

A shepherd and his sheep

Sheep and their wool were an important economic force from medieval times. By the middle of the 17th century two-thirds of England's foreign commerce was based on wool, and everyone who had land, from peasants to major landowners, raised sheep.

Evidence of the landowners' prosperity can be seen in the many beautiful churches in Norfolk, such as St Peter and St Paul, Salle.



The March picture in the Reepham Life 2018 Calendar of the shepherd and his boy reminds us that by the 19th century things were very different and sheep were traded primarily for their meat. The Reepham Archive believes that this is a photograph of a young Robert Eaglen possibly with his father John.

John Eaglen was a shepherd all his life, born in Little Witchingham in 1832. As a boy he lived in Booton, and after marrying we find him living in Low Common Cottages in Whitwell with his wife Emily and a large family.

Robert (born 1874) also became a shepherd for a while and two of his brothers are called "Shepherd's Page" in the occupation column of the 1881 Census. By 1911 Robert was married with two children and had become a gamekeeper, living on Bawdeswell Road.

The Norfolk Electoral Rolls for 1919 show him with his wife Laurena working as a gamekeeper on an estate near Swaffham. (Typically, Laurena also had the vote on account of her husband having an occupation and of them not being lodgers – they were renting their house at the time.) Although her parents moved away from Reepham, Robert's daughter Fernleigh married Arthur Hardiment of Hardiment's Stores, the grocery shop in Reepham's Market Place.