



## ECONOMIC HISTORY

### Overview

Kirby Bellars is a rural parish and has never been a major manufacturing or service location. Throughout its history, the main economic activity has been farming. An important feature in the 19th and early 20th centuries was the development of foxhunting.<sup>1</sup>

The parish has been well served by road, water and rail transport facilities. Since at least the mid-nineteenth century, a shop provided basic provisions and later a post office was included but both have now closed.<sup>2</sup> The Flying Childers Inn was established on Main Road next to Kirby Hall in the eighteenth century and was relocated to its present position in 1905.<sup>3</sup>

### Farming

#### *Medieval farming*

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<sup>1</sup> TNA, RG 13/3012, 109.

<sup>2</sup> Melville & Co, *Dir. Leics* (1854), 159; *Kelly's Dir., Leics & Rutland* (1912), 113.

<sup>3</sup> *Melton Times*, 14 Jun 1985, Oral testimony from David Wheeler.

In 1086 Kirby had 17 carucates (27 per cent) out of the total of nearly 70 carucates, held by Geoffrey de Wirce in the eight ‘parishes’ of the manor of Melton, but none of the manor’s 84 a. meadow was in Kirby.<sup>4</sup> It is probable that Kirby had a good share of Melton manor’s 48 ploughs, 100 freemen, 10 villeins and 13 bordars. Another seven carucates of land and 20 a. of meadow in Kirby were held by Ralph of Geoffrey de Wirce.<sup>5</sup> Ralph had three ploughs and there were also six villeins and four bordars with another plough. On the death of John of Kirby in 1290, it was noted that the entire demesne meadow was within the headlands of the arable fields.<sup>6</sup>

In 1316 Roger Beler I founded a chantry for two chaplains, which was enlarged to a collegiate chapel in 1319. His initial grant included the rent of eight quarters and a half of maslin (*mixtilio*), the earliest indication we have that rye was grown in Kirby.<sup>7</sup> His second grant included 200 sheep, 12 oxen, 12 horses, 16 cows and a bull, 12 swine, six ploughs and two carts, together with utensils for a brew house and a bake house. The deed describes the original endowment as now comprising ‘three carucates of land sown, with the whole of the hay adjacent’. The word ‘adjacent’ may either refer to meadow being on the headlands, or possibly that some of the land had been taken from the open fields of the village and enclosed.<sup>8</sup> The number of sheep for a four-virgate holding with little or no additional meadow is suggestive that some of the land may have been given over to permanent pasture by 1319.

An undated rental of the priory land from the reign of Edward III lists the names of holders, the ‘lands’ and virgates rented in the open fields, and rent paid. The ‘lord’ of the

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<sup>4</sup> A. Williams and G.H. Martin (eds.), *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London, 2002), 643, 644.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *VCH Leics.* II, 162.

<sup>7</sup> Hamilton Thompson, ‘Chapel of St Peter’, 155; *Cal. Pat.* 1313-17, 438; LA, DIOC/REG/3, ff 211-213 (1316).

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton Thompson, ‘Chapel’, 183; LA, DIOC/REG/3, ff. 340-344 (1319).

manor, Lady Beler, was a considerable holder, paying 98s 1/2d for about 35 a. with 30 acres outside the open fields and 5a. scattered through the open fields.<sup>9</sup> Ralph Leyk held 62 a., including two 30 a. lots which were not in the three open fields. There were 13 other holders, none having more than 6 acres in total.

In 1359 the chapel became Kirby Priory and control passed to the Augustinian abbey at Owston.<sup>10</sup> The original 40s. of rent in Kirby in 1316 was described as derived from free tenants in 1359.<sup>11</sup> At the Dissolution in 1535-6 the 'servants' of the Priory included 16 yeomen, 17 field labourers, a dairywoman and two pensioners, suggesting a substantial farming enterprise.<sup>12</sup> These were not necessarily all employed in Kirby: as well as the manor of Buckminster, the priory also owned land in the parishes of Thurmaston and Belgrave.<sup>13</sup>

We know a little more about peasant farming from the inventory of the goods of John Smyth of Kirby Bellars, who was hanged at Leicester in 1375. Although we do not know the size of his holding, he had eight horses, eight oxen of his own with another thirteen obtained by theft, three pigs and a bound cart for eight horses. He also had £28 owed to him by eight people.<sup>14</sup> Of course, even discounting the stolen items, this list may not have been typical of a 14th-century peasant farmer.

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<sup>9</sup> TNA, SC 12/10/8, priory rental.

<sup>10</sup> A. Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel of St Peter at Kirby upon Wreake', *Trans. LAHS* 16 (1929-31), 208; LA, DIOC/REG/9, ff. 372d-373d (1359).

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 153, 209; LA, DIOC/REG/9, ff. 372d-373d (1359)..

<sup>12</sup> Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 152; *L&P Hen. VIII*, x, 496.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton Thompson, 'Chapel', 209-10; LA, DIOC/REG/9, ff 372d-373d (1359).

<sup>14</sup> *VCH Leics.* II, 167, citing *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, III, 376.

The 1381 poll tax return includes the occupations of 43 males, of whom 28 (65 per cent) were engaged in farming: 22 husbandmen, five ploughmen and one shepherd. There were also five taxpayers described as workmen, who may have been agricultural labourers.<sup>15</sup> A description provided on the death of Robert Swillington in 1391 informs us that the manor comprised four carucates in the open fields, 30 a. of meadow and two pastures, including 'a several pasture called le Clos'. A few years later the bailiff's accounts suggest that the four carucates were in fact demesne land, which could be farmed directly by the lord, although variable amounts were leased out each year (see below). The rents of the villeins in 1391 amounted to £7 16s. 0d. per annum.<sup>16</sup>

Although rich documentation, such as fine rolls and patent rolls, survives for many medieval and later land transactions in Kirby, these often include land in other villages, and contain little information about farming practices or the size of holdings.<sup>17</sup> One grant suggests that individual holdings in the three fields were not necessarily equal in size, with an 8¾ a. holding comprising 2 1/8 a. in Westfield in 7 parcels, 4 3/8 a. in Middlefield in 11 parcels and 2¼ a. in Eastfield in 7 parcels. Unfortunately, the date is uncertain, as the information survives only in a copy made in 1484.<sup>18</sup>

These demesne accounts give details of the cropping in 1395-6, 1399-1400 and 1406-7, and show land scattered through 120 named furlongs of the three open fields.<sup>19</sup> Very few of those furlong names have continued into modern times, but those which have survived

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<sup>15</sup> C. Fenwick (ed.), *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381, I, Beds-Leics* (New York, 1998), 500.

<sup>16</sup> TNA, C136/73/8.

<sup>17</sup> See Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, 105-130.

<sup>18</sup> H.L. Gray, *English Field Systems* (1959 edn.), 472 citing Cott. MS Nero CXI f 59b.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, SC6/908/23, 24 and 27: Min. Account Roll, 1395-6, 1399-1400, 1406-7. See also R. H. Hilton, *The Economic Development of some Leicestershire Estates in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (1947), 153-6.

suggest that each of the three fields extended as a narrow band from the meadows in the north to the southern boundary of the parish. For example, Middlefield had Hampton Gate, a name that still exists in fields near the Quorn Hunt Headquarters.<sup>20</sup> The southern parts of the three open fields were a long way from the village, and the need to reduce travel time may explain the medieval moated site near present-day Ashby Pastures Farm.<sup>21</sup>

The total amount of arable land in demesne in 1406-7 was about 360 a. including fallow land.<sup>22</sup> A considerable, but variable, amount of this was let out each year when needed for neither crops nor pasture. The arrangements were complex and demonstrate the flexibility that could exist within a three-field system.<sup>23</sup> For example in 1406-7, nearly 47 a. in Westfield was let, together with 7a. in Middlefield. As a result, the total amount of land that the lord of the manor cropped in that year was 168 acres, about 47 per cent of the total demesne arable land. Peas were the main crop, occupying 39 per cent of the area, barley took up 13 per cent, wheat ten per cent, oats five per cent and 33 per cent was sown as temporary pasture. In contrast, in 1395/6 171 a. of demesne land was cropped, and 253 a. in 1399/1400. It is not clear what the arrangements for leasing were in those two years. As mentioned above, there was also some permanent pasture and meadow in demesne.

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<sup>20</sup> ROLLR, FNS, Frisby and Kirby Women's Institute Field-name survey 1974.

<sup>21</sup> R.F. Hartley, *The Medieval Earthworks of North-East Leicestershire* (1987), 11, 34.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, SC6/908/23, 24 and 27: Min. Account Roll, 1395-6, 1399-1400, 1406-7.

<sup>23</sup> Hilton, *Economic Development*, 152.

As the demesne land was scattered throughout the open fields, it is likely that others were cropping on a similar basis. Furlongs varied in size from about 10 a. to over 30 a. The amount of demesne land within each furlong ranged from three roods to nearly 16 a.

By 1420, Sir Robert de Swillington still held the four carucates of arable land that his grandfather had held in 1391, but the amount of meadow had increased from 30 a. to 40 a. The rents from free tenants amounted to £4 per annum and the villeins and cottars paid a total of £3 14s,<sup>24</sup> compared with from the £7 16s 0d rent received from villeins in 1391.<sup>25</sup> This reduction may be simply due to the variation in the amount of demesne land leased each year.

#### *Farming between 1536 and 1750*

The dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 transferred what may have been a single block of land outside the open fields into lay hands. A licence of 1548 concerning the priory lands mentions closes of land and pasture called le Barnclose, le Overbromehill, le Netherbromehill, le Gore and le Ley Close, containing just over 28 a., meadows called Watermylle Close, le Farre Close and a close of pasture called le Convent Close. This was granted to Lord John Grey of Pirgo, together with 312 a. in the three open fields.<sup>26</sup> In 1573 his widow Mary and her sons conveyed this and other properties to Thomas Markham esquire. The estate comprised 100 messuages, 20 tofts, a watermill, a windmill, 20 dovehouses, 100 gardens, 2,000 a. of land, 500 a. of meadow, 1,000 a. of pasture, 20

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<sup>24</sup> TNA, C 138/48/71: inq. p. m. 1420.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, C136/73/8

<sup>26</sup> *Cal. Pat.* 1548, 277.

a. of wood, 500 a. of furze and heath and £10 rent in Kirby Bellars.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that some of this estate was in other parishes, as the total number of acres exceeds the area of the Kirby parish.

At the inquisition on depopulation at Leicester in 1607, Thomas Markham was cited for the decay of two houses of husbandry and the conversion of 80 a. of arable land to pasture in Kirby.<sup>28</sup>

In the sixteenth century, probate inventories throw further insight into the economies of the local farms.<sup>29</sup> Barley was grown more extensively than in 1400 at the expense of peas and beans, which were still important. No root crops were listed, even as seed. For example, in 1551, Robert Dalby had 11 a. of barley, 16 a. of peas, 4 a. of wheat and one of rye, a total of 32 a. of crops, suggesting 48 a. of arable land. In 1558, Thomas Kempe had 11 a. of barley and 12 a. of peas on his land, together with 3a. of wheat and rye, suggesting a total arable area of around 40 a. In addition there would have been pasture and meadow, producing a total farm size of perhaps around 60 a.<sup>30</sup>

The sample of seven inventories from 1541 to 1558 suggests that the arable and pastoral sides of the industry were of equal importance.<sup>31</sup> Although sheep were more numerous than cattle, the average total value of the cattle was nearly 27 per cent of the farm goods, whereas the sheep took up only 7.7 per cent. There were nearly always pigs and poultry

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<sup>27</sup> TNA, CP 25/2/166/2605/15, 16 ELIZ1MICH.

<sup>28</sup> L.A. Parker 'The depopulation returns for Leicestershire in 1607', *TLAS*, XXIII (ii) (1947), 254; TNA, C 205: Chancery: Special Commissions of Inquiry, James I; TNA, STAC 8/17/16, James I.

<sup>29</sup> ROLLR, wills & inventories (W & I), Thomas Pare 1541, Richard Jesson 1546, William Gerves 1548/9, Richard Frankes 1549, Robert Dalby 1551, Thomas Kempe 1558 G-O, Thomas Walker 1558 P-Z.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

in the farmyard and a bacon flitch hanging from the ceiling of one of the rooms. At least two of the seven farmers were still using oxen for draught purposes, but most farmers were finding horses easier to manage.<sup>32</sup>

At first in the sixteenth century, the farmhouses consisted of one-storey buildings, each with a main living room called the 'hall' or 'house' and a 'parlour', which usually served as a bedroom.<sup>33</sup> Most had separate kitchens, which may have been in detached buildings. Increasingly in the sixteenth century, upper floors were inserted to make separate sleeping 'chambers' as the standard of living improved, at least for some of the farmers. Nearly all the farmhouses had utensils for brewing beer from some of the barley they grew. To supplement their incomes some farms had spinning wheels for wool and/or linen, although there is no evidence that flax was grown at this time in the parish.<sup>34</sup>

When De la Fontaine (I) purchased the priory lands in 1603, the copyholders of the former Priory estate had held land by indenture which, with one exception, had expired.<sup>35</sup> This exception was for three lives and amounted to about 55 a. The total holding was 1,500 a., with 600 a. in demesne and another 210 a. held by freeholders. There were also several cottages, each with pasture for two beasts and a follower, and six sheep. The 'parsonage' was rented at £100 per annum, but this must refer to the advowson or the tithes, and not a building. The total holding was valued at £16,519 16s. 0d. and produced

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> MS on de la Fontaine 1603 purchase of ex-priory land was in possession of Wm Herrick Esq. of Beaumanor in 1794: J. Nichols, *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1795, reprinted 1971), II, 231.

an annual income of £540 5s. 1d.<sup>36</sup> The ex-Priory tenants' acres in the three open fields had been laid so that every one had his own land lying together and in May 1603, by consent of the freeholders, the lands were severed and inclosed. The figures may include land in other parishes such as Buckminster-cum-Sewstern, which had belonged to the Priory.<sup>37</sup>

After de la Fontaine (II) acquired the manor in 1622, he built a mansion house and created a park, probably of over 100 a.,<sup>38</sup> by destroying much of that part of the village in the vicinity of the former Beler manor house and the former priory.<sup>39</sup> Also the final inclosure of the open fields heralded a major change in the farming practices of the parish, with the mixed farming of the open field system giving way to predominantly pastoral farming. It also resulted in a serious population loss, and de la Fontaine (II) was fined £500 for depopulation in 1636.<sup>40</sup> It is likely that the crucial year was 1635 when the bishop's transcript of the parish register shows no entries. Fourteen surnames that had appeared regularly in the register before 1635 no longer appeared after this date.<sup>41</sup> From 1636 to 1639 the occupations of 36 adults were written in the register and 17 were in farming. There was only one husbandman, one yeoman and one shepherd, but 13 were labourers.

In 1662 the land use on the estate of de la Fontaine (II) had changed substantially from 1622, when he acquired the manor. The 2,000 a. of arable land in 1622 had been reduced

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> OS Map 1:2500 sheet XIX. 12 (1903 edn).

<sup>39</sup> Nichols, *History*, II, 231.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> ROLLR, ID41/3, bishop's transcripts of parish register, 1631-40.

to 100 a., whereas the 300 a. of pasture had been increased to 1,400 a., although it is possible that some of this land was in Asfordby or Frisby on the Wreake.<sup>42</sup> In a sample of ten probate inventories of farms from 1634 to 1664, eight had no wheat, barley, peas or beans in field or store at all.<sup>43</sup> On average the value of these crops as a proportion of all farm goods dropped from 37 per cent in the previous century to 7.5 per cent. On the other hand, the value of sheep and cattle together rose from 34 per cent to 78 per cent of farm goods.

These inventories also indicate the much greater wealth of those whose goods were appraised, than in the previous century. The term 'yeoman' was in increasing use as some of the farmers improved their standards of living. The average number of rooms in farmhouses increased from 3.5 on average before the inclosures to 4.4 afterwards, with most farms now with upstairs chambers. Thomas Floore in 1635 and John Andrewe the shepherd in 1640 both had butteries for brewing beer and dairies including cheese-making equipment. John Shippye also had a buttery in 1637. The mention of dairies suggests that there may have been a change from an emphasis on beef to milk production.

After 1770 the building of isolated farmsteads in the fields away from the village was a major development, which can be traced by studying Prior's map of 1777 and early Ordnance Survey maps.<sup>44</sup> A crop return for 1794 lists eight 'growers of grain' on a total

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<sup>42</sup> Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, 128, 130; TNA, CP25/2/313/1JASIMICH 1622 and CP25/2/677/14CHASIITRIN 1662.

<sup>43</sup> ROLLR, probate inventories of Richard Ragge PR/I/36/136, Thomas Floore PR/I/37/188, Robert Wright PR/I/38/106, John Bishop PR/I/39/247, John Shippye PR/I/39/227, Randle Hart PR/I/39/236, Robert Trentham PR/I/42/22, John Andrewe PR/I/42/148, Edward Ellwood PR/I/43/21, William Franke PR/I/51/17, Thomas Smith PR/I/51/22, John Cooke PR/I/62/20.

<sup>44</sup> J.D. Welding (ed.), *Leicestershire in 1777: An Edition of John Prior's Map of Leicestershire* (1984), 26; British Library, Melton Mowbray area, two-inch to one mile surveyors' map, 1816.

of 93 a.<sup>45</sup> Of the 93 a. wheat occupied 15 per cent, barley 49 per cent, oats 29 per cent and beans six per cent. In the following year the same eight farmers grew grain crops on 135.5 a. in roughly the same proportions, although wheat had increased at the expense of barley.

In 1801 only 247 of Kirby's 2,730 a. were arable.<sup>46</sup> Wheat was the most important crop occupying 38 per cent of the small arable acreage, with barley at 28 per cent, and turnips taking 12.5 per cent. There were also small acreages of peas, beans and oats. The high proportion of pasture throughout the whole area made it very suitable country for hunting. The 1848 tithe award gives a figure of 22 per cent arable for the 1,030 acres of First Schedule land, where the owners were the impropiators of all tithes.<sup>47</sup>

In 1866 arable land occupied 1,193 acres or 44 per cent of the farm land of the parish.<sup>48</sup> This percentage appears to show an increase in the proportion of arable land in the previous 18 years, but the tithe award of 1848 does not include all the farm land in the parish. On the arable land in 1866 wheat occupied 34 per cent, barley 17 per cent, oats 15 per cent, beans 13 per cent, peas 5 per cent, root crops 6 per cent, and 7 per cent was uncropped. There were also 474 cattle, including 137 milk cows, 1,570 sheep and 152 pigs.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> ROLLR, QS 28/119.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, H.O. 671'15; W.G.Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire crop returns of 1801', in W.G. Hoskins, ed., *Leicestershire Agrarian History* (1949), 127-153.

<sup>47</sup> ROLLR, DE 682/3/2, Kirby Bellars tithe award 1848.

<sup>48</sup> ROLLR, MF 174 (MAF 68/40).

<sup>49</sup> ROLLR, MF 174 (MAF 68/39).

In 1880 the return showed a decrease in the **proportion** of arable land from 44 per cent in 1866 to 31 per cent of the farm acreage. The total farm acreage listed had fallen from 2748.5 acres in 1866 to 2108 acres in 1880. The crop percentages that were listed were similar to those of 1866. Cattle numbers were now 644 with sheep numbers were also up to 1601. On the other hand pigs numbers had declined to 90.<sup>50</sup>

In 1910 the return showed a further decline to 1,149.5 acres in the total farm acreage listed.<sup>51</sup> Of this total acreage the arable land occupied 45 per cent. Wheat was still the most important crop at 28 per cent of the arable acreage. The area of barley declined as oats increased. Cattle numbers had increased again to 723, including 133 dairy cows. Numbers of sheep and lambs also increased to 1,758 whereas pig numbers remained the same.

A much fuller return of 1914 showed a total of 2456 acres with considerable increase in grassland to 85 percent. However the numbers of cattle and sheep did not change greatly at 720 and 1512 respectively. There were 100 horses. Wheat occupied 148.5 acres, which was 62 percent of the total arable land.<sup>52</sup>

By the 1930s practically the whole of the Melton Mowbray area was grassland.<sup>53</sup> An agricultural return for 1927 shows that only 7 per cent of farmland in Kirby was arable.<sup>54</sup>

There were 1645 sheep and 944 cattle, 312 specifically for dairy purposes. There is no

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<sup>50</sup> ROLLR, MF 174 (MAF 68/172).

<sup>51</sup> ROLLR, MF 177 (MAF 68/2414).

<sup>52</sup> ROLLR, MF 177 (MAF 68/16).

<sup>53</sup> Dudley Stamp Survey, Geographical Publications Ltd, Land Use Survey of Britain 1:63360 Sheet 63 Leicester, 1931-5.

<sup>54</sup> ROLLR, MF 177 (MAF 68/3356).

doubt that milk production was an important feature. The sale particulars of the manorial estate in 1918 shows that both Kirby Lodge Farm on Dalby Road and Kirby Gate Farm had dairies and cheese rooms.<sup>55</sup> There were also dairies at the Manor House and Church Cottage, both occupied by graziers in the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

Land tax documents from the 1770s indicate that the people who actually farmed the land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were mainly tenants of a few absentee landlords, but as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed the number of proprietors and holdings increased and some farmers and graziers also owned the land they farmed.<sup>57</sup> The 1908 valuation list, for the Melton Mowbray Poor Law Union, has 50 proprietors with 56 holdings, although many properties were quite small.<sup>58</sup> The lord of the manor held a quarter of the agricultural land, which was valued at about 21 per cent of the total for the parish. Ten years later the manorial estate was split up and sold.<sup>59</sup>

In the 1851 census there were seven 'graziers' with farms mostly under 60 a., though Thomas Adcock at Park Farm had 225 a.<sup>60</sup> The eleven 'farmers' tended to have larger acreages, the largest being the 300 a. of William Chandler, at what is now Hillcrest Farm. Another eleven people were described as 'cottagers' mostly living in Main Street and renting a few acres of land. Approximately twenty heads of house worked as 'agricultural labourers' or 'farm servants'. Altogether 78 per cent of adult males were working the land. In 1901 the proportion in farming had dropped to 56 per cent, although another 21 per

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<sup>55</sup> ROLLR, DE 3177/102, Sale particulars of Kirby manor 1918.

<sup>56</sup> Nthts RO, FS 52/12 inventory of Manor House; oral testimony.

<sup>57</sup> ROLLR, QS 62/170 land tax documents 1773 to 1832 and DE 8012/47 for 1837.

<sup>58</sup> ROLLR, DE 558/29, Kirby Bellars valuation list 1908.

<sup>59</sup> ROLLR, DE 3177/102, Sale particulars of Kirby manor 1918.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, HO 107/209, 62 Census 1851.

cent were grooms looking after horses in stables at Kirby Hall and Sanham House on the Great Dalby Road.<sup>61</sup>

From 1813, the occupations of the fathers of one or more children in the Anglican baptism register reveal the trends right up to the present day.<sup>62</sup> Over 70 per cent of the fathers were in farming in each decade throughout the nineteenth century, with rather more labourers than farmers and graziers. The peak decade was the 1840s, with 86 per cent engaged in farming. After that, the figure fluctuated but was still 53 per cent in the 1950s and 18 per cent in the 1980s. Since 1989 the register has no baptisms involving the farming community. Of the 74 Kirby children who attended Frisby Junior School from 1937 to 1946 the proportion of fathers who were farmers or farm labourers was 36 per cent.<sup>63</sup>

If we look at the farming landscape today it is obvious that the land is much more arable than the 1930s. In 1937 an agricultural return for the combined parish of Frisby and Kirby produced a figure of 94 percent grassland.<sup>64</sup> Wheat was the main arable crop. There were 1253 cattle with 63 percent reared for dairy purposes in particular and the rest for beef. There were 2324 sheep, 123 pigs and 95 horses.

A considerable amount of pastureland was ploughed during the Second World War when extra home-grown food was needed. A set of returns in 1941 for 22 individual farms and smallholdings, totaling 1886 a., in the Kirby part of the combined parish show the effect

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, RG 13/3012, 109 Census 1901.

<sup>62</sup> Parish registers 1813 to present, in the parish chest.

<sup>63</sup> Frisby on the Wreake Primary School Log Book 1912-1980 (in private hands).

<sup>64</sup> TNA, MAF 68/3836.

of the directives from the War Agricultural Executive Committee.<sup>65</sup> At least 13 grass fields were ploughed to produce crops of oats, kale, wheat and potatoes in 1940 and this was increased to 20 fields in 1941. There were a few minor discrepancies in the figures, but proportion of farmland under grass in 1941 was certainly reduced since 1937 to about 70 percent of the total farm land. Oats had increased significantly to become the main arable crop, although wheat was a close second. Practically all the farmers were tenants.

After the War some but not all of the ploughed land reverted to pasture. Since then, the development of more powerful machinery has enabled the heavy, clay soils to be ploughed and cultivated more easily. A land use survey undertaken by this writer in summer 1991 indicated that 55 per cent of Kirby Bellars parish (pre-1936 area) was under grass for grazing sheep and cattle and for producing hay crops. In a more recent survey by this writer, taken in 2011, grass covered 61 per cent of the parish (pre-1936 area) and arable crops occupied 36 per cent. Oil seed rape was the main arable crop on 18 per cent of the parish, followed by wheat with 10 per cent.

In the 1990s nine farmsteads and their fields could be identified within the parish boundary, and in three more cases the farmsteads were in the adjacent parishes of Frisby on the Wreake, Great Dalby and former Eye Kettleby (now part of Melton Mowbray).<sup>66</sup> There were several scattered holdings, mainly pasture land, particularly close to the village. In 2013 there were only four remaining establishments that could be described as farms. They were Hillcrest Farm, Windyridge Farm, Sanham Farm and Kirby Lodge Farm on the Great Dalby Road. There have been several cases of farmsteads and small

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<sup>65</sup> TNA:PRO MAF 32/382/283, farm nos. 13, 14, 18-21, 24-5, 27, 29-31, 33-4, 37, 40-1, 43-4, 49, 51-2.

<sup>66</sup> Oral testimony of David Woodward, ex-farmer at Windyridge Farm.

amounts of land being acquired for breeding and keeping of horses for racing, hunting and general recreation. This has happened at Kirby Gate Farm, Cream Gorse Farm, Windmill Farm, and to some extent at Brockleys. The remainder of the land of these farms has been merged with the land of other farms.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Nursery**

In 1978 a wholesale tree and shrub nursery was established by Stewart St John at the northern end of the village, on land which had originally belonged to the Manor House.<sup>68</sup>

In 2013 the nursery occupies about 30 a., including the recent acquisition of the field called Brummells to the north of the churchyard.<sup>69</sup>

### **Woodland**

There is no mention of any woodland in the parish in 1086. The treasurer's roll taken at the time of the dissolution states that the priory had 'wodds growinge upon the demeanes in severall places',<sup>70</sup> but this woodland was not necessarily in Kirby Bellars. No other reference to woodland in the medieval parish has been found, and no woodland is shown in Prior's county map of 1777.<sup>71</sup> By 1835, a fox covert called Cream Gorse had been created in the south-west corner of the parish, which is still there today.<sup>72</sup> Another small area of trees has become established on the railway embankment to the east of Main

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Oral testimony from Stewart St John; ROLLR, DE 3177/102, Sale particulars of Kirby manor 1918.

<sup>69</sup> Oral testimony of owner and OS Map 1:2500 sheet XIX. 12 (1903 edn).

<sup>70</sup> M.E.C. Walcott, 'Chantries of Leicestershire and the Inventory of Olneaton', *AASR&P*, X (1870), between pp. 330-1.

<sup>71</sup> *Domesday* 643, 644; ROLLR DG 9/Ma/LI [DG 9/2727].

<sup>72</sup> OS Map 1:63360, sheet LXIII (1835 edn).

Street and altogether trees now occupy about 0.9 per cent of the parish, excluding the nursery.

## **Crafts and Manufacturing**

There has never been any large scale manufacturing. However there were a few people who engaged in non-farming occupations and the farming community was involved in processing its produce.

### *Mills*

Domesday Book makes no mention of a water mill in the parish, but both water mills and windmills are mentioned in 1316, and appear regularly in medieval documents thereafter.<sup>73</sup> At the dissolution of the priory there was a watermill and also a small mill in its possession, the former not necessarily in Kirby, but the latter ‘withen the precyncte off the monasterie’.<sup>74</sup> In 1573 Thomas Markham, lord of the manor, also had a watermill and windmill, which may have been the ones attached to the Priory. Maps produced by the Melton Mowbray Navigation before canalisation show what appear to be mill features near the river, and a small circular lake today in the north of Kirby Park may have been the millpond.<sup>75</sup> However the construction of the railway in 1846 probably destroyed most of the evidence. Aerial photographs suggest post windmills stood to the south of Main

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<sup>73</sup> *Domesday*, 643, 644; Hamilton Thompson, ‘Chapel’, 155; *Cal. Pat.* 1313-17, 438; Lincolnshire Archives., DIOC/REG/3, ff. 211-213 (1316), Farnham, *Medieval Village Notes*, 106; *Cal. Pat.* 1548, 277.

<sup>74</sup> M.E.C. Walcott, ‘Chantries of Leicestershire and the Inventory of Olneaton’, *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, X (1870), between pp. 330-1.

<sup>75</sup> ROLLR, DE 336/11A, Jessop’s plan for the Melton Mowbray Navigation, 1790.

Road at the top of the slope between the Thorpe Satchville Road and Gaddesby Lane.<sup>76</sup>

They also show the line of an ancient track, which was probably the Windmill Gate of the manorial bailiffs' accounts.<sup>77</sup> The *inquisition post mortem* of Roger Swillington of 1391 mentions the windmills outside the moat of his capital messuage, which was probably in what is now Kirby Park.<sup>78</sup> There are still two artificial mounds just outside a moat there today, although some archaeologists interpret them as Tudor 'prospect mounds' for viewing the gardens.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Other trades***

The poll tax of 1381 listed a butcher, a spinner, a wright and three tailors.<sup>80</sup> The parish registers give information about the occupations of 36 parishioners from 1636 to 1639.<sup>81</sup> They included two blacksmiths, a cooper, a miller, a slater, a tiler, a tallow chandler, two tailors and four weavers including a silk weaver. Contemporary probate inventories show that farmers often supplemented their incomes with spinning and even weaving of wool and/or linen.<sup>82</sup> Some farmers had butteries for brewing beer and dairies with cheese-making facilities. It has been suggested that the forerunner of Stilton cheese was made in the parish, perhaps by the daughter of Sir Erasmus de la Fontaine.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs, ANW 24.

<sup>77</sup> TNA, SC6/908/23, 24 and 27: Min. Account Roll, 1395-6, 1399-1400, 1406-7.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, C136/73/8.

<sup>79</sup> Hartley, *Medieval Earthworks*, 11, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Fenwick (ed.), *Poll Taxes*, 500.

<sup>81</sup> ROLLR, MF 585 bishops' transcripts on microfilm.

<sup>82</sup> ROLLR, probate inventories of Thomas Floore PR/I/37/188, John Bishop PR/I/39/247, John Shippye PR/I/39/227, Robert Trentham PR/I/42/22.

<sup>83</sup> *VCH Leics.* II, 233; W.G. Hoskins, *Midland England: A Survey of the Country between the Chilterns and the Trent* (1949), 95-6; Hickman, *History of Stilton Cheese* 7, 12-14, 18, 20, 22.

In the 1841 census, most of the working population of the parish were engaged in agriculture or they worked as servants. The only craftsmen listed were a dairyman and a carpenter.<sup>84</sup> In 1851 there was a bracemaker, shoemaker, carpenter and worsted weaver.<sup>85</sup> In 1871 there was a brewer and four female dressmakers, reduced to two in 1881.<sup>86</sup> In the 1891 and 1901 censuses there was only one craftsman, a carpenter, listed.<sup>87</sup>

The present parish registers give a useful guide to occupations of parishioners from 1813 although some of the occupations listed were conducted outside the parish, particularly after 1960.<sup>88</sup> The registers reveal that there were two framework knitters in the 1820s, a baker in the 1840s, a wheelwright in the 1850s, a blacksmith in the 1880s, a carpenter (see above) in the 1890s, and a cabinet maker in the first decade of the 20th century. The 1901 census lists three people working at the Holwell iron works at Asfordby Hill, and within living memory several other villagers walked to employment there.<sup>89</sup> There was a bootmaker/repairer in the 1940s and a blacksmith in both the 1930s and 1950s. The blacksmith's forge was part of a wheelwright's workshop at the back of the former Flying Childers Inn on Main Road. After that there are cases of residents working in crafts and manufacturing, such as factory hand, machine tool operator and sheet metal worker, but these occupations were not in the parish. Today there are two workshops at the back of Park Farm, one for repairing vehicles and the other, established in the 1970s, deals with carbon fibre moulding compounds.

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<sup>84</sup> TNA, HO 107/587, 24.

<sup>85</sup> TNA, HO 107/2091, 7.

<sup>86</sup> TNA, RG 10/3292, 21; TNA, RG 11/3181/94, 10.

<sup>87</sup> TNA, RG 12/2543; TNA, RG 13/3012, 109.

<sup>88</sup> Parish registers 1813 to present in the parish chest.

<sup>89</sup> TNA, RG 13/3012, 109.

## **Mining and quarrying**

There is some evidence that there was a certain amount of sand extraction in the medieval period. In the bailiffs' account rolls of Kirby manor from 1395 to 1407 a furlong in Westfield is called sanpittes (sand pits).<sup>90</sup> The most important site however is the Priory Water series of lakes, which resulted from gravel extraction in the Wreake flood plain in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>91</sup> The quarrying by Jelson was started in 1961 on the south-west side of Station Lane, an area that is now used for recreational fishing. In 1969 further extraction started on the north-east side of Station Lane and since the late 1980s this has been the focus of nature reserve run by the Leicestershire Wildfowlers' Association. The reserve extends over 81 ha. (200a.), including approximately 32 ha. (79 a.) of open water in the form of two large lakes and several smaller lakes and ponds. The list of plant and animal species that have been recorded is impressive.<sup>92</sup>

## **Services**

An account of roads, water transport and railways is to be found in the introductory chapter. Kirby was well-placed on the routes between Leicester and Melton Mowbray.

## **Roads**

The Main Road from Melton Mowbray to Leicester passes through the southern end of the village. When Roger Beler commissioned the building of a chantry chapel in 1316, specific mention was made of the economic advantage of building it close to this road in

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<sup>90</sup> TNA, SC6/908/23, 24 and 27: Min. Account Roll, 1395-6, 1399-1400, 1406-7.

<sup>91</sup> P.M.J. Shelton, *Priory Water Wildfowl Project* (2006).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

order to tap into passing traffic.<sup>93</sup> This in turn led to the development of a daughter settlement, or settlements, Westthorpe and Eastthorpe, since destroyed, in what is now Kirby Park. The road was a turnpike from 1764 to 1872 with a toll gate at the junction with the Thorpe Satchville Road. In 1872 the turnpike trust was closed as it was facing strong competition from the railway.<sup>94</sup> The Flying Childers Inn was and is in a good position to tap into passing trade. In 1901 there were a groom, a French motor mechanic and a 'lampist' (dealing with car or coach lights) living at the inn.<sup>95</sup> The inn was converted into cottages for servants at the Hall about 1904 and the present Flying Childers Inn was built further west.<sup>96</sup>

Nineteenth-century trade directories do not mention any carriers travelling from Kirby Bellars to Melton Mowbray, but presumably use was made of the cart, which passed along Main Road from Frisby on the Wreak, every Tuesday market day.<sup>97</sup> In the 1930s buses were introduced and today there is a regular service along Station Lane to Melton Mowbray and Leicester, with buses every 20 minutes during the day.<sup>98</sup> There is also another hourly service between Melton Mowbray and Leicester along Main Road.<sup>99</sup>

### ***Melton Mowbray Navigation***

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<sup>93</sup> LA, DIOC/REG/3, ff. 211-213 (1316).

<sup>94</sup> Annual Continuation Act (to expire 1 Nov 1872), 35-6 Vic., c.85.

<sup>95</sup> TNA, RG 13/3012, 109 Census 1901.

<sup>96</sup> Oral testimony from David Wheeler, *Melton Times*, 14 Jun 1985; A. Fox, *Kirby Bellars: a Parish History*, privately printed (1997), 11.

<sup>97</sup> W. White, *Hist. Gaz. and Dir. Leicestershire and Rutland* (Sheffield, 1846), 253.

<sup>98</sup> Oral testimony of older residents in the 1990s; service 5A, timetable at <http://www.arrivabus.co.uk> (accessed 2013).

<sup>99</sup> Service 128, timetable at <http://www.centrebus.info> (accessed 2013)

By far the most important cargoes by weight were coal going east, and corn and wool going west. There is no evidence that there was a purpose-built wharf at Kirby, and no coal was landed there in 1839 but 42 tons of coal were landed in 1840 and 40 tons in 1841.<sup>100</sup> The mean annual value of 27 tons for the three years 1839-41 was the second lowest of 11 sites on the Navigation. The coming of the railway was a severe blow to the fortunes of the company and the waterway finally closed by Act of Parliament on 1 August 1877.<sup>101</sup>

### ***Railway***

The railway from Syston to Peterborough opened in 1846 with a station, including a goods siding, in the parish on Station Lane. In 1868 eight passenger trains called there daily.<sup>102</sup> It was nearly a half-mile walk across to two fields to get to the station from Main Street and the distance on foot from the parish church area of Asfordby was one mile. From 1846 a railway station master and his family actually lived on site. In 1891 the 14 year old son was a porter. In the 1891 census of the parish there were also two railway labourers, a platelayer and an engine driver (possibly a farm engine however).<sup>103</sup> In 1901 seven Kirby residents worked on the railway; a stationmaster, signalman, two porters, a ganger and two platelayers.<sup>104</sup> In the mid-twentieth century the siding was used to bring

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<sup>100</sup> ROLLR, 3D42/4/23/8.

<sup>101</sup> Act for closure of Navigation, 40-1 Vic., c 78.

<sup>102</sup> W. White, *Hist. Gaz. and Dir. Leicestershire and Rutland* (Sheffield, 1868), 356.

<sup>103</sup> TNA, RG12/2543, census 1891.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, RG 13/3012, 109 Census 1901.

coal to Kirby, but no goods went out from there.<sup>105</sup> The station was closed to passengers in 1951 and finally for goods in 1964.<sup>106</sup>

### *Shops*

It is doubtful whether there would have been a shop in the modern sense in the medieval period, but three tailors and one butcher paid the Poll Tax in 1381.<sup>107</sup> The parish registers of 1636 to 1639 indicate the presence of two tailors, a tallow chandler and a victualler.<sup>108</sup> In the 1841 census, apart from a tailor and the publican at the Flying Childers Inn, there was no obvious shopkeeper.<sup>109</sup> In the 1854 Melville's trade directory there is mention of John Bowley, shopkeeper and carpenter, who was described as a 'carpenter and cottager of nine acres' in the 1851 census.<sup>110</sup> After 1854 there seems to have been one shop in the village until the later twentieth century.<sup>111</sup> A Post Office appears in a 1912 directory with Miss Sarah Randell as sub-postmistress.<sup>112</sup> From 1985 only the Post Office element remained and this closed in 2004. The village was also served by various mobile shops, at first horse-drawn and later motorised. In 2013 an Asfordby butcher still visited the village twice each week.

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<sup>105</sup> Oral testimony of older residents collected by author, 2014.

<sup>106</sup> J. Simmons, 'Railways', *VCH* 3 (1955), 125; Gough, *Midland Railway*, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Fenwick (ed.), *Poll Taxes*, 500.

<sup>108</sup> ROLLR, MF 585 bishops' transcripts.

<sup>109</sup> TNA, HO 107/587, 24

<sup>110</sup> Melville & Co., *Dir. Leics* (1854), 159; TNA, HO 107/2091, 7.

<sup>111</sup> *Drake's Dir., Leics & Rutland* (1861), 299; TNA, RG 10/3292, 21; TNA, RG11/3181/94, 10; TNA, RG 12/2543; oral/written testimonies reported in A. Fox & J. Luke (eds), *Kirby Bellars Remembered*, privately printed (1999), 14-15.

<sup>112</sup> *Kelly's Dir., Leics & Rutland* (1912), 113.

After 1962, Kirby Grange became variously a hotel, flats, an establishment for second-hand car sales, night club and a restaurant, but in 1995 the site was cleared to make way for a small housing estate called Priory View.<sup>113</sup> Nearby, on the corner of Main Road and Main Street, there was for 20 years a lorry park for Ritchie Transport of Melton Mowbray and an adjacent petrol station. These were replaced by eight mainly terrace-style houses in 2008.

In 2013, a large proportion of inhabitants are either retired or engaged in professional and managerial occupations. A company called Event Hire, providing tables and chairs for functions, was established at Ash Tree Farm (now Ash Trees) on Main Road in 1972. There is also a boarding kennel and cattery at former Kirby Hall Farm and a boarding kennel at White Lodge in Station Lane. Other businesses are run from home using computers and the internet. David Weston, professional artist, lived and worked at the end cottage next to Kirby Hall, from 1970 until his death at 75 years of age in 2010. The former wheelwright's workshop and blacksmith's forge formed part of his property and an inspiration for some of his work.

### **Fox hunting**

Part of the parish is occupied by the Quorn Hunt Headquarters and kennels, which were moved from near Barrow on Soar to Gaddesby Lane in 1991.<sup>114</sup> In the vicinity of the buildings there are three fields of pasture for grazing the horses. The first meet of the Hunt in November was traditionally held, since the 18th century, at Kirby Gate on the

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<sup>113</sup> Oral testimony of older residents.

<sup>114</sup> *Quorn Hunt: to Commemorate the Opening of the New Kennels at Kirby Bellars* (1991) (copy at Melton Mowbray Library, 799.259).

Main Road, and older residents remember it as a big event in the life of the village.<sup>115</sup> They recall hunting parties with rich and famous people, including royalty, staying at Kirby Hall, which was hired from Colonel and Mrs Muir for the season by wealthy people, such as the Vanderbilts. The social activity at Kirby Hall declined after the death of Colonel Muir in the 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War, and eventually the Hall was turned into flats around 1960.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the fact that the main hunting season only ran from November to April, the effect of hunting on employment can be seen in the 1901 April census, when 23 males were working with horses as grooms or stud grooms.<sup>117</sup> The two main 'hunting boxes' were Sanham House on the Great Dalby Road and Kirby Hall, but Kirby Cottage (later called Kirby Grange) was also hired for the season.<sup>118</sup> Park Farm was tenanted by a grazier but it also acted as a 'hunting box' for the owners, the Burdetts of Foremark in Derbyshire.<sup>119</sup> In 1901 at Kirby Hall stables there were nine grooms and another eight were at Sanham House. In addition there were the domestic servants, including butlers, cooks, coachmen, footmen, a scullery maid, kitchen maids and housemaids. Most of these people had come from other parts of Britain, even from abroad, including a French servant at Sanham House; a male French cook and three German grooms at Kirby Hall.

The 2004 ban on hunting foxes with dogs dealt a serious blow to the Hunt, but it still survives in a modified form with no loss of jobs. An obvious effect of the hunting activity

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid; oral testimony.

<sup>116</sup> M. Dawes (Mrs M. Forshaw), in A. Fox & J. Luke (eds), *Kirby Bellars Remembered*, privately printed (1999), 62.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, RG 13/3012, 109.

<sup>118</sup> *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, 11 Nov 1899.

<sup>119</sup> W. White, *Hist. Gaz. and Dir. Leicestershire and Rutland* (Sheffield, 1863), 356.

was the establishment of allied businesses, such as livery stables and stud farms, which today are still part of the parish economy, for example at Kirby Barn Farm, Kirby Gate Farm, Cream Gorse Farm, and to some extent at Brockleys. Racehorses as well as hunters are bred. There is also, at Loseby House on Main Road, the Equine Emporium for purchasing horses, ponies, tack and trailers. More general interest in equine pursuits is indicated by the grazing ponies and horses, which are a feature of the parish, particularly close to the village.

### **Servants**

There were undoubtedly servants on the farms and large houses, but we see little documentary evidence of them in the medieval and early modern periods. In the 1381 poll tax return, which is partly torn, there is no mention of the word ‘servant’, but there are no unmarried females on the list of legible names.<sup>120</sup> The parish registers from 1636 to 1639 give the occupations of 36 people and four were classed as servants.<sup>121</sup> In the 1841 census there were 45 servants listed in 15 households, out of 48 households altogether in the parish.<sup>122</sup> In nearly all these cases the heads of house were farmers or graziers. In the 1851 census, there were 37 servants listed, of whom 18 were specifically unmarried female house servants, usually teenagers, and two were female housekeepers.<sup>123</sup> There were 19 unmarried males classified as servants, all working on farms. The birthplaces of nearly all the servants were out of parish, but relatively nearby.

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<sup>120</sup> Fenwick (ed.), *Poll Taxes*, 500.

<sup>121</sup> ROLLR, MF 585, Kirby Bellars bishops’ transcripts.

<sup>122</sup> TNA, HO 107/587, 24.

<sup>123</sup> TNA:PRO HO 107/2091, 7.

In the 1891 census there were 14 female ‘domestic servants’, six female housekeepers and 16 male farm servants, but there were also more specialised servant occupations, such as butler and footman, appearing at Sanham House.<sup>124</sup> In each of the first two decades of the twentieth century four grooms appeared in the parish registers, and one in the 1920s along with a gardener and a chauffeur.<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately, the occupations of females only start to appear in the marriage register in 1935. From that year until 1940, three Kirby brides were described as servants but none appears after that.

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<sup>124</sup> TNA, RG12/2543.

<sup>125</sup> Parish registers 1813 to present in the parish chest.