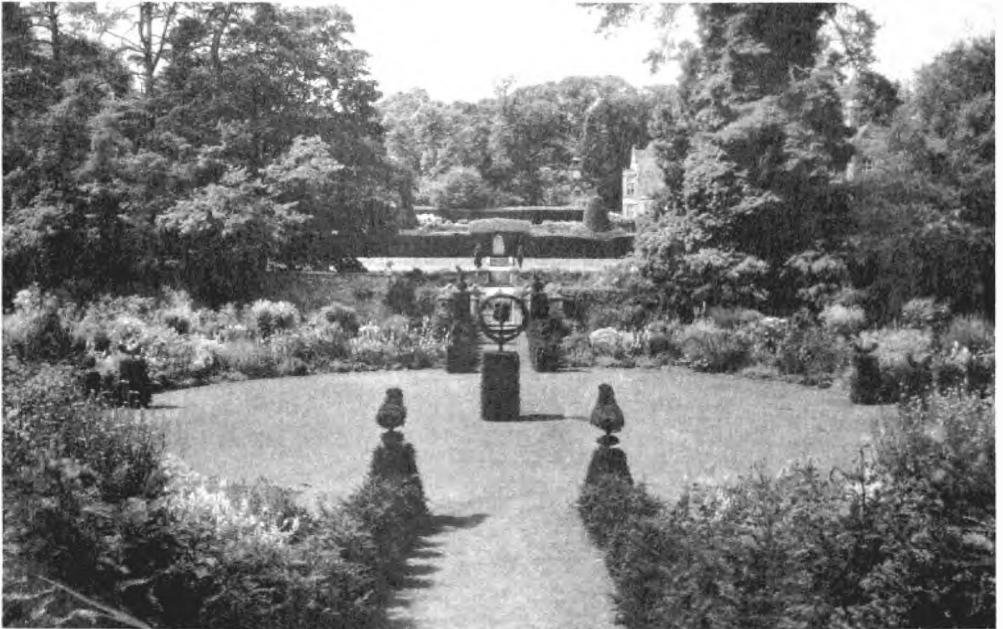


WYCHWOODS HISTORY

THE JOURNAL OF THE WYCHWOODS LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Number Twenty, 2005



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Foreword

This is our twentieth journal and over the years we have covered many varied and interesting subjects and mentioned a large number of people by name. The time has come when, to make this information more readily available, it needed indexing and the Society owes Joan and Jack Howard-Drake a huge debt of gratitude for taking on the task. The Index is now available in the same format as the journals and is free to members at meetings or from the treasurer. Several of us have already found it very useful, and are constantly surprised by the achievement the journals represent, all started by Jack Howard-Drake.

Our nineteenth journal was unusual for the Society in that it dealt with one subject – Shipton Court. This year we revert to our familiar format.

The memories of Joan Rein add to the story of the Thomson family in the Court. Roman finds at South Lawn and Swinbrook show early settlement locally. Oxfordshire Church Courts take us into the world of ordinary people and their problems in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In autumn 2004 Milton celebrated the 150th anniversary of the building of St Simon and St Jude Church. Staying in the 19th century the article using census returns gives a snapshot of family groups over the night of the 3rd to 4th April 1881. Another side of life in that century and beyond is featured in an article on musicians in West Oxfordshire. It shows lighter moments that could be enjoyed by country dwellers. We come back to harsh reality in the twentieth century with the story of a local farmer, Albert Oliver, in World War 1.

We are always pleased to publish articles by members and others that cover their local history interests; so let us have your contributions.

SUE JOURDAN
Chairman

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Joan Rein Remembers

TRUDY YATES



TAKE ON THE DAY OF ALEXANDER REIN SEIOR'S DIAMOND WEDDING ANNIVERSARY WITH HIS FAMILY - 11 MARCH 1957. LEFT TO RIGHT: JOHN ALEXANDER, JOAN MARY, ALEXANDER SEIOR, ALEXANDER (SASCHA), ERLING AND SIGNE MARIE.

Not long before the publication of *Wychwoods History* no. 19, dedicated to an investigation of its long and fascinating history, Shipton Court enjoyed the return of one of her early 20th century daughters. The date was 16 April 2004 and the visit of Joan Thomson Rein from Oslo had been long awaited. Joan was the younger daughter of John Graeme Thomson and his wife Mary Catherine McLean, who lived at the Court from 1919 to 1931. Since I had been writing an article about the Thomson years, Joan and I had been in touch by telephone and letter many times. These conversations were very helpful to me but not, in the end, definitive. Many 'slips' could have been prevented by a face to face visit before the Journal went to press and this seemed possible in the autumn of 2003.

Joan was anxious to make what she termed 'a final trip to England' to visit her sister, Dor, who now resides in a Witney nursing home. The sisters' only brother David died some years ago. However, the rigours of the Norwegian winter interfered. And so, Joan, a sprightly 87, was finally able to make the journey with her daughter Signe and son Erling when England's own springtime afforded a long, leisurely walk around the Wild Garden. Here, Joan had spent many happy hours as a child and she quickly corrected the misconception that the Halls, owners of the Court from 1933 - 1947, had built the tree house in which the Hall children were photographed.¹

'No, no,' she said, 'that was built for us and it was one of our favourite places.'

Lunch in Flat Three at the Court was the perfect venue to inspire memories, for it was here that the Thomson children lived. Joan's bedroom was the Yates living-room; the nanny slept in our bedroom; our dining-room was the childrens' schoolroom and Dor's bedroom was our study cum guestroom. The Yates kitchen notable for its dollhouse dimensions, served the Thomson children as a boxroom for toys and off-season clothing.

'I remember how frightened I used to be when there was a wind and rain storm,' Joan said. 'I would lie rigid in bed while the windows rattled and I could see the curtains move in the draught. I remember those



APRIL 2004. JOAN THOMSON REIN (SECOND FROM LEFT) WITH HER CHILDREN, ERLING, JOHN AND SIGNE MARIE (NELLA)

curtains,' she added. 'They had a big, blowsy flower pattern.'

'By the way,' she said, her mind moving nimbly on, 'is there still a squeaky board in the hallway down toward Dor's old room?' Assured that there were a number of such floor boards in our 400-year-old apartment, she continued. 'I used to get up early and I would try to creep down the hall to David's room which was at the front of the house. I could never get away with it. Quiet as I tried to be, Dor would always hear the squeak and come roaring out of her room to frighten me.' So much for the myth of loving older sisters.

'David and I were very close,' Joan continued. 'In the summer we would take an old rug and some cool drinks and make our way through a hole in one of the yew hedges. We scrambled up, spread the rug on top and were thoroughly convinced we were hidden from the world. Of course, all one had to do to find us was to peer out of a second floor window.'

Joan went on to recall 'camping out' in the Summer House. 'We spent the night there with some friends who had come to participate in a gymkhana and we fancied ourselves explorers in the wilds of somewhere or other.' She chuckled as she added, 'I suppose we were totally oblivious to the retinues of servants who paraded down from the house with supplies – food, blankets, firewood. We were grateful to the ones who came for us

AUTUMN 1940. LEFT TO RIGHT – DOR, DAVID AND JOAN THOMSON



with umbrellas in the middle of the night when leaks in the roof from a rain storm dripped on our heads. It was not a survival of the fittest operation by any stretch of the imagination!

The afternoon flew by and soon Signe and Erling arrived to reclaim their mother, who was in full flow of little girl memories. I decided then that a follow-up article must be written with a number of these recollections in Joan's inimitable voice. I have received the following memories by post throughout the summer and autumn of 2004, along with the photographs. I have also requested a copy of Joan's memoirs, which she is in the process of writing for her family. It will be added as an informative and utterly beguiling addendum to the Shipton Court archive.

'It amuses me that you are interested at what went on in Shipton in the twenties, so here are two little tales about our peacocks which may seem a bit exotic today. We had a peacock and two peahens. They lived up at the farm but each day about 10 am the cock would perform a little ceremony. In our day there was a round garden which was reached by the path between the two ponds. The path continued through a gate and down some steps. The garden consisted of a circle of yew hedges, not very high, with herbaceous borders on the inside and a circle of grass in the middle. There were steps at the far end leading up to a little plateau, planned as a sitting place. My father's racehorses had had two bad years, so neither the steps nor the plateau were paved as they were intended to be. This didn't bother the peacock which each day stood there, you could see him from far away, spread his tail and performed a stately dance. Roughly, it was two steps to the right and a bow, two steps to the left and a bow, a half turn right, a half turn left, a complete turn at one point and then a kind of 'belly dance' shaking, which made all the feathers shimmer and sparkle. It

was a remarkable performance, like a formal court dance.²

'The Samudas, who lived at Bruern Abbey, had white peacocks which we children thought very dull, though I believe are supposed to be quite special. I remember the excitement when Mrs Samuda telephoned my mother and said they had a visit from our peacocks! How the peacocks knew about each other, I don't know. They have very shrill voices but, even as the crow flies, it is quite a long way from Shipton Court to Bruern Abbey, added to which, all the peacocks had their wings clipped! How they got home again, I don't remember but it was quite a sensation.

'Our cock had a tragic end. It was my duty to feed the tumbler pigeons that lived in the dovecote by the long pond. I used to go down after breakfast with my dog, a Jack Russell called Jean Pean, named after my father's first girl friend. Whether the girl friend was bow-legged or just a bitch (or both!) we were never told.

'I used to sit on the steps and the pigeons were very tame. They took corn from between my lips and off Jean Pean's head. The dog sat quite still and controlled but, every now and then, a pigeon probably pecked her ear by mistake and then there was chaos, barking and a lot of dashing about. Next day, all was normal again.

'I don't remember exactly how it happened but, one day the peacock was wandering along the path by the dovecote, probably one of the chaos days, and the dog dashed after him too. He tried to escape through the shrubs in order to fly from the wall behind the dovecote, which was low on the garden side but a considerable drop down into the field below.

'Jean Pean got hold of his tail feathers just as he reached the wall and hung on for dear life as the peacock flew over the wall and ditch and down into the field. Alas! The dog's paraglide ended for her with a mouthful of feathers but for the poor peacock, with a bare behind. I never saw him again and I can't recall that he was served for dinner, either!

'On Fridays during term time, our chauffeur went to Oxford to meet Miss Fraser off the London train. She was a teacher from Mme Vacarni's School of Dance and she came in time for lunch on Friday and left again on Saturday morning. At 2.30, the children of our parents' friends arrived, accompanied by their nannies or governesses, who sat round the walls of the ballroom while their charges had their lesson.

'The front row who were the oldest children consisted of, among others, my sister Dor and Diana Mitford, later married to Sir Oswald Mosley, the Fascist leader in Britain. In the second row stood her sister, Unity, who later in life trailed around after Hitler. Being the youngest, I was in the back row. After dancing class, there was tea and then everybody went home.

'At 7.30, some of the parents arrived to join our regular weekend house party for dinner and afterwards, they all migrated to the ballroom. Here Miss Fraser taught them the new dances which were taking over from the

Vienna Waltz and the Lancers. They learnt the quick step, slow fox trot, slow waltz, tango and even the completely new and rather daring Charleston.

'The emancipated post-war women wore their short, fringed dresses, heavy necklaces and silk buttonshoes. They had the latest haircut, the shingle, with a headband to keep it tidy.

'There must have been a certain amount of practicing during the weekends as I, too, learnt the Charleston. In fact, once I demonstrated it to an interested audience on a bar counter in Monte Carlo! Thinking back, it seems quite out of character for my mother to have taken me to a bar but maybe it's just because I don't remember anyone else being with us. I suppose I was so awed by the attention that I didn't notice anyone else, or perhaps gloating over really being able to show off for once!

'I thought people might be interested in another memory or two about the Mitford girls. We knew about the 'Hons cupboard' long before it was described in print. The girls, in order to survive in a badly heated house, used to sit on the shelves in the heated airing cupboard. I can't remember which of them wrote describing this. Nancy, I expect.³

'It's strange how several of them became authors. They had no education. When Dor was sent to Paris, Mrs Redesdale told my mother that she couldn't understand why it was necessary to spend so much money on a girl's education. 'All she needs is a husband with a title and a suitable estate.'

'Then she produced Diana, the Fascist; Unity, the Nazi and a third one, whose name I forget [Jessica], who went with Winston Churchill's nephew to fight for the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. Family dinners must have been hilarious. Of course, she did produce Deborah, the Duchess of Devonshire and the one son Tom, who was to inherit the title but was killed early in the war.⁴

I have chosen a particularly timely memory of Joan Rein's to conclude this article. In *Wychwoods History* no. 19, Dor Thomson's idyllic hunting recollections were quoted at length. At one point she described the sport as 'marvellous for the Thomson children.'⁵

'Not for me, it wasn't,' Joan proclaimed emphatically. 'My hunting career was very short,' she explained. 'I made my debut at the Opening Meet, which was held at Shipton Court on my fifth birthday.⁶

'I rode Whiskers, an old white pony who was very motherly. When I fell off, she used to turn her head around and give me a push back into the saddle, as it was difficult for me to mount alone with such short legs.

'I went with our groom, Walker, who knew roughly where hounds were likely to show, and we didn't follow the field but took short cuts so that we could follow what was going on. As usual, it was freezing cold and I longed to go home but this was out of the question for the Master's daughter, so we plodded on.

'At last Walker said we could go home, he was obviously bored stiff, and we trotted down the Burford road, aiming for the Court. Just before we got to the corner where there is a gate into the Wild Garden, we heard a great 'Hollay' and suddenly a fox jumped over the wall on the other side of the road 10 to 15 yards ahead of us, closely followed by the whole pack of hounds in full cry.

'To my horror, they then pounced on the fox and tore him to pieces before my eyes, while the field soon followed and the huntsmen did their jobs. The stern was cut off and somebody said that as I was the newest member of the hunt, I should be "blooded". In a state of complete shock, I was led forward and the bloody stump of the stern was smeared all over my face, apparently a great honour.'

'Luckily, it wasn't far to the house and when we got there, Walker rang the bell and asked the butler to fetch my Swiss nanny, which he did. Lisbet was then instructed to take charge of me but that my face was not to be washed until the next day, "in no circumstances." Not surprisingly, Lisbet thought this barbaric but she bathed me and put me to bed where I slept soundly until the early hours, completely exhausted.

'Early in the morning I woke up to the strong smell of fox and painfully tight skin on my face. I got up and, with a hairbrush, scrubbed myself clean until my face was nearly raw, threw out the pillows and lay with my head at the foot of the bed since the sheets were smelly and bloody too.

'I had a very sore face for some time after that and no desire ever to go hunting again. Obviously, I had to but, fairly soon after this I developed asthma from horses and dogs and, in the end, was let off the compulsory riding lessons etc. My sister Dor, who loved everything to do with horses, had a bad smash about then, so nobody bothered about me, for which I was truly grateful.'

In the next issue, Joan Rein will recount her amazing war time romance with the young Norwegian lawyer who finally became her husband after the war was over.

References

- 1 *Wychwoods History* no. 19, (2003) p 86.
- 2 See front cover.
- 3 Jessica in *Hons and Rebels*.
- 4 Joan forgot to mention Pamela Mitford perhaps because she was too normal to be memorable.
- 5 *Wychwoods History* no. 19 (2003) p 74.
- 6 This would be in 1922.
- 7 Would hunters call this the brush?

Milton Church 1854-2004

JANET WALLACE

The Church of St Simon and St Jude had its 150th birthday on 28th October, 2004. It was built on one acre and five perches of land given in 1853 by James Haughton Langston of Sarsden. This land had previously belonged to his father who had purchased it earlier from William and Martin Brooks. Squire Langston also paid all the costs involved in the structure both internally and externally, as well as making an endowment of £100 per annum for the incumbent, which was paid until his death. Prior to this time, Milton, Lyneham and Bruern had been served by the Church of St Mary the Virgin at Shipton.

The architect of the Church was George Edmund Street, who was to become well known for his Victorian Gothic church designs and many other buildings, the most important of which is the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand in London. He also designed the church of SS Philip and James in north Oxford. Street was born in 1824, the son of Thomas Street, who was a solicitor. From an early age he became very interested in medieval churches, and during visits abroad was able gain an extensive knowledge of continental architecture. In 1844 he started his training in architecture, in London at the offices of Scott and Moffatt. He worked for 5 years with George Gilbert Scott, who allowed his pupils to take considerable responsibility for designs to which he put his own name! In 1850 he was appointed to the post of Oxford Diocesan Architect, Bishop Samuel Wilberforce being the president of the Diocesan Society. He married twice, both wives dying young, and had one son from his first marriage. He died in London in 1881, was honoured with a state funeral and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Milton Church was one of Street's earliest buildings. It was built on a hill, with a stepped-up wall alongside the road, which gave it a sense of importance and elevation. There is a well proportioned and attractive lych gate through which to enter the churchyard from the road. Originally the wall ended immediately below the lych gate, but later upon enlarging the churchyard the wall was extended to the present churchyard boundaries, being walled on three sides, with railings on the south side. The church is elevated, with a steeply pitched roof and a small octagonal bell tower in the same manner, the supporting base of which stands out between the



GEORGE EDMUND STREET
c1850 A.D. 1880

two west windows. There is a large open porch leading to south door. The ceiling of the porch is well carved with the added touch of carved leaves which we will also note inside the church. There is a plain tone seat on the west side. There are several items to see outside, especially the fine carved gargoyle in the shape of a lion with a row of carved stone above, outside the lady chapel. The gothic arches of the porch are also of note and well-proportioned.

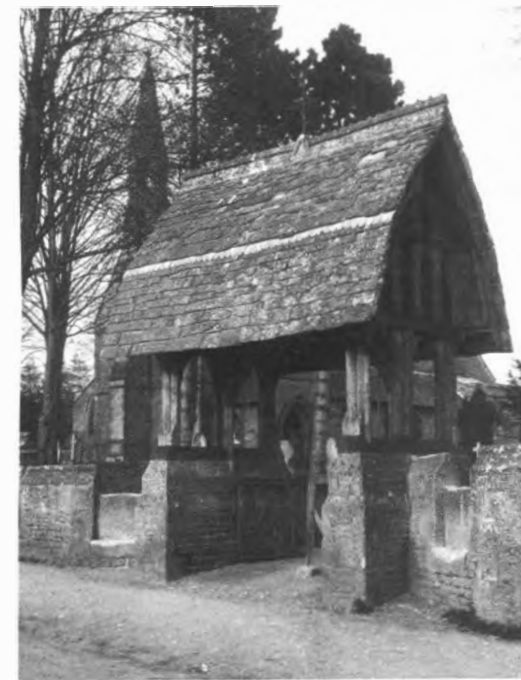
Internally, the church consists of a wide central nave with two blocks of pews divided by an aisle with another set of pews on

each side divided by two smaller aisles. Beyond the outer aisle on the north side is the organ loft and vestry, and on the south side is the lady chapel. Due to the wide central nave of the church between the relatively plain trefoil shaped pillars supporting the gothic arches, the ability to observe is greatly enhanced. The walls are mostly plastered, with exposed stonework around windows, doors and arches. The back, or west end of the church is quite plain, although the later addition of a stained glass window somewhat belies this. Advancing forward to the east end of the church the interior becomes more important leading one's eye up to the altar and the east window, although the trees now block out some of the sunlight. The floor tiles become more ornate in the chancel, with two sets of steps rising up to the altar, which is backed by a simple wooden carved screen. The stone work around windows, some now of stained glass, also become gradually more ornate. Originally there was sufficient seating for 400 at a time when the population of Milton was about 1000. The pews are quite plain except for the front of each block which is pleasantly carved and are the choir stalls. The organ loft is an original feature of the

MILTON CHURCH c1900

church as are the well crafted stone font and pulpit. There is also some fine wrought-ironwork in front of the altar and choir stalls with plain wood above.

Overhead can be seen the wood-lined roof which also becomes more intricate above the chancel with carving along the upper walls echoing the rear of the altar and there are fairly plain shaped supporting timbers. On either side of the nave are a row of four clerestory windows. The stonework of each window is slightly different - a feature missed by many! The corbels at the base of the main timber supports holding up the roof have more of the stonework designs of leaves. George Street's favourite church was at Southwell in Northamptonshire, and in that



church there are similar features, which he might have copied for Milton. The stonework above the arches is not always symmetrical in the chancel as it has to accommodate the differing arches near the east end of the church, finally drawing one, yet again, to its importance. Street was also involved in the restoration of Shipton church so although the church at Milton is completely different, he may have introduced one or two touches as a linkage. Two other churches in the area that were designed by Street

MILTON CHURCH LYCHGATE



MILTON CHURCH
INTERIOR

are at Filkins and Toddington. He was also responsible for several other church restorations.

The Church of St Simon and St Jude is therefore, a well-designed edifice which was built by Alfred Groves and

Sons and completed in 1854. The Petition was dated 25th October 1854 and signed by Samuel Wilberforce (Bishop of Oxford), Joseph Phillimore, Patron (Chancellor of the Diocese of Oxford) and the Rev. William Edward Dickson Carter, (Vicar of Shipton). It was inaugurated by Wilberforce on 28th October, 1854.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary there was an evening service on 28th October, attended by the Bishop of Dorchester, the Rt. Revd Colin Fletcher, who gave the address and cut the birthday cake; a talk in the church about the church by Tim Porter on 30th and a United Benefice service on 31st attended by the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt. Revd Richard Harries, who was the celebrant and speaker.

In addition there was a beautiful display of flower arrangements throughout the church, the theme of which was to emphasize the parishioners – their baptisms, weddings, past membership of the church and those who gave their lives in World War I and World War II. There was also an interesting photographic display obtained mainly from the archives of the Wychwoods Local History Society; a display by children of imaginary church plans; a book of extracts from church records including some information about those who gave their lives in battle; and a reminder of the Crimean war of 150 years ago. There were a variety of refreshments, and parties for the children and for all who had been baptized and married in the church; they also received a commemorative book mark. The church was open for local people to attend.

Note

The description of the architecture of the church is taken from the talk given by Tim Porter on 30th October 2004. See also G. E. Street's original plan for the building of Milton church in *Wychwoods History* No 8 pp 38-39.

Roman Activity at Swinbrook

PAULINE HOLDSWORTH AND MARGARET WARE

Pauline Holdsworth says: It all started in July 1999 when Rob Lane, former gardener for Swinbrook House, invited me to pick some of his broad beans from the kitchen garden while he was away on holiday. As I pottered along the rows I noticed what turned out to be my first find of Romano-British greyware pottery. Thanks to Margaret and Frank's field-walking, I was able to identify it, but could not believe my luck when I picked up another piece, followed by another... until I had a pretty heavy bag of beans and pottery sherds.

Since then I have found many more pieces of Roman pottery there, and a slender bronze ring shaped like a snake, identified at Cirencester Museum as probably Romano-British. I've also found one tiny coin, probably of the Emperor Constans (337-350 AD), and Rob gave me another coin he had also found in the garden – a double denarius of Gordian III (238-244 AD). Sadly the vegetable patch is now grassed over, so my searches are restricted, but I find it humbling and comforting to hold in my hand things made, used and discarded nearly 2000 years ago by our forebears, who had to work to eat and live, just as we do today.

Margaret Ware writes: The density of Pauline's finds suggest that there was some sort of Romano-British settlement in the vicinity, conveniently near a spring. Over a couple of years, she collected 265 pottery sherds weighing over 2 kg in total. Ninety percent were of fairly coarse reduced- or grey-wares, possibly locally made, the rest being finer, oxidised wares, reddish in colour. There was one piece of a mortarium (food grinding bowl) in a whitish fabric, 3rd- 4th century AD? These finds probably came from a fairly humble farmstead, almost certainly occupied by native Britons.

These discoveries spurred Pauline on to think of other possible sites on the Swinbrook Estate and, with Barbara Wilson's help, she went to search two fields further down the valley near Pain's Farm where she frequently walked and had previously spotted what looked like pieces of old building material. They gathered carrier-bagfuls of material and, suspecting it might again be Roman, contacted Frank and me again and we also walked over the site. This second location is SE-facing, just above another spring, where a substantial spread of Roman pottery and probable Roman building materials over an area roughly 50 x 50m indicates the site of another,



THE SNAKE RING, DR.33 CUP, DR.37 BOWL AND SHERD SHOWING DECORATION.

hitherto unrecorded, settlement. By contrast, this one seems to have been of a higher status than the one up the hill since, out of the 209 pottery sherds (weight 1.5 kg) collected, the better-quality oxidised ware made up just under half the total, and included four mortarium fragments and nine pieces of second-century Samian ware originally imported from Central Gaul. This is a hard, dark red burnished table-ware, and two pieces have been identified as rims of cups (Dragendorff 33 type) and one of a bowl (Dr.37 type), the latter decorated with swags, leaves and a star design.

But 500 pieces of brick and tile weighing 17.8 kg constituted the majority of finds from this second site. Some appeared from their shape to be Roman roof tiles, while many other pieces were a distinctive purplish colour, possibly suggesting burning? More interestingly, there were eleven pieces of combed box-tile, indicating that at one stage the inhabitants (probably again native Britons) had become wealthy enough not only to purchase expensive tableware, but also to have central heating installed, in the best Roman tradition! Professor Peter Salway has commented that this might be considered to be another of the 'Akeman Street' villas. The recovery of one piece of rough pottery which has been identified as probably Iron-age, suggests that British farmers had indeed been occupying this site from before the Roman invasion, their descendants 'making good' and becoming Romanised over the following two or three centuries.

Some of these finds were identified by Paul Booth of Oxford Archaeology, to whom our thanks are due, and both sites have been reported to the County Sites and Monuments Record.

Shipton and the Church Courts

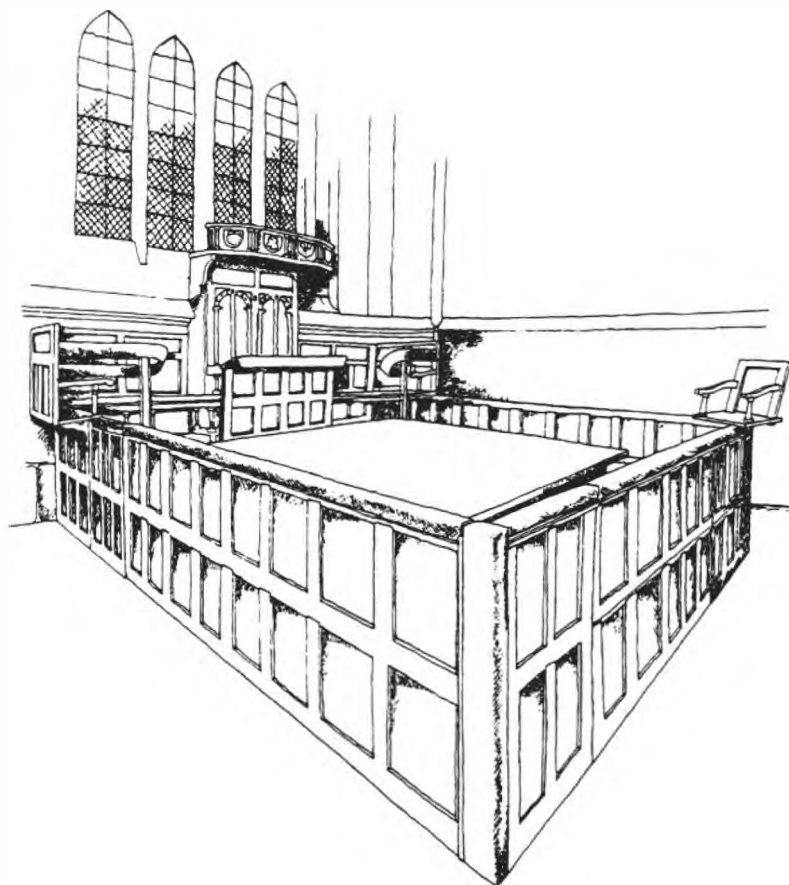
JACK HOWARD-DRAKE

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the church courts were an important feature of the country's judicial system. The courts which made the most immediate impact on people were the bishop's and archdeacon's courts in each diocese. They dealt with the discipline of the clergy and with many administrative matters such as proving wills, awarding grants of administration, issuing licences and faculties and so on. They also had wide jurisdiction over the laity in, for example, the adjudication of disputes about tithes, wills, marriage contracts and other matrimonial affairs, and in punishing immorality, scandalous behaviour, failure to perform religious duties, accusations of immoral and scandalous behaviour, and other secular and ecclesiastical offences.

There are two main classes of documentation covering the courts' role in litigation affecting individuals. The first contains the depositions of witnesses in what were known as instance cases, the ecclesiastical equivalent of civil actions. In these a full procedure was used by means of written documents. The plaintiff's case was set out in a 'libel', a series of numbered articles to which the defendant responded, either in a personal statement or in a series of numbered counter allegations. Further charges and counter charges could be made, including calling into question the credibility of the other side's witnesses. Verbatim copies of the evidence – the depositions – were read out in court and because of the full nature of this evidence, the depositions provide a good deal of information about the people and places involved.

There are 18 volumes of these records in the Oxfordshire Record Office. Eight have been calendared and published in seven booklets covering various periods from 1542 to 1606. (There are gaps in the records). A further booklet for the period 1616 to 1622 is in preparation.¹

This article brings together some of the references in these papers to those who lived in the parish of Shipton, which at the time included Milton, Leafield, Ramsden, Lyneham and Langley. Ascott, although it functioned as a separate parish, was still technically a chapelry of Shipton, and Bruern, always described as extra-parochial, had close links with Milton. They are both included here.



CONSISTORY COURT IN CHESTER CATHEDRAL DRAWN BY WENDY JONES AND REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION FROM SHAKESPEARE AND THE BAWDY COURT OF STRATFORD, BY E.R.C. BRINKWORTH, PUBLISHED IN 1972 BY PHILLIMORE & CO LTD., SHOPWYKE MANOR BARN, CHICHESTER, WEST SUSSEX, PO20 2BG

Tithes

A frequent cause of action in the church courts were disputes about tithes, a tenth part of the produce of the land payable by parishioners to the clergy. The plaintiffs and defendants relied mainly on the custom of their parish to argue whether tithes should be paid at all and if so, who should get them. Tithe cases could be very complicated and one dated 17 April 1591, in which the parties were two prominent residents of Shipton, illustrates some of the complexities involved.

Tithes were divided into the great and small tithes. In general the great

tithes, the major crops like corn and wool, went to the rector of the parish, and the remainder, the small tithes to the vicar. Shipton was a prebend of Salisbury cathedral which meant that the income from Shipton church, its buildings and lands, went to the cathedral for the support of a canon there. The canon or prebendary became the rector of the parish and as such had the right to the great tithes – which accounts for the building of the great barn at Prebendal House. This right was frequently leased to a tenant and at the time of the court case it was in the hands of Richard Wisdome who sued Richard Whiteinge for some of the tithes on wool. Whiteinge accepted that by custom Wisdome was entitled to the tithe of wool on sheep wintered in the parish and shorn there but argued that if the sheep were sold out of the parish the tithe on them belonged to the vicar. As compensation the vicar paid the rector a farthing for every sheep kept in the parish from midsummer to November and then sold, or a halfpenny for every sheep kept in the parish from November to midsummer and then sold. Whiteinge had 100 sheep in the parish which he sheared and from which he had 100 fleeces and he said he had paid the proper tithe on them. He had, however, bought eight sheep in Burford market and kept them in Shipton field in May and June and then sheared them. He claimed that Wisdome was not entitled to any tithe on these eight.

A complex case about tithes in Ascott occupied the court from February to December 1572. It is described in detail in *Wychwoods History* no. 11. In brief it concerned the claim of Alexander Gardner and Bartholomew Chawney to all the tithes in Ascott. This was contested by William Bonde who argued that he was entitled to those tithes in Ascott which were known as the priory tithes. There is nothing to show that there was ever a priory in Ascott but there is sufficient evidence that the word priory refers to a building in Ascott used at one time by an agent, probably a priest, collecting tithes for the Priory of St Frideswide in Oxford, which held land in Ascott.

This was a case in which doubt was cast on the integrity of witnesses. Bonde said that Richard Hicke, one of the witnesses for Gardner and Chawney was well known for dishonest living. Another of their witnesses, Richard Whyting, one time parish clerk, was a common drunkard who had been sent to London to appear before the High Commission for drunkenness. His wife had not been able to go to church for six months because he couldn't afford to buy her a coat. Bonde, however, had to admit that one of his own witnesses, Margaret Fletcher, was very poor and had had to borrow a coat from his maid to go to Oxford. He believed she had spent what money she had in the alehouse but he knew of no other dishonesty on her part. He also admitted that two of his witnesses, Alice Andrews and Alice Blunsden of Over Norton, were pregnant when they were married, but they had married the children's fathers and he knew of nothing to their discredit since.

A simple tithe case can give information about the local economy. In 1586 and 1587 Alexander Hawten of Idbury had fifty tegs (sheep in their second year) in Lyneham field in Shipton. He sold them to Edward Hasellwood of Lyneham a fortnight before Whitsun for £16:13:4. He thought that at shearing time they would produce four tods of wool (one tod equals 28lbs) worth 14s. a tod.

The leasing of tithes to others could lead to its own complications. In 1611 Thomas Paynter was the rector of Shipton and had leased all the tithes of hay, corn and wool in Shipton and its hamlets, including Lyneham, Meriscourt and Fines Court, to Samuel Foxe, the son of John Foxe the Martyrologist. Samuel in turn had leased the Lyneham tithes to Alexander and Edmund Cooke for three years. Thomas Willis had reaped the corn in Lyneham and Meriscourt and the Cookes were suing him for the tithes. Willis maintained that he had paid Alexander Cooke's father, James, 10s. a year for six years for the tithes and said that when James died, he had asked Alexander to continue the arrangements he had made with his father and Alexander had said that he would.

Mortuaries

Under the feudal system, when a tenant died, the lord of the manor had the right to take his best animal as heriot. The parish priest could then take the second best animal, the theory being that this was in compensation for any tithes that the dead man or woman, as a parishioner, had failed to pay him. The payments were known as mortuaries. The system was open to abuse and in 1529 an act was passed to regulate it. It provided that strangers, non-residents and non-householders, were not liable and that payments should be made 'only in such place where heretofore [they] have been used to be paid and given'. Payments were to be made in cash at a fixed rate on a sliding scale. Those leaving goods worth less than £30 were to be exempt; from £30 to £40 the rate was 3s.4d. to 6s.8d. and over £40:10:6.

At the end of 1603, Henry Mills, the vicar of Shipton, took a case in the church court against Alice Weaver for a mortuary following the death of her husband, Henry Weaver. Because the vicar's right to a mortuary was linked to his right to tithes, the court took evidence that Mills was in fact the vicar of Shipton and entitled to receive tithes from all the titheable parts of the parish except the tithes on corn, hay and wool. In other words he received all the vicarial tithes, the rectorial tithes going to the rector, although Mills was entitled to the 'odds' of wool under seven pounds.

As the 1529 Act exempted strangers, non-residents and non-householders from payment of mortuaries the court was also concerned to establish the status of all those in the case together with examples of the value of estates left by deceased parishioners and the amount of any mortuaries which had been paid.

So far the court was dealing in facts but when it came to the question whether Alice Weaver was obliged to pay a mortuary opinions varied. The customs of the parish were particularly relevant here in view of the provision in the 1529 Act that payments should be made only where 'they have used to be paid and given'; but the memories of the parties to cases and their witnesses often varied according to the point they were trying to prove. So it was in the Weaver case.

Some of the many witnesses who were called said that mortuaries were paid by everyone in Shipton wherever they lived in the parish and gave various examples of what had been paid, some after disputes with the vicar. In particular Henry Rawlins, who had had a lease of the mortuaries for seven years, said that he had been paid a mortuary of 32s.4d. by a young woman in Ramsden when her husband died; but she was poor so he had given her 16d. back. Alice and her witnesses maintained that whatever the custom in the rest of the parish, those who lived in Ramsden and Leafield did not pay mortuaries. Ramsden and Leafield were separate villages and had their own customs. This argument seems to have been well founded. There is ample evidence that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the various villages in Shipton parish were separate units of administration. Churchwardens were appointed separately for each of them and from 1565 almost every entry in the parish registers makes clear where the parishioners lived. When William Master, the vicar from 1564 to 1591, established a charity in his will, he appointed trustees from each of the villages except Langley. In 1584 John Whyting left 6s.8d. to the poor people of Shipton 'village', 5s. to the poor of Milton 'village' and 3s.4d. to the poor of Lyneham; and there are many other examples.

By chance a similar case about mortuaries in Kingham was before the court some six months after the Shipton case. Moorecrafte, the rector, was suing Elizabeth Harris who had refused to pay a mortuary on her late husband's estate. Here again many witnesses were called, some arguing that mortuaries were paid in Kingham, others saying they were not. To account for non-payment it was said that Moorecrafte's predecessor, Doctor James, had been kind to his parishioners and had not demanded mortuaries, even though they were due. On the other hand, Ralph Willet, a former rector who had been vicar of Shipton, was said to have sued successfully for mortuaries. One former rector, Marberry, had once refused to bury a corpse unless a mortuary was paid.

It is particularly unfortunate that we do not know the results of cases like these.

Wills

In 1992 the late Tom McQuay published an article in *Wychwoods History* no. 7 with the title 'Death By Misadventure'. Among other

references he quoted from an entry in the Shipton parish registers dated 4 April 1621 which reads (modernised) Master John Ardes 'was killed by a fall from his horse galloping from Chipping Norton late in the evening and brought back home dead'. We should know little more about John Ardes² were it not for the fact that after his death there was a dispute about his will which led to a case in the church court. The will itself is not recorded elsewhere.

There is, however, a grant of administration to Thomas Sylvester dated 23 August 1622³ and it was Sylvester who brought the case against Ardes' widow, Susan, but in the absence of the articles of the libel it is not clear what he was suing her for. As we do not have the full text of the will, we do not know who Ardes left his estate to or whom he had named as executor, and there may have been some argument about this. It could also be that Sylvester was not satisfied that Ardes' goods had been properly appraised for probate. William Whiting was one of the appraisers and made a point of saying that the goods appraised were such as had been shown to them by Susan. His list of the goods, which included valuations, is at appendix and was somewhat different from the list provided in evidence by John Baynham, who had been one of Ardes' servants. Baynham's list is also at annex. Whiting, for example, did not mention the gelding that Ardes was riding when he had his fatal fall.

Whatever the reason for the case, the evidence the witnesses gave tells us quite a bit about Ardes and his family. For example he was obviously a gentleman of quality who wore a rapier and a dagger and was keen on hawking. He had some arable land in Shipton which he let to Whiting 'to be sown to thirds', i.e. Ardes retained the right to a third of the crops grown there. Baynham said that after Ardes died, he had helped Susan get in a third of the wheat, barley, maslin, oats and pulse due to her.

We also learn that Susan was previously married to an Ashfield by whom she had a son, Thomas. Philip Barrett said that he was a tenant of Ardes in Milton at a yearly rent of 20 marks. 20 nobles was due to Ardes before he died but when he offered the money to him Ardes said there were other matters to be arranged and that his stepson would be coming home shortly and would sort them out. When Ashfield came he said the lands now belonged to him and Barrett paid him the 20 nobles. He had paid the other 20 nobles at Michaelmas and settled a number of other matters.

We know from the parish registers that Susan's first husband was named Michael and that she had children by him other than Thomas who does not appear in her will⁴ of 1636 and after a number of bequests to various children, a grandchild and a servant, she left the bulk of her estate to Rowland Ashfield who was her executor. Perhaps one reason behind the court case was that Thomas had been a bit too quick to claim his inheritance.

Testamentary cases frequently turned on family disputes. One

morning at the end of 1614, William Sessions of Milton, lying on his deathbed, asked Edward Tenant to write his will for him and everyone else to leave the room. Tenant did so and read it to him and Sessions said he was content with it but intended to add further legacies to it. One of his sons, Andrew, came into the room and said he didn't like some already made and no more were made. When Andrew discovered that Sessions had given his wife, Joan, the house in which Andrew lived, he said 'father, if you have given away my house and land you have much forgotten me'. It is not clear who was suing whom but it could be that Andrew was suing his mother for the house he was living in.

Some testamentary cases raise complicated issues going back many years. Joan Benett of Lyneham, who died in September 1618, was, according to the parish registers, 'an old maid which falling down from a loft was killed immediately', and there was a case in the church court in October 1619 about the disposal of her goods. For 19 years she had lived as a sojourner⁵ in Edward Whiting's house in Lyneham. When she went there she brought with her a flock bed, various other items of furniture, some clothing and £7 which she handed to Whiting in trust for the time she lived in his house. About 18 months before she died she moved to the house of Thomas Benett, her nephew, as a sojourner and took her furniture and goods with her. Whiting handed the £7 to Benett together with £1 which was due to Joan as a legacy from one John Robins and which had been paid to Whiting's wife as Robins' executor.

The court case was between John Harrys, the plaintiff, and Thomas Benett, the defendant. When Joan Benett died, Alice Harrys, John Harrys' mother, went with Elizabeth Cooke to talk to Thomas about Joan's goods which she thought belonged to her as Joan's next of kin. Thomas said 'My aunt towards her death grew discontented and had she not died I think we should have parted and I told her thus, 'aunt if you cannot be contented you may part when you will, tonight if you think good'. She made me this answer 'what cousin, so soon tonight, I pray let me have my money first with me'. I said to her again 'aunt, let me have but two day's warning you shall have all your things and all your money to a farthing'. When Elizabeth Cooke asked him whether there had been an agreement that he would look after Joan during her lifetime for the money, he said that there had been no such agreement. They all went into the room where Joan was lying (she obviously had not died quite as immediately as the parish registers say), and where there were various of her goods, Alice said she wanted a brass pot which was there and Thomas said she could have it if she gave him another one; but Thomas's sister said she wanted it. All that Alice could have at the time was a pair of sheets.

Other witnesses in the case added some details. John Hooper said that some three years earlier Joan Benett 'had grown poor, weak and impotent and destitute of a house of her own to live in' and had told him she was

going to live with Thomas Benett. She had agreed with Thomas for her houseroom and her keeping as long as she lived, in return for her goods and the £8 from Whiting. She asked Hooper to help her by getting Thomas to enter into a bond guaranteeing her houseroom and keeping if he should get married. If he should remain a bachelor she 'would stand in his courtesy'. Hooper reckoned that keeping Joan was worth £5 a year. Whiting said that at no time in the last ten years had John Harrys afforded Joan 'any maintenance relief or house. Thomas Benett had paid for her funeral.

As so often in these cases there are many uncertainties and inconsistencies but we hear the people speaking about their day to day affairs; and it must be said that the picture of Joan's relatives squabbling about her possessions in the room where she was dying is not a very pretty one.

Marriage

Until the passing of the Hardwick Marriage Act of 1754, the essential requirement for a legally binding union was not a ceremony in church but an agreement, a 'contract', between a man and a woman before witnesses, to take each other as man and wife. However, to be fully acceptable to the ecclesiastical authorities and to the community at large, contracts were commonly publicised by the calling of banns and were solemnised in church; and over the years a church ceremony became the normal form of marriage.

Most matrimonial cases before the courts were concerned, therefore, with the question whether a binding contract had been entered into since such a contract invalidated subsequent contracts or even a marriage in church. It may be worth describing two cases at some length to show some of the complexities which often arose in matrimonial disputes.

In 1615 there was a case about whether John Bencher and Margaret Brookes of Shipton had lawfully contracted themselves in marriage at a meeting in George Peesley's house. According to Peesley's evidence he and Margaret had met in Margaret's house with various neighbours and Margaret 'after long speech and conference' with Bencher said she was his wife and promised to meet him on the following Saturday in Peesley's house in Burford and 'before witnesses to assure and contract herself unto him'. When they met, they went into a private room and when Margaret had assured John that she was still the same woman to him they took each other as man and wife and kissed. John gave her a piece of silver as a token of marriage. Thomas Hobby had come with Margaret to Peesley's house but the contract 'was not made in his presence for it was the desire of the said Margaret that he should not be acquainted therewith'. It is possible that Hobby was the plaintiff claiming that there had been a previous contract. Margaret had twice refused the piece of silver worth 9d. which John had offered her but accepted it at the third time of asking. Richard Vaysey said that when he and the others were on their way home in the

evening Elizabeth Lewes, who had been one of the witnesses to the contract, had said that Margaret 'had that day knitted a knot with her tongue that she should not untie with her teeth', by which he understood her to say that John and Margaret had 'absolutely contracted themselves in marriage to each other'. He had heard Elizabeth say to Margaret that she had made a better market than she had done herself and got a good husband whereas she 'had lost her eggs'. Margaret had said that Elizabeth might do as she had 'God willing in good time'. It was a 'common speech and fame' in Shipton-under-Wychwood as well as in Burford that John and Margaret were contracted together in matrimony.

In another case Thomas Clemson had told Thomas Orpwood that he thought a kinswoman of his, widow Margery Bainger, would be a good wife for his brother Richard and that he would bring them together and further the suit. He later told the lady what he had in mind. She thanked him and told him that she had another suitor but she would put him off and appoint a time when Richard should come and see her, when he would be very welcome. It was arranged that Richard would visit her on the Sunday when the King was in his last progress at Woodstock and that they would ride together to the court there. Clemson and Richard went to Margery in Oxford but the weather was too wet for the journey to Woodstock and they went to Abingdon where Richard lived. Later Clemson and Thomas Orpwood met Margery at Master Ratcliffe's house in Oxford and Thomas told her he was glad that it was his brother she was going to marry and Doctor Johnson who was there with various others asked whether he could be her father to give her away in church. Margery thanked them and Thomas understood her to be well pleased to become Richard's wife. Henry Medux, Margery's brother, had gone to Abingdon to get details of Richard's estate; and Richard had arranged for Clemson and Thomas Orpwood to ride to Aston where Margery lived with her mother and brother 'purposely to give security for the jointure of 100 marks a year to Mistress Bainger'. Richard had sent tokens of gold to Margery and the messenger who took them said that she had sent many thanks for them. Richard had dealt with his brother about a house to live in after his marriage. When Margery went to dinner at Thomas's house in Abingdon she and Richard had 'used one the other very lovingly and familiarly' and Richard had drunk to her and her sister, Catherine, and called Catherine by the name of his sister. There was a 'common fame and report in Oxford and Abingdon spoken of by many credible persons there' that Richard Orpwood and Mistress Margery Bainger were contracted together in marriage. They were said to be sure together as man and wife 'except for the rites of the church for the celebration of the marriage'. Witnesses had seen household stuff being taken out of Master Ratcliffe's house near the market place in Oxford where Margery lived and it was assumed by the market people that it was because the widow Bainger was to be married to

a gentleman of Abingdon. Richard and Thomas had negotiated about a piece of land which would be settled on Margery as security for the 100 marks a year. It was known that Richard had provided a house in Abingdon for them to live in when they were married. Once Richard and Thomas Clemson had come into John Cornish's tailor's shop and when Thomas asked Richard how he was getting on with his case Richard had said 'that they had tied a knot with their tongues that they could never undo with their teeth'. (This seems to have been a common phrase.) On several occasions Richard and Margery had been seen walking and talking together in a friendly manner, and sometimes riding on the same horse. On one such occasion Richard had given Margery a pair of gloves as a token of his pledge. When Richard was ill messengers had taken Margery tokens – a piece of venison and two pieces of gold, and Margery had told them that she was still of the same mind. Clemson had told Margery that the greatest cause of Richard's sickness was the time it was taking over his suit to her and Margery had assured him that her love to him was as great as ever. Margery had once been heard denying that there was a contract between herself and Richard and had then said she had done it to try his patience and that she must have time to make her wedding clothes. John Pope had told Margery that Richard had heard 'that some disgraceful speeches had been made to her about him' and Margery had said that she had never spoken ill of him in her life.

Divorce

A strange case appears in the church court records for 1547. It does not say who was suing whom about what but simply states that in 1539 or thereabouts, William Harvie, who then lived in Lyneham, had married Margaret Stybarde of Lyneham in Shipton. Some three years later two sons of hers, aged about 14 and 16 arrived in Burford and said that they came from Birmingham where their father, William Stybarde, was still alive. An enquiry was ordered and Harvie, who had moved to Chipping Norton, accompanied by an official of the court and by Thomas Geffes and John Woolinge of Lyneham, went to Birmingham. There, in church on a Sunday, they were told that Stybarde was alive but had fled, having got two wenches with child. Harvie obtained a 'written and sealed testimonial' from some of the chief men in Birmingham and the record says that he and Margaret were 'immediately divorced'. Presumably this means that his marriage to Margaret was annulled since there was no divorce in the modern sense; but what the case was doing in the church court some five years later remains a mystery.

Defamation

People in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were very protective of their good names. Humble folk took the same view as King Richard II

who, in Shakespeare's words declared

'Mine honour is my life; both grow in one
Take honour from me, and my life is done'.

Slander was a matter for the civil courts but if it involved immorality it was dealt with in the church courts as defamation. Most defamation cases, therefore, contained accusations of sexual misconduct, which earned the courts the name of the bawdy courts. These accusations were not always of particular immoral acts. It was common practice when people fell out to call a woman a whore as a general term of abuse, sometimes with colourful adjectives attached, or to call a man a whorson knave or something similar. Sometimes a defendant would claim that he was only calling a woman a whore of her tongue; but sometimes the accusations were more specific.

Anne Cappe was quite specific when she and Agnes Charles fell out on their way from Burford to Shipton between Christmas and Lent 1614. Anne called Agnes a whore and 'being provoked by Agnes' added, 'if I am a whore I am not so very a whore as she that had five bastards by one man'. In 1584, Thomas Fitch, a gentleman of Bruern and servant to Sir Henry Unton⁶ sued Agnes Tayler of Asthall. He accused her of saying that 'Master Fitch ... was for her cousin Anne Banckcrofte in the forenoon and one Goldsmith was for her in the afternoon'. She had once met Christopher Banckcrofte, Anne's husband, when he overtook her on the road between Burford and Asthall. She got off her horse and told him she wanted to speak to him so he told his footman to help her on to his horse. She then told him several slanderous stories about Fitch. She admitted telling Christopher that when he was in Ireland Anne had one or two children, one of which was by Fitch.

Agnes took a counter-action against Fitch in which witnesses said that they had heard Fitch tell her that she had not treated him like an honest woman but like a whore.

Yet again we have a story where it is not easy to be sure of the facts. One would think that Anne Banckcrofte had good grounds for a case against Agnes and that her husband might have had something to say about her; sadly these records often leave us wondering.

A brief reference which teases the imagination is that in which William Harris of Lyneham was accused by Edmund Reelie of saying that he had got Harris's 'maid with child among his writings'. And odd events could lead to harsh words. When Anne Whiting and Humphrey Smith met in Ascott, Anne accused Humphrey of levelling his bow to shoot at her son. The bow had slipped aside and Humphrey had hit her son's dog, cutting off his leg. Humphrey had called her a whore for accusing him. William Head had tried to effect a reconciliation but 'they used many angry speeches'. Anne had said 'bear witness he calls me whore' and Humphrey said somewhat

enigmatically 'good woman, I say if he be a man he be a knave, if a woman she is a whore, that says I know either your son or your bitch'. One can only hope that Anne knew what he meant – or perhaps that she didn't.

Others

Although most cases dealt with either tithes, wills, marriage contracts or defamation, there were some which did not fall within these categories. One such, fully described in *Wychwoods History*, no. 7, is about the vicar of Shipton, Henry Mills, refusing Henry Rawlings communion and being accused of obscenity when he told the story of the Turkish lady who made water in her hand to give to her thirsty dog, in order to demonstrate the foolishness of believing good deeds were a way of ensuring a place in heaven. As with so many cases in the church courts it incidentally provides additional information, in this case a pleasing picture of the congregation in Shipton church including the gentry from the court and humble folk from the various villages in the large parish of Shipton.

Office cases

Office cases were those which were instigated by 'the mere office of the judge' and were the ecclesiastical equivalent of criminal cases. They were usually brought to the attention of the authorities by the presentment of alleged offenders during the bishop's or archdeacon's visitations. The accused was cited to appear, witnesses were called and sentence was delivered. The whole proceedings after the citation were oral and were recorded in 'office' act books. These books do not, therefore, contain the detail that is to be found in the records of instance cases. Furthermore they are in highly abbreviated Latin.

There are 66 of these office act books in the Oxfordshire Record Office and not surprisingly they have not been studied in much detail; but one has been published, the act book of the archdeacon's court for 1584.⁷ Even this is in the original Latin but in it we can catch an occasional glimpse of one or two local people who found themselves before the court and the procedure which was followed.

The apparitor, that is the court messenger, had failed to deliver a citation to Alice Bowman alias Smith of Shipton in person and when she failed to turn up she was excommunicated and the court ordered that the citation should be posted on the door of Shipton church. She then appeared and was absolved. She and John Smith were, however, warned that they were not to live together as man and wife during the lifetime of Richard Bowman.

When someone was presented on the basis of rumour or 'public fame' which they denied, the judge could order them to purge themselves on a specified day with a specified number of honest neighbours who were called compurgators. A proclamation giving notice that the purgation was

to be made on such and such a day was given out in the parish church at least six days before. It called for all those who had grounds for opposing the purgation to appear in court and bring forward their objections. If these were believed the accused was pronounced guilty and ordered to do penance.

In the absence of objections, the accused appeared in court and protested his or her innocence. The compurgators then said on oath that they believed the accused was speaking the truth and he or she was then declared innocent, usually with a warning to avoid the cause of suspicion in the future.

James Turner *alias* Hall of Shipton denied carnal knowledge of Emma Hawes. He produced three compurgators, William Padburye, Bartholomew Hickes and Henry Potter, Turner's good character was restored and the case dismissed.

Andrew Michell of Shipton was cited to appear in court in October 1584 and denied that he had worked on either a Sunday or a holy day during the last three years as far as he could remember. For some reason he was back in court the following February and was excommunicated but later absolved.

Thomas Whiting and Richard Haines, both of Shipton, and Elizabeth Whiting of Ascott were all in trouble for not proving wills, Thomas Whiting his son's, Haines his father's and Elizabeth Whiting her husband's. John Hyatt of Lyneham denied that 'there had been any such woman in his house'; and John Hooke of Ascott appears in the record just once with the cryptic remark 'John Hooke of Ascott has two wives; excommunicated'.

Sometimes office cases were conducted by the same plenary procedure as instance cases. A case of this sort was before the court in 1603 when three of Shipton's churchwardens, Richard Cooke, John Toms and William Whitlow, presented William Michell of Milton over the handling of certain church funds. The money came from a legacy in the will of John Chapman and the will and the case against Michell are described in an article in *Wychwoods History*, no. 14.

The courts and the parish

The church courts were a visible presence in the daily life of parishioners. They would see the apparitors bringing messages and delivering citations, perhaps fixing them to the church door, and the bishop's and archdeacon's visitations would certainly cause a stir. They would have to make the journey to Oxford to appear as parties and witnesses. They would be in church to witness the humiliation of those ordered by the courts to do penance, perhaps by standing in a prominent place throughout a service and making a public confession.

The courts imposed onerous duties on the churchwardens whose

expenses were a charge on the parish. The Shipton churchwardens' accounts show, for example, that in 1679 there were visitations at both Chipping Norton and Deddington, each of which cost Shipton 6s.8d. plus 3s.6d. for making a presentment. Milton paid 1s.3d. for a presentment and their churchwardens' expenses were 3s.4d. Leafield paid 1s.2d. for a presentment and their churchwardens' expenses were 3s.4d. The expenses of the other churchwardens were 3s.10d. in Ramsden and 1s.2d. in Lyneham.

In 1696 the churchwardens were involved in a case in the appeal court, the Court of Arches in London. They had taken a case against Henry Godfrey, a lawyer of Burford, who had land in Milton, for his refusal to pay his share of the cost of repairs to Shipton church. They won their case but Godfrey appealed and the case went to the Court of Arches where it dragged on until 1699. The churchwardens' accounts went up to London as part of the evidence and were never returned. They found their way to Lambeth Palace Library where they were among 10,000 documents damaged during the war. They came to notice in 1997 as one of the last documents to be repaired and a copy is now in the Society's archives.

This article can, perhaps, be said to illustrate the truth of Professor G. R. Elton's comment that the records of the church courts '... illuminate the history of church and people in ways which no other source can. They take one to the realities. This is because of the wide range of cases which came before these courts and because that range touches the human being so very near his personal centre ...'⁸

References

- 1 The first eight volumes of depositions in the Oxfordshire Record Office are MSS.Oxf.dioc.papers d.14, c.21, d.15, d.16, c.22, c.23, c.24 and c.25. These have been calendared as Jack Howard-Drake, *Oxford Church Courts Depositions, 1542-1550, 1570-1574, 1581-1586, 1589-1593, 1592-1596, 1603-1606 and 1609-1616*. The booklet in preparation covering the period 1616-1622 takes in the ninth and tenth volumes, MSS. Archd. Papers Oxon c.118 and c.10.
- 2 Apart from the burials of Ardes and his wife and the baptism of a son, there is nothing in the parish registers. There is a reference in the churchwardens' accounts to Ardes having been a churchwarden in 1621.
- 3 Oxfordshire Record Office (O.R.O.) MSS. Oxon. Wills, Ardis, Ards, John, 1621.106.126.
- 4 O.R.O. MSS. Oxon Wills, Ardys, Suzanna, wid., 1636. 199.242; 113/1/32.
- 5 This hardly squares with the dictionary definition of a temporary resident.
- 6 See Jack Howard-Drake, 'The Untons', *Wychwoods History*, no. 6.
- 7 Oxfordshire Record Society, Oxfordshire Record Series, vols. XXIII and XXIV, *The Archdeacon's Court, Liber Actorum, 1584*.
- 8 Quoted by E.R.C. Brinkworth in *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford*.

Appendix

Ardes' possessions according to John Baynham:-

one cow and a bull, four yearling bullocks and heifers, two mares, two colts, nine sheep, four store hogs, one chest of wainscot, one chair, two stools, one form, one carpet, a pair of playing tables, three pewter platters, one brass posnet, a pair of andirons, one frying pan, a pair of tongs, three cloaks, two doublets, two pairs of breeches, three pairs of stockings, one pair of boots, one pair of shoes, a sword, a rapier, a dagger, a hawk with bells, lure, hoods and hawking bags, and a gelding 'whereon the deceased was riding when he took his death'. Ardes also had certain arable lands in Shipton under Wychwood which 'he did set unto one William Whiting to be sowed for the thirds'.

Ardes' possessions as appraised by William Whiting:-

3 cows and a bull (£8), 5 yearlings (£4), 2 mares and 2 colts (£5:6:8d), 10 sheep (£3), 120 pigs (30s.), bedding (£4), a trunk of linen (50s.), a chest and 2 trunks (13s.4d.), a livery cupboard, 2 old chairs, old stools (6s.), cushions, carpets, a pair of tables and a box (4s.), pewter (30s.), brass (10s.), a pair of andirons, 2 spits, a frying pan and other trifles (5s.), wearing apparel, a sword, a rapier, a dagger, money in a purse (£8), a bread bin and a glass frame (2s.), hawk bells, lure, hood and a hawking bag (2s.6d).

One of Yesterday's Heroes – Albert Oliver MM

WENDY PEARSE

Many of us have probably wondered about the origin of the name Judd's Grave crossroads in Shipton. Unfortunately despite a number of suggestions the true explanation is lost in the mists of time. However, of the beginnings of the semi-detached houses which face us at those crossroads, there is no doubt. They belong within the phrase 'land fit for heroes' coined at the end of the Great War 1914-1918. And Albert Oliver, the first occupant of the left hand side house for nearly fifty years, was one of those heroes.

The date was the 4th September 1918; the place, the trenches of the Western Front. The Allies were at last achieving their long awaited advance against the German army. French land had gradually been recovered, the rewards stretching further and further northwards from the initial engagements on the Marne. Now a strategic point lay along the French/Belgian border in the valley of the Lys. As Bert Oliver of the 3rd Worcestershire Regiment waited in anticipation for the order to advance, his thoughts most likely turned to his home and family.

Perhaps memories took him right back to the beginning. The outbreak of War and the possible excitement, the thrill of action, this was the fever which swept through the young men of Britain eager to do their bit. Bert, then a fifteen year old may have felt like so many others of his age group that he could barely wait for his time to come. Of course, elder brother Phil had been one of the first to go. He was a guardsman trained, one of the elite 2nd Grenadier Guards. Several years of service making him and his fellows true specialists in the unsurpassable British Army. However by the time War was declared, Phil had become a reservist and was back in Combe, Oxfordshire. These reservists were instantly recalled and they landed with the regular troops in France on 13th August 1914 together with other renowned regiments of the Regular British Army. An Army which was to become known to history as 'The Old Contemptibles' following Kaiser Wilhelm's disparaging comment about Britain's "contemptible little army". How proudly they had advanced to Mons, feted everywhere by the locals. Then gallantly fighting and retiring

through the long exhausting 220 miles of the retreat southward, during days of terrific heat on feet tortured by the unrelenting French cobbles. Until at last, the fight back on the Marne and the northward return as the Western Front which would last so many weary years, was gradually established from Switzerland up to the Belgian border. Finally the Allies made their redoubtable stand at Ypres resolutely denying the Germans that section of Belgian soil which would claim so many Allied lives over the next four years. At the same time establishing the last length of trenches which enabled the Allies to retain the Channel ports. Sadly outside Ypres Phil had fired his last bullet. He died of wounds on 17th November 1914 in a military hospital behind the front. Like his comrades he had been a member of the 'Fifteen rounds a minute Brigade' who the Germans believed were firing machine guns, so fast and accurate was their marksmanship. The Regiment's story of these epic events is told in the book by J.M.Craster, *Fifteen rounds a minute*, which is largely based on the diaries of the second in command Major 'Ma' Jeffreys who was one of only two of the original officers of the 2nd Grenadier Guards to survive these first three months.

The blow of Phil's death had been hard for the Oliver family of Combe. Elizabeth and Augustus must have been so proud of their soldier son Philip, photographed so resplendent in his Guardsman uniform. Yet they chose a photograph in civilian clothes to be used for his commemoration card. Perhaps like many other parents and wives of this great yet almost totally devastated Regular British Army at the end of 1914, partially regretful of the day when their loved ones had taken on the soldier's role. Bert had treasured the little book sent to him by Phil in 1912. Written by the Guard's chaplain it outlined the duty and obligation taken on by a recruit to both God and Country and the reward of true comradeship which the Regiment inspired. Great indeed must have been the comradeship of the 2nd Grenadier Guards in 1914 where their strong reliance on their fellows had not prevented casualties of 959 in just over three months, in a War which many believed would be over by Christmas.

Phil's body was destined to lie forever in the cemetery at Poperinghe, but like innumerable families all over the world, the Olivers gave other sons to the conflict. John was serving in Mesopotamia, Bill, the oldest was working in a munitions factory in Coventry and Syd was a policeman in London. Bert, on leaving school had become a waggoner on a local farm. In March 1917, he had received his call, following his 18th birthday on October 5th 1916. He reported to Cowley Barracks in Oxford, and subsequently his father received a postcard dated 8th March 1917 stating that Albert Edward Oliver had been appointed to the 2nd/1st Queens Own Oxfordshire Hussars and that his father had been recorded as his next of kin. The 2nd/1st Oxfordshire Yeomanry (Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars) had been formed in Oxford in September 1914 and in July 1916

had become a cyclist unit in the 9th Cyclist Brigade. Transferred to the 4th Cyclist Brigade in February 1917, which was, at the time of Bert's arrival, stationed at Ipswich. Later the Brigade was deployed around the south east corner of Essex at Wivenhoe, Frinton and Manningtree until January 1918 when it was sent to Ireland and stationed at the Royal Barracks in Dublin. On the 14th February, Bert by then a lance corporal was attending an N.C.O. course at the Irish Command School of Instruction in Dublin. His exercise books from this course still survive and detail the various subjects involved. These range through drill, map reading, trench warfare, musketry, bomb, Lewis gun and gas instructions and first aid and include finely executed drawings of the various types of grenade and give details of codes and cyphers. To quote Bert 'The reason for an N.C.O. Course is to train men to instruct others in the highest knowledge of modern warfare.' And surprisingly the lectures included important psychological training. An N.C.O. should have a pleasant manner quickly altered to firmness, possess real sympathy for the private soldier whilst to command soldiers effectively an intimate knowledge of human nature was essential. The training of a high quality of discipline was very important together with fine moral qualities, courage and devotion to duty. Unfortunately before Bert's course reached its conclusion the Germans' Great Push began. Their first breakthrough occurred on 21st March 1918 with the Allied troops forced to retreat and die in their thousands before this massive onslaught. Reinforcements became essential wherever they could be obtained and on 11th or 12th April Bert left Ireland and landed in France three days later. His 'Soldier's Pay Book for Use on Active Service' was issued in Ireland on 11th April and inside the cover he has written 'Last leave 13th April 1918.' It was very fortunate that he appears to have returned home briefly, for on 30th April his father, a thatcher, was buried at Combe. The vicar at the time included the following note in the burial register. 'Died just a fortnight after he finished the task of thatching of the Church House which we had given him to do which was fortunate for us as he was the only thatcher in the village'. Clerical property appears to be high on the vicar's priorities.

On 14th April 1918 on arrival in France Bert was transferred to the 3rd Worcestershire Regiment. This regiment part of the 25th Division, had endured the full extent of Ludendorff's first breakthrough, the St. Michael Offensive, on 21st March, fighting near the Flesquieres Salient and Bauphame and suffering severe casualties. Withdrawn from the line following the Allies retreat, by the 1st of April the remnants of the Division were entrained together with the survivors of four other deeply involved divisions and sent north to the French/Belgian border to a supposedly quiet sector, to rest and recuperate. Unfortunately come the 9th April the Germans second offensive, Georgette, was launched directly at the area now held by these recovering divisions around Armentieres



ALBERT OLIVER AGED 18 YEARS

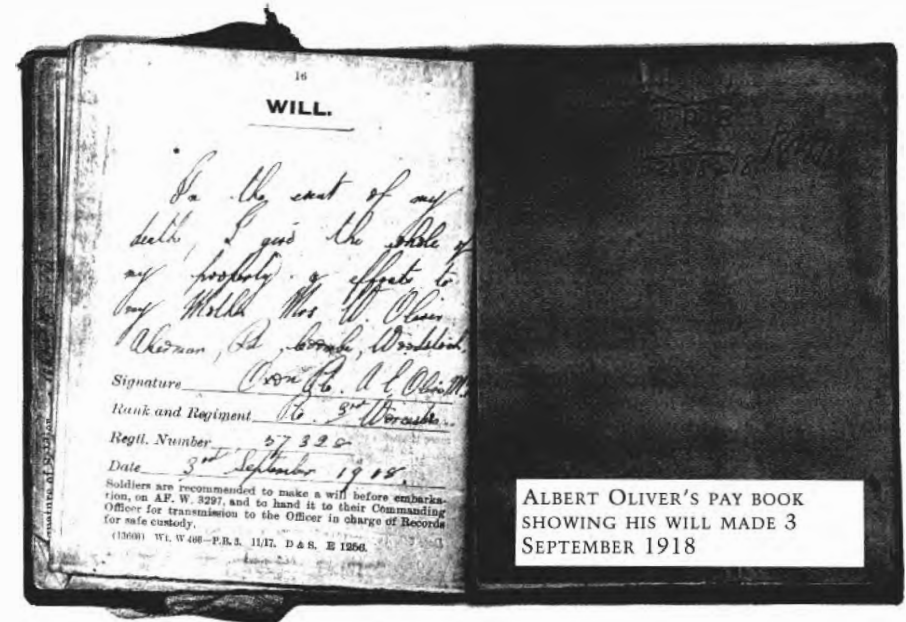
and the Lys valley. Initially mustard gas attacks followed by heavy bombardment saturated the British troops before the advance of German storm troopers. The defenders fought gallantly during the ensuing days retreating only as a last resort, until at last the 3rd Worcesters were relieved and evacuated on the 21st to a safe area to refit. Here 13 officers and 250 other ranks reinforced the battalion and it appears that Bert was amongst them. On 25th April he went into the front line for the first time and the next day the battalion counter attacked at Kemmel village. Exposure on the flanks forced a retreat and over the next few days shelling and repulsing attacks caused

many casualties. From the 25th until the end of the month the battalion sustained 140 casualties of which 24 died. Bert's initiation into front line warfare, like that of so many other young soldiers, was straight in at the deep end.

However on 2nd May the battalion was relieved and seven days later the Division was given a second chance for rest and recovery travelling south beyond the site of the St. Michael Offensive to a quiet section of the French front known as the Chemin des Dames. Ironically, there the five worn and weary divisions, which had already faced the two onslaughts of St. Michael and Georgette, were still not spared. Code named Blucher, this third onslaught began on May 27th with fifteen minutes of saturation by gas shells followed at 1am by bombardment. It was considered by the few survivors of the two previous offensives to be the worst that history had ever known. The fifteen mile ridge of the Chemin des Dames quivered and shook under the concentrated and prolonged gunfire whilst fire erupted all along the line, continually shattered by bursting shells and mortar bombs. By 2.30 pm the battalion was no more than 120 strong caused by many casualties and the separation of troops during their retreat. Bert later told

his sons that he didn't stop running for 24 hours. Today we can barely imagine what terror this type of situation must have meant for those involved. They had no idea whatsoever of which direction the next shell or bullet might come from or who awaited them behind the next tree, barrier or corner. Eventually however as with the earlier offensives, the German advance ground to a halt and between the 9th and 19th June the 3rd Worcesters reformed, absorbing other units and by the 22nd June the battalion had regained a strength of over 800 men. It was also transferred to the 19th Division which placed Bert under the Divisional Commander Major 'Ma' Jeffreys who had fought through the months of 1914 as second in command of brother Phil's 2nd Grenadier Guards. It would be interesting to know if Bert was aware of this coincidence. On the 30th June the battalion once more entrained to return to the British Zone in the north. July really was a quiet month refitting and training well back from the front but on 4th August the men moved once more back into the battle line in the area of the Lys valley. Over the next week 50 casualties were sustained through sniping and artillery action through day and night but towards the end of the month more time was spent in reserve and training. Meanwhile on the 8th August in the southern section of the Allied line, British, Canadian, Australian and French troops, following preparations of great precaution and secrecy, launched the Battle of Amiens and the beginning of the Allied advance to the Rhine.

Back in the Lys valley following a barrage on 3rd September the battalion advanced amid long range fire from concealed machine guns and captured Richebourg St. Vaast. At the back of his Pay Book on 3rd September 1918, Bert wrote a short will leaving all his effects to his mother. After five months in the front line, it seems some particular incident must have prompted him to take this step. The Pay Book also shows that Bert's first pay of 10 francs 'in the Field' was issued on 20th April 1918 by 2nd Lieutenant E. Chapman and the second on 7th May 1918 by Lieutenant G. Duffield. Now as Bert lay waiting with his comrades in the trenches on 4th September, these two officers finally gave the signal and led their platoons forward, as the Division drove relentlessly through the shattered ruins of Neuve Chapelle to reoccupy the old British Front line. Opposite in the old German line, German troops held the line in strength and despite strenuous efforts no advance across no mans land could defy their deadly machine guns. Another officer's signature in the pay book dated 20th July 1918 is that of 2nd Lieutenant D. G. Ross and it seems very likely that 2nd Lieutenant Ross was the officer connected with Bert's award of the Military Medal. Early on the 5th September patrols were sent out to check the situation in the old German line. The enemy proved to be well entrenched and the patrols were badly cut up. In the enforced retreat, Bert, amid the unceasing clamour of the battlefield, dragged a wounded officer back through a cornfield, hopefully



to safety. On this day, 2nd Lieutenant Ross was a casualty and probably was the officer who kept repeating during their frantic journey that he just wanted to get home to see his wife and children again. Sadly Bert's efforts were in vain. 2nd Lieutenant Ross died a few days later. Amongst Bert's surviving papers is a short letter written in pencil on paper from a field notebook. It was included in a letter from Bert to his mother which the officer commanding B Company, Lieutenant J. Simmons had censored.

3rd Bn the Worcs Regt.

Dear Madam

I have just recommended your son for bravery in the Field and expect he will get the MM or DCM for it. He certainly deserved it if anybody did. He is a jolly good chap in every way and we all like him. Excuse me writing this to you but I am just censoring his letter and know you will be pleased

to hear a good account
of him.

Yours faithfully
J.S. Simmons Lieut.

69 18 O/C B. Comp.

There is also an official card from Lieutenant Colonel P. R. Whalley, Commander 3rd Battalion, The Worcestershire Reg. which reads

'No 57328 Pte A. E. Oliver
I have received with great pleasure,
and congratulate you on, the report
of your gallant conduct on 5th Sept,
1918, when succouring a wounded man.

The award was listed in the London Gazette on 11th February 1919

On September 20th another attack was delivered against the strongly held German line and success followed, but a severe counter attack finally forced Bert's B. Company to retreat, their doggedness to this point being inspired by the bravery of 2nd Lieutenant J. S. Harvey, another signatory in the Pay Book. Also at this time, Lieutenant J. S. Simmons, the letter writer, was wounded. Orders were soon issued for a second attack and in the darkness of the 25th, the 3rd Worcesters once more took up their positions. The German line was seized despite heavy fire from artillery and machine guns. At 6 pm the Germans counter attacked. Orders were given to push forward to meet the enemy. 2nd Lieutenant E. Chapman dashed out followed by his enthusiastically cheering troops of young soldiers, bayonets fixed, quickly followed by Lieutenant Duffield with his platoon. The enemy wavered, stopped and fell back in disorder. The line held. A warm message of congratulations was sent by the Divisional Commander, now promoted to General Jeffreys, and Lieutenants Chapman and Duffield were awarded the Military Cross. The next day another counter attack was repulsed but during the following night the battalion was relieved. In the month of September 163 casualties had occurred including 25 deaths. Following more training in the relief zone, the 3rd Worcester~~s~~ travelled south and on 13th October, after church service~~s~~ in Cambrai which had been taken only five days before, they once more returned to front line duty. Another relief, then their final return to the front line on 6th November. The next day an attack was launched on the village of Breaugie~~s~~ with the intent of taking the railway beyond. They were checked by heavy machine gun fire but finally took the line at dawn on the 8th. Relieved by the 8th Gloucesters, when the Western Front finally fell silent on 11th November, the 3rd Worcesters were back in billets.

PART OF A LETTER FROM
LIEUTENANT J S SIMMONDS
SENT TO BERT'S MOTHER
CONCERNING HIS
RECOMMENDATION FOR A
MEDAL

300 Bn the Worces Regt

Dear Mother

I have just recommended
your son for bravery in the
field and expect he will
receive the MM or DCM for it
He has been in the front line
and has been in every
action (and) we all like him
to see him in the front line
and I am sure you will be
proud of him

By 27th November, the Battalion was in Fienvilliers and remained there for three months. Some training, a great deal of football and cross country running occupied the men's time whilst pivotal men and coalminers were quickly demobilised. After ten months away from home, on 19th February Bert arrived at Calais heading for Victoria Station on a fortnight's leave. He returned to Le Havre and

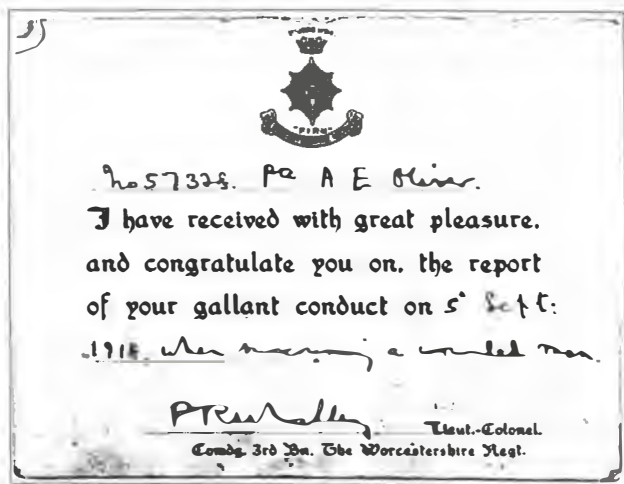
by the beginning of April had been transferred to the 17th Worcestershire Regiment, mostly based at Harfleur. The summer passed in routine duties, guard duty, training, guarding POWs and POW camps. Then when the 17th Worcesters ceased to exist on 8th October, Bert spent his remaining Army days with the 9th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. He arrived at the Dieppe Concentration Camp on 31st October waiting to embark and reached the Army Dispersal Unit at Fovant in Wiltshire by 5th November 1919. On 12th, 18th and 25th November at Combe Post Office, he received his last three army payments and his Certificate of Transfer to Reserve is dated 2nd December 1919. And so Bert's days in the British Army came to an end.

With the war over the necessity of finding employment loomed. In time Bert went up to Coventry to work with his brother Bill at the Armstrong Siddeley factory where Bill had been a foreman during it's use as a munitions factory. Bert's aim was to raise enough money to have a farm, but his earlier experience in the Cyclists' Brigade had not been forgotten. For amongst his War Medals is another medal inscribed with his name and Armstrong Siddeley Athletic Social Club 1920 Cycling 50 Miles Time Trial. There is also a medal dated 1906-07 presented to A. Oliver by

Oxfordshire Education Committee inscribed 'Never Absent Never Late', a testament of young Bert's character at nine years old. He was also able whilst in Coventry to more easily visit his young lady Hilda Williams who was in service with a shoe manufacturing family, the Coxs, in Wellingborough. Born in Combe, Hilda had worked in the land army in 1918.

However in October 1918 a meeting of the Smallholdings Committee had been held at County Hall, Oxford to consider the procedure for acquiring land for Ex-Servicemen. A sub-committee was set up to make a report and in January 1919 the report was discussed together with a circular from the Board of Agriculture. The report was approved and in April, Major Hall, Mr Matthews, Mr Parsons and Mr Rowell were appointed as the Sub-Committee for the Chipping Norton District No 3, to inspect lands proposed to be acquired and to interview applicants. In October 1919 land at Milton (Heath Farm) 64 acres was acquired for £2550.00 and in December 69 acres in Shipton for £1900.00. By January 1920 214 Ex-Servicemen had been interviewed for land, 89 Civilians and 143 still remained to be seen. On 7th October 1922 Scheme 69 at Shipton had been agreed for 67 acres of pasture land of which A. E. Oliver was to rent 23 acres. Also Scheme 76 in which A. E. Oliver was to rent 33 acres of arable land. The agreement was to start from Michaelmas (29th September) 1921.

Thus began Bert's connection with Shipton. His pasture land was that behind Station Road Garage. The red brick and stone building on the northern side was his summer milking shed, whilst his arable land began at Judd's Grave and ran uphill on the west side of the Leafield Road. In the beginning the smallholding only consisted of land so Bert lodged with the



CONGRATULATORY
POSTCARD FROM
ALBERT OLIVER'S
COMMANDING OFFICER
ON HIS CONDUCT
WHICH RESULTED IN A
MILITARY MEDAL.



TWO OF ALBERT OLIVER'S MEDALS. THE THIRD WAS BURIED WITH HIS SON DAVID.

Hedges family in one of the houses in Swinbrook Road. He built a manger and rack for his horses under a tree in the field and all he could afford to buy was a plough which his son still has and a drag for cultivating the land. But in 1925 he and Hilda were married and able to move into their newly built house with associated buildings at Judds Grave Crossroads. Two of Bert's sisters, Matilda and Jinny, came and stayed whilst they helped him rebuild the wall all up the Leafield Road. The buildings consisted of a cowshed, a stable for two horses, a cartshed, barn and open fronted barn for cattle. Bert started with dairy cows. One of his first purchases costing just over £20 was a Jersey Shorthorn cross, a brindle cow. On 18th May 1927 he obtained from the Chipping Norton Rural District Council his Registration Certificate as a 'Cowkeeper, Dairyman and Retail Purveyor of Milk' and became one of six different farmers delivering milk around Shipton, first by bicycle, later by pony and trap. Bert's pony was named Topsy and he kept her until she was 35 years of age. He always said that she was his best friend. He also invested in poultry, in huts and wire pens erected up the Leafield Road above the buildings. The hen houses were 12 feet long, 6 to 8 feet wide with slatted floors and the hens could be fed from the outside. Bert and Hilda had three

JOHN OLIVER DRIVING
AND BERT BINDING CORN
IN 1961



sons, Alan who became a builder in Shipton, John who followed his father on the farm and David who sadly died at ten months old in the Radcliffe Hospital probably of pneumonia. Today Alan only has possession of two of Bert's medals. His Victory Medal was buried with baby David; as Bert said 'One medal for each of his sons'. On the Shipton photograph of the Local Defence Volunteers in the 2nd World War, Bert can be seen on the left hand side wearing the armband of a corporal.

And so from the killing fields of France and Flanders Bert moved on to the peace and quiet of his land in Shipton and spent the majority of his life there. Not long after his fiftieth anniversary on the farm, he died in 1972, aged 73.

I would like to thank the following people. John Oliver for introducing me to the documents relating to his father's service in the Great War from which this research commenced. Alan and Cynthia Oliver for showing me the medals and providing further information. The Archivists at the Worcestershire Regiment Museum Trust for helpfully sending copies of the War Diaries for 1918 and other information.

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The People of the Wychwoods in 1881

ANTHEA JONES AND SUE JOURDAN

What a surprising variety of Christian names there were in mid-Victorian England. Queen Victoria reigned from 1837 to 1901, and the Christian names in the Wychwoods are taken from the 1881 census enumerators' books. It is doubtful whether such variety would be found earlier in her reign in 1841, when the first detailed household enumeration was made, but when the Wychwoods project of computerising all the available census enumerators' books is completed, it will be possible to find out. The variety probably reflects the notable increase in schooling and literacy by 1881 though few of the children in school as a result of Forster's Education Act of 1870 would have reached the stage of parenthood ten years later. Some examples of 'literary' and unusual names were Selina, Clara, Priscilla, Blanche, Ivo, Marguerite, Rosanna, Clarissa, Carlton, Perceval, Barnwell, Thirsa, Tabitha, Rowell, Jarvis, Horatio, Escott, Nimrod, Letitia, Candace, Malinda, Levina, Shiprah, Kendrick, Rhoda, Ambrose, Vashti, Zilpha and Zeda. In Ramsden there were four Kezias. It is tempting to suggest that Bethnel was reminding his parents of conception at Bethnel Green; and would parents of an albino be so cruel as to name their daughter Albina? The fashion for two Christian names is also apparent, and Old Testament names like Lot, Noah, Eli and Absalom may reflect a familiarity with the Bible.

This study of the people of the Wychwoods in 1881 has been possible because of the efforts some years ago of many volunteers. In 1987, the Genealogical Society of Utah was granted a licence by Her Majesty's Stationery Office to transcribe and index the 1881 census. The purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) was originally to transcribe only those parts of interest to genealogists, but a full transcript was made a condition of the licence. From the census microfiches, 45,000 batches of printed copy were made and distributed to volunteer groups for transcribing, and then the material was entered in a computer database. Most of it was carefully checked, but inevitably not all. The History Data Service at the University of Essex acquired the published CD rom and worked on the data to produce an 'enriched' version which was also closer in format to the original census enumerators' books.



VIEWS OF LEAFIELD EARLY 1900s

The Wychwoods Local History Society bought the computer census material for the eight townships constituting the original parish of Shipton under Wychwood: Ascott, Bruern, Langley, Leaffield, Lyneham, Milton, Ramsden and Shipton, and this is a preliminary report on our study. The data has been supplied in the form of Excel spreadsheets so that several researchers in the Society can use it. The Society also purchased the rest of Oxfordshire and all Gloucestershire, and next it is intended to trace the 'Shipton' born (using the word when in inverted commas to indicate all eight townships), and see how far from their birthplace they were living in 1881.

First the computer files were checked against printed copies of the original books. The result was established that the transcripts and data entry were astonishingly accurate. Occasionally local knowledge has suggested a differing interpretation of a name, for example Hambridge should be Hambidge; Gillett should be Gilletts, Louch should be Souch and a number of Pratleys are read as Pretleys. These are relatively trivial errors and family historians would check a variety of spellings of a particular name. Two single entries were omitted, one in Ascott and one in Ramsden, and these have been inserted into our files. From this census information some of the structure of our eight townships has been analysed.

Few addresses within the villages were given in 1881. In Ramsden only Mount Skippet, Ramsden Heath and Brices Lodge Farm were listed separately from the village, while only the two pubs, the Swan and the

Churchill Arms, the Vicarage and the Station are defined within Ascott village. In Shipton the names of the farms, inns and mills and some individual house names like Rose Cottage and The Laurels were given. Many more areas of the village were defined in Leaffield with The Green, South and North of the Green, By the Pool, The Riding and Loughboro Riding, Purrence, Field Assarts, Parsons Row, Chimney End, Lower End and Witney Lane. Langley was simply Langley and Langley Farm. Milton was divided into The Green, Lower End, The Square, High Street, Frog Lane and a few named houses like The Elms and The Parsonage. Bruern lists Bruern Abbey, Grange and Farm and Grange Hill, Tangley Farmhouse and cottages. Lyneham is the only village where houses and cottages are actually given numbers, like 71 High Street and 90 Priory Cottages, as well as properties like Tithe Farm and Bruern Railway Cottages.

Population, ages and households

In the eight townships together there were 3413 people in 778 households.

TABLE 1 POPULATION

	ASCOTT	BRUERN	LANGLEY	LEAFIELD	LYNEHAM	MILTON	RAMSDEN	SHIPTON
Males	190	20	27	361	121	414	202	337
Females	211	22	23	350	94	422	231	387
Total	401	42	50	711	215	836	433	724

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF THE AGES

TOWNSHIP	UNDER 16		16 TO 65		OVER 65		TOTAL	UNDER 16
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE		
Ascott	84	100	96	101	10	10	401	46%
Buern	9	8	11	14	0	0	42	40%
Leaffield	162	139	174	178	24	34	711	42%
Lyneham	53	36	62	53	6	5	215	41%
Milton	181	172	208	223	25	27	836	42%
Ramsden	73	102	115	117	13	13	433	40%
Shipton & Langley	142	165	202	229	19	17	774	40%

Wychwoods households were not large, with the exception of a few notable 'big houses' like Shipton Court. The average is 4.4 people per household, probably a little larger than households were in the past. Nearly half of all households were of one, two or three people, and well over half had no more than four. Average household size is a crude

measure, but nonetheless gives an indication of the shape of households in the past. The Wychwoods households in 1881 are fairly typical of the mid-19th century, but perhaps marginally lower than the figures for the whole country calculated by Peter Laslet from the census reports.¹ The average began to decline quite sharply in the 20th century. The presence of resident servants together with greater numbers of children account for the larger households of the past.

TABLE 3 SIZE OF HOUSEHOLDS

TOWNSHIP	1-3	4-6	7-10	MORE THAN 10	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS
Ascott	36	35	12	2	85
Bruern	2	2	3	0	7
Langley	3	4	1	1	9
Leaffield	65	54	33	3	155
Lyneham	15	16	12	0	43
Milton	88	65	39	1	193
Ramsden	35	37	20	2	94
Shipton	62	60	26	4	152
All townships	306	273	150	13	742
%	42	37	20	2	

There was a scatter of large households throughout the Wychwoods, though less than 2% of households matched the 'folk memory' of large Victorian families. Shipton Court with 18 people in the house and some servants living round about was outstanding. In the house with Cecil Samuda on census day there was his wife Cecile and two year old son Cecil, together with visitors Francis and Jane Winnington and their year old daughter Frances. Staff of 12 included two ladies maids, one from Wales and one from Switzerland, and two 20 year old nursemaids, one from Berlin. It would appear that although the servants were not listed as visitors, the guests had brought staff with them. Next in size were three households of 12, two in Shipton and one in Ramsden.

In Shipton, William Maddox was a farmer of 640 acres on Shipton Downs, employing 14 men and eight boys and Revd Henry Barter aged 45 was at the Vicarage, with his occupation given as vicar farming 70 acres of glebe and employing four men and a boy. His household of 12 consisted of himself and his wife and three daughters aged 15, 11, and 4 years, his sister and six servants: a cook, a lady's maid, a nurse and a nursemaid and two housemaids. Interestingly the five vicars in the census all had servants (and where they had children they were all daughters!) and three of them had big households. In Ramsden, Revd Robert Lowbridge Baker, aged 50, rector of Wilcote and vicar of Ramsden lived with his wife, five daughters and five servants. Visitors increased the size of the household of the vicar

of Leaffield; on census day Revd Thomas Lee aged 46 had a household of 11 with his wife, Margaret from Scotland, and two daughters aged 9 and 4 with a governess, Emily Ward aged 31 who was a teacher of music, two visitors and four other servants. The two smaller vicarage households were in Ascott, where Revd Samuel York also aged 46 was living with his wife and two servants, and in Milton, where the unmarried Revd Alfred Deacon, aged 33 had one servant. The vicars were not generally local men. Revd Deacon was born in S America, Revd Lee in Wales, Revds Baker and York in Somerset and Revd Barter locally in Sarsden.

St Michael's School

All the population of the Wychwood villages lived in domestic households except the female staff and residents of the only institution, St Michael's School in Shipton, a college for young ladies. The Principal of the school was Miss Margaret Moore aged 36 from Ireland, with two assistant teachers, her cousin Ethel and Edith Heale both aged 20, and a 17 year old German girl, Clara Borries, as assistant. There were 18 pupils ranging in age from 11 to 17 including seven girls aged 15. Six pairs of girls have the same surnames so it would appear that there are six pairs of sisters. Only six pupils were born locally, in Chipping Norton and Over Norton. The rest of these 'pupils' would have widened the horizons of Shipton: the two Coates were from Hereford, the Todds from Bradford, the Simpsons from Warwick, the Sykes from Bristol, the Pages from Hay in Wales and the Wyndhams from Australia.

TABLE 4 HOUSEHOLDS WITH SERVANTS

TOWNSHIP	NONE	1	2	3	4+	HOUSEHOLDS WITH SERVANTS
Ascott	81	5	3			9%
Bruern	4	1	2			43%
Langley	8	2	0	0	0	22%
Leaffield	151	3			1	3%
Lyneham	39			2	2	9%
Milton	175	16	1		1	10%
Ramsden	87	5	0	1	1	7%
Shipton*	131	13	4	2	2	14%

*St Michael's School was not counted as a household.

One of the crude measurements used to show affluence is the numbers of resident servants in a household. Discounting the small communities of Bruern and Langley, Shipton had the highest proportion of households with servants. Milton had only one household with more than four servants: Robert Gorton, baker and grocer who employed two men who lived in, one of whom was an apprentice and the other a baker's assistant,

and two domestic servants; also in the household were Robert's wife Fanny, their two daughters, a son in law and a baby. So Milton would not be classified as an affluent community but nevertheless sixteen households had one servant: eighteen women and two men. Even Alfred Groves, the builder who employed '40 hands', lived in a relatively modest household with his wife, three sons and three daughters, his sister in law and one female servant. One other household, a tailor's, had a resident apprentice: William Keel lodging with Jane Carr whose husband was absent. No other village had apprentices listed.

Children

More than two thirds of all households (70%) had children, and 17% had more than four children.

TABLE 5 NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS

TOWNSHIP	NONE	1	2	3	4	5+
Ascott	31	15	8	13	5	17
Bruern	2	1	1	1		2
Langley	0	4	1	1	1	2
Leafield	47	26	25	11	13	33
Lynham	12	11	5	5	1	9
Milton	62	36	27	21	14	33
Ramsden	27	13	15	14	4	19
Shipton	49	32	16	23	13	19
Totals	230 (30%)	138	98	89	51	134 (17%)

At the other extreme, there were quite a few people living alone. It is a comment made about the modern situation that the number of single person households is increasing, but single person units were not unknown in the past. However, not many were young people.

TABLE 6 HOUSEHOLDS OF ONE PERSON

TOWNSHIP	HEAD MALE	HEAD FEMALE	TOTAL
Ascott	2	4	6
Bruern	0	0	0
Langley	0	0	0
Leafield	6	3	9
Lynham	0	0	0
Milton	8	7	15
Ramsden	5	3	8
Shipton	3	3	6

Just under 6% of households in the Wychwoods in 1881 consisted of one person. In this respect, Milton stands out as what might be termed a 'rural town'. A similar claim has been made in earlier accounts of Milton on the basis of the variety of occupations.² Seven women lived alone, all elderly, aged 69 to 82, all widows, and eight men, seven of whom were widowers, and one whose wife was not present. Someone living on their own, as today, could have found the closeness of neighbours, the number of small houses or cottages, and the facilities in the village street helpful. In Leafield three of the female heads were living alone, one, a 20 year old gloveress, Keziah Croxton, born in Taynton, and two widows of 67 years, Eliza Dore and Ann Wright.

TABLE 7 SURNAMES WITH OVER 30 INDIVIDUALS IN A COMMUNITY

TOWNSHIP	SURNAME	NUMBER	HOUSEHOLD HEADS
Ascott	Moss	62	14
Milton	Groves	35	7
	Miles	60	14
Shipton	Smith	49	11
	Longshaw	40	10
	Townsend	37	9
	Turner	31	7
	Rainbow	30	4
Leafield	Pratley	122	28
	Shayler	51	9
	Wiggins	41	7
	Ferriman	37	5
	Franklin	37	5
Ramsden	Dore	42	7
	Millin	35	7

This ignores, of course, the possibility that there were brothers and sisters, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles and cousins living nearby. In Leafield, no less than 122 people had the surname 'Pratley' – surely some of them related; there were also 26 Pratleys in Ascott in four households and 20 in Milton in five households. It was not uncommon for two families of the same surname to be living in the same place, and where the surname was a common one, like Smith, they were not necessarily related, though in Shipton there were 11 Smith families, in Lynham three, in Ascott four and in Milton eight. But the record of the Pratleys in Leafield, 62 people named Moss in Ascott in 14 households, and 60 in Milton named Miles, also in 14 households, point to local family networks. Moreover, it is not that the numbers of these names were the result of large numbers of children; only 17 Mosses were under 12 years old, and 21 Miles, so that much the larger number were of working age.

The 30 people in Shipton with the name Rainbow were in four large families. There were no such large surname sets in Lyneham; Bruern and Langley were too small to make a realistic statistic.

Birthplaces

The large number of people with the same surname is perhaps a sign of lack of mobility in the villages, another received impression of rural life in Victorian times. In Leaffield an astonishing 78% of the population was born in the village with 11 more born in Leaffield but living in nearby Langley. But in all eight communities there were inhabitants from all over Britain and from overseas too. Taking the Wychwoods townships together, the proportion born in the township where they were enumerated in 1881 is 58%; exactly half of this number were aged under 16 years and so probably living with parents. Adult mobility once children had been born was naturally rather hampered, but it is notable that half of those over 16 were living in their birth place (997 out of 1986). In a study of six Kent parishes south of the Medway, the proportion stated in four censuses, 1851 to 1881, to have been born in the parish in which they were living was 46%; of the returns which could be checked against parish registers, a very small number were not supported by the record.³ The concentration of particular surnames in a small area is a feature of even present-day England which is well-known to genealogists. David Hey has written a fascinating book, *Family names and family history* (2000), in which he demonstrates the local basis, often topographical, of certain surnames, and he refers to 'core families' of an area. The townships of the Wychwoods are relatively small, and if those born in an adjoining township were added to the immediate one, the local basis of many families would be even stronger.

TABLE 8 PERCENTAGE OF RESIDENTS LIVING IN PLACE OF BIRTH.

TOWNSHIP	BORN IN VILLAGE	AGED UNDER 16	TOTAL BORN IN VILLAGE	BORN IN VILLAGE %
Ascott	127		238	59%
Leaffield	257		557	78%
Lyneham	31		61	29%
Milton	263		490	59%
Ramsden	112		238	55%
Shipton	192		395	54%
Total	982		1979	58%

School children

Although provision was made in Forster's Education Act of 1870 for a school place to be available in every area, it was not compulsory to send a child to school, and a small fee was payable which poor families could be excused. Forster's Act introduced locally elected School Boards, which

reviewed the schools in their area and supplied 'the gaps' with non-denominational 'board' schools; because of the substantial efforts of church societies, both Church of England and Nonconformist, to build more schools in the earlier part of the century, there was no need for a 'Board school' in many places. In 1876, School Attendance Committees were instituted, with powers to compel attendance. Not until 1880, by Act of Parliament, was it compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 10 years to attend a school, at which age they could leave provided they had reached a certain standard. In the 1881 census, therefore, children aged 5 to 10 were returned as 'scholar'. The interesting point is how many over the age of ten had this designation and therefore were at school longer than was compulsory.

TABLE 9 SCHOOL CHILDREN

TOWNSHIP	AGED 3 TO 10 YRS	11 TO 13	OVER 13	Total
Ascott	85	26	5	116
Buern	3			3
Langley	10	0	0	10
Leaffield	125	27	6	158
Lyneham	37	9		46
Milton	166	33		199
Ramsden	71	12	2	85
Shipton	116	22*	12**	150

* plus 3 'pupils' of St Michael's School given as scholars

** plus 15 'pupils' of St Michael's School given as scholars

While the proportion of the population under the age of 16 was very large – nearly 50% – it was rare for a child of 13 or above to be at school. Some scholars were only 3 years old, but only four in Milton were aged thirteen and none older than this. All five children at school aged 14 in Ascott were girls, and two girls were aged 13. One boy in Lyneham was aged 13. Again the number of children at school over the compulsory age shows the relative affluence of Shipton.

One household, described as 'Milton schools', contained six residents: a certificated teacher was the head of the household with his wife and their two sons who were scholars; two women, aged 23 and 21, certificated schoolmistresses, were lodgers and boarders, born respectively in Wiltshire and Lincolnshire. There were two more teachers in the township, one man and one woman. Similarly in Shipton, in the school house near to the Vicarage there was the head of the school and certificated teacher John Pierce, who was born in Rye, Sussex, with his wife Emilie who was also a certificated teacher and Emma Thackthwaite, a school mistress. The Pierces had four daughters and a son aged between three and 13.

Enos Shaw was the school master in Leafield with two single women, Fanny Clark and Annie Goff, infants school mistress and assistant; both boarded with Mary Harding, a tea dealer. Fourteen year old Minnie Franklin, the daughter of the gamekeeper, was given as a school teacher and another 14 year old, Annie Shaw, was a monitress. In Ramsden Robert Vingoe was a teacher with sixteen year old Sarah Allen as monitress. There too Annie Pratley aged 19 was listed as a school teacher (unemployed).

Several of the school teachers were enumerators of the 1881 census and like the vicars tended to be a more mobile section of the population. The enumerator of Lyneham was the vicar of Milton.

TABLE 10 THE ENUMERATORS

TOWNSHIP	NAME	OCCUPATION	AGE	BIRTHPLACE
Ascott	William Perkins	Late victualler	39	Oxfordshire
Leafield	Enos Shaw	Schoolmaster	32	Yorkshire
Lyneham	Alfred Deacon	Vicar	33	South America
Milton & Bruern	Henry Hearne	Schoolmaster	28	Buckinghamshire
Ramsden	Robert Vingoe	Schoolmaster	25	Cornwall
Shipton & Langley	James Willis	Saddler	57	Oxfordshire

Women heads of households

Men headed most households but a number of women did as well. Unsurprisingly a number were elderly widows, that is aged over 65.

TABLE 11 WOMEN HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD

TOWNSHIP	AGED UP TO 65	OVER 65	TOTAL	WIDOWED	SINGLE	HUSBAND ABSENT
Ascott	13	2	15	12	1	2
Bruern	1	0	1	0	0	0
Langley	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leafield	15	7	22	16	6	0
Lyncham	1	0	1	0	0	0
Milton	25	13	38	29	5	4
Ramsden	1	3	11	6	1	4
Shipton	16	8	24	17	6	1

Milton had the highest proportion of households headed by women, 38 out of 193. Most of these were elderly, seven lived alone and five were paupers; but six were living on investment income. Amongst the younger widows, Sarah Wilkes was a charwoman aged 35 years maintaining a family of five children, the oldest of whom was eleven. The other women heads followed a variety of occupations. Two were laundresses, one with four children; one was an insurance agent, an occupation for a woman which may be thought unusual in Victorian England (her daughter was a

schoolmistress); four women described themselves as agricultural labourers (one was aged 69). A confectioner, glove stitcher and glove maker were also supporting households. Lyneham and Bruern each had just one woman heading a household. In Bruern she was returned as a farmer's daughter and was presumably well-to-do; she lived with her sister. In Lyneham the woman was a schoolmistress.

Ascott had 15 women heading households, and only two were elderly. Two were farmers; four had pensions (one from the Great Western Railway), and a nurse, a grocer, two gloveresses, an agricultural labourer's wife (husband perhaps living elsewhere), and a housekeeper made up the set. On the edge of Ascott but in Shipton parish, at Coldstone Farm, was Sarah Spencer, a widow aged 80 who was a retired farmer's wife, though she had her son, a retired maltster, living with her.

In Shipton, not all of the 16 female heads under 65 were given an occupation but of those that were, one was a grocer, two were farmers and one a laundress. Harriet Coombes, 56, was Shipton's Post Mistress with her 2 unmarried daughters in their twenties, Elizabeth and Harriet, as her assistants. The inn keeper of the Crown Inn was widow Ann Coombes, 61; her son W H Spencer, an unmarried jeweller age 31, lived with her. Those over 65 years included three unmarried women described as annuitants, meaning that they had a pension.

In Leafield, one of the four public houses, Royal Oak in Field Assarts, was also run by a widow, Harriet Holloway aged 59. There were also six elderly unmarried women as heads of households. The youngest, Elizabeth Wheeler aged 50 was a grocer and dressmaker, three had no stated occupation, one was a seamstress and one a gloveress. Lucy Hobley aged 51 farmed 100 acres in Witney Lane and had a household of seven but no children resident and Sarah Pratt, 65, lived 'south of the green' and farmed 97 acres. Mary Harding, a 62 year old widow, was a tea dealer at The Green.

In Ramsden, Eliza Fowdrey, aged 28, whose occupation was given as an agricultural labourer was head of the household as her husband was absent. She was looking after four children under six years. Julia Swinton, aged 69, was the only one to be said to be living on the interest of money. She had the one male servant, George Waller, aged 23, her coachman and two female servants. She was originally from Newcastle and had living with her an unmarried daughter and a visitor, Elizabeth Hood, aged 75, whose birthplace was given as Dumbartonshire, Scotland. She was the only visitor in the Ramsden census.

Self-sufficiency

The original parish of Shipton under Wychwood was very much an agricultural community in 1881 with the majority of men employed in agriculture. The large villages were still largely self sufficient communities with a variety of shops and artisans but signs of 'progress'



VIEW OF THE
STATION AND THE
CHURCHILL ARMS IN
ASCOTT.

were also present. The villages along the railway, Shipton, Bruern and Ascott, all had station and railway workers and a gas

man in Shipton indicates the presence of the gas works supplied by coal transported by rail. Each community also had occupations showing a local trait – four potters and a brickmaker in Leafield, three woodmen and a hurdlemaker in Ramsden as well as two families of plasterers. A gamekeeper and his assistant lived in Leafield. Milton had stone masons. The only general practitioner was Dr Sam Haigh aged 37 in Milton. Many households had more than one breadwinner with working wives and children. All the villages had women working as gloveresses. A sign of the modernisation of even the country districts by 1881 was a female insurance agent in Milton in 1881. A study of the occupations will be included in another article.

This article is an indication of some of the questions which can be answered about a community from a computerised data set from a census. The 1881 census has not yet attracted as large an amount of research as the 1851 census, which was the first set of enumerators' books with detailed information of interest to historians released for inspection under the 100 year confidentiality rule. There are many more aspects of Wychwood society which can be investigated from this 1881 computer database.

References

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2. See for example 'Honey Merchant and Tailor and other occupations in Shipton, Milton and Leafield 1785-1817'. *Wychwoods History* 13. p 28-45.
3. A. Perkyn, 'Birthplace accuracy in the censuses of six Kentish parishes, 1851-1881' in ed. D. Mills & K. Schürer, *Local Communities in the Victorian census enumerators' book* (Local Population Studies, 1996), pp. 229-245.

Tripping the Light Fantastic Toe: Traditional Dance Musicians of the Wychwood Villages

KEITH CHANDLER

Alerting the readership of Jackson's Oxford journal to the death of 'a well-known character' in September 1854, one correspondent wrote:

An eccentric character, well known as 'Old Brooks' the celebrated fiddler, was taken ill in Oxford about a fortnight ago, and was removed to the Workhouse, at which place he died on Sunday last, aged 74. The deceased had for the last forty years been in the habit of attending all the feasts and fairs in this and the adjoining counties, and as a musician few excelled him. Many years ago he practised as a miniature painter, and his portraits were distinguished for their fidelity and exquisite finish, but for a long time he abandoned that pursuit, and devoted himself exclusively to what appeared to be more congenial to him, an itinerant musical occupation.¹

A further contemporary account in the Oxford Chronicle reads:

'Old Brook', the celebrated fiddler, well known in the county of Oxford and the adjacent counties, who for upwards of 40 years attended the village feasts, &c., died in the Oxford workhouse, on Sunday last, aged 74, where he had been an inmate about a week. He formerly practised as a miniature painter.²

Wychwood historian John Kibble provides one of the clues necessary for identification. Writing of his home village of Finstock, he observed that:

In a tiny cottage at the bottom of Well Hill, part of what is now 'Stratford Cottage,' lived a Mr. Brook, who got his living painting miniatures and playing the violin. I have portraits of my grandfather and father which he painted on ivory. The latter was painted in 1826.³

The records of the City of Oxford Guardians of the Poor for 1854 reveal this man to have been Charles Brooks, whose death was recorded on 3 September.⁴ This musician and artist leaves no baptismal trace in the relevant register – at that date inhabitants of Finstock generally went to Charlbury for the purpose – but Thomas and David Brooks, sons of William & Susanna of Finstock, registered in 1780 and 1782 respectively,

may perhaps have been his brothers. In entries for seven offspring baptised at Charlbury – but while the family was resident at Finstock – Charles is designated as ‘painter’ in 1819, 1821, 1823, 1824 and 1826, and as ‘musician’ in 1820 and 1827.

He was absent from Finstock at the date of the 1841 census, and this may possibly be explained by the timing, taken as it was at the end of Whitsun week, when peripatetic musicians would have been especially active. It is possible that he was at Kirtlington, where until circa 1862 thousands of persons gathered to dance, sing, drink, eat and generally be entertained during the week following Whitsun. The enumerator at that place noted how, on the eve of the celebration in 1841 that:

There is a feast kept on Trinity Monday called a Lamb Ale which is supposed to have been held annually for upwards of 500 years which is always visited by Gipsys and People with Stalls.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO HAVE SLEPT IN:⁵

	Male	Female	Total
Barges, boats, etc	3	0	3
Barns, sheds & like	41	34	75
In tents or in the open air	42	34	86

In 1851 Brooks was already in Oxford Workhouse, although he is unlikely to have resided there on a permanent basis. His age was given in 1851 as sixty-five, birthplace as Witney, and occupation as ‘Fidler.’ At that date the brothers Thomas and David Brooks were living at Holton, to the east of Oxford City, which might explain why Charles ended his days in that particular workhouse, rather than one closer to Finstock itself.

In conjunction with Kibble’s evidence, the death notices offer two loose dates for musical activity. Attendance at ‘all the feasts and fairs’ is ascribed to ‘upwards of 40 years’, that is, from as early as the Napoleonic War period. And the exclusive devotion to music as a livelihood must have occurred after 1826, at least. His musical activity would have certainly encompassed playing for social, or country dancing.

Peripatetic musicians would follow one of a number of options to earn money at the feast days of benefit societies, the Whitsun ale gatherings, or on the occasion of a fair. A small number, such as George Broadis (circa 1820-1865), Edmund Warman (1824-1875), both of Brize Norton, and Edward Butler of Minster Lovell (1822-1892), owned a canvas marquee with wooden flooring on which dancing was performed.⁶ At Burford Statute Fair held on 9 October 1852, for example, the Banbury Guardian’s local correspondent wrote of how:

This town was a concentrated scene of animation on Saturday last, the first ‘Mop’ being held on that day. The weather was propitious, which induced numbers to enjoy the holiday. Dancing booths (and here the

commodious, well-conducted, elastic ‘deals’ from Brizenorton stand first), rare shows, and divers other enchantments to captivate the gay, were provided in profusion, and met with liberal support.⁷

Four years later, at the September Forest Fair in Wychwood the Banbury Guardian wrote that there were six dancing booths:

This famous holiday, on Wednesday, the 17th last, was attended by a greater assemblage of persons than ever...at a moderate calculation, at something like 40,000...Mr. Cooper estimates the number of stalls, &c., at 166, including bazaars, some of which were very large ones; beer booths, &c., 77 (in other years 109 or thereabouts); 14 shooting galleries; 4 swing-boats, or whirligigs; 6 dancing booths; 5 weighing machines; 4 ‘cheap Johns;’ 21 snuff-box, &c. throwing apparatus; 1 archery ground; 1 Punch and Judy; 16 shows; 7 tea-booths; 1 dioramic exhibition; and only 1 photographic tent.⁸

One or more of these are likely to have been the enormous London-based booths of the type regularly at St. Giles’ Fair in Oxford from 1823, at least. In that year Jackson’s Oxford Journal commented that:

...the grand attraction each evening was an immense booth erected in a close at the top of St. Giles’s, stated to be 180 feet long, and 50 feet wide, superbly illuminated with some thousands of variegated lamps, in different pleasing devices. It was stiled [sic] by the proprietor ‘Vauxhall Gardens, and Freemason’s Assembly Rooms’, and was large enough to admit of 600 persons to dance at one time, the band being placed in a gallery in the centre of the booth. Liquors and provisions of all kinds were served out in the anti-room [sic]; and the whole was conducted with the greatest decorum. The Magistrates kindly allowed the proprietor to stop an extra night, in consequence of which the room was lighted up again on Thursday evening, when an immense company of respectable persons again joined in this favourite and rational amusement. We learn that it is the intention of the proprietor of this Vauxhall in Miniature to attend Wychwood Forest Fair on Wednesday next, and to return to this city for the fair in St. Clement’s on the 26th instant.⁹

One such booth was later observed at the Forest Fair by Jesse Clifford, at an unspecified date following his move to Charlbury in 1842:

...the Vauxhall dancing saloon was there, with harps and violins, and when at night lit up with its 500 coloured lamps, looked splendid. It had a buffet for the sale of refreshments, and retailed its famous sandwiches at 30/- per lb.¹⁰

There is, however, no evidence that Charles Brooks ever owned such a booth, and it seems likely that he would have taken a more flexible option. One such was to arrange in advance with a publican at the celebration site, and play for dancing either inside or immediately outside their place of business. It was reported of activity at the Statute Fair in

Witney in October 1856, for example, that:

In the evening, the ruddy swain, and bonny lassie tripped the 'light fantastic toe' to the enlivening strains of the violin and tambourine, in the booths erected for the purpose, and at the various inns in the town.¹¹

The most casual of options was simply to turn up at a venue and hope to find either enough space to busk to a crowd, or to create an arena for public dancing, although the cacophony associated with such gatherings would have proven a hindrance. At the Wychwood Forest Fair held during September 1853, it was observed by the Oxford Chronicle how:

The ringing sounds of laughter and the buzz of conversation filled the air on all sides in cadences mingling with the boisterous din of the showfolks, the solicitations of the vendors of small wares, and the notes of the strolling musicians and ballad singers, the majority of whose ditties, whether joyous or lachrymose, formed a strange discord, above which the ear was assailed in never-ending iteration with the efforts used by a large proportion of the number for giving effect to the popular but somewhat unmeaning strains of 'Pop goes the weasel'.¹²

Writing of the village of Silverstone, Northamptonshire, during the first half of the nineteenth century, but more generally applicable across the whole of the south Midlands, the Reverend J.E. Linnell noted that:

The travelling fiddler was sure to turn up at the Feast; indeed, no holiday was complete without him and his instrument. He was the lineal descendant of the wandering minstrel of the olden time, but there was none of the romantic glamour with which imaginative writers have invested his ancestor about him. As a rule he was a ne'er-do-well with an inborn hatred of hard work and a love of rambling. He could accommodate himself to all circumstances. If there was no bed for him in the inn where he played for dancing, he would make himself comfortable in the stable. For that matter, he could sleep soundly enough in a dry ditch; it made little odds. His stock of tunes was usually limited, and included 'The Triumph', 'Hands Across' and 'Soldier's Glory'. He had a joke for every body – for women generally a tainted one. Altogether he was an utterly graceless rascal.¹³

The life choices of Charles Brooks, already quoted, whereby he 'devoted himself exclusively to what appeared to be more congenial to him, an itinerant musical occupation', clearly supports, in part at least, Linnell's assessment.

In addition to social dancing musicians were usually able to turn their hand to other dance forms requiring music for performance. One of these was the morris dance, practised extensively in the majority of the Wychwood communities up to the third quarter of the nineteenth century. A report in the Banbury Guardian on the Club Feast held at Leafield in 1852 notes that, 'Leafield and the neighbouring villages are and

have been long celebrated for their morris-dancers',¹⁴ and no doubt Finstock was one of the communities the correspondent had in mind.

A volume by Brydges and Haslewood published in 1814, and based on material gathered during the previous four years, reveals how:

At the village of Finstock, near Charlbury, Oxfordshire, the Morris is held by prescription, with a right of common, of a considerable extent, by the Forest of Whichwood. The young men and maidens claim the right of procuring from the forest as much materials for the bower, as, with the May-pole, they can draw away, always preserving leather harness for that purpose, and when the sports are ended the bower and May-pole are sold, and the money expended in malt, from which is brewed ale for the ensuing year.¹⁵

The clear implication is that this tradition extends back into the eighteenth century. Most often, bower houses consisted of foliate tree boughs roofing a wooden frame, under which the festivities, including morris and social dancing, occurred. At Finstock the temporary structure was erected on Well Hill, and was, according to one informant in 1894, 'A Large Affair'.¹⁶ Despite an absence of confirmatory evidence, it may be that Charles Brooks, on occasion at least, provided the musical accompaniment to dance performance at this venue.

Of the morris dance set at Finstock I have written elsewhere,¹⁷ and a comprehensive rehearsal of those data is not germane to the present thesis. It is necessary, however, to draw attention once again to an oral tradition current within the Dore family as late as 1990, which held that there had once been a morris dance set composed of six brothers from that family.¹⁸ The dating is ambiguous and said to have been at the 'time of the Huguenots,' so may have occurred elsewhere. Other than a stray illegitimate birth in 1698, the initial appearance of the Dore family in the parish registers is recorded in 1765. If this Dore set danced at Finstock there was only one set of brothers for whom this would have been a possibility. These sons of John and Martha Dore are listed below.

Name with date of birth and when aged 20

Thomas 1766–1786; John 1769–1789; Charles 1772–1792; James 1775–1795; William 1778–1798; Stephen 1783–1803; Richard 1786–1806

On age grounds, the first six named might have been active in 1801, when Thomas was 35 and Stephen 18; and the last six in 1804, when John was 35 and Richard 18. It seems possible, therefore, that there may have been a morris dance set based in Finstock and composed of the Dore brothers named above, perhaps during the first decade of the nineteenth century; coincident, in fact, with the information given by Brydges and Haslewood, already quoted.

Linnell observed how, 'In every village there are always families whose

delight it is to make melody on various kinds of instruments',¹⁹ and the Dore clan were certainly prominent among those living at Finstock. Unlike Charles Brooks, this family's music of choice was made on the pipe (known colloquially as 'wit' or 'whittle') and tabor ('dub'). The former had two holes on top and one below, and by a combination of fingering positions and force of breath expended through the mouthpiece a musical scale might be produced. The compass of this scale depended largely upon the talent and motor skills of the player, and this varied widely. From the hand or wrist which fingered the pipe a small, narrow tabor drum, generally covered with skin on either side, and sometimes with snare attached, was suspended. This was beaten in time to the music with a stick held in the opposite hand. The playing technique was a difficult one to learn, requiring absolute coordination, and not every player who charged money for accompanying dancing was of the highest proficiency.²⁰

Several sons of two of the Dore brothers named above as possible dancers were active in a subsequent incarnation of the Finstock morris set. Thomas Dore was father to Stephen (1803-1878) and John (1807-1884); and James Dore to James (1802-1853), Charles (1809-1882) and Stephen (1816-1880). One informant recalled a set of six Finstock dancers named as perhaps active during the eighteen fifties which included four men with this surname, namely Charles, Stephen, John and William, while a second Stephen Dore was given as pipe and tabor player for the set.²¹ The John Dore named as dancer may be synonymous with the man of the same name, said to have been 'of Finstock', who played pipe and tabor for the Shipton under Wychwood morris set, which was active into the eighteen fifties.²² Of the two Stephen Dores, the older seems the most likely identification for the musician. The evidence suggests that this instrumental combination became a less frequent accompaniment to morris dancing as the nineteenth century unfolded. Thus, the older a man, the more likely he was to have acquired skill as a pipe and tabor player.

Edwin Turner (born 1831), another man who followed his father into the morris team, later named 'Drummer Dore of Stonesfield' as a musician for the Finstock set.²³ The name sits firmly within evidence relating to Turner's claim to have travelled to London each summer for nineteen consecutive years, in order to take the earlier hay harvest. While there, he claimed, he and others gave performances of morris dancing in the streets, including the district of Clerkenwell. Although no specific dates were given, we may observe that one of his children was born in Kensington in 1869, while in early April 1871 he was absent from home when the census was taken. The following year Jackson's Oxford Journal reported that at a Petty Sessions held at Chipping Norton on 22 May 1872:

Edwin Turner, labourer, was summoned by Henry Hopkins, farmer, of Ascott under Wychwood, for absenting himself from his service on the 22nd April; Turner did not appear, and a warrant was issued for his apprehension.²⁴

Thus the period 1869 to 1872 may be suggested as dates when this activity occurred, probably towards the end of the sequence, as Turner would have already been aged forty-one at the latter date.

In all likelihood, 'Drummer Dore of Stonesfield' may be identified as James Dore, baptised at that village on 15 August 1802. He was the son of the James Dore already noted as a possible dancer in a set of brothers, who on the evidence of respective baptismal registers apparently lived in Stonesfield between 1800 and 1806, at least, before returning to Finstock by 1809. The elder James Dore lived to be ninety-two years of age, his burial taking place in Finstock on 10 February 1867, but his short spell of habitation at Stonesfield is unlikely to have earned him the epithet recalled by Edwin Turner. His son James undoubtedly moved to Finstock when his parents relocated between 1806 and 1809, and he was certainly a resident of the latter community from 1826 at the latest, and was so given at the baptism of his first son, Charles, in Charlbury on 26 March 1826. But during a period when most persons were more commonly known by a nickname, his birth at Stonesfield would have distinguished him from the other 'Drummer' Dores in the village. The younger James Dore preceded his father in death, his burial taking place on 25 May 1853, shortly after Whitsuntide.

Although Henry Franklin (born 1830) remembered James 'old Jim' Williams (c.1767-1846) playing the pipe and tabor to accompany the Leafield Morris Dancers,²⁵ by the time he himself joined that dance set, perhaps around 1850, the more usual musical accompaniment was the fiddle. 'Never had dub and whittle', he claimed, 'but a man once came over from Finstock named Dore who used to play it.'²⁶ Exactly which member of the Dore family this might have been, however, is not revealed, although Franklin would undoubtedly have known him.

One further player of the pipe and tabor remains to be examined, namely Thomas Langford, baptised at Charlbury on 18 March 1796, a son of John and Jane 'of Finstock'. On 21 January 1821 he married Charlotte Oliver, once again in Charlbury, though both were noted as belonging to Finstock, and his wife came from a family who were involved with the morris dance team. He was a man whose early life was spent as a labourer – he was so designated at the baptisms of eight children between 1821 and 1836 – and in the 1841 census was noted as 'Agricultural Labourer'. Ten years later he had become a 'Farmer of 4 acres', and in 1861 was enumerated as 'Landed Proprietor'. With holdings as small as four acres his elevation from the labouring ranks was modest, but significant. With the earnings gained from his musical activities and single daughters at home doing gloving out-work (in 1861 at least) added to the equation the family would probably have been relatively comfortable.

Recalling in 1894 details relating to the long-defunct morris set at Ascott under Wychwood, in which he had been a dancer for twenty years,

Benjamin Moss recalled that Thomas Langford had accompanied them on pipe and tabor.²⁷ Moss was born in 1826 and his two decade span of dance activity is likely to have encompassed portions of three decades, into the mid to late eighteen sixties. Indeed, the date Whit Monday 1864 was fixed in his mind as one of performance, possibly the final one; as was circa 1859, when the side received fourteen shillings and unlimited beer for both dancing and fighting one another at Pudlicote House for the entertainment of a group of gentlemen.²⁸ Thus by implication, Thomas Langford continued to play for morris dancing at least until a few years prior to his death in 1868.

As a rule, musicians hired out at a pre-negotiated rate. Interviewed again in 1911 Benjamin Moss recalled that Thomas Langford and Stephen Dore had played for them, but named no others, suggesting a musical association by both players with the Ascott Morris Dancers spanning two decades.²⁹ Dore, he claimed, had been a 'little bit covetious' in asking seven shillings a day for his services, but Langford 'was content' with five shillings.³⁰ Both men also played for the Finstock side, which was synchronously active with that of Ascott, at least into the eighteen fifties. We may suggest, then, that when one man was playing for the side from the home village, the other was out with the Ascott team, and vice versa. No doubt the reality was nowhere near as clear cut as this, and indeed, 'Drummer Dore of Stonesfield' must fit into the equation at some point prior to his death, immediately following Whit week in 1853, as may John Dore also. Just as the six men out morris dancing together on one day was not, for whatever reason, necessarily the same six men that turned out the following day, so too for the musicians, who moved from one village set to another as whim, family pressure or finance dictated.

During the nineteenth century many, if not all, of the Wychwood villages were home to a number of musicians who actively played for dancing in sundry forms. To cite merely a few in addition to those named in the text: James Williams' son John (1804-1866) and Charles Busby (c.1821-1902), both at Leafield, John Dix (1782-1855) at Field Assarts, William Ivings (1806-1894) at Spelsbury, and Thomas Humphries (1816-1888) at Hailey. But Finstock appears, on the surviving evidence at least, to have been the base for a greater number than any other.

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- 20 For an extensive discussion of pipe and tabor players see the 'Musicians' chapter of my 'Ribbons, Bells and Squeaking Fiddles'. *The Social History of Morris Dancing in the English South Midlands, 1660-1900* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, for the Folklore Society, 1993), especially pp. 173-179; republished, with minor textual emendations, on *Morris Dancing in the English south Midlands 1660-1900. Aspects of Social and Cultural History* (Stroud: Musical Traditions Records, 2002) MTCD250 [CD-ROM].
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- 23 English Folk Dance and Song Society, Camden Town, London, Cecil James Sharp MSS., field notebook (words) 2 (16 March-[blank] 1912), interview with Edwin Turner, Finstock, 5 April 1912.
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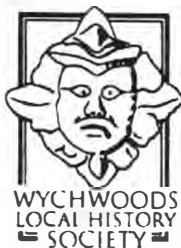
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Cover illustration: The formal garden across the ponds at Shipton Court which the Thomsons' peacock chose for his daily performance, c1920s.



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