

The Beeches & The Beechnut – Holme Pierrepont

The Beeches has been a farm cottage for much of its history, but during the 1920s it is believed it was in fact graced by King Edward VIII, when he was the Prince of Wales. The Beeches was formerly the cottage for the Earl of Manvers' Home Farm at Holme Pierrepont, built in the early years of the 19th century. The adjacent Beechnut was formerly farm buildings that housed the Earl's world renowned Shorthorn cattle.

Farm cottagers – the Richards family

The farmhouse now known as 'The Beeches' was first built as a small cottage attached to the extensive estate of the Manvers family of Holme Pierrepont. A survey of the estate taken in 1803 records that the cottage was complete and the earliest occupant was William Richards. In fact, the Richards family appear to have had an even longer connection to Holme Pierrepont as there is reference to an Aston Richards in 1611. Within a few years William Richards' son George took over from his father as 'cottager' and a later survey taken during the 1820s shows George Richards living in the house and farming over six acres of the Earl's land.

George Richards

George Richards continued at the cottage as farmer with his family throughout the mid 19th century. The 1838 tithe records show the cottage clearly labelled and George Richards as farmer. By 1851 the census shows George as 'cottager for 8 ½ acres of land', with his wife Margaret and their grand-daughter Ann living in the house.

1860s cottage and farm

In 1861 there are two documents that give us a picture of what Home Farm cottage was like at this time. Firstly, a valuation of the Earl of Manvers Estate describes the cottage and farm as "cottage, garden, paddock, orchard and stockyard" and even details the cottage as "brick and slate stuccoed – 2 rooms and 2 chambers...[and] leanto kitchen and dairy". Secondly, the 1861 census shows George widowed aged 79 and also blind. He lived in the house with his daughter-in-law Mary, aged 55, who was running the house for him, along with a visitor, Sarah Ward, aged 72 and 'formerly cottager'.

William Richards

George Richards passed away in 1871 at the age of 89 and the Home Farm cottage was taken over by William Richards, although it is unsure what relation William was to George, but it is most likely he was his son. The 1871 shows William Richards in the house with his wife Elizabeth and his grand-son William, aged 16 and already working as an 'attorney's clerk'.

New farmer and dairyman

During the late 1870s, after almost 80 years, the Richards family left Home Farm cottage. Unfortunately, the records of the occupants of the farm house at this time are unclear, but the farm continued as the dairy for the Earl of Manvers. It seems likely that it was farmed by William Slack, who was recorded in the 1881 and 1891 censuses, as well as the Electoral Registers and rate books, as Dairy Farmer at Holme Pierrepont.

Renovations and changes to Home Farm

At the turn of the 20th century the Fourth Earl Manvers spent a large amount of money rebuilding and redeveloping his farm buildings, including Home Farm cottage. It was during the late 1890s that the cottage was renovated and extended and became more like the home of today. In 1897 the building now known as the Beechnut was built to house the Earl's herd of pedigree Shorthorn cattle – in fact the bedrooms in today's home were originally bull boxes.

Expert cattleman – Christopher Dobson

The 1901 census records 'the dairies' as unoccupied but shortly afterwards the Fourth Earl Manvers brought Christopher Dobson from Cumberland to look after his prized cattle. The 1911 census shows Christopher Dobson, aged 38 and 'Cowman on Farm' in the house with his wife Hannah and their three children, William, Margaret and Percy. At the same time, the 1910-11 Inland Revenue valuation gives us more detail of the farm run by Christopher Dobson. It was described as a 'good mixed farm' with a number of farm buildings, including cow sheds, engine rooms, stables and harness room, along with the cottage. Altogether Home Farm and the surrounding land covered almost 210 acres of Holme Pierrepont.



Gentleman famer – William Shelton

During the early 20th century Christopher Dobson was listed at Home Farm in a number records as 'herdsman to Manvers'. Dobson and his family remained at the farm until around 1918-19 but by the 1920s it had become the home of William B. Shelton. William Shelton was described as a gentleman farmer, who apparently worked in white gloves. In around 1927 the Home Farm cottage was modernised and it was at this time that it officially became known as 'The Beeches'.

Edward, Prince of Wales visits Home Farm cottage

During this time it is believed that Edward, Prince of Wales, future King Edward VIII, visited the area. He stayed at nearby Lamcote House (also owned by Earl Manvers) where he visited his mistress, Freda Dudley Ward. He often went to Holme Pierrepont for sport and an old farmer relates that the Prince in fact visited the cottage and in particular popped into the kitchen on a number of his visits – perhaps for a nice cup of tea!

The Beeches during World War II

The late 1940s not only brought change to the nation with the outbreak of World War II but the Manvers Estate, having been in financial trouble for a number of years, was placed on the market. In 1941 we have two comprehensive documents, the National Farm Survey and the full Estate sales particulars, that give us a complete picture of the farm and its buildings at this time.

The sales catalogue lists the Beeches as “a very attractive farm, formerly the Home Farm of the Fourth Earl...and used by him for his world-renowned herd of Shorthorns...Together with a delightful house and model farm buildings”. The house was described as “most conveniently arranged” and contained conveniences such as scullery with sink, hot and cold water, inside coal place, kitchen with thermo stove and a cloak room with lavatory. To compliment this, the National Farm Survey tells us much more about the land being farmed, including 20 acres of wheat, 3 acres of turnips and Swedes, 8 acres of barley and 4 ½ acres of potatoes. The farm animals included 39 cows, 97 sheep, 166 fowls and 5 horses. The farm survey also shows that the farm was no longer owned by the Earl of Manvers, but had been sold to five people, one of whom was Robert Marsh from Sandwich.

Late 20th century – the Marsh family

After the war William Shelton left the Beeches and it became the home of Robert Marsh and his family. Generations of the Marsh family remained at the Beeches for close to 40 years until the late 1980s when it was sold by Robert's grandson, Roy Marsh, to the current owners.