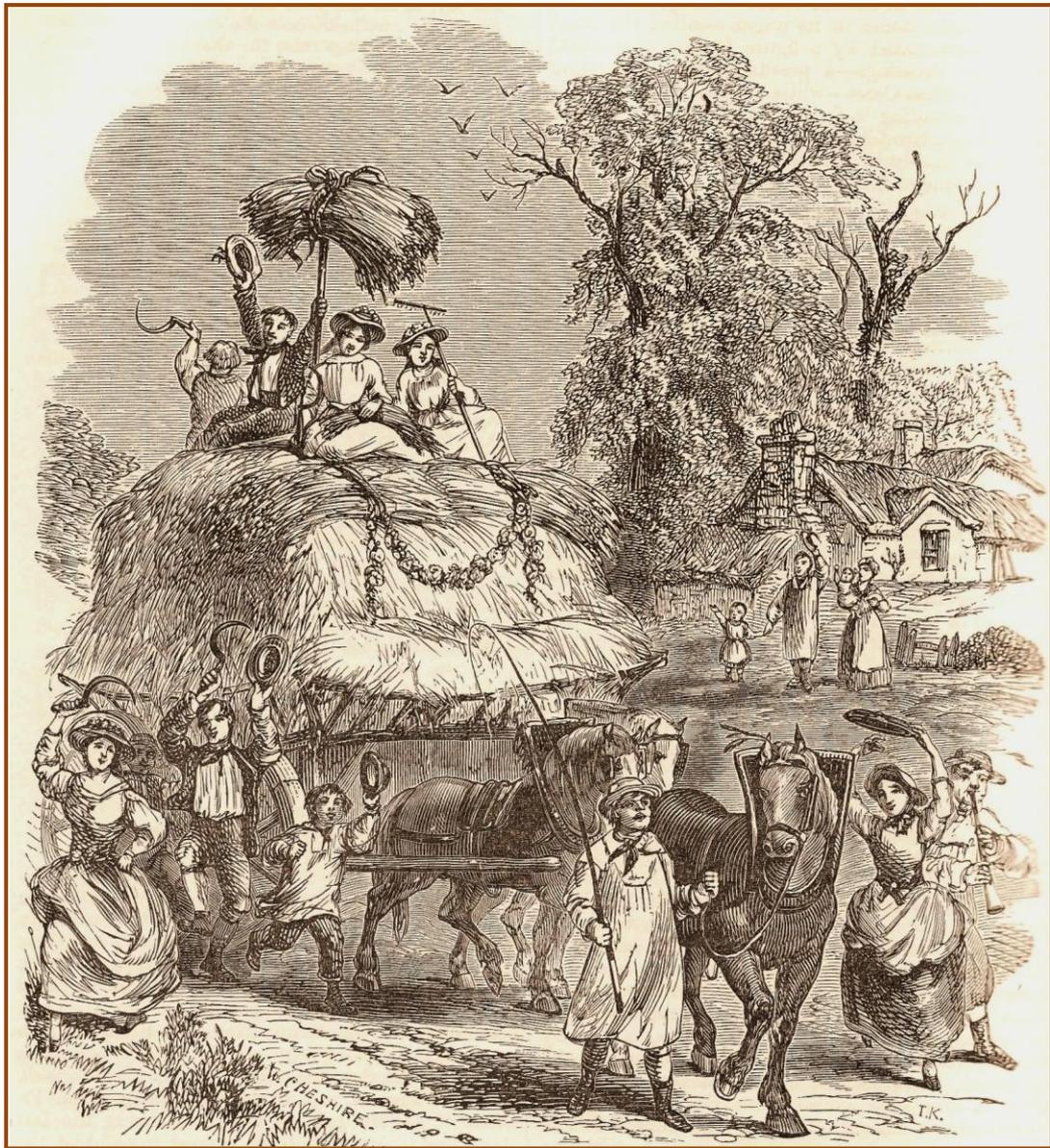


'HARVEST HOME' CELEBRATIONS AT NEWICK, SUSSEX



'Harvest Home' from *The Book of Days*, W and R Chambers Ltd 1864

'HARVEST HOME' CELEBRATIONS AT NEWICK, SUSSEX

The 'harvest home' was a yearly event in Newick village held on a day in September or October celebrating the final bringing in of the harvest at the end of the season.

The celebrations were popular in the 19th century and indeed before that. The *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* newspaper 14th September 1795, published in Lewes, stated... 'Almost the whole of the farmers in this neighbourhood will celebrate harvest home in the course of the present week - many of them have already carried their last load'. In 1813 Reverend Arthur Young in the book *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex* states (page 90) that 'after harvest is finished, it is everywhere, I believe, customary for the farmers to give a harvest home or supper to their harvest men'. About 30 years later *The Sussex Express* newspaper on 10th September 1842 stated that 'harvest homes are now very general in the neighbourhood...' In the mid nineteenth century, in 1856, the *Sussex Express* reported that 'this autumn our paper has perfectly teemed with harvest homes'.

The celebrations were organised by the village gentry and farmers for all the labourers to enjoy, it being recognised as a general holiday for the whole village. Many visitors flocked to Newick to take part in the festivities.

In the mid nineteenth century the event usually took place in the 'Home Field' courtesy of Mr Robert Wood. The entrances to the field were elaborately decorated with tall, triumphal arches of evergreens, flowers and ribbons surmounted with sheaves of corn. Over the main entrance was the sign 'Welcome to our Harvest Home'. In the field were several tents or booths and these too were beautifully decorated with flowers and corn. Other signs and banners which would be used at the event displayed 'Peace and Plenty', 'God

Speed the Plough', 'The Earth is the Lord's and the Fullness Therof', 'Rest and Be Thankful' and 'God Provideth the Harvest'.

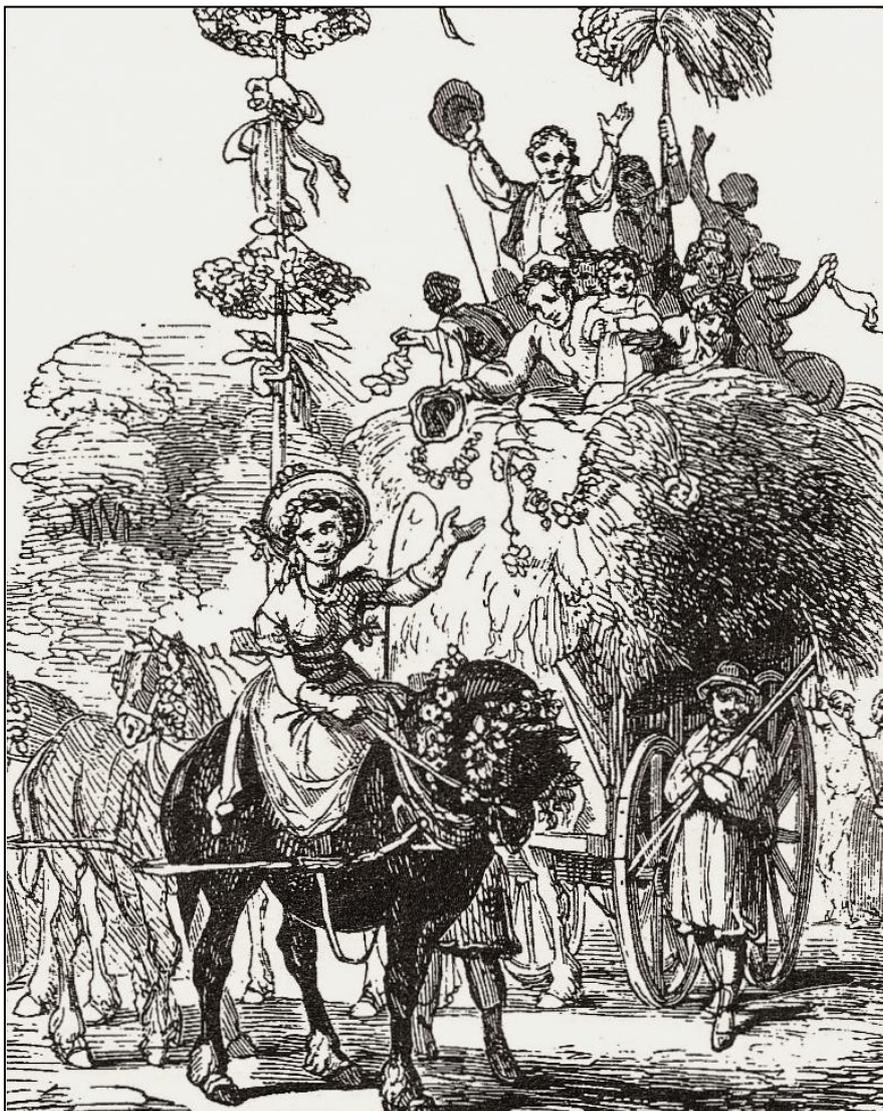
The day would start with a procession with the gentlemen farmers and the labourers, banners and waving flags all headed by a band - the Buxted Brass Band or a band from Brighton. They marched to the church for a thanksgiving service. After the service the procession would reassemble and then march through the village, stopping at the houses of the gentry and making its way back to the Home Field.

This picture below is a harvest home celebration in 1863 at Swallowfield village, near Reading in Berkshire. It shows the procession with the farm labourers in their smocks, followed by hand-bell ringers and then four decorated horses drawing a wagon load of wheat, bedecked with flags. Behind this are the top-hatted gentry together with the long line of nearly all the farmers and labourers of the parish. On the right a brass band plays next to the marquee. The procession was preceded by a church service. All very similar to the Newick harvest home events in the 1860s.



Harvest Home at Swallowfield, Berkshire
(from *Illustrated London News* 10th October 1863)

Below, are two more illustrations of typical harvest home celebrations. The first is from *The Third Tour of Doctor Syntax* by William Combe 1821 and the second is from the early 19th century publications of William Hone.



At the Home Field in Newick, after the procession, the labourers and the farmers and the gentry, sometimes over 200, would all sit down together in tents to have a fine, substantial meal. In the mid 1800s this would be prepared by Mrs Gilbert from the Bull Inn or by Mr Weston from the Crown Inn. The chairman would be the Reverend William Powell or estate owners Mr Sclater or Mr Blaauw accompanied by other dignitaries from the parish or nearby.

After the meal, the cloth was removed and toasts were offered to The Queen, other members of the royal family, the bishop and the clergy, the rector, the army, the navy and the volunteers, the tenant farmers, the labourers, the visitors, the chairman etc. 'God Save The Queen' was sung. Below is an 1843 illustration of a typical harvest home meal in a timber barn.



A harvest home meal - from *Illustrated London News* 7th October 1843

The Sussex Express newspaper 10th September 1842 refers to the words of a song which was sung at these harvest home celebrations, '...usually sung with the customary zest'. A similar version is included in *Everyman's Book of English Country Songs* edited by Roy Palmer (1979) page 48:

*Here's a health unto our master, he's the founder of our feast,
And when so e'er he dies may his soul then be in peace.
I hope all things will prosper, what e'er he takes in hand,
For we are all his servants and work at his command.
So drink boys drink, and see you do not spill,
For if you do, you shall drink two, this is your master's will*

The *Sussex Archaeological Collections* in 1862 (volume 14, pages 186-188) refer to another song sung at Sussex harvest home celebrations, accompanied by a pail of beer and a ceremony, explained as follows:

'The leader or chairman, standing behind the pail with a tall horn cup in his hand, filled it with beer from the pail. The man next to him on the left stood up and holding a hat with both hands by the brim, crown upwards, received the cup from the chairman, on the crown of the hat, not touching it with either hand. He then lifted the cup to his lips by raising the hat and slowly drank of the contents. As soon as he began to drink, the chorus struck up this chant:

*I've bin to Plymouth and I've bin to Dover,
I have bin rambling boys all the world over-
Over and over and over and over,
Drink up yur liquor and turn yur cup over;
Over and over and over and over,
The liquor's drink'd up and the cup is turned over.*

The man drinking was expected to time his draught so as to empty his cup at the end of the fourth line of the chant; he was then to return the hat to the perpendicular, still holding the hat by the brims, then to throw the cup into the air and reversing the hat to catch the cup in it as it fell. If he failed to perform this operation, the fellow workmen who were closely watching him, made an important alteration in the last line of their chant, which in that case ran thus 'The liquor's drink'd up and the cup aint turned over'. The cup was then refilled and the unfortunate drinker was compelled to go through the same ceremony again'.

After the harvest home meal and the toasts, the day's amusements in Newick began. Fun was had with races, jingling, jumping in sacks, driving wheelbarrows blindfolded, throwing the hammer, throwing the cricket ball, putting the stone, eating treacle rolls, trap-bat, egg races for the ladies, climbing the greasy pole for a leg of mutton, cricket and stoolball. Prizes were offered. Other entertainments were punch and judy and sometimes a conjurer or a performance by a party of 'niggers'. The band would provide music to enliven the proceedings. The women and children would be given a tea in the tent in the afternoon - at times when there were more than 200 they were obliged to have separate sittings. In the evening there would be dancing and the rector would normally give a magic lantern display. Some balloons might be sent up. Firework displays were sometimes given.

The harvest home celebrations were clearly splendid occasions. Below are extracts from the book *The Third Tour of Doctor Syntax- In Search of a Wife* 1821 illustrating, in a poem, the early 1800s....the procession, the meal, the jovial song and drinking and the dancing through the night till dawn:

*'The dance, the music and the song,
United as they came along,
And gave a spirit to the scene,
Amid the gambols on the green*

.....

*The rural banquet now appeared,
Each loaded dish was loudly cheered;
Beef roast and boiled, the Briton's fare,
Was in abundant plenty there;
The pastry too with walls of crust,
Waited the ploughman's eager thrust;
The pudding with its plums well stored,
And many a cheesecake crowned the board;*

.....

*Ere a short hour was gone and past,
This mighty meal had seen its last,
While many an empty dish displayed
The change by hungry labour made.
The brimming cups now took their round,
When jest and merry tales abound;
And social fun and many a joke
Blend with the pipe's ascending smoke,
The toasts are given, the jovial song
Does the gay festive hour prolong.'*

.....

*Nor was this merry-making done
Till Luna yielded to the sun*

Below is a newspaper extract describing a typical Newick harvest home (1866).

<p>al dis- tracters method e very enefit. street, th, his riends st few im by rly six</p> <p>ath of limber lay he a few</p> <p>- The ied on</p> <p>ect to itted? on, or cause other n this ow me nsities public- ersons, d two ice at have tes me t have ll you ter of e more t-door ionary mbled, would means name 1866.</p> <p>THE r men aster, ore G. Police- tuesday row at re Mr. ie wall ought do to else." th me nying he did d. He nding that." e two several down.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">NEWICK.</p> <p>HARVEST HOME.—There is no day in the year which is looked upon with so much interest by all classes of society in the parish, as that in which the annual harvest home takes place, and this is accountable for in a very easy manner, namely, owing to the perfect unity that prevails. The seventh of these festivals took place on Wednesday, and with a degree of success which has never been equalled. The morning was very wet and miserable, and the greatest amount of disappointment was occasioned by this circumstance. But the faces of the inhabitants brightened with the weather, which after 10 o'clock in the morning was favourable, nothing occurring to check the day's enjoyment. The Homefield was kindly placed at the disposal of the committee by Mr. R. Wood, and here a large number of persons assembled, soon after 10 o'clock, and, headed by the Buxted Band, proceeded to church. Divine service was performed by the Rev. W. Powell, who preached an eloquent and appropriate sermon from Jeremiah 5 c., xxiv. verse. At the conclusion of the service the dinner took place in the Homefield, and was well provided by Mr. Weston, of the Crown Inn. The tent was profusely decorated with evergreens and floral devices, with mottoes, &c., which reflected the highest credit on the tastes of those who had devoted so much time in their preparation. Nearly 200 sat down to dinner. The chair was occupied by J. H. Selater, Esq., who was supported by T. St. Leger Blaauw, Esq., Rev. H. Campion, F. Selater, Esq., R. Gravely, Esq., F. Swain, Esq., F. Gravely, Esq., W. Copeland, Esq., &c. There were also present Messrs. R. Wood, C. Wood, Freeland, W. Ellis, T. Guy, D. Gilbert, M. Meetens, G. Kenward, J. Leney, Jas. Brook, W. Martin, E. Ashford, F. Fuller, R. Fuller, Jno. Brooks, &c. Several formal toasts having been disposed of, the Chairman gave "The Health of the Rector," the Rev. T. B. Powell, who was highly esteemed for his charitable actions and his sympathetic spirit. He also thanked the Rev. W. Powell for his excellent discourse. "The Tenant Farmers" was proposed by Mr. Blaauw, and acknowledged by Mr. R. Wood, who expressed the great interest he and the other farmers took in the proceedings. He concluded by proposing "The Trade of Newick." This was acknowledged by Mr. Ellis, who said the trade and the agricultural interest were so closely allied that they might always be sure of having the co-operation of the trade in such festivities as that. The Rev. Mr. Campion pointed out the beneficial effects which attended such gatherings, and gave "The Labourers." To this Mr. Aaron Moor responded in a most sensible and well-timed speech. The Chairman gave "The Health of W. H. Blaauw, Esq.," who was one of their oldest and staunchest friends. Mr. T. St. Leger Blaauw responded on behalf of his father. "The Visitors" was acknowledged by Mr. S. Thorncroft, of Brighton, an old inhabitant of the parish, and Mr. Gravely responded for the toast of "The Committee." The list was brought to a close by "The Health of the Chairman" being proposed by Mr. Thorncroft. The Chairman, in responding, spoke of the interest he took in the proceedings, and expressed his readiness to do all he could to promote future success. The out-door sports were then proceeded with, and during the afternoon the ground was visited by many of the gentry of the district. Racing and other amusements were engaged in, and a party of "niggers" performed at intervals. At dusk Mr. Gravely entertained the company by an exhibition of the magic lantern, and all passed off most agreeably. The arrangements were complete in every respect, and much praise is due to the committee and other gentlemen, whose energy tended so much to promote success.</p>	<p>S of a Gi h Ti Brar H. V not Pelh Seco b T. Brar Tayl run 10. Pelh Sr Well b W. Page e an Crow out, Pelh man. Saun Woo Tayl G. C Woo</p> <p>S belo Hot Lot 2, th know acre £17 £76 adjo farn 10, 1 Lon of u Pra Lor</p> <p>I befc Col the com Hen of F beh hou alle goir app</p> <p>C took Chi R b Br Hill Bro</p>
---	---	---

A typical Newick harvest home as reported in the East Sussex News newspaper 7th September 1866

Descriptions of Sussex harvest home celebrations in the local newspapers were usually trying to emphasise the co-operation existing between the farmer and his labourers, rather than illustrating any class differences.

However, in this respect, the 1870s is an interesting period. It was in the early 1870s that agricultural labourer Joseph Arch in Warwickshire started a movement, which spread nationally, promoting the needs and demands of agricultural labourers. Should the normal agricultural labourer see himself as a servant to the farmer, to be content with his station in life, permanently low down in the social scale? A visitor to the Newick harvest home celebrations in September 1871 perhaps pushed the 'them and us' class differences a little too far. Reverend J C S Darby from Warbleton, in proposing a toast to the labourers and working classes, *'urged the working classes to become the best of their description, to do their duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call them and not to give way to the restless ambition which would lead them to seek to change their position...'* The article states.....*'No one responded to this toast'!*

In 1872 the National Agricultural Labourers Union was formed.

The idea of labourers 'doing their duty' arose in the newspaper report on the Newick harvest home of 1876. The chairman at that event, J Brooks from Goldbridge Farm, denounced the agitations of the Agricultural Union movement and recognised that farmers would not oppress their labourers if those labourers did their duty towards their employers.

Harvest home events in Sussex continued to be reported in the 1870s, 80s and 90s. Cricket matches were very much part of the Newick celebrations, often with large numbers of players in each team.

Into the 20th century, harvest home celebrations declined. At the celebrations in Glynde, Sussex, in September 1900, Admiral Brand said that harvest homes were common events when he was a boy but were not common occurrences any more. Fewer events were reported in the newspapers. Chalvington, West Hoathly, Kingston and Wadhurst were referred to and the Searles estate of G Maryon Wilson in Fletching.

The 1925 harvest home at Newick Park chaired by J H Sclater had his six sons each sitting at the labourer's tables. The newspaper report stated *'the*

evening passed away pleasantly, the good feeling between employer and employed being very manifest'.

William (Bill) Holmes from Newick recalls these times in the book *Newick School - Reminiscences of School and Village Life 1920-1950* edited by R A Sellens (2000) stating (page 18) '*...they used to have what we called harvest home, that would be in September, when they used to have a dance in the barn... with accordions and other musical instruments'.*

The *Sussex Express* newspaper on 8th September 1933 included an article referring to the general decline of harvest home celebrations:

'...here and there the old time rural celebration of harvest home may survive in Sussex, but on a modest scale, unrecorded and unknown to all but a few of the farmers friends and employees. Years ago...it was the greatest festivity of the year which afforded an opportunity for a free indulgence in strong beer and served a nobler purpose in giving master and man a community of interest in the fruits of the earth....the reaping of the crops has lost much of its picturesque character and importance...modern machinery has banished the sickle and the scythe. The gleaner has disappeared....The harvest has lost its significance to the rural dweller and there seems no occasion for jubilation at a fruitful season'.

Newick did have its very busy soft-fruit growing business into the mid/late 20th century, with some of the proprietors having a celebration at the end of the fruit-picking season. This is referred to by Christine Hall (nee Carter) in the book mentioned above, *Newick School - Reminiscences of School and Village Life 1920-1950*, where it states (page 69) '*...we would have a party; everybody would bring along a bottle or something to eat and we had an occasion rather like the harvest home parties on the farms; it was a great social time'.*

Now, in the 21st century, it is the annual harvest festival at Newick church where the autumn harvest is still celebrated. However, it is nostalgic to still remember the earlier times in Newick when, at the 1867 celebrations, Mr Sclater, referred to 'harvest home' being the two sweetest words in the English language.

.....

Information Sources:

Newspapers: *Sussex Express* 10/9/1842, 11/10/1856, 28/9/1861, 6/10/1863, 30/8/1864, 8/9/1866, 12/10/1867, 14/9/1900, 11/9/1925, 8/9/1933; *Sussex Advertiser* 14/9/1795, 30/8/1864, 14/10/1865, 25/8/1868, 19/9/1871, 26/9/1876; *East Sussex News* 2/9/1864, 7/9/1866, 17/9/1869; and others

General View of the Agriculture of the County of Sussex, Reverend Arthur Young 1813 (page 90)

The Sussex Archaeological Collections 1862 volume 14 (pages 186-188)

Illustrated London News 10/10/1863

The Book of Days W and R Chambers Ltd 1864 volume 2 (pages 376-380)

The Third Tour of Doctor Syntax by William Combe 1821

Everyman's Book of English Country Songs edited by Roy Palmer 1979 (page 48)

Newick School - Reminiscences of School and Village Life 1920-1950 edited by R A Sellens (2000) page 18 and 69