

## OUTLYING FARMS

With the open field system before the Inclosure Act of 1812, farmsteads in Toft were clustered in the heart of the village, their plots and fields dis-aggregated in relatively small and spread allotments, obliging the working of plots separated from each other. A process of aggregation into larger and more connected parcels of land followed enclosure. The more efficient scale and pattern of holdings encouraged the establishment of new farmsteads embedded within the farmland more distant from the village centre. It led in the mid C19 to the establishment of the two isolated steadings at WoodBarn Farm and Wood Farm, adjacent to the northern boundary of the parish on Hardwick Hill, as similarly in the case of Bennell Farm on the Comberton boundary. A consequence of farming the upland was the necessity to bore for water, unlike the village centre farms, which are located on an aquiferous contour.

### WoodBarn Farm

The Farmstead is located adjacent to the south-east corner of Hardwick Wood. No evidence has been found to suggest that WoodBarn existed as a house or farm before the Inclosure Acts, which were implemented in Toft in the 1830s. The first farmhouse dwellings, two adjoining cottages, date from the 1840/1850s. It is possible that they were built by the Beldam Estate that may have owned the land.

No information is available of who owned and lived at WoodBarn during the 19th century, or what sort of farming was done. As the soil here is heavy, flinty clay, large-scale cultivation for arable crops would have been very difficult for animal power. Emphasis on livestock, with most fields grass for grazing or hay would have seemed likely. Intensive arable cropping became possible with the advent of motorised farming in the mid 20th century.

The earliest extant record of a tenancy is that of Mr Fred Barton c1917. In June 1948 WoodBarn Farm, Manor Farm and other property in Toft were auctioned by Beldam Estates and purchased by Mr W. G. Barton, the son of the last tenant. Water came from a deep borehole installed in 1946.

Ownership of the farm then passed through a number of hands. In 1951 the farm was purchased and farmed by R.A.Hastings. The two cottages were altered to make a single farmhouse, and a generator was installed for electricity. Work to amalgamate fields and improve field drainage was carried out. Most of Toft Plantation was felled and cleared of timber to make more land available for arable farming. The farm was purchased and farmed by G.Briers from 1954. The Farm was sold again in 1955, purchased and farmed by Hutching Bros. In 1962 the farm was purchased by T.R. & K.H. Quenby and farmed by T.R. Quenby & Son. Mains electricity was connected in late 1962. Mains water was connected in 1985. Three large grain stores with drying facilities were built, and further amalgamation of fields and improvements to land-drainage. The 189 acre farm is spread over 7 fields, all used for arable cropping - in 1948 the same acreage was spread over 19 fields. Further land was added in the 1970s/80s with the purchase of parts of Wood Farm (now known as Frogs Hall) and parts of Manor Farm, aiding field rationalisation. In 1991 the farmhouse together with the adjacent wooden barns and gardens was separated from the farm to form an independent dwelling.

Ownership of the farm was assigned to R.J. Quenby in 2000 and T.R.Quenby & Son continued to farm the land for arable crops - oil seed rape and wheat. From 2001 farm operations have been contracted out.

## **Wood Farm (Frogs Hall)**

This small farm of 45 acres, now known as Frogs Hall, has over the years also been called Drift Farm and Wood Farm. Located between WoodBarn Farm and the Hardwick Road, the first dwelling on the site was an estate house constructed c1850.

Allotments 6, 7, 9, 10 in the 1845 Tithe Map approximate to the area of the present farm. It is not known how these became consolidated to one unit. No ownership records have been found for the C19 and early C20, but it is known that parts of the farm belonged to owners of Papworth Hall and Madingley Hall estates at some period. The farmstead, including house and associated buildings, was let as a tenanted farm. It is probable that the farm concentrated on livestock production such as cattle for milk, together with pigs, beef cattle and poultry.

Water supply for the Farm would in the early years have come from a well for domestic use and from ponds for livestock. In the 1930s a borehole was installed powered by an engine. Mains water was not connected until 1985 and mains electricity in 1965.

After the last tenant, Mr Frank Howard, left in the early 1970's, the farm and its operations were taken over by T R Quenby & Son, owners of neighbouring WoodBarn farm.

***Michael and John Quenby***

Images on following pages



Wood Barn Farm



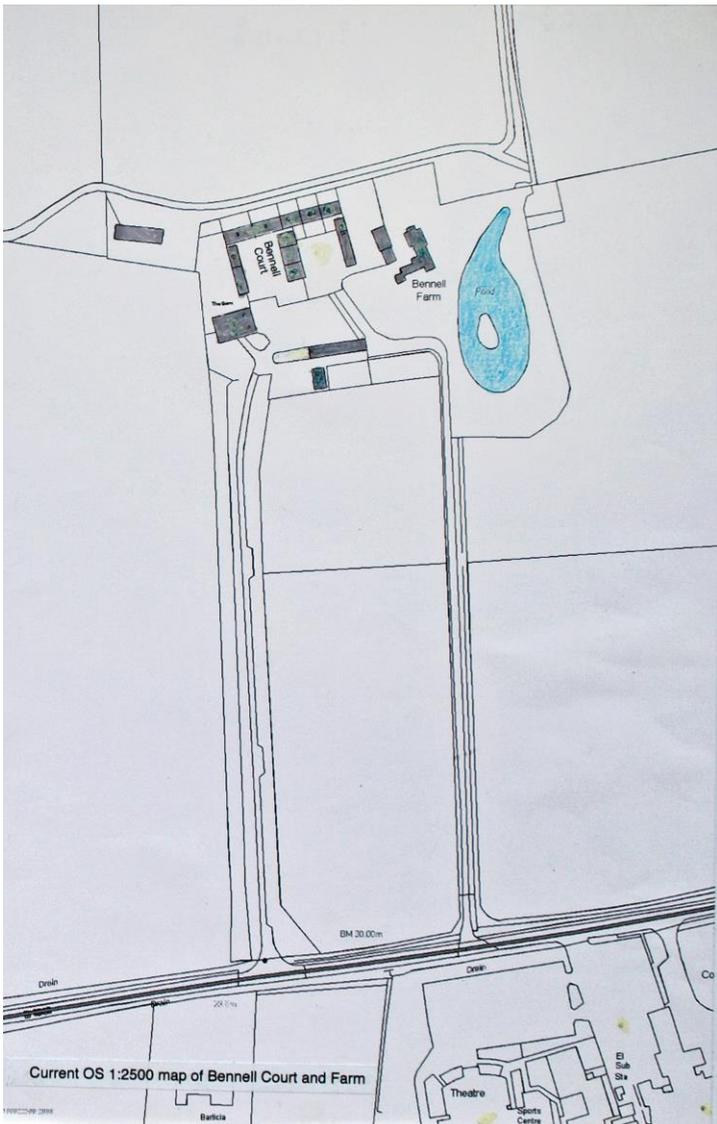
Wood Barn Farm, 2010



Bennell Farmhouse and lake



Bennell Farm



Bennell Farm 2



Farmer Robert Arnold, Bennell Farm



Maine-Anjou cattle, Bennell Farm