

# The Chronicle

No 3



The Journal of the  
Long Wittenham Local History Group

No.3  
November 1988

**THE CHRONICLE**

The Journal of the  
Long Wittenham Local History Group

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Cover illustration: Working in the field - from Fitzherbert's Book of Husbandry  
(See article "Riches to Rags")

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## EDITORIAL

It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to introduce the contents of the third issue of The Chronicle. They range from the history of the Vicarage to an overview of the shops, from men and their status in the 16th century parish to the life, loves and writings of a Wittenham writer, from the work of wheelwrights to the workings of a long-lasting parish charity. Each piece enlarges the mosaic of past Wittenham life which the Group are working to reconstruct.

Kathleen Jewess

# **WHEELWRIGHTING**

By

Juliet Surridge

Wooden spoked wheels were an outstanding achievement of the wood worker's skill and were first represented c. 2000 B.C. in painted clay models from the Near East. About 500 B.C. Celtic wainwrights in the Rheinland were making wheels of surprisingly modern appearance and their art spread to Northern Europe and to Britain.

Wheels and vehicles of many different kinds were made throughout the Roman Empire, but little is known of their development from that time on until the 12th century, when ready-made pairs of wheels could be bought in English market towns.

Wheelwrighting was a profession crucial to village life, the wheelwright being the master craftsman of the countryside. In 1851 the census counted 2,057 wheelwrights, and 1,652 of these employed fewer than two people. Only twelve employed more than twenty, so it is clear that factory methods were not widespread.

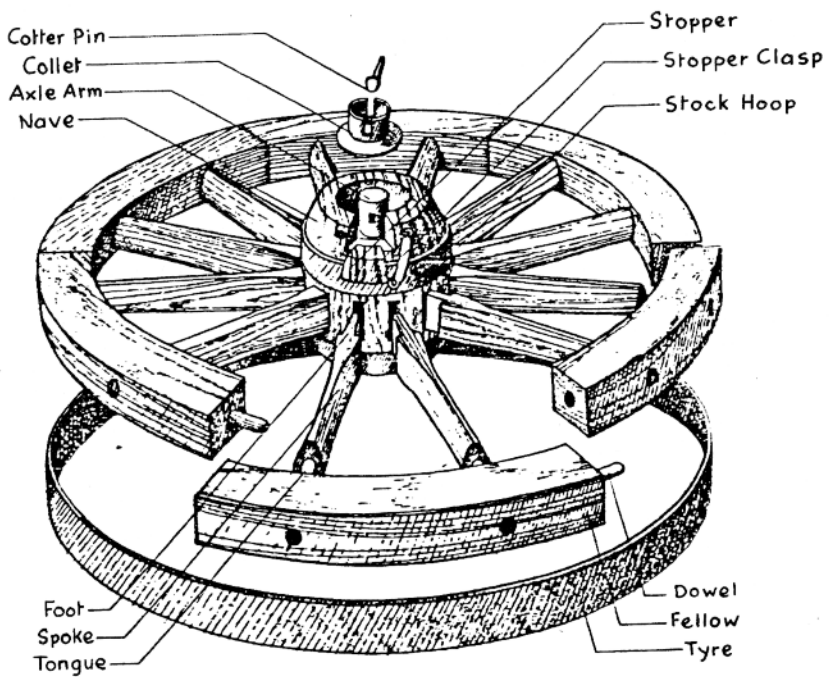
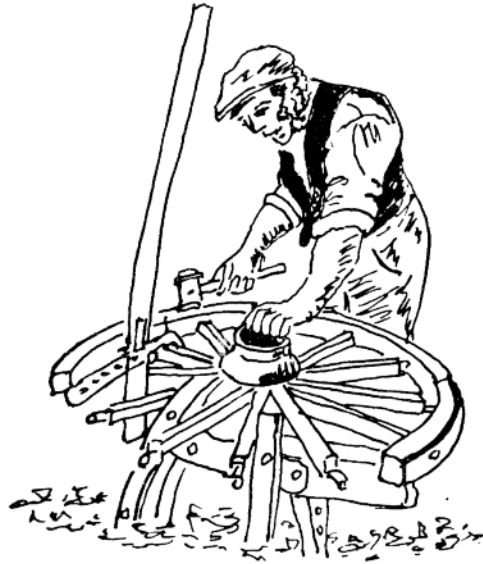
Crafted wheels were gradually displaced after the invention of the pneumatic tyre (1888) and wire spoke (1895), but wheels were still being made in Long Wittenham until just before the last war.

John Hewett (1720-1803), documented in parish records, was a wheelwright in Long Wittenham, and his descendants played a prominent role in the village as wheelwrights, carpenters, farmers and builders. The first John Hewett was a man of substance. His will disposed of two houses, £840, and land at Harwell (nine acres freehold, two acres copyhold and three yard lands). In Long Wittenham at least seven members of the family became wheelwrights/carpenters, although some of them appear to have undertaken funerals and performed building and repair work as well.

Until about sixty years ago, most timber used in Long Wittenham would have been sawn in the Village saw-pit. The saw-pit at 33 High Street was filled in within living memory (another has recently been uncovered in a shed in the village). This was the site in Long Wittenham at which wheels had been made by several generations of the Hewett family.

At the saw-pit, logs were converted into beams and planks. To do this the log was laid over the pit, with one man standing on top of the log and the other standing in the pit below. The pits were about six feet deep, twelve to fourteen feet long, and three to four feet wide, a short ladder being used for getting in and out. The top of the pit was surrounded by a stout timber sill of oak or elm. Though mostly used for converting large timber, lighter work, such as the cutting of wheel felloes, cart shafts, and plough handles, was also done on the pit.

The wheelwright worked in buildings usually surrounding a yard in which were placed those pieces of equipment which could survive the weather and were convenient to use outside - tyre bender, geared- tyre bender, geared rollers and a grindstone.



In the main shop, the wheel stool and chopping block would be set in a central position and on one side the lathe for turning hubs. Along one wall was a narrow bench, often made from a thick plank with its waney (uneven) edge left showing at the front. Behind the bench would have been the tool rack filled with chisels and gouges and, hanging up, templates and other tools.

To make a wheel, elm logs were cut into lengths and after several years of seasoning were turned on the lathe to the diameter required. The mortice holes for the foot of the spokes were driven into the hub while it rested on the wheel pit. When the angle and alignment of the spokes had been adjusted, the upper end of the spokes were cut to fit the holes in the felloes.

Some workshops had their own smith who made iron tyres, bonds for the hubs and the iron cart furniture and fittings for the vehicles, but in most instances this was done by the local blacksmith.

The wheelwright was not only a maker of wheels. He made wagons, carts, ploughs, agricultural implements, hay rakes, and many other things needed by the village and surrounding farms. He often supervised the felling of local trees.

In country districts the local builder or wheelwright was also the coffin maker and undertaker, with the coffin usually being made only to special order on a death taking place. The vast majority of coffins were made of home grown elm. Elm was used because it was one of the most plentiful as well as one of the cheapest hardwoods.

## **POOR HEATH CHARITY**

By

Harold Thorpe

Under an Act of Parliament of 1809 for enclosing and allotting lands in the Manor and Parish of Long Wittenham in the County of Berkshire, a plot of land was allotted to the Vicar and Churchwardens as Trustees. This was to compensate the poor inhabitants of Long Wittenham for the loss of their rights to cut and take away “furze bushes and thorns” from any of the Common or Waste Grounds which were being allotted by the Act. The land allotted covered some twenty-five acres and was situated at the top of Syres Hill, adjoining the Wallingford Road.

For some time after the enclosure the poor were allowed to cut the furze and the pasturage was let to Mr Joseph Hewett for £7 per annum. Subsequently, the Vicar (the Revd R.B. Paul) and Churchwardens (Mr J. Moulden and Mr Joseph Hewett) let the ground for a term of years to Mr William Hayward at a yearly rental of £20. The proceeds were expended on coal which was distributed to the poor of the village. It is interesting to note from the records that at times the coal was delivered by barge to Wittenham Wharf. After the opening of the railway it was brought to Culham station.

By an agreement dated 1st October 1849, after Mr Hayward's death, the land was let to Mr Ingram Shrimpton for a term of twenty-one years. However, in July 1853 Mr Shrimpton left England for New Zealand and the lease was taken over by the Revd Clutterbuck, the Vicar of the parish. The rent over the twenty-one years was £20 for the first seven years, £25 for the second seven years and £30 for the final period. Over the twenty-one years, seventeen to thirty-two tons of coal were purchased each year at prices ranging from 18 shillings to £1/2/0 per ton, and between ninety and one hundred families benefitted. On the expiration of the lease in 1870, the land was valued by a Mr William Franklin, who estimated the rent at £2/2/0 per acre. The Revd Clutterbuck continued in occupation at a yearly rental of £52/10/0 until his death in 1885.

The then Vicar (Revd Hodgson) and Churchwardens (Mr James Sadler and Mr Harry Bush) then offered the land to the parishioners in allotments each not exceeding twenty poles at a rental of three pence per rod, pole or perch per annum. No applications were received and the land was then let to Captain (later Rear Admiral) W.R. Clutterbuck in 1887 at a rental of £31/5/0 per annum. Coal at this time was costing sixteen shillings and sixpence per ton and around thirty tons a year were purchased and distributed to between seventy-five and eighty recipients. During his tenancy Admiral Clutterbuck personally made up any deficiency in the annual accounts. He relinquished the tenancy at Michaelmas 1921.

The tenancy of the land was taken over by Mr Henry Wigley, who in June 1922 bought the land freehold for £450. The Trustees (Revd T.D. Hopkyns, Mr Henry Hewett and Mr (later Sir) Frederick Hallett), on the advice of the Charity Commissioners, invested this in 3% Loan Stock to produce an income of £22/6/0 per annum. This Stock was compulsorily sold in 1946 and re-invested in 2.5% Treasury Stock with a reduced income of £16/18/4.

Coal was still distributed until 1972, although by this time it was costing £17.50 per ton, but the recipients had dropped to twenty-seven, who each received one hundredweight. In recent years parcels of groceries have been distributed to some twenty-four widows and widowers, but this has only been made possible by a generous annual gift by an anonymous donor.

# SHOPPING IN LONG WITTENHAM

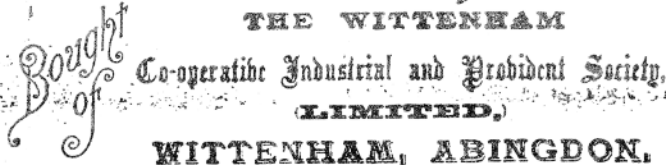
By

Members of the Local History Group

What is progress? Today, stocking up on family necessities for most villagers involves a car trip to Tesco's with its attendant trolley pushing and queuing at the check-out. A century or so ago, the lucky or 'unlucky cottager (according to your point of view) had barely to step outdoors to find all that he (or she) needed to sustain him, almost literally, from cradle to the grave.

However, it must be borne in mind that most people grew their own vegetables and many had a family pig. Also, the Victorian diet of villagers contained far less milk, butter and cheese than it does today. Considering this, it is perhaps surprising that there were so many shops in a small village, although obviously they did not operate at the same time.

Approaching from the East end of the village, we would first come to "Sadlers", where James and Martha Sadler ran a bakery and grocery shop. Mrs Sadler held a contract in the 1840s to supply food for the poor, financed by the village overseers. This century, it was run by Mrs Booker, whose husband also cultivated a small holding.

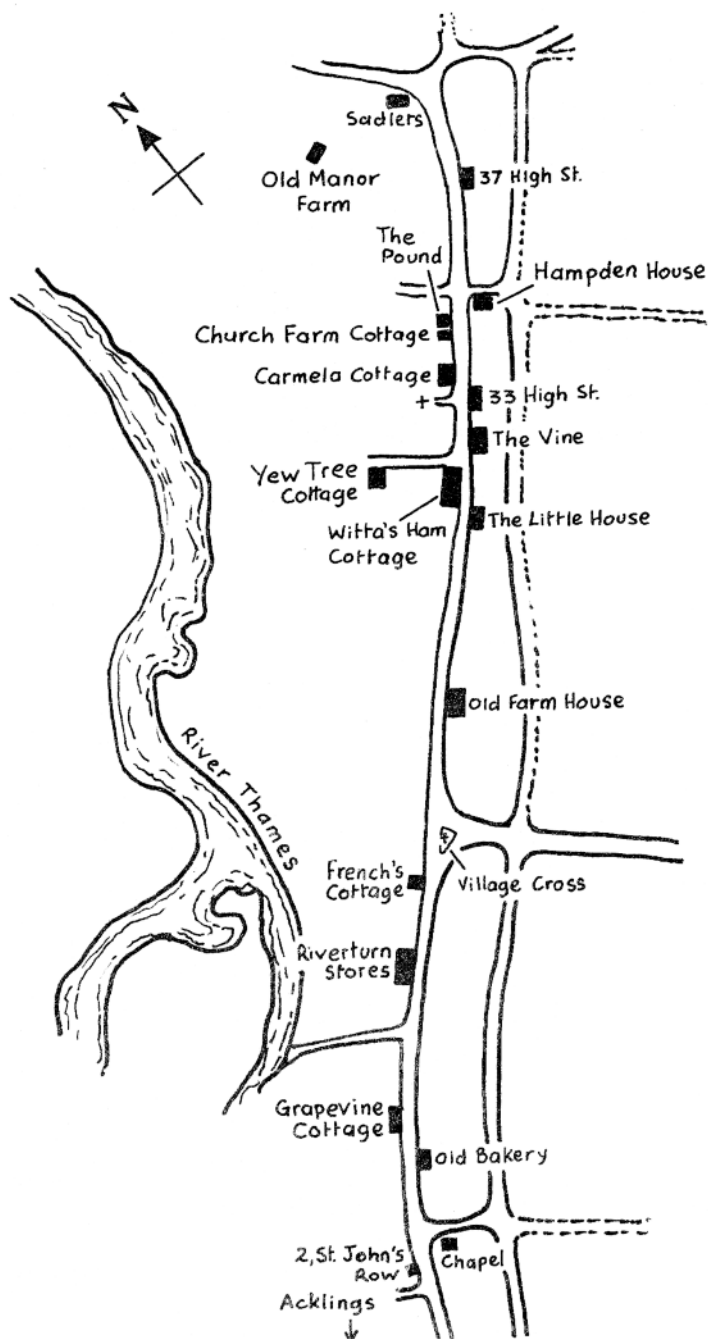


Let Star Brakes	3.3
2 Spears	7.0
Knap for wood	1.0
3 cut Coal	3.6
Paid ac.	14.9
Sept 5/13	

**Try Peek, Frean & Co.'s TIVOLI WAFERS.**

Bill for: "Set shoe brakes..2 spades..knife board..3 cwt. coal"  
from the Wittenham Co-operative Industrial and Provident Society

Sadlers - Bakery & Grocers  
37 High Street - Blacksmith's Shop  
Hampden House - Post Office  
The Pound - Shoe Mender  
Church Farm Cottage - Hairdresser  
Carmella Cottage - Co-Operative, and later VG Stores  
33 High Street - Blacksmith's  
The Vine - Butcher's Shop  
Witta's Ham Cottage - Co-Operative Industrial Provident Society  
At other times, a Draper's, and an Army Surplus Store  
Yew Tree Cottage - Bakery  
The Little House - Carpenter's  
The Old Farmhouse - General Stores & Newsagent  
French's Cottage - Potter's  
River Turn Stores - General Store, Bakery & Post Office  
Riverturn Stores  
Other times - Cycle Repairs and Fishing Tackle (above the shop)  
Grapevine Cottage - Builder  
Old Bakery - Baker's  
Chapel - At various times. Thereafter, Butcher & General Store,  
Newspapers & Post Office, Village Stores  
2 St John's Row - Sweet Shop  
Beyond Acklings - Cobbler  
Old Manor Farm - Milk obtained





Wittenham Co-operative Industrial Provident Society at the time it was run by Robert and Sophia Holmes - 1870

Moving westwards across Church Lane and progressing to even more recent times, Mrs Sheila Davis used to run a hairdressing shop in the end cottage of what is now “Church Farm Cottage” in the late 1960s.

Crossing over to the other side of the High Street, we see “Hampden House”, which was built by the well-known Clutterbuck family and Mr Augustus Chambers. It was then known as Maywood. It became a Post Office when Mr Chambers transferred that business from the Wittenham Co-op store. His daughter Amy continued as Post Mistress until she resigned and rented a room for that purpose to Mr Reynolds.

Further on and on the other side of the High Street, is “Carmela Cottage”, where Mr George Tame was the first manager of the Wittenham Co-op in its new home. He was later followed by Mr Augustus Chambers, who ran the shop before moving to Hampden House. This store, it has been said, was purpose-built by village residents. Mr Fred Carter worked here before the First World War and used to tell how he helped to deliver goods, including oil and coal, by pony and trolley to North Moreton and the Wittenhams. Subsequently, the business was taken over by the Oxfordshire Co-operative Society and remained as a grocer’s shop until it closed in 1975.

Originally, the Wittenham Co-operative Industrial Provident Society (the proper title) had its shop premises opposite the Vine (where “Witta’s Ham” now stands). It was run by Robert Holmes and his wife Sophia. He was the lock keeper at Clifton Lock from 1856, and in 1867 was accused of poaching in the Cut. He was forbidden to “use nets”. (One wonders if this meant he was demoted to the “worm on a string” class of fishing.) He resigned

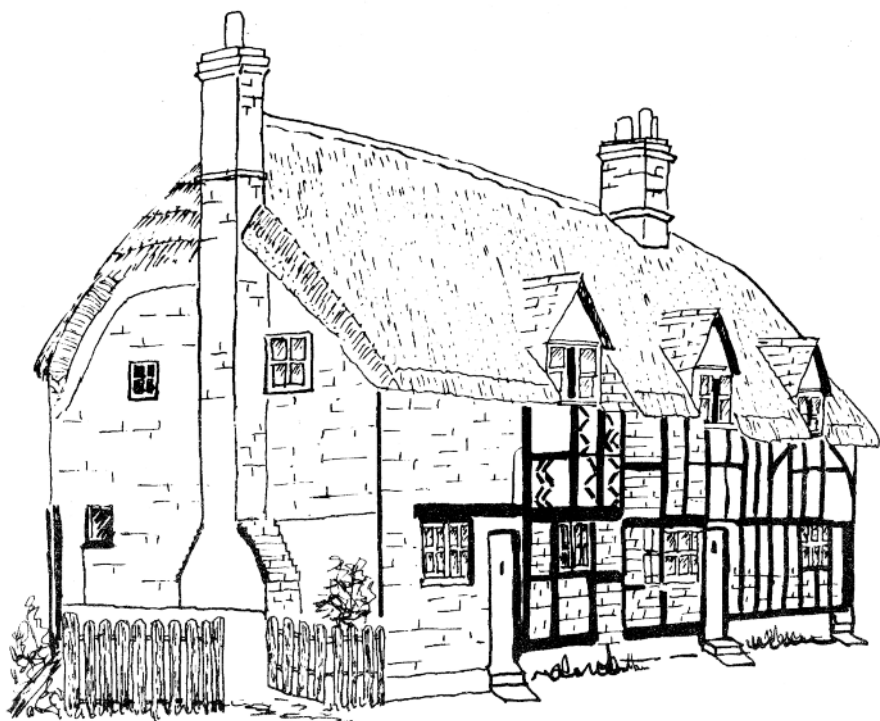
in 1868 to run the Wittenham Co-op. When the Society moved to its new premises, Sophia carried on with a grocer's and draper's shop whilst Robert continued with his own craft of basket-making.

Villagers still talk of the Misses Holmes who sold sweets in the same building, whilst wearing chenille hair nets. Amongst their goodies, were liquorice strips, bulls' eyes (otherwise gob-stoppers) and sharp acid drops.

Sometime later, in a cottage where "Witta's Ham" now stands, Mr Sharp ran an army surplus store between the two wars. There, he sold clothing, trestle tables and other supplies (purchased from Didcot Ordnance Depot), which he stored in a yard by the cricket ground. He moved from the village but subsequently opened a shop in Bridge Street, Abingdon.

Branching off up School Lane, we come to "Yew Tree Cottage", where the Eason family, from the days of Sarah (a single lady), ran the village bakery until it closed in the 1930s. The large oven forms part of the modern kitchen and was often fuelled with blackthorn from the hedgerows. Until most cottages had cooking ranges of their own, it was customary for the baker to cook joints of meat for special occasions and other foods. Mr Tom Eason would bake an already-mixed cake for villagers for 1d.

Back again in the High Street but across the road, stood Vine Cottage, now the present-day public house. It was here that in 1841, James Kingham ran a butcher's shop.



Witta's Ham Cottage

At this point we might note the number of businesses, largely in this area of the village, which - although not shops as we know them - served the needs of the villagers. From 37 High Street, right up to the studio at the "Little House" (then called the Elms), were a blacksmith's forge (run by the Eason family), and the premises of a carpenter, wheelwright and coffin maker (where the Hewetts and the Tames worked). Here, within a few yards, we encompass the cradle and the grave.

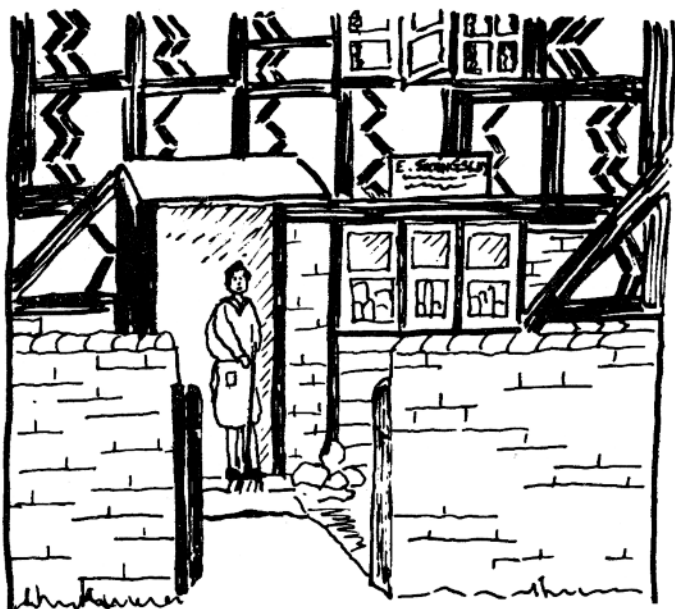
James Chambers, another local builder and a house restorer, lives in “Grape Vine Cottage” at the west end of the village. At that time, the house possessed a fine shop window. This had been used when a former owner, Mr Alfred “Doggie” Winters, had a general store, for which his wife made extremely good black puddings and faggots. Another service was provided at Clutterbuck Farm (the old Manor Farm) where, within living memory, a can of milk could be bought for 1d.

At the beginning of this century, the village postman, in his spare time after walking to and from Abingdon, Appleford and Little Wittenham, would mend shoes in a little hut on the Village Pound. Another cobbler, Mr “Topper” Thatcher, although crippled, worked from a cottage situated beyond present-day “Acklings”.

Yet another service was provided this century by a potter working from “French’s Cottage” in the middle of the village. By a coincidence, another potter lived there quite recently.

Reverting to our original walk through the village, and with retail shops in mind, on the south side of the High Street we next come to “The Old Farmhouse”, where Mrs Skingsley ran a general store and newsagent’s from her rather dark room which now forms the kitchen. Amongst other items, she sold good quality cheese, ham and faggots, the latter always referred to by her as savoury ducks.

Further up again, but on the other side of the Street, we reach “Riverturn”, where there was another general store plus a bakery. Mr Charles Bidmead was the first proprietor here, in the 1890s. He was a cycle repairer and agent and for a few pence per hour,



Mrs. E.M. Skingsley's shop - Moulden's Farm House, 1958



people could hire the then-fashionable mode of transport, a bicycle. Many of the village children learnt to ride a bike in this way. In 1933, Mr Bidmead sold his premises to Mr Sing, and a bakery was built; this housed the baker who moved there from the Old Bakehouse. A later owner also ran a fishing tackle shop from above the bakehouse. In time, it served as the Post Office, before the authorities compulsorily transferred that business to a van, which came in twice a week from Wallingford.

Further along this side of the road, Mrs Lottie Thatcher ran her well-remembered sweet shop from No. 2 St John's Row. Other goods were also sold there.

Across the road at the "Old Bakery", George Musgrove, a local chapel lay preacher, ran his bakery for many years. There had been a chapel in Long Wittenham from 1822, and it flourished in the early years of this century. But in spite of the efforts of Mr Musgrove and his successors, congregations dwindled, until it closed in 1955.

When Bill Heard and Bill Otter bought the chapel for a village shop in 1961, the pulpit was still standing. After alterations, it opened as a butcher's and general store in 1963. Newspapers were also sold, and soon the Post Office was authorised to function there as well. (This was generally considered to be a great improvement after the mobile arrangement.) New services continue to be provided: although the original deeds forbade "drinking, gambling and dancing", the current owner has introduced a wine store to meet present-day villagers' requirements.

Throughout the centuries, enterprising villagers have provided for the needs of the community with shops supplying the necessary foods and services. Although today our facilities cannot possibly rival those of Tesco's, our one remaining shop still provides a much-needed focal point in the village and offers the community - apart from the opportunity of buying goods ranging from an egg to a stamp - premises on which to exchange news, to meet old friends and to make new ones: all essential parts of village life.



Methodist Chapel 1955

The History Group wish to thank all of those villagers who supplied the information on which this article was based.

**RICHERS TO RAGS:**  
**THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF ELIZABETHAN**  
**LONG WITTENHAM**

By

Janet Haylett

Today the people who live in Long Wittenham have a variety of occupations: teachers, car mechanics, shop assistants, civil servants, and so on. Very few people are engaged in occupations connected with farming. But four hundred years ago, when Queen Elizabeth I was on the throne, the majority of those living here were so occupied, either with farming arable, keeping animals or processing agricultural produce. Others would have been carpenters, shoemakers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths and such like. The village would have been largely self-sufficient. Many people combined a trade with farming, the time spent on each depending on the season. Robert Hurst of Long Wittenham described himself as a carpenter in his will, but it is clear that his wealth was derived from his farming activities, not from carpentry.

In the late 16th century English society was composed of thousands of relatively small rural communities with a smaller number of towns and a few large cities such as London. Each village, parish or town had its own integrity as a social unit, with everyone having his or her own place in the social structure. In

a rural community such as Long Wittenham the gentry occupied the top positions, with yeomen, husbandmen and labourers in successively lower positions down the social scale.

Land was the key to social status. As well as the amount of land someone held, the terms on which he possessed it (e.g., freehold, copyhold or leasehold) was also important. In Long Wittenham most of the land was owned by St John's College, Oxford, which had been given the manors of Long Wittenham (along with others) by Sir Thomas White, who founded the College in 1556. It was leased to the tenants by copyhold. This meant that the terms of the lease were governed by the customs of the manor and recorded in copies of the manorial court roll - hence the name copyhold tenure. There seems to have been very little freehold land in the parish and in this respect Long Wittenham was probably not typical. Other factors also affected social status: birth, conferred title, wealth, legal status, marriage ties and education.

There were no substantial gentry resident in Long Wittenham and hence no 'great house'. Thus it was the lesser gentry who were at the top of the social scale. Only one or two families held this position at any one time in the village, and often they were related; two brothers, for example, might both call themselves 'gentleman'. One contemporary definition of a gentleman, by William Harrison in his "Description of England", 1577, was "those whome their race and blood or least their vertues doo make noble and known". In rural communities they usually had the most land, rarely did any manual work themselves and

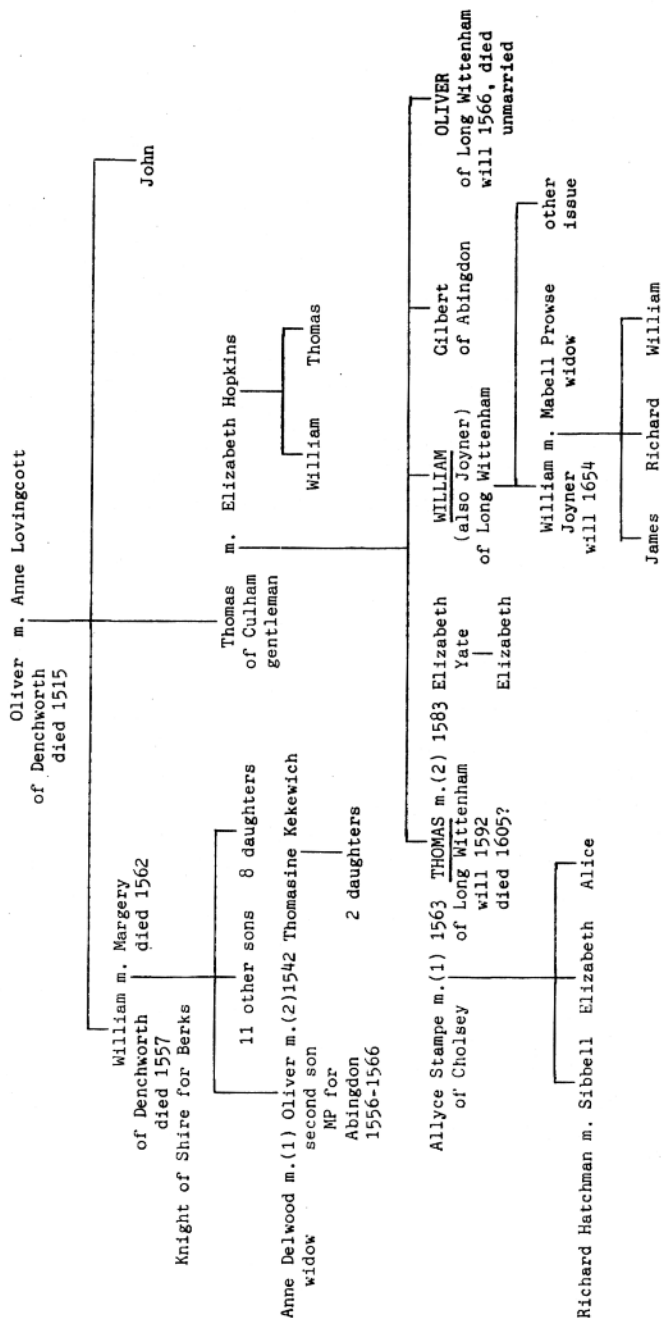
enjoyed a way of life which made them leading figures in the community. They took office and exercised authority not only locally, but frequently at county level.

On the next step down the social ladder were the yeomen. They were good, solid citizens, often quite wealthy, but lacking that extra ingredient (probably good connections) which would turn them into gentlemen. Yeomen, too, were rare in Long Wittenham four hundred years ago; there were perhaps only a handful. However, the next rung down the social ladder was quite crowded. This step was occupied by husbandmen and they were the most numerous class of landholders in the village in Elizabethan times. In the terriers (lists of lands) of the late 1500s about thirty people are named, and most of these were husbandmen. At the bottom of the social scale were the labourers or cottagers. They left very little evidence of their existence because they held little or no land and owned few worldly goods, and most records were kept to record possession of land and goods. There were probably at least as many labourers as husbandmen.

Mr Thomas Hyde, who was the gentleman in the village from about the 1560s until the early 1600s, was well qualified by birth and connection to occupy a high position in the social scale. The Hydes were a well-known family in the Abingdon area and many members held high office such as High Collector of taxes for the towns and hundreds.

Thomas' grandparents were Oliver and Anne Hyde of Denchworth, near Wantage. They had three sons, William, Thomas and John, William married Margery and they had twelve

## HYDE



sons and eight daughters. The second of these sons, Oliver, became the first Member of Parliament for the newly-created Borough of Abingdon in 1556. Oliver was a man of firm mind and Roman Catholic sympathies. He made his fortune by marrying two wealthy widows but died, possibly of the plague, in 1566.

The second son of Oliver and Anne, Thomas, gentleman, moved to Culham. He married Elizabeth, the widow of Richard Hopkins of Abingdon. They had four sons, Thomas, William, Gilbert and Oliver, all of whom (with the possible exception of Gilbert) lived in Long Wittenham. It was this Thomas, cousin of Oliver Hyde MP, who occupied the summit of the social hierarchy in Long Wittenham in the latter half of the 16th century.

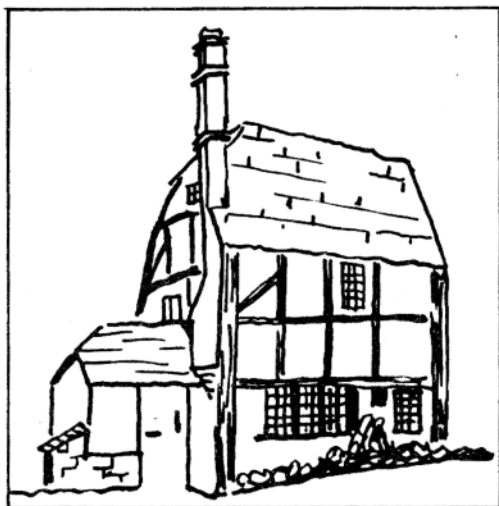
In those days, as in many other parishes, the land in Long Wittenham was divided into two great open fields, the North Field and the West Field. Each was divided into furlongs of about ten acres. Each furlong was further divided into acres, half-acres and strips which in Berkshire were called 'lands'. The lands were separated by a ridge with furrows on either side. It is not clear whether an acre corresponded to the standard measure which is used today or simply to an arbitrary division of land.

Thomas Hyde, gent, had about forty-three acres and forty-eight lands scattered all over the parish in different furlongs in units of 'an acre' or 'a land'. He also had two and one-half acres of furze, five acres allocated by lot, a small amount of land due

to him by custom and “one plate [plot] whereuppon my dwelling house standeth”.

Thomas married twice. His first bride was Alyce, the daughter of John Stampe of Cholsey, whom he married in 1563. They had at least one daughter, Sibbell, but most likely Thomas’ other two daughters, Elizabeth and Alice, were also from this marriage. In 1583 Thomas married again, this time to Elizabeth Yate, a widow, who had one daughter. In 1592 Thomas became ill and, being convinced that he was going to die, made a will. In this he left 3s/4d to the poor, twenty-two pounds to his second wife, Elizabeth, 20s to his cousin, James Hyde, and 6s/8d to each of James’ brothers. His “plate, implements, household stuff, goodes, cattells and chattells”, his land and his crops were to be divided into three parts. His daughters, Elizabeth and Alice, were to get one-third each. His wife, Elizabeth, was to have the remaining third, including his house, as a widow's estate, but she had to give Richard Hatchman (his oldest daughter Sibbell's husband) two hundred pounds in lieu of his share. He would presumably inherit the estate on Elizabeth's death. If Elizabeth failed to comply with any of the conditions laid down in the will, then Richard would get the third part straight away.

Unfortunately, no inventory of Thomas Hyde’s worldly “goodes, cattells and chattells” survives so the exact value of his possessions remains unknown. However, if two hundred pounds represented a reasonable recompense to Richard Hatchman for his third of the estate, then Thomas Hyde, gent, was worth about six hundred pounds in 1592. In view of how relatively little land



more time transitory under suitable  
 one more I have referred it to  
 the London Corporation and to the  
 City of London first. & you will be  
 sure of Longe within a few days  
 of the same.

Thomas Hyde

Top left: The original part of 'The Manor' (formerly Willingtons)  
 which may have been Thomas Hyde's house

Top right: Arms of the Hyde family, quartered with Lovingcott

Above: Thomas Hyde's signature on his will, dated 1592

he had it seems unlikely that this was all derived from Long Wittenham, and it is probable that Thomas had land or property elsewhere. Thomas was a modest man. He asked to be buried “as sone as conveniently after my soule ys depted with so lyttle costs and pompe as may be”. In fact, he did not die in 1592 but probably in 1605, as this was when the lease was surrendered on land in his name.

William, Thomas’ brother, also lived in Long Wittenham, but he often called himself William Joyner, and in the records his family is listed as Hyde also Joyner or as Joyner also Hyde. If anything he was better off than Thomas. His son, also a William, married late in life. His choice fell upon Mabell, the widow of William Prowse, who was vicar of the parish from 1610 until 1644. The Joyner/Hyde fortune was left to Mabell’s sons, James and Richard Prowse. The Prowse family were leading citizens of Long Wittenham as gentleman or yeomen until the 1880s.

Beneath gentlemen were yeomen. These were substantial landholders with farms typically of fifty acres or more and who possessed “a certain preheminance and more estimation” among the common people (William Harrison). Yeomen, too, held high office in the community and could be churchwardens, overseers of the poor and jurymen at quarter sessions.

John Yate was a yeoman farmer in Long Wittenham in the late 16th century. He may also have been Thomas Hyde's brother-in-law, as Thomas Hyde's second wife was Elizabeth Yate. It was not unusual for gentry and yeomen families to

intermarry, especially if this improved the financial position of the gentry and the social status of the yeomen. John had inherited the largest share of his father's estate, which was worth almost two hundred pounds, and which included a house in Broadstreet, Abingdon. John Yate's house in Long Wittenham had a well-furnished hall (main living room), two chambers (bedrooms), a room in the loft and a kitchen. He had silver spoons, a silver cup, furniture at Shrivenham and a copyhold at Stowe in Buckinghamshire. He only had about twenty-two acres of land, held mostly in half acre parcels, in Long Wittenham. He also had an acre of furze. In his will, made in 1596, he made many bequests, mostly in barley or livestock. The total value of the items listed on his inventory was only £11/7s/8d, surprisingly little for a yeoman, and it is possible that he, too, had assets outside the village.

Farmers with an acreage from, typically, five to fifty acres were classified as husbandmen, and there were many of these in Long Wittenham. Husbandmen could hold the lesser offices of sidesman and constable.

In the 16th century the Sadlers were husbandmen in Long Wittenham. Richard Sadler made his will in 1590. In this he left Alice, his granddaughter, forty shillings to be paid on the day of her marriage, but most of his other bequests were to be paid in so many bushels of wheat or malt a year. The residue of his estate went to Alice, his wife, and William, his son. His house had a hall furnished with a table, chair, benches and an old cupboard. There was only one bedroom with two beds, a cupboard, chest

and coffer. In the attic there was a bed, a chest, two little coffers and six pairs of hemp sheets. The attic was also used as a store room for wool, corn, malt, bottles and cheeses. In the kitchen there were brass pots, candlesticks, six pieces of pewter (probably plates), spoons and andirons - all the usual kitchen implements. There were also six flitches of bacon and a piece of beef, altogether a well-stocked larder. There were outhouses, too, for brewing beer and storing barrels. All the items listed in the inventory had some value, even if only a few pence. But it was in the stable, and barns that Richard Sadler's real wealth lay. He had geldings and mares and a yearling colt, seven cows and three bullocks valued at ten pounds, hogs and pigs and over one hundred sheep. He had wheat and rye worth eleven pounds, barley worth fifteen pounds, hay and pulses worth £7/6s/8d. In total all his goods, cattells and chattells were valued at £86/14s/2d.

All this made Richard Sadler a relatively well-off husbandman. Only about 20% of husbandmen in Oxfordshire at that time left estates valued at £60 or more. Not unexpectedly, he had quite a lot of land - fifty seven acres, two headlands (at the head of strips upon which the plough turned), two butts (a butt was shorter than the normal strip and arose because of the irregular shape of the land), seven yards, three acres of furze, one close with two barns and six yards, six swathes and three yards of meadow. This was enough for the family to prosper, so that by the following century the Sadlers could call themselves yeomen. There were many husbandmen like Richard Sadler in Long Wittenham, although not all were as wealthy.



Right: A Husbandman and his wife  
Below: Labourers in the field



Labourers or cottagers had “neither voice nor authoritie in the commonwealthe but are to be ruled and not to rule other” (William Harrison again). Needless to say they hardly ever held any office of authority even at village level. Although the more fortunate had a few acres to farm, many had only their one-roomed cottage and a garden plot. They would also have had some common grazing rights on the heath. The ownership of the rich meadow land on the river eyots was, however, disputed. They are referred to as ‘common eyots’ in the terriers, but the Crown also claimed them. The position regarding fishing rights is not clear. Labourers relied almost entirely on the wages they could earn working for others. A few labourers may have lived-in with their employers and received board and lodging. Others may have been given board but returned to their own cottages at the end of the day's work. But farm work is seasonal and very few men were employed all year. Not many labourers had enough assets to justify the expense of making a will. Wills had to be written down by the parish clerk and taken to Abingdon to be proved, and this was an expensive business.

“The poor always ye have with you” (St John's Gospel, chapter 8). And it is true that there was desperate poverty in Elizabethan England. The town dwellers, without the possibility of either growing or being given food, were especially hard hit in times of economic depression. The rapid rise in population and the increase in grain prices resulting from poor harvests led to large-scale poverty in the towns, especially in London. However, those in rural communities fared better, and there is

little evidence for rural poverty on a large scale. Except in times of famine or economic depression, the villages could usually support their indigenous poor, although they would try to send away paupers and vagrants who lacked village connections. There were, however, beggars in the vicinity, as shown by one poignant entry in the parish register which reads “Robert a beggar’s childe was christened 11 November 1591”.

Elizabethan society tried hard to discourage vagrancy by imposing severe penalties. Persistent beggars were sent to gaol or houses of correction. However, those living in a community but who were unemployed, the deserving poor, were treated more sympathetically. Help came from the church ‘poor box’ and from bequests. This individual charitable giving was the most valuable form of support. Almost everyone well-off enough to make a will bequeathed money to “ye poor of the parish”, varying from fourpence to forty shillings. Richard Hurst in his will made in 1583 recognised the landless poor and left half a bushell of malt “to every poore householder that hath no land in tenure”.

Within the ‘degrees’ of people there could be a considerable range of wealth, and often the distinction between gentleman and yeoman, yeoman and husbandman, and husbandman and cottager, was not clear cut. There was considerable social mobility so that it was perfectly possible for lesser gentry to aspire to become middling gentry and for upwardly mobile yeomen to become gentlemen. In “De Republica Anglorum” of 1583, Sir Thomas Smith explained this as follows: “(yeomen) commonly live welthilie, keepe good houses, do their business, and travaile to

get riches...by these means do come to such wealth, that they are able and daily doe buy the landes of unthriftie gentlemen, and after setting their sonnes to the schooles, to the Universities, to the laws of the Realme, or otherwise leaving them sufficient landes whereon they may live without labour, doe make their saide sonnes by those means gentlemen.”

This was especially true in the late Tudor and early Stuart times when the population of England was increasing rapidly and inflation was rampant. Families with enough land to produce surplus grain on a commercial scale were able to prosper. Long Wittenham was well placed to take advantage of the increased demand for grain from the growing population in London. Grain could be sent down the River Thames (made navigable to Oxford over the years 1540-1635) from the quay in the village or from wharves at Burcot or Sutton Courtenay. Several Long Wittenham families, such as the Butlers, the Lovegroves and the Sadlers, were able to move up the social scale from husbandman to yeoman by exploiting this situation.

It was also possible for fortunes to decline. Without male heirs, families could simply disappear altogether. Farmers with insufficient land or good farming practices had to sell their land to pay their rent. There were some disastrous harvests in this period, notably in 1586 and 1594-98. Loss of land could lead to a spiralling decline. The gap between rich and poor widened.

Some people did not fall directly into the categories of gentleman, yeoman, husbandman or labourer. These were the craftsmen such as Richard Hurst, a carpenter, the alehouse keeper, Thomas Cope, and the vicar, Edward Bricke. Their status was determined by similar considerations of wealth, connections and education. The craftsmen and tradesmen often farmed their own land as well. As well as social mobility there was considerable geographical mobility. Of the ninety or so surnames which appear in the parish registers between 1580 and 1599, only about half (forty-one) recur in the years 1600-1619. There were fifty-two new surnames of people coming into the village. This pattern was repeated to a greater or lesser extent over the following centuries and was not unusual. People moved to find work, some moved out of the parish when they married and children were sent away into service or to apprenticeships.

Life in Long Wittenham four hundred years ago was very different from that of today. Everything was geared to the farming year, with almost everyone from gentleman to yeoman to husbandman to cottager concerned with work on the land. Nowadays, comparatively few villagers are occupied in agriculture. The social structure is very different with social class, if it exists at all, being determined not by land holding but by wealth, occupation, personal qualities and, to a lesser extent, education. Class divisions are less rigid and less important. Almost everyone can hold high office, for example as judges, jurymen or Members of Parliament, or more locally can be churchwardens or members of the district or parish councils. ThomasHyde, John Yate, Richard Sadler and their families all lie

at rest in St Mary's churchyard. No doubt Long Wittenham in 1988 would totally baffle and confuse them all.

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Terriers (lists of lands held) of Thomas Hyde, John Yate and Richard Sadler. St John's College Archive XII.19.

Will of Thomas Hyde, gent (1592). Berkshire Record Office (BRO) MF 524.

Will and inventory of John Yate, yeoman (1596). BRO, ME 556.

Will and inventory of Richard Sadler, husbandman (1590). BRO, ME 538.

Will and inventory of Richard Hurst, carpenter (1583). BRO, MF 52H.

Parish registers and Bishops' Transcripts for Long Wittenham, 1566 onwards (no burial records before 1607).

Coat of Arms recorded by William Harvey on the Heralds' Visitation of Berkshire, 1566. The object was to register the Arms of those who had a right to bear arms. William Harvey was a deputy of Clarenceux, King of Arms.

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# THE VICARAGE

by

Penny Moorley

The Vicarage of Long Wittenham, as it now stands, was built in the early nineteenth century with post second world war additions to the rear. Nothing now remains of the original Vicarage, and there is nothing to tell us when this house was built, but it was a box-frame, half timbered construction with brick infill, and from its height, timbers and windows, probably early Georgian.

Exeter College, Oxford held from 1322 the right to appoint the Vicar of Long Wittenham church as well as owning the lands attached to it. Because of this, the archives of the College contain files of documents relating to the Vicarage, and there are additional bits of information in the Register...and...History of the College which was published in 1879 by the Rev C.W. Boase.<sup>1</sup> The first known reference to the Vicarage House in Exeter College archives is a lease dated 16th September 1741 to the Jennings sisters for £16.5s.4d, with the stipulation that they keep up the choir and be prepared to put up two scholars who came to instruct or preach. The Vicar at the time was Ralph Bridcoake or Bridcock,<sup>2</sup> but there is no evidence that he actually lived in the village. As a Fellow of New College, Oxford (as was his successor), he probably had rooms there (as did Thomas Glubb

of Exeter College, Vicar 1799-1823), and needed only to visit the village to conduct services. It was not until 1803 that clergy had to be resident in a parish, and by 1838 they were not allowed to hold more than two benefices more than ten miles apart, which presumably was to encourage better pastoral care.

The original Vicarage had modest accommodation and the farm buildings and yard stretched down to the main road. In June 1823, following the death of Thomas Glubb, an inventory recorded:

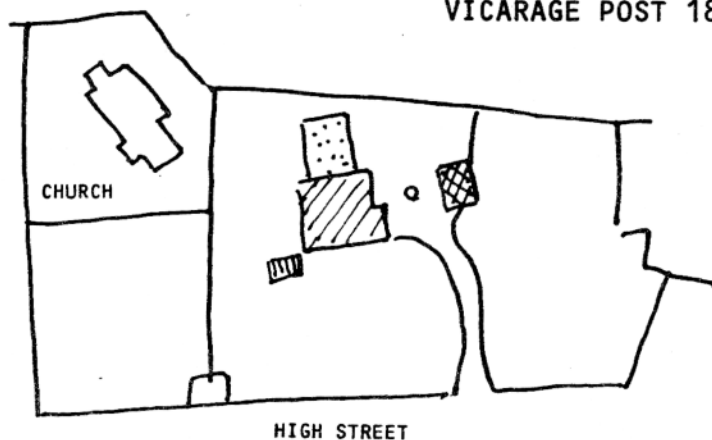
a hall	2 bedrooms
a parlour	2 servants' rooms
2 attics	detached kitchen & kitchen
hood barn	wine & beer cellars
Dairy	brewhouse
pleasure gardens	

and there were also a farmyard, backyard, two threshing barns with plank floors, stabling for twelve horses, a cow-shed and pig-sty.

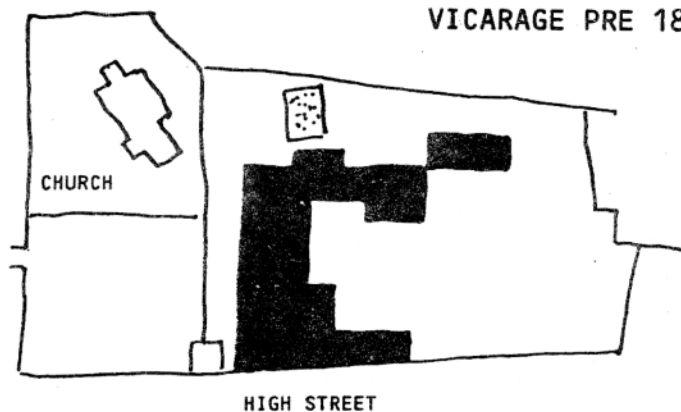
Peter Johnson, Glubb's successor, only stayed for two years, marrying in 1824, at which time the living was worth £137.16s.8d.<sup>3</sup>

Some benefices were painfully poor. The Queen Anne's Bounty relieved the poverty of the country clergymen in benefices under £200 per annum, but it was not until 1824 that those under

# VICARAGE POST 1826



# VICARAGE PRE 1826



£50 had to be made up to that amount. Robert Bateman Paul, inducted to the living in 1825, took out a mortgage in 1826 for £294.6s. from the Bounty (Boase says £379 under the Gilbert's Act<sup>4</sup> - in fact it was two years' income on the living) towards the rebuilding of the Vicarage, and the College, having been given £450 from an anonymous benefactor, made up their share to £1,000, and undertook to contribute half of all expenses exceeding £1,000 - Boase says £811 in total.<sup>5</sup>

The new 'extension', built to connect with the old house, is of Georgian design and made of brick. Presumably the new part was used solely by the Vicar and his family, the older part being used as kitchen and servants' quarters. By the 1840s, designs for new houses were allowed to be drawn up by local architects and not solely by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' architect, as there was so much building going on. They suggested that grants should allow, if possible, for two sitting rooms, a study, a kitchen and scullery, a minimum of five bedrooms, pantry, china closet, larder, w.c., linen closet, wine and beer cellars, dustbins and coal house.

James Clutterbuck, the Vicar who arrived in the village in 1830, had a growing family, and the new house provided four large bedrooms, living room, dining room, study and 'bathroom'. In the 1840 census the Clutterbucks are not listed, but by 1851 they were in the house. Besides the Vicar and his wife there were five daughters, two sons, four servants and a governess - the



The original Vicarage



The Vicarage - 1983

Vicar's children would not have associated with village children on equal terms in school.

1861:	Rev Clutterbuck	1871:	Rev Clutterbuck
	Mrs Clutterbuck		Mrs Clutterbuck
	four daughters		three daughters
	a son		grandson
	a visitor		granddaughter
	two servants		a visitor
	six servants		

1881: Rev Clutterbuck  
Mrs Clutterbuck  
daughter  
granddaughter  
housekeeper  
housemaid  
kitchen maid

There were probably more domestics who lived at home in employment at the Vicarage and there would have been staff to maintain the gardens. The barns and sheds were all demolished, the farmyard covered and the garden laid out, so that by the turn of the century it was very pleasant and more fitting for a country clergyman. Some of the stables were rebuilt. The Vicar was Rural Dean and had a strong connection with Culham College, where some of the abler boys from the village were educated. He would have needed horses, but not as many as the twelve in Glubb's day, when horses would have been used largely for farm work. (The farm house and buildings had been built in 1816 in the North Field.)

The Vicarage garden was extensive and well-stocked, with the paths well kept to allow the ladies to ‘take a turn about the grounds’ without getting their clothes too dirty. There was a well, now near the driveway; the Vicarage was one of several houses in the village which had a pump to drive water into a tank in the house, as mains water did not arrive in the village until after the First World War.

The old building was demolished sometime in the 1950s, when the flat-roofed extension was added and the staircase window put in. It would appear that these twentieth century replacements of garage, oil tank space and kitchen take up completely the area occupied by the old house. The verandah, reconstructed at the turn of the century, still stands. When the last incumbent left in 1980 and the parish amalgamated with Clifton Hampden, the Vicarage was sold to a private buyer, who made it more in keeping with a modern life-style, while preserving much of what was left of the Victorian country parsonage.

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1. The material on Long Wittenham can be found primarily in files N II 6 Box 3  
C.W. Boase, Register of the Rectors and Fellows, Scholars Exhibitioners and Bible Clerks of Exeter College Oxford with Illustrative Documents and a History of the College (Oxford: Rector and Fellows of Exeter College, 1879), 272 pp.
2. Boase, Register...and...History, p. 218.
3. Ibid., p. 120.
4. Ibid., p. 122.
5. Ibid.

## A.E. COPPARD

by

Kathleen Jewess

Alfred Edgar Coppard was a minor writer, specialising in short stories - which he called 'tales' - and poetry. He published some thirty-odd books, as well as an autobiography, many of which, it must be said, combine truth and fiction. Indeed, he appears purposely to have veiled his life, and certainly it has proved remarkably difficult to pin down just what he was doing at any given period. In fact, it has so far proved to be impossible for the years in Long Wittenham, and this sketch must be in the nature of an interim report.

Coppard was born in Folkestone on 14 January 1878, the son of a journeyman tailor and a housemaid. Five years later the family moved to Brighton, where his father made uniforms for the soldiers at the barracks. When Coppard was nine his father (age 29) died of tuberculosis; Coppard later wrote that this "sank us at once into destitution".<sup>1</sup> His mother ironed twelve hours a day to try to keep the family in food and shelter, and they had recourse to parish relief. The following year he went to live with his uncle in London; he worked first for a tailor in Whitechapel, the experience of which formed the substance of his story "The Presser", and then as a messenger for Reuters. But one day, when he was fourteen, he refused to return to London from visiting his

mother in Brighton, and he remained there until he moved to Oxford in 1907.

Already by this time, two of his three passions, sport and reading (the third would be the love of women), were well-developed. At the age of fifteen he ran his first race, the Lewes Road Handicap, and the money he regularly won thereafter was mostly spent on books. He had discovered Keats and Chekhov, Hardy and de Maupassant and Henry James, and from this period he began to try to write verse. At the age of twenty he won second prize in a literary competition organised by the West Sussex Gazette, but he did not begin writing seriously until after he had moved to Oxford.

In 1905 he married Lily Anne Richardson, the daughter of a plumber in Brighton, who was a stenographer in the same office in which Coppard then worked. They shared interests in poetry and rambling, and she introduced him to music. In 1907 they moved to Oxford, where he became an accountant with the Eagle Ironworks, and over the next twelve years they lived in a number of places, in Jericho, Iffley, Combe, Chinnor and in various lodgings in the city itself.

The period from 1907 to 1919 saw his spare time taken up with politics - the Independent Labour Party - and intellectual interests, as well as rural interests and sports. Stimulated by the activities and ambitions of the undergraduates whom he met in the ILP and at lectures, he began in 1911 seriously to write poems and stories. His first published piece, for which he received no

payment, was “Communion”, which, appeared in The Varsity in May 1916; the first piece for which he was paid was the tale called “Piffingcap”, which was published in Pearson's Magazine in July 1918. There were others later that year, which led to a momentous decision: at the age of forty, he embarked upon a full-time literary career.

In April 1919 he went to live in a cottage in a field called Shepherd's Pit in Headington (his wife lived at the Witney Aerodrome where she was a secretary and he bicycled to her on weekends). His earnings in 1919 were only £32 and £65 in 1920, but his wife sent him part of her wages (a fact which he concealed from his friends).<sup>2</sup> He remained at Shepherd's Pit until 1922. By that time, however, the crucial event had happened: Harold Taylor, the founder of the Golden Cockerel Press, wanted to publish some of Coppard's stories as the Press' first book. The book, Adam and Even and Pinch Me, duly appeared in 1921 to decent reviews and sales. His first book of poetry, Hips and Haws, was published the following year, and from then until 1951 Coppard published a book virtually every year. A number of these were published by the Golden Cockerel Press over the next ten years or so, five of which were illustrated by the new owner, Robert Gibbings. (He had bought the Press in 1924 from Taylor, then mortally ill with tuberculosis.)

Taylor was clearly a man with strange and complex fancies. Certainly he published Coppard's work; but he also insisted that Coppard and his wife Gay become lovers. She was not, initially, desperately keen, but the affair rapidly seems to have become an

obsession with them both (and rendered Harold Taylor livid with jealousy).<sup>3</sup> Coppard had always been a womaniser, and Gay Taylor was only one of many lovers; during the years of their affair he continued to enjoy occasional conjugal relations with his wife, and near the end he saw other women as well.

During much of this period Coppard lived in a wooden hut in Kimble Wood, Skirmett, near Henley, but he and Gay had visited the Wittenham area and walked by the river in Little Wittenham. It was here that she returned one day in June 1926: Coppard, who now had a new woman, had told her that while they should remain friends, they should no longer be lovers, and she decided to commit suicide. She tried to drown herself in the river near the lock house below Wittenham Clumps, but found herself unable to stay under water. She returned to his hut, they made love, she became pregnant, and July 1926 she had a painful and messy abortion. But the hold was still there and the final break only came in September 1927.<sup>4</sup>

It was not before time, because Coppard was by now a father. His new woman was Winifred deKok, the daughter of a South African solicitor. By one account, she had come to Abingdon and, wanting to be a children's doctor and wanting first to have the experience of children, she decided to have a child by Coppard. Their daughter Julia was born on 9 May 1927, and it was probably shortly thereafter that they moved to May Tree Cottage in Long Wittenham. It is, however, unclear for how long they lived in the village. Irene Bond, who was in service with them, estimated in an interview that it was probably until 1932;<sup>5</sup>



May Tree Cottage, where Coppard lived around 1930

on the other hand, in the 1930 Who's Who, Coppard gave the Henley address. Again, it is unclear just how many children there were: Irene Bond remembered two children, but others in the village do not remember any children at all; a search through the birth records from 1920 to 1945 turned up only Julia, although it is possible a second child was born abroad. The Dictionary of National Biography states that he had one son and one daughter, without giving names or dates.

Coppard and deKok remained unmarried until 1932. On 18 April 1932, however, Coppard's first wife, Lily Anne, died in the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford of complications after an operation for cancer of the ovaries, with Coppard present at her death. Five months later, on 29 September 1932, Coppard and deKok married. (Coppard dressed up the story of the death and second marriage and re-told it as a pub tale in his autobiography.) Both Coppard and deKok gave their place of residence as Long Wittenham; curiously, on Lily Anne's death certificate, this is stated as her place of residence as well.

Coppard concentrated on poetry and, in particular, on short stories, which he called tales: his explanation was that while a story is written, a tale is told. As he wrote in 1931, "I have always aimed at creating for the reader an impression that he is being spoken to, rather than being written at."<sup>6</sup> Most of the stories fall into one of two general categories. Firstly, there are those woven around a character named Johnny Flynn, which are to a greater or lesser extent autobiographical: Coppard notes in his autobiography that the story "Ninepenny Flute" was a "transcription of my boyhood". Secondly, there were the rural tales, which, indeed, formed the bulk of his output.

An example of the latter is "The Field of Mustard", which can be found in The Oxford Book of Short Stories. Dinah, Rose and Amy are "three sere disvirgined women from Pollock's Cross", who are collecting kindling in the Black Wood. While working, Dinah and Rose talk about their lives, and particularly about their disappointments: Rose was childless and wished she had had children, while Dinah had four and would have preferred

none. In the course of their desultory talk, it becomes clear that they had shared a lover. In the end, Dinah tells Rose that she wished Rose had been a man, since she liked her. In short, the story is about the disappointments of life. Coppard's style ensures that the reader does not miss his point, with the environment mirroring the feelings of the characters. While waiting for Amy, Rose and Dinah sit upon a hedged bank: "In front of them lay the field they had crossed [the field of mustard], a sour wind rising faintly from its yellow blooms that quivered in the wind. Day was dull, the air chill, and the place most solitary." This transference of internal feelings to the external world is made even more clear by the ending:

The wind hustled the two women closer together, and as they stumbled under their burdens Dinah Lock stretched out a hand and touched the other woman's arm. "I like you, Rose, I wish you was a man."

Rose did not reply. Again they were quiet, voiceless, and thus in fading light they came to their homes. But how windy, dispossed and ravaged, roved the darkening world! Clouds were borne frantically across the heavens, as if in a rout of battle, and the lovely earth seemed to sigh in grief at some calamity all unknown to men."

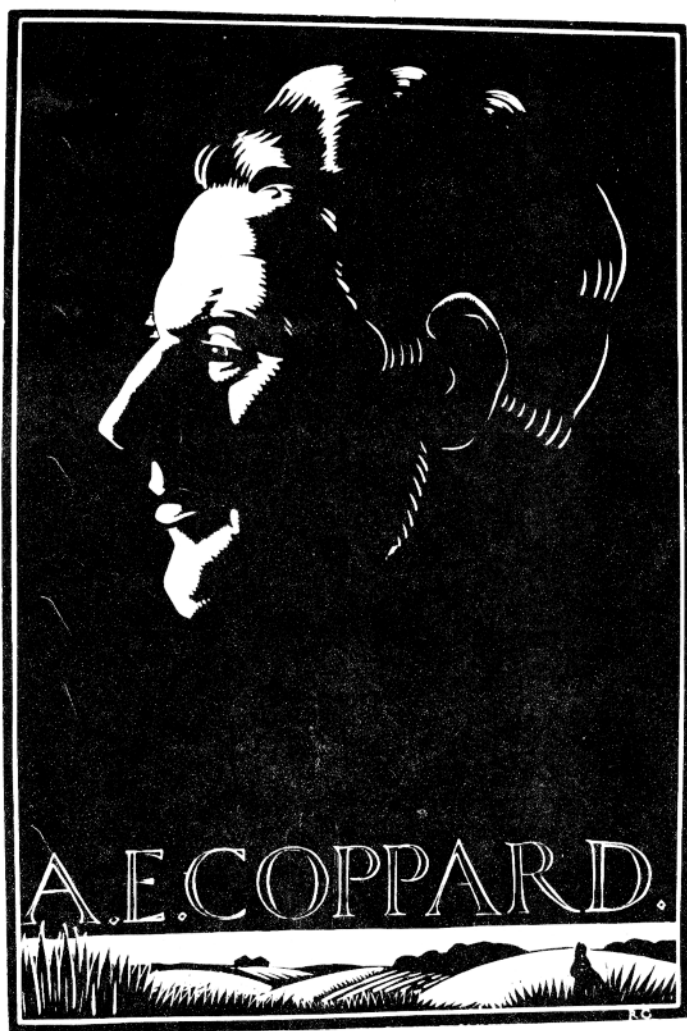
This is a style of writing which either appeals or does not, and certainly there are divergent views about Coppard's word. On the one hand, Ford Madox Ford wrote in 1927 that 'He is almost the first English prose writer to get into English prose the peculiar quality of English lyric poetry - the fancy, the turn of the imagination, the wisdom...and the beauty of the great lyricists.' (New York Herald Tribune, 27 March 1927); on the other hand,

certain critics think that the style is all too much, with the atmosphere and scenery reflecting the characters' emotions and the prose faintly peculiar. It is possible to reconcile the two, however, since some critics felt that Coppard did his best work in the 1920s and that it deteriorated thereafter.

After Coppard and his family left Long Wittenham they lived in various places, with his last home in Dunmow, Essex. His popular repute as a writer continued to grow, and in 1946 his Selected Tales was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in the US. He died in 1957, nearly 80 years old. His autobiography - probably intended as a first volume, since it ends in 1922 - was published a few months later. Its title perhaps gives a taste of a style which the reader will either enjoy or reject: It's Me, O Lord! An Abstract & Brief Chronicle of Some of the Life with Some of the Opinions of A.E. Coppard Written by Himself.

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2. Loran Hurnscot (Gay Taylor), A Prison, A Paradise (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1958), pp. 152—53.
3. Ibid., pp. 15-30.
4. Ibid., pp. 89-110. .
5. Interview with Irene Bond, 28 June 1983.
6. Jacob Schwartz, The Writings of Alfred Edgar Coppard, A Bibliography, With Foreward and Notes by A.E. Coppard (London: The Ulysses BookshOp, 1931), p. 13.
7. Coppard, It's Me, O Lord!, p. 38. Article on Coppard in The Bookman, April 1933.
8. Robert Gibbings, Till I End My Song (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1957), p. 14.



Portrait of Coppard by Robert Gibbings,  
illustrating Coppard's Count Stefan (1928)

## **FROM THE LOG BOOK OF LONG WITTENHAM SCHOOL:**

September 24th, 1917

“I opened school today at 1.30 pm so that upper division could go collecting Chestnuts as advised by E<sup>dn</sup> Authority.”

November 28th, 1917

“Public Schools of the district having a Sham battle on the neighbouring Clumps. I propose to close school at 11.45 and re-open at 1 pm so that children can have a chance of watching a portion of it at any rate.”

## **THE OLD MISER**

A house still standing, the second west of the Plough Inn, was owned and occupied about 1800 by an old miser named Tyrrell or Tirrold as it was formerly spelt, said to be descended from the Tirrolds of Aston.

My great grandfather Thomas Stibbs rented some land of his, and when he paid his rent the old man used to make a fire of a few sticks, taking the precaution to keep a jug of water handy with which he extinguished it almost before my grandfather was out of the house. After the old miser's death a quart pot full of guineas was found under a brick in the floor.

Henry J. Hewett  
April 12th, 1924