

260 agricultural labourers over 10 years old. Times were hard and children had to supplement the family income.

In 1835 there were about 20 farms in Melbourn which included 8 owned by John and Wortham Hitch (4 each). Of the 150 landholders only 120 had a cottage and Common rights. There were 3,400 acres of arable land, 215 acres of meadow and pasture, and 850 acres of Common and waste – both the heathland, and the marshy meadows in the east needed improvement. A three course rotation was in practice, but land owned by Peterhouse College, Cambridge, was farmed on a four course rotation. Melbourn had 1,600 sheep and only 50 cows, but very little meadow in 1838.

Enclosure comes to Melbourn

Conditions for the agricultural labourer were desperate. The end of the Napoleonic Wars meant that many ex-soldiers were unemployed. Grain prices fell and farmers lowered wages. A landlord-dominated Parliament passed the *Corn Laws* which prevented the import of grain until the price of English wheat reached 80s a quarter.

A steep rise in the price of bread and flour during

For Sale

Growing Crops of Corn and Farming stock to be sold by auction by Thomas Cockett. All the growing crops of wheat, barley, oats, peas, tares and trefoil; also a narrow wheel wagon, 2 dung carts, farming implements, cart and plough harness, and effects, the property of Mrs. Wedd, at Melbourn in the County of Cambridge. Credit will be given for the corn and trefoil till Christmas next, on approved security.

Royston Crow 25th July 1817

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

Against Enclosure

The Proprietors and Occupiers of Lands and Estates in the parish of Melbourn, in the County of Cambridge, do hereby give notice that they object to and will oppose an application intended to be made by GB White to Parliament, in the next session, for leave to bring in a Bill to obtain an Act for dividing, allotting and inclosing the open field lands, commons and commonable places within the said parish of Melbourn, as injurious to their several and respective interests.

Cambridge Chronicle 18th September 1818

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

the post war depression led to violence. Riots broke out in 1816 in demand for higher wages and many labourers destroyed agricultural machinery, which was depriving labourers of jobs.

At the other end of the scale, the larger landowners wanted to employ more scientific methods of farming, which could only be done if the land was enclosed. For this, an Act of Parliament was necessary. To enforce it, the consent of 75 percent of the owners of the land in each district had to be obtained, and as there were a large number of landowners in Melbourn, this took time. When, finally, consent was obtained, a notice was pinned to the church door in Melbourn, for three successive Sundays in August and September, to allow people to prepare their objections. The application was also published in local newspapers.

A petition was sent to Parliament asking for a Private Bill. Opponents sent up a counter petition, but stood little chance of being considered. Finally, the Bill was pushed through Parliament and became law in 1839.

The Commissioners, Thomas Uttond, Anthony Jackson and A Walford arrived in the village on 1st



Above, an Enclosure receipt and below, part of the 1839 Enclosure map

