



FRUIT

PICKING

INDUSTRY

OF

MARSHES

NORFOLK



The Fruit Picking Industry of Martham.

All over the Eastern part of Norfolk raspberries, currants, strawberries, and gooseberries are grown in large fields similar to the apple orchards of Kent and Surrey. This is a purely summer industry, and when the fruit is ripe it has to be picked consequently necessitating the labour of a great many people. Women and children are generally the labourers in this case, and it is not easy work to leave every cane or bush, as the case may be, perfectly free of any fruit.

Early in July the green gooseberries are gathered. The bushes are generally small & close to the ground so that the pickers have to sit or kneel down to gather the fruit. Each picker has a certain number of bushes allotted to her which are numbered and a small basket, which, when full is emptied into a larger wicker basket, or the Norfolk "Skep". Each woman can then have her numbered gatherings weighed at the end of the day, and her wages paid at the rate of three half-pence a stone. This seems a very poor rate of payment but some women get so quick at it that they can gather 20 stones in one day, thus earning half-a-crown.

When the goose-berry picking is finished then the strawberries are ripe. This is the work in which the children play a great part. No matter what age they are - they are generally taken to the strawberry fields to help. It is the hardest work of all the picking, because the women have to crawl along the ground to get at the fruit, and the constant nipping of the stalks makes the tips of the fingers very sore. These fields are in rows, each of which is numbered, with trays accompanying them into which the fruit is emptied as the baskets get full. This strawberry picking often keeps a great many children away from school and always means a bad attendance on the schools to be closed earlier - this is the chief reason why the schools in the eastern part of Norfolk always close much earlier than the other parts and also have a longer holiday - because at the end of their five weeks - the harvest generally begins and makes it necessary to have another week. There are some people engaged in the currant picking at about the same time - but it is not very important, because there are very few growers of currants - unless it is the red currants which do not get ripe enough for sale until well into the raspberry time which is the most important of all.

GENERAL VIEW OF COUNTRY. ALLOTTED TO FRUIT-PICKING.



GOOSEBERRIES.



Directly after the strawberries follow
the raspberries, and poor and rich
alike grow raspberries by the acre, or by
the yard as the case maybe. No market
gardener - however small - will ever be
found without his allotted piece of
ground for raspberry canes. The large
fields are planted with rows of canes
which are numbered differently, and
one picker is given one row to gather
perfectly. At the end of the row there is a
pail with a small basket - both of which
bear the same number. In a shed,
which is to be found in every field, there
are short round tubs which are
numbered in the same way as the
pails & small baskets are. The
women often bring their children to gather
the fruit at the bottom of the canes, while
they take the top fruit. When the small
baskets, which they tie round their waists
are full - they empty them in the pail at
the end of the row - which, when full, are
in their turn, collected by men, employed
for the purpose, and emptied in the
barrels of the same number in the shed.
This goes on all day long, and if there is
not much fruit on the canes - then some
women can manage to clear two or
perhaps three rows. At night, or when
the women are tired, their amounts
are weighed and they are paid then
at the rate of five pence a stone, and
one woman can sometimes pick 8 or 9 stones
per day.

VIEW OF MARTHAM STATION WHEN BARRELS
HAVE BEEN RETURNED.



The fruit is used in a great many ways - The white & black currants are generally sold locally in the markets of Norwich and Yarmouth. The other fruits - strawberries and raspberries - are sent largely to the great jam factories - Crosse & Blackwells and red currants with gooseberries are sent to Chivers for jams & jellies.

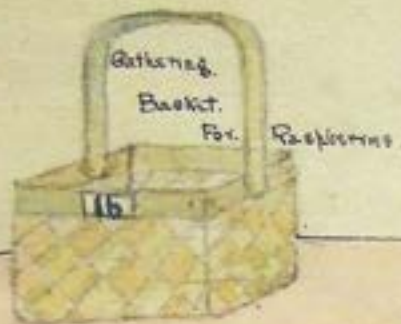
The tubs of fruit - each bearing the name of the sender with his address - are packed in the fruit vans belonging to the railway which are closed & very similar to a guards van - and are sent to these great factories. When the fruit has been taken from the tubs, the tubs are returned to the owners, & towards the end of the season it is a very common sight to see half the platform taken up by stacks of these empty fruit barrels, baskets and trays. They are stored all the winter in large barns - until the next raspberry picking.

As Maitland is a large village
and in a great many ways - almost
the centre of the picking-trade - there is
not sufficient pickers to be obtained from
this one village so large numbers are
hired from other villages round about
such as Horsey or Winterton where the
industry is fishing and the men being
so engaged, cannot grow or tend to
raspberries as they have to be cared for.
At seven o'clock in the morning, large
waggons, belonging to the owners of the
fruit fields, are sent off to these villages to
fetch the pickers, and at eight o'clock
the rumbling of the waggons can again
be heard bearing the pickers with their
large shady hats covering their faces, and
carrying a small basket in which is
packed their dinner. At dinner-time if
the weather is fine - they have their dinner
in the open fields, but if it is wet there is
always a barn or shed they can go to,
which will always be provided in case
of rain when they are picking. At
about five o'clock in the evening the
waggons return to the villages, & bear
home the weary pickers who are
generally in the highest of spirits, and
go home singing gaily

The general dress of a picker is anything but picturesque. She generally wears all the oldest garments she can, and thick heavy boots as a protection for the feet. A large coarse sacking apron covers the skirt and the arms are generally bare to the elbow, and get scorched quite a dark brown towards the end of the season. The "gathering hat" is quite indispensable, and is a light, large hat made of plaited rushes with a piece of bright coloured ribbon or muslin twined round. These keep the sun from the eyes of pickers and they are so enabled to see the raspberries better, and they are never worn with the idea of protecting the complexion or enhancing the beauty, which in a great many cases they do. Some of the young girls of the town wear gloves while picking, & so keep the fingers without thorn scratches or red stain from the raspberry juice.

TRAYS, BASKETS, ETC USED IN

THE FRUIT-PICKING.



TRAYS FOR WHITE CURRANTS TO BE SENT AWAY IN



TUB FOR RASPBERRIES TO BE SENT AWAY IN



Closed Basket for Gooseberries



16
Raspberries



Basket for Currants



Basket for Raspberries

Basket for Gooseberries

Last year owing to the great competition in this fruit dealing business one large fruit dealer in Martha's Vineyard was offered a very low price for his fruit so that he refused to part with it. However, he had a "pulping machine" made by which the raspberries were crushed and reduced to a pulp. This pulp was then stored away in air tight barrels with nothing put with it to preserve it simply the pulp of the fruit and the juice. This year in the early season he was able to sell the pulp and made a very good price of it.

SPRAY OF RED
CURRANTS.



SPRAY OF RASPBERRIES
(THE PRINCIPAL FRUIT).

