

The Charman Family

The following Charman history was written by
Historian Frank Holmes
Holmes chronicles the life and times of
a pioneering family, who helped found Australia.

The following details are part of an article that appeared
in the Sussex County Times on 18th April 1986

"Some Sussex families must be as old as the county itself, and one such is the Charman family, who for generations were yeomen farmers at Warnham and Ockley.

They are on record as being in the area as long ago as 1593 when a William Charman served on the jury at the Sussex Assizes on July 16th of that year.

I have been allowed to catalogue some of the family papers that survived the years, and they begin with the Will of John Charman, of Warnham, dated 1748, which was written on parchment about 20" by 15", and it took quite a lot of time to decipher the old English writing, but it was worth it.

It was almost like an inventory, for practically every item in the house is detailed, even down to and I quote " my pewter chamber pot". There were later Wills of the members of the family. The executors had to go to Chichester to have the Wills proved by the clerk to the Bishop of Chichester.

But since there are 68 pages of records, I can only deal with a small part of the family history, and it relates to that of the family living at Warnham in 1800. There were seven boys and two girls, all born between 1803 and 1824, and they grew up at a time when the whole of Sussex was what would be described today as a disaster area.

BAD HARVESTS

There was unemployment, made worse by bad harvests which resulted in riots by farm workers. One at Horsham, saw ricks and barns set on fire and several of the desperate men were hanged for their part in the struggle to avoid starvation. One a youth of 17, was hanged at Horsham for arson, and later when it was much too late, was found to be innocent.

Wages for those who could find work were at a level that was impossible to keep a family on, and the parish relief for those who could get it, varied from one shilling and sixpence; to four shillings a week. Such was the environment that the Charman family grew up in, and life on the farm must have been very hard for the parents to keep a family of nine on the proceeds of what was produced there.

So it came about that four of the sons decided to try their fortunes overseas. George left Liverpool on 10th September 1845 for America, where he and his wife had a very bad time, on one occasion, being attacked and driven out of their home. Thomas, Samuel, and Stephen had left a few years earlier for Australia, where they became successful farmers."

* The next two pages contain photocopies of letters that were written home to Michael Charman, by his brother Stephen Charman – the first written on 28th April 1853, and the second on 20th March 1857.

The third letter in May 1878 was written by Thomas Charman also to his brother Michael Charman.

These letters were kindly donated by Mr L Jones – great grandson of Mary Charman.