

7. CONCLUSION

It is evident that there was a "reluctance of this traditional rural life to fade away more rapidly before the forces of industrialisation"(1). In 1851 Bramham represented the traditional rural community, dependent on agriculture and as yet little changed. The crucial factor behind the situation is the nature of farming. It was still organised on a hierarchical basis with a member of the gentry still holding a dominant position closely interacting with his tenant farmers. Those holding their own freehold land did not have the acreage to influence the situation. Yet the whole structure was built on the labour of "destitute" workers who existed in large numbers, thus it came relatively cheaply. As long as this situation existed the community would remain traditional with labourers unable to break out of the structure. Farm machinery had not, by 1851 made a revolutionary impact on agriculture and certainly in 1914 Mrs Young of Bramham remembers harvesting potatoes and flax by hand. Thus human muscle remained crucial to farming and meant that it remained labour intensive so a relatively large village like Bramham could exist supported from the land.

But it would be wrong to say that agriculture itself had remained static. Striking innovations and higher levels of efficiency had been reached which met the increased demand from a growing industrial society. The advent of mixed farming and technical improvements were all part of agricultural change in the 19th Century. But in 1851 in Bramham the social setting remained rural, inward looking and traditional and this is essentially the crux of the situation. Developments had occurred within the existing framework and this was not to really break down until after the 1870s.

The structure of village society in Bramham shows a community very much interdependent which emphasises the limited rural outlook. The landowners, farmers and wealthy were dependent on the local labour force to farm the land for them. While agricultural labourers in their poor condition relied upon their employers to provide regular wages and work. Wives and children can be seen to have been particularly dependent on the head of the household's income. Women for their part relied on the existence of a wealthy class in the village to provide them with their most predominant occupation - domestic service. While traders and craftsmen flourished at this time of agricultural prosperity and

increased communications relying on local consumption and demand. Even the poorer members of society, the retired and unemployed were catered for on a village basis where family and kin ties would have been important.

It may be a romantic idea to talk of a closely knit interdependent community but to a certain extent the census of 1851 reflects this picture. What is clear is that Bramham in the mid 19th Century was still a traditional community, rurally based and little changed as yet by the urban and industrial developments of the day.

Footnotes:

- (1) Chambers, J. D, and Mingay, G. E, The Agricultural Revolution, P-162.
- (2) Chambers, J. D, and Mingay, G. E, The Agricultural Revolution, P-162.