

Decline in fortunes of the Leamon family of Whitwell Hall

The cover photo of the Reepham Life 2019 Calendar shows the Leamon family outside Whitwell Hall in 1884.



In 1871 the farm and tannery business was being run by Robert Leamon, an ardent politician and prominent agriculturist. The farm covered 1,300 acres, employing 38 farm workers with 18 boys and five women, and the tannery business employed a further 20 men. Robert committed suicide in 1878 and it was left to his sons Philip and Arthur to continue the business. (The eldest son, also a Robert, had become a clergyman.)

By 1881 Philip had married Elizabeth Reed and was living a typical gentleman farmer's life at Whitwell Hall, hunting with the North Norfolk Harriers, giving harvest suppers for his workers, being a churchwarden, playing cricket and entertaining the local choir. But by 1884 he was on the verge of bankruptcy and the sale was announced of the Whitwell Hall estate and tannery.

In 1887 all the livestock on the Whitwell estate was put up for auction as well as the household contents. In 1888 Philip applied for discharge from bankruptcy, but he had continued to contract debts knowing that he could not repay them.

In 1891 there were six children and Elizabeth was teaching them on her own at home at an address in Norwich. Eventually, she was admitted to hospital suffering from melancholia. In 1894, supported by Samuel Bircham and other local dignitaries, an appeal was made for financial help for the grandchildren of Robert Leamon, reminding people how generous Robert had been towards the local poor.