



2. View from the Green of the former retting pit with Green Farmhouse beyond.
(Photo: author)

their employees living in four other tenanted cottages. Documents reveal that hemp was grown here from at least the 14th century. It was harvested and soaked in retting pits - pools created in the streams - until the outer matter had rotted. Then the smelly fibres could be spread along the margins of the Green to dry before being processed. In the Sandlings people grew the crop on their smallholdings and stored it in small timber thatched 'hemp-houses'. Apart from essential use as cordage it was spun and woven into the coarse textiles needed in a pre-industrial age for sacks, bags, covers of all kinds, clothing and aprons. Some cottagers or their children owned a few sheep; these were run with the manorial flocks on the sheepwalks and their fleeces carefully processed at home to be woven into homespun or knitted.

In the 18th century the Green was embedded in a sporting estate created by Lord Archibald Hamilton and his sister's husband, the Earl (later Marquess) of Donegal. Much of the heath was still grazed by sheep, but long belts of conifers were planted as cover for game. At the end of the century a survey shows that the tenements around the Green were now occupied by the Sheldrake, May, Collins, Foulger, Ablett, Webb, Walton, Kirk, Cable, Nunn, Snowling and Reeve families, and Francis Cook.⁴ The farm and its acres were divided between James Stebbing, John Knights and John Cooper. Noticeable is the amount of hemp being grown, now amounting to five acres. The timber-framed cottages were gradually being replaced with brick; when Lord Rendlesham owned the estate he had a reputation for improving tenants' housing. They were usually built in pairs, with a kitchen opening off the front room, a stair beside the chimney to a bedroom, which gave on to the other bedroom.