

The Lighteach Timeline

**A Shropshire Farm
Through The Ages**

By

David Hill

Introduction

There have been 7 great waves of change which have impacted on England since time immemorial:-

- After the ice age to the Roman invasion - 13000 years
- The Romans - 400 years
- The Anglo Saxons - 600 years
- The Normans and the full flowering of the feudal system - 700 years
- The Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions - 300 years
- The 20th Century - 100 years
- The 21st Century

Through the centuries each overlord or government has sought to increase their power and influence over the common people.

At Lichteath the people have worked through each of the waves improving the land. Drainage has always been continuously managed. Roads have been created and maintained. Fields have been cultivated, animals reared and slaughtered. All this against a backdrop of increasing influence from the powers above. As generations passed there was a continuity in the way the land was managed with family always coming first, influenced by myth superstition and religion.

This then is the timeline of that continuity that has shaped Lichteath.

David Hill

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NOTE

The figures in brackets e.g. (1) are references to the source books listed in the bibliography at the end.



The Ice Age



13,000 BC

By 13,000 BC the last ice age is beginning to come to an end. The orbit of the earth has change subtly and carbon dioxide levels have risen, so that ice no longer covers Shropshire. People are beginning to colonise the land.



A belemnite

The whole of north Shropshire and South Cheshire became covered by a huge lake. The lake dries leaving clays and mudstones at Prees with fossils of the ammonites which are huge snail creatures, and belemnites which are prehistoric octopi.

Possibly the Lighteach land starts to be used for hunting, foraging and fishing in the local ponds.

10,000 BC

By 10,000 BC the climate has now improved significantly and we are in the middle of the stone age. The climate becomes warmer and wetter than today. The landscape becomes wooded with juniper, the first tree to return, quickly followed by birch, hazel, pine, willow and alder. In the lowlands, oak, elm and pine dominated the landscape. This heavily wooded landscape was home to red deer, roe deer, wild cattle and pigs.

People are hunter gatherers. They forage and kill the wild animals. Stone tools become smaller and more specialised with stone blades becoming common. The Lighteach land may have had a couple of roundhouses on it and the area would have been increasingly used for food.



The Bronze Age



4,000 BC

By 4,000 BC farming had begun. People farm pulses, barley and wheat, but still use wild resources. Rather than settle in one place, they still move around within territories. These territories were focused on great communal monuments, such as the henges. People move around trading goods such as gold, salt, tools and fish.

At Lighteach it is probable that a mound is created which later becomes the moated site that exists today. Communal gatherings take place at the mound. This provides opportunities to meet, trade, feast and perform ceremonies. The religion is pagan with sacrifices and offerings to the pagan gods.

In time this becomes a way marker for the route between two ancient henges, The Bull Ring Henge at Doveholes, north of Buxton and Breidden Hill (Rodneys' Pillar). The route intersects with other routes to form a network for early trade. One of the commodities that pass along these routes would have been gold mined in Wales.

At Lighteach, as everywhere else, gradually farming took hold. Rectilinear fields and paddocks would have been created. Arable crops, oats, rye, millet and wheat were grown widely and livestock reared. Grain would be stored.

600 BC

The tribe called the Cornovii come to dominate the area. Their capital was probably a hill fort on the Wrekin but more locally they had a hill fort Mediolanvm near Whitchurch. At Lighteach more land was cleared and where needed it was drained. Simple ploughs were in use.



The Romans



47 -410

The Romans had invaded in AD 43. In AD 47 they defeated the Cornovii at a decisive battle at the Wrekin Hill fort and that was to be the only fight that the Cornovii put up. They readily adopted the Roman way of life and urban living.

The Romans eventually criss-crossed the landscape with roads, beside which many villages and towns developed. Travellers along the roads between towns would have seen clusters of traditional British roundhouses. These would have been increasingly interspersed and replaced with the white plaster rendering and red-tiled roofs of villas, as landowners built Mediterranean-style farmhouses. A patchwork of small family farms gave way to extensive and intensively exploited estates.

The Romans introduced new breeds of farm animals, such as the prized white cattle and new species of game including the brown hare and pheasants. The list of vegetables introduced to Britain includes garlic, onions, shallots, leeks, cabbages, peas, celery, turnips, radishes, and asparagus. Amongst the many herbs that they introduced to Britain were rosemary, thyme, bay, basil and savoury mint.

At Lighteach the new crops and animals would have been gradually introduced and hunting would have continued, as trade moved on the local Roman roads nearby. With the Romans comes the first records of cheese production which would have probably been one of the products of Lighteach.



Anglo Saxon Authority



642

After the end of Roman rule in Britain (circa 410 AD) the Cornovii tribe fell under the rule of the Kingdom of Pengwern that was consumed by neighbouring Mercia after AD 642.

Throughout this period there were multiple disputes and wars between the existing peoples, the old Britons. There were also battles and wars with incoming invaders known collectively as the Anglo Saxons.

From these disputes the Kingdom of Mercia gradually emerged as the tribal skirmishes and wars gave way to some kind of fragile unity under a single ruler. Mercia became part of the Heptarchy, the seven disunited kingdoms that made up Anglo Saxon England. During this period its rulers became the first English monarchs to assume such wide-ranging titles as King of Britain and King of the English.

The area around Lighteach would have been farmed by small local tribes who were bonded by kinship, geographical identification, or religion rather than land ownership.

There was a system of loose fiefdoms in which a Thegn (or Lord) would hold land around his manor. This Thegn would have a hierarchy of powerful people or the church above him to whom he would provide services and taxes, with ultimate allegiance to the King. The Thegn would have achieved this position from local power based on kinship, force or intrigue. At Lighteach the local manor would have been Prees manor.





Anglo Saxons

The Anglo Saxons who once farmed Prees would have farmed three large fields for crops, one of which was left fallow (ploughed and harrowed but left for a period without being sown in order to restore its fertility or to avoid surplus production) each year. The rest were divided into long strips which were shared amongst the tenants. There would also have been an area for cattle and any land left over would have been used for common pasture. All of the houses would have been arranged around the Moot place where the village problems were sorted out according to the law. Unfortunately much of the law was verbal and disputes were common.

Since the Anglo Saxons were efficient farmers, it is likely that there was a marketplace for sale of surplus food and livestock. It is also possible that they built a Church, and as sites were repeatedly used throughout the centuries, it is highly probable that it was erected on the site of today's church.

Under King Penda Anglo Saxon Christianity began to exercise a growing influence. In 669 St Chad was appointed bishop of the Mercians and the diocese of Lichfield formed. The church exerted considerable power in Mercia and the diocese thereafter, gaining considerable grounds and appointing a hierarchy of clergy.

By the 10th century Mercia had been growing closer to the kingdom of Wessex and in 927 it became united with it under King Edward the Elder.

By now it was to be expected that the farmers at Lighteach would be practising Christians.

669

927



Norman Knights In Action



1066 Norman Conquest

William the Conqueror declared that all land belonged to the Crown. He parcelled it out to barons, as the Thegns now became, and the Church while keeping an estate for the monarchy.

The number of roads throughout the country grew mainly because the number of monasteries increased and the monks needed to be able to get around the countryside easily to collect their rents and administer their land. Religious guilds formed that collected tolls from passers-by to finance road maintenance.

From the fifteenth century, the term manor acquired a legal meaning and also denoted 'a piece of landed property with tenants over whom the landlord exercised rights of jurisdiction in the private court'.

Ligtheach and the surroundings all lay within the vast area controlled by the Bishops of Lichfield and Coventry. The land controlled by the Bishops changed with the centuries as the power struggles of the day changed their holdings but through it all the area around Prees remained firmly in their control.



Typical Village



By the 12th century Prees would have been an archetypal medieval village with its church, manor house, mill, ponds, streams and open fields surrounded by an area of woodland and heath. Within those fields lay the area that we know today as Lighteach.

1298

In 1298 the ninety five or so households on the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield's estate at Prees farmed 1,300 acres of open arable land and enclosed fields. Most of the households were those of peasant farmers with an acre or less of grassland, they also had access to the common heath and moorland.

The open field system was in operation with three large fields split into multiple strips farmed by the peasants under the patronage of the Lord of the Manor. There were also common areas of ground for grazing of animals. There continued to be significant amounts of surrounding woodland. (1)

The bishops exercised their authority through a steward who travelled extensively around the various estates, but locally with the bailiff or sometimes the beadle (a local man primarily intended to be an officer of the court) or the reeve (a locally chosen man who would take charge).



Church Authority



1299

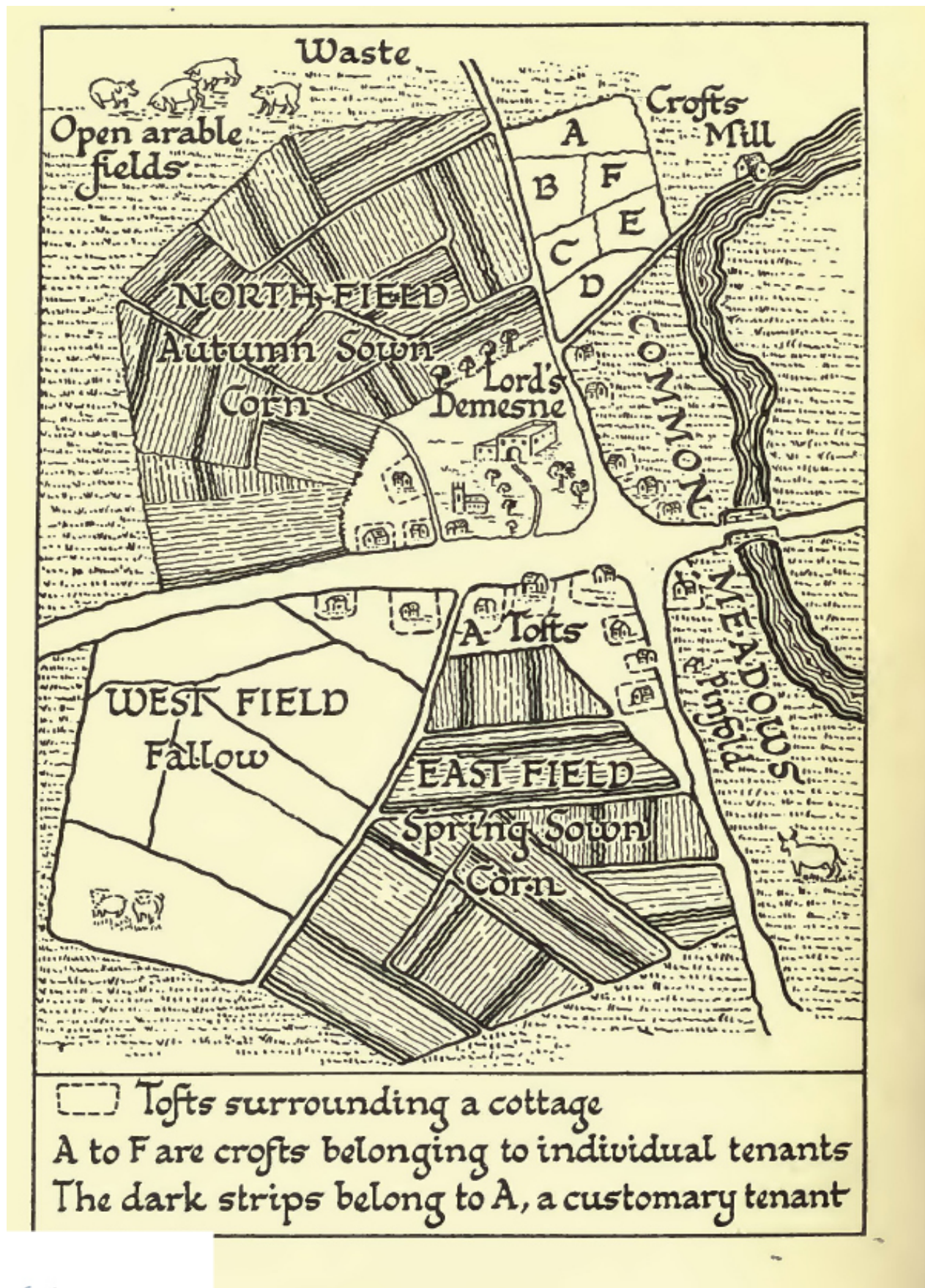
In 1299 the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry was Walter Langton, he was also the treasurer of the realm and was in the king's favour. King Edward 1 granted him a charter for his good services to the Crown confirming the rights in his manors which previous bishops had been claiming. These included:

1. rights of toll and team, sac and soc (rights of jurisdiction)
2. infangthief (the right to try and hang a thief caught in the manor)
3. halimote (the right to hold a court)
4. Shire and hundred courts and sheriffs to have no jurisdiction
5. right of free warren (right to hunt game)

Central to the operation of the manor court is its monitoring of communal behaviour, known as the 'View of Frankpledge.' This was a system of mutual responsibility meaning that a tithing (a group of about 10 households) agreed to work together to keep law and order within their grouping. If anyone disobeyed the rules the most common punishment was a fine (or 'amercement') paid to the bishop via the bailiff but other punishments were possible, such as being locked up in the village jail or put in the stocks.



Typical Medieval Village Layout



The Black Death Arrives



1307

In 1307 a market was created in Prees.

1324-5

Farming of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs was prioritised over the growing of crops. English wool was increasingly valued and widely smuggled. Sheep farming was widespread and valuable. For example, wool was sent from Prees to Haywood in Staffordshire where it was sold for £8 a sack (1). For a period it seemed that the wealth of England depended on wool and its cloth.

The forfeited goods of a felon at Prees in 1324 included an acre sown with wheat, another sown with beans, and half an acre sown with rye, and there were 600lbs of beans and 180lbs of barley in his barn (1).

1348

The black death reached Prees in 1348 and with it Lighteach. The population was decimated, land could not be worked. Rents and land prices plummeted. There were 22 new tenants appointed to vacant holdings in Prees where the normal number was 2 a year (1).

1381

In 1351 Parliament passed the Statute of Labourers that fixed wages to pre-plague levels and insisted that all able bodied men under the age of 68 work the land. This was not well received by the peasants. This was followed by a series of acts raising a poll tax. In 1381 peasants led by Wat Tyler, marched to London demanding to speak to the King. They became violent and started to murder his key advisers. Although the revolt was a failure the key demands of higher wages and more freedom were gradually met.



Enclosures



1400 Onward

The late 1300's saw relative prosperity visit Lighteach as the effects of the black death faded and the population recovered.

The peace was often shattered by the effects of the Welsh raiders who once again brought hard times to the area.

There was a significant rise in enclosure during the late 15th century period. Enclosure was quite often undertaken unilaterally by the landowner, sometimes illegally. The widespread eviction of people from their lands resulted in the collapse of the open field system in those areas. The evidence suggests that the area around Lighteach avoided such enclosures long after such practices were common.

However by the late sixteenth century the lords of Prees were happy to allow enclosure of the common land, regarding it as another source of income. The custom was that if a cottage was built on common ground and it had a fire burning in the hearth then that established the rights to the surrounding land.

For example it is recorded in the local court rolls:-

"In 1578 Thomas Clerke was holding a cottage lately erected by the lord's licence on the waste near Crossbank and in 1580 Ralph Suker took a cottage recently erected on the waste in Leeton's end." (2).



Split With Rome



1536

Henry the Eighth, split the Church in England from Rome in 1534 and followed with the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536.

The process led to some changes within the Church with boundaries being redrawn. The name of the diocese in which Lighteach sits was changed from Coventry and Lichfield to Lichfield and Coventry in 1539 as the power structures altered.

1550

In 1550 Bishop Sampson, of Lichfield and Coventry, let the manor of Prees to Richard Cupper a London speculator whilst retaining some rights. The sitting bailiff John Lawrence, alias Parkes, continued in office at a fee of £4 a year.

At some point later it appeared that a George Mainwaring acquired the lease and the Mainwaring family then became the dominant family in Prees. The Mainwarings did not run things to the satisfaction of the bishops and over many years they engaged in legal disputes.

1600

The seventeenth century saw the beginnings of the Agricultural Revolution with Jethro Tull's corn drill which sowed in rows and a four course rotation of crops being introduced. Farming at Lighteach would have taken on the new ideas as the century progressed.

Potatoes had been introduced into Britain in 1586 but the takeup was limited around Prees and it is not until the 1740's that there are records of them being produced.



Cromwell Wins



1646

During the Interregnum, when there was no king, after the Civil War the governance of the Church by the bishops was abolished in 1646 and a committee of lay commissioners was substituted to control the affairs of the Church. The lands of the Church were confiscated and sold. The manor of Prees was sold on 18 December 1647 for £1,122 6s. 2d. to one Henock Smith and the 'scite of the manor of Prees' was sold on 21 April 1648 to one Thomas Harpar for £147 13s. 5d. (2)

The Puritan government advocated an austere lifestyle and restricted what they saw as the papish excesses of the past. Most notably holidays such as Christmas and Easter were suppressed. Pastimes such as the theatre and gambling were also banned. In Prees, as elsewhere, presumably some celebrations did continue in clandestine, but with caution.

At the Restoration in 1660, the bishops and their territorial possessions were restored.

1690

In 1690 we get the first named person to have lived in the old house at Lighteach, a Mrs. Sarah Hassal, where she is recorded as giving gifts for the poor. (2)



The Hills Take Over



The old Lighteach from a contemporary sketch

1708

The Hill family already owned large estates in Shropshire based on the wealth generated by Sir Rowland Hill (1492-1561), who was Lord Mayor of London in 1549. He had made his huge fortune based on trading cloth on the continent.

As time went by the Hill family who were thriving managed to buy the freehold of more and more of the area from the Church, which was increasingly impoverished as the rents received on their long leases became increasingly out of date.

Reverend Richard Hill (1655 - 1727), also known as the Great Hill, made another fortune from his Paymastership and he purchased more estates in many counties, including Shropshire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. He purchased the lease of Lighteach in 1708 from the Mainwaring family after their wealth was depleted by the civil war.

John Hill of Lighteach (1656 - 1713) was the brother of Reverend Richard Hill and supported his brother's activities. At his marriage in 1699 he is described as an apothecary. It appears that John moved into the house on the moat at Lighteach following the purchase in 1708.

The Hills would not farm the area themselves but rely on a series of other tenants who in their turn would pay them rent or tithes.



Stagecoach Rivalry



1783

1794



Richard Hill
1732 -1808

The introduction of the first mail coach speeded up all coach services and in 1783 the Royal Mail from Shrewsbury was making London in 22 hours.

Rowland Hill (1705 - 1783), the 1st Baronet, was succeeded by another Richard Hill (1732-1808) the 2nd Baronet. In 1794 it was this Richard that acquired the Manor of Prees and with it Lighteach by exchanging land at Meriden near Coventry with the bishop.

The improvement in agricultural practises and machinery that was to be known as the Agricultural Revolution was gathering pace. The Board of Agriculture was established to promote advances in agriculture. By 1794 it had published a General View of the Agriculture of the County of Salop. The Agricultural Revolution was leading to breeding livestock for more and more meat to satisfy the burgeoning population.



A Shropshire Pig



Cows Go Big



Show animals were bred to become a symbol of prestige and modernity.

1809

Throughout the early part of the 19th century the Hills thrived. In 1809 Sir John Hill (1740-1824) became the 3rd Baronet and worked to expand the family fortune.

1815

1815 saw the start of a twenty-year depression in agriculture. It was so severe that landlords as well as tenants suffered financial ruin, and large areas of farmland were entirely abandoned.

1824

In 1824 Rowland Hill (1800–1875) became the 4th Baronet. He undertook large works which were mismanaged and by the time of his death part of the vast fortune bequeathed to him was gone.

1841

The site and its surrounding plots are all recorded on the tithe apportionment of 1841 to be occupied by a John Morris. The tithe apportionment describes the plots as follows:-

- Plot 962: Little intack (meadow)
- Plot 693: House building, garden and moat
- Plot 694: Building and fold yard
- Plot 695: Near Hall field (grass)





1850

The Bathos, who were a large local family, seem to have taken over the tenancy at Lighteach from the Hills at some point around 1850.

The Bathos had connections to many local farms. They are recorded as taking part in hunting and shooting events. They are an equestrian family both breeding and riding horses widely.

The census records show that Lighteach was occupied by William Batho and then his son George Batho with his wife. Both had 3 servants living with them.

1863

The original Lighteach burned down in 1863. It was reconstructed away from the mound on which it originally sat and became the basis of the farmhouse today. By 1869 the new hall was habitable.

The movement for farm improvement with the building of barns and courtyards to enable more productive use of land and livestock was gathering pace. The Hills invested in the magnificent new farm yard buildings at Lighteach in order to be able to claim the higher rent which could then be demanded.

Two records come from wills of the Bathos' as follows:-

Richard Batho - died 4 Sept 1873 at Lighteach left under £2000.
Ann Batho died 6 July 1874 effects under £450.



The Hill Sale 1890

In 1875 Rowland Clegg-Hill (1833–1895) became the 3rd Viscount Hill after his father's death. Rowland continued to spend with abandon. The Hills had to sell their Prees estates to raise some money.

On 5 December 1890 a sale of property in Prees took place at Shrewsbury. It was sold as freehold except for a little over 10 acres which was copyhold of Wem Manor, an outdated form of lease. It was described as an agricultural, residential, and sporting estate. The sale particulars are reproduced below.

THE PREES ESTATE, SHROPSHIRE,

IN THE PARISHES OF PREES AND WEM.

Adjoining Prees Station on the Shrewsbury and Crews Branch of the London and North Western Railway, and abutting on, and partly intersected by the main Road from Shrewsbury to Whitechurch, and within 3½ miles of Whitechurch, 5 miles of Wem, and 14½ miles of Shrewsbury.

Plans, Particulars, & Conditions of Sale

OF A HIGHLY ATTRACTIVE AND VALUABLE

AGRICULTURAL, RESIDENTIAL, & SPORTING ESTATE,

THE WHOLE OF WHICH IS FREEHOLD,

Except 10·139 Acres COPYHOLD of Wem Manor.

To be offered for Sale by Auction, by

MESSRS. W. G. PREECE & SON

AT THE MUSIC HALL, SHREWSBURY,
ON FRIDAY, 5TH DECEMBER, 1890,

AT 12 O'CLOCK NOON,

IN 43 LOTS,

OF FROM LESS THAN ONE ACRE TO UPWARDS OF 220 ACRES EACH,

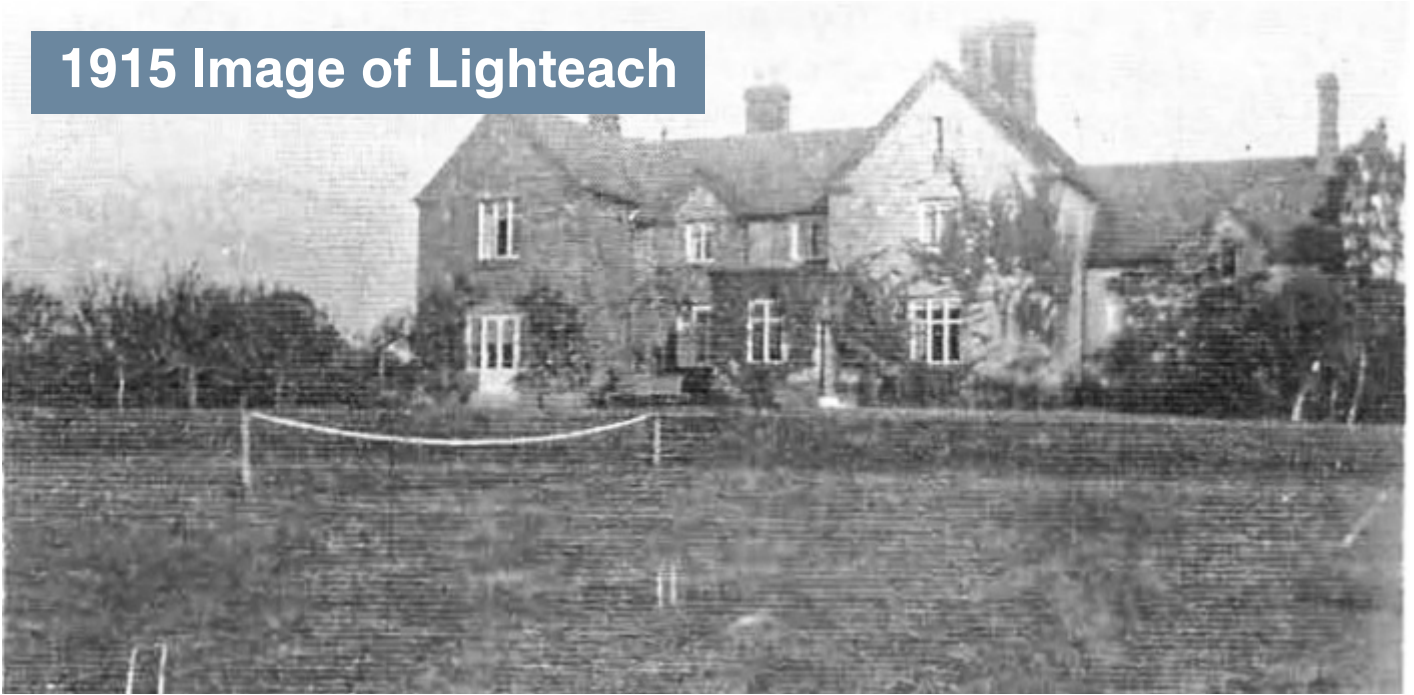
On each other Lots and order as may be decided upon at the time of Sale, thus giving both large and small Capitalists an exceptional opportunity for investment for

Residential, Building, or Speculative purposes.

A GENERAL SUMMARY IS GIVEN ON PAGE 2



1915 Image of Lighteach



1918

In 1915 Edward Walley who had been the tenant of another farm acquired the tenancy from George Batho and started to farm the estate. The Walleys concentrate on building up the dairying with the women producing Cheshire Cheese. The name Walley derives from a person living by a wall or embankment.

Immediately following the end of the Great War, George Batho perhaps motivated by the death of his son George in the war, decided to develop his interests in the cotton trade and was eventually to move to Lytham.

George then offers Lighteach to Edward Walley with the following prices in October 1918:-

Lighteach 222 acres at £50 an acre, Mill House at £425, The old Mill at £525 with the tenant in place, Crew Hall and 6 acres at £320, 16 acres of thickets and woodland at £20.00 an acre. The total being £12,370

Edward Walley then counters with an offer of £10,000. George is astounded at such a low figure and counters with £12,069.00. Edward is then delayed by an illness. However, as Edward is the sitting tenant he stands firm with his offer.



1919 Abortive Auction

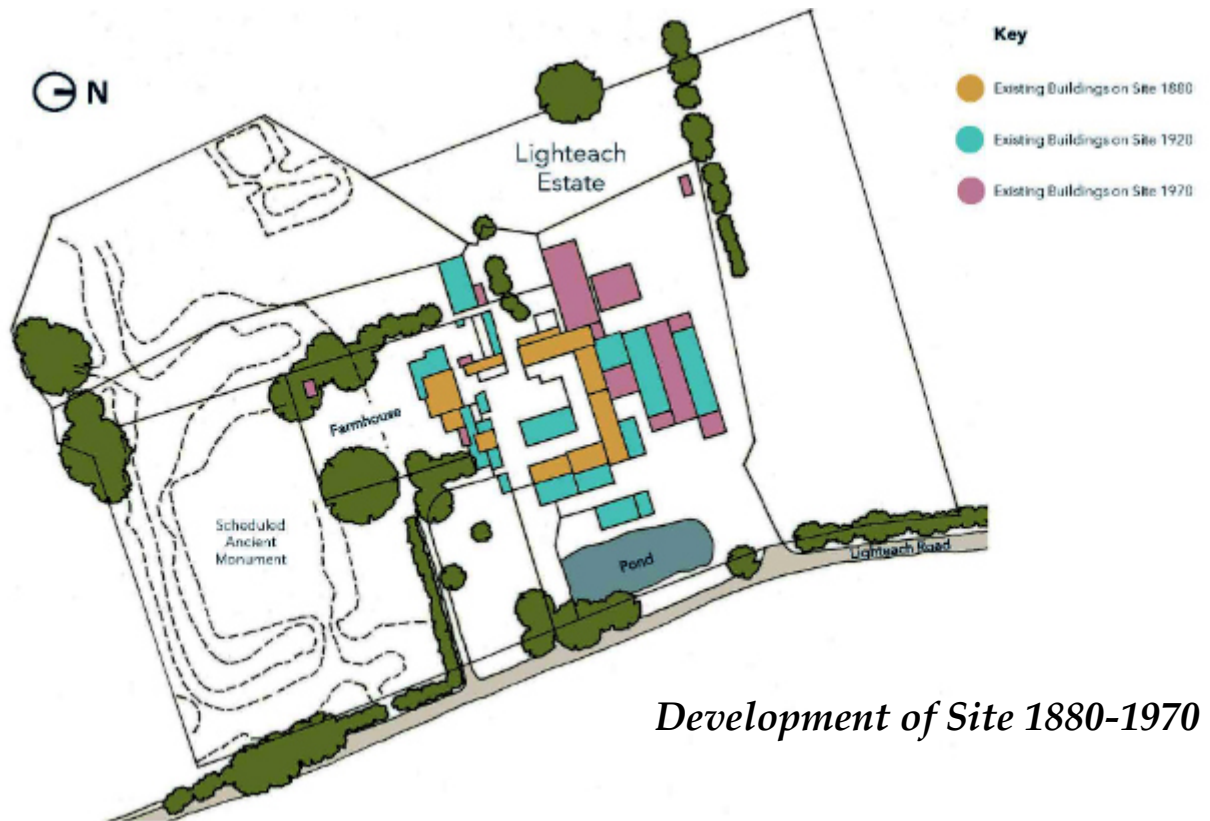
On Friday, June 20, 1919 it is George Batho that puts his entire holdings of land including Lighteach up for sale at auction. It would appear that the auction was a failure and having been unable to sell it George took the £10,000 on offer. Edward was then the proud owner of Lighteach. The auction bill is reproduced below.

Particulars of Very Desirable and
Valuable Agricultural Properties
Within easy reach of the noted market towns of
WHITCHURCH & WEM.
Comprising :
Within a mile of PREES.
A High-class DAIRY FARM with Superior Residence "The Lighteach,"
Area - 237 Acres 2 Roods 28 Perches
(COTON.)
A Valuable Freehold Small HOLDING "Crewe Hall,"
Area - 5 Acres 3 Roods 36 Perches.
Attractive Small HOUSE and LAND, Area 1a. 2r. 23p.
Windmill Cottage and Garden.
(TILSTOCK.)
Valuable Small DAIRY FARM "The Brook Farm"
And TWO COTTAGES with Large Gardens. Area 19a. 0r. 21p.
(Abbey Green, WHIXALL.)
An Unusually Desirable Small Holding. Area 9a. 2r. 12p.

To be offered for sale by Auction in Six Lots by
FRANK LLOYD AND SONS
At the Victoria Hotel, Whitchurch, on
Friday, June 20th, 1919, at 3 o'clock.
On Instructions of the owner Geo. Batho, Esq.
Solicitors:
Messrs. HENRY LEE, BYGOTT & ECCLESTON, Whitchurch and Wem.
Auctioneers' Offices : Whitchurch, Wrexham, Crewe & Chester.



Development Of Lighteach Estate



The Walleys



A colourised photo from 1928

The Walleys

When the Walleys arrived in 1915 the farm was generally run down. Edwards vision was for a large dairy farm, with cheese making on site. He intended to run it as a business but with enlightened ideals driven by his devout Baptist faith. His real aim was to make enough to pay for a missionary overseas. It was always going to be Edward's way, as he balanced his farming, his work for the church and his family.

Edward introduced his "New Agricultural Labourers Settlement Scheme", a profit-sharing scheme. He would prepare an annual report for the year, pronounce on world events, declare what profit he thought fair, there were to be no questions asked, announce the bonus (if any) and how it was to be divided and give a Christmas lunch for the workers and their wives at the same time.

The Walleys have a disconcerting way of referring to each other by their middle names. Thus Edward Walley is really Alfred Edward Walley, Lucy is Florence Lucy Walley and even Edward's wife called Sarah is known as Sallie

Edward was to father an ever growing family. About every 2 years Sarah aka Sallie, Edward's wife, produced a child, 8 in all. Alfred Pierpoint born 28th April 1916, Gladys Mary born 22nd Sept 1918, Florence Lucy born 15 February 1920, Harold Leslie born 23rd April 1921, Edna Joan born 29th June 1923, Dorothy Barbara born 15th June 1926, Nancy Helen born 21st July 1931 and Sarah born 17th Feb 1935.



Making Hay In The 1920's



1922

1922 was a difficult year, one in which there was no bonus for the staff, and wages were cut. The Lighteach stock valuation recorded 56 dairy cows, 35 heifers, 3 bulls, 6 work horses, 3 colts, 31 pigs and 22 chickens.

Lighteach produced a large amount of milk for sale and also used this to produce cheese and butter. In 1923 the farm produced 25 tons of cheese. The cheese making enterprise was largely run by the women whilst the men did the work in the fields.

In December 1923 foot and mouth disease struck Lighteach and all the cows had to be slaughtered. This was followed by a major fire in the barns.

1924

In 1924 electricity was installed together with a steam boiler. Market conditions had improved and a bonus was at last declared. Edward set about intensifying production with the introduction of more pigs, which could then manure the fields.

1926

By 1926 cheese production rose to 33 tons whilst having 110 milking cows. In 1928 Edward bought another small dairy farm, Petsey, near Hodnet. This meant that the bonuses for that year were postponed by Edward. For several years he ran both farms and tried to improve the yields on both.

1929

In 1929 progress continued to be made across both farms and Edward felt able to declare a bonus of £150 for the 2 years, but delay it's payment for another and then he went on to castigate the workers for being afraid of working too long because they thought that there would be no bonus!



Troubles In The 1930's

1930

In 1930 Edward's health took a massive knock. He was by now 46 and had to undergo an operation for gallstones. This compounded by steadily falling prices made 1930 a challenging year.

1931

1931 turned out to be the worst farming year at Lighteach. All aspects of farming experienced low prices and lack of demand. The milking machines did not prove as productive as the hand-milked herd and pig prices remained stubbornly low. With a depressed world market, cheap imports undermined local prices. Overall, the farm only broke even on the pigs. These were not the only difficulties as the corn crop, also ended in ruin, due to the weather.

Added to these disappointments Edward had an industrial dispute. He asked one of the farm workers to help in the dairy. He refused so Edward sacked him, forthwith. The other 3 or 4 men took the position that they would not do women's work either and were also immediately sacked. It was Edward's way or the highway and it proved to be the highway.

1932

1932 saw even lower prices, workers suffered a pay cut and there was no bonus. Paradoxically Edward used the opportunity to expand Petsey by buying more land

1934

By 1934 after yet another poor year the corner was turned by dint of hard work and a recovering agricultural economy. Edward was able to show a profit but even talk of a bonus was delayed.

In 1935 Edward was able to borrow heavily and buy another farm, Lilyfields, which was adjacent to Lighteach. Edward applied for accreditation with the Milk Marketing Board, which had been created a couple of years earlier to help the dairy farmers. After suitable modifications he was accepted and there was then a guaranteed buyer for the milk at a good price.

By now Lucy was starting to help in the production of the cheese and by 1940 it is recorded that she even made the cheese before going off to get married. She married into the Appelby Family where she made a name for herself in cheese production, even getting an MBE in 2001 for services to Shropshire Cheesemaking.

1936

From 1936 to the outbreak of war all of Edward's enterprises flourished with good prices for the produce and a high demand for the farms output.



Planes over Lighteach



For illustration only - no accuracy implied

The War Years

1944

With the war came government controls and a demand to produce ever more food. All possible land was to be put into production. There were at least four land girls working on the farm and at times many more. The work was largely still hard physical labour with horse drawn transport still in use. The guaranteed prices and guaranteed sales meant prosperous times for the farms under Edward's control. As the war came to a close the social activities at the farm increased with Americans from local bases being frequent visitors especially keen on meeting the eligible young ladies of the household.

It was reported that the planes from the nearby airbase at RAF Tilstock used the farm as a guide when coming in to land. In 1944 Barbara became a full time employee on the farm joining Leslie, Mary and Joan.

In 1944 Edward bought yet another farm, Ferney Leas, which was quite run down. His expenditure on bringing it up to date denied bonuses to his workers. By 1946 Lighteach became connected to the national grid. Demand for labour continued to be high and German prisoners of war were used, although Edward complained that it wasn't a stable work force!

1947

In 1947 the government introduced the deficiency payments scheme which refunded the difference between actual market prices and a guaranteed price. The scheme ran until 1973.

In 1949 progress was still being made with the installation of the milking parlour and the introduction of a Friesian herd.



A Radioactive Cow?



Following the radiation leak at Windscale - cows and their milk absorbed radioactive isotopes

1950's



**1953 Mr William Whitaker
Towers
of Bolton -Le Sounds
Marries
Nancy Helen Walley
of Ligateach**

By the 1950s, the tractor was rapidly replacing the horse when it came to farm work. New husbandry techniques were also emerging. Chemical weedkillers started to gain popularity.

Edward was increasingly unwell in the early 1950's. Barbara, Joan and Helen were now effectively running Ligateach. Edward eventually died in 1954, leaving his farming interests to his wife.

In 1956, the Coventry Evening Telegraph produced an article on the 210 acre Ligateach Farm, which was one of the only remaining establishments that produced Cheshire Cheese on site in the area. The farm was recorded to have produced cheese at this site since 1915 and to pipe the milk from the milking parlour, across the yard in a stainless steel pipeline, and then into the cheese vat in the dairy. They would also directly pipe the whey to the pigs, where it was then mixed with the meal.

It was also recorded to have been owned by Mrs. Walley at the time, following the death of her husband two years previously, and run by her two daughters, producing 25 tons of cheese per year.

Radioactive dust which leaked from the nuclear reactor on October 10/11 1957 at the Windscale plant in Cumberland led to milk being poured into the sea within a 200-mile radius and urgent blood and soil tests were ordered to assess levels of radioactivity.



Foot And Mouth Disease Hits



1960's

The 1960s were a time of expansion, specialisation and intensification for farmers. The message for small farms was that if they wanted to compete with the larger, intensified operators, they needed to co-operate or get out. At Lighteach the family farm continued to produce milk and cheese as it had done for decades. The milk and cheese was exclusively sold through the Milk Marketing Board who would send along a cheque in payment each month.

1962

The winter of 1962-3 was vicious with temperatures staying below zero day and night until March 1963. The challenges for the farm were huge.

1964

In 1964 Sarah died and the ownership of the farm passed to a partnership comprising of her daughter's namely Lucy, Joan and Barbara. Alfred had died in December 1963.

In 1964 a tragic fatal accident happened with a 15 year old farm hand, Roger Edgar Lewis. It was reported by the Crewe Chronicle, that a tractor overturned whilst making silage and killed him.

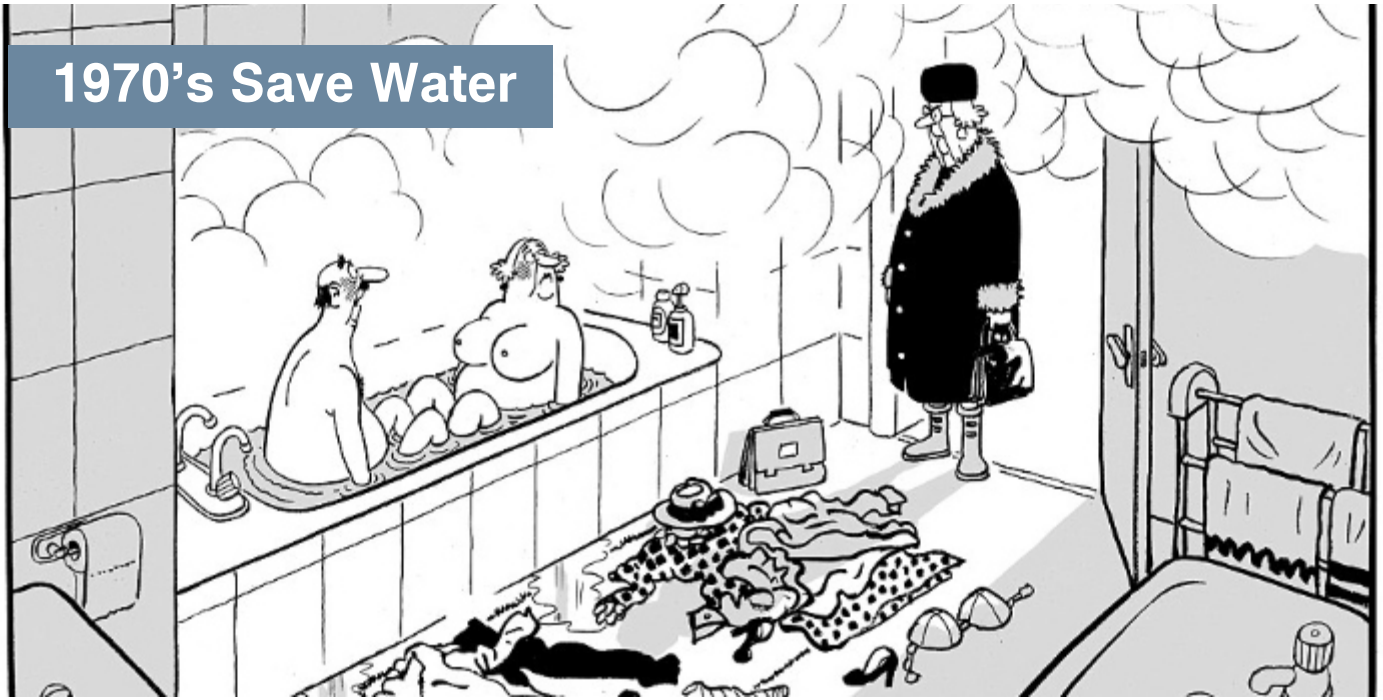
1967

A major outbreak of foot and mouth disease began in October 1967 after a farmer inadvertently sent two heifers to Oswestry market, not realising that pigs on the farm were carrying the disease.

The virus spread and, in total, 442,000 animals were slaughtered across the UK and the outbreak had an estimated cost of £370 million. The effects at Lighteach were massive with all their cattle being slaughtered and burned in a massive pyre.



1970's Save Water



1971

In 1971 Britain went decimal, pounds shillings and pence were replaced by pounds and pence. Farm accounts now had to be prepared in decimals which many people found hard to understand.

1973

Ted Heath, the Conservative Prime Minister led Britain into joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973. With the EEC came the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). On entry to the CAP, UK market prices were increased and the deficiency payment system was scrapped.

With the EEC also came VAT which also was introduced in 1973. Suddenly accounting became a whole lot more complicated for farmers. The initial VAT rate, which didn't apply to food was 10% and it was later dropped to 8%.

In 1973 the Arab nations imposed an oil embargo and the price of fuel trebled. This led to inflation in the UK with a stagnant economy and recession. Britain became widely known as the sick man of Europe with economic hardship.

1974

In 1974 the Health and Safety at Work Act imposed a whole new raft of rules on farmers which would then be increased regularly.

1976

The summer of 1976 was amazingly hot and dry with a long standing drought, adding to yet more pressure to conserve water. The press advised that bathing with a friend was a sensible way to conserve water.

Milk and cheese production carried on at Lighteach throughout the recession, with the milk tankers arriving to take away the milk.



1980's The Decade of Surplus



The agricultural policy of the EEC resulted in mountains of products across Britain and Europe that couldn't be sold. There was a milk lake, a butter mountain, a wine lake and massive wheat stocks. So the rules were changed.

1981

The countryside lobby was gaining an upper hand with more and more well meaning legislation pouring out such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, where owners and land users are required to seek permission to carry out "damaging operations". The farmer would be required to comply with ever more onerous and randomly enforced legislation.

1984

Milk quotas, the maximum amount of milk that was allowed to be produced, were introduced and allocated to farms including Lighteach on 2nd April 1984 in order to restrain rising milk production. Costs had to be cut. There developed a thriving market in the sale of milk quotas.

1988

In 1988 Edwina Currie all but destroyed the poultry industry when she said that most of the eggs in the UK were infected with salmonella. Egg sales collapsed and four million hens were culled.

1989

In 1989, the death knell for raw milk cheeses was nearly sounded when a number of supermarkets wrongly responded to a listeria scare by insisting their suppliers pasteurise their milk for cheesemaking. By the end of the 1980's cheese production at Lighteach was no more. The tanks and machinery were to stand idle for another 40 years before being removed.



1990 BSE Hits



John Gummer enjoys a burger

1990

BSE, also known as mad cow disease, made a huge impact in 1990 and beyond. The doomsayers were predicting a pandemic which would wipe out humanity. John Gummer, a government minister, famously tried to restore confidence in the industry by eating a beefburger with his daughter. However a link was established between BSE and vCJD the human version and the world banned UK beef exports and beef consumption slumped. A campaign to “Keep Britain Farming” was launched with widespread protests.

1992

The reforms to the common agriculture policy of 1992 saw the idea of set-aside being introduced for farmers aiming to pay farmers not to produce.

1994

In 1994 the Milk Marketing Board was abolished and the quota systems revised. There were still around 35,000 dairy farms. A successor organisation called Milk Marque was set up which in its turn evolved and the industry transformed itself with ever evolving large processor companies dominating the sector. The old certainty of price was gone and prices were on a downward trajectory. There are now about 7,000 dairy farms.

The torrent of environmental legislation continued to impose new duties on farmers, including the banning of stubble burning and protection of hedgerows.

Farming at Lighteach continued in the new environment with Lighteach Farm Partnership continuing to run things.



A New Millennium



2000

In the year 2000 the first foot and mouth disease outbreak since 1967 was a watershed moment in farming history. The impact on Lighteach was huge with the army being called in. At Lighteach the burning pyres of animals devastated everyone. The disease was finally controlled in late 2001.

2001

Symbolically the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Maff) was replaced by the Department of The Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (Defra) in 2001.

2003

By July 2003, European ministers, had agreed that farmers should concentrate on producing food according to what the market demanded. The rollout of the new Single Payments Scheme was a disaster due to terrible organisation and computer glitches.

2007

Horribly, foot-and-mouth returned in August 2007 and the industry was left incredulous after a government-funded laboratory was found to be the source of the outbreak.

Fuel prices rocketed in 2007 and the farming lobby closed down the refineries wringing concessions from the labour government.

The new milk processors continued to force down the price of milk causing ever more pressure on the farmers at Lighteach.

2008

In 2008 the Credit Crunch happened with the world's banking system being saved by the central banks. Interest rates plummeted, which in turn reduced farmers borrowing costs but caused the value of land to soar.



Focus On Lighteach Farming

One of Edward's daughters, Helen married William Towers in 1953, also known as Bill. They moved in to the adjacent farm Lilyfields. They had 8 children of which Tim was one. They worked with the other partners in running Lighteach. In 2006 Tim Tower's father, William died and Tim found himself in the Lighteach Farm Partnership. In 2009 Tim co-operated with Promar, an agricultural consultancy, in producing an article for their magazine which gives some details of his plans and the farm. The version that follows has been edited to remove the sales fluff.

Radical Shake Up

Until early last year, Tim had been running a system based on an all year round calving with a herd of 220 cows on 330 acres. The majority of the farm is down to grass, with maize and a small acreage of barley.

Performance had been slipping recently with a lengthening calving interval and a decline in total milk sold and milk yield from forage. The system needed to be simplified and focused to improve overall efficiency to generate the funds required to allow the reinvestment needed for better cow accommodation and compliance with the NVZ (nitrate vulnerable soil) regulations.

The big decision is to reduce cow numbers from 190 to 165 and move to a tight autumn calving herd. The high cow numbers were placing undue pressure on the buildings, so cows that fell outside the target calving winter have been sold and others purchased that fit the new calving period. Ideally the farm can cope with 180 cows in milk.

In early December, 48 spring and summer calvers were sold along with 12 barreners and replacements are now being added to the herd.

To help ensure the new calving window is met Tim has joined the Genus RMS scheme and has moved away from DIY AI. In addition he has started rearing replacements again and the aim is to have around 50 heifers calving every year at the start of the calving window. In future Tim will probably use sexed semen on heifers to help maintain a tight calving pattern.

To help improve yield from grazed grass, Tim is setting up a paddock grazing system to replace the current set stocking arrangement and is investing in the grazing infrastructure with tracks, fencing and extra water troughs. The target is to achieve a 21 day rotation with the cows getting fresh grass at least once a day.

Tim is also looking to improve the quality of his grazing and will be looking to overseed some paddocks and increase the proportion of clover in the leys.

The aim is to increase annual milk yields back to 7,200 litres as soon as possible, with a target of 8,000 litres with yield from forage rising from 1,770 to 3,000 litres per cow. "The targets are challenging," admits Tim Towers, "but we are confident".



2010's Lighteach



2012

In 2012 after two months of intensive campaigning retailers and processors agreed to milk price increases and to abide by a code of conduct designed to help make sure farmers are treated more fairly. However the pressure on the dairy industry continued with more and more dairy farmers quitting.

2013

In 2013 the scandal that was nicknamed "Horsegate" broke with traces of horse meat being found in processed beef products. Sales of beefburgers and similar products slumped.

The winter of 2013-14 brought unprecedented amounts of rain and flooding was commonplace.

2015

The problem of bovine TB was to hang heavy over all of Shropshire with outbreaks becoming increasingly common. There was fierce debate about the role of badgers and their culling.

EU membership was a hotly debated topic. In 2015 the single payment subsidy to farmers was replaced by the new "Basic Payments Scheme" which removed incentives for particular crops.

The debate on the EU culminated in the Brexit Referendum of 2016 and instituted an interminable series of negotiations and political crises.

2019

At Lighteach with the family becoming increasingly old the decision to sell the buildings and their surroundings was made. As a preliminary to the sale planning permission was sought to convert the buildings to homes and this was granted.



2020's A New Dawn

2020

2020 started with talk about a new disease called Covid. Within weeks there was a global pandemic and people were told to stay at home. The pandemic was met with stoicism at Lighteach and life carried on as normal.

In early 2021 Lighteach was put on the market through an estate agent. The author visited the farm and immediately knew that he wanted to purchase the property. The discussions were all positive but somehow the red tape surrounding the purchase dragged on and on and so it wasn't until August 2021 that completion occurred

The idea was to convert the the redundant buildings into luxury new homes and do some kind of a conversion to the house. We decided to seek some new planning permissions but the process seemed to take forever and so in in mid 2022 we decided to implement some of the existing planning permissions and by the end of 2022 to to refurbish the house.

This all adds up to a new beginning for Lighteach with a rejuvenation and new people who want to make a better life for themselves in the glorious countryside of Shropshire. The new barn conversions will be available for purchase in early 2023 and the development should be complete by 2025.



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If there are any errors please let me know and I will make corrections in future publications.

Bibliography

I have consulted many sources in the preparation of this time-line including the British Newspaper Archive and Farmers Weekly.

I have relied on two main publications for information they are:-

A History of Prees – Published 1996 by Mary Preston (referenced by (1) within the text)

The Story of Edward Walley, His Life and Times 1886 - 1954, - Published 2018 by Andrew W Kohn (referenced by (2) within the text)

There is an excellent source of information on cheesemaking at Lighteach here <http://britishagriculture.blogspot.com/2016/01/making-farmhouse-cheshire-cheese.html>



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