

A HISTORY OF LAVENDON: A series of seven Newspaper Articles written in 1964 for the Bucks Standard Newspaper by Richard Britnell, now Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Durham and Fellow of the British Academy. Professor Britnell, a former resident of Lavendon, has kindly consented to the publication of these early articles on this website. His principal interest is in the economic and social history of Britain during the period 1000-1550. The Articles are illustrated with recent photographs by Nigel Stickells.

Week 1 - 17 April 1964

WOODS AND FIELDS

The village of Lavendon was founded on the bank of a stream that flows southwards from Northey Farm to the Ouse, creating here a hollow in the lie of the land. To the north was a spur of the great forest of Salcey, which stretched along the northern boundary of the county. Before the land was cleared for agriculture the whole of the northern part of the parish was woodland, to the south of which there was moor and heath. Threshire Wood, Park Wood and Tinick Wood are but shreds of the thick curtain of forest that once separated Lavendon from Bozeat and Harrold. From the eastern side the forest was eaten into by Snelson, from the north by Harrold, and from the south by Lavendon itself.



Fig 1 - Three Shire Wood is viewed here from the Forty Foot Lane, now the Three Shire Bridleway. Another bridleway, ahead, skirts the southern edge of Three Shire Wood and, at the time of the Enclosure Award in 1802, was described as a private wood road and extension of the then Castle Lane from Lavendon.

In 1806 every manor in Lavendon had woodland, and there was pannage for large herds of swine. Clearing of the forests continued into the Middle Ages: before 1227 Lavendon Abbey had been given “Hiltbeya’s assart” and another assart unnamed. But hunting rights were too highly valued for the woods to disappear unchecked. Forest law was enforced from time to time to safeguard royal rights, and in the twelfth century part of the forest was called the “king’s wood”. In the 1270’s though, the *quo warranto* inquests brought to official notice the extent to which the King’s rights had been disregarded in Lavendon and Brayfield. John Peyvre, of the Castle, and John de Beauchamp had parks in Lavendon, Henry de Norwich had a park “at Waterhall”, and Reginald de Grey, not satisfied with his park and warren at Snelson, had recently made himself another in Abinton (part of Brayfield). The Castle Park, from which we have the name Park Farm, had been created by the de Bidun family at least as early as the mid twelfth century.

The last wood clearance of any great extent was in the later nineteenth century, when Causeley Wood disappeared from between Park Wood and Harrold Road. Until the last century Park Wood was called Gusset Wood, perhaps from the name of Adam Grosset, a fourteenth-century tenant of the Castle. Threshire Wood, so called because of the counties of Buckingham, Bedford and Northampton meet there, was once Tinick Wood (meaning “Ten Oaks Wood”), a name which occurs in a charter of 1227 as “Tynnokeswade”. Snip Wood was Snypwode (perhaps meaning “Snipe Wood”) in 1323.

Material at hand does not allow for much of an account of the village field system before the seventeenth century. There is a hint in the Abbey’s confirmation charter of 1227 that Lavendon then had a two-field system. In the seventeenth century there were five open fields, but one of these was no more than a latish continuation into Lavendon of Brayfield’s Water Field, known in Lavendon as Brayfield Field (Brayfield Side 1802). Of the other four, one south of the village was called Mill Field in 1607, Nether Field in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and Lower Field in 1802. West of the village was Windmill Field, to the north was Causeley Field, and in the north-west corner of the parish, between Windmill Field and Causeley Field was Tinick Field (Upper Field, 1802). By the end of the Middle Ages much of the parish stood outside the open-field system. Beyond Causeley Wood and Snip Wood, Snelson may once have had open fields of its own. Elsewhere there were ancient enclosures representing land cleared of woods, as at Lavendon Park, where twenty or so tiny enclosures were to be seen in 1802. Other blocks of ancient enclosures, around the Castle, the Abbey and Uphoe, were enclosed demesne: at Uphoe land had also been reclaimed from Snip Wood. Though the parish waited until 1801 for its Enclosure Act, the parish was by then already enclosed, at least in part, by private agreement, though this was recent. The likelihood is that the stimulus to enclose the open field came most strongly from the Farrer family, whose share after enclosure comprised practically the whole of Causeley Field and a large chunk of Windmill Field.



Week 2 - 24 April 1964

LAVENDON BEFORE DOMESDAY BOOK

The archaeologist's trowel has much to discover about Lavendon's early history, for little time has been spent on it so far. Although the ancient Forty Foot Lane passes through the parish, by the Mill, Lavendon Grange and Tinick, no definite remains are associated with it in Lavendon, despite Ratcliff's rumour that Roman coins have been found near the Grange. The only certain Roman find from the parish a coin of the usurper Allectus (293-296) has come from the centre of the village, less than a hundred yards from the church.



Fig 2 – The ancient Forty Foot Lane heads northwards towards the now ruinous Tinick Farm and the Tinick or Three Shire Woods beyond, visible on the skyline to the right.

An Anglo-Saxon patriarch is commemorated in the name Lavendon, which is believed to mean “Lafa’s Valley”. Scandinavian elements in Brayfield place-names and the possibly Scandinavian “Snell” of Snelson (“Snell’s homestead”) suggest that these were later satellites of Lavendon village. Certainly Lavendon existed before Newton Blossomville. “Lauuendene” in Domesday Book describes not only the present parish (since it includes the areas occupied then or later by Brayfield, Abinton and Newton Blossomville as well), nor a single manor (since it had ten), but an early unit of taxation, assessed at the round figure of twenty hides. As late as 1279, administrative conservatism was such that Brayfield was still included with Lavendon in the Hundred Rolls.

MEDIEVAL LAVENDON

On its ten manors the Domesday “Lauuendene” had twenty-four villeins, thirty-four bordars and eight slaves, though three manors had no villains and one of these had no tenants at all. Three sokemen held a small manor from the Bishop of Coutances. The Hundred Rolls of 1279 record five unfree cottars at Snelson “each of whom holds two and a half acres” and another five at the Castle “each of whom holds three acres”, more services being demanded from the Snelson cottars than from those at the Castle. These are the only unfree tenants we hear of in Lavendon or Brayfield. If the Hundred Rolls were to be trusted they would indicate a marked decrease in the number of unfree tenants, but everything points to the fact that their information about Lavendon is incomplete. It is hard to believe that there were no more than 450 acres of arable land in Lavendon and Brayfield in 1279.



Fig 3 – Lavendon Castle: some of the Castle earthworks have been built over in more modern times. However, those earthworks that enclose the three baileys are especially prominent, one example of which as shown here on a frosty morning.

In 1279 there was demesne at the Castle, Snelson and Waterhall (in Brayfield), though the areas given (20, 80 and 15 acres respectively, excluding land held by villains) must be underestimated. Lavendon lords had valuable hunting and fishing rights, the latter being a constant source of litigation. There was a mill belonging to Castle Manor in 1086, perhaps the one which stood at the bathing place due south of the village, later known as Page Mill. At Snelson too there was a mill at least as early as c1150, and in c1323 there were two. The present Lavendon Mill belonged to

Lavendon Abbey, and was one of the Abbey buildings scheduled for repair in 1482. It was still called the Abbey Mill in the seventeenth century.

Of Lavendon's medieval manors the largest was the Castle Manor, which in 1086 had a demesne of two teamlands worked by seven villains, six bordars and three slaves. The castle was perhaps constructed in the late eleventh century by the Bidun family, who made their Lavendon manor the administrative centre of their barony. Since it was a small, private castle it makes few appearances in the records, but it entered into the national defence system in 1193 when Richard I was threatened by the rebellion of his brother, John. In that year twenty loads of wheat were paid for by the Exchequer "to maintain Lavendon Castle". In later years the estate split up, the castle itself held after 1250 by the Peyvre family from the heirs of William Briwerre, to whom the barony was granted in 1204.



Week 3 - 1 May 1964

MEDIEVAL LAVENDON (cont)

Snelson was another important manor, held in the twelfth century by the de Lega family of Thurleigh and later by the de Greys from the barony of Odell. The name first occurs as "Senellestuna" about the year 1160, when its boundary reached the woods in the north of the parish. In the following century Snelson was described as a "vil". The nucleus of Uphoe Manor was held in the thirteenth century from the Earls of Huntingdon, but the manor was built up by the de Norwich family by the acquisition of freeholdings on other manors. Lavendon Abbey held land from the Castle, Snelson, Waterhall and the Earls of Huntingdon. Another small estate was held in 1279 by John de Beauchamp from the Wakes, its manor house being possibly on the site of Park Farm.

Lavendon Abbey was a small house of Premonstratensian or White Canons (priests, not monks) situated in the extreme west of the parish. Its numbers probably never rose much over thirteen, the minimum number for such a foundation. Halnath de Bidun of Lavendon Castle was an enthusiast for monasticism, and had connections with Peter de Goxhill, founder of the first Premonstratensian house in England. In the years between 1155 and 1158, perhaps immediately after his father's death, John de Bidun founded Lavendon Abbey. The site chosen was beside the Forty Foot Lane, "adjacent to Warrington". Despite the imposing array of gifts to the Abbey which was confirmed by King Henry III in 1227, the problem of poverty always hampered it. Even in Lavendon the Abbey can have no more than a couple of hundred acres, though the Abbot said in 1339 that "he and his predecessors time out of mind have been accustomed to hold a leet at Lavendon of divers of their tenants of that town". Unsuccessful legal actions deprived the Abbey of several churches with which it had been originally endowed, Lavendon and Lathbury churches being the only two retained, although it later acquired the churches of Brayfield, Aston (Northamptonshire) and Shotteswell (Warwickshire). Lavendon Church was given by Hugh de St Medard in the late twelfth century, and a vicarage was instituted early in the thirteenth century by Bishop Hugh of Lincoln. In 1231 the Abbot was instructed to provide a chaplain to officiate in St Mary's Chapel at the Castle. Of the two

attempts to found cells at Lavendon Abbey, one (at Blackwose in Kent) was taken out of the Abbey's hands because it was too far away to be properly supervised, and the other (at Holme Lacy in Herefordshire) was never put into effect.



Fig 4 – West of Lavendon Grange and Abbey and to the side of the ancient Forty Foot Lane is a piece of land mentioned in the confirmation charter as having been given to the Abbey by Ranulf Earl of Chester in the 12th century. The earthworks here include three former fishponds, one with a large island.

There is no evidence that the Abbey ever did anything to improve the world, and the few known anecdotes suggest the contrary. Simon de Norwich claimed in 1339 that when recovering some distrained cattle Abbot Richard and his friends led the canons into attack, “broke down his close, houses and doors there, assaulted him, carried away his goods and assaulted his men and servants”. If the Abbey was vicious in its later years this was not the result of excessive wealth, for the total revenue in 1536 was less than £80. Poverty must have been the main reason why the Abbey buildings were in ruins in 1482, and again in 1535 in spite of Bishop Redman’s three-year plan of reconstruction (1482-5). Neglect of the buildings was accompanied, however, by violation of the Rule. At the end of the fifteenth century canons were found to be staying in bed when they should have been up for Matins, and many spent their days in gambling and playing tennis. They wore their tunics above their knees. Two canons were convicted of wenching in 1491, one of them being John Hulle the sub-prior, who suffered no punishment. Hulle was not taken in hand until 1494, having by then repeated his original offence and followed it up with an attempt to poison the Abbot. The improvement recorded in 1500 probably did not last, and nothing was lost when the Abbey went in 1536. William Calys, the last Abbot, was compensated with a pension of £12.

Week 4 – 8 May 1964

MODERN LAVENDON

When Lavendon Abbey was dissolved in 1536 and its possessions secularised, a new manor was born, Lavendon Grange, or Lavendon Manor (so-called because royal documents would naturally refer to it as “our manor of Lavendon”). Since its lands had been monastic the Grange paid no tithes, “only three pence half penny per annum as an Easter offering”. The owner of Lavendon Grange had privileges in the parish church even after the advowson had been sold in 1632-3, and though a newcomer in Lavendon’s social hierarchy he adopted the title “Lord of Lavendon”. Unlike Brayfield, however, Lavendon never came to be dominated by a single family. Amongst the Farrer family’s papers is a mid-eighteenth century memorandum that “In the parish of Lavendon are four Manors”, Snelson, the Castle, the Grange and Uphoe. Court rolls of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries survive for all four. From 1537 to 1788 Snelson and the Castle were combined in the same hands, and a single court was held for the two of them at least for the latter part of this period. In 1798 the Farrers bought the Castle, having already acquired Uphoe in 1719, and they remained lords of both manors until the 1920’s.



Fig 4 – The Old George House is a former public house in Lavendon High Street.

According to the ecclesiastical census of 1563 Lavendon then had thirty-five families. By 1851 the population was 755, and though it rose rapidly to 916 in 1871, it soon declined thereafter until in 1951 it was 581. In 1854 Lavendon had nine bakers, two shopkeepers, a maltster, a butcher, a blacksmith, a carpenter, a

shoemaker, a mason, a wheelwright and a flour-dealer. John Perry was miller at Lavendon Mill. The village had all its three public houses the George, the Horseshoe and the Green Man, at least as early as the end of the eighteenth century, if not sooner. Part of the Green Man is dated 1678.

The system of parish governments created by the Tudors and Stuarts has left no early records in Lavendon, but there are account books dating from the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries which show how things worked under the pressure of economic crisis and the Napoleonic War. At that time parish affairs were in the hands of small landowners, tenant farmers and the wealthier tradesmen, subject to the supervision of JPs. Such “substantial householders” were Thomas Gent, owner of Northey, William Bithrey, tenant of Snelson, Uriah Clayson, shopkeeper, Thomas Crouch, landlord of the George, and John Billing, farmer and village butcher, who was churchwarden from 1772 till his death in 1819. Two churchwardens, two overseers of the poor, two surveyors of the highways and two constables were elected by the Vestry annually. The pressure on the overseers of the poor became so great, however, that in 1796 and fairly frequently thereafter, three were appointed, and after 1804 two assessors of taxes were annually elected to relieve the overseers of this duty.



Week 5 - 15 May 1964

The number of paupers receiving weekly pensions rose from 18 in the last week of the year 1769 to 86 in the same week of the year 1800. The overseer's expenditure rose by seven or eight times, from an average of £170 a year (1769-78) to £791 a year (1829-34), almost all this money being raised by the village ratepayers. The workhouse which still stands (having been converted to a private house) was in Castle Road. It was kept for the destitute, especially infirm women, who made lace and knitted goods for sale, their profits being £60 for a year's work in an exceptionally good year. Men were employed on the roads by the surveyors, or else, after the 1780's, were sent to farmers in the parish for employment, their wages being subsidised by the parish. Inevitably under such a system there was terrible hardship, and some overseers were hard of heart. John Lambert, for instance, stopped the pension paid to William Berrill, aged seventy-nine, on the grounds that he was “constantly at work on the highway and earns his full money” and he noted that he had “sent a shirt to Richard Webb aged 90, perhaps the last he may trouble the parish for”. Bearing in mind, though, that poor-relief was paid for by those who administered it, it is surprising that things were not even worse. The individual overseer was not a law unto himself; any difficult or expensive case was handled by the Vestry. A select Vestry of twelve “for the concerns of the poor” was set up before 1822 in accordance with the Act of 1819, and it continued to meet until 1835. At Christmas, 1835, Lavendon lost its autonomy in Poor-Law administration when it became a member of the Newport Pagnell Union. The remaining civil powers of the Vestry survived until the Local Government Act of 1894, when they were taken over by a Parish Council.



Fig 5 – Lavendon Mill, in flood, where John Perry was the miller and his friend John Newton, Curate of Olney 1764-80, held services.

A sense of social responsibility was encouraged by the religious upheaval of the late eighteenth century, which coincided with the period of agrarian revolution and chronic economic distress. John Billing wrote a poem with the burden that the prosperous “should relieve the poor”. Olney was then a great evangelical centre, and the celebrated John Newton (Curate of Olney 1764-80) was a friend of John Perry the miller. Newton used to hold services at Lavendon Mill, and John Billing’s memoranda in the churchwarden’s account book suggest that he for one came into contact with the Olney movement. Evangelicalism in the Established Church went hand in hand with Olney’s Nonconformist revival under Mr Hillyard (with the Independents, 1788-1828) and the Rev Sutcliff (with the Baptists, 1775-1814). Although at Lavendon there may well have been a long tradition of dissent, the Olney revival stimulated Lavendon Nonconformity into a new lease of life.

By 1830 Lavendon had two hundred Independents (Congregationalists) and twenty Baptists. Families which had provided churchwardens in the eighteenth century and then fallen under Newton’s spell (Parris, Perry, Billing) were staunch supporters of the Nonconformist cause after 1840. About the year 1840 the Baptists and Congregationalists combined to construct a meeting house out of two old cottages, and this building was crammed several times every Sunday until the present Union Chapel was built in 1894-5. The old meeting house still stands on the square, adjoining the Chapel. The Chapel always relied on visiting preachers, but close links were preserved with the Olney chapels; the Olney Baptist minister and Congregationalist minister visited Lavendon alternately each month to “preach and

observe the Lord's supper" till into the present century. In 1927 a Deed of Church Government and Fellowship was drawn up, reaffirming the Chapel's evangelicalism, and a Trust Deed provided for the appointment of twelve trustees. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century a brick chapel was built by the Primitive Methodists, after considerable exertions to raise the money for it. It relied on circuit preachers. But this chapel gradually lost its congregation to the Union Chapel after 1895 and the Bedford Circuit eventually sold the building.



Fig 6 – The Lavendon Union Chapel built in 1894-5.



Week 6 – 22 May 1964

One important result of the religious revival was the new emphasis which came to be placed on education. In the past “schooling” had been virtually an equivalent word for “apprenticeship” and when an overseer paid sixpence in 1799 for “a Gairl Schooling” she was being taught to make lace and earn her own living, not to study books. The same thing is to be understood of the Select Vestry’s resolution of 1833 “that Mr Cumberland be allow’d 2s. per week for keeping a school 3 hours in the winter and 4 in the summer from 1 o’clock”. The first sign of education in the modern sense is found in churchwarden’s account book. In 1793 William Goodwin, who was parish clerk of Brayfield, was paid a guinea “for two years’ teaching the children on Sundays”. The Chapel in turn subscribed to a Writing School 1840, and employed William Steff as schoolmaster from 1840 to 1847 at thirty shillings a quarter. By 1854, however, part of the present school was already in use as a National School

under the trusteeship of the rector and churchwardens. The infants' room was added in 1875, partly with money from the Parliamentary Grant for education set up by the Act of 1870. Since 1905 the building has been let by the trustees to the County Council for a rent of five shillings.

In the twentieth century ease of communications has revolutionised village life. The smithy, which joined the Chapel, is now an outhouse, and the nearby wheelwright's yard was transformed into a garage and workshop by Mr Frank Lay in answer to mechanisation of agriculture and road transport. Fewer men work on the land than a century ago, and the majority have to travel outside the village. No longer are there maltsters and bakers in the village; the malthouse near the church was demolished when the road was widened. There is a closing shop in Olney Road belonging to W Botterill and Son Ltd., of Bozeat, which has an average of thirty employees. There are two stores in the village, of which one is also the Post Office, and Mr E. J. Lay's butcher's shop. Mr J. F. Lay has a small builders business in Northampton Road.

The present century has seen a fair amount of new building, especially in the Olney Road where the R.D.C. has built the new estate. The number of new houses will increase in the near future, even though building permission is tightly controlled to prevent obstructing main road traffic. Modern traffic in fact, is likely more than anything else to affect future development. The centre of the village is potentially an accident black-spot, although the road was widened in 1954 and plans have already been proposed for the construction of a bypass at some time in the future.



Fig 7 – St Michael's Parish Church dates from the mid-eleventh century. The plaque on the boundary wall opposite records the road widening in 1954.

BUILDINGS

Parish Church.

The architectural history is of three main stages:

1. In the mid-eleventh century the lower three stages of the tower, the nave and the western half of the chancel were built. (N.B. herringbone work in the tower, the tower arch, the uncovered window above the pulpit in the N wall of the nave).

2. In the mid-thirteenth century the aisles were added and the chancel lengthened. (N.B. the grotesque heads above the columns of the S arcade, c1230, the early English lancets in the chancel, and the north and south doorways).

3. In the late-fifteenth century both porches, the clerestory and the top stage of the tower were added and the large windows in the aisles inserted. The south porch was originally of two storeys; the staircase (entered through a four-centred arch beside the font) is blocked. The font is also of this period.

The east window was erected c1390. The pulpit is of the seventeenth century and the bishop's chair is of the early eighteenth. The chest still contains parish records, including the registers, which begin in 1574.



Fig 8 – The moated Uphoe Manor was acquired in 1719 by the Farrers.

Earthworks.

The earthworks at Lavendon Castle, which had a motte and three baileys, are in good condition still. The motte (on which the farmhouse stands) is low, and its

defences are now hard to distinguish on the southern side. The earthworks of Lavendon Abbey are still undisturbed. There is a circular moat around Uphoe Manor, and indications that it was at one time more extensive. Until recently Park Farmhouse was also surrounded by traces of a moat; it was most marked behind the house, where it contained water.



Fig 9 – Earthworks and Moat at the former Lavendon Abbey.

Later Buildings.

The old part of Lavendon Grange was begun by Robert Eccleston in 1625-6, but considerable extensions have been made since. Behind the Grange is a seventeenth century outhouse with a large open fireplace. The core of Uphoe is also of the seventeenth century. Some impressive oak beams were exposed during recent alterations there. The village itself contains a number of seventeenth century buildings. The Green Man has the date 1678 on one part of the building, but the main structure is probably a little earlier. The thatched cottage opposite the church at the end of Castle Road is of this date, and there is a house in the Northampton Road with the date 1690. From the nineteenth century date the Rectory (1839), the Schools (the two senior rooms c1850; the infants' room 1875), and the Union Chapel and Schoolroom (1894-6).



ARCHAEOLOGY

Roman: A double denarius of Allectus (293-296) was found in the garden of 1 Castle Road in 1962 by W. J. Britnell. It is of London mintage, and the reverse has Laetitia with the inscription “LAETITIA AVG”. It is now in the writer’s possession. What would appear to be pieces of Roman tegulae were found during the recent roadworks on the Northampton Hills (Grid Reference SP912539) but they were with medieval pottery. Otherwise Lavendon’s rumoured Roman finds are unverified. Ratcliff reports Roman coins having been found near the Grange, but his lack of precision suggests that he had not seen them.

Medieval: From the Castle is recorded the discovery of “various coins and counters” (Ratcliff) and the matrix of a fourteenth-century seal (T. Wright, “Town of Cowper”). The latter, of which a description was sent to the Royal Archaeological Society, was circular with a diameter of an inch. “In the centre there is a head seen full-face, possibly intended to represent the Saviour or the head of the Baptist. It is surrounded by four small busts, the faces in profile, each turning in a different direction from that placed opposite. The inscription is in English: “NON SWILK AS I” (Not such as I). The whereabouts of these finds has not been traced. From the site of the Abbey are recorded Early English, as well as Roman, coins and Nuremburg counters (Ratcliff) and ten skeletons in perfect condition (Ratcliff). What became of them is not said. An alabaster statuette (without head) ... is now in the vestry of the parish church. There is a carved stone in the wall of Lavendon Grange in front of the house. The remains of a fifteenth century mortar, some pillar bases and other worked stones have been kept at the Grange by Mrs Hartigan. Ratcliff records the discovery in 1869 of a “gold epaulet” on the Northampton Hills by Edward Panter and his companions. Its present whereabouts is unknown. During the recent roadworks on Northampton Hills a large amount of medieval pottery (St Neots Ware) was found, much of which was moved up to the fields above Lower Farm with the topsoil.

Modern: Cannon balls are said to have been found at the Castle (T. Wright “Town of Cowper”). A cannon ball believed to be from Snelson is now the property of Lavendon School. From time to time are found specimens of the trading token issued by Edmund Baltswell, baker, c1655. On the obverse they have the baker’s arms and “EDMOND BALTSWELL”; on the reverse is the monogram “EAB” and the legend “IN LAVENDON BUCKE”.

