

Chapter 3.

Crondon Park.

Crondon is situated on the north-west side of Stock Village, and is now within the Parish of Stock.

The Manor of Crondon is shown in Domesday Book as part of the fief of the Bishop of London. The tithes of the manor were later assigned to the church of Orsett, twelve miles away, where the bishop also held a manor. Consequently the lands of the Manor of Crondon formed part of the Parish of Orsett.

The Manor of Crondon passed to the Crown (as did the manor of Bishop's Hall in Chelmsford - another manor of the Bishop of London) and was sold to Sir William Petre of Ingatestone Hall in 1546.

In the field known as Chapel Pieces, there is a mound surrounded by a moated depression. There may well have been a chapel attached to the manor house when the bishops owned it. Certainly during the penal times, there was a place of Roman Catholic worship, maintained by the Petre family. This chapel remained until it was dismantled in 1832.

In 1551, part of the estate was disparked, and leased by the Petres into several farms. This process continued until the seventeenth century.

In 1675, Toby Edmonds rented the Parklands for £119.6s.8d. and in 1682, John Beard was charged £150 rent for 'The Old Park and Crondon' as well as another £50 for two fields. The property included the Church House and a cottage.

By 1695, accounts show that although the rent was £140, allowances were being made of £77.0.6d. by the landlord. This serves to emphasise the agricultural situation at the end of the seventeenth century, when weather and economic pressures lowered agricultural prices



This farm is in open, slightly undulating country, and since the area was disparked, there has been the same small amount of copse and woodland remaining. There is a spring near Swan Wood and wells have been sunk near the site of the old house and chapel.

The soil is more variable than that at Fristling Hall. About fifteen acres is light, sandy soil where pasture or crops become scorched in dry summers. There is also a gravel seam covering some seventeen acres, which again causes drying out. Unlike other gravel areas on nearby farms, this has never been considered worth the labour and expense of quarrying.

Any ground bordering woodland is heavy clay, and Gorse Cover, (about twenty acres) is, as its name implies, still a totally unproductive area.

Apart from this, the land has average fertility for the district, which means that a quantity of manures and fertilisers are necessary to make the land productive.

The farm has changed little in size, being about 340 acres since the seventeenth century. Although it is now mainly in the Parish of Stock, it used to be included in the three parishes of Stock, Buttsbury and Orsett (the Hamlet of Orsett -detached) This last section was transferred to the Parish of Stock in 1881.

CRONDON PARK

viewed from the south





Extract from The Enrolment Book of leases

E.R.O. D/DP E182

The Petre Archives

Erndon Park

L120.0.0.
t.65.

This house & park with the Site of the house & Yards -
and Gardens in Leases to Sir Richard Mayson for 11 years
Commencing from Michaelmas 1715 Containing together

75 - 2: 25 -

Stray Cows

21: 3: 2 -

Two Lady mads

29: 2: 8 -

Cow house mads

10: 2: 20 -

Little hill firs

6: 2: 5 -

Soddy firs

15: 1: 8 -

Storke pond

69: - - -

Pond Quarter besides the two ponds

68: 1: 23 -

Whistlinghall Quarter

61: 3: 5 -

This Lease not to plough any of the mads or
pastured grounds on pain of five pounds an Acre
nor to keep in tillage above twenty Acres in any
one year on pain of forty Shillings y^e Acre nor to
take more than two Crops together without a
Hallow which of one to be of Summer Corn the
penalty of forty Shillings an Acre

358: 2: 16 -

Corpleant 6 firs yearly during the term and
to Carry out Load of Coals from Stratton to a
Jugals house yearly or bid & send

Details of rentals or other accounts of the farm are very sparse between 1700 and 1763. Many local farmers were in arrears with their rent from 1702 to 1706, but the tenant of Crondon was not one of them. By 1707, John Stott was charged £110 per annum for rent.

The farm was next leased to Michael Mason in 1715 for 22 years at £120 per annum. It is interesting to see some of the conditions of the lease, whereby the lessee was limited to the amount of land he could plough up, and was constrained by being unable to take more than two crops together without a fallow. Meadow and pasture lands were to be left unploughed. Heavy penalties were incurred should there be any infringement of these clauses. The replacement of timber was ensured, as the tenant had to plant six trees a year. In addition, Lord Petre had a yearly load of coals carried for him from Maldon to Ingatestone. Not all the leases at that time appear to have the same conditions.

It is possible that these terms may have been negotiable, for with improving techniques in husbandry, the 25% arable land allowed would later have been too little for this area. Indeed, subsequent leases only stipulated that permission must be obtained from the landowner for ploughing more of the land.

The Mason family farmed Crondon Park for 117 years. Michael Mason established a Catholic Mission at Crondon, which continued until 1831. The Petres paid the tenants a salary of £20 a year for the upkeep of the chapel.

When Michael Mason's son took over the tenancy in 1724, the farm was leased for 11 years at a rent of £120 a year.

There are two accounts in the 1730's showing that Michael Mason's widow carried on the farm at the same rent, until her son, John, became the tenant.

From 1735, his rent was £130, but there appear to be no further accounts relating to the farm until 1763 when the rent was unaltered.

Between 1765 and 1773, John Mason was in arrears with his rent, as were most farmers in the area. This was probably triggered off by severe flooding in the district, followed by a series of mainly wet years, after the 1762 floods. Mason was £15 in arrears in 1765, and this sum increased during subsequent years to £80 in 1773.

Such was the situation when his son Michael took over the farm in 1774: for at least two years no rent was paid, and arrears amounted to £50. However the eighties saw the beginning of that rise in wheat prices which was to make landlords and their tenant farmers prosper during the next thirty years.

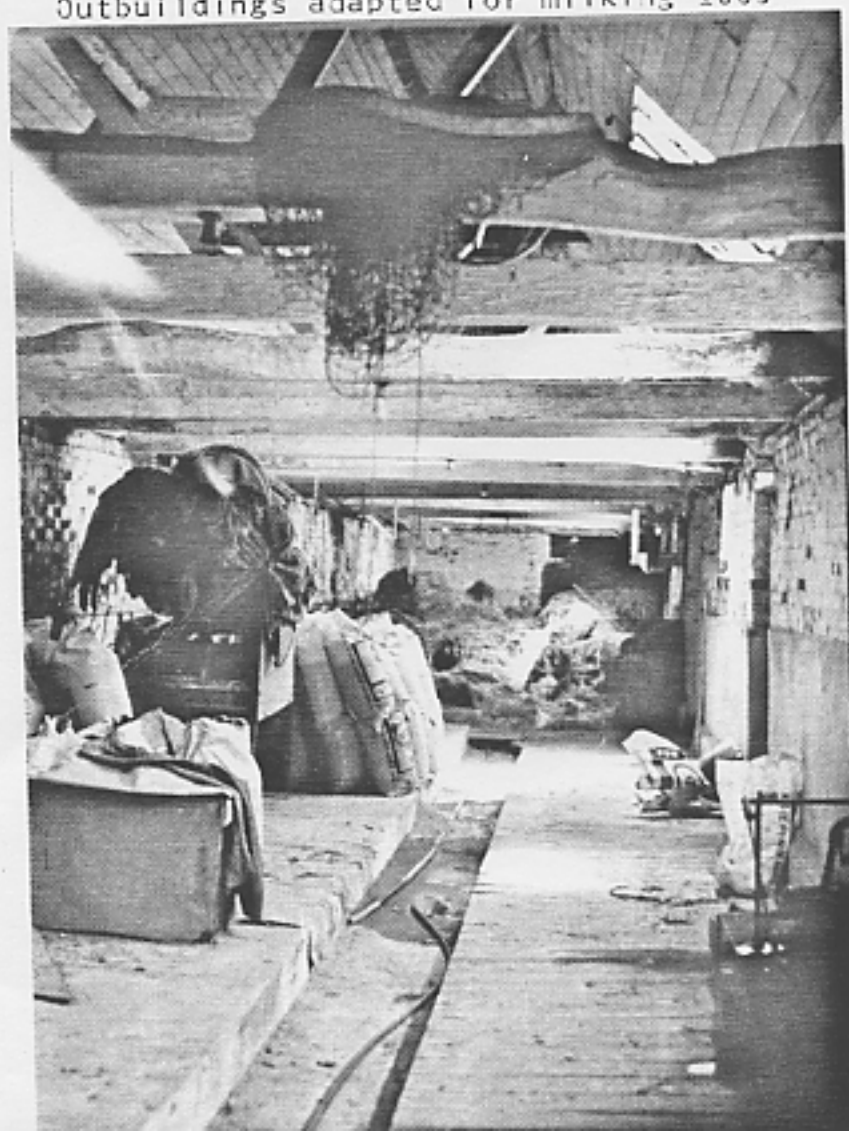
His lease was renewed in 1791 at a rent of £210 - a rise of about 65%. It was about this time that rents increased throughout the country as leases came up for renewal. In the Petre estates the gross income from farm rents rose more substantially between 1800 and 1820. The rent for Crondon Park was increased in proportion to the general rise at the time. Colin Shrimpton writes that the average rent of farms on the Petre estate was under 20/- an acre in 1791, rising to 40/- in 1830. As the rent for Crondon was only about 12/- an acre, this seems to indicate poor quality farmland.

During the war years from 1793-1815, Michael Mason was obviously doing well, even renting another adjacent small

Crondon Park Farmhouse
Built 1835



Outbuildings adapted for milking 1889



farm of 23 acres for a few years.

Apart from repair accounts, there is nothing to indicate how he managed in the depression which followed the peace of 1815. There is one account in the cash book of a local agricultural merchant which notes the purchase of one load of bean straw for £1.10s., and one of clover for the same price in 1817. This was a year of drought when the hay crop in most of the country had failed: the merchant had sold for 10/- a load the previous year.

Michael Mason was a well educated man, who interested himself in the community. In 1819, together with other local worthies (including Thomas Bridge) he perambulated the boundary of the Parish of Stock. He recorded this in a beautifully written account, with attractive sketch maps of farms in Stock Parish. Field names were included in the survey, as were the acreages.

There seem to be no further pertinent records until 1831, when he was reputed to be impoverished, and unable to continue the tenancy. The officiating priest left also, and in 1832 the chapel was dismantled, and the house razed to the ground.

It is not clear whether the farm was in hand after this, until William John Wright took on the tenancy. A new house was built in 1835, and a new well was sunk in Chapel Pieces where the springs rise. Water is piped to the farmhouse to the present day from this well. There were sundry other repairs to the property, including drainage.

In the Tithe Awards for Stock in 1841, and the Hamlet of Orsett in 1849, about 60% of the farm is shown to be arable, as against 25% in 1715. The large field of the eighteenth century had been broken up into smaller ones by the nineteenth.

that this tenant had much capital when he took on the farm, although he bought some new farm implements including a 'broadshare' plough from William Bentall of Maldon. From report, much of the land was now left to rough pasture, and the arable fields were starved and weedy. In 1889 the tenancy expired and Robert Craig became the new tenant.

While the first Scotch farmers had settled in Essex in the 1880's in response to newspaper advertisements, others followed on recommendation in the ensuing years. Robert Craig was an Ayrshire farmer, who, while on a visit with friends at Forest Lodge Farm, was shown over the adjacent farm of Crondon Park.

It was described as derelict at the time, and Craig decided to take it on. Other farms in the district were either vacant or about to become so, and offered scope for his three younger brothers later on. He was a man of some substance, for in Scotland he had been a prominent breeder and show judge of Shire horses.

According to his grand-daughter, the main reasons for coming to Essex were, in order of importance :

1. The milder weather, causing less hardship than the harsh northern climate. Health was a major consideration.

2. Cheap farm rents. Land in Ayrshire was expensive and hard to come by. A large family could not be supported on the same holding. In Essex there were other farms available for his brothers at low rents.

3. Cheaper labour. Not only was it less expensive to hire labour in Essex, but more important was the fact that the Essex labourer did not have to be boarded in the farmhouse as in Ayrshire. As the farmer's womenfolk did all the milking and dairywork, the extra cooking took up too much of their time,

as well as involving extra expense.

4. There were too many restrictive clauses in Scottish leases regarding farming practice.

As Crondon Park was now to become a dairy farm, the landlord had the farm buildings adapted to the purpose. He paid, for example, for plumbing work and new building. The farm was then leased to Robert Craig at a rent of £340 for fourteen years.

In a train specially hired for the purpose, he transported his livestock, farm implements and household goods to Billericay Station. As well as his own family, he brought one farm worker to live in the house, and another couple to live in one of the cottages.

His dairy herd of Ayrshire cattle, together with his horses for breeding, formed the basis of Craig's farming activities. According to Primrose McConnell, there was no better breed of cattle than Ayrshires for dairy purposes. Even when bought in Essex, they only cost a quarter of the price of shorthorns. As Craig was an admiring acquaintance of McConnell, farming method would probably not been dissimilar.

When R. Hunter Pringle visited Crondon Park in 1893, many of his general comments on the more successful Scotch immigrant probably applied to Robert Craig.

Apparently, however, even at this late date, the immigrant farmers were regarded with suspicion, and agricultural merchants would not give them the same credit they extended to Essex farmers.

In spite of Craig's apparent success, in 1895 the rent was reduced to £250, although extensive drainage was carried out, for which he paid a yearly interest of about £15.

His new lease in 1903 shows that rent was raised to £340, by

which one may assume that the farm was becoming more profitable.

Finally, some indication of his farming is given by the Essex War Agricultural Commission Census of 1916. Conditions and methods are unlikely to have been radically different at the end of the nineteenth century.

It will be noticed that over 70% was arable land (c.f. the 60% of the 1840's) although a proportion of this may be due to a war-time increase.

Permanent grass	92 acres
Clover and grass	73
Wheat (autumn)	52
Wheat (summer)	9
Other arable	119
horses (mostly	
brood mares)	16
ploughteams	4
cows in milk	48
cows (dry)	17
cattle	16

Employees

2 horsemen, 2 stockman and 1 dayman

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4. Tudor Secretary - F.C. Emmison - p 223 270
5. E.R.O. D/DP A 63 1-9
6. E.R.O. D/DP A 64
7. Mr.R. Orr, Crondon Park Farm - from information
8. Kelly's Directory 1899
9. E.R.O. D/DP A66
10. E.R.O. D/DP Ei82
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14. E.R.O. D/DP A68
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21. Survey of the Parish of Stock in the County of Essex - M.J.Mason 1819. E.R.O.
22. Mss. relating to Catholic Register - Mr.L.D. Jarvis, Stock 1835
23. E.R.O. D/DP A227
 Extract of account for building (abridged)
 Sinking well £ 7 . 0 . 0
 Bricklayers work-new house
 and cottages £114 . 14s 9d.
 glazier £ 47 . 17s . 11d
 stonemason £ 21 17s . 0
 lime £ 13 . 9s 0
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