

# 'Such a Day as is Seldome Seene'

## THE MEMORANDUM BOOK OF A CHESHIRE YEOMAN, JOHN RYLE OF HIGH GREAVES, ETCHELLS, 1649 - 1721

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In Stockport Local History Library there is a modern transcription of a remarkable document, the seventeenth-century notebook of a yeoman farmer from north-east Cheshire, John Ryle of High Greaves Farm. The original document is elsewhere, being found amongst the family papers of a descendant in another part of the country. The beautiful transcription was made by local historian and calligrapher, the late Frank Mitchell of Gatley. John Ryle began his Memorandum book in 1649 and added to it regularly until his death on March 1st, 1691 (his last entry is for May 1690). His son Reginald continued with the notebook until 1721, although he lived at least a further 13 years.

High Greaves was a farm in the manor of Etchells in an area of scattered houses known as Heath Houses, only separated from Cheadle manor to the east by Cheadle Brook. In fact, John Ryle found Cheadle Church nearer than Northenden Church, his parish church. There was another farm called Lower House, High Greaves, but it was only ten acres and tenanted by the Bancroft family. High Greaves itself was nearly 39.25 Cheshire acres in

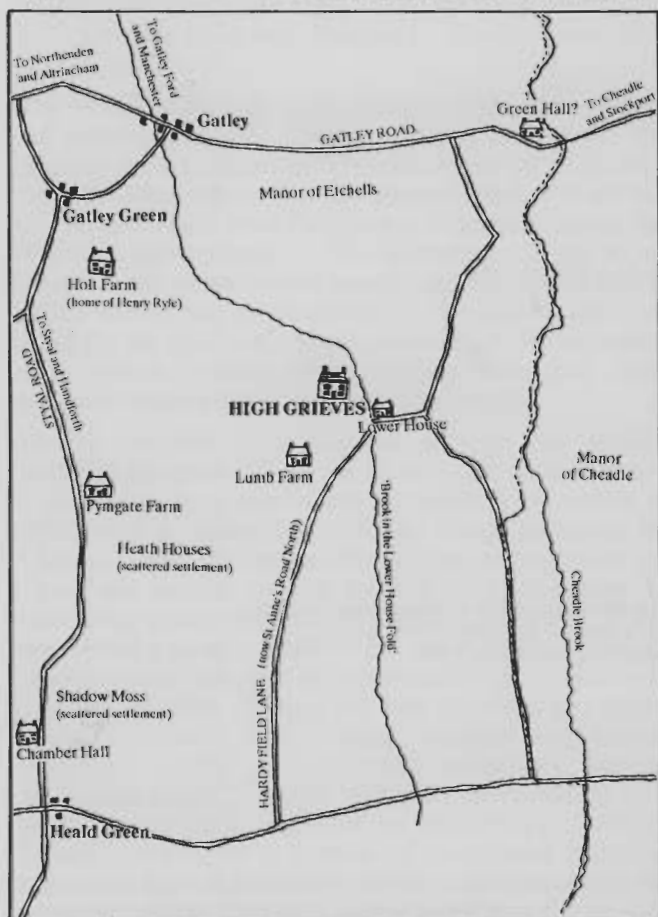
size, the largest three-life leased farm in Etchells. (A Cheshire acre was at least two statute acres.) So High Greaves was nearly 80 acres in extent. Only Peel Hall Farm, the dower house of the Tatton family (Lords of the manor of Northenden and Etchells), at 120 acres was larger, apart that is from the home farm at Wythenshawe Hall itself. It was firstly occupied in John Ryle's time by Mrs Katherine Nicholls (the mother of Robert Tatton who was Lord of the twin manors from 1617 to 1669) and then by Robert's son Thomas Tatton.

The Ryle or Royle family were an ancient and widespread family in this area of north-east Cheshire. Part of Etchells manor had been known as Royle Thorn after the family since the fourteenth century. When John Ryle began his notebook there were six tenants in Etchells called Ryle and four in the twin manor of Northenden.

John Ryle became the tenant of High Greaves in 1648/49, either following the death of his father or even of his widowed mother. (The three-life leases of Etchells would give a widow precedence over her eldest son.) The year 1649 was a bad one in which to take over a farm. The Second Civil War had ended in the summer of 1648, and Charles I had been executed in January 1649, just over two months before John Ryle began the notebook. There had been bad harvests in 1647, 1648 and 1649 throughout the country, but especially in war-torn and war-weary Cheshire. That is why the first entry in the notebook is of the corn prices at Stockport Market on April 6th, 1649. Oats were £4 a bushel, wheat £2 13s 4d, beans at £2 8s and barley at £2. (A bushel was a dry measure of approximately eight gallons.) All these prices were about four times the average - in other words these could well be famine prices and that was why John Ryle made a note of them.<sup>1</sup> He was probably a young man in his later 20s and he and his wife Anne must have viewed the future with a mixture of hope and despair - hope that all would come right in the end and despair at the hard work they had to do.

Farming in Etchells was still done in the great open fields, to some extent as it had been in the Middle Ages. Northenden and Etchells used the flexible four-field system, according to unwitting evidence in John Ryle's notebook, into the late seventeenth century. This type of field system, four large open fields divided into smaller units (called shuts or fields in Northenden and Etchells) was, according to H.L. Gray derived from Celtic field systems.<sup>2</sup>

The division into smaller units gave the four-field system great flexibility. The work of Paul Booth and J. Phillip Dodd on the mediaeval fields of Frodsham shows that each shut could have its own plan of arable, fallow and pasture.<sup>3</sup> This meant that one great open field could be part fallow meadow and grow oats, hay, hemp, flax, barley, wheat, rye, beans, peas and, from the late



Map showing position of High Greaves Farm

seventeenth century onwards, potatoes.

Most tenants also had crofts nearer their houses for growing vegetables like cabbages, onions, mustard and carrots for the cooking pot and they also had orchards. John Ryle's orchard contained cherries and plums as well as apples and pears. A tenant's lounts or strips were still scattered throughout the four-open fields but most tenants had a way of getting around the problems this might cause without going to the trouble of buying and selling land. They subtenanted land from each other.<sup>4</sup> The consolidation that went on later in the eighteenth century made permanent these adhoc arrangements. 'Consolidation' does not necessarily mean 'enclosure' here. More often it was the holding of a number of lounts or strips in the same part of an open field. Some of those lands had been exchanged earlier for land elsewhere.

The memorandum book spans a period in which England's agriculture, and this part of Cheshire especially, was recovering from the effects of civil strife and political instability to the 1720s when the beginnings of the Agriculture Revolution is conventionally thought to have begun. There was consolidation of landholding and the introduction of new crops like clover and turnips (both of which arrived in Etchells after John Ryle's death).

Eric Kerridge in his study *The Agricultural Revolution (1967)* maintains that the revolution of the eighteenth century merely built on an early agricultural revolution which began in the late fifteenth century with the change from permanent arable and permanent pasture to 'Up-and-Down Husbandry', the increased use of fertilizers such as manure and black marl, and although it does not have any relevance for North-east Cheshire, the drainage of fenlands.

'Up-and-Down husbandry' was certainly well-established in Northenden and Etchells by the end of the seventeenth century. Dr. William Nicholls,<sup>5</sup> owner of the dower lands of Etchells manor, Peele Demesne, and step-father to the then lord of the manor, Robert Tatton, in April 1640, because of complaints by neighbouring customary tenants, was requested by Robert not to burn two parcels of land called the Two Slutches. He had already push ploughed and burnt two other parcels of demesne land called the Toad Hole and the Toad Hole Close. (Push ploughs or breast ploughs were used to clear off turf in preparation for burning.)<sup>6</sup> Objections came from the tenants because he was converting permanent pasture to up-and-down husbandry. Dr. Nicholls's defence was that Robert Tatton 'affordeth the liberty to his Tennants to push plow and burn there grounds'.<sup>7</sup>

This little contretemps shows that converting permanent pasture to up-and-down husbandry was practised in Northenden and Etchells at least from the 1630s onwards and probably long before that, and that up-and-down husbandry were quite acceptable - as it should have been because, according to Kerridge, this new farming method had originated in the north-west. Dr. Nicholls's cycle for the Toad Close was nine years or arable followed by at least the same length of time again as pasture. According to Dr. Nicholls himself, he had turned a piece of ground not worth 10 shillings into valuable pasture and the 1648 Rental Survey, which valued the Toad Hole and Toad Hole Close at £1 10s, bears this out.

Other improvements were also taking place in Northenden and Etchells as elsewhere. Shadow Moss the common pasture for Etchells was being enclosed piecemeal by

tenants both large and small. The court leet records of Etchells imply that most were really 'encroachment by agreement' between the customary tenant and the lord of the manor. There were 22 instances of 'encroachment by agreement' on Shaw Moss and other 'greens' in Etchells and 14 'without the consent of the Lord'. Northern Moor was smaller and so most of the encroachments there were 'without the consent of the Lord'. In 1700 William Tatton esquire enclosed the whole of Bolshaw Outwood (a part of Shadow Moss which extended eastwards, south of Heald Green), 'leaving a reasonable part for the use of tenants, freeholders, and inhabitants of Etchells to get ridging clods, sand, clay and gravel'<sup>8</sup> - which gives some idea of the various uses to which a moss like Bolshaw Outwood was put, not to mention brick-making, turves for fuel, coal pits and, occasionally, grazing. According to the Court Leet Records of Northenden and Etchells and, occasional references in wills and probate inventories, the Tattons also allowed their tenants to enclose small intakes of land from Shadow Moss and Northern Moor (the common pasture land in the manor of Northenden). Like most of Cheshire enclosure in Northenden and Etchells tended to be piecemeal and by agreement (or coercion when the Tattons wanted to enclose) between the landlord and the customary tenants.

Commercial farming predominated in the eighteenth century but there was growing reliance on farming for profit rather than subsistence throughout England in the seventeenth century. Profitability was Dr. Nicholls's reason for converting demesne permanent pasture. There are hints in the memorandum book that John Ryle was moving with the times and probate inventories for the area show a growing concern with comfort in the home and affluence that may have been financed by commercial farming.

The notebook itself is mainly a mixture of the meteorological and the agricultural as you might expect from a farmer. (Even today, with all their modern gadgets, weather dictates to farmers what they do and in which field.)

This area of North-east Cheshire was not wholly given over to cheese-making as was the lush central and south of Cheshire. In fact, the farming here was much the same as the farming of south-east Lancashire across the Mersey, mixed arable and fat stock rearing and store cattle with some cheese-making. Northenden and Etchells were also areas of rural industry, especially linen weaving and partly as a by-product of fatstock rearing, tanning. These activities were carried on alongside farming.

However, John Ryle did not have a second craft or occupation, unlike a neighbour a mile to the south, the ejected Presbyterian clerk Francis Shelmerdine who, in addition to farming approximately 35 acres, became a weaver-clothier in order to keep his family after his ejection from Mottram-in-Longendale in 1662 following the Act of Uniformity.<sup>9</sup>

Ploughing could be as early as February or as late as early May (1690) when the Lord of the Manor, William Tatton, did not get his '2 Days Work' (ploughing) done in the Lower Shut in the Great Long Acres until May 5th and 6th (after John Ryle had done his own ploughing and sowing).

Harvesting could begin as early as late June. In 1667 John Ryle had had all his wheat ground at the mill (Northenden Mill, two miles to the north-west, on the River Mersey, demolished sometime in the 1960s) by July 21st<sup>10</sup> and in

1696 he sold a bag of new oats at Stockport Market on July 23rd. The following year was so dry that turves (peat turves for fuel cut from the great Shadow Moss a mile to the south) were dry enough to be carried off the moss on May 21st (turves were stacked on the moss after cutting to dry out).

The seventeenth century has been seen by some historians as a mini ice age and John Ryle wrote about its effects. In 1683 there was ice until March 25th, in 1686 four inches of snow fell in March, in 1688 it snowed for three nights in April, in 1689 there was six inches of snow late March. May 1689 was a month of great fluctuations with three or four hot days followed on Whitsunday (a holiday naturally) by snow and hail. In the December of that year it was so cold through snow and frost that Cheadle Church had less than 30 people in it on Sunday 22nd.

What concerned John Ryle more than snow or frost, which could hinder work but sometimes be beneficial, were rain and floods. Etchells was a low-lying manor in the Mersey Valley and not only was there the great River Mersey to flood but also numerous small brooks as well as all the ditches at the sides of lanes and fields. Floods could delay ploughing and sowing, ruin crops and turn the journey to and from Stockport Market into a very dangerous one.

*Upon the 30th of January about the year 1662 it was an extraordinary flood. I was at Stockport, and Mercy (Mersey) water was so high that the water came up to the topp of Lanc/Cheshire bridge at that on Lanc-Chester side. It filled the arch within about a foote or half a yard at the most. I durst not side over the bridge at the School House because I could not see no part of the battlement of that bridge. The water came up in the slack end of the bowling green, that I rode my mare to the knees in the cartway. I mett severall persons that told me I could not ride over at the Bearhole unless I would swime, so I was glad to ride up the Hillgate to gett forth of the town and to ride through Edgly to gett home.*

The School House probably belonged to Stockport Grammar School, originally sited in the centre of Stockport. The Hillgate was a long road leading from the centre of Stockport south towards Bramhall. Today it is called Higher Hillgate, Middle Hillgate and Lower Hillgate. Edgeley is an area south-west of Stockport and was quite a detour for John Ryle, who would normally have ridden home through villages closer to the River Mersey, such as Cheadle, along one of the main local highways, now the A560. Instead he was forced to ride over rough ground, perhaps over fields and along muddy dirt tracks.

It was not always water that fell on Etchells that caused flooding. There were a couple of brooks that drained into the Mersey between Gatley and Cheadle, Gatley Brook and the Micker Brook and many others which drained into them. It is these that were the main cause of the flooding mentioned by John Ryle; Lady Brook and Norbury Brook (which drained into Cheadle Brook and may have been the cause of the flooding mentioned below), a stream called 'the Brook in the Lower House Fould' that rose just south of the moss called Bolshawe Outwood and passed close by High Greave and The Lumb Farms and drained into the Gatley Brook. Cheadle Brook drained into the Micker Brook.

*And upon June the second '88 it was a shower towards Poynton, Lime and Adlington that raised Cheadle Brook in three houres time from as small as might be to go up to the Green Hall and Midingsted, and the brook in our fould did not runn at all.*

Just how extensive flooding could be is shown by the following entry.

*1689. Upon Friday the 18th of October it began to rain and rained that afternoon and a great deal of that night and the next day it was such extraordinary rain that I was at Brownley Green and could not come over that brook without a staff, and when I came to Brinksoe Brook I could not get over but was glad to go through Gatley untill I came to the Hobcroft Bridge. And so came through the Brookshoot and Cleasfield home. The brook continued running over the Twenty Acres Lane from Saturday until Tuesday, and all that time it flowed over the Dams in the Black Eye Meadow. Mercy Water (River Mersey) continued bank full until Tuesday night at which time Mrs. Ratcliffe went over to live at Salford.*

'Mrs Ratcliffe' was Mrs Ann Radcliffe, the twice widowed mother of Robert Tatton. She had first married William Tatton. After his death in 1673 she married Robert Radcliffe, the youngest son of Sir Alexander Radcliffe of Ordsall Hall Salford, and had four children by him to add to the three surviving children by her first marriage. Robert died after a duel on Bowdon Downs in 1686 at the age of only 30. Ann Radcliffe moved to Ordsall Hall in Salford at the end of 1689 because her eldest son Robert had come of age and was to marry Frances Legh of Lyme on January 1st 1690, and because the dower house of the Tatton family, Peel Hall, was occupied by young Robert's uncle, Thomas Tatton.

John's son Reginald also experienced flooding.

*This year we had all harrowed before the end of February 1715 and on the 9th March when we were ready to sow it happened the greatest flood in these small rivers that has been seen in our memory. The Brook in the Lower House Fould spread over the Little 20 Acres and Oxhey, Greaves Meadow and Shaw Meadow.<sup>11</sup>*

Hurricanes such as was experienced by the south of England in October 1987 were nothing new in this area as John's son Reginald noted in 1714.

*On ye first of February was a great Hurricane which did blow down many barns and trees and some houses. 'Tis credibly reported that two hundred barnes were blown down in Cheshire.*

Then there were strange days of weather.

*February the 4th 1679-80 was such a day as is seldom seene. In the morning it was fair but windy. Towards noone the wind was extraordinary high and tempestuous. It lightened and thundered, it rained, healed and snowed, and towards evening it was reasonably calm and sunshine.*

There were also earthquakes like the one described in 1690 by Reginald Ryle.

*There was an earthquake on the 7th October a little before eight o'clock in the morning, and upon the 13th day it did hail, rain, thunder, and a tempestuous wind.*

Although this period is known as the mini ice-age,



*High Greaves Farm as it was in the early 20th century*

droughts were nearly as common as floods. They could bring both benefits and disadvantages, even tragedy. John Ryle noted that the summer of 1666, the year of the Great Fire of London, was a time of drought. He also said that the great drought of 1681 lasted from April to August 14th.

Reginald Ryle called the summer of 1714 'the greatest drought that was ever known so that straw sold at 2/6d a trave'. (Traves or thraves were specific amounts of unthreshed corn, hay or thatching and bedding straw: 1 thrave = 2 shocks of corn, 1 shock = 60 units.) 1720 was better but very dry.

*In the year 1720 was a forward spring and a very dry summer. In ye latter end ye harfest was so very forward that we housed holland oats a week before St. James' Day (July 25).<sup>12</sup>*

John Ryle's Memorandum Book is very useful for the things he mentions in passing, the things he took for granted, like the four-field common field system, that boon work was still done for the Lord of the manor by the customary tenants. Most of the boon work and services such as giving hens, capons, turves, and coals to the lord of the manor had probably been commuted to money some time before the end of the seventeenth century but work days such as two days ploughing and one day mucking probably continued for longer as these were useful sources of brief but unpaid labour for the Tattons. It would

probably cost a shilling or two a day more to hire a labourer to do the work. But, as the Tattons sold the three-life leases tenancies to their tenants, even the work days were commuted to money. The boons and services for High Greaves in 1673 were as follows:

*2 hens or 1s. 1 capon or 1s.  
1 day ploughing or 2s  
1 day mucking or 2s  
1 load of coals or 2s 6d  
(from the open pits on Shadow Moss)  
2 loads of turves or 8d  
(also from Shadow Moss)  
2 days of sheaving or 6d  
1 load of pyles or wearwood if demanded  
(either dragging wood blocking the weir at  
Northenden out of the water or, more likely,  
wood to mend the weir after floods).<sup>13</sup>*

Farming practices that were taken for granted are mentioned. The Broad Field was marled in 1684 and John Ryle said of its productiveness the year later that 'Wee took forty riders at one load'.<sup>14</sup> Marl was a black clay soil spread over fields to give substance to a sandy soil. It was taken from pits on Shadow Moss, Gatley Green and Lawton Moor in Northenden. Often after the marl had been taken out the pits filled with rainwater and were stocked with edible fish - perch, barbels, etc. - much to the delight of local poachers as the court leets record.

In 1688 wheat and oats were sown, probably in separate lounts in the same two small fields in the Blackshaw and the Colts Heay. A shaw could be a part of an old wood that had been cleared with uncleared patches of woodland left to enclose a few acres of land. A 'heay', 'hey', 'hay' or 'hayment' was a piece of ground enclosed by hedges and, as their names imply (Colts Hey, Oxhey, etc), after the crops had been taken off animals were put in to graze the stubble. Sowing wheat and rye mixed together, later ground together to make maslin flour or blendcorn bread flour, was a common local practice, but John Ryle's Memorandum Book is the only mention I have come across of sowing two separate crops in the same sub-field.

John Ryle had a few sheep, probably less than 20. Sheep had been kept in moderate numbers in this area earlier in the seventeenth century (although even these numbers were small when compared with those for around Macclesfield and the panhandle of Cheshire) but by the time John Ryle took over High Greaves they were declining even further. On May 4th 1680 he notes dressing a sheep of the 'quicks' (live maggots in a wound).

Evidence for the continuation of the open-field system is unconsciously woven throughout the Memorandum Book. Henry Ryle of the Holt (one of the many Ryle cousins) grew peas in the Great Long Acre in 1683. The Lord of the Manor also had a lount in the Great Long Acre and grew oats there in 1690. There is a reference to eating 'pescods' in October 1683.

*We had green pescods boyled, wch growed in Hen. Ryle's Great Long Field in the year 1685, October 5.*

Could this mean that mangetout are nothing new and peas were eaten in their pods in the seventeenth century? Sugar peas were certainly grown in the seventeenth century as an early crop.<sup>15</sup> But why in October when they would have been as dry as bullets? It is possible that pea plants from accidentally sown peas from the previous June crop had sprung up and John was helping himself, with Henry Ryle's permission, to an unlooked for bounty before the winter ploughing destroyed them.

## Conclusion

The notebook, unlike many diaries produced at this period, says nothing about John Ryle's private life. From other sources we know that John Ryle's eldest son Reginald was born in 1656 and that his daughter Anne died in July 1664 and that his wife died in 1673, but nothing of this and the trauma the last two events must have caused him appears in the notebook. Yet it is significant that the notebook, which is uneven in its entries, has little to say about the 1660s and 1670s and doesn't really have year by year entries until 1677.

John Ryle remarried some time in the 1670s or 1680s and had at least one son, Joshua, by his second wife (whose name is not known). His daughter Katherine distressed him by marrying without his consent shortly before he died - John Coppock. Why John Ryle objected to the marriage is not made plain in his will but, reading between the lines, it is possible that his objections were a mixture of lack of financial settlement for his daughter being forthcoming from John Coppock's father (also John Coppock) as was usual in marriage settlements, and the feeling that Katherine, the daughter of a well-to-do yeoman farmer, in marrying the son of a tanner was marrying beneath her. She was his only surviving

daughter and he, like any father, wished her to marry well. As it happened he need not have worried for his daughter. Soon after his death, John Coppock the elder was granted a customary tenancy in Heath Houses near High Greaves of over 25 Cheshire acres (50 statute acres), one of the largest in Etchells. In 1700 John the father bought the farm for £108. In 1735 Deborah Coppock, probably the widow of one of John and Katherine's sons, was still in possession of the farm.

John Ryle was a revered figure in the area, serving as mislayer in 1661 and 1662, ale assessor in 1665, and burleyman for Heath Houses in 1686.<sup>16</sup> A note is made in Etchells Court Leet of the death of Reginald Ryle of Highgreave in 1673, who was not his son, but who may have been an uncle or a brother.<sup>17</sup> Nothing of this appears in the notebook.

Only two nationally important events are noted: the appearances of Halley's Comet in December 1664, April 1665 and September 1665; and the Great Fire of London in September 1666. Of the Great Plague of 1665, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the young Duke of Monmouth's visit to nearby Dunham Hall at the invitation of the Whig politician Henry Booth, just prior to his rebellion in 1685 there is nothing. John's son Reginald continues this reticence in the one or two pages written by him. There is only one obscure reference to plague in France in 1721.

Surprising as it may seem from this article, the actual Memorandum Book is very small. It makes 20 A5 pages of Frank Mitchell's beautiful calligraphy, but would make only three pages in 10pt Times Roman. Now comes the great unanswerable question. Why did John Ryle write his Memorandum Book in the first place? A number of possible explanations may be suggested. John seems to have had a great interest in the weather. He had noscientific education and no time to really pursue this interest until the 1680s.

The Memorandum Book began in 1649. The seventeenth century was a period of increased diary writing and memoranda books. The best is the diaries of Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn and the puritan cleric Ralph Josselin. Memoranda books and diaries are not unknown in North-east Cheshire/South-east Lancashire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they are rare enough to be like gold dust to the local historian. There is the well-known memorandum book of William Davenport of Bramhall Hall, esquire, which chronicles events national and local from the 1620s to the late 1640s. In 1783 Peter Pownall, the son of a Bramhall farmer, began his diary and continued it for seven years. In between comes the memorandum book of John Ryle in which he wrote down anything that he thought worthy of note, like the famine prices in Stockport.

The occasional notes continued until the late 1670s. By then John was a widower and young Reginald had just married Alice Hardy and soon after the second son, John, married Mary. Evidence from other sources such as Etchells Court Leet Records shows that Reginald took over some of the farming in the 1680s, so John had some time to write down his observations of local weather as they affected farming, particularly that of his own and his neighbours'. John was by then probably in his 50s. But he still seems to have devoted most of his time to the farm. 80 acres of mixed arable and pasture required a good deal of labour to make it productive. John, Reginald, Reginald's

wife, and later on Reginald's children, would probably not be enough to work the farm and living-in farm servants would have been needed.

The most basic question of all about this notebook is how had John Ryle learnt to read and write? The seventeenth century, particularly the first half, was a time of growing literacy and probably as much as 50 percent of men could read and write in small degree (enough to read a will and sign their names) as shown in Margaret Spufford's work on wills in the Cambridge area in *Comparative Communities* and reinforced by my own on 250 wills and probate inventories from a large area of North-east Cheshire (now part of Greater Manchester). Still the degree of literacy displayed by the notebook would have been rare amongst yeomen. Where would John have been taught such skills? Northenden had a parish school from 1530.

At one time this school was thought good enough to educate the son of the Lord of the Manor. Stockport Grammar School was established in the sixteenth century and would have taken the sons of yeomen farmers. At Northenden the schoolmaster is likely to have been the curate, Ralph Lowndes, who lived at the Rectory from 1627 (the death of the previous rector) to 1640 (his own death) and the same is true of Cheadle parish where Edmund Barrow was the curate until the mid-1630s. If John Ryle was educated locally, it is Lowndes or Barrow who would have taught him.

On the other hand, there was William Bailey, schoolmaster from Etchells, who turns up, along with his son young Thomas, as a member of the royalist garrison of Wythenshawe Hall in 1644. Where he taught I am not sure. But William was a youngish man with a son of only eight. He may have taken over from Ralph Lowndes, although from 1640 onwards, the Rector, Thomas Mallory junior, was in residence in Northenden.

Whoever taught John Ryle seems to have given him a sense of syntax, a love of words and a wide ranging vocabulary that stayed with him all his life. John was a naturally good writer. He used good, plain prose with few

flourishes, yet he sometimes showed a poetic sense of rhythm. Reginald's writing is not so rounded and is more bald in its statements. He might have shared his father's interest in the weather from a farming point of view, but not his love of writing. So his entries are sparse and finally end in 1721.

Next to consider is how accurate are John Ryle's observations. The past tense used throughout this Memorandum Book predisposes us to think that it was written later. It is possible that the Memorandum Book was written up from rough notes made at the time (I would have dearly liked to see this if it existed, since it probably contained much more detail than the Memorandum Book). I think that these notes were supplemented by John Ryle's memory at the time of writing the fair copy.

## High Greaves after 1690

Between 1701 and 1720 the Tatton family sold most of the three-life leased tenant farms to their tenants. Unfortunately the document selling High Greaves to Reginald Ryle has not survived amongst the Tatton Family Papers but a survey of the Chief Rents dated to 1735 shows that it had been sold to the Ryles.

Some of these erstwhile tenant farms, such as Chamber Hall Farm, Shadow Moss Farm in Etchells and the Tomlinson tenement in Northern Moor, later came back into Tatton possession as William Tatton gradually expanded the number of short-leased tenancies he owned in the mid-eighteenth century. High Greaves was not one of them.

In 1732 Joseph Royle, the son of either Reginald or his brother John, still owned High Greaves.<sup>18</sup> But in 1753-4 High Greaves Farm was sold to Jeremiah Bowers for £4,500 (i.e. £48 per statute acre - William Tatton was then paying £38 per acre for land in this area). The Bowers family owned High Greaves well into the 19th century. In 1821 the farm was over 72 acres, so it had lost about 8 acres. On the other hand, the Bowers family also held a smaller holding nearby (either Lum Head Farm or the Lower House).

## NOTES

- 1 Prices would be high anyway at this time of the year because it was the early spring and not the winter when there was starvation - the winter stores of dried grain and pulses have gone (or are nearly at an end, apart from the seed) and there is nothing in the garden or the fields to replace them.
- 2 A.R.H. Baker and R.A. Butlin, *Studies of Field Systems in the British Isles*, 1973, pp.42-3.
- 3 Quoted from Etchells leases of 1700, Tatton Family Papers, John Rylands Library.
- 4 P.H.W. Booth, M.A. and Dr. J. Phillip Dodd, 'The Manor and Fields of Frodsham, 1315-74'. *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 1979, Vol.128.
- 5 Dr. William Nicholls was rector of Cheadle. One of the neighbouring tenants making complaints about his farming activities was his own curate, Francis Shelmerdine, who tenanted Chamber Hall, the old mediaeval courthouse of Etchells, only half a mile south of Peele Hall.
- 6 Eric Kerridge, *The Agricultural Revolution*, (1967) p.34.
- 7 Tatton Family Papers, document no. 209 (John Rylands Library).
- 8 The Court Leet Records of Northenden and Etchells and wills and probate inventories show how widespread this practice was.
- 9 Francis Shelmerdine had come of a Stockport clothier family in the first place.
- 10 Green Hall was a farm house on the road between Cheadle and Gatley, just on the outskirts of Cheadle, the home of a local yeoman farmer, not a gentry family. The Midingstead was probably the midden of the hall-farm house.
- 11 Lower House, High Greaves. The fields named were all to the north of High Greaves. Greaves Meadow belonged to High Greaves, probably part of the Little 20 Acres did as well. Oxhey and the Shaw Meadow belonged to the Lower House in the late seventeenth century. In 1690 Robert Bancroft who then tenanted the Lower House from Mrs Mary Tatton, the widow of Thomas Tatton (it would have been part of her dower as it was earlier for Mrs Katherine Nicholls), was allowed passage through High Greave in return for which Reginald Royle was able to 'dam & slop the water' in the ditches in the Black Hey Meadow, the Griany Meadow, the Shaw Meadow and Torkington's Field (the Torkingtons held a farm in Gatley). By 1821 the Oxhey, Shaw Meadow and the Little Twenty Acre (only four acres by then) were all part of High Greaves Farm.
- 12 Holland linen was very fine linen, so Holland oats might mean high grade oats, more suitable for human consumption than animal.
- 13 1670 Rental Survey from the Tatton Family Papers in John Rylands Library, Manchester.
- 14 'Riders'. Another measure of corn in the sheaf.
- 15 Joan Thirsk, *Agrarian History*, Vol.IV, 1500-1640, p.7.
- 16 Miselayers assessed the amount of levy or tax that local people would pay for the upkeep of the highways, bridges, the poor, etc, whilst burley men helped the two constables, reporting misdemeanours to the latter.
- 17 Etchells Court Leet Records, Michaelmas 1673. A note is added that the heirs of Reginald Ryle were no longer obliged to repair the pound.
- 18 *Manchester Court Leet Records* edited by J.P. Earwaker, Vol.VIII. In 1732 Joseph Royle of High Greaves was fined for giving short measure at Manchester market.

A NEW  
and Accurate Map  
of the Environs  
of Stockport

A SCALE OF 2 MILES

