

Danehill Parish Historical Society

# Colin Godmans Farm

A compilation of articles from DPHS  
magazines



## COLIN GODMANS.

*From DPHS Magazine Volume 3 No. 7 "PERRYMAN'S ROADS AND LANDS" by D.S. Rawlings.*

The name Colin Godmans has been the cause of much speculation as to who he was, when he lived, and if he was a smuggler or even a highwayman. Godman, I think, does refer to a person who owned or occupied the land in the past, and could indicate that Colin and Cold Godmans were once part of the same farm. Godman is a well-known family in Sussex and there have been a number of people with that name living in Fletching and the surrounding parishes over the years. Colin, however, is more likely to refer to coal, or more usually "cole", the old name for charcoal. Besides the Cold and Colin Godmans we

have Great and Little Collingford Farms in Danehill, Besides Cole Alen Stuffle, Now known as The White House.



An early  
photograph of  
Colin  
Godmans

For what it is worth, there is a document in the East Sussex Record Office dated the 1st October 1391 <sup>(5)</sup> which roughly translates as follows: 'I Peter Denot have granted and by this Charter confirm to Nicholas Godman and his heirs for ever, one parcel of land, viz an orchard and a piece of land and wood situated in the Parish of Fletching called Regwode, a part of the land and wood tenanted by Nicholas Godman and his heirs'. The Regwode, sometimes called the Regis Wood (King's Wood) adjoined Leggs Wood and it is possible that Nicholas Godman also owned and gave his name to Colin and Cold Godmans.

By the time of the 1927 Kelly's Directory Miss Martindale, MD, BS, JP is shown as living at Colin Godmans. Dr Martindale was the daughter of Mrs Louisa Martindale who had lived at "Cheeleys" and had, what is now the Martindale Centre, built for the village of Horsted Keynes. Dr. Louisa Martindale had a remarkable career; she was Senior Surgeon and Physician at New Sussex Hospital for Women in Hove. She pioneered the use of X-rays for certain types of cancer at the hospital. In 1931 she was awarded the C.B.E. and became internationally known for her work.

The old house had now been transformed from a working farm house to a desirable country residence. The next occupier shown in 1938 Kelly's Directory was Mr. Edward Watson Barnett, who had previously lived in "The Neuk" in Church Lane.

Another eminent owner of Colin Godmans in recent years was Dr E.B. Worthington, MA, PhD, he was the President of "COWAR" the Scientific Committee on Water Research. He was part author of "Life in Lakes and Rivers" with T.T. Macklan, and author of other books and scientific papers including "The Wild Resources of East & Central Africa" and "Science in Africa".

Dr Worthington had a number of lakes made in the fields near the house that he used for

*From DPHS Magazine Volume 3 No.7*

**Extract from PERRYMAN'S PROGRESS ...** from 15<sup>th</sup> into 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. By Joan Ward

### **COLIN GODMANS.**

...It is even possible that the making of "coall" (charcoal) may have had some influence on the origins of the names of the two largest holdings on the hill. (Perrimans Hill)

At the north end of the ridge lay COLD GODMANS (later called Chelworthe or Chelwood); and slotted neatly into the South-East side of the South end of the hill is the property still known today as COLIN GODMANS. An age-old track, thereby connecting the two properties, runs along the brow of the hill, with some of the trees in its boundary-straight hedges now grown into the weird distorted shapes produced by an ancient hedge-layer's craft. For most of the way it runs through land attached to the northern settlement, (whose folk provide another story, to be told another time see *DPHS Magazine Volume 5 No.1, May 1994.*)

We must now turn to the South-eastern slope of the hill, to Colin Godmans. Here may also be an example of a place reflecting a former owner's name, for in 1458 a John Godman, who was holding lands in Withyham, was associated with a Nicholas Bowyer. Now, when in 1543, a John Boyer of Hartfield died, we are told that his son, William inherited lands called Legswode and COLLEN GODMANS.

The story of these South-eastern properties begins to emerge with more certain details in 1565. In this year, one Christopher Turke dies, possessing land called Colling Godmans. Christopher, apparently had two daughters. One, Elizabeth, had married Percival Martin and been the first to inherit her father's property. The Manor Court records in 1594, that "Elizabeth, wife of Percival Martin, tenant of certain free land called Collin Godmans, 30 acres, paying an annual rent of 7s, 1 hen, 5 eggs and 1 days work in Autumn and lands called the Birgs, 40 acres, paying an annual rent of 8s.5d, 1 hen, 5 eggs and 1 days work in Autumn has died; and Anna, wife of Richard Michelbourne, gentleman, is her sister and next heir."<sup>(19)</sup> Richard Michelborne was Lord of the Manor of Horsted/Broadhurst and lived at Broadhurst Manor, Horsted Keynes.

By 1608, we find that Sir Richard is himself holding the property, so presumably Anna has died also.<sup>(20)</sup>

In 1609, we have a copy of an indenture whereby Sir Richard gives possession to his brother John of London. Sir Richard "in brotherly love and affection conveys to John all that messuage or tenement called Collen Godmans, and all those edifices, houses buildings and lands appertaining thereto, lands called Byrges, Bastyans, and Leggs wood."<sup>(21)</sup>

A year later, we find that John is disposing of his properties for cash. "Unto William Crowe, all that parcel of arable pasture and meadow ground called Leggs Land, and coppice woods called Leggs Woods."<sup>(22)</sup>

For £200 he agrees to "Bargain and sell, grant, enfeoffe and confirm unto John Bannister all that messuage called Collingodmans and certain lands called Birgs and Bustians, four score acres of land."<sup>(23)</sup>

Now John Bannister was probably a grandson of the Nicholas Bannister already mentioned, and may well have been related to the Agnes Bannister who married a Richard Turke in 1552 (24), thus providing a family interest in buying back Turke property. Certainly the Bannisters appear to be prominent and responsible members of the Fletching community; for example, John's name appears regularly as a member of the homage (or jury) of the Manor court ... some nineteen times, in fact, between 1588 and 1615<sup>(25)</sup>, just the year before he died. Before his death he had further consolidated his family acres by buying back Leggland and Leggwood from William Crowe.<sup>(26)</sup>

As I have said, John died in January 1616, followed by his wife, Joan, just a month later. They apparently had had four children; a son John (2<sup>nd</sup>) who had been born in 1589; a daughter, Joan, who later married William Marchant; a daughter Mary, who married Thomas Turner; and their youngest son Thomas, born 1601 (and therefore not of age when his father died).<sup>(27)</sup>

John (2<sup>nd</sup>) inherits what may be called the original Bannister property ... in particular 40 acres of land called Simnetts (part of Pound Farm, Fletching) ... but the 80 acres of Collingodmans and Bergs are willed to Thomas.<sup>(28)</sup> Both sons seem to carry on their father's tradition of community leadership, perhaps John more so than Thomas. However,

1776 The Land Tax Rental for Colin Godmans was £30, in 1776, Paid by Thomas Geere. In 1777 John Baker Holroyd Baker purchased Colin Godmans when the Tax is paid by John Friend. For 1778 Master Bates paid the £30. In 1780 he is described as John Bates.

From 1781 to 1785 The Earl pays the Tax . The next tenant who paid was John Bridges or Brigden, who pays from 1785 to 1795, the tax was reduced to £28 a year, suggesting that less land was included.

The next tenant of this farm was my ancestor John Lucas, who, in 1796 paid the £28 Tax. John had moved with his family from East Grinstead to become a tenant of the Earl of Sheffield. John Lucas paid the Land Tax on Colin Godmans until 1828 when it was paid by Daniel Coatsworth.

Tithe 1840 FOR Colin Godmans shows Owner: Earl of Sheffield, Acreage 92-0, Occupier: Richard Smith, he was also shown on the 1841 Census.

1851 Census: The only occupant was Soloman Stapley aged 41, an agricultural Labourer, his wife, Caroline also 41 and two working sons three younger sons and two daughters . William Hobbs was shown for 1861, farming 93 acres employing 3 men and 2 boys. In 1871 William Marten was shown farming 117 acres employing 4 men and 1 boy, it has



been suggested that it is his wife, Jane whose back view appears in the photograph of the courtyard, they also employed female servant, 16 year old Lucy Whellings. John Osbourne was shown in 1881 with 96 acres.

The 1911 Survey shows the owner of the farm as “The executors of The

Earl of Sheffield” with Richard Stevenson and the acreage has been reduced to 57.2.

**Interior Courtyard at Colin Godmans. Early photograph**

Port Books of 1322 record the goods that were carried to Flanders, and in every instance timber, billets, firewood and charcoal formed the greater part of the cargo.

Many crafts associated with timber were carried on in the Weald and the management of the woods as 'coppice with standards' became the usual practice; ash was used for Crusader lances, yew for the Bowmen, willow for basket-making, the list is endless, but always with oak pre-eminent for ships and houses.

It is difficult to assess accurately the agricultural prosperity of the Weald during the medieval period, but in addition to timber, sheep rearing was important and the export of fleeces to the continent of great significance. The late 15<sup>th</sup> century saw the start of a dramatic rise in the Iron industry and a subsequent fall in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Much research remains to be done but it is quite certain that by the 16<sup>th</sup> century the prosperous yeoman farmer, with his substantial and often decorative timber-framed house, was now coming into the market and buying up small parcels of land in order to develop his freehold or copyhold estate. He might not be literate but he wanted to educate his sons, arrange good marriages for his daughters and be able to leave, by will, considerable sums of money to his dependants, striving to extract from the Weald the wealth he desired in order to achieve his ultimate ambition; 'to live without manual labour thereto to beare the countenance of a gentleman ... armes bestowed upon him by heralds, and thereto be called master which title men give to esquire and gentleman'.  
Bernabi Rich, 1609.

Notes:(1) SRS. Vol. XIV, p.34

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**COLIN GODMANS FROM THE LATE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.**

*From DPHS Magazine Vol. 3 No. 7 May 1988 "Perrymans Hill" with additional notes by P. G. Lucas.*

The article by the late Joan Ward "Perryman's Progress" from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries" includes details of the owners and occupiers of "Colin Godmans" in some detail. The final transaction was the sale of the property by Thomas Geere to the Lord of the Manor, John Baker Holroyd, in 1777.leaving it to later writers to describe Perrymans Hill's progress in the later years.

Using Fletching Land Tax Returns we can follow the progress to 1831.

Thomas continues to enlarge his boundaries; and we have already seen his transactions with the Pollards and his acquisition of Barelands.

Thomas had married Jane Wood in 1625, but their only son, born in 1627 had died in 1645.<sup>(29)</sup> So, when Thomas, himself, died in 1652, he had no direct heir to follow him. In his will he mentions his sisters and their husbands and children and leaves all "My freehold lands in the parishes of Fletching and Maresfield. My capital messuage, barns buildings, outhouses, edifices whatsoever and lands adjoining called Collingodmans, the Leggs wood lands and certain lands lately purchased of one Pollard" plus instructions about felling the coppice woods, to a John Bannister (whom we will call John (3<sup>rd</sup>)), describing him as a "cousin".<sup>(30)</sup>

From the evidence of Fletching Parish Registers, my own theory is that John (3<sup>rd</sup>) was, in fact, Thomas's nephew; and that John (2<sup>nd</sup>) had married twice, with John (3<sup>rd</sup>) the only son of a first marriage to one Mary Wells who died in May 1627, while Joan, James, Jane, and William (all mentioned in Thomas's will) were the children of a second marriage to Katherine Comber in September 1627. Although no record has so far been found, John (3<sup>rd</sup>) was probably born between 1613 and 1620; but as the church mice of Fletching had to augment their poverty with the occasional meal of parchment it is possible that the record of John's birth disappeared long ago with the mortal visceral remains of an ancient 17<sup>th</sup> Century mouse.

John (3<sup>rd</sup>) carries on the family traditions. 1639 saw the death of his father whose properties we assume he inherited, certainly, we find, later on, that his own heirs are in possession of the original Bannister lands of Simblets etc.). From 1640 until a year before his own death in 1666, John is not only a member of the homage of the Manor courts but from 1658 held offices variously described as Reeve, Bailiff, Accountant and Auditor.<sup>(31)</sup>

John (3<sup>rd</sup>) married Elizabeth Rootes in 1639 and two of his four children lived to maturity. His daughter Elizabeth, born in 1643, married a Thomas Geere, and so provided John with a grandchild, Mary, who was mentioned in his will. She also had a son Thomas, who plays a part in the story of Perrimans Hill later on. John's eldest child was his son James (born 1640), John (3<sup>rd</sup>) died the 11<sup>th</sup> April 1662. In his will, after various bequests including "To Elizabeth Bannister, my loving wife, the bedde in the parlour chamber, one Trunke with all the linnen therein, and a joyned box which was formerly hers ... and £25 per annum for her natural life" came "The residue of all my goods, chattells and ready



money, and all my lands situate in Fletching, I doe give unto James Banister my sonne."  
(32)

James married comparatively late in life, at the age of forty-six, and into the same family as his sister had done. His wife, Elizabeth Geere was probably a sister of his sister's husband. Their only child, a daughter, was also called Elizabeth.

James does not appear to have been such a prominent, public personality as his father, grandfather and great-uncle were; but we do see him extending his boundaries, in the family tradition, in 1695, when he buys the property called Wilfords. "For the sum of £81.10s. conveys absolutely all that messuage or tenement and 3 pieces of land totalling 4 acres called the Wilfords in Fletching." (33)

On paper, at least, he shows the concern of a kind husband and father for in 1702 we find a document drawn up "In consideration of the better maintenance of his wife Elizabeth if she should survive him and for the natural love and affection he bears to his daughter Elizabeth."

This was a Lease and Release indenture for the security of his wife and daughter between himself and Robert Geere (probably his brother-in-law) who, after the death of James, would hold the property in trust for them. It is interesting to see that the property now listed includes also those original Bannister lands left to John (2<sup>nd</sup>) James's grandfather.

"All those his several tenements and farms, lands, woods etc. called by the names of Collingodmans, the Bergs, the Wilfords, Pollards lands and Leggswoods, 200 acres. Also all that messuage, tenement and barns etc. called the Simletts with 35 acres of land belonging; also all that messuage and farm called the Bartletts" (another part of Pound Farm)"and 35 acres of land." (34)

James dies sometime before 1706 and from this date onwards Bannister affairs lurch from one precarious situation to another. We have an indenture of 1706 in which the widow Elizabeth and her daughter mortgage the property to a Nathaniel Trayton. (35) Two years later, the mortgage is transferred to Thomas Isted. (36) In 1716, however, it is stated that the mortgage is fully repaid; moreover Elizabeth, the daughter, has married one Peak Elphick. They had one child, a son, Thomas, who died in infancy; but, on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1726 Elizabeth Elphick died intestate and without a living child. To her husband, Peak Elphick,

The south bay has a very large fireplace taking up almost the whole width of the sitting room, with seats within the angle and a tradition of hiding places below. One of the courtyard windows shows within this room, again with hollow-chamfer decoration, and at the west end a fine, dog-legged staircase with flat newells rises to the first floor. The roof construction in the bedroom above the sitting room is of side purlins with Queen struts, and there are heavy bay posts at the fireplace end.

The west wing is also of stone with a very heavy buttress on the south wall; the stones are well dressed and a brick chimney has been built in the angle between the north and west wings, with delightful, small, softly coloured bricks, the face of the gable stands today, looking back over the centuries and remembering the people who have lived within its walls, without doubt one of the treasures of the Sussex Weald.

The fine timber-framed buildings of the Weald occur in such numbers, not only in villages but also in the countryside, that the inevitable question is raised as to the occupations of the owners and the reason for their wealth. Although timber was easily obtained, either by purchase or by prescriptive right from the Lord of the Manor, the construction of a house was an extremely costly venture. In many parts of the Weald, especially in the forest area of the High Weald, agriculture was often of subsistence level, and although in many cases there would be little corn or hay to sell away from the farm, yet the timber resources were tremendous and varied.

From early medieval times the best timber had always been selected and felled for ship building, the timber floated down the rivers to the Sussex ports, or carried on a type of sled or low cart, drawn by oxen, over the muddy roads and tracks; when such carrying became impossible the trees would be thrown down at the side of the road and left until the winter frosts hardened the ground; it is recorded that several great trees, cut down in Sheffield Park in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, took three years to reach their destination.

Many other aspects of the timber economy produced a good return. There was a large trade in bark, cut from the trees when the sap was rising in the spring, and sold to the many tanneries which were working in Sussex. Tanners were working in Ditchling as early as 1332, as is apparent from the Subsidy Rolls, and many were men of substance by the 16th century. Perhaps the most significant factor was the great volume of trade which passed through the medieval port of Winchelsea in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Time and again the

**From “THE HOUSES ON PERRYMANS HILL” by Margaret Holt.**

Colin Godmans is one of the most interesting small houses in the Parish of Fletching but its background history is difficult to unravel and the derivation of the name obscure, 'Colin' being of Scottish ancestry and not common in Sussex. What is certain is that John Colyn was dealing with lands in Fletching in 1343 and a Fine of 1325 records 'the homage and services of Roger Godman and Isabel his wife', indicating the interest of the Godmans in the estate at that time, but there does not seem to be any connection between the main branch of the family who were living at Wivelsfield, and the Fletching branch. The name of the holding or house is definitely referred to on the death of John Bowyer of Hartfield <sup>(1)</sup> who died in 1537 possessed of lands called 'Collen Godmans'. John Bowyer was one of the celebrated Iron masters from Hartfield whose son Henry rose to fame as the Master of the Queen's forest of Ashdown and subsequently built Cuckfield Park. The name 'Colin' may also be connected with 'Collins Field' and 'Great and Little Collingford' mentioned in a Chancery Inquisition of 1606.

The house sits high upon a ridge looking down the valley towards the Annwood brook with dense woodlands flanking the hills on either side, remote and mysterious even today. It is built around a small inner courtyard, only 15ft. square, and the wings of the house are not all of one build. The earliest part is the north wing, still timber-framed with several panels of reticulated tracery, some of which are infilled with brick, making a particularly charming facade. The gable ends both terminate with tall brick chimneys and the east front is also timber-framed with some ashlar work near the great chimney stack of the south end; the south front is completely stone faced, the slope of the ground allowing the construction of a cellar which runs beneath the whole of this range and appears to have a hearth at the lowest end of the chimney stack. Small windows give light to the cellar and larger ones are at ground and first floor level, all with stone mullions. There is now an entrance with stone steps leading up from the garden to the sitting room.

A small staircase in the corner of the north wing rises to the first floor and a trapdoor gives access to the attic; just at the termination of the stairs the north wall contains a small window with delicate hollow chamfer decoration. The roof structure of the north wing comprises heavy rafters with collars dove-tailed and pegged into each rafter, the central tie-beam slightly cambered and small braces are joined into the collars; the north side has been altered to a side purlin with a raking strut. The bedroom in this wing has two very heavy intermediate timbers on the north and south walls with a small bay at the east end which contains a charming fireplace, with a timber bressumer above the hearth.

the natural assumption was that his wife's property was his, and he continued to maintain possession. <sup>(37)</sup> Thus was provoked a stormy, legal furore.

If we think back through the Bannister family, we remember that John (3rd) had some brothers and sisters, namely, Joan, James, Jane and William. Joan and Jane had married; the former a Jessup, and Jane, in 1654, a Robert Wood. Neither appears any longer in Perrimans Hill affairs. William had married a Frances Cooper, and retains our interest mainly through a phrase in his will which will be mentioned later. James had married Mary Longley in 1668 and in 1669 had a son John whom we had better call John (4th).<sup>(38)</sup>

It was this John who decided that he had a much better claim to the Bannister estates than Peak Elphick. His complaint goes to the Lord High Chancellor and even makes reference to that sensitive point that crops up again and again in Perrimans Hill documents, i.e. the treatment of woodland, for we read that "John Bannister further states that Peek Elphick has threatened to commit waste on the said premises, to dig up the ancient pastures and cut timber growing on the estate, which said estate has been in the family for 100 years."<sup>(39)</sup>

Peak Elphick's letter of defence, in which he tries to justify his right to possession and entitlement to "fell, cut down and dispose" of trees; and denies vehemently any expressed intention to commit "waste or spoyl!" runs into some one thousand, eight hundred words. Even the typewritten copy occupies two sides of foolscap paper. I am told that the original is written in copper plate letters about half an inch high with about four words to a line and thus runs into pages and pages ... truly an impressive epistolary creation!<sup>(40)</sup>

In the meantime, another character has entered the story ... Thomas Geere. Do you remember him ... the son of James's sister Elizabeth? Now the first result of the legal volcano between Peak and John (4<sup>th</sup>) was that Peak was allowed to remain where he was. The perhaps surprising second result was that in an indenture dated December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1737 we find that Thomas Geere is entitled to the reversion and remainder after the death of Peak Elphick.

John (4<sup>th</sup>) disappears from this history and had to be content with his wheelwright's business and what he had inherited in his uncle William's will some twenty years earlier ... messuage, tenement, barns, buildings lands etc., and left him, ironically, with the proviso "But he must not cut down or spoil the timber growing on the estate."<sup>(41)</sup>

Now to return to Thomas Geere. Unfortunately he does come over as rather a feckless character ... or perhaps he just had no head for finance. It is true that with a timely bequest from his wife's father (a Thomas Bevis) he had managed to take over, in 1735, the original Bannister lands called Bartlets and Simblett (or Pound House and Pound Farm) and these were to be inherited by his son <sup>(42)</sup> but as his immediate action after the indenture of December 1737 was to mortgage his interest therein it is hard to find any other motive than financial instability. <sup>(43)</sup>

Peak Elphick died in 1756 and Thomas Geere became the heir.<sup>(44)</sup> He started with a mortgage to a Mary Ridge, but complications grew thick and fast. For the next twenty years Thomas became more and more entangled in a web of mortgage and borrowing involving Mary Ridge (who by this time had married and become Mary Snashall) a Miss Rochester and a Mr Bull ... until in an indenture dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1777, John Baker Holroyd contracted to buy absolutely "The messuages, farms, lands and hereditaments called Collingodmans, Birgs, Wilfords, Pollards land, Legswood, Legswood fields and Bareland fields." and Thomas Geere conveyed the property to John Baker Holroyd and his heirs for ever. <sup>(45)</sup>

As the eighteenth Century ended John Baker Holroyd, now entered on the Land Tax records as Lord Sheffield, started to bring the South end of Perrymans Hill into the new century as part of the vast landed estates of this very agriculturally progressive nobleman. But I will leave other writers to describe Perrymans Hill's progress into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

There is one further point to make ... The characters of the stories I have been telling, whose names appear on deed and documents, were the OWNERS of the properties; and although sometimes they themselves lived and worked on the hill this was more rarely than often.

The names of the farm and cottage dwellers, who created the line of the fields and the shape of the woodlands are mostly unknown. Yet it was their hands which guided Perrymans Hill's progress from wasteland to useful agriculture.

We can only be certain that the work was hard. At times the hill must indeed have seemed a mountain; and, knowing the special viscosity of Sussex mud there must certainly have been times when they felt themselves in the Slough of Despond.

BUT ... I remember my own first sight of Perrymans Hill, some twenty years ago. We had walked up from the low ground on its western side and reached the track at a point a little below Chelwood Farm. It was a day in late March or early April. White clouds scudded across the sky, but the sun shone warmly, encouraging the bright dandelions which gold-studded the field edge. As we stood at the top of the hill and looked across at the wide views to the South and West, we faced the fresh, brisk breeze, scented with growing grass and new Spring growth in the hedgerows. A sky-lark soared with jubilant and ecstatic song into the blue, blue sky.

There was only one possible word ... **DELECTABLE**.

#### Sources

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