and employed others in the trade. No doubt this helped to alleviate some of the difficulties experienced by the poorer, landless people of the village when they lost all opportunity for pasturing a few animals on the common pasture after enclosure. Such opportunities were not available to earlier dispossessed people of Foston

To bring this account to an end we leave Countesthorpe in the late 19th century when, In White's Directory of 1877, it is described as '*a large village, on an eastern declivity, above a rivulet ... [which] gives name to a township and chapelry in Blaby parish*'. It consisted of around 1,234 acres and there were 1,026 people in 236 houses. The Trustees of Monks Charity were lords of the manor, but most of the land belonged to W and C Bassett, William Tebbs, G Payne and Samuel Barrows.

As we have already seen tithes had been commuted for around 200 acres of land at enclosure. The curacy was consolidated with Blaby and the Particular Baptists and Primitive Methodists had chapels. There were three Friendly Societies in the village and a lodge of Oddfellows. The Parish Feast was on the first Sunday in December [i.e. close to St Andrew's Day on 30th November]. Some 18 acres of glebe land was let to the poor of the parish in garden allotments at low rents.

The village was already lit by gas supplied by the Narborough Gas Company and the Midland Railway had arrived. Amongst other notables listed were 7 farmers or graziers, 10 bag hosiers, 3 hosiery manufacturers, 9 shopkeepers (in addition to the Leicester Provident Society, grocers, shoe and hardware dealers) and a Cooperative store. The major source of employment remained in the framework knitting industry. The village also boasted a National School headmaster and infant school mistress, a surgeon (Ulysses Burke), a policeman, four pubs (the Roebuck, King William IV, Axe and Square, Bulls Head) and two beer-houses, bakers, a maltster and grazier, the C of E curate, Baptist minister, and three carriers.

In spite of its religiosity as suggested by the presence of Baptist and Methodist congregations in addition to the established church, Countesthorpe was a rough and ready place. This was a community very different to that of the favoured few remaining farmers of Foston. It is difficult today to imagine how, in mid-Victorian times when the population of Countesthorpe was around 1,000, but concentrated in a much smaller area than today – say within an approximate circumference of 250 to 300 yards. Families of 7 or 8 and more, mother, father, sons and daughters and sometimes other relations, as well as lodgers, lived in one- or two-bed-roomed houses. And when at the time of the 1851 census children as young as six were already working as winders in the hosiery trade.

COUNTSTHORPE IN 1886



Ulysses Burke was educated at Kings College in Dublin. As his tombstone in St Andrew's churchyard states, he was for 60 years a surgeon in Countesthorpe. As such he must have encountered much poverty and we know that he was, at least twice, in 1837 and 1868, called upon to attend men dying as the result of alleged murders. The first after a fight that started in the old King William IV between Nathan Cox Clowes and Anthony Elliot that resulted in the death of Elliot; and the second after the proprietor of Crow Mill shot and killed John Gillam who with his mates from Countesthorpe was out at midnight to net fish in the mill pond after a session in the Axe and Square.

ULYSSES J BURKE'S TOMBSTONE
60 years in this parish



Hetty would have been able detail many more cases of affray, offences against the property of local frame-owners, wife-beating, and assaults leading to violent death. But that is another story.

I am extremely grateful to June Hawkins not only for making this document available to U3A members, but also for her considerable help in improving its presentation. The account of the two communities was designed for a PowerPoint illustrated talk and any necessarily remaining inconsistencies in the text or format can be attributed to this origin.

Mike Thompson
9th March 2021