

THE "SWING" RIOTS OF 1830



The Newton family came to Crowmarsh Battle Farm in 1792. The fertile land near the Thames produced good crops and high yields. This enterprising family refurbished the farmhouse, barns and farmyard.

Thomas Newton, recognised that new methods of drainage and crop rotation were needed to produce larger yields from any land, even those with a good

fertile soil. Parts of the farm had been enclosed by the previous owner and in 1830 Thomas applied to parliament to enclose more land. Enclosure threatened the livelihoods of the small subsistence farmers, who cultivated the common land in the local area.

The first decades of the 19th century saw great hardship for English agricultural workers. Farming was becoming increasingly mechanised, and the new threshing machines, which automated the harvesting process put farm labourers out of work. As a result, it was increasingly hard for the rural population to support themselves and their families. Wages were low, people were starving and anger against the terrible conditions being experienced was beginning to boil over into violence.

The first outbreak of rioting in Oxfordshire happened at Benson on Sunday 21 November 1830. A notice had recently been published informing the population that Newton had applied to parliament to enclose a large portion of the land around Benson and Ewelme.

To comply with the law, Newton had to pin notice of this application to the church door, and a large crowd formed outside St. Helen's Church to meet him. When Newton failed to appear, the crowd moved south to Newton's home at Crowmarsh Battle Farm and proceeded to destroy his threshing machines. The incident was called a Swing Riot, named after an anonymous threatening letter signed by "Captain Swing". The identity of "Swing" was never known.

The day after the application was published in the local paper, Thomas Newton's house was raided at 2 a.m. by a mob, who demanded that he listen to their grievances. Over the next few days, similar attacks were reported in the villages of Crowmarsh and Ewelme with hay ricks and farm buildings being set on fire and machinery destroyed. Soon, the violence and destruction had spread throughout the county.

On the 25 November a King's Proclamation was given at Henley market, which offered £500 rewards to anyone who could apprehend those responsible for the '*outrages and incendiarism*'. Punishments for the rioters were harsh. In England, nearly 2000 were

brought to trial for involvement in the riots. Only 19 were hanged, but many hundreds were either imprisoned or transported to the colonies.

Enclosure was generally only popular with richer farmers. It did not finally happen in this area until 1862.

In 1894, The Chamberlain family took over the farm from the Newton family, who had been there for over 100 years, farming sheep and cattle. By 1909, all the livestock had been sold and the farm became entirely arable. Four generations of the Chamberlain family have now farmed Crowmarsh Battle Farm.