

## The Victorian Farmer

### Notes from booklet by David J. Eveleigh

Landowners made long-term investments, farmers did not want their working capital to be diverted into buying land; spent on stock, seed and equipment. Leases tended to be short-term, with few 'tenant rights'.

Landlords retained hunting rights (though tenant farmers were regular huntsmen, even riding over their own land ...)

Farmers who rented over 500 acres were usually well educated, progressive.

Low prices caused by Napoleonic Wars rectified by Corn Laws, which enabled farmers to invest in equipment and improve productivity. 1840s were 'steam powered, i.e. mechanised, crop rotation developed, drainage installed, artificial fertilisers introduced.

Corn Laws repealed in 1846 by Robert Peel, but two good decades ensued

**Farm buildings.** Divided into:

- Old (pre enclosures)
- Georgian (large farms)
- Victorian (reflecting investment of capital)

Single workers lived in farmhouse. Service rooms included dairy, laundry, brewing, baking, kitchen. In kitchen, fireplace/oven, Windsor chairs – farm workforce all ate there.

Wealthy farmhouses 'turned their backs' on farm and farm buildings – approaching the lifestyle of their landlords.

**Women.** Farmers' wives ran the dairy, producing milk, butter and cheese. Also cured meat, baked bread and ran market stalls. Also fed farm labourers.

Coal became available with spread of railways. Made rush-lights and candles. Later, paraffin lamps.

**Golden age** of farming ended in 1875; prices fell, only farms over 300 acres could hope for a return on investment. Wet seasons. 1879, imports of cereals started. Accusations that farmers, particularly in the south, had lived too well. Farmers from north worked hard, lived modestly. Best labourers took train to cities – from 1876 – 1911, percentage of workforce working in agriculture nearly halved.