The Catlin and Robinson families were well-known in this area at one time, and among family mementoes is an undated (probably early 20th century) notebook belonging to Martin Catlin Robinson, 1860-1933. Martin Robinson was born at Ugley Hall, where his father John George Robinson was farmer. After his grandfather’s death in 1881 the family moved to Trout Hall, Wenden.

The notebook is stamped ‘Surveyor, Wenden’, but in notes left by his brother Francis he is described as ‘a clever architect’. His contribution to local building is uncertain but is likely to include The Crossways, Wenden, to which he moved with unmarried sisters in 1919. The memoir deals exclusively with events that took place before his birth. It starts with his great-great-grandfather Stephen Robinson (1724-1806) and continues with his great-grandfather John (1762-1841), whose sons included Martin’s grandfather, Stephen (1791-1881). The later sections concern Catslins of Saffron Walden. John Robinson married Hannah Catlin (1761-1824), while his son Stephen married her niece Mary Catlin (1797-1833). Two of Mary’s brothers, Nathaniel and Thomas Archer Catlin, played active roles in early 19th century Saffron Walden, including a partnership in Gibson’s Bank. Selected extracts from the original notebook are given below, with later additions in square brackets:

Stephen Robinson, usually referred to by old folks when I was a boy as ‘The old gentleman of all’ or ‘Old Stephen Robinson of all’, left a farm at Horseheath in about the year [1790] and hired Wenden Hall, then the property of the Marquis of Bristol. He lived at Wenden Hall for some years with his only son John, and it was probably on John’s marriage that Stephen moved to Littlebury where he lived in a house about opposite the Vicarage until his death in February 1806, aged 82.

The former tenant of Wenden Hall was one [Thomas] Rickard, when Stephen Robinson entered the outgoing and incoming tenants and valuers met at Wenden Hall, old Mr Rickard brewed some punch, the party not being teetotallers, this he
stirred with the granary key, remarking ‘Excuse this here together, the gals do steal the spoons so’.

Stephen Robinson was I hear red haired, rather thin and so strong that the labourers always said he was double jointed, a relative remarked that strangers who happened to sit in the pew in front in church must have been surprised if the old gent happened to kneel with his feet in front of him.

His son, John Robinson married Hannah Catlin of Saffron Walden in 1786, farmed Wenden Hall for many years as tenant of the Marquis of Bristol, he also owned and farmed Wenden Place, Clanver End and the Bulse farms, all in Wenden. He left Wenden Hall in [about 1820] lived at Wenden Place with his youngest son Robert; when Robert married in [blank] John built Trout Hall, by adding the rooms on north side to a pair of old cottages which now form the kitchen scullery and two rooms over.

The top part of the garden was then a small pasture, the lower part a tan yard, the cottages was occupied before alteration by two labourers whose wives were known as ‘Poll Jack’ and ‘Poll Jonah’, they do not seem to have been over particular about cleanliness for when old John Robinson looked over the cottages before alteration his white stockings became black with fleas.

John Robinson's children were Nathaniel, born 1790, who married Miss Wadham of Clifton, lived at Granta House, Littlebury opposite the church and carried on a malting business, he died in 1847. Stephen (my grandfather) born August 6th 1791, married Mary Catlin, of Saffron Walden, lived at Walden until his father's death, then at Trout Hall Wenden until his death in May 1881. Robert, born 1795, married [blank] lived at Wenden Place, died [blank], whether at Wenden or not I do not know. Martha born 1793, married the Rev Septimus Meggison then curate in charge at Wenden, afterwards Rector or Vicar of Bolam Northumberland, she died in 1829.

The Cornwell family succeeded John Robinson at Wenden Hall, and farmed it for 80 years or more, my memory does not go further back than Charles Cornwell, one of the most kind hearted men I ever knew, who left Wenden Hall a year or two before his death in [blank].

John Robinson was a big man, of great strength and weight; he is said to have weighed 21 stone, before the days of police he was chief constable of this district, and on one occasion when there was a disturbance at Elmdon and a mob of men threatened to wreck the squires house, John Robinson rode up to help to keep the peace, noticed who were the ringleaders, threw the reins on his cob's neck, rode into the crowd, collared two ringleaders, dragged them through the crowd, had them handcuffed and taken off in a waggon and so quelled the riot [this is presumably a reference to the Swing riots in Elmdon in 1830].

I have now an old flint horse pistol of about 8 bore, which I hear was supplied to John Robinson for his use, if need be on such occasions; I believe it was never used except as a 'while time' by our man Isaac Cain when he 'sat up of a night' for my grandfather's horse, years back when the said Isaac was house boy.

One Billy Shelford, an oddity and half witted, worked for old John Robinson for many years, and afterwards for my grandfather until he was killed by a blow from a publican, verdict manslaughter.

Billy often took too much beer, on one occasion he was found asleep by the road side by a farmer, and the pony on which Billy had ridden to deliver a message,
grazing by the road side; the farmer asked Billy who he worked for, he said 'old Jack Robinson of Wenden'. The farmer told John Robinson this, so next day he sent Billy to Walden to Day & Green's for grocery, and said 'If they want to know who the things are for say old Jack Robinson of Wenden'. Billy scratched his head and said 'I didn't know you'd heared that'.

Day & Green's shopmen often told Billy of remarkable events, one day on his return his master asked him whether he had heard any news in Walden, Billy replied 'why yes, a elephant flew over Walden yesterday and knocked a hay stack down at Debden'. Billy slept in the brew house at Trout Hall, one night my grandfather knew Billy had taken too much and went to see if he had put himself to bed properly, he found that Billy had got into bed, but had pushed a lighted candle under the bed.

The Catlins lived at Walden for many years, when they came there I do not know, the first Catlin found in the Walden Register was a fustian maker. What their first business was at Walden, I do not know, the only information I had from my father was that they had some property in Jamaica, and lost it by neglecting to bring an action against some one who took possession of it, my father did not know further particulars.

They appear to have traded in some way in Jamaica produce and were possibly in partnership with one Thomas Mead, I have one or two old pocket books said to have belonged to the Catlins. [One of these pocket books has the inscription 'THOS MEAD IN IAMAICA' in gold tooling, and 'Robert Catlin, Saffron Walden, Essex 1797'.]

My Grandmother Robinson was Mary Catlin, daughter I believe of one Martin Catlin who died in [1815]. Her brothers Nathaniel and Thomas Archer Catlin were at one time partners in Gibson's Bank, when they retired from this I do not know, probably many years ago. They owned some maltings in Walden, carried on a malting business for some time, and retired from it in [blank], transferring the business to George Stokes, who had been their clerk, which he carried on until his death a few years ago – George Stokes was a Trustee for some years under the will of [blank] Catlin [this seems to be an error for Edward Stokes].

T. A. Catlin's health was not good, he was small and thin therefore his brother Nathaniel obtained a portrait (now in Walden museum) of an enormously stout man, Bright of Maldon I think, who is said to have weighed over 30 stone – this portrait N. Catlin hung up in the office as that his brother T. A. Catlin might look at it and grow like it.

In spite of this kind and thoughtful action, T A Catlin did not increase in stature or in health and died in [1837]. His widow survived him by many years, married one Dalton, a parson [Rev Edward Dalton died March 12 1871 aged 55, Rector of Tramore, Ireland] and lived I think principally in Ireland...

**Notes**

*Saffron Walden History*, No 3, pp 6-9 & No. 6, pp 19-20.

**Acknowledgements to the late Sheila Purnell, who carried out much research on the Catlin/Robinson families.**