



Elm Grove – Henstridge

Elm Grove in Henstridge dates back to the beginning of the 17th century and started life as a simple farmhouse. The area of the marsh was formerly owned by King Harold and eventually passed into aristocratic hands during the medieval period. The farmhouse, known as Marsh Farm for much of its history, has been the home of generations of the same farming family for almost 150 years. Now featuring a picturesque Victorian exterior, added during the 1880s, Elm Grove still stands within open fields and farmland as it did when it was first built 300 years ago.

Anglo-Saxon and Medieval marsh

Henstridge was a royal estate held by King Harold during the Anglo-Saxon period and passed to William the Conqueror after the invasion. Throughout the medieval period the lands passed from the King into the hands of a number of prominent aristocratic families. By the 16th century the area commonly referred to as 'the Marsh' was in the hands of the Milborne family but was divided between two sisters, Elizabeth Titherley and Mabel Ernle.

Marsh Farm first built

The early history of 'the Marsh' and in particular Elm Grove is difficult to pinpoint, but it is believed to have originally been a simple farmhouse built sometime during the late 16th or early 17th century. The Victoria County History (VCH) of Somerset (C.R.J. Currie and R.W. Dunning, 1999) explains that the marshes were already being used for farming and grazing by the 14th century and the farmhouses appeared during the early 17th century. However, local historian, F.C. Wakeford (The History of Henstridge, c.1953), believes they were already completed in the 16th century.

18th century – Mr. John Martin

The early history of Marsh Farm is difficult to trace as early records for the area attribute the same name – 'marsh' or 'marsh farm' to a number of different homes and buildings. However, sources from the late 18th and early 19th centuries begin to become a little clearer and start to give us a picture of who was living and working at Marsh Farm. It appears that in the late 18th century Marsh Farm was owned by Mr. John Martin. In 1818, property deeds show it was still owned by John Martin but had become occupied by Mr. William Lovell.

The Lovell family at Marsh Farm

Land tax records for Henstridge during the 1820s show the farmhouse was still owned by John Martin and occupied by 'Messrs Lovells' and known as the 'Marsh Estate'. The census records supported by the electoral registers for Somerset show that Marsh Farm continued to be the home of the Lovell family for the entire 19th and early 20th century. In the 1841 census the house was home to Thomas Lovell, his wife Matilda and their three daughters, plus a servant. The 1843 Electoral registers also show Thomas Lovell as occupier of 'Henstridge Marsh' and the landowner was William Lambert White, who had acquired the manorial lands originally held by Elizabeth Titherley.

Another William Lovell – farmer and cattle dealer

By the 1850s the records show that Marsh Farm had become the home of a relation of Thomas's, William Lovell, who had bought the freehold of the farmhouse and land. The 1861 census shows William living at Marsh Farm, a "farmer of 120 acres employing 2 men and a cattle dealer". He was in the farmhouse with his wife Maria and their five children, William, Jane, Francis, Mary and Thomas, and a general servant.

Matriarch – Maria Lovell

William passed away in 1865 and the farm remained in the hands of his widow, Maria. At the time of the 1871 census Maria was away with friends and her children were at home at Marsh Farm. 25 year old Jane was listed as the head of the house with her brothers and sisters, George, Francis and Maria. The 1881 census shows widowed Maria Lovell was still living in the house aged 67 and receiving an annuity. Her son George was listed as a cattle dealer and her youngest daughter as housekeeper.



Latest renovations at Marsh Farm - 1888

Maria Lovell passed away in December 1884 and her son George took over the running of Marsh Farm and from 1886 George appeared in the Kelly's Directory for Somerset as farmer at 'Marsh'. It is during this period, after the death of his mother that George made great changes to the farmhouse. George added the latest in Victorian decorations and external detailing and completed the renovations with a new date plaque clearly seen under the middle gable "G.L. 1888".

George Lovell marries Elisheba Gillett

The 1891 census records George Lovell in the farmhouse with his new wife Elisheba, who it appears was formerly married to a neighbour, Thomas Gillett, who died in 1884. Also in the house at this time was George's nephew Charlie and niece Kathleen. The parish valuation in 1896 also lists George Lovell as owner/occupier and the farm covered almost 70 acres. At the turn of the 20th century George and Elisheba Lovell continued to live comfortably at Marsh Farm. The 1901 census shows the couple, aged 53 and 52 respectively, in the house with one live-in servant. The 1911 valuation survey also shows George as owner/occupier at the house and the farm covered over 110 acres. The house was described as "in good repair" and "the buildings are modern and excellent".

Marsh Farm becomes Elm Grove

George and Elisheba lived at Marsh Farm until the end of World War I when George passed away. Elisheba continued at the farm until the late 1920s but the management of Marsh Farm was passed to her son from her first marriage, Robert Gillett. It was at this point that Marsh Farm was officially renamed 'Elm Grove' to differentiate it from the other farms in the marsh area.

Robert Gillett – the last in the family line

Robert Gillett continued at Marsh Farm into the 1930s, after the death of his mother in 1929. As the country entered the war years the National Farm Survey gives us a picture of what the farm was like in 1941. Robert was described as a grazier and the farmhouse was classified as 'good'. Robert was farming 25 acres of wheat and 10 and ½ acres of oats along with keeping 48 cows, over 320 fowls and 65 ducks. It is interesting to note that at this time Elm Grove still had no electricity.

Late 20th century Elm Grove

Robert Gillett passed away in 1947 and for the first time in almost 130 years the farmhouse passed out of the hands of the descendants of the Lovell family. By 1950 Elm Grove had become the home of the Warren family who remained until the early 1960s when it became the home of Herbert and Freda Moody. Within a few years new owners, Alfred and Christable Doble had moved into Elm Grove and by 1985 the 300 year old farmhouse became the home of current owners, who have lived happily in this quiet country spot ever since.