



Swanbourne Agricultural Workers Strike 1873



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The Swanbourne Agricultural Workers Strike 1873

Introduction

In 1873, around half of the agricultural labourers working in Swanbourne went on strike. It is the only time in the history of this village that such an event has occurred, and it has been written about in some detail by Pamela Horn, Buckinghamshire historian, and also features in Ken Reading's history of Swanbourne. (See Bibliography).

So why has there been all this interest? One of the reasons is that we have access to a lot of information about the strike. Also, it sheds a lot of light upon the history of those times, and in particular, about the history of the village. This account builds on these previous accounts but I have also discovered, by going back to original documents, that there is an even more interesting story around the strike than has been told before.

So this account is based on the 40 or so letters, on lists of workers and their wages, on the National Agricultural Labourers' Union newspaper, and on the diaries of Sir Thomas Fremantle, which are all held in the Buckinghamshire Archive. (D/FR 109 and D/FR 133 are the sources for the letters).

In addition, there is other information from other sources, including the 1871 census and information supplied by descendants of those involved in the strike in one way or another, which add some additional colour to the story.

Some questions to be answered

In describing the strike, there are a number of questions which arise, and which I will attempt to answer as best I can. In essence, these are:

- What was it that made the agricultural workers feel that things had to change?
- What gave them the confidence to believe that change was possible?
- Why did they fail in their immediate objectives?
- What did they achieve in the longer term?

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This account brings together all the knowledge that we currently have about the strike. But it is open to correction and addition as new information comes available. So if anyone reading this fascinating story has anything they would like to comment on or would like to add, then the Swanbourne History group would love to hear from you.

(See www.swanbournehistory.co.uk for contact details.)

Ken Harris

Background to the strike

In 1871, when then the national census was taken, the population of Swanbourne was 558 people, having dropped from a peak of 668 in 1831. This decline in population was part of a general trend that continued until the 1950s, when the population was only 350. This decline in population had many causes, which are outside of the concern of this account, but one factor was certainly the decrease in occupational opportunities in the village itself alongside the new jobs which were to be found in the growing towns. Industrialisation and urbanisation were having their impact.

Altogether there were 107 separate households in the village, and of these, 55 contained people who described their occupation as Agricultural or Farm Labourer, whilst 21 were farmers of some description. So around three-quarter of the village households were dependent on farming for their livelihood, with around one half being in someone else's employment.

Farming therefore was the key occupation in the village. But there were several additional factors that I have identified that led to the strike taking place at this particular time, and in the manner that it did. I have set these out in detail below.

Wages remained low

In Swanbourne, weekly wages for most Agricultural Labourers were around 12s per week, which was just about enough to live on.

Because of the high birth rate, there was a steady supply of labourers. However, many people, particularly younger workers, were prepared to go off to look for work elsewhere, particularly since the coming of the railway to Swanbourne in 1850. So the number of workers tended to match the number of jobs available.

According to the 1871 census, there were 82 Agricultural and Farm Labourers and 2 gardeners. There were also 23 people described themselves as farmers (including 1 with no land, 1 out of business, 1 retired, and three with other occupations as well – 2 publicans, 1 shoemaker). Between them, these 23 people employed 58 men and 37 boys, totalling 95 people. This matches the 88 Agricultural labourers and 5 farm labourers, 1 labourer and 1 undergardener listed in the census.

So was there full-employment? Probably at the busiest times, such as harvest, there was. But in the slack winter months, those who did not have regular employment and existed on piece work would have found it particularly difficult to find anyone to take them on.

Schooling became compulsory

The 1870 Education Act made schooling compulsory for all children aged 10 and under. In Swanbourne, a new infants school was built by Sir Thomas Fremantle to accommodate the extra children.

It is not clear whether the previous fee of 2d per week which had been levied up to this time was still in operation, (schooling did not become free nationally until 1891). But whether or not there was a direct cost, there would have been indirect costs to this compulsory education. In particular, it meant that the children were less available to help with tasks which had economic value, and which before had brought money into the family.



The Infants School around 1911

Cottage industries were in decline

One of the ways in which families had managed to maintain themselves was to earn additional money through various forms of work which could be carried out in the home. In particular, woman and children had been engaged in straw plaiting and lace making. Straw plaiting used a locally produced straw which could be plaited into long bands with different patterns. These would then be sold to traders who were able to sell them in Luton to the manufacturers of hats. Lace-making was focused on Newport Pagnell, and required more skill than straw-plaiting, and so was undertaken by women rather than children. But these industries were in decline because of the impact of manufacturing, which made goods more cheaply and in greater quantities.

In Swanbourne, in 1851 there were 26 straw plaiters. In 1861, this had risen to 33, including 6 children under 10. However, by 1871, there were only 20, and none of these were under 10. In the 1860s, there had been a straw-plaiting school, but this was closed by 1871.

In the same way, in 1851, there were 39 lace makers, in 1861, there were 32, but in 1871, there were only 11.

Royal Commissions

Between 1868 and 1870, the Reports of the Royal Commission on Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture drew the attention of a wider public to the living conditions to be found amongst agricultural labourers and their families. There was discussion in the newspapers, in parliament and even in churches about these conditions and what might be done about these conditions. One of the ways in which the workers themselves attempted to improve their lot was the creation of trade unions.

The Poores Land

One additional source of produce for the working man in Swanbourne had been the plots of land which formed the Poores Land (9 acres 37 perches). These allotments supplemented the land available in addition to any land attached to the houses themselves.

The Poores Land had been allocated as part of the field enclosure of 1763 to provide “*for the use and benefit of the most necessitous, industrious, and honest Poor who shall not receive any weekly Collection, or be provided for in the Poor or Church-houses of the Parish, the Rents, Issues and Profits.*” The Vicar and churchwardens held it in trust.

At first, it had been rented out to a farmer. But Ken Reading tells us that a tenant farmer had absconded in 1824/5 without paying the rent. After this, it was divided into plots and rented to the workers. In 1866, there were 82 plots, of which 64 or 66 were occupied at 6d quit rent, the other 16 or 18 were let at full rent, producing about £5 annually. However, it seems that the trustees thought that they could raise more funds for the poor of the village by letting it all out to the farmer William North for £25. However, when this was decided on, not all the tenants were prepared to leave.

After consultation with the Charity Commissioners, the Rev Niven, Vicar and the Churchwardens decided to take the case to court. The court case for repossession was taken against Reuben Ash and Charles Alderman, although whether this was because they were the only ones who were refusing to leave or whether they were seen as the leaders of the opposition, is not clear. The court found in favour of the Vicar and the two labourers were left with debts of ‘upwards of £50’ each for legal costs. When they could not pay these costs, they were declared bankrupt. It seems, from Joseph Alderman’s Union article (see page 35), that they were actually imprisoned for a time.

This injustice, as it was perceived by the agricultural workers, continued to be a bone of contention between them and the church wardens and vicar, who were the trustees of the Poores Land.

Benefit Society and Coop Shop

But it was not all bad news. The Fremantle family recognised the need for help to be given to the poor. In 1866, they created (or possibly revived and improved) the Swanbourne Benefit Society, and then in 1868, the Swanbourne Co-operative Society was established, with Edmund Fremantle playing a significant part.

The Benefit Society was established with the purpose of raising funds, through voluntary subscriptions by its members ‘for the mutual relief and maintenance and assistance of the members’. There were two kinds of members – honorary members and benefited members. The honorary members contributed either 3 pounds, or an annual subscription of 5 shillings, but could not themselves receive money from the Society. The governing committee consisted of a president, two trustees, two directors and a treasurer drawn from the honorary members and two stewards who from the benefited members.

Anyone wanting to become a benefited member had to be under 45 years of age. They put their name forward and were to appear at the next quarterly meeting, with a certificate of their age if required, and of their health from a respectable surgeon. Depending on their age, they paid 1 shilling if under 25, 2 shillings if under 35 and 3 shillings if under 45.

As well as giving approval of fitness for members, the surgeon provided medicines to those members requiring them and made out certificates for those members needing to be given

money. Sickness benefit of 8s a week could be given, for up to 26 weeks, and then 4s for a further 26 weeks.

For all its undoubted benefits, however, the Society did not help those who were healthy and in work or those without regular work or the elderly or long-term sick.



The Co-operative Store was established in 1868, with support from the Fremantles. It was intended to assist the poor to avoid them getting into intolerable debt.

The Co-operative Stores around 1910.

Agricultural Unions

Following the transportation to Australia of the 7 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' in 1833, there was little activity in forming unions of agricultural unions until 1866. An organisation was formed in Buckinghamshire around this time, and also in Kent, Hertfordshire and Herefordshire, but they were not very effective. However, the Trade Union Act, which was passed by Parliament in 1871 provided the legal basis for trade unionism for the first time. As a result of this legislation, no trade union could be regarded as conspiracy because of a "restraint of trade" unless its actions would be criminal if committed by an individual. Also trade union funds were protected. However, the Criminal Law Amendment Act passed on the same day made picketing illegal.

The local agricultural unions received a boost when a National Union was formed in Leamington Spa in May 1872, under the inspiration of Joseph Arch, a Warwickshire man who was a local preacher in the Primitive Methodist Church, most of whose members were from the working class.



Joseph Arch and the NALU

Swanbourne Methodist Chapel

In Swanbourne, the first Methodist Chapel was built in 1858, by Thomas Bowler, builder and farmer, and probably rented out to the Primitive Methodists, who had begun to establish themselves locally from the late 1830s onwards. Then in 1870, the Methodists had borrowed £120 to purchase the chapel for themselves. Whilst this would be a financial burden for them, taking 28 years to pay off, it also gave them an independence and a confidence that they had previously lacked. This was probably the first time that any of them would have owned a building. (See



The Methodist chapel
around 1900

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Together these different factors provided both the motivation and the means for the formation of a union by the agricultural workers of the village. The way in which this actually led to a strike, rather than an amicable agreement to raise the wages of the workers, is the subject of the next part of this story.

The lead-up to the strike

The landowners and tenant farmers

By 1873, most of the land and houses of Swanbourne were owned by Sir Thomas Francis Fremantle. Sir Thomas had been born on 11th March 1798, the first child of Captain Thomas and his wife Betsey. The family had purchased The Old House and moved into Swanbourne later in the same year. Sir Thomas had had a highly successful career as an M.P. and then in the Board of Customs. At the beginning of 1873, he was approaching his 75th birthday, and in his 27th year as Chairman of the Board of Customs.

His home in Swanbourne was Swanbourne House, which had been completed a few years before in 1867. However, he lived most of his time in London, where his address was 20 Eaton Place. Much of the time, he was accompanied by his wife Louisa and youngest daughter, also named Louisa.



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Swanbourne House around 1911



Sir Thomas had his own farm, which was managed by his bailiff, William Phillips, who took day-to-day responsibility for running it. William Phillips, aged 54, lived with his wife Ann and son Lewis, at Deverels Farm.

Sir Thomas had two sons who also played a significant role in the strike event. His eldest son, aged 43, was also named Thomas Francis Fremantle (a fact that confused Ken Reading in his telling of the story). His Swanbourne home was The Old House, but he was also living in London for much of the time. He was a Director of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, and lived at 22 Chesham Place, Belgrave Square, together with his wife **Augusta**, and their 6 children.



The Old House as it appears today.



The Old House had a large garden area at its rear, and Thomas Fremantle employed **John Phillips**, aged 42, the brother of William Phillips, as gardener. John Phillips was in charge of a few under-gardeners, and responsible for the grounds of The Old House. He lived with his wife Ann aged 33 and daughter Sarah aged 6 in Nearton End, probably in the Gardeners Cottage.

Gardener's Cottage, Nearton End around 1911.

Sir Thomas Fremantle's fourth son (and fourth child) was Captain Edmund Fremantle. Born in 1836, Edmund had entered the Navy at the age of 13 and eventually became an Admiral. From 1867 onwards, he had been on shore leave and half-pay, but in 1873 he was expecting a new commission. Whilst in Swanbourne, he lived in The Cottage, Mursley Road, with his wife **Barbarina**. Despite its name, The Cottage was a sizable Georgian house.

Because he was the only one of the Fremantle men who was actually living in Swanbourne at the time of the strike, Edmund played an important role in keeping his father and brother informed of what was actually happening.



The Cottage as it appears today.

One other farmer who appears in this story was Philip Dauncey, who lived in Little Horwood, in a house known at different times as The Rectory or Horwood House, which was situated where the current Horwood House, built in 1911, is situated. Philip Dauncey was the son of a King's Councillor, and probably moved to Little Horwood in the 1820s. He became a very successful and world renowned breeder of Jersey cattle, and in 1871, had a 391 acre farm employing 13 men and 4 boys in. He was also a local magistrate and a close friend of the Fremantles. At the time of the strike, he was aged about 78, and had remarried a younger woman Emma Anderson from Yorkshire, following the death of his first wife, Mary.

The Union

The Bucks Farm Labourers' Union was formed in April 1872, and a meeting of the Union was held in the Market Square, Aylesbury, on May 18th 1872. Amongst others, it was addressed by **Edward Richardson**, a former teacher and keen supporter of the agricultural workers. During his time as a teacher in Dinton, he had seen just how poor the position of

the agricultural workers was, and decided to do something about it. (See Bibliography for sources of information on Edward Richardson).

The Buckinghamshire Herald, the local Tory-supporting newspaper, was hostile to union activity. Its report of this meeting appeared in its issue for Saturday 18th May.

Extract from an account of the speech by Edward Richardson

Let the aged, the sick, the blind, the fatherless, the widow, be sought out as fit objects of charity, but let the working man have wages enough without it to educate his family. There were difficulties in the way, but if the farmer said he could not afford the wages he must go to the big landowner to reduce his rent. The labourer would be thought the more of by demanding higher pay. He had taught schools for the paltry pittance of £30 a year, but at least when he claimed £90 and got it, he found he was more respected than when he received the smaller pay. Landowners objected to this movement because they were afraid the labouring man should rise till he got the upper hand; but this was quite a delusion, for as the labourer stood lowest next to the pauper on the ladder, he could not rise without elevating those above him.

Taking a labourer's wages at 13s a week, Edward Richardson went on to show that a man with a wife and a family of three children, after paying the smallest possible amount for food, rent, firing, schooling, washing clothing, etc. could have nothing left for the savings bank.

Unionism spread rapidly to the surrounding area, and branches were formed in Mursley and Swanbourne. On Monday 30th September 1972, a march was organised by the Mursley branch of the Union, and Edward Richardson was there. So too was **Joseph Tattam**, the son of William Tattam, formerly of Swanbourne. William Tattam had moved to Little Horwood with his family in the late 1840s, where he became a farmer, and by 1871, Joseph Tattam had taken over the farm. Maybe as the son of a former agricultural labourer, he was a great supporter of the farm labourers. Here is an extract from an account in the NALU newspaper. (2)

Mursley near Winslow – the members of this branch (established about 6 months ago) held their first demonstration on Monday Sept 30th. A number of the leading members, headed by a good band, started from Stewkley at 8 a.m., and proceeded in a van, and other conveyances, on a circuit of twelve miles. At each village, a short explanation of the movement was given by Mr Joseph Tattam, chairman, and farmer of Little Horwood, and by Mr G. Walters of Mursley. At one, the procession reformed at Winslow Market Place, where Mr. E. Richardson joined them, and made an appropriate speech. Tea was provided at Mursley, of which over 600 persons partook, the national melodies and a little dancing occupying the intervals.

At seven, stirring addresses were delivered by the chairman and Mr. E. Richardson, laughter and cheers being the order of the evening. The weather was delightful, and all showed by their zeal to the carrying out of the programme, that their hearts were in the movement. This branch has certainly been most creditably worked, notwithstanding the jeers and oppression of the opposition. The Secretary, the

Treasurer and the Chairman act as one man; no work appears a trouble to the Committee, and the whole conduct of the proceeding reflect the highest credit on the Mursley Branch. Several farmers have already lowered their men to 10s per week, some as low as 9s, and the men seem more determined than ever to carry out the whole project of the Union.

Another person who seems to have witnessed this meeting was Sir Thomas Fremantle, who was in Swanbourne at the time. In his diary for Monday 23rd September 1872 (there seems to be some discrepancy over the date of the meeting), he wrote:

"I had to go to Mursley. I believe under the described (?) schoolmaster of Dinton, Richardson, they paraded with a band of ??? and a flag carried by one of the garden men. This [processed?] through the adjoining villages. Smith went without leave, and two more Swanbourne men joined the party – but the rest declined to have anything to do with the meeting. Some however went after they had done their work."*

(*This is probably Thomas Smith, an Agricultural Labourer aged 40, who had a wife a 2 young children, and lived in a house in one of the houses for the poor in Cemetery Hill – then known as Petticoat Lane.)

Whilst this meeting encouraged the growth of union membership, it did not generally lead to strike action. However, events began to escalate in Swanbourne at the beginning of 1873, when a call was made by the Agricultural Labourers for the Poors Land to be returned to them for them to cultivate for their use. This might have been precipitated by the fact that the winter seems to have been a particularly hard one, and food was getting scarce.

On **Friday 10th January**, Sir Thomas Fremantle wrote in his diary:

"Rev Malden, Tom & Eddy came to talk over an application which had been made to Rev. Malden for the use of the school room to hold a Union meeting – a long discussion, but I got out for half an hour before luncheon & again after luncheon."

Tom and Eddy were his two sons, and his diary does not record the decision that was made, but it seems likely that the application was refused. If so, this would explain why meetings were later held in the Methodist Chapel.

The next day, **Saturday 11th January**, Sir Thomas Fremantle's wrote:

"Long interview with Bowler¹ about the ??? He is stupid ??? and quite unequal to the details. Visited Jasper Alderman, who is very unwell – our poor friend Seaton died this morning very peacefully.

Gave out the bread and beef to the members of the Benefit Club. About 45 attended & all was well arranged."

[¹Bowler is probably Thomas Bowler, who had built the Methodist Chapel and was generally sympathetic towards the poor, he himself having come from Tring to Swanbourne to work as a male servant to a local farmer. In 1871, he was a widower, living in Nearnton End, in what is now called Old Nearnton Farm].

On **Monday 13th January**, Sir Thomas wrote: *“As soon as I got to my room, my tenants came to pay rents for Sw[anbourne] and North Marston. Had a good deal of talk with them about the Union.”* However, there is no record of what this talk involved, but it seems likely that the desire for an increase in wages would have been mentioned.

A week later, on **Monday 20th January**, so Thomas wrote: *“Had visits from my tenants who have all paid rent except Seaton. Rather dissatisfied with the state of our labourers who are very discontented and beginning to make a row about the Poores Land.”* Seaton, of course, was dead, so his non-appearance seems quite reasonable in the circumstances.

By **Friday 24th January**, Sir Thomas had left for London, and so was not resident in the village. There is nothing further relating the situation in Swanbourne until **Tuesday 11th February**, when he wrote: *“Tom called & we discussed Swanbourne affairs till dinner time.”* There is no detail about their discussions, but it is clear that the two men had news of what was happening in the village – possibly Tom had been there over the weekend, and so had something fresh to share with his father, or else they had received letters from Edmund.

On **Thursday 13th February**, there was the first of a whole series of private letters which were sent between Swanbourne and London over the next few weeks, and which almost give us a blow by blow account of the lead up to the strike, and the strike itself.

The question of the Poores Land was being pressed by the workers, and a meeting of the Poores Land trustees, meant to be private, was held but a notice was put on the church door, and someone called Bowler took it to be a public meeting. Whilst Ken Reading thinks that this must have been one of the poorer members of the Bowler family, I think it was most likely to be Thomas Bowler, who was much more sympathetic to the poorer sections of the village, and had built the Methodist Chapel for them. However, there was generally a lot of resistance to the idea of allowing the workers to cultivate this land again

The first letter is from Edmund Fremantle in Swanbourne to his father in London, which is in reply to a letter from his father about the Poores Land meeting, to be held that evening.

My dear father,

Thank you for your letter about “the land belonging to the Vicar and the church wardens”

I recognise the wisdom of the objection that you make that once occupiers of the old piece of land, another low might occur as to the payment of rent for that which I fear the men have got to consider their own. Also I dare say you are right as to the other debts properly turning up and assuredly North¹ has the right to be treated with some consideration, so as you say the trustees had better be satisfied now with looking into the accounts.

This is what Mr. Malden² tells me they mean to do tonight but I regret with you that he should have put a public notice of the meeting of the trustees on the Church door – a

notice which does contemplate “the land being free from debt in a few months” and which was actually read by Bowler & probably by others as a public meeting.

I shall tell Bowler that you advise the trustees to decline to say anything as to the future until final payment of debts has been made & there the matter will probably rest.

Your “private” I like much, as it would if it could be carried out obviate most objections.

I think Mr Malden is as strongly against letting the land be held by the men at a nominal rent as you are at present, but Bowler and others are rather inclined to let that course be taken as the easiest mode of satisfying the men & it is not improbable that Malden might have turned round and acquiesced in that view. Now however I think nothing is likely to be done in a hurry or in fact till Michaelmas³ next.

The country is getting much drier than it was though we still have some snow about.

Love to Mother and Louisa,

Your affectionate son,

Edmund.

[¹ In 1871, Henry North was a farmer of 19 acres, living at Bennetts Farm, now called North Hill Farm.

² Mr. Malden was Vicar of Swanbourne from 1868 to 1879.

³ Michaelmas was 29th September – many months away.]

The lack of action over the Poors Land seems to have spurred the agricultural workers into action, because 2 days later, on **Saturday 15th February**, the Swanbourne Committee sent letters to at least 7 different people.

The ones which were sent to Sir Thomas and to William Phillips, his bailiff, and also to Thomas Fremantle are all part of the collection in the Bucks Archive. John Phillips also had one, and in addition, Edmund Fremantle said that letters were sent to at least three of the other farmers in Swanbourne – John Baseley, James Keen and George Rand.

The three letters in the archive all have the same format. The letters are addressed to either the farmer or to his representative, and above the addressee’s names are the names of the workers whom they employed. Then came the letter itself, followed by the signatures of the Swanbourne Committee.

The letter to Sir Thomas Fremantle reads as follows:

*By wish, Charles Alderman
George Alderman
Phillips Alderman
Jeremiah Harding
William Cambell +*

*Jeremiah Alderman +
William Gurnett
George Walker +
Thos Cambell +
John Grantham +*

*To the Right Hon
Sir Thos F. Fremantle*

We the above signed labourers in your employ beg respectfully to inform that on and after Feb 22nd 1873 they will require a rise in their wages of 3 shillings per week and a general conformity of their rules, a copy of which I enclose. Being desirous of retaining good relations between employer and employed; and to assure you that no unbecoming feelings prompt us to such a course, we invite you (if our terms are not in accordance with your views) to appoint an early time to meet us so that we may fairly consider the matter and arrange our affairs amicably.

Your Obedient Servants

*The Committee
Jos Alderman Secretary*

*Alfred Pitkin
Jasper Alderman
Reuben Ash
William Gurnett
Thomas Phillips
Phillip Alderman
Jeremiah Harding*

Joseph Tattam on Executive Committee, Aylesbury

The crosses seem to indicate that the person has not been able to sign their name for themselves. Also, in pencil, alongside some of the names, Sir Thomas Fremantle has written the word 'gone', probably to indicate that he has heard that that individual has left Swanbourne.

From the 1871 census, taken 2 years previously, and other sources, we get the following information about the members of the Strike Committee named on this letter.

The Strike Committee

Joseph Alderman Secretary, aged nearly 30, a tailor by profession, married to Louisa, aged 24, a tailoress, and with two children – Amy 3 and Florence. A member of the Methodist Chapel.

Alfred Pitkin, aged 32, agricultural labourer, married to Susanna aged 32, and with 3 children, Ann aged 8 and Alice aged 7, Mary aged 1. They lived in Nearton End in 1871, and were members of the Methodist Chapel

Jasper Alderman, aged 28, agricultural labourer, married to Eliza aged 28, with 2 children ? Benjamin aged 3 and Charles aged 2. They lived in Petticoat Lane (Cemetery Hill), and were involved with and possibly members of the Methodist Chapel.

Reuben Ash, aged 41, agricultural labourer, married to Selina aged 39, with 8 children? George 18, William 17, Harry 14, Harriett 12, Thomas 10, Annie 8, Eliza 6, Ellen 4.

William Gurnett, aged 47, former soldier, now a thatcher working for Sir Thomas Fremantle, married to Charlotte aged 35, with 5 or 6 children, Hannah 9, William 8, Ellen 6, Mary 4, Charles 1 and another child on the way. A member of the Methodist Chapel.

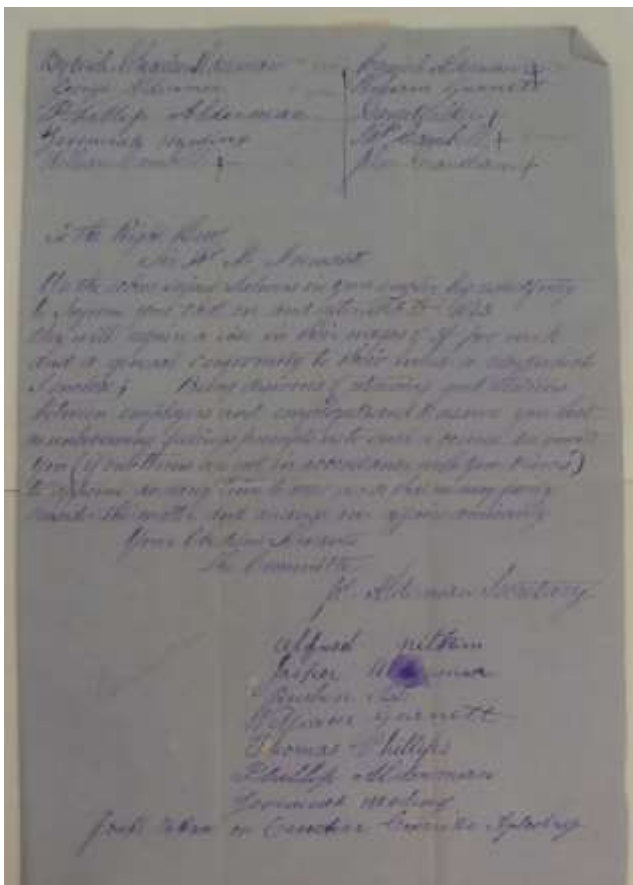
Thomas Phillips, aged 26, farm labourer, married to Rachel aged 22, a straw plaiter, living in Nearton End. They were expecting their first child, who would be born in August.

Phillip Alderman, aged 26, agricultural labourer, married to Rebecca aged 26, a straw plaiter, with 3 children, Louisa aged 5, Rosina aged 3 and Frederick aged 1. Rebecca was also expecting their fourth child. They lived in a house in Smithfield End, which they shared with Rebecca's mother, Susanna Alderman, the second wife of Jasper Alderman. Jasper was also an agricultural labourer and the Parish Clerk. Phillip is recorded as a Baptist in 1867.

Jeremiah Harding, aged 41, agricultural labourer, married to Caroline, aged 40, a straw plaiter, with 4 children, Albert 14, John 9, Annie 7 and James 4. They lived in Nearton End.

Joseph Tattam, aged 34, married to Annie E. Tattam from Weedon, Northants, was a farmer in Little Horwood, employing one man and one boy. He had been born in Swanbourne, the son of William and Lydia Tattam, who were members of the Baptist Chapel, of which William's parents had been founding members.

[Note: Ken Reading was wrong in saying he the son of Thomas Tattam. This other younger Joseph Tattam was his cousin.]



The letter to Sir Thomas Fremantle

On getting his letter, William Phillips immediately wrote to Sir Thomas, also forwarding his own copy of the letter.

Swanbourne,

Honoured Sir,

I received the cheque. The men are beginning to be a little quere now. They brought me their rules and a letter this morning demanding 3 shillings a week more pay

I told them that if other farmers rose their men's wages I would rise them but I must not start first it appers it is me Mr Basely and Mr Keen that have the papers. I seen Mr Brooks Mr G Belgrove Mr Colgrove and Mr Woodward and their men have said nothing about more pay at present. I have not seen Mr. Rand but I think he as one but I think he was the cause of there starting. I enclose the papers which I Beg you to Return.

Sir Thomas,

I remain your humble Servant, W Phillips

A note written on this letter by Sir Thomas, suggesting that he was in favour of giving a pay rise, but not of having anything to do with the Union. It says:

Wd not have anything to do with union or rules – but if their pay shd be increased, we would consider it. Tell the farmers an increase must be given first or last & the sooner the better.

The next day, **Sunday 16th February**, Edmund Fremantle writes to his father, Sir Thomas, providing his own information about the workers' demands. Nearton End is at the heart of the action.

My dear Father,

You will probably hear all about the strike movement from Phillips. John Phillips has also a notice of 3/ rise in wages or a strike on the 22nd Feb. Phillips did not know last night whether the movement was general(?) in the Parish or not but he said he would inquire and inform you. The worst part of the respectful & proper notice from the men is the request for a 'general conformity to their (union) rules'. I had not heard anything about it till J Phillips brought his notice, though I knew that a good deal of union talk had been going on in Nearton of late. I am sorry that Grantham and T Phillips are in the movement.

Your affectionate son,

Edmund.

From Sir Thomas Fremantle's Diary, it seems that the letter from the Strike Committee arrived on **Monday 17th February**. He recognises that this same letter has been sent to other employers as well.

"Had my early breakfast & prayers at 8.45 rather hurried and annoyed as the Sw Labourers have sent us a round robin demanding 3/ addⁿ & compliance with the Rules of the Union."

Edmund Fremantle wrote to his brother, Thomas, on the Monday, repeating some of the same information that he had given his father, but also adding some further details of events in Swanbourne. He is rather critical of the way that the men's discontent has been handled, suggesting that if some compromise solution had been arrived at earlier, the strike threat could have been averted. He does not now expect a peaceful outcome. But he sees his father's attitude as being the key to what will actually happen.

My dear Tom,

You will I suppose have received already direct from the men, a notice of their intending strike at the end of this week, if you do not comply with their union rules, and grant them an extra 3/ a week. However John will read the notice he has received by basket today. He wishes me to write to you & tell you what he is now at work at. He is in the middle of draining the lawn but that will be finished this week. He wants to get on with the flower beds and walks he says but I have suggested to him not to undertake any new work till he hears from you.

Of course my Father and you will settle what course to adopt. I much regret that things have been allowed to get to this pass, as if some time ago, the masters had met with the men, and met them half way, affairs might have been compromised.

As far as I can learn, the home farm, Baseley, Keen and Rand have been threatened with the strike, While Colgrove, C Brooks and the Belgroves have nothing to do with it. Most of the latter employ non-union men and have set their faces against it from the commencement. Many of their men are 60 or close to that age and the Union does not receive any above 60. Rand is said to have promised a rise, but I do not know how much nor whether the report is true.

I hear that no action has been taken in any of the adjoining parishes though I believe the wages are 13/ and 14/ in Hogston.

At Winslow there are hardly any union men, and at Mursley they have got cool upon it, the great meeting of the union (?) with the band, not having been paid for.

I shall be curious to hear what my Father means to do. Of course Colgrove and the others who have not been threatened hope that he will not give in, but it is easier to say than to act upon. There will I fear be much distress and trouble about it before it is settled, and I am sorry for the old place. Fancy Grantham being a striker. I rather suspected as much before.

Your affectionate brother, Edmund.

He adds a P.S.: *My father's garden men have not joined, I reckon because they are all quite young. W Phillips seems quite inclined to fight it out. He would not "humble to them" he says.*

The 'notice received by basket' presumably gave Sir Thomas's reply to the workers' demands.

Sir Thomas also had a letter dated Monday 17th February, from Mr Dauncey, a farmer in Little Horwood, in which he says that he too had had requests or demands from his workers for more money. He said that he had decided, on a short term basis, to give them some extra money. But the wages that he quotes are already those that Sir Thomas is paying his men. Mr Dauncey has also had the loan of a pony from Sir Thomas, and the care of the pony was as important as the concerns about the workmen.

Horwood February sixteen

My dear Fremantle,

I have since I wrote to you ridden the pony twice, once to Winslow and once to the Cottage. I cannot ride him with comfort to myself, & am doubtful whether I can manage to get more exercise at all. It would however help me in some respects very much if I could. I am very thankful for the chance you have given me - it has made sure that I must try before I die (?) and very doubtful whether I shall ride at all. I shall not send the little black home till I hear from you, so that you may give orders for his reception at the old house. I have not clothed him, nor has he been ever chilly, or coughed even once when I was on his back.

I hear that the union men have written to Sir Thomas on the subject of wages. My men have applied for more money which with the exception of the ploughman who looks after the horses I have decided to give. There is pinch from the price of coal and to give, not permanently or as a wage, but as a help for the time I do not object. My wage is twelve shillings for six days, fourteen with milk for cowmen. My ploughman fifteen.

At the top of this letter, there is also an interesting snippet referring to Edward Richardson, the former teacher and support of the agricultural workers:

Mr Richardson is advised medically to try the sea. He goes :: to Queensland with 300 passgs paid out and home.

He seems to have seen a handbill that was being circulated amongst the workmen, inviting them to join a boat which was sailing to Queensland, where the State government were looking for more workers.

The handbill below provides us with information about the planned voyage, which was due to start around 17th March. It also sets out the rations which that will be provided on the voyage (5 lbs of flour, 12 lbs of beef 2 lbs of sugar, ¼ lb of tea weekly) and the wages which emigrants could expect in Queensland (Female Domestic servants from £30 to £32 p.a.;

General Labourers from £30 to £50 p.a. ;Ploughmen from £60 to £70 p.a.) These rates of pay quotes were considerably higher than they could expect to get as farm labourers.

By Authority of H. M.  Government of Queensland.

EMIGRATION TO QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA.

From the great demand which now exists in the Colony for all kinds of labour,
the Agent-General will grant

FREE PASSAGES

TO

FARM-LABOURERS & FEMALE DOMESTIC SERVANTS,

(Without undertaking for payment of cost of passage,)

AND

ASSISTED PASSAGES

TO

MECHANICS AND OTHER ELIGIBLE PERSONS.

TO INTENDING EMIGRANTS.

An unusual opportunity now presents itself to Farm-Labourers, Female Domestic Servants, and other eligible Persons desirous of Emigrating to Queensland, under the personal superintendence of Mr. E. RICHARDSON (of Aylesbury), who has made official arrangements to accompany some 300 emigrants on or about the 17th of March next.

The advantages offered are a Free Passage, Free Kit, and Railway Fare Paid. Each emigrant being required to provide the regulation quantity of clothing only. Special advantages offered to Female Servants. The increased demand for good servants has materially improved the rates of wages, which now stand as follows: Female Domestic Servants from £30 to £52 per annum. General Labourers from £30 to £50 per annum. Ploughmen from £60 to £70 per annum; with rations, consisting of 8lbs. of flour; 12lbs. of beef; 2lbs. of sugar; $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. tea—weekly.

Mr. Richardson expects to return to England about November, 1873, to report upon the prospects of New Settlers in Queensland. He will also visit those persons who left Aylesbury for Brisbane, in the ship 'Storm King.'

Gentry and friends can render valuable assistance by helping bonâ-fide emigrants with gifts of wearing apparel, also by assisting in filling up the necessary forms.

As the responsibility of this undertaking is necessarily great, Mr. Richardson will gladly acknowledge, on behalf of the emigrants, any pecuniary help, parcels of left-off clothing, books, or other articles needed during a long voyage.

An early and personal application (if possible) should be made to Mr. E. RICHARDSON, or Mr. S. G. PAYNE, Government Agent, Aylesbury.

L. POULTON, PRINTER, MARKET SQUARE, AYLESBURY.

Although both Sir Thomas Fremantle and his son Thomas were both in London, on **Wednesday 19th February** they corresponded with each other by letter. They were clearly reliant on Edmund for news of what is happening in Swanbourne. They were moving towards a position of not saying anything to the Union at all.

Sir Thomas to his son:

My dear T,

I have no letter from Wm Phillips this morning. Have you anything from Eddy?

My present idea is to direct my bailiff to inform the Council that I see no reason to enter into communication with them respecting their wages & employment of my labourers – but any man in my services wd be quite at liberty to make to me or my bailiff any statement he might think fit and it should, be fairly considered. Will this do?

Yours affectionately,

TFF

Tom's reply to his father:

My Dear Father,

I have nothing from Eddy today or from Swanbourne.

If you write a formal answer to the Committee they will probably publish it in their Union Paper.

I should prefer sending our answer to the labourers themselves through the bailiff – to be read to them. It is the labourers who address you as 'we the above signed' though at the foot are the signatures of the Secretary and the Cttee. But there is not very much in this distinction.

I think the substance of the Communication quite the right thing

Yr aff s

T F Fremantle

I expect to have something from Eddy tomorrow morning.

Wednesday 19th February

At the same time, Edmund Fremantle was writing letters to both his father and his brother. He has his own views on how the strike threat should be handled, which he offers to them both. He clearly thinks that they should do everything they can to undermine the Union. It is his opinion that a small increase in wages in exchange for leaving the Union could still be a satisfactory solution. Phillips had gone into Winslow to find out whether the strike threat was going wider afield, though his impression was that Unionism was on the decline in the nearby villages.

Letter from Edmund to his brother.

My dear Tom,

Thanks for your two letters. I will send you £1 as you wish. As to the strike movement, I quite agree with you in the proposal to take strong measures. My great fear is that the thing will be compromised now without anything being said about the Union, and you are sure to have another Union ultimatum before long.

I am sorry the Union was not checked before but it is not too late now. I would grant the extra 2/ on condition that the men left the Union, and with the proviso that if I got any similar papers from the Union, the men would be dismissed. I feel quite sure that if we only choose to use it, in refusing assistance and help to Union men, even without the last resource of turning out of cottages. Dauncey and the farmers have acknowledged that they will have to follow suit in what my father does, and he will have given a decided impetus to unionism which is I firmly believe rather on the decline in Mursley & Little Horwood if he does not put his foot down now. Of course if he gives no advance of wages it is a different thing, but I assume that he is ready to give an extra 1/ or 2/ which seems really to be wanted to keep the labourers in the parish.

I am much mistaken if the whole of the labourers with perhaps one or two exceptions did not leave the Union at once as they do not care about paying the extra 2d a week. I should have no scruple in refusing to help any Unionist and I have already before to act on these principles.

I saw John this morning and he has nearly done the draining. He seems very reluctant to be left without men, but he would do what you wished of course. We deferred further consideration of the matter till Mr Phillips came back from Winslow but he will not be back before post time.

You ought to come down with Father's ultimatum, I think. In case of refusal from the men your idea of giving notice to Reuben Ash would be a great coup. You might at all events refuse to employ any Unionists.

Your affectionate brother, Edmund.

Edmund also wrote a letter to his father. In it, he also talked about his prospects of being offered the captaincy of a ship.

Swanbourne

My dear Father,

I have no sympathy at all Unionists, but from their point of view I looked upon their demand for increased pay as couched in respectful language. Phillips has probably been talking to the farmers at Winslow today, but he has not returned yet.

In your place I should certainly defy the Union, offer the increase you propose of 2/ but on condition that they left the Union, and with the notification that any further Union demand would be met by instant dismissal & that in self defence you would be obliged

to recover possession of your cottages so as to place men who would work for you in them.

As far as I can learn there is not the semblance of a strike anywhere else around here, and I am almost sure that the men would agree to your terms. To comprise the matter now, unless the men are strictly told that you discourage the Union in every way will I feel the result in a further demand before long. To give in even to a limited extent without a clear understanding on their point is a direct encouragement to Unionism – I think that you ought to show your teeth if you make any concession. The farmers are foolish I think if they resist all rise of wages, as there is certainly a want of men, and some of these will no doubt go away if they are not to some extent satisfied.

I wish this bother had not arisen, but I fully expected it. It will I fear give a great deal of trouble any way. Perhaps you would come down and settle it as far as may be. You will not, I suppose, care to leave town this wintry weather.

.....

I am quite ready for a start when called on. I think my turn is positively the next, though I am rather frightened at finding some 7 years men who ought to have been retired I make out still remaining on the Active List,

Your affett son,

Edmund.

On **Thursday 20th February**, Thomas visited his father probably in his office, and they walked home together, discussing the situation in Swanbourne, but cannot come to a decision on what to do beyond what they have already decided on.

From Sir Thomas Fremantle's Diary:

"4 – when Tom came to talk to me about the Labourers difficulty at Sw & we came home together walking ... we could not come to any settlement, as I had not heard from Phillips, so I wrote to order him up to Sw (London?) tomorrow."

At the same time, William Phillips was writing to Sir Thomas updating him on the situation on the Fremantle farm, and the decision that the local farmers had come to, to offer a 1s a week rise if they leave the union.

Honoured Sir,

I have seen all the farmers except Mr Rands and they all agree to give 1s a week more money, but no more if the men feel disposed to leave as they say they may – that will make the milkers 14s a week and the others 13s.

The men on the farm are Jer Harding, Jer Alderman, Philip Alderman, W Campbell, They are 4 cattle men and I have emploid Charles Alderman and George Alderman, but I shall not keep Geo Alderman after this week. The cattle men have been having

13s per week the other 12 up to now then there are George Walker and W Gurnett thatching cottages. I don't hear anything about the gardening men. I think they have nothing to do with the union only John Grantham, and I talked to him and he says he will leave it.

Mr Brooks and Mr G Belgrove and Mr J Belgrove and Mr Colgrove never ask for more money.

Sir Thomas,

I remain your Humble Servant

W Phillips

Edmund also wrote a further letter to his brother, in which he expressed his view that the offer of a shilling will not be enough, and that they needed to take stronger action in hiring in non-union labour from neighbouring villages. He shared news about John Phillips and the arrival of a load of manure. He also talked of his intention to visit his Uncle, William Robert Fremantle, who was the vicar of Claydon at that time.

My dear Tom,

I enclose you a cheque for £1. The meeting of farmers yesterday came to the resolution to give five 1/ a week more.

I question whether it will be accepted by the Unionists and I think the present time should be made one for making a firm hand against dictation from the Union. I would go so far as to say that unless they withdraw from the position they have taken up about your having anything to do with the Union, I would refuse any advance and let them do their worst. At the same time I would take non union men. There are any amount of these latter to be got from Drayton, Stewkley and even Mursley and Little Horwood. It is very tempting to try and compromise matters, but I do not think it will avert a strike or disturbance and I should take the bull by the horns at once.

John tells me that his legacy burial has been settled, also he has received your note and wishes you to know that the manure has arrived but that the "6 tons" only weighed 4 tons 8 ½ cwt.

We are going to Claydon (Rectory) tomorrow till Tuesday, but if you were coming down here I would ride over and meet you.

John is quite ready to do anything you wish.

Your affectionate brother,

Edmund.

The next day, **Friday 21st February**, William Phillips travelled up to London as directed by Sir Thomas Fremantle.

In his diary, Sir Thomas wrote:

“came home at 2 to see W. Phillips, whom I had directed to come to London to talk over the case of the labourers who threaten to strike for 3/ addⁿ wages. Tom attended our meeting & resolved not to give in to their requirements, but to pay 2/ more to non-Union men.”

Sir Thomas also wrote out his instruction to William Phillips, saying that these were to be read to the labourers, though it is not obvious whether these were sent to him through the post or handed to him when they met. He was clear in his intention of not having anything to do with the Union, as he saw this as the interference of strangers and an obstacle to good relations between worker and employer. He also recognised that the option of going to Queensland, which the workers have informed him about, was not an easy one, but he raised no objection to anyone who wanted to, to giving it a go.

W. Phillips,

I request you will inform Jeremiah Harding and others who have written to me to say that they require a rise in their wages of 3/ a week & a general conformity with the Rules, a copy of which they enclose, that I cannot accede to their request and further that I must decline to enter into communication with ‘The Union’ of which Jos Alderman is the Secretary as I observe that the interference of such bodies between labourers and their employer, instead of leading to an amicable settlement of any differences that may arise, lead in most cases to strikes, loss of employment, and angry feelings between the parties.

And I earnestly tender my advice to my friends amongst the labourers at Swanbourne to avoid committing themselves to engagements with a Union which hereafter they may be sorry for.

If they can improve their condition by emigrating to Queensland (as proposed in the paper they have forwarded to me) I shall be glad that they should do so. But I fear that it is only in the case of young and industrious men who are prepared for a rough life, that the venture will be successful.

Wages at home must be regulated by circumstances, & the Farmers of Swanbourne will, as they always have done, give a fair rate of remuneration to their men – But the amount to be fixed must depend on private arrangement for the advantage of both parties not on the dictation of strangers.

(to be read to the labourers)

Tom Fremantle also wrote to John Phillips that day, giving him his instructions on how to handle the strike threat, and also what he should do about the pony:

John Phillips,

You will inform the men Thomas Phillips and Alfred Alderman that I received two notices (one to myself and the other to you) 'requiring' an addition of 3 shillings to their wages and a general Conformity to their Rules. It is not my intention to comply to the Rules of the Union, one of which states that "All cases of dispute between the members of the union and the Employees must be laid before the Branch Committee to which such members belong". It is impossible that I should accede to this proposal.

They are welcome to continue in my service as at present. If on Monday morning the men do not come to work, you must do the best you can hiring a boy for a week or two to look after the pony, and meanwhile you will look for a man not belonging to the union to whom I should be willing to give a good wage for working in the garden and looking after the pony.

I do not object to keep a man who has belonged to the union if he is willing to leave it, but I consider that a non-union man is an equally good workman.

Yours faithfully TF Fremantle.

On **Sunday 23rd February**, William Phillips write to tell Sir Thomas what he has done. He clearly had not understood his instructions very well, as he offered the workers a shilling even before they have agreed to leave the union, with an offer of further money if they left the union.

Swanbourne

Honoured Sir,

I read the paper wich you gave me to the men & I gave them 1s last night same as the other farmers and I told them if they left the union you would give them a further rise this week but you would not give 16 nor agree to their Rules they gave me their notice for another week and they would consider the mater over.

Your humble servant,

W Phillips.

The offer of more money does at least have the effect of putting any strike action back for a week whilst the workers had time to consider the matter.

William Phillips letter had reached Sir Thomas by **Monday 24th February** since Sir Thomas wrote to his son, expressing his regret at what William Phillips had done. He asked if Tom had any news from John Phillips.

My dear T,

I read W. Phillip's letter. I am sorry he gave the extra 1/ to the men. I meant to leave them as they were so long as they continued in the Union. This will lead to further negotiation – eventually to a strike. Have you anything from John?

Yours affectionately,

T.F.F

The next morning, **Tuesday 25th February**, Sir Thomas wrote again to his son, letting him know of his intention to withdraw the additional shilling, which William Phillips had offered, unless the men leave the union. This almost seems designed to provoke a show down with the Union, without ever dealing directly with them, or acknowledging their right to represent the workers.

My dear T,

I will write to W. Phillips. I shall not allow him to give any additional 1/- to the men unless they satisfy him that they have left the Union and will give him a promise not to join it again while in my service.

I am going to St. Michael's at 5 o'clock. I shall probably be back home at 6 p.m. or soon after, when I shall be glad to see you.

Yours affectionately, T.F.F

Meanwhile, John Phillips was writing to Tom Fremantle, firstly to tell him about the dung and the discrepancy over its weight, and then informing him of what the workers were doing and what he has done about it.

Honoured Sir,

I write to say that I received your letter, and as you will see that I have seen the Station master about the Dung. He says that he Waid each Load, there were only 6 and there is what each Load Waid seperatly in the Invoice which I have sent only 4t 8c 2s in all. Sir, have told Robert about your wishing Him to look to the Carriages.

I cannot say anything about the Men til next Week as they say there notice means for this week but they are at work this week all right. There is no noise or disturbance in any way nor I don't think there will be.

My Brother and the Farmers gave the men 1/ more on Saturday and I done the same I hope I did not do rong in so doing. Sir we are getting on very well with the Work we have done the draining or nearly so, I don't wish for better men than the two I have if they will only be contented. I thought about setting Alderman to dig some Gravel now in a Day or two, and me and Phillips would get on with the other work. I thought I would try and do without Alderman in Alderman in a few weeks as soon as we have

done most of the extra work. Sir my Brother is going to give the men 1s more on Saturday night, am I to do the same if they will be content with that.

I remain Honrd Sir, Your Obedient Servt, John Phillips

The next day, **Wednesday 26th February**, Sir Thomas wrote to William Phillips along the lines that he had told his son he would do. He was clear that the men were not to be paid the extra shilling for another week, unless they gave a clear undertaking not to remain in the union. He also recognised that it was important that the farmers were not to be seen to be forming their own unofficial union, by agreeing to pay the same wages, as he presumably thought that this would give added justification to the workers to have their own union.

W Phillips,

Your brother John writes to inform Mr F that it is your intention to make a further advance of 1/ to the men employed by you on Saturday night. I have to inform you that I cannot allow you to make any increase in the wages of the men unless they are able to inform you that they are no longer members of the Union and that they will not join it again so long as they are in my service.

If they agree to this, you can raise the wages of your Milkers and Cattlemen to 15/ a week. You need not take notice of what other employers of labour may think proper to do, as it is not desirable that there should be a Union of the Farmers.

TFF

NB If the men come to work on Monday at their increased wages, they can do so.

They make strike if they like, but you must not turn them off.

If they are out of work, it must be their own doing.

The next day, **Thursday 27th February**, Williams Phillips replied to Sir Thomas, though it is not clear whether he intended to pay the extra shilling even if they did not leave the union, which they have said they were not willing to do.

Honoured Sir,

I told my Brother that I should give my men 1s a week rise the same as the other farmers last week & if they agreed to leave the union I should give them a further rise but not without Sir Thomas.

I ask them this morning if they should leave the union and they all said no. I told them then I should give no higher wages to them. I shall not turn them away if they keep on at the same pay,

Sir Thomas,

I remain your

Humble Servant

W Phillips

On **Friday 28th February**, John Phillips writes again to Tom Fremantle, expressing his regret that he had not sought his advice before giving the extra shilling, but said that he was going on what his brother had said. He does not expect the men to leave the union, and reports that they are having frequent meetings. He also reports on the health of the pony.

Honoured Sir,

I am very sorry that I did not ask you before I gave the men the shilling, but I understood from my Brother that you were willing to do so. I promise that I will not in future.

Sir the Pony was brought home one day last Week and is quite well not any worse for being away. I don't know at present what the men really will do but I fear they are determined not to leave the Union and what I hear they seem as if they would stand out next week they often have meetings they met last night a lot of them.

J. Phillips

There is also a long and compassionate letter in the archive that is only dated February, and seems to be from Lady Louisa Fremantle (it is signed L F) to Sir Thomas, in which case, she must have returned from London to Swanbourne. The writer sets out a very strong case for the workers having an increase in their wages, and recognises that perhaps they, as the leading members of society, have not been as faultless over the problems that have arisen, as they might like to think. At the top of the letter is written 'Dearest L' – maybe Sir Thomas's reflection on his wife's compassionate attitude.

I believe it may be too late to make any observations upon the state of things at Swanbourne – but better late than never. I wish first to write down some reflections – When we are tempted to give grievous fault with others, which may in great measure be deserved, I think we ought also to ask ourselves whether we, as the more enlightened part of the Community, who desire (I hope at least) to act on Christian principles, whether we in the higher position have not been wanting in some essential points in our duty to those whom we employ – Have we taken pains to find out the real condition of the respectable & well conducted among our poor men, as heads of families, by enquiring what difference the high price of coals and bread, two of the chief necessities of life, has really made in their expenditure. Have we been quite right, especially the last three months in letting the question of wages drop, knowing how severely the labourers must have felt the price of fuel, joined to the last few weeks hard weather – Would it not have been wise, for our own sakes, as well as showing more care for these people, on whom we must depend in great manner for the

cultivation of our land, if we had spoken to them about these matters (as probably we shd have found proper after inquiring) if we had voluntarily proposed an increase of wages again to the farmers and acted upon it ourselves – I never can think that merely putting off consideration on certain important subjects will bring things right –

However all this is passed & I only refer to it to induce an impartial judgment – and as one element in the possibility of coming now to some solution of the present difficulty – would it still be the best plan to speak to the men explaining that you had intended to increase the wages – but that you did not admit the right of any public body or Society to dictate terms between employer and employed – especially in the case of an employer who had endeavoured in many ways to act simply for the welfare of the working classes around him. Letting them have land to occupy near the village which you had in fact intended to add to, giving help & counsel to their Benefit Society which you had been the chief means of setting up at first. Paying large sums yearly for the education of their children, besides many other useful institutions set on foot & kept up at considerable expense by the Ladies of your family – that though you would absolutely refuse such dictation, yet having considered the high price of many necessities of life you were willing to give say 14/ or 15/ per week & to advise the Farmers to do the same and you might even say that each of your own labourers who are married men you would make a present of so much to make an increase of their means, in consideration of the hard weather the last month – I may be wrong in these ideas, but it must be worthwhile to be cautious before you turn off such very respectable men as John Grantham, such good industrious workmen as Jeremiah Harding & there are several of that type on Phillips's list.

I cannot agree with the view that we ought to expect uncomplaining contentment from people who I am quite sure find it just as much as they can do to keep & clothe & educate a family, without running into debt, it is done in a few cases of healthy, sober men with tidy good wives, but the least want of health in wife or children, the least want of thriftiness in the wife, & all are not thriftily brought up, will run them into debt for shoes or rent even with the help of £3 or £4 for the summer harvests.

I should like to see every good labourer able to lay by a little for the rainy day, & not thus live from hand to mouth – and I think it not unnatural that the day labourer in the present advancing state of society should snatch any prospect of bettering his condition – we should not blame it in higher ranks of life, when people have families – why should we blame it in them, even if they show ignorance in the way they do it.

LF

Young men like George Ash should not do more than pay their own board to their mothers.

On **Saturday 1st March** ,Tom Fremantle, who had gone to Holme Priory, Wareham for the weekend, writes again to his Father, recognising that the one shilling that had been given to the workers in the first instance without the condition of them leaving the union had been a mismanagement, and was likely to lead to a struggle.

Holme Priory, Wareham.

My Dear Father,

Many thanks for your letter. I return W. Phillips letter to you. From what Eddy last wrote to me (which you saw) I rather fancy the men must have expected an unconditional rise, and so the matter has not been well managed in the best way. We are in for a fight now, and I shall write again to John to keep him up to the mark.

I don't see that what we have to do is confined to 'Weeding out the men who have been most active'. It seems to me very unlikely that after what has passed that they will go on without a further rise. And if so you will have to take measures at once to get men of some kind, or leave your farm without men to work it for some time to come.

.....

Yours affectionate son

T.F Fremantle

Saturday was also the day on which 'The Labourers Union Chronicle and Journal of the National Agricultural Labour Organisation' was published, and the Fremantles had been getting a copy of their own. Edward Fremantle had copied out some extract from the edition of Saturday 1st March to send to his father. There is a reference in the article to the part that the dispute over the Poors Land had played in the dispute. It is also the workers perception that, whatever the Sir Thomas and the farmers might think, there was, in effect, a Farmers Union in existence.

After a notice that the members of the Union have demanded a rise of wages as the employers "will not come to any amicable settlement" it talks of the battle of "right against might", of "surplus labour being gone, etc." It goes on "It is here that we had our common lands taken from us seven years ago and we never hear about having it again. When will such robbers be arrested? We believe the union will do much to stop such proceedings, etc." It also says "The farmers here have a Union of their own".

The Course of the Strike

On Monday 3rd March Edmund wrote to update his Father on the strike, which had now started. It seems as though the majority of the workers had not turned up for work on Saturday, though one of them, Thomas Phillips who was not related to the Phillips brothers, was saying that he would return to work on Wednesday, but was currently in Dunstable – apparently because he wanted to be out of the way of what was going on. On the Monday morning, there was a parade around the village, but it was pouring with rain, which seems to have dampened the spirits of the strikers and their family.

Swanbourne,

My dear Father,

You may like to hear how the strike question is progressing here. I have only to say that Swanbourne is out on strike speaking generally. Phillips seems to be doing all the milking himself with the help of two or three boys.

We shall I fear have some trouble as idleness is likely to lead to riot. There has been a grand parade of Union people through the village this morning, about 30 in all men women and children wearing rosettes, but they did not look very cheerful in the rain. Thomas Phillips I hear means to leave the Union – he has not behaved at all well, refusing to do so on Saturday night, & not looking after the horse yesterday, but he sent his father to say that he was “coming back to work again on Wednesday” and that he would leave the union. He is now at Dunstable I hear as he wanted to be out of the way of today’s doings. John P[hillips] is rather irate with him, but I have advised him to take him back if he leaves the Union on Wednesday, paying him 14/. Tom has authorised John to pay as much as 15/ to any non-union men who can be depended upon but I doubt whether Thomas P can be trusted much yet. However I think that those who are non-strikers will soon break altogether with the union men.

.....

Your affect[ionate] son

Edmund

John Phillips also informed Tom Fremantle of what was happening at The Old House, including some further information on Thomas Phillips not working, and so describing what he had done to find someone else to care for the pony.

Honoured Sir,

I write a line to say that the Men left me on Saturday. I told T Phillips if you would leave the union you would give him 15/ a week and not join it again. He said he would not so I have got the Baker Son¹ to see to the pony. Sir on Sunday it appears that Phillips changed his mind and sent me word he was going out for two days and that on Wednesday he would come back to his work and leave the Union. I don’t like the way

of his going out visiting as I know nothing about his going till after he was gone. The Captain advises me to take him back at 14/ but I don't think he will come back for that as you see I promised him 15/. Now Sir if he comes on Wednesday leaves the union and promises not to join it again may I give him the 15/ you know Sir he suits us very well nor do I want to change.

I remain Honoured Sir,

Your Obednt Servt.

J Phillips

[¹Charles Holtham, aged 15, lived with his family at what is now 28 Winslow Road.]

On **Wednesday 5th March** Tom Fremantle, having received the letter from John Phillips, had telegraphed back to him, and then updated his father on what he had told John.

My dear Father,

I have the enclosed from John Phillips, received last night. I telegraphed to say I could not give 15/ and wrote that I did not care to keep Thos Phillips unless as a non-union man at 14/. I never meant John to promise 15/ unless the men came to work on Monday.

.....

Have you got any news?

Yours affectionate son,

T.F Fremantle

I enclose also John's earlier letter

The next day, **Thursday 6th March**, William Phillips wrote to Sir Thomas, to tell him what the labourers were doing to gather support from the neighbouring villages. He himself only had two boys to help him in place of the 7 men he had been used to having, and so was having to spend all his time looking after the cattle.

Honoured Sir,

The men are walkin about and makin a great talk every night at deferent villages, Jerimiah Harding, Jerimiah Alderman, Phillip Alderman, George Alderman, Charles Alderman, Thomas Campbell, William Campbell, those are the names that have been at work on the farm all winter. I have only George Walker and 2 boys so it takes all our time to look after the Cattel.

The union men are haven a meeting at the Chapel in Nerton this afternoon so they are round the place with their flags and ribons now. Sir Thomas I will wright the other names at night,

I remain your humble servant

W. Phillips.

Thomas Phillips did not return on the Wednesday as he had said he would, and on **Friday 7th March** John Phillips informed Tom Fremantle about what he was doing about getting extra help in his place. He was clearly talking with Edmund Fremantle about the situation, and is wanting someone to be sent from Dorset to help out.

Honoured Sir,

I write to say that T Phillips as not come to me again nor does he seem to leave the union as he said he would, so I have Charles Turvey¹ with me now the one that went with you shooting. I have also the boy as well which I should like to keep for a few weeks as I am very much behind with the garden.

Sir I told the captain that I should be glad if you would send a man from Dorsetshire. Sir, Turvey wants 12/ a week. I told him that I would see how he suited me I think he will be a very good one to work, as I told him I should expect a good deal of work done. Sir, am I to pay him 12. I will attend to your wish as regards the Pony.

I remain Honoured Sir

Your Obednt Servt

J Phillips

[¹Charles Turvey, aged 18, lived at The White Hart where his father was the publican, and in 1871, had been described as a Carrier.]

On the previous day, Captain Edmund Fremantle had received word that he was appointed to a ship, and so had gone into Aylesbury to try and get some more information. Consequently, it was left to his wife, Barbarina to write to Sir Thomas, her father-in-law. She enclosed also a list of the men in the union which had been compiled.

My dearest Pappy

As Eddy has gone to Aylesbury today, he has deputed me to answer your letters to him. I enclose a list which I believe to be quite correct of the Union men. Also those on the first part of the list (except the three with / before their names who were sick) struck on Monday. You will have heard from Phillips this morning, but he wishes me to add that he engaged Evans¹ this morning to work for him and that he is a very good

workman. John Phillips seems to be getting on very well with young Charles Turvey and Charles Holtham.

I hear that about a dozen of the best men are going to Yorkshire on Monday where they expect to get £1 and some are going to Queensland but I don't know how true this is.

The Unionists had a large tea party at the Nearnton Chapel last night and held a meeting opposite the National School afterwards at which Tattam and Joseph Alderman spoke.

.....

I remain

Y affectionate daughter

Mrs Fremantle

I have calculated that exactly half the labourers are unionists, but they are the best half as so many of the others are old now.

[¹James Evans, a 32 year old agricultural labourer, born in Quanton and living with his wife and family in Nearnton End, and appears on the list of those not in the Union.]

See appendix 1 for the list of names that Barbarina Fremantle had produced. There were altogether 30 names on two sides of the paper. Sir Thomas Fremantle seems to have produced a second list (see appendix 2) of all the workers who were not on Barbarina's list, containing the names of 36 names in total, divided into 4 sections - 22 names of men who were presumably considered to be fit and able, 9 names of old men, 3 names of boys and 2 names of men who might not be in Swanbourne.

The next day, **Saturday 8th March**, a week into the strike, another edition of the Union paper was published. Under the section headed 'local activities', there is an upbeat account of the events taking place in Swanbourne, written by Joseph Alderman. In it, there is a reference to a conversation that had taken place with Lady [Louisa] Fremantle, which may have been the reason why she had written to her husband.

Swanborne: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have" Heb 13 5th verse. Such is the answer that Lady Fremantle gives her parishioners to their petition for an advance upon 12s per week. I wonder her ladyship did not come fairly at the questions: why not give us the 3rd verse of the same chapter, and practically carry out its injunction? The parishioners are reminded of the many advantages they have over neighbouring parishes. Then 1st: Better pay. I certainly am at a loss to know what is the meaning of her ladyship on this point, but if cash is meant, we differ in opinions as we can point to a village (Hogstone) about one mile distant, where the labourers are receiving 15s and 16s a week. All honour for Hogstone farmers! but here (Swanborne) with three of the Right Honourable Sir T. F.*

Fremantle's family (including himself) we are told "to be content with such things as ye have!" Learn what the apostle says farther: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal" I might add another line – An empty cupboard, children crying for food, a long baker's bill, and finally the County Court Officer to distress you.

'Ah!' says the mother of a large family "it's easy to teach contentment in prosperity but in poverty it's hard to practice" Then there's the nice allotment; well we pay nearly double the farmer does who occupies the land before: moreover we had our common rights taken from us nearly the same time as we took to the allotments, and because we tried to defend our own they took two of our most respectable men to prison (Aylesbury) and we had to beg £10 to release the victims of their greedy rage; but their revenge was not yet full, so the shepherd of the flock sent for his dog (the Court Bailiff) and sold all they possessed in the home of their nativity. But then we had no Joseph Arch – no Labourer's Union; so the weak went to the wall. Now we see better days, and having grasped the arm of the NALU, we say to the great and mighty 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall'

For the weak grow strong when they all unite

And by helping one another we shall soon regain our right.

This is how we are doing at Swanbourne. 35 men are out under marching orders, all in order, parading the different villages. Monday's excursion (under the command of Mr Jos Tattam farmer) was from Swanbourne to Little Horwood, where we were regaled with a good lunch of bread and cheese and smoking hot coffee, which we all enjoyed to our hearts' content, (provided by Mr John Ash, farmer of Little Horwood). From thence to Mursley, Drayton and Stewkley, where we had some capital speeches by Mr Thomas Alderman, J Tattam and others. The principles of the Union were fully explained. The men said, "Union for ever; let's flock into the Union" and many were wondering how and when and where this mighty movement will end. So let us wire in, boys – and keep our peckers up, we shall soon rejoice together in having better luck.

J Alderman, Branch Secretary.

The Bible reference - Hebrews 13 v 3 - says: "Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them; those who are tortured as though you yourself are being tortured." This seems to have been another reference to the two workers who had been imprisoned for debt in 1866 following the dispute over the Poors Land and the allotments. It appears that they had been released after the payment of £10 towards the money they owed, but even then, the bailiffs had been called in and their household effects sold off to pay the remainder. This treatment of the 2 agricultural workers nearly 9 years earlier clearly still rankled.

On the same day, Edmund received a telegram from the private secretary to the First Lord that he was appointed to the *Barracouta*. Edmund was very disappointed, as the *Barracouta* was an old paddle steamer, which he knew of from his previous service. He decided to go into Aylesbury on Monday, to check that the appointment was in the papers, and when it was, reluctantly decided that he should take it.

Monday 10th March was Sir Thomas's 75th birthday, and Edmund found out that his name appeared in the paper as being listed

It was not until the next day, **Tuesday 11th March**, that Barbarina Fremantle again wrote to Sir Thomas, in place of her husband, sending him her best wishes for his the birthday that she and her husband had missed, and expressing her and Edmund's feelings about his appointment to the Barracouta. She tells of the ten men who had gone off to Leamington, where the National Union had its headquarters in expectation of being offered work in Yorkshire. She had spoken to one of the Unionists who had expressed his surprise that it had come to a strike, and that Sir Thomas had not agreed to a payrise.

The Cottage, Tuesday March 11th

Dear Pappy,

I meant to have written to you yesterday for your birthday but I put off doing so till the afternoon, & I then had so many interruptions. Tho' a day after the day, please accept my very best wishes for today.

I felt sure that you would sympathise with us in Eddy's disappointment about his ship. I sincerely hope that he has done the best in accepting the Barracouta, but I am so grieved to think of his having to serve three or four years in such a ship. I can't say I have much faith in Sir A. Milne's promise of securing him to another ship if he can. When he is once gone from England I don't think Sir A. will give him a thought – I can't help feeling very low at the prospects of his going away so far, but my dear little boys are a great comfort to me.

I don't think there is much to tell about the strikers. Ten¹ of them went to Leamington yesterday to be hired by a man from Yorkshire. They intend sending for their wives and families in a few week's time when they have made homes for them. In the meantime, some of the women are selling their household goods to raise money to pay their way here. I saw a cartload of things go away yesterday that some man had bought. One of the Unionists told me that they never imagined it would [come] to a strike. They quite thought that you with your usual kindness would have given in directly and that the farmers would have been obliged to follow your example.

Please give my love to dear Mammy and tell her that I will write to her tomorrow. I enclose you any advertisements I thought you might like to see.

Yr very affectionate daughter,

B Fremantle.

[¹A list in the archive gives the names of 9 of the workers as Charles Alderman snr, Charles Alderman jnr, Jesse Alderman, Alfred Alderman, Harrison, Alfred Pitkin, George Alderman jnr, boy Edward Harrison, boy Thomas Campbell.]

On **Wednesday 12th March**, John Phillips replied to a letter from Tom Fremantle of which we have not got a copy. Tom wanted to know about Charles Turvey's attendance at church, presumably to know whether he was of good character, and worthy of employment. The pony was being well cared for, and there was more manure on its way.

Honored Sir,

I write in answer to your letters which I received. C Turvey does sometimes go to church. I pay the Boy 6 shillings a Week and find him very usefull. Sir, I have not turned the Pony out at present and I don't think that I ought as the Weather is so wet and cold. I am sure Sir it would be almost enough to kill him. I asked my Brother and Robert both and they say he would be sure to take cold.

Sir we have got the other Manure come it did old out weight this time quite, I don't think it will either it will be sure to lose a little weight in coming down on the truck.

I remain Honoured Sir

Your Obednt Servt, J Phillips

There was no further information on the strike until **Saturday 15th March**, when Thomas Phillips, having returned from his travels to Dunstable, decided that he needs to grovel to Tom Fremantle, to try and get his job back.

Swanbourne 15th March

Honourable Sir,

I now take the great liberty to write to you hoping you will pardon me. But Honourable Sir, I feel very sorry that I have left your employment and went in company with a wrong society. I should be most happy to fulfill my place again if you would be so kind and condescending as to allow me to do so hoping you will pardon me.

I am Sir your most humble Servant.

Thomas Phillips

The next day, **Tuesday 18th March**, Tom Fremantle replied to Thomas Phillips. The grovel had come too late, Tom now had all the workers he needed, and he was not in a very forgiving mood.

22 Chesham Place, 18th March

Thomas Phillips,

Your letter reached me yesterday and I am glad to find you are sorry for the mistake you made in joining with others in making demands upon your and their employers which we could not submit to, by the advice of the Union. You have confessed your

mistake like a man, and I dare say I may be able at some future time to make arrangements to have you again in my employment.

But just at this moment I do not make a change in the Garden where I have men to go on with while Sir Thomas and other employers have not the men they require. If you wish to do what is useful to us and is sure to remember afterwards to your advantage.

I recommend you to apply for employment upon the farm for a time, or to some other employer at Swanbourne, who is in more pressing need of help than I am – You have always worked well for me and I was sorry to lose your services. But no man can serve two masters and no master will willingly employ a man who looks first of all for his orders to another Master The Union.

Yours Faithfully,

T.F.Fremantle

On **Wednesday 19th March**, William Phillips was indisposed, so his wife, Ann wrote to Sir Thomas, with further news on the strike. Things were not going well for the strikers, and Sir Thomas's workers seemed ready to return to work, if Sir Thomas would have them.

Honoured Sir,

My Husband as got a gathered Finger and cannot wrote but he wished me to say that the men have left the Union and are all willing to come back if you Sir Thomas are willing to take them

.....

Sir Thomas, William Camble (sic) came to work yesterday he was ill before the strike and only came off[f] the Club on Monday he had lumbago in [h]is back the Village is getting more quiet now Sir Thomas.

I remain Honoured Sir

Your Humble servant

A. Phillips

Sir Thomas replied to this letter the next day, **Thursday 20th March**, telling William Phillips how he wanted him to handle the labourers on his farm. Rather late in the day, he decided it was time to come and speak with the men directly.

Mr Phillips,

I am glad to hear that your men are prepared to discontinue their connection with the Union. They have put you to much trouble & inconvenience, but as I believe they acted thro' ignorance and were misled by mischievous & designing men. I will not object to

your taking them back at the wages they were receiving when they left their work, provided they undertake not to rejoin or subscribe to the union so long as they are working for you.

I shall go to Swanbourne tomorrow & shall wish to speak to the men separately at the farm.

I request therefore that you will ask them to meet me tomorrow at half past 12 o'clock.

I am sorry to hear that you have a bad finger.

The final letter is from John Phillips to Tom Fremantle on the same day, telling him more about the pony and the strike, and his views on the garden and the price of manure.

Honoured Sir,

I am very sorry that you should be disappointed as the Pony was not turned out. My Brother and I both feel quite sure that if you have him turned out that he will almost sure to take a cold such wet cold wether as this is. I think Sir if I was you I would let him be in the Stable till after Easter as most likely you will want Him for use then and after that the Wether will be more settled, Sir but of course you can do as you please and if it is your wish I will let him go out.

Sir I spoke to my Brother about Thomas Phillips he says that he don't want him as is own men are all willing to come back to him again they seem to have quite done with the union all of them. T. Phillips came to me last week, he wanted me to take him on again I told him I could not. I advised him to write to you at once, now Sir if you please we could set him to get some gravel as we really ought to have some in the walks before they are fit for you or Her Ladyship either to see after the draining and all they are in a bad state.

Sir, I was in hopes we should have got all the place to look nice before you came Home and should have done so if the Men had not being so stuped but I believe they are most of them sorry for what they have done.

I think it were very rong to charge so much for Manure when they never brought the weight at all.

.....

I remain Hon Sir, Your Obdt Servt, John Phillips.

On **Friday 21st March**, Sir Thomas returned from London to Swanbourne, to speak with his workmen as he had arranged. In his diary, he wrote:

"Rose at 8.30, with dear L to Sw. It turned out a wretched day as we met with snow soon after leaving London & it continued all day....."

..... saw my farm labourers and allowed them to return to work as they assured me they have left the Union. Lunch with Eddy and back to London by 6."

The Strike was over

The strike had lasted less than three weeks from Saturday 1st March. We hear that by Wednesday 19th March, Sir Thomas's men at least were willing to return to work – without any increase in wages being guaranteed. They just wanted their old jobs back.

We do not know exactly what Sir Thomas said to the men on Friday 21st, but it seems likely that they were granted an increase in wages, though it was most likely only going to be a shilling.

There was nothing of relevance to Swanbourne in the Union Paper for 22nd March, but on **Saturday 29th March**, there was a further report on donations for what was being called 'the Swanbourne Lockout', even though Sir Thomas had been careful to make sure that no one was stopped from working.

It reported that donations were received from: H Ash 5s, John Ash 4s 6d, Joseph Tattam 12s 4d, a Whaddon friend 1s, a Horwood friend 1s, Geo Healey 1s, a friend 6d, H Ash 5s

The Bucks Herald on the same day carried an account of the response to the Queensland advert.

Exodus of Agricultural Labourers from Aylesbury. – On Wednesday last, 150 Agricultural Labourers and their wives and children, left Aylesbury railways station en route for Queensland, wither they are deported mainly through the influence of paid agitators. There was the usual scene outside the railway station prior to the departure of the emigrants by a special train provided by the London and North-Western Railway Company for the purpose. The train stopped at Tring and took up 50 more emigrants, also bound for Queensland, in the ship Ramsey, which sailed from London on Wednesday.

Mr. Richardson, the agitator, accompanies the emigrants to Queensland, but unlike the poor dupes who have gone with him, he will be able to return again when he likes. On Sunday afternoon there was a large meeting of labourers in the Market-square and Mr. Richardson delivered a parting address.

Amongst these workers were 2 Swanbourne brothers, Robert and James Gates (see below for more details) and

On 11th April, Sir Thomas wrote in this diary “..talked with C. Brooks about Mr. Arch's meeting last week at Swanbourne. It appears that the Arch agitator came to Whitchurch with a party of Roughts in a van & collected a large meeting opposite to the Cottage. His language was more moderate than that of Richardson, Tattam & the local agitators – but still very offensive, & he avoided direct personality. Bowler was present & denounced Mr. Arch's assertion that men had been turned out of their cottages – when he was hassled & hustled! But it all went off quickly. Mr. Arch's visit was evidently intended to counter all the injury done to the cause of the Union by the premature strike which took place in the village a short time ago.”

So this would appear to be the end not only of the strike, but of the Union. No further records of any union activity after this date have been found, and the determined resistance of Sir Thomas Fremantle in having anything to do with the Union, had undermined its efforts very effectively.

With few exceptions, those who were willing to work in Swanbourne were able to find work, particularly as some people had left the village and so the competition for jobs was not so fierce. Wages seem to have been raised, and the shock of the conflict seems to have been a warning to both employers and employees that they needed to find a better way of handling their differences, without it leading again to such an unfortunate outcome, from which no-one seemed to benefit.

The Aftermath

There is still more work to be done to try and track down, as far as we can, what happened to the different people involved in the strike.

However, there are a number of interesting stories that we already know of and are worth telling.

Sir Thomas Fremantle

Sir Thomas, having reached the age of 75 during the course of the strike, eventually decided to retire. On 29th November 1873, he wrote to his son saying that he had offered his resignation to Mr. Gladstone (the Prime Minister) which had been accepted. He was subsequently awarded a peerage, and became known as Lord Cottesloe.

Sadly, in 1875, Lady Cottesloe (Louisa) died of accidental poisoning. Lord Cottesloe died in December 1890 at the age of 92 years.

Edmund Fremantle

Edmund was offered the commission of the paddle steamer *Barracouta* and was sent to the Gold Coast in West Africa (now Ghana). Here he was involved in an attack on the Ashantis at Fort Elmina, which began on 12th June 1873, and he then supported a land attack on the Ashanti headquarters at Coomasie (Kumasi). This became known as the 2nd Ashanti War.

After this successful campaign, he sent a request back to his family in Swanbourne that the next child born in Swanbourne should be named Elmina after his victory over the Ashantis at the Fort.

He remained in active service in the Navy for many years after this, rising to the rank of Admiral in 1896. He died in London in 1929, but was buried in Swanbourne.

Thomas Fremantle

The younger Thomas Fremantle continued to serve as director for the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, and eventually became its chairman in 1896. In the meantime, in 1876, he had become an M.P., one of three representing Buckingham, gaining his seat at a bye-election caused by the raising of Benjamin Disraeli to the Peerage. He served in this role until 1885. On the death of his father in 1890, he had himself become a Peer, as the 2nd Lord Cottesloe, and he moved from the Old House into Swanbourne House. He died in 1918.

Phillip Alderman

The first child to be born in Swanbourne after Edmund Fremantle's request about the naming of this child was made was to Rebecca, wife of Philip Alderman, a member of the strike committee. Philip was employed on Sir Thomas Fremantle's estate, so it was as well for him to name his son, born on 11th July 1873, Edmund Elmina Alderman – so adopting not only the name of Elmina Fort, but also Edmund Fremantle's first name. The young Edmund was baptised in the Parish Church on 17th August 1873.

Family folklore suggests that Phillip and the family were evicted from their home as a consequence of the strike, but this is not borne out by the entry in Sir Thomas Fremantle's for 11th April, in which he says that 'Bowler was present & denounced Mr. Arch's assertion that men had been turned out of their cottages'. Also, the 1881 census shows that the family were still living in living in Smithfield End, alongside Phillip's parents, and their daughter Fanny Isabella had been born, there 2 years after the strike, and another daughter Katherine was also born there in 1883.

But by the 1891 census, the family were living in Nash where Phillip was running a grocer's shop. In the 1901 census, he was still living in Nash, described as a farmer, with Rebecca down as General Store keeper. The 1911 census has them still living in Nash, at Church Farm, with Philip a farmer, and Rebecca a domestic, so by this time, they would seem to have given up the shop. Rebecca died in 1922 and Philip in 1930.



Philip Alderman and Rebecca Hinton before their marriage in 1867



Philip Alderman's shop in Nash



The Alderman family in Nash, 1895

Thomas Phillips

It is not known where Thomas Phillips found employment after the strike, but in 1881, he was living in Smithfield End, and employed as a Gardener Labourer. Thomas and Rachel also had a son, Alfred William, born on July 30th 1873, so 19 days too late to bear the name Elmina!

Thomas subsequently left Swanbourne and was a gardener in Winchmore Hill (1891) and then Redhill in Surrey, where he had his own market garden. So, despite the indecision that he showed in 1873 over the question of whether to strike or not, he managed to develop a very successful career in the garden trade.



Thomas, Rachel, Julia and Alfred Phillips, around 1876

Joseph Alderman

Joseph Alderman, aged 30, as secretary of the Swanbourne Committee and the person who had penned the article in the union newspaper, may have found it very difficult to remain in Swanbourne, although as a tailor, he had an independent living. He and his wife Louisa, and daughter Amy, moved to Widnes, Lancs, where he probably worked in the cotton industry.

He probably moved there to be with his brother-in-law George Harrison. George, who was born in Thorngumbald, East Yorkshire, had married Joseph's sister Mary in Birdsall, North Yorkshire in 1858. In 1971, George is described as an out of work groom, and living with Mary and their 5 children in Nearton End Swanbourne. George and his eldest son George Edward, were listed amongst those travelling to Leamington on 10th March in search of work in the North, so it would seem likely that they found work in Widnes and were joined there by Joseph and family later.

Whilst in Widnes, Joseph and Louisa had two more children, Thomas and Daniel, before moving to Peterborough by 1879, where he again took up the role of tailor, and had another daughter, Mary. George Harrison and family also moved to Peterborough. George was a widower in 1881, so Mary had died by then. (The death of Mary Harrison was registered in Peterborough in 1878).

Joseph Tattam

There is a bit of a mystery surrounding what happened to Joseph Tattam after the strike. In Ken Reading's history of the village, he wrote that H.R Langley of Winslow, a life-long trade unionist, had told him that *'Joseph Tattam was a very strong supporter of Joseph Arch the Warwickshire President of the Union. Joseph Tattam came to his end quite early in life through his loyalty and adherence to the labourer's cause. A Public Meeting was held in Aylesbury to further the cause of the N.A.L.U. and Jos. Tattam was a delegate.'*

William Selby Lowndes, Lord of the Manor of Winslow and Whaddon, knowing this instructed two men, (keepers on his estate) to rough up Tattam, and on his leaving Aylesbury Town Hall they did so with some violence eventually knocking him down the steps. He never fully recovered from the attack and died one year and a day afterwards, his widow had to go out to work and eventually came to my Grandfather as a house-keeper, and then they married, this being my Grandfather's second wife, a kindly good woman of strong Non-Conformists religious outlook. She died in 1923. My Grandfather was John Keys, builder of Winslow; this I believe to be a brief but true record of that event.'

I have not yet found any other record of the incident mentioned, but the death of Joseph Hobbs Tattam, Bucks County Councillor, took place in Little Horwood on 12th May 1894. He was aged 55, and acknowledged as being a radical. In the 1901 census, his widow, Annie Elizabeth Tattam, was a servant living in the home of John Keys, a widower, and their wedding was registered in Winslow at the end of 1901. The death of Annie E. Keys, aged 79 was registered in June 1923 Winslow, Bucks. So most of the details of H.R Langley's story have been confirmed.

Emigrants

The only people from Swanbourne who are recorded as having emigrated to Australia on the *Ramsey* in response to the efforts of Edward Richardson, are two brothers by the names of James and Robert Gates.

In 1871, **James Gates**, Ag Lab, aged 25 was living with his wife Eliza aged 40, in Duck End, and brother-in-law, Thomas Caple. In 1881, Eliza was living in Stewkley with her brother, Thomas.

Robert Gates aged 26, and his wife Ellen, also aged 26, and mother Mary, aged 61, were living in Steeple Claydon. Ellen seems to have emigrated.

Although members of another family from Swanbourne, Charles and Edward Currell, also sailed on the *Ramsey*, their widowed mother had remarried to Thomas Johnson, a Little Horwood farmer on 25th June 1871, and the whole family seemed to have moved from the village with her, as neither Charles or Edward are recorded as being involved in the strike, and they are recorded as from Little Horwood in the list of emigrants given in the book 'The Aylesbury Agitator'.

A few observations

In the 1871, 36 of those classified as agricultural workers were aged under 20. Of these, in 1881 18 were still agricultural workers living in Swanbourne, 3 were in nearby villages, 1 had died, 1 was in prison, 3 were in Australia, 10 were in other professions elsewhere (8 in London & 2 in the Midlands).

Of the other 60, 42 were still living in Swanbourne (all agricultural workers except for 1 publican), 7 had died, 2 were in Australia, 6 were agricultural workers elsewhere, and 3 had found new professions elsewhere.

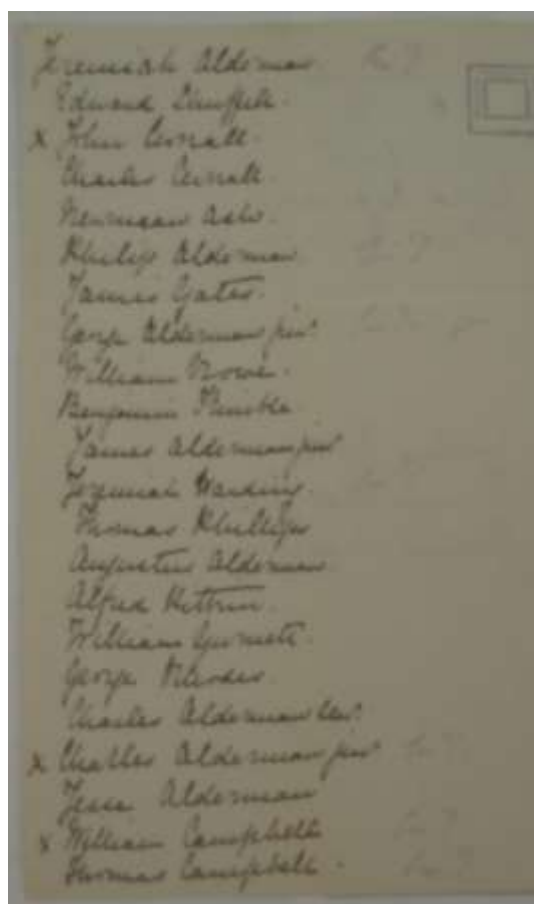
It does seem therefore that those who were willing to strike were more likely also to leave the village and seek employment elsewhere. But this may be a reflection on their age and their determination to find better-paid work for themselves rather than any pressure on them to leave the village.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Mrs Edmund Fremantle's list of men who had joined the Union – the cross indicating those who were off work due to sickness at the time.

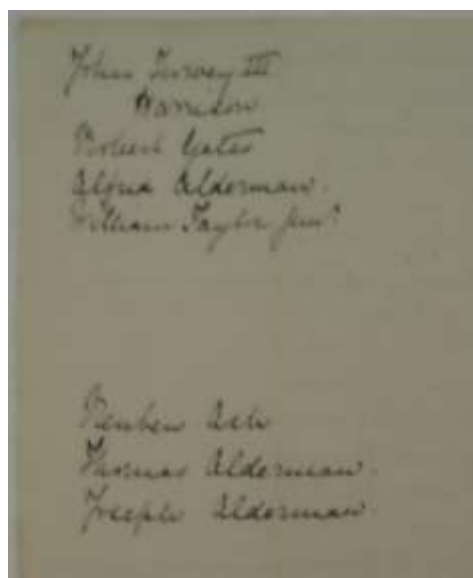
Jeremiah Alderman
Edward Sheffield
xJohn Currell
Charles Currell
Newman Ash
Philip Alderman
James Gates
George Alderman jnr
William Rowe
Benjamin Kimble
James Alderman jnr
Jeremiah Harding
Thomas Phillips
Augustus Alderman
Alfred Pitkin
William Gurnett
George Rhodes
Charles Alderman snr
xCharles Alderman jnr
Jesse Alderman
xWilliam Campbell
Thomas Campbell



Jeremiah Alderman
Edward Sheffield
x John Currell
Charles Currell
Newman Ash
Philip Alderman
James Gates
George Alderman jnr
William Rowe
Benjamin Kimble
James Alderman jnr
Jeremiah Harding
Thomas Phillips
Augustus Alderman
Alfred Pitkin
William Gurnett
George Rhodes
Charles Alderman snr
x Charles Alderman jnr
Jesse Alderman
x William Campbell
Thomas Campbell

On other side of paper
John Turvey III
Harrison
Robert Gates
Alfred Alderman
William Taylor jnr

Reuben Ash
Thomas Alderman
Joseph Alderman



John Turvey III
Harrison
Robert Gates
Alfred Alderman
William Taylor jnr

Reuben Ash
Thomas Alderman
Joseph Alderman

Appendix 2

At some point, Sir Thomas or someone else compiled a list of all the other workers who were not on the first list.

Names not on Mrs E F list of labourers who have joined the Union

22

1. John Ash
2. William Turvey
3. John Grantham
4. Henry Alderman snr
5. John Bowler
6. Joseph Hinton
7. Ebenezer Phillips
8. Matthew Alderman
9. John Boughton
10. Will^m Alderman
11. Benjamin Gurnet
12. Henry Alderman jnr?
13. James Evans
14. James Turvey
15. James Alderman
16. William Rhodes
17. William Willis
18. William Gates
19. Robert Alderman
20. John Gurnett (Holkham)
21. George Alderman snr?
22. George Ash jnr?

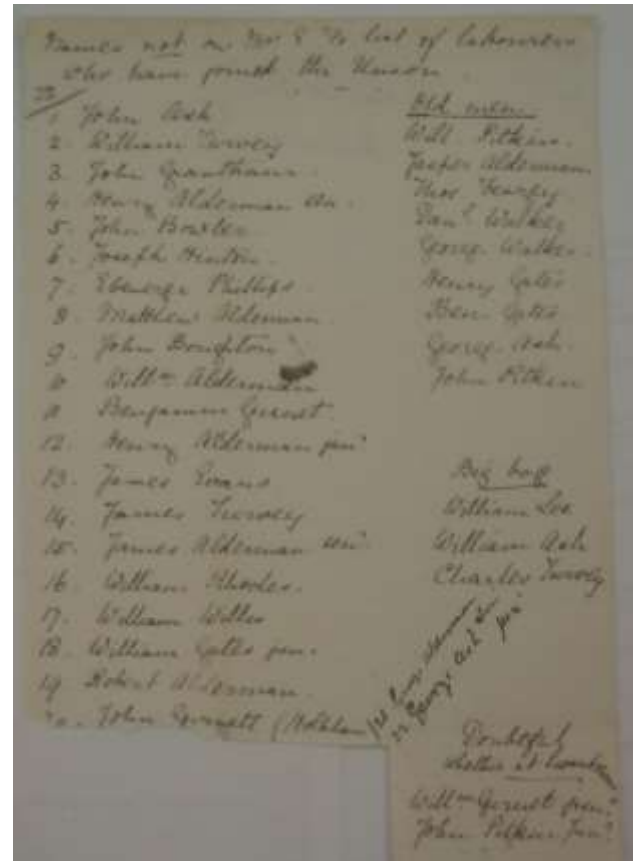
Old Men

- Will Pitkin
Jasper Alderman
Thomas Feazley (sic)
Dan^l Walker
George Walker
Henry Gates
Ben Gates
George Ash
John Pitkin

Big boys

- William Lee
William Ash
Charles Turvey

Doubtful whether at
Swanbourne
Will^m Gurnett jnr?
John Pitkin jnr?



Bibliography

“Swanbourne, a history of an Anglo-Saxon town” by Ken Reading, chapter 8.

“Agricultural Trade Unionism in Buckinghamshire, 1872 – 1885” by Pamela Horn, first published in ‘Record of Bucks Vol XX, part 1, 1975’.

“The Aylesbury Agitator - Edward Richardson: Labourers’ Friend and Queensland Agent, 1849 – 1878” by John R. Millburn and Keith Jarrott.