

The Curtis Dairy Farmers of Home Farm

RICHARD CURTIS SELLEY and CHRISTOPHER JOHN HOGGER

This article has two parts, both written originally by Richard Curtis Selley and somewhat adapted later by Chris Hogger. The first part is concerned essentially with the descendants of John Curtis (1799-1871). Having married in 1834, he worked in Streatham as a gardener, florist and dairyman. After his death his dairying business was taken over by his son Charles and by the 1880s was located in Ewell. Charles died in 1896 and the firm was then managed by his widow Clara Isabella. It subsequently combined with Dumbrill Ltd. but in the 1920s was taken over by United Dairies, for whom Clara's son Charles John worked for nearly a decade. In 1935 the family moved to Effingham and purchased Home Farm where they operated as C. I. Curtis Dairy Farmers Ltd. for twenty years, until selling both the business and the Home Farm property in 1955 to Cow & Gate. The family continued to maintain a presence in Effingham until 1999. The second part presents Richard's memories of his younger years at Home Farm, where he was born.

The Curtis family

The ancestry of John Curtis has not yet been determined, but he was evidently born around 1799 to parents William and Sarah. His census returns show that he believed his birthplace was Hertfordshire, possibly in the South Mimms / Potter's Bar area.

John married a woman named Harriet; her maiden surname was also Curtis, although this is currently regarded as coincidental. Harriet was the great-great-grandaughter of a Thomas (I) Curtis and his wife Thomazina who lived in the Bridport area of Dorset. According to an entry in the register of the non-conformist Bridport Meeting House, their son Thomas (II) was baptised on 25 May 1702. Thomas (II) and his wife Betty produced in 1739, at Frome St Quintin, Dorset, a son Thomas (III). He in turn married Sarah Bazely and produced in 1775 a son Thomas (IV). Thomas (IV) married a woman named Frances; she may have been the Frances Way who married a Thomas Curtis at Askerswell, Dorset on 2 September 1797 [IGI: Batch M158831].

The children of Thomas (IV) were mostly born at Frome St Quintin and their birthdates were recorded by him on a slip of paper (Figure 1) dated 1 June 1825. They include Harriet, born on 26 October 1808. The baptism records for St Quintin (Figure 2) are missing for 1787-1804 but those for 1806 include the baptism [IGI: Batch C158751] on 6 April 1806 of Harriet's sister Sarah, consistent with the birthdate of 28 March 1806 listed by her father.

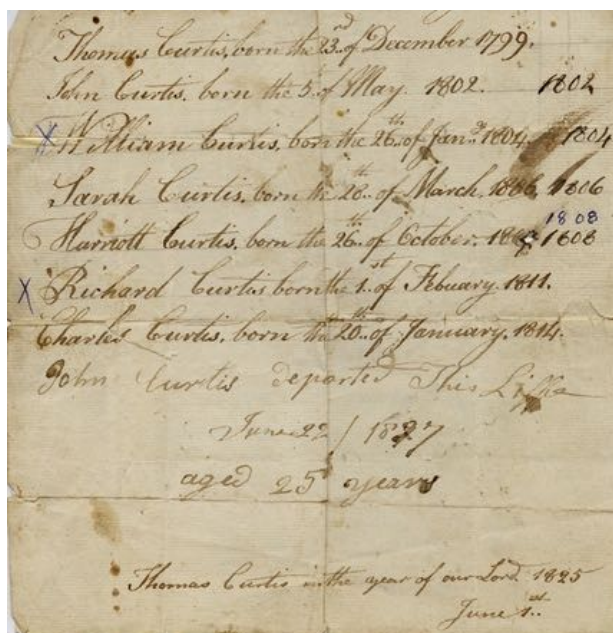


Figure 1 The listing by Thomas (IV) Curtis of his children's birthdates, including a note that his son John had died aged 25 in 1827.



Figure 2 St Quintin Church in Frome, Dorset.

John and Harriet married in London, at St Bride's in Fleet Street, on 5 March 1834 [IGI: Batch M022421]. They appear then to have settled straightaway in Streatham, Surrey where, by 1841, they had produced three children. John's parents were evidently living almost next door to him.

1841 Census

No. 5, Balham Place, (off) Balham Road, Streatham, Surrey : PRO Ref: HO107 Piece 1068 Book 1 Folio 21 Page 6

John Curtis : 40 [rounded] : gardener : no [not born in Surrey]

Harriett [sic] Curtis : 30 [rounded] : — : no

Thomas William Curtis : 6 : — : yes

Ann Johnson Curtis : 4 : — : yes

William Curtis : 7 months : — : yes

1841 Census

Balham Nursery, Balham Road, Streatham, Surrey : PRO Ref: HO107 Piece 1068 Book 1 Folio 21 Page 7

William Curtis : 69 : nurseryman : no

Sarah Curtis : 69 : — : yes

One of the fields used for the family business is shown in Figure 3, as painted around 1838. This image appears in *Streatham. Pictures from the Past* [The Streatham Society, 1983] with the caption 'Curtis's Field, on what until recently was the Unigate Sports Field. Watercolour by David Cox Junior c.1838'. This volume also describes Streatham Spa II thus: 'The Well House was built in the early 19th Century. The site was taken over by the Curtis family for their dairy farm, later belonging to Unigate. The waters were sold with the milk until the last War. The Well House is now a Grade II listed building'.

William died aged '71' in St Thomas's Hospital, London on 12 February 1843, having fallen off a cart and broken his leg, according to his death certificate [GRO Ref: St Olave 4 344, 1843 (Q1)]. A month later his business was put up for sale; the Curtis family archives include a catalogue of the sale on 27 March 1843 of the lease and contents of the nursery at Balham Hill, Clapham, being the property of 'the late Mr. Curtis'. The lease was purchased by John.

John's children were baptised in Streatham at St Leonard, whose register [IGI: Batch C055191] gives their birthdates as well as their baptism dates, thus: Thomas William born 24 March 1835, baptised 26 April; Ann Johnson born 29 July 1836, baptised 21 August; John born 24 July 1839, baptised 25 August, died 29 October 1839; William born 11 October 1840, baptised 8 November.

In 1843 their son Charles Curtis was born; his record in the St Leonard register gives his birthdate as 11 June and his baptism date as 2 July. His birth appears not to have been registered with the GRO – the family may have been too busy dealing with their (possibly ill) son William, who died on 11 August [IGI: Batch C055191].



Figure 3 Curtis's Field, c.1838.

The 1851 Census finds John living with his family in Balham Road and occupied as a dairyman and florist; Harriet's father Thomas (IV) was also there:

1851 Census

Balham Road, Streatham, Surrey :

PRO Ref: HO107 Piece 1579 Folios 294-295 Pages 13-14

John Curtis : head : mar : 51 : dairyman & florist : Southmims [sic – South Mimms], Hertfordshire

Harriet Curtis : wife : mar : 42 : — : Frome, Dorsetshire

Thomas Curtis : son : unm : 16 : milk boy : Balham, Streatham, Surrey

Ann Curtis : dau : unm : 14 : — : Balham, Streatham, Surrey

Charles Curtis : son : unm : 7 : — : Balham, Streatham, Surrey

Thomas Curtis : father-in-law : widower : 76 : formerly gardener : Frome, Dorsetshire

Ann Smith : visitor : widow : 42 : — : Stansted, Hertfordshire



Figure 4 Charles Curtis with his mother Harriet c.1860.

The 1861 Census records the family still living in Balham Road very near to Balham Place.

1861 Census

Balham Road, Streatham, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG9 Piece 375 Folio 34 Page 4

John Curtis : head : mar : 61 : nursery gardener : N.K. [not known], Hertfordshire

Harriett [sic] Curtis : wife : mar : 51 : — : Frome, Dorsetshire

Charles Curtis : son : unm : 17 : no occupation : Streatham, Surrey

Ann Curtis : dau : unm : 24 : no occupation : Streatham, Surrey



Figure 5 John and Harriett Curtis, probably in the 1850s or 1860s.

In 1863 John ordered the sale, on 19 October, of the Balham Hill nursery. The catalogue of sale [Curtis family archives] was addressed to ‘Gentlemen, Nursery men, Builders, Cowkeepers and Others’ and the items listed for sale included a heap of manure.

Later papers in the handwriting of Charles’s son Charles John Curtis record that after this sale in 1863 John and Harriett had started a dairy at Chestnut Grove in Balham, and this is indeed where the family is found in the 1871 Census, although Harriett was apparently not at home (her whereabouts then are unknown).

Meanwhile, John’s other son Thomas William had married in 1861 to Elizabeth Mary (née) Reynolds [GRO Ref: Lambeth 1d 421, 1861 (Q1)] and by 1871 had produced three sons: James Lever Curtis [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 477, 1864 (Q1)], Alfred Curtis [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 495, 1868 (Q3)] and George Herbert (I) Curtis [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 546, 1870 (Q2)]. He too was working as a dairyman.

Later that year John died aged ‘71’ [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 453, 1871 (Q4)], and in 1878 Harriett died aged ‘69’ [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 453, 1878 (Q3)] (it is merely coincidence that these two references have identical page numbers).

Shortly before Harriett died her son Charles had married, to Clara Isabella (née) Lemon – this was her preferred order of forenames, although at birth she had been registered as Isabella Clara [GRO Ref: St

Luke 1b 601, 1858 (Q1)]. Their wedding took place at Ewell Parish Church on 8 May. Their marriage certificate [GRO Ref: Epsom 2a 27, 1878 (Q2)] describes him as a dairyman and her as the daughter of a rope maker.

1871 Census

Chestnut Grove, Streatham, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG10 Piece 718 Folio 57 Page 35

John Curtis : head : mar : 71 : dairyman employing 3 men : Potter's Bar, Middlesex [sic – Hertfordshire]

Charles Curtis : son : unmar : 27 : dairyman's assistant : Streatham, Surrey

John Curtis : grandson : unmar : 8 : scholar : Streatham, Surrey

1871 Census

No. 18, Bellamy Street, Clapham, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG10 Piece 698 Folio 42 Page 44

Thomas W. Curtis : head : mar : 36 : dairyman : Streatham, Surrey

Elizabeth M. Curtis : wife : mar : 32 : — : Lambeth, Surrey

James Levy [sic] Curtis : son : unmar : 7 : scholar : Balham, Surrey

Alfred Curtis : son : unmar : 2 : — : Balham, Surrey

George H.[Herbert (I)] Curtis : son : unmar : 2 : — : Balham, Surrey

Their first child Charles John was born a year later, on 3 March 1879 [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 700, 1879 (Q2)]. Here he is with his parents in the 1881 Census:

1881 Census

Chestnut Grove, Streatham, London : PRO Ref: RG11 Piece 664 Folio 85 Page 22

Charles Curtis : head : mar : 35 : dairyman : Balham, Surrey

Clara Curtis : wife : mar : 23 : — : City of London

Charles [John] Curtis : son : unmar : 2 : — : Balham, Surrey

Elnor Lemon : visitor : unmar : 30 : stockbroker : City of London

Albert Sloper : visitor : mar : 40 : retired grocer : Devizes, Wiltshire

Jane Sloper : visitor : mar : 38 : — : City of London

Harriet Boniface : servant : unmar : 16 : general servant domestic : Hailsham, Sussex

In 1883 Thomas William died aged just “48” [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 412, 1883 (Q3)]. At the time of his death he had been running his dairy business in Valley Road, Balham.

In 1886 the family moved to West Farm in Horton, near Epsom; later they held Manor Farm and Green Manor Farm. These were run as dairy farms, the milk being transported to a dairy at Chestnut Grove for treatment and distribution. Figure 6 shows some of the Horton farms in the 1860s.

Handsome gold-embossed certificates in the Curtis family archives show that Charles was a regular winner of prizes awarded by the British Dairy Farmers Association:

1885. Second Prize. Awarded to C. Curtis of Balham for Guernsey heifer ‘Mill Maid’.

1885. Highly Commended. Awarded to C. Curtis of Balham for Guernsey heifer ‘Rosy Morn’.

1885. Highly Commended. Awarded to C. Curtis of Balham for Shorthorn Cow ‘Daisy’.

1886. Reserve Number. Awarded to C. Curtis of Balham. For Shorthorn Cow in Milking Trials ‘Countess’.

1886. Third Prize. Awarded to C. Curtis of Balham. For Guernsey Cow ‘Mill Maid’.

1888. Highly Commended. Awarded to C. Curtis of Horton. for Guernsey Bull ‘Bamborough’.

1892. Highly Commended. Awarded to C. Curtis of Balham and West Farm, Epsom for Fancy Butter – Class 54.

1893. Highly Commended. Awarded to C. Curtis of Horton for Shorthorn heifer ‘Daisy’.

These prizes show how the business prospered under Charles. Presumably the herd at Balham was gradually run down and removed to the Ewell farms. The milk was transported to the dairy at Balham for treatment, bottling and distribution.

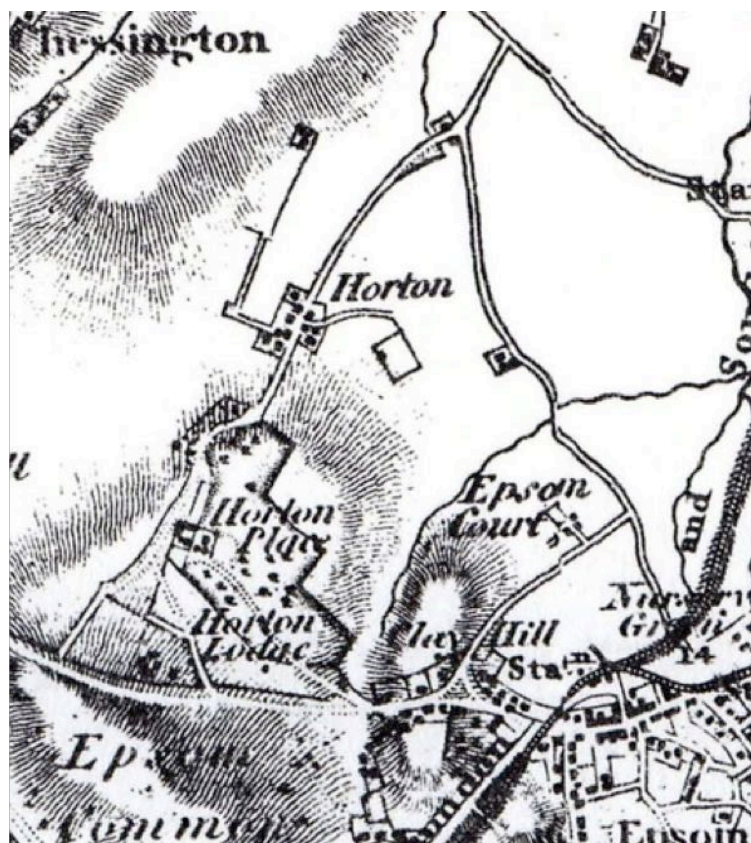


Figure 6 Farms in Horton, Ewell in a map of 1862.

Here is the family at West Farm in the 1891 Census:

1891 Census

West Farm, Epsom, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG12 Piece 546 Folio 71 Page 5

Charles Curtis : head : mar : 46 : farmer : Balham, Surrey

Clara Curtis : wife : mar : 33 : — : London, Middlesex

Charles J. Curtis : son : un m : 18 : farmer's assistant : Balham, Surrey

William T.[Thomas] Curtis : son : un m : 10 : scholar : Balham, Surrey

George H.[Herbert (II)] Curtis : son : un m : 8 : scholar : Balham, Surrey

Edwin E.[Elnor] Curtis : son : un m : 6 : scholar : Balham, Surrey

Alice West : servant : un m : 21 : general servant domestic : Holmwood, Surrey

In 1892 Thomas William's widow Elizabeth Mary died aged '53' [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 634, 1892 (Q1)].

In 1893 Charles and Clara produced at Horton a daughter Clara Lilian [GRO Ref: Epsom 2a 21, 1893 (Q1)] who in later life was often known simply as 'Lily'.

In 1896 Charles died aged '51' from a septic leg [GRO Ref: Epsom 2a 11, 1896 (Q1)]. His widow Clara continued to develop the dairy business, establishing the company C. I. Dairy Farmers Ltd. By now the family was sufficiently prosperous for Charles John and his brothers William Thomas and George Herbert (II) to be sent to Epsom College, the adjacent public school.

The 1901 Census finds Clara still living at West Farm with her sons William and Edwin. Edwin was aged 16 yet had no occupation; according to family anecdote he had been tossed into a hedge when he was a small boy and 'was never the same again'. Clara's other sons Charles John – a dairy farmer – and George Herbert (II) were meanwhile living at 184, Streatham High Road with assorted dairymaids, bookkeepers and domestics.



Figure 7 Charles Curtis, dairy farmer of Balham and Ewell : probably 1880s or 1890s.

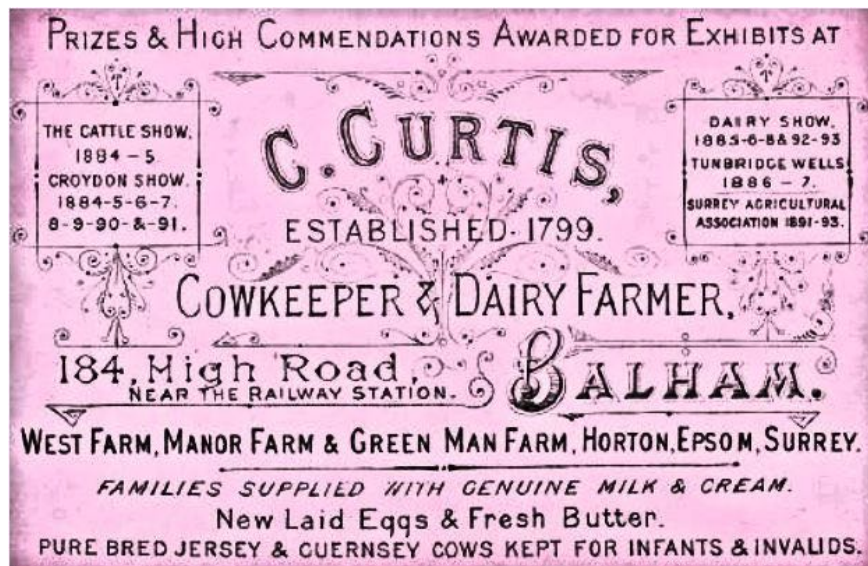


Figure 8 One of the company's business cards stating that it had been established in 1799; the details suggest that it had been printed in the early 1890s.

1901 Census

West Farm, Epsom, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG13 Piece 584 Folio 33 Page 23

Clara Curtis : head : widow : 43 : dairy farmer : London City

William T. Curtis : son : unkm : 20 : dairy farmer's assistant : Balham, Surrey

Edwin E. Curtis : son : unkm : 16 : — : Balham, Surrey

Lilian C. Curtis : dau : unkm : 8 : — : Horton, Surrey

and 2 servants

1901 Census

No. 184, High Road, Streatham, London : PRO Ref: RG13 Piece 473 Folio 108 Page 39

Charles J. Curtis : head : unkm : 22 : dairy farmer : Balham, London

George H. [Herbert(II)] Curtis : brother : unkm : 18 : dental student : Balham, London

and 6 boarders/servants assisting the business

In 1906 Charles John married Florence Lizzie (née) Potterton [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 929, 1906 (Q4)]. She was born in Streatham in 1876 with her forenames registered as 'Florence Lizzie' [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 712, 1876 (Q2)]. (However, she appears as 'Florence E.' in the 1891 Census so may have been formally intended as Florence Elizabeth.) Their first child Dorothy Joan was born on 28 June 1907 [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 639, 1907 (Q3)].

Also in 1906, London County Council compulsorily purchased the farm at Horton and built a mental institution on the site. Clara subsequently moved into the nearby 'Fitznells' (or 'Fitznell Farm'), the old Tudor manor house in Chessington Road, Ewell.



Figure 9 Fitznells in Ewell, under refurbishment in the 1960s.



Figure 10 Curtis family group taken in the garden of Fitznell Farm in Ewell, probably about 1909-10.

The original photograph shown in Figure 10, from the Curtis family archives, was annotated by Dorothy Joan (née Curtis) Selley, who identified the persons depicted as follows:

Back row, standing, from left:

William Thomas Curtis ; Janet Susannah ('Susan') (née) Odell ; Clara Lilian ('Lily') (née) Curtis ;
George Herbert (II) Curtis ; Florence E. (née) Murphy.

Next row, seated on chairs, from left:

Florence Lizzie (née Potterton) Curtis ; unknown woman ; Clara Isabella (née Lemon) Curtis ; Edith (née)
Potterton.

Seated on ground: Charles John Curtis, holding his daughter Dorothy Joan.

The child appears here to be no older than 2, perhaps 3 at the most. Dorothy Joan was born in mid-1907, and so if she was correct in identifying the child as herself then the photo must have been taken about 1909-10. The woman at far left, Florence, was her mother. Clara Isabella was her grandmother, the mother of Charles John.

The woman at the centre of the back row, if 'Lily', was the sister of Charles John and was born in 1893; her age in this photo would therefore have to be about 17.

The couple at the back to the left of Lily are identified above as Charles John's brother William Thomas and "Susan". These two married each other about a decade later, in early 1920.

The couple at the back to the right of Lily are identified above as Charles John's brother George Herbert (II) and Florence E. (née) Murphy. These two married each other in late 1911.

The only significant question mark hanging over these identifications is how plausible it is that 'Susan' should have been in the same photo as the man whom she would not marry until ten years later. It may simply be that she was working at the time in the Curtis dairy business and that her relationship with William took a long time to develop.

By 1910 the business based at 184, High Road in Balham had 400 acres of land distributed over several farms around Ewell, with a herd now of 200 cows. Figure 11 shows an image of another of Charles John's cards, again stating that the business had been established in 1799.

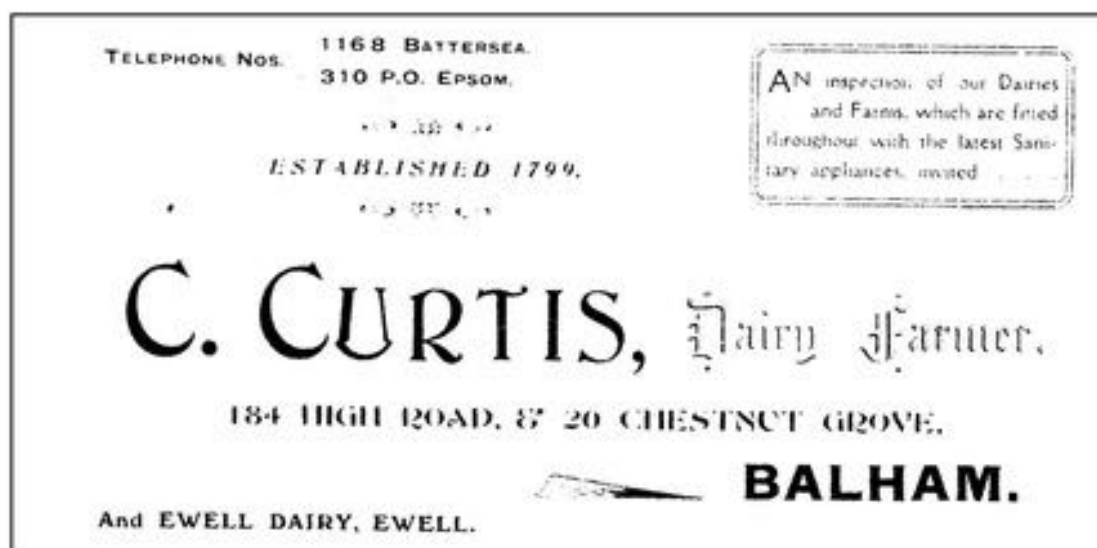


Figure 11 Business card of Charles John Curtis.

The 1911 Census finds Clara living at Fitznells, Charles John in Streatham and the sons of Thomas William also in Streatham:

1911 Census

Fitznell Farm, Ewell, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG14 RD31 SD2 ED6 SN174

Clara I. Curtis : head : widow : 53 : dairy farmer : London City
 William T. Curtis : son : unm : 30 : farm manager : Streatham, London
 George H. [Herbert(II)] Curtis : son : unm : 28 : surgeon dentist : Streatham, London
 Edwin E. Curtis : son : unm : 26 : florist and poultry farmer : Streatham, London
 Clara L. Curtis : dau : unm : 18 : — : Epsom, Surrey
 Jane E. Strong : visitor : unm : 44 : manageress [of] dairy : Islington, London
 and 2 servants

1911 Census

No. 16, Airedale Road, Streatham, London : PRO Ref: RG14 RD26 SD5 ED14 SN9

Charles [John] Curtis : head : mar : 32 : dairy manager : Streatham, London
 Florence Curtis : wife : mar : 35 : — : Streatham, London
 Dorothy [Joan] Curtis : dau : unm : 3 : — : Streatham, London
 and 1 servant

1911 Census

No. 8, Pendennis Road, Streatham, London : PRO Ref: RG14 RD26 SD5 ED36 SN46

George Herbert [I] Curtis : head : mar : 41 : dairy farmer : Balham, London
 Annie Sophia Curtis : wife : mar : 42 : — : Downe, Kent
 Leslie Bernard Curtis : son : unm : 13 : [at] school : Streatham, London
 and 1 servant

1911 Census

No. 115, Sunnyhill Road, Streatham, London : PRO Ref: RG14 RD26 SD5 ED48 SN191

Alfred Curtis : head : mar : 42 : dairyman : Wandsworth Common, Surrey
 Annie Curtis : wife : mar : 41 : — : Gayhurst, Buckinghamshire
 Elsie Curtis : dau : unm : 14 : scholar : Streatham, Surrey
 Rowland Curtis : son : unm : 7 : — : Streatham, Surrey



Figure 12 Charles John Curtis with his daughter Dorothy Joan.



Figure 13 His mother Clara Isabella (née Lemon).

Later in 1911 George Herbert (II) married Florence E. (née) Murphy [GRO Ref: Epsom 2a 24, 1911 (Q4)].

In 1913 Charles John and Florence produced their second daughter Frances Louise, born on 4 June [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 1205, 1913 (Q3)].

In 1914 Clara Lilian gave her place of residence as Fitznells when she married George Stone [GRO Ref: Pancras 1b 294, 1914 (Q4)]. Her niece Dorothy Joan also lived there for a while during her childhood for the sake of her health, the rural air of Ewell being deemed healthier than suburban Streatham or Balham.



Figure 14 Guernseys belonging to the Curtis firm after the move to Fitznell Farm.



Figure 15 Close-up of the logo 'C. CURTIS EWELL DAIRY AND FITZNELLS FARM EWELL'.

In 1917 the firm Curtis Bros. run by Thomas William's three sons (James, Alfred and George) combined with Dumbrill Ltd. to trade thereafter as Curtis Bros. & Dumbrill Ltd.

In 1920 William Thomas married Janet Susannah ('Susan') (née) Odell [GRO Ref: Epsom 2a 33, 1920 (Q1)]. She was born in 1881 [GRO Ref: Lambeth 1d 502, 1881 (Q2)].

By the early 1920s Clara's dairy business at Fitznells was operating under the name C. I. Dairy Farmers Ltd. Figure 16 shows a photograph taken in about 1923 showing the company name on one of their milk floats.



Figure 16 C. I. Dairy Farmers milk float in about 1923; by the kind permission of the Bourne Hall Museum.

The 1921 Census finds Clara, together with her married daughter Clara Lilian and the latter's husband George Stone and children, in Broadstairs, where they were possibly on holiday:

1921 Census

'Martinhoe', York Avenue, Broadstairs, St Peter, Kent : PRO Ref: RG15 Piece 04454 Schedule 152
in the household of a general labourer Walter John Bax and his family ...

Clara Isabella Curtis : visitor : widow : 63 : --- : City of London
 George Stone : visitor : mar : 35 : assistant chief clerk (bank) : Ewell, Surrey
 Clara Lilian Stone : visitor wife : mar : 28 : home duties : Epsom, Surrey
 George Eric Stone : visitor son : both [parents] alive : 4 : --- : Ewell, Surrey
 John Curtis Stone : visitor son : both alive : 2 : --- : Ewell, Surrey
 Violet Grace Harriet Willard : visitor : unnm : 21 : children's nurse : Sydenham, Kent

It has not so far been possible to determine who, if anyone, was at this time looking after Fitznell Farm in Clara's absence.

Her oldest son Charles John was living in Balham and occupied as the dairy manager of Curtis Bros. & Dumbrill Ltd.:

1921 Census

184, Balham High Road, Balham, Wandsworth Bor., London & Surrey : PRO Ref: RG15 Piece 00410 Schedule 309

Charles John Curtis : head : mar : 41 : dairy manager (employer Curtis Bros & Dumbrill Ltd) : Balham, London
 Florence Lizzie Curtis : wife : mar : 44 : home duties : Balham, London
 Dorothy Jean [sic - Joan] Curtis : dau : both alive : 13 : --- : Balham, London
 Frances Louise Curtis : dau : both alive : 8 : --- : Balham, London
 Emma Virtue Chinery : servant : unnm : 38 : domestic servant : King's Lynn Norfolk
 Hilda Parkinson : servant : unnm : 36 : domestic servant cook : Liverpool, Lancashire

whilst two of his brothers were farming elsewhere:

1921 Census

Court Farm, Ewell, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG15 Piece 03097 Schedule 10

William Thomas Curtis : head : mar : 40 : farmer : Balham, London
 Janet Susannah Curtis : wife : mar : 39 : home duties : Clapham, London
 Joseph William Ernest Odell : visitor : --- : 37 : farmer (temporarily retired) : Clapham, London
 Frank Herbert Milsted : visitor : --- : 56 : exporter : Bishopsgate, London
 Lilian Allen : servant : --- : 27 : domestic : Leatherhead, Surrey
 Victor Allen : boarder : --- : 6 : --- : Leatherhead, Surrey

1921 Census

43, West Hill Avenue, Epsom, Surrey : PRO Ref: RG15 Piece 03101 Schedule 65

Edwin Elnor Curtis : son [sic] : unnm : 37 : poultry farmer (employer C I Curtis farmer) : Balham, London
 Jane Emily Strong : visitor : unnm : 65 : manageress dairy retired : Barnsbury, London
 Beatrice Ellen Mann : servant : unnm : 18 : general domestic : Epsom, Surrey

Jane Emily Strong had, at the time of the 1911 Census, been working at Fitznell Farm as the dairy's manageress. Charles John's third brother George Herbert (II) (the dental surgeon) and wife Florence Emily were visiting the home of a ship owner Henry Samuel at 'Hone House', Boundary Road in Grayshott, Hampshire.

Charles John's cousin Alfred Curtis had now retired from dairy farming and was living at 115, Sunnyhill Road, Streatham, whilst Alfred's brother George Herbert (I) Curtis was still in work, at Curtis Bros. & Dumbrill Ltd., and living at 109, Babington Road in Wandsworth.

In 1924 the company featured in one of Francis Frith's photographs of Ewell, shown in Figure 17; their logo is on the sign outside the large house on the left side of the road.



Figure 17 Frith photograph of Ewell High Street in 1924, with Curtis signboard at the left.



Figure 18 Close-up of the signboard.

Fitznells was sold by auction on 24 June 1925; the Curtis family archives contain the plan and particulars of the sale, which was handled by Knight, Frank & Rutley.

The October 1926 house magazine of United Dairies reveals that the ‘grandfather of Alfred, George and James Curtis’ – i.e. John Curtis – had founded the dairy at Valley Road, Streatham.



Figure 19 Curtis & Dumbrill's new bottling plant and dairy in Valley Road, Streatham, in 1926.

By 1926 United Dairies had taken over Curtis Bros. & Dumbrill Ltd., together with a tranche of other dairies in the district including Clara's. The Valley Road dairy (where Thomas William had been living at the time of the 1881 Census) was refurbished in 1926 to become capable of processing 30,000 gallons of milk a day. This dairy must have been the wonder of its age since it merited a visit by the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Elizabeth) in 1927. Charles John was put in charge of this operation which he ran until he moved with the rest of the Curtis family to Effingham in 1935 when the Home Farm was purchased.

By 1928 Clara was living at 46, Merton Hall Road in Wimbledon; Charles John was at "Terriston Lodge" in Ullathorne Road, Streatham, working for the dairies of Curtis Bros. & Dumbrill Ltd.; William Thomas was still living at Court Farm in Ewell; George Herbert (II) was a dental surgeon in London; and Clara's fourth son Edwin Elnor, described as a gentleman, was at Hampton in Middlesex.

C. I. Curtis Dairy Farmers Ltd. bought the Home Farm at Effingham in 1935. Clara moved from her Wimbledon home to 'Windy Ridge' in Effingham around 1936-37; Windy Ridge was situated on the raised minor road running alongside the east side of Effingham Common Road, opposite Leewood Farm. Charles John had already moved into 'Terriston' in Effingham on 4 September 1935 (this house name was a melange of syllables from the names Curtis and Potterton). His brother William Thomas moved to 'Glen Lynn' (later 'Haverthorn') by 1936. William Thomas ran the farming whilst Charles John ran the pasteurising and retailing side of the business. Their brother George Herbert (II), the dentist, came to live at "Fairhaven" in 1936, but moved to Epsom Downs in 1939.

The southern half of the Home Farm house was occupied by Mr. Capon, the chief clerk of the business, and his wife, using the east-facing front door as their entrance. Charles John's daughter Dorothy Joan had in 1933 married Harry Westcott Selley [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 1008, 1933 (Q2)], who was born in 1902 [GRO Ref: Wandsworth 1d 734, 1902 (Q3)]. She and her horse-loving friends used the northern half of the house (entered from the farmyard via the west-facing back door) for riding weekends, until the outbreak of WWII when she and her family moved in permanently to escape the London blitz. Their part of the house was fitted with the very latest Potterton coke-fired central heating system (her mother was of that family) and the old dairy on the ground floor was turned into a bathroom with a vast black marble bath. An air raid shelter was built in the garden, with an escape tunnel that exited in the adjacent orchard. Her second son Richard Curtis Selley was born on the kitchen table in 1939 [GRO Ref: Surrey S.W. 2a 948, 1939 (Q4)].

Under the ownership of C. I. Curtis Dairy Farmers Ltd. the Home Farm consisted of some 400-500 acres and had about 50 cattle, including about 30 in milk, 2 bulls and assorted heifers and calves. The cows used to walk up and down The Street in Effingham twice a day in single file to the field now occupied by houses of Leewood Way. Milk was also bought in from adjacent farms and small-holdings.



Figure 20 One of the two Guernsey bulls in the orchard of the Home Farm, Effingham.

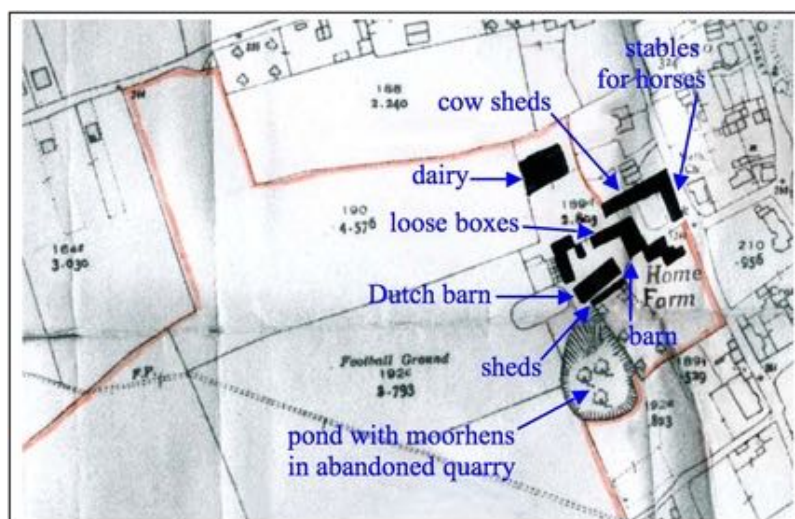


Figure 21 Map of the Home Farm, Effingham.

A state-of-the-art dairy (pasteurising and bottling plant) was built by Dorothy Joan's husband Harry in 1938, and was visited for many years by agricultural students from London University.

About 1000 gallons of milk per day were distributed by about half a dozen 2-wheeled horse-drawn 'chariots'. The business also had shops in Bookham, Leatherhead and Ashted. Although the farm was predominantly a dairy farm, some cereals were grown but most of the land was given over for pasture and hay. Some chickens and goats were kept too, for domestic purposes only.

In 1944 Charles John's daughter Frances Louise married to (Albert) Edward Jackson [GRO Ref: 2a 1070, 1944 (Q4)]. He lived in Middle Farm and ran an engineering works on the corner of The Street and Orestan Lane (later Colets earth-boring company).

Frances Louise kept about half-a-dozen Curtis Guernseys at Middle Farm until about 1948-49, when she and Edward moved with their herd to farm in Devon.

Florence Lizzie died aged '68' in 1945 [GRO Ref: Surrey Mid.E. 2a 485, 1945 (Q1)] and was buried in St Lawrence churchyard.

In the early 1950s hand milking was replaced by machine milking (on the first day, by the time that the morning milking been completed it was time to start the afternoon milking). At about the same time the horses were replaced by electric milk floats. This was not an immediate success because the former

charioteers, now float drivers, often forgot to plug in their new steeds to recharge their batteries at the end of the day's round.



Figure 22 The Home Farm Dairy, built in 1938 by Harry Westcott Selley.



Figure 23 The Home Farm barn and loose boxes, viewed from the dairy. The Home Farm house is here hidden from view behind the barn.



Figure 24 Middle Farm, run by Frances Louise after marrying.

In 1952 Clara died aged '94' [GRO Ref: Surrey S.W. 5g 989, 1952 (Q4)].



Figure 25 Clara, in Effingham shortly before her death in 1952.



Figure 26 The rear of the Home Farm house, viewed from the west in about 1955.

In 1955 the Curtis family sold the Home Farm to Cow & Gate, after which the herd was dispersed, the fields leased to contractors and the farm effectively closed down. Dorothy Joan, who in 1949 had remarried to Charles Matthew Foreman [GRO Ref: Surrey Mid.E. 5g 513, 1949 (Q2)], moved out of the Home Farm to 'Thornet Wood', a bungalow built in the orchard of 'Glen Lynn', between her uncle William Thomas's house and Indian Farm. The Home Farm dairy was later demolished to make way for the development of Middle Farm Close.

William Thomas, whose first wife (Janet) Susan had died aged '70' in 1952 [GRO Ref: Surrey 5g 935, 1952 (Q1)], fell in love with a South African widow, moved out to South Africa and married her. The new owners of Glenn Lynn renamed it 'Haverthorn'. William Thomas died in 1965.

In 1966 Frances Louise sold her Devon farm and the last of the Curtis herd of pedigree Guernseys was sold out of the family business, 167 years after its founding.

In 1971 Charles John died [GRO Ref: Surrey S.W. 5g 1192, 1971 (Q2)] and was buried with his wife at St Lawrence. Their grave is shown in Figure 27.



Figure 27 The grave of Charles John and Florence Lizzie Curtis in St Lawrence churchyard.

In the 1970s Frances Louise returned to Effingham to live with her horse at Nook Farm in Orestan Lane. Dorothy Joan's husband Charles Matthew, who had been born on 4 December 1898, died in 1982 [GRO Ref: Surrey Mid.E. 17 0018, 1982 (Q4)]. Frances Louise then moved in with Dorothy Joan at 'Thornet Wood' for the rest of her life. Frances Louise died at age '81' in 1995 [GRO Ref: Surrey Mid.E. 48A/7562A/116, 1995 (April) – indexed, for family reasons, under 'Selley'].

In 1999 Dorothy Joan died aged '91' [GRO Ref: West Surrey A6B/7611A/118, 1999 (May)]. Her death marked the extinction of the Curtis family's period in Effingham, spanning 64 years. At their peak there were 6 Curtis households in the village. For some 20 of those years, 1935-1955, C. I. Curtis Dairy Farmers Ltd. had been one of the largest employers in Effingham and adjacent villages.

Thus over a period of 200 years the Curtis family went from being cow keepers, dairymen and nurserymen to yeoman farmers, rich in land, houses and cattle. As London expanded they sold their Balham lands for building, moving to farms in Ewell. They sold these farmlands for development to buy farms in Effingham. These were sold by the mid-20th century. The male Curtis line is now extinct, their fortune gone. The well-known histories *Ewell: the Development of a Surrey Village that became a Town* [C. Abdy, 2004] and *The History of Effingham in Surrey* [M. M. O'Connor, 1973] make no mention of the Curtis family. Only Curtis Field Road, off Valley Road, marks the family's time in Balham, and Curtis Road, just off the Kingston Road, marks their sojourn in Ewell. The Curtis family may thus be termed as spectral cattle herders, whose migration across Surrey over nearly two centuries has been lost to history, save in this account.

Memories of the Home Farm

As recalled by Richard Curtis Selley, who was born on the kitchen table of the Home Farm in 1939 and lived there until 1955.

The early history of the Home Farm has been extensively researched by Keith and Valerie Cornwell, the present owners. This article provides an account of life on the Home Farm in the middle of the last century. The Curtis family bought the Home Farm in 1935. Previously they had farmed some 600 acres around Ewell, including the Horton, Green Man, West Court and Fitznells farms. When the family moved to Effingham my great uncle William Thomas Curtis ran the farming side of the business and lived in 'Glen Lynn' (later 'Haverthorn'). My grandfather Charles John Curtis ran the dairy side of the business and lived in 'Terriston'.

There was a petrol pump in the farm yard, but the petrol was only for commercial use on the farm. No petrol was available for social or personal use during the war.



Figure 28 Goats on the air raid shelter looking north towards the barn and the Home Farm house, about 1940.



Figure 29 View from the top of the dairy looking SE towards the barn; note the petrol pump.

We kept a pony and trap and I can recall drives to Cobham to picnic and fish beside the River Mole.



Figure 30 Pony and trap in the farm yard with Richard and his aunt Frances Louise, about 1944.

My earliest recollections of life are of sheltering under my bed in the middle of the night while a ‘dog fight’ was going on overhead. During the war Yew Tree House was requisitioned by the Government. It was occupied by paroled Italian officers. One day they started chatting to me over the garden fence. They asked me to climb over to play with them, but when I asked my mother’s permission she did not think that it was a very good idea. When a stick of incendiary bombs dropped on the Home Farm the Italian POWs were the first people out to extinguish the flames.

Later I remember while walking back from Bookham lying in a ditch as a flying bomb flew over. One of these came down next to ‘Windy Ridge’, my great-grandmother’s house. It destroyed the adjacent house, later rebuilt and aptly renamed ‘Phoenix’, and blew out some of the windows in the Home Farm.



Figure 31 The Home Farm from the road, perhaps in summer 1944.

White tape can be seen in Figure 32 around panes of the ground floor window to the right of the door. These repairs are believed to indicate damage caused by the flying bomb that landed on the house since rebuilt as 'Phoenix'. [In *The History of Effingham in Surrey*, Monica O'Connor states that the house had been called Little Thatch and was struck by a V1 on 10 July 1944, killing the owner and injuring his wife and child.]

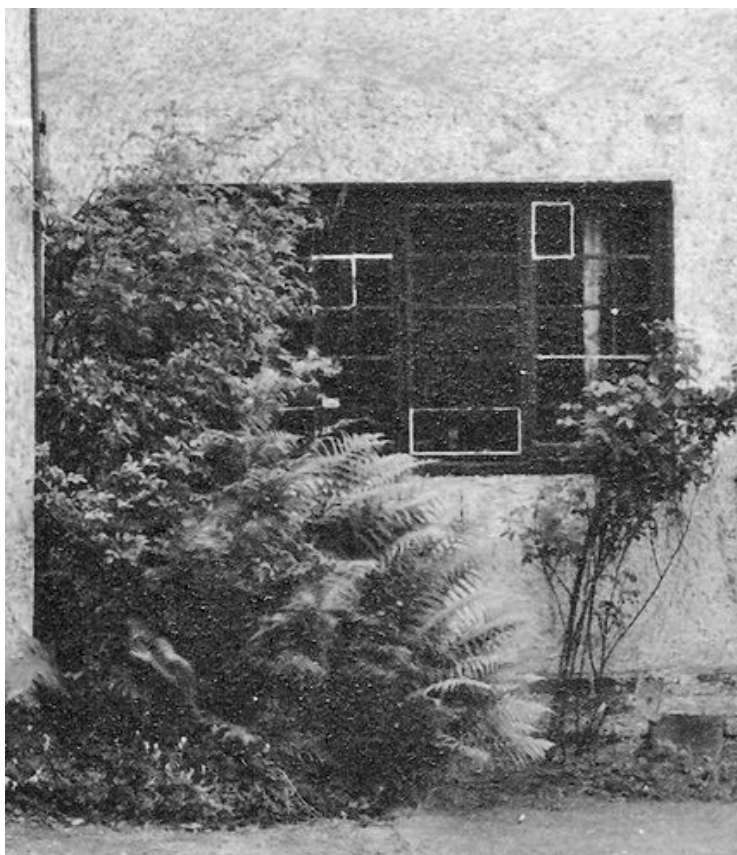


Figure 32 Close-up of the window panes with the white tape visible.

I recall VE and VJ days clearly, being allowed to stay up late to see the huge bonfires on the King George V Playing Fields. At the end of the war German POWs worked on the farm.

After the war the Home Farm saw many technological changes. I can remember the day when the cows were no longer milked by hand but by machine. The cows were not terribly impressed and made a great fuss. The cows soon settled down, however, to the new technology. I can also recall when the horses were replaced by electric milk floats. Failure to plug in and charge the battery of a float at the end of the day's milk round meant that the next day it would run out of electricity somewhere miles away and my grandfather would have to drive off with a spare battery. In those days the farm was a lively place with a staff of over a dozen, including stockmen (and ladies), tractor drivers, milk delivery men and staff pasteurising and bottling the milk in the dairy. The old farm buildings were arranged in the open square that is still preserved today. On the north side was the cowshed, on the east side was the stable for the horses, on the west side was an enormous barn. On the south side of the square was the farm house. In the middle of the yard there was a massive dung heap over which in summertime was a swarm of flies over which, in turn, were wheeling swallows and shrieking swifts.

Between 1944 and 1947 I went to school at The Spinney in Bookham. At first I was collected and returned in one of the mistresses' cars. From the age of 6, however, I would walk down the street and catch the bus from St Lawrence Primary School. I was sent away to boarding school at the age of 7 for the next 11 years, of which the less said the better. But the holidays on the farm were a delight, especially the summer ones. I could wander over the farm and fields wherever I wanted. I would camp out in the orchard, cook my meals over an open fire and sleep in a tent. Beyond the orchard was a large old chalk pit, now in-filled. The slopes were overgrown with elder and old man's beard. In the middle of the pit was a murky pond, with a diverse ecosystem sufficiently large to provide a home for a pair of moorhens. On summer evenings I would punt myself around the pond in the lid of an old tin cabin trunk while bats swooped overhead. Happy days! As I grew older I began to work on the farm. I can recall long hot August

days following the mower and 'stooking' sheaves of oats in the far fields. The sheaves would then be put into thatched ricks. In winter a thrashing machine powered by a steam engine would be hired, along with a gang of gypsies, and the grain separated from the chaff and straw, which would be baled for bedding. Now combine harvesters to do it all in one go.



Figure 33 Richard with his great-aunt Eileen L.A. (née Hunt) Potterton (at left) and his mother Dorothy Joan (at right with dachshund 'Judy') at Home Farm, late 1940s.

We farmed some of the fields up Beech Avenue, and I can recall leading cows over Ranmore Common to be sold in Dorking Market. Around 1948-49 my aunt and her husband moved from Middle Farm with part of the herd, to a farm in Devon. In 1953 my brother John made tape-recorded interviews of my grandfather Charles John Curtis, great-uncle William Thomas Curtis and some of the farm workers. This is an invaluable record of life on a Surrey farm in the middle of the last century. My grandfather spoke with a south London accent, having run the dairy at Balham. My great-uncle spoke with a Surrey dialect and the cowman, who had spent some years in Australia, spoke “strine”.

The centre of the village in those days was Church Street. On the corner of the road leading down the hill to the Home Farm there was a general store (Stanton’s), then the post office, the smithy and the snob (a snob is a cobbler and leather worker – snobs were often to be found adjacent to smithies so that horse harnesses could be repaired while their wearers were shod).

In 1955 my grandfather and great-uncle (then aged 76 and 75 respectively) decided that it was time to sell the Home Farm. This was a great sadness for me as I would have loved to have carried on the family business. Aged only 15 I was obviously too young. The farm was sold to Cow and Gate Ltd (later Unigate). Our family had to move out of the Home Farm. My great-uncle sold us a plot of land next to Glen Lynn (later Haverthorn) that he had bought at the same time as Glen Lynn and used as an orchard and tennis court. On it was built a bungalow called Thornet Wood. Subsequently the Home Farm was gradually run down. One by one the Curtises died or moved away from the village. In 1999 the death of Dorothy Joan Foreman (née Curtis, sometime Selley) marked the extinction of the Curtis family in Effingham, after 64 years residence in Effingham. The bungalow at Thornet Wood was demolished and replaced with a smart executive house.



Figure 34 This view of Home Farm appears to be later than the similar view in Figure 26 as some of the brickwork has now been painted white.

For some years after the Home Farm was sold in 1955 it was my dream to become a farmer and buy it back. My family dissuaded me from this career. So I became a geologist instead, travelling the world at other people’s expense, and gambling with other people’s money. Thankfully I have now grown out of my boyish fantasy. Keith and Valerie Cornwell, the present owners of the Home Farm, have graciously allowed me to visit on several occasions. It is sad to see the farm lifeless and dead, but it gives me much delight to see the house so lovingly preserved and its history researched.

Some audio recordings were made at Home Farm on 25 August 1953, two years before the Curtises sold the farm to Cow & Gate Dairies. They were made on a tape recorder transported around the farm on a wheelbarrow. The recordings were made, and put originally onto 78rpm lacquer discs, by Dick Keele, a professional sound engineer, whose voice you hear introducing and closing the edit interview. The interviewer was John Selley [Richard’s younger brother], then a 17-year old school boy at Cranleigh. The composite audio file, kindly provided to ELHG by Richard, can be listened to on the Group’s website.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 2: internet (unattributed)

Figure 16: by courtesy of the Bourne Hall Museum

Figures 17, 18: low-resolution copy from the Surrey History Centre

Figure 27: supplied by C. J. Hogger

All others: supplied by R. C. Selley