

Aspects of Burton Overy



Edited by
Joan Stephens

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Introduction

The history of Burton Overy certainly goes back to Norman times, and probably beyond. The village is set in a hollow amongst trees, some two kilometres from the A6 Leicester to Market Harborough Road. It was designated as a Conservation Area in 1974.

In the year 2000, within the civic parish it has a population of 293 living in 129 households, eight working farms, a post office, a pub (The Bell), a village hall (in need of radical restoration), and a thriving church community based around St. Andrew's Church.

This brief history of the village, undertaken to mark the new Millennium, spans many different aspects of life in this small Leicestershire village over the past 1000 years, and records some of the changes which have taken place.

As one village resident wrote in her diary mid-way through the twentieth century: "In spite of all the changes, Burton Overy is a green and pleasant village". Her comment remains true today. It is the earnest hope of those fortunate enough to live there, that it will remain true not just 100 years hence, but in another 1000 years too.



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The editor and writers involved in producing *Aspects of Burton Overy* have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the facts, figures and quotations it contains. There are inevitably omissions, for which we apologise, but hope the book will be read and accepted in the spirit of goodwill in which it has been compiled.

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1

In the Beginning...

The land

How the village got its name

The village we know now as Burton Overy had several names: in the Domesday survey it is called Burtone, in the Leicestershire survey of the 12th century it is called Bicton, and in the 13th century it was called Burton Noveray.

The Overy part of the village's name derives from de Noveray, the name of a family associated with the village in the 13th century. Burton means fortification. At one time it was thought that the area known as The Banks was a "simple defensive enclosure" (*Victoria History of the Counties of England – Leicestershire*, 1907 edition), thus explaining the name, but it is now identified as "the earthworks and buried remains of two medieval manorial fishponds and medieval garden remains", and is a scheduled Ancient Monument (see Appendix).

Valuable meadowland

The *Domesday Book* (1086) was a survey for tax purposes and records Burtone as being held by Hugh de Grentemaisnil (also Grandmesnil or Grentmesnil), one of William the Conqueror's trusted lieutenants at the invasion of 1066. By 1086, Hugh de Grentemaisnil was the biggest landowner in Leicestershire. In Burtone, his assets are listed as:

12 carucates of land at Burtone
This land is for 8 ploughs.



Remains of medieval works showing in the north eastern part of the village under snow, with The Elms on Elms Lane in the centre. Taken December 1981 (courtesy Jim Pickering)

In the demesne there are 3 ploughs and 8 serfs
 And 15 villeins and 6 socmen with
 5 bordars have 6 ploughs.
 There are 14 acres of meadow.
 It is worth 4 pounds.
 Now it is worth 6 pounds.

A carucate was about 120 acres, so 12 carucates was about 1,440 acres. The working population of the village was 34. The principal groups forming peasant society were all represented in Burtone. In Leicestershire as a whole, serfs made up 6.5% of the population, villeins 41%, socmen 30%, and bordars 21%.

We also see that Burtone had 14 acres of meadow. In medieval England meadowland, which must have a good water supply and good drainage, was very precious because of a general shortage of animal feed and the need to have grazing for the oxen which pulled the ploughs.

Landed gentry and manor houses

At the death of Hugh de Grentemaisnil, Burtone passed to Robert Meulan and then, from 1125 to 1144, to his son, Robert Earl of Leicester. Burtone remained with the Earls of Leicester until 1204, when the last Earl, Robert Fitzpennell, died without heir and Burtone passed to his younger sister, the wife of the Earl of Winchester. At her death, the manor of Burtone passed to her son, and formed part of the Winchester estate. The de Noveray family may have been under-tenants of the Earls of Winchester, not the Earls of Leicester.

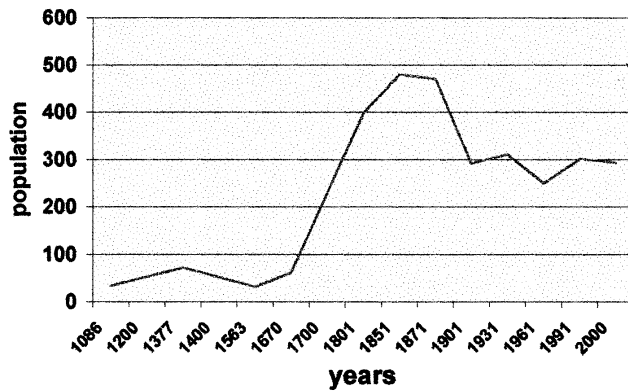
Burtone actually comprised two manors, probably deriving from the two houses Hugh de Grentemaisnil is recorded as owning in 1086. One, originally known as the de Noveray Manor, but later as the Pulteney Manor, was tenanted by Robert de Noveray, probably from the Winchester estate. This was prior to the partition of the estate in 1277, when the de Noveray Manor and the other manor, later known as the Ferrers Manor, were allotted to two sisters. The de Noveray Manor went to Elizabeth, wife of the Earl of Buchan, and the Ferrers Manor went to Margaret, wife of the Earl of Derby.

The de Noveray Manor descended from the Earls of Buchan to the Beaumont family in 1308: the de Noverays were probably the Beaumonts' tenants in demesne. By 1409, the de Noverays had lost control of the manor, which passed to the Walsh family until 1526, when it passed to Sir Thomas Pulteney of Misterton, a former Lord Mayor of London, and the husband of a Walsh daughter. By 1605, the manor was held by Francis Hodges and was sold in 1618 to John Nedham. By 1724, the manor had passed to Sir Geoffrey Palmer – the Palmers remained lords of a manor in Burton until 1877.

The Ferrers Manor was originally held by the Ferrers family, and then passed to the Greys of Groby. The Greys probably retained it until 1554, when Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, was executed for treason. His property, including Burton, became forfeit to the Crown, though the Earls of Stamford, descendants of the Duke, claimed rights in Burton Overy until the end of the 19th century. The Ferrers Manor appears to have been split up in the 16th century. In the 1550s, part of its land was owned by John Harrison, and part by William Payne, whose part seems to have been acquired by the Wraske family, who held it until the late 18th century.

Ridge and furrow, wongs and selions

How did an agricultural manor like Burtone operate in medieval times? The village itself existed before the manor came into being with the Norman conquest. Earlier, the land surrounding the village belonged to the village, and many of the customs and practices from the earlier times will have become manorial custom and practice. The



Village population 1086 to 2000

medieval three field system required complex co-operation.

The strips or ridge and furrow form the characteristic landscape around Burton Overy. Adjacent strips are sometimes referred to as *selions*, and sometimes by the Leicestershire name of *wongs*. They were each about a furlong (220 yards) long, and about seven yards wide, giving an area of approximately a third of an acre.

Wongs were often shared, with individuals owning different strips on different *wongs*. More land was acquired by taking in areas hitherto uncultivated – this was done not only by peasant groups, but also by free tenants and the nobility. The arable land in a village was divided into three main areas so that, at any one time, one third was under spring crops, one third under winter crops, and one third was fallow.

Records show that, up to the 17th and 18th centuries, the village arable land at Burton was still divided into three large open fields, as it had been in medieval times. Although some enclosure for pasture and meadow took place by the end of the Middle Ages, the majority of the land remained unenclosed up to the end of the 18th century.

Trades and occupations

Until the latter decades of the 20th century, the main trades and occupations of those living in Burton Overy related to farming and agriculture – ploughmen, graziers and herdsmen. With the enclosures of 1765, much of what had previously been arable land changed to highly productive grazing.

From 1801, census returns not only record changes in the population, but also record how people made their living. At the beginning of the 19th century, the population of Burton Overy was just under 400.

The 1851 census records the population at a peak of 484 inhabitants living in 115 dwellings. By 1901, the population had declined to 292.

The farming heritage

In 1851, farming was still the mainstay of the community. Burton Overy at that time comprised 16 working farms, covering a total of 1,725 acres. The smallest holding was 10 acres, farmed by William Woodford. The largest was 400 acres, farmed by William Beardley. Seven farms ranged from 10–60 acres; six farms ranged from 100 to 190 acres; there were two farms of between 230 and 268 acres, and the largest was 400 acres.

There were 59 farm labourers living in the village, in 43 families. The Jenkins family had four members – grandfather, son and two grandsons – all working on the land at the same time. The youngest workers were around 12 years old, and the oldest in their late 70s.

Only one holding below 60 acres employed two labourers. On the larger farms:

John Black, 100 acres, employed two labourers

Thomas Moore, 100 acres, employed four labourers

Richard Nichols, 109 acres, employed three labourers

Richard Bradley, 130 acres, employed three labourers

Thomas Buckley, 170 acres, employed three labourers



View down Back Lane

Joseph Henson, 198 acres, employed five labourers
 John Grove, 268 acres, employed no labourers
 John Oswin, 230 acres, employed two labourers
 William Beardley, 400 acres, employed 12 labourers

The census lists 33 farm labourers' wives, out of a total of 66 housewives. The large Victorian family is confirmed by the number of children: 128 under 12, comprising 36 boys and 40 girls of school age (between five and 12 years old), and listed as scholars, and 30 boys and 22 girls under five years old. Children made up a quarter of the village population.

Trades ancillary to farming, and represented in the village, included fellmonger, corn factor, butcher and animal slaughterer, farm supplier, agricultural ironmonger, carrier and blacksmith.

Domestic service and other forms of employment

Outside farming, the major form of employment was domestic service. At The Rectory, there were four house servants. There were 41 villagers listed as being "in service", many living with the family they served. For example, Anne Moore, described as a widow and landed proprietor, employed two general servants, a cook and a housemaid, while Joseph Brook-Stephenson, also described as a landed proprietor, and who had a large family, employed a coachman, a groom and four housemaids.

It must be remembered that, in the 1850s, the village was still a self-contained unit, and most people spent their lives within 10 miles of their birthplace. To support the community, the village had a number of secondary tradesmen:

Retail Traders

Butchers	2
Grocers	3
Bakers and flour sellers	2
Publicans	2
Beerhouse proprietors	1
Tailors	2
Dressmakers/seamstresses	3
Shoemaker	1
Farming butcher	2

Builders etc.

Plumbers	2
Joiners	2
Carpenters	1
Bricklayers	3
Painters and decorators	2

By the 1850s, the hosiery and shoe industries in Leicester were starting to employ outworkers in villages close to the town. Burton had nine persons described as framework knitters, three glove stitchers, and

a worsted knitter. So far as the shoe trade is concerned, there was one cordwainer, and 17 workers described as 'shoe knitters'.

A diverse and thriving community

The village was thus a diverse and thriving working community. However, the census lists four elderly residents over 70 as receiving Parish Relief. It also lists six people as "visitors" to the village. As was common in Victorian families, a number of unmarried daughters or sisters were supported in households. In Burton 14 older daughters and six unmarried sisters are listed.

In the latter half of the 19th century, the village population declined. This was partly due to increased mechanisation in agriculture, but also to the centralisation of the hosiery and shoe industries in Leicester. Between the wars, the average population of Burton Overy was around 300. Now, although the village still has eight working farms, the support services for agri-

Between the wars, the average population of Burton Overy was around 300

Aerial photograph, taken in summer 1972, showing the extensive area of the deserted part of the village in the fields to the south west near Kingarth Farm (courtesy Jim Pickering)



culture and retail trade in the village have disappeared.

Appendix

Scheduled Ancient Monument

The area known as “The Banks” in Burton Overy, in fields and gardens to the south of the church, was designated as an Ancient Monument in 1981.

According to the official schedule, these are:

the earthworks and buried remains of two medieval manorial fishponds and medieval garden remains. The fishponds comprised part of the medieval gardens known to exist from documentary sources, and the formal layout of the earthworks visible on the site.

The eastern pond is 65m in length and 10m wide, the banks being up to 2.5m high. The southern end of the bank has been reduced to 0.3m high for a distance of approximately 25m.

The official report states:

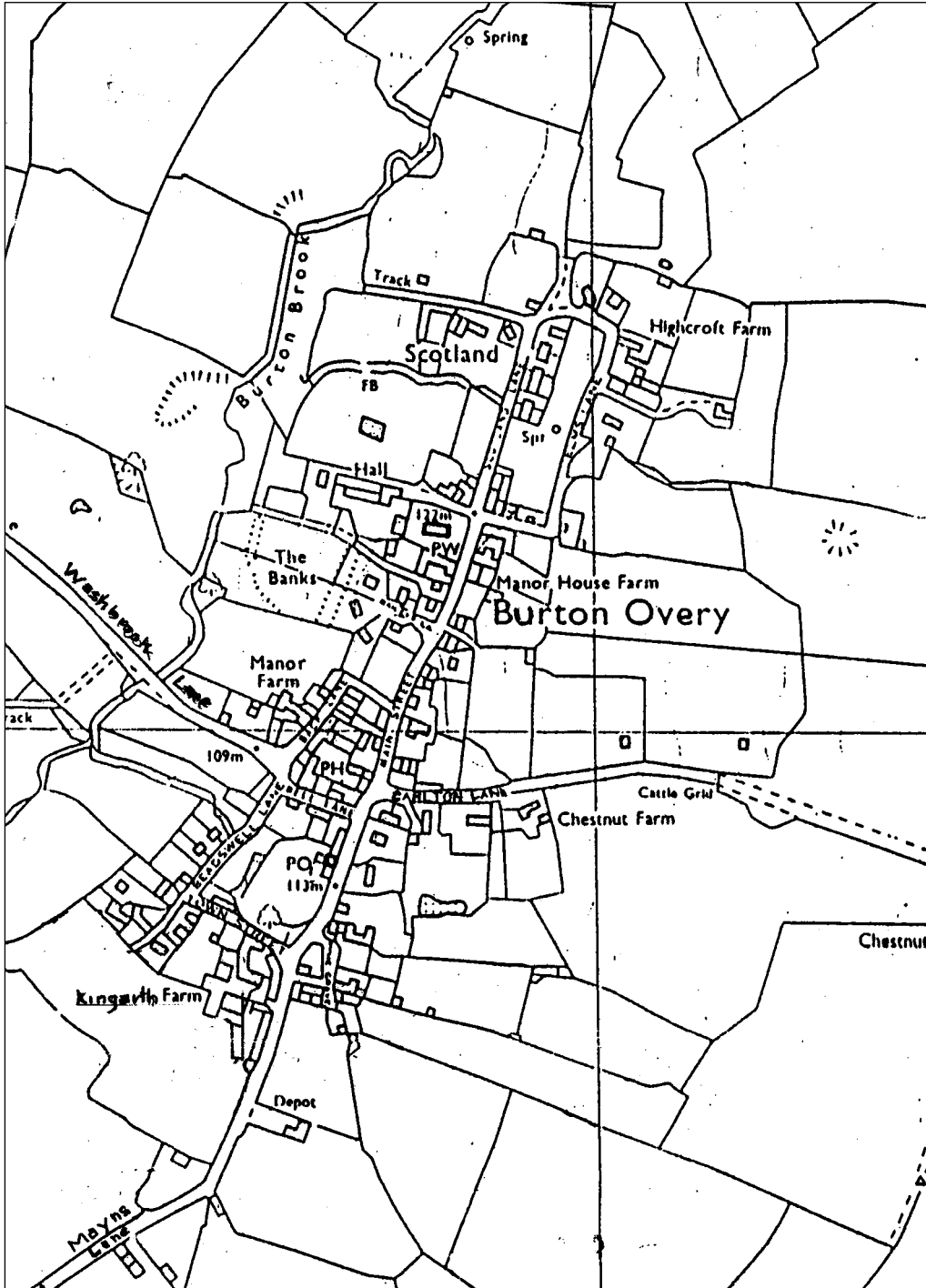
In 1307 Robert de la Ward, alias de Noveray, held a manor at Burton from the Ferrers family. A document dated 1307 clearly mentions “the great garden on the west.” The size and nature of the ponds and garden features suggest that they were located in relation to a building of high status such as a Manor House.□

It notes that the original ideas about the Banks were of a possible small Roman camp. This has not been ruled out, since it could well have been re-used in medieval times. The schedule continues:

The tradition of constructing and using fishponds in England began during the medieval period, and peaked in the 12th century. They were largely built by the wealthy sectors of society. The main species of fish kept were eel, tench, pickerel, bream, perch and roach. Large quantities of fish could be supplied at a time. Once a year, usually in spring, the ponds were drained and cleared out.

In conclusion:

The remains of the fishponds and formal gardens associated with the medieval manorial site at the Banks survive as a series of



Plan showing the site of The Banks ancient monument



View along Bell Lane

earthworks and buried deposits. The formal garden remains represent an extremely rare survival, in that contemporary sources show them to be demonstrably early in comparison to other similar sites. The earthworks remain largely undisturbed by subsequent activity, with the result that the preservation of archaeological deposits relating to their construction and use will be good. In addition, waterlogging in the area of the ponds suggests a high level of survival for organic remains, which might contain information about the economy of the site and its contemporary environment.

The earthworks also offer a good opportunity to understand the development and status of the manorial site, whilst providing an important insight into the wealth and social status of its occupants in the medieval period.

2

Farms and Farming

Open field farming

In very early times, the parish of Burton Overy was divided into three large open fields, and the village would have been more or less self-sufficient. Villagers lived by using the local natural resources, and from records we get an idea of how the village changed as methods of farming improved.

The village itself is sited mainly on gravel, but the surrounding area is largely clay and limestone (known locally as ironstone). In the north east of the parish, the land rises to over 500 ft. (153 metres). A small brook runs through the middle, and a tributary of the River Sence forms the south eastern boundary.

The open fields were known as the Mill Field, the East Field and the West Field, although by 1766 the East Field was known as Brook Field. The Mill Field was not the site of the two medieval windmills but probably related to an earlier mill.

Originally, villagers were allotted strips in the different open fields and there was a common policy, laid down by the villagers themselves, on what crops were grown and when they were harvested. Each year one of the fields lay fallow. In early records acres of furze and heath are mentioned, and this would have been used as rough pasture.

The best grazing was the stubble, as an amount of the corn crop was lost and weeds and grass would be growing. Every landholder was allowed to turn his beasts into the stubble of any field after harvest until seedtime which, in the case of a field lying fallow, would be a year. With these common rights of pasture, there had to be communal control. Grazing was very valuable. Each landholder was allowed so many head of cattle on the stubble, depending on the size

of his holding of strips in the open field. From records of a court held at Pulteney's Manor in 1691, John Renalds was fined 6d (2^{1/2} p) for "putting on more cattle than he hath common for".

In the 14th and 15th centuries there is evidence of increasing pasture land. It was becoming more profitable to raise sheep for wool than to grow corn, and in 1381 John Wraske was described as a shepherd. It was common for farmers to make bequests of sheep and John Weston, in his will dated 1616, left one sheep to each of his grandchildren.

Crops grown in medieval times were oats, barley, peas and beans, and these would have fed the villagers and cattle. John Gray's inventory of 1663 states that he had barley, peas and hay in his barn when he died, the barley being used for drink as well as food.

In 1691, Ralph Gray and two other villagers were fined 6d for not selling ale by sealed measure. In 1622, crops of flax and hemp were being grown on gravelly soil; the hemp would have made ropes and sacks for use on the farms and the flax was probably made into linen and clothing by a weaver and tailor – both are listed among craftsmen in the village in 1381.

In 1691, Ralph Gray and two other villagers were fined 6d for not selling ale by sealed measure

The open field system of farming had many disadvantages. Infections and diseases could spread quickly amongst the stock, and common pasturing made breeding difficult and selective breeding impossible.

Records show that by the end of the 16th century part of the parish was already enclosed to form pasture and meadow held in severalty, meaning that it was an enclosed area of land held by one person as opposed to scattered strips in the open fields.

It is not known how many of the villagers owned land in the 16th and 17th centuries, but in 1582 William Ward left his daughter, Ann:

"my close in Burton adjoyninge to the parsonage...on the south syde, and so a close in the tenure and occupacion of Thomas Hookes on the north syde"

provided she pay 20 shillings (100p) annually to the poor of Burton Overy. The will of George Smith in 1624 states that he owned six closes besides the one adjacent to his home.

Farming after the Enclosure Act

In 1766, the open field system officially came to an end with the Enclosure Act. This required landholders to enclose their land with a "ditch" and a "quickset hedge," which, until the hedge matured, was to be protected by a "double rail" fence.



Manor House Farm, c.1960

Unlike some villages in the Midlands, where the land was dominated by one or two landowners, there was little opposition to enclosing the fields in Burton Overy because the land was divided amongst a large number of people. The Enclosure Commissioners made allotments of land totalling 1,779 acres, the size of each depending on the previous ownership or rights in the fields and common.

The Rector, John Lee, became the largest landowner with 245 acres allotted to him in lieu of tithes and another 45 acres for glebe. He was also no longer obliged to keep a boar for the parish, as had previously been the case.

Two other landowners were allotted over 200 acres: Henry Coleman and Daniel Woodruffe. Below these were a group of seven owners, whose allotments varied from 60 to 100 acres. There were a further 41 allotments of less than 35 acres and some of less than an acre. Some common pasture remained for village use: Washpit Leys and Old Hill, and also, it is thought, another part known as Burton

Field.

The area by the bridge, known as Washpit Leys, was set aside for sheep washing, and sheep were washed here until the iron railings were taken away at the beginning of the 1939–45 war. Dipping now takes place at individual farms or mobile units with purpose-built troughs and chemical dips.

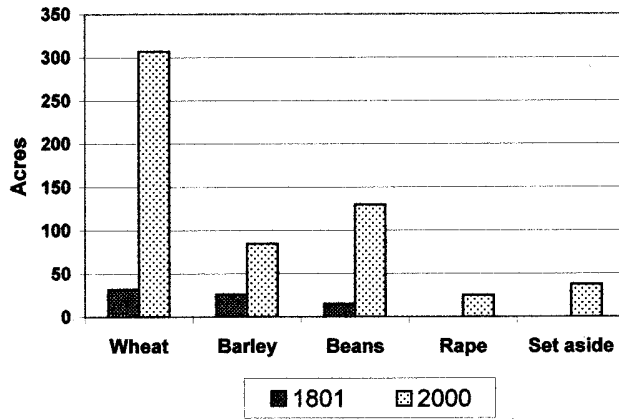
Two mills were named in the Enclosure Award. One was in the field at the top of Washbrook Lane on the north-east side, and was owned at that time by Simon Pickford. The other was in the extreme northern tip of the parish, at the junction with the Roman Via Devana, or Gartree Road as we now know it. Samuel Mayne was granted nine perches of land in another man's holding "where his mill now stands and turns". After 1835 there is no further mention of the mills, but there would have been little use for them as livestock farming increased.

After Enclosure, much of the land was put down to grass since the landholders could contain and improve their stock. In 1790, a description of the village mentions the opulent graziers living here, although as early as 1662 when Parliament introduced the unpopular "Hearth Tax", several graziers were listed as having four hearths, when most craftsmen or yeomen would have had two or three. In 1673, nine tenants of the manor were paying rents in pepper and cumin seed. These rents varied according to the price of the spice, and were generally paid by wealthy people.

It is not known if many families in Burton Overy suffered as a result of losing their rights in the open fields, but in many villages



Jack Harris, of Chestnuts Farm, and Albert Burton stacking sheaves of corn



Acreage of crops grown in 1801 and 1999

inhabitants could no longer survive and were forced to move elsewhere. It is said that the average rent for land in Leicestershire rose from eight shillings an acre, to £1 an acre after Enclosure.

In the Leicestershire Crop Returns of 1801, Burton Overy had only 93 arable acres out of 1,800, with a comment: “The whole Lordship is unfavourable to ploughing being very strong clay”. Crops being grown were: 32 acres of wheat, 26 acres of barley, 11 acres of oats, two acres of potatoes, 15 acres of peas and beans and seven acres of turnips.

In the year 2000 there are approximately 550 arable acres (see the chart of crops above), but the majority is still pasture and grass. Mechanisation, improved crop varieties, and agricultural subsidies probably account for the increase in arable land. Silage has now taken over from hay as the main grass crop and has changed the landscape from one with barns and haystacks, to heaps of black or white plastic bags containing wilted and treated baled grass to feed the stock over the winter.

Farms and families

Roger Harris, of Chestnuts Farm, has all pasture today and keeps a dairy herd. He has had family living in Burton Overy since the 17th century. His mother’s family, the Cox’s, were originally foresters, timber merchants and graziers. James Cox, Roger’s great-grandfather, was the baker and had the village shop. Eulo Cox, James’s son, farmed at White House Farm (Back Lane). Eulo and Ellen (nee Lewin) had two sons, Goodhall, who died aged 11 from diphtheria, and Harold, who was killed in the first world war, aged

21. They also had two daughters, Edith and Elsie.

When James Cox died, Eulo took over the bakery and shop, and Elsie delivered the bread by horse and cart. The Sunday joint could be cooked at the bakery for 2d. In May 1918, Elsie married John (Jack) Harris, of Great Stretton, where they lived until 1934, when they moved to Chestnuts Farm. Elsie was churchwarden for many years, as were her father and grandfather before her. She also looked after the village hall and, during the War, ran dances with Mrs Hill to raise money for Red Cross parcels for British prisoners of war. They had nine children, all still living in 2000.

Manor Farm, in Back Lane, now owned by the Langton family, is one of the oldest houses in the village and, in medieval times, may have been the site of Pulteney's Manor. At one time the manor was probably owned by Sir John Pulteney (c. 1290–1349) who was said to have been the richest London merchant of the 14th century, owning a cloth mill and dealing in meat and grain. He invested much of his wealth in land and was regarded as the greatest citizen landlord of rural acres, having inherited estates in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire.

In 1646, a contract between Thomas Paucke and Thomas Nedham mentions five cottages, a windmill, seven gardens, two orchards, 150 acres of land, 140 of meadow and 140 of pasture, 40 of furze and heath, eight shillings rent and a rent of two and a half pounds of pepper and one pound of cumin, and common of pasture in Burton Overy. It is not clear if all the land mentioned belonged to the manor, but in 1673 nine tenants were required to pay Thomas Nedham, lord of the manor, rent in pepper, in varying amounts, at Pentecost, Michaelmas and the Purification of Mary. Two other tenants paid rent in cumin seed at Michaelmas only.

Pulteney's Manor was where the village court was held. In 1673 Francis Needham was fined 2d for not scouring his orchard ditch, and



Charlie Holman cutting corn with



*John (Knocker) Holman at the Millennium Celebration in June 2000
on his 1917 Titan tractor*

John Woodward fined for having his swine unringed. Then, as now, building without consent was an offence, and in 1691 Theophilus Weston and Thomasine Pridmore were fined six shillings each for building houses on the common without leave. At the same court, another villager was fined 6d for hedging in the lane Pennyman Green.

Manor Farm, in the year 2000, is a mixed farm, but with twice as much pasture as arable, and sheep as the principal stock. After the War three people worked on the farm, but in 1965, as on many other small farms, outside labour became uneconomic.

The Brown family, of Highcroft Farm, have records of their farm from 1603, when it was in possession of the Wraske family. In his Will, dated 1623, Robert Wraske, described as a shepherd, left his son, Richard, some buildings and part of his house in the Mill Field, one headland upon Tofts, one half rood (one eighth of an acre or .05 hectares) on a furlong (220 yards or 201 metres) called Porters Hedge, as well as other roods of land in the East Field and West Field. This is not the first record of the Wraske family: in 1551, Robert Wraske bought a “moiety of messuage (a half share in buildings) and a sixth part of 200 acres, 40 meadow and 12 pasture”, possibly the same land referred to in the will of 1623.

Records, and an early undated map, indicate that Highcroft Farm was possibly one of the original farms, and the outline of the present



*Bob Caple and Sonny Clarke
carting hay with an early tractor
and haycart*

farmland is very similar to the earliest records.

In 2000, the Brown family has a dairy herd and some arable land. They make silage for the winter, grow and mill their own feed, and keep records on a computer – a different farm from Robert Wraske's of the 17th century, but still worked by the family as possibly it was then.

The Barbour family bought their farm in 1914 and named it Kingarth, after the place they originated from in Buteshire.

Early maps of the village show Kingarth Farm with buildings, more or less as they are now. Mayns Lane, leading to the A6, is named after the Mayne family who rented the farm from the late 18th century to 1900. Samuel Mayne, who died in 1814, was described as a miller.

In 2000, three generations of the Barbour family still live in the village, and keep a dairy herd as the main part of a mixed farm.

Rosemary Rowe (nee Holman) remembers having to go with her sister Marjorie, on Saturdays to churn the butter at their grandparents' house, Manor House Farm. The Holmans used to make and sell butter and cheese, and when the top storey of the farmhouse was removed in 1962, cheese presses were found in the attic.

John (Knocker) Holman also has many memories of helping on the farm. Around 1920, his father had bought seven or eight acres of standing corn at Illston Grange, and when it was almost ripe, a neighbour's beasts got in and trampled it down. He remembers walking to Illston Grange at the age of seven with a sickle to cut the corn.

He also remembers walking sheep and cows into the cattle market in Leicester. He set out at 5 a.m, or 4.30 a.m with sheep, because they walked more slowly. His father would then go into town with a pony and float and fetch him back. If they had bought sheep or cows as well as selling them, John had to walk them home too.

Taking beasts to market was not without incident: one Wednesday, John and his brother, George, were taking beasts to market when the animals became jumpy in Great Glen, which was not surprising as they met an elephant walking with a circus to Northampton!

John stayed at home working on the family farm until he was 16, but knew he did not want to farm, so went to work for a relative who had a bakery in Welford Road, Leicester. Later he went to work for Evans Lifts to learn engineering.

In 1941 his uncle, Tom Holman, of Burton Overy Grange, said he ought to come back to help at the farm. Tom bought him a tractor and plough, and 200 gallons of paraffin. John borrowed a threshing machine and used his machinery to work for local farmers as he still does to this day. He finished up with four threshing machines and, after the War, began a farm machinery collection.

An employee of Burton Overy Grange, Frank Smith, was said to have remembered the location of all the drains and details of the fields.

In the days when sheep were shorn with hand shears, another young man in the village, Bob Jenkins, was able to shear 300 in about a week. On one occasion he had a bet on whether he could shear a sheep in the time it took for the clock to strike mid-day. He won it – just!

Burton Lodge Farm, which is on the outskirts of the village south of the A6, was called Glebe Farm until 1935, when it was sold. Burton Lodge Farm was built after the Enclosure, when it was possible for farmers to move out of the village and build on their own land. The Chantrell family now own the farm and, unlike the other farms in the village, most of their land is farmed as arable.

Burton Lodge Farm was built after the Enclosure, when it was possible for farmers to move out of the village and build on their own land

There are tales from farms which have long since disappeared. Charlie Fox of Scotland Farm, now King's Orchard, used to tell of cattle being walked to Smithfield market in London before the railway station opened in Great Glen. The cattle were driven about 20 miles a day and the drover stayed overnight in public houses which, at that time, would have had a field nearby for customers' animals.

As well as being a grazier for 40 years, Charlie Fox learned the craft of thatching from his father and, when he was 73, he re-thatched the roof of his farm together with Harry Chandler, who had also been employed on the land all his life, and worked for Mrs Hannah Barbour, of Kingarth Farm.

In the 1930s, Mrs Kate Forryan, of Oaks Farm (now demolished), played Father Christmas and walked through the village with a sack on her back to the Christmas party in the village hall. The children never knew who she was.

The village school children enjoyed harvest time as it was an excuse to skip school. Records show that "taking dinner or tea to the fields" was a frequent entry. Others included "following the plough", "stone picking", "gone twitching", "dibbing beans" and "spudding

thistles". The school also provided part-time potato getters, damson pickers, currant pullers and cornfield weeders.

In the 1920s, the Minute Book of the Women's Institute records that meetings were poorly attended or cancelled because members were helping with haymaking or the harvest. Nowadays, although some of the farmers' wives are still involved with keeping records and helping on the farm, increasingly, for social and economic reasons, the younger wives are often pursuing their own careers.

Farming in the year 2000

In the year 2000, Burton Overy is unusual in still having eight working farms within the parish. In 1851, there were 16 farmers or graziers who, between them, were employing 35 labourers, and 66 people described as farm labourers were living in the village. Until the end of the War, many of the farmers in Burton Overy were employing two or three farm workers and also Land Girls during the War. Today, much of the work is done by the farmers themselves, and only two farmers employ a full-time outside farm worker.

Since the early years of 1900, mechanisation and improvements in the methods of farming, creating higher yields for less labour, have had a dramatic effect on the industry. Some of the smaller farms in the village have disappeared, with the land sold to other farmers, and the houses sold separately. Farms are now faced with increasing political and economic pressures and the disastrous consequences of BSE disease. As in the past, they are having to adapt and diversify to survive.

Bricks and gravel

From earliest times, manorial and glebe terriers provided detailed descriptions of land holdings in the open fields, and within the village itself the names would have been passed down orally from one generation to another. Although it has not been possible to establish all the names of the fields, many of those which are still used today give us clues as to what sort of field it was, and its owner-ship.

Highcroft Farm has a field called Brick Kiln Close, and although the kiln is believed to have ceased functioning in the 18th century, there are houses in the village (e.g. Curlieu Cottage) which are built with local bricks.

There are several fields called Gravel Holes: gravel would have been especially valuable with the coming of the Turnpike Road from Leicester to Market Harborough in the 18th century. When the road was being repaired at Great Glen, 3000 loads of gravel were fetched from Burton Overy at 2^{1/2}d a load. The holes are now filled in, but



Manor Farm, believed to be the oldest house in the village and the site of the original Poultney's Manor

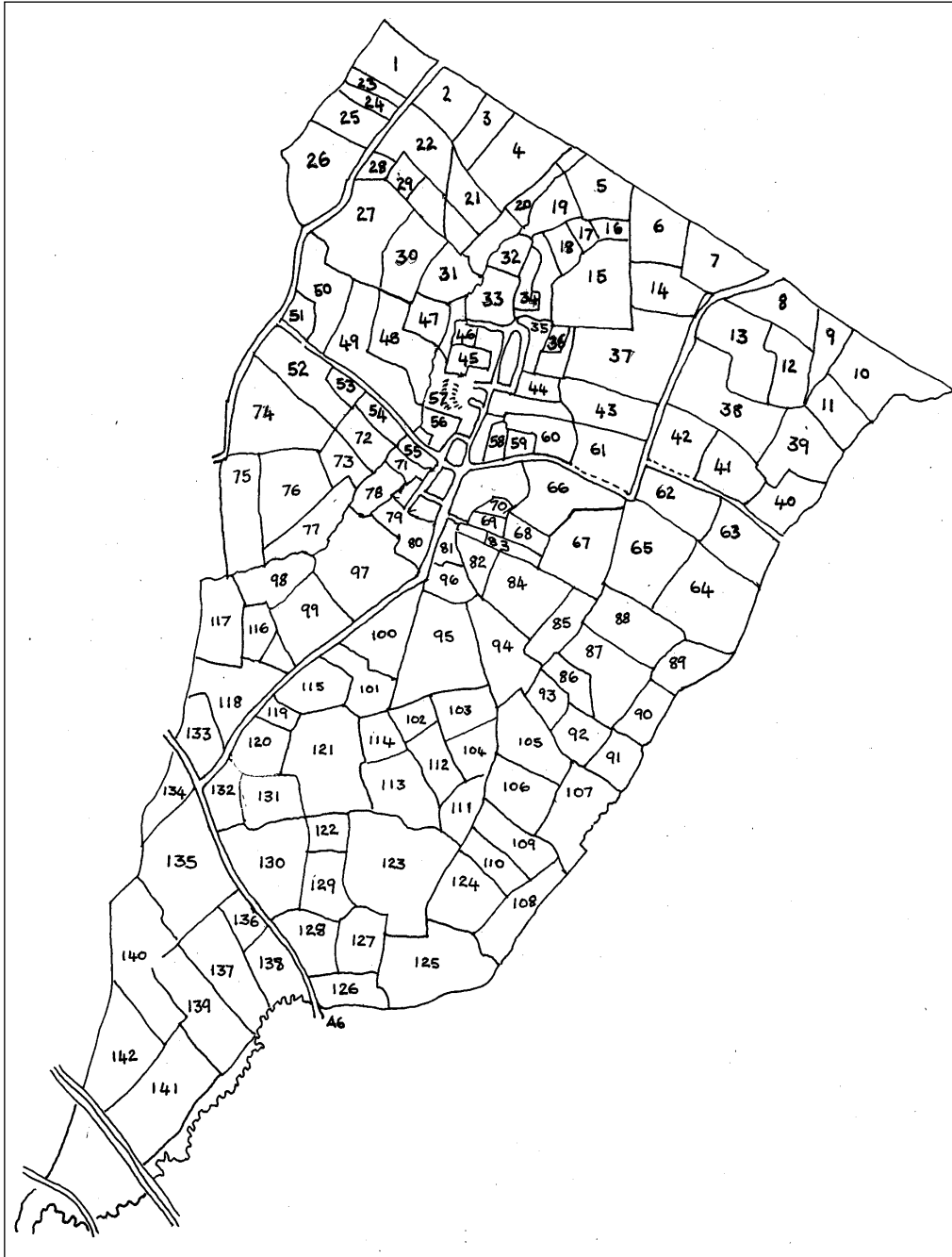
until the mid-1950s the gravel holes by the Illston road were used as a village tip.

Bailey's Lane is named after Fred Bailey, who lived at Banks Farm and was the grandfather of Alan Brown, of Highcroft Farm. He allowed the children of the village to play in the field.

It is not known why the north end of Burton Overy is called 'Scotland', In some areas part of a village was subject to a parochial tax called 'Scot tax' and the rest of the village would be free, hence 'Scot free'. 'Scotland' is found in several other Leicestershire villages; sometimes it was just a local name given to the cold, north end of a village.

Field Names

1	Thirteen Acre	49	Gravel Holes
2	Norton Meadow	50	Ten Acre
3	Two Acre	51	Peberdy's Close
4	Twenty Acre	52	Seeds
5	Gartree Field	53	Top Washpit
6	Best or Bottom Close	54	Lower Washpit
7	Top Close	55	Croft
8	The Old Hill	56	Manor Farm Paddock
9	Not recorded	57	The Banks
10	Burton Close	58	Little Easom's
11	Not recorded	59	Big Easom's
12	Easom's Meadow	60	First Close
13	Easom's Top Field	61	Goose Pits
14	Gravel Holes	62	Old Plough Field
15	Great Close	63	Burton Close
16	Second Meadow	64	Carlton Sic
17	First Meadow	65	Foot road field or First Close
18	Blue Potts	66	First Big Field
19	Spinney Field	67	Second Big field
20	Carvers Meadow	68	Brick Barn
21	Not recorded	69	Dutch Barn
22	Gravel Holes	70	Pond Field
23	Town Close	71	Birds Close
24	Manor Field	72	First Ashby's Close
25	Ayres Close	73	Second Ashby's
26	Stretton Sic	74	Oaks Close
27	Cheese Worms	75	Tors
28	Hare's Close	76	Frying Pan / 20 acre
29	Catwool or Catwell	77	Long Meadow
30	Seeders Close	78	Cricket Meadow
31	Ten Acre	79	Morrill's Close
32	Gravel Hole	80	Home Close
33	Not recorded	81	First Home Banks
34	Woods Close or Coverdale	82	Home Close?
35	Home Close	83	Woodruffs
36	Brick Kiln Close	84	Not recorded
37	Thistle Close	85	Wranglands
38	Not recorded	86	Seven Acre
39	Crowd Heyes or Far field	87	The Sandilands
40	The Meadow	88	Barn Field
41	Tongs	89	The Meadow
42	Ploughed Close	90	Rabbit Hole Meadow
43	Goose Pits	91	Peewit Meadow
44	Not recorded	92	Gravel Hole
45	Fish Ponds	93	Five Acre
46	Hooks Close	94	Pond Field
47	Six Acre	95	Cow Close
48	Not recorded	96	Second Home Banks



Field names in the Parish of Burton Overy

97	Dairy Ground	120	Not recorded
98	Glen Meadow	121	Gravel Holes / Jo's Big Field
99	Sea Brooks	122	Not recorded
100	Clay Pits	123	Great Close / Ken Burton's
101	Butchers Close	124	Fox Holes
102	Little Shinnel	125	Old Gravel Pits
103	Bottom Cow Close	126	Bridge Meadow
104	Eight Acres	127	Not recorded
105	First Rice Piece	128	Not recorded
106	Second Rice Piece	129	Second Judds Close
107	Bell Pool	130	First Judds or Carters Close
108	The Meadow	131	Not recorded
109	First Long Leys	132	Orchard Close
110	Second Long Leys	133	Gymkhana Field /Top Close
111	Nine Acre/Barn Close	134	Old Allotments
112	Long Shinnel	135	Drive Field
113	Corn Close	136	Six Acre
114	Top Butchers	137	Middle
115	Cricks	138	Capons
116	Barn Close	139	Front
117	Mowing Field/New Meadow	140	Thru Yard
118	Home Field	141	Railway
119	Farthings	142	Co-op Field



A view down Main Street showing the village telephone box, which is a listed building

3

Buildings Past and Present

Houses and cottages

The most notable houses in the village date from the Georgian and Queen Anne periods and include the Old Rectory of 1710, The Elms, Manor House Farm, The Paddocks, White House Farm, The Old House, Beresford Cottage, Ivy Cottage, Higher House and Burton House.

At least eight houses are fully or partly timber framed, mainly rectangular two- or three-bay buildings of post and truss (also known as box framed), construction without cross wings. Steeply pitched roofs were originally thatched. These all date – in their present positions, of which more later – from the mid-1600s. Manor Farm is perhaps the oldest of these.

Ridgefield and Wheatridge, in Main Street, are three-bay timber-framed houses. One bay was the space allotted in those times to house two oxen for the village plough teams. The family lived in two bays and animals in the third. Wheatridge, so named after its recent renovation, was the village butcher's shop kept for many years by George Pears, who was born in Burton House, almost opposite. He followed his father into the business, and claimed never to have travelled further than the city of Leicester in his whole life!

When Mr Pears house was renovated, on his retirement to a nursing home, it was found to contain a concealed carved beam dated 1651 with the legend:

John Collman laid the same and hereupon I have set his name.
John Gree(n) paid us well becus he menes herin to dwell.

Higher House, opposite Wheatridge, is also largely timber-framed with a tall front wing added in the early 19th century. This incorpo-



The old Butcher's Shop before renovation in the 1990s

rated trusses in the roof, with curved principals, and old tie beams, indicating the re-use of earlier timbers. In Victorian times this was a poultry farm run by the Allen family.

A donkey was kept there for many years, and when Mr David Burrows bought Higher House in 1963, the donkey came as part of the sale. Pepe, as he was called, was much loved in the village and gave rides to all the children. He wore a straw hat at summer galas, with his ears sticking up through holes in the brim. The children took him for walks round the village, but when it came to the Blessing of the Animals Service in church, he resolutely refused to enter the building! Pepe was a great Burton Overy personality, who died aged 40. His stable was converted into living accommodation, and is now called The Old Coachhouse, on Main Street, within the grounds of Higher House.

In the angle of Bell Lane and Main Street is another timber-framed cottage which, in a recent renovation, was found to contain many wattle and daub interior panels in the walls. In common with many of the other timber-framed dwellings, the outer walls are now infilled with brick. This house dates from around 1650, and was known as Smith's Cottage – the blacksmith lived here and his forge was next door on Bell Lane (Forge Mews). Later a family named Smith bought the cottage, which caused much confusion over the name.



Pepe resolutely refused

It is thought that the main part of the village was originally sited nearer the brook, and aerial photographs have shown extensive areas of medieval house platforms in the low ground immediately south of the present village. Due to incessant flooding of the houses – not a happy thought when your walls are made of mud – around 1650 houses were gradually moved further up the hill, as the opportunity arose, to be away from the floods. This was possible because the timber frames were easily taken apart, each joint being marked with Roman numerals by the original builders, and re-erected elsewhere. These houses had little in the way of foundations anyway.

Another timber-framed thatched cottage adjoins the Post Office and dates from 1650, according to *The Victoria County History*.

South View, at the southern end of the village, is also fully timber-framed and dates from the 1650s, but with a renovated brick gable end, dated 1739. It also contains many wattle and daub interior panels, some with intricate designs on the mud surface. This house is best viewed across the fields on the right as one enters the village from the A6.

The most substantial early house is Manor Farm in Back Lane. The three-bay house has a lower storey of ironstone and retains some stone mullioned windows and an original doorway. The upper storey is timber-framed but faced with brick, and there are original attics. A carved beam bears the date 1650 and the initials of Robert & Anne Freeman, one of the notable village families of the past, who presumably built this house – the family farmed in the village for many generations.

Approximately 50 per cent of the village houses had thatched roofs in 1900

In more recent times, the Misses Oswin lived there, and now the second generation of the Langton family run the farm. It has been suggested that part of the ground floor of the house could date back about 700 years.

Jack and Floss Langton, who farmed Manor Farm previously, now live in a new house on Back Lane built on the site of the old farm



The Old Granary, demolished in the late 1980s

granary, which was demolished in the late 1980s.

Manor House Farm, on Main Street opposite the church, has an excellent Georgian front, although the attic storey was removed in 1962. This was the home of the Coleman family (who also owned Kingarth Farm at the southern end of the village, another ancient holding with a newer Georgian house on it).

In 1779 Henry Coleman, “a freeholder of Evington and Burton Overy”, became Deputy Lieutenant of Leicestershire. In 1848, another Henry Freeman Coleman (obviously the two main families inter-married), was appointed by the monarch as High Sheriff of Leicestershire. The Colemans were politicians and local dignitaries as well as farmers. We shall meet Henry Coleman again in connection with the village chapel.

Manor House Farm is dated 1697 and until quite recently had an engraved pane of window glass which read “Henry Coleman jnr. 1756”.

There are two farms with the name ‘manor’ because in medieval times there were two manors in Burton Overy. One was the Ferrers Manor, and the other the de Noveray Manor, from which the village took its name, although later the name changed to Pulteney’s Manor.

Kingarth was always quite an extensive farm and the County Record Office has a map, dated 1795, of the “estate” when it was owned by B F Coleman. This shows the whole of the property and has a note in the margin, “bought of Rev James Sherrard Coleman 1819”. The Sherrard family, mentioned elsewhere in this book, are related to our present Queen Mother. Kingarth is host to our village ghost, also described in another chapter.

At the extreme northern end of the village is Highcroft Farm on Elms Lane, which was recently traced by one gentleman as being owned by his ancestors in the 1500s, an ancient site but now with

wholly modern buildings. It has been suggested that the original house lay just to the north of the present farmhouse, and that it was demolished, and the new one built re-using all the old beams, etc. In the past it was known as Burton Overy Farm, and was re-named in the 1900s.

There used to be another timber-framed farmhouse at this end of the village, known appropriately as Scotland Farm. It was demolished in the late 1900s and a modern private house, Kings Orchard, now stands there. This was on the track which leads north west from the top of Scotland Lane – apparently this track was known in medieval times as Gambles Lane. It probably led then to another part of the village, which now only shows on aerial photographs. The former Clay Pitt Lane is now Mayn's Lane. Another lost road name is Norton Lane, which left the village to the south and ran alongside the stream towards Great Glen. Now just a short stub turns left from the bottom of Town Street. This would have served the part of the old village which today shows only as house platforms in the fields there.

The Elms, on Elms Lane, was a farm until 1952, when the land was sold and it became a private house. This is another three-storey Georgian house, with the typical appearance of the time.

The former rectory was built in 1710, in the reign of Queen Anne, by the Rev Chapman Dolby. There must have been an earlier building on the site, for the list of rectors in Burton Overy starts in 1220. The



Smith's Cotage

house is large, with three storeys, an open hall with a fine oak staircase, and lofty rooms. The many windows give it a light and airy look.

Outside there is a big lawn, and carriage drive, and the garden has many mature trees including a superb specimen Giant Redwood (Sequoia), and two mature oaks. The older, now with a huge girth, is known as the Boscobel Oak (see Chapter 4 for its history). The younger oak nearby is an offspring of the larger one, as is the oak next to the telephone box in the centre of the village.

The garden outhouses of the rectory have been converted into a small private house, and the former coachman's cottage is the frontage of the village hall. On the southern side of the rectory the old stable block was enlarged and turned into a pleasant village house, known as Banks Farm. This is approached through the old village tithe or threshing barn, an early 19th century building possibly built on the foundations of an earlier tithe barn – it is still known in the village as the tithe barn.

Ivy Cottage, in Rectory End, is a Georgian (circa 1790), hunting box added on to what was probably a farm cottage. The outbuildings still retain a common wall with what is now Stable House – once the stable block of Ivy Cottage.

In the 1900s, the then owner, a Mr Stuart, a keen member of the Fernie Hunt and a London businessman, built a wooden squash court adjoining the house. At the time it was believed to be the only wooden squash court in England. Paddy Swain remembers playing on it, but it fell into disuse and disrepair and was demolished in the mid 1980s.

There are many smaller timber-framed cottages in the village which were almost all thatched in previous years. They were built on their present sites about 1650 “up the hill”, away from flooding. At this time there was a return of the plague in England, and many of the re-

many smaller timber-framed cottages in the village ... were almost all thatched in previous years.

positioned houses may have held plague-stricken families in their earlier positions.

It was thought then that burning the house out would prevent the spread of the plague. The main beams of an oak-framed house would not burn through and be lost in a quick fire of this kind, and several of the present-day cottages (for instance, Overton Cottage in Main Street), are built of well scorched re-used beams – another reason for the old timber-framed houses all being erected at about the same time in their present positions.

Overton Cottage has several other pointers to an earlier history: Two upstairs rooms have oak floorboards which have been dated as 14th or 15th century. Prior to the 1600s, when a family moved house, they took their floorboards and window glass – if they had such a luxury – with them, and that appears to have happened in this case, for broken “bull’s eye” glass was found under the brick floor of the living room, placed there to act as a primitive damp proof course.

This particular cottage also has a timber-framed, wattle and daub chimney breast, a rare thing in Leicestershire, for they were banned in 1467 and again in 1621, as being “too dangerous”. In rural areas they were put up much later, regardless of the law! Fortunately, although Overton Cottage still retains this rare feature, it is now lined with a brick flue.

Many of the small cottages have timber-frame beginnings, for example Tylers Cottages in Main Street, and the Old Forge range of cottages in Bell Lane. Some display the beams in walls and ceilings. One of these, Yearnor Cottage, also contains a carved beam with initials and the date 1651 – when uncovered recently it was found to have been covered with pages from a bible!

Public houses

Bell Cottage, and White Cottage, in Bell Lane, were the original Bell Public House, after which the road was named. We know that in 1846 Robert Cook was the landlord, and it has been noted that the pub was very handy for the thirsty blacksmith just across the road!

In 1933, the new Bell Inn was built on the main village cross roads and the old inn was divided into two private houses. The car park between the old and new inns is the site of another timber-framed thatched cottage with wattle and daub walls, but unhappily it caught fire and burnt down before the War. It is said that the Fire Brigade did attend, but only made matters worse by washing away the mud wall panels and the whole place was demolished and removed forever. No doubt the beams would be sold and re-used in other houses.

The new Bell Inn, now the only public house in the village, is the one inn with an almost continuous, albeit chequered, history which depended in recent years on the fortunes of the brewery that owned it. It has twice been sold from one brewery to another, and was even threatened with complete closure in the 1990s. When the village petitioned the owners to keep it open, it was sold again. The new brewery owners renovated the interior, and it is now in



The old Bell Inn in Bell Lane



The cottage on the right burned down before the War and is now the site of the pub car park

2000, once more a thriving concern run by a village couple and the lively centre of village life.

At one time there were two other inns. The first to disappear was the Old Crown near the church, in the cottage next to and due north of the old Schoolmaster's house. Part of it was occupied until this year (2000) by Bert Ashby M.M., a veteran survivor of the Second World War. It is said that at one time this house belonged to a butcher, and it is believed to retain the old slaughterhouse at the rear.

At the south end of the village in Town Street was the New Crown Inn, which was the tall brick house, now known as The Beeches, on the north side of the road. This property has been in the same family for five generations. The present and former lady owners both bought the house to keep it within the family when they were only 21 years old. The family now hopes to keep it for many generations to come.

The inn was built in 1840, with stables to the side and rear and a carpenter's workshop over the stables. In the 1900s, the first floor was turned into one big clubroom, where the village football team would don their black and amber strip before playing on their field nearby, and where they would quench their thirst afterwards. The inn closed in 1936.

As well as the official inns there were ale houses – before the introduction of cheap tea from the Empire everyone drank beer (ale), in preference to the impure water. Indeed, as late as 1930, there was no mains water in the village, and neither electricity nor mains drainage.

Several houses had their own brewhouse and freely sold ale to others. One such was apparently run from Woodbine Cottage at the south end of the village, and may have been known as "Paul Pry".

Whether this was the ale house, or the owner's name, is not known.

Many cottagers brewed and sold the weak "small ale" and it was drunk all day and at every meal including breakfast. Beer drinking was officially approved as the lesser of two evils, compared with the prodigious drinking of cheap gin that used to take place, with a guarantee that it wouldn't send you blind.

The Beer Act of 1830 provided licences for anyone who applied, and ale houses were set up in front parlours and back kitchens, with beer on sale all day. Later it took the Government years to solve the resultant problems.



The New Crown Inn on Town street)

The school

In the early days, village children would be educated at home (if they got an education at all), or they would be sent out to learn trades elsewhere, which meant that they lived away from home and were not a charge on either their parents or the parish.

Between 1722 and 1828, for instance, we find that 82 Burton Overy children aged between eight and 15 years, were apprenticed out – 28 boys to framework knitters and some of the girls to learn housework, a euphemism for being a skivvy – a hard life for a girl as young as eight.

However a school was endowed in the village in 1724, and by 1749 Burton Overy had a resident schoolmaster, Randolph Ward and his wife, Ellin. He rented yardlands in the open fields of the time for farming, until he died. His will was published (County Record Office) in 1773.

We do not know where the school was held, but it may have been in the single-storey building which was added on to the southern end of Overton Cottage, in Main Street, at about this time. This was later known as the Village Reading (or Meeting) Room.

A Sunday School was also held regularly, the master being paid £4 per year from the Palmer's Charity – the Palmers were big local landowners who lived in Carlton Curlieu.

In 1855 Thomas Moore, whose family was long established in the village, gave a plot of land at the church end of Elms Lane, for build-

ing a school. The building cost £300 – the specification and plans are in the County Record Office. One playground was in front of the building, and the other to the north side (the sexes being segregated for play). On the far side of this, the schoolmaster's house was built at the same time; this house stands on the cross roads.

By 1863, a Miss Mattocks was mistress of the National School. Later it became known as the Public Elementary School, and ultimately as the Burton Overy C. of E. Primary School. It is a pretty little Victorian school building, and when it closed in the 1960s, was sold as a private house, and turned into an equally pretty Victorian country cottage.

The last schoolmistress was Mrs V Hogben, who had 18 pupils in the single- class school when it finally closed. She and her family emigrated to Canada to continue teaching there.

Nevertheless we are told that the cottage still has covenants in the deeds and insurance in case it needs to be requisitioned as a school again. It is now known as The Old School.

The chapel

Henry Coleman, whose family were well established in the village and who had recently been appointed High Sheriff of Leicestershire, gave the land to erect a chapel on Main Street in 1855. There had always been many religious dissenters in the village, and in the past, rooms in Daniel Woodruffe's house, and in one of the Coleman houses, had



*Before the school closed, summer 1969. Mrs Hogben with the last class
L-R: Back row: Gary Thorpe, David Hill, Nick Burton, Glen Thorpe, Stephen
Burton, Simon Dale, Michael Hill, Stephen and Michael Brown. Front row;
Neil Daykin, James Burton, Heather Ridgeway, Sarah Hill, Mrs. Hogben, Sarah Burton,
Deborah and Carol Pollard, Richard James*

been licensed for dissenters' worship.

Another small, attractive Victorian building was built on Main Street at a cost of £300, probably designed by the same architect as the school. It was originally called the Independent Chapel, and later the Congregational Chapel, and was well used by villagers until the late 1970s, when it was sold for conversion into a private house.

Much fuss was made in the village during the conversion when half the burial ground at the front was dug out and carted away. Passers-by alleged that they had seen bones being treated with scant respect, and the police were called in.

The village meeting room

This building, which was unfortunately declared unsafe around 1970 and demolished by order of the local council, was added to the south end of Overton Cottage, in Main Street, possibly in the early 1700s. It occupied the whole of the present front garden of that cottage and was a single-storey, one-room structure of brick, with a thatched roof. It had two ecclesiastical style windows with pointed arched tops, and a similarly shaped heavy

*Much fuss was made ...
when half the burial
ground at the front was dug
out and carted away*



The Chapel in Scotland Lane, built in 1854–55

wooden door.

It was probably intended for use by the many religious dissenters in the village. After the chapel was built 150 years later, the meeting room virtually became the village hall and was used by the whole community for dances, parties, rehearsals, Parish Council meetings and so on. The Burton Overy Womens' Institute was started in 1918 and met there.

Former Parish Council Chairman, Alan Brown, remembers one winter in the 1970s when there was a very heavy snowfall, and the village children rolled a huge snowball, and pushed it up against the door during a Council meeting, virtually imprisoning the councillors in the building.

There was a village band and a choir. Both may well have practised and rehearsed in this big room. Certainly concerts were held for the villagers, and the band would play for the dances held here. The 19th century big drum used by the band still exists in safe keeping in the village.

In 1931, a religious sect known as The Church of God, which had separated from the Plymouth Brethren, started to hold services in the meeting room and soon some people began to call it the gospel hall. These services followed a successful period of door-to-door campaigning in this and nearby villages, spearheaded by two local businessmen, Albert Parker and Arthur Chammings, who were lay preach-



*The old meeting room, at the far end of the building, with two arched windows.
It was demolished in 1973*

ers for this church.

People were invited to become “born again” Christians by accepting Jesus as their personal Saviour. Over 20 people were “saved”; nine were baptised by immersion and became members of the Church of God in Leicester. At the time the church met in two locations, one in St Saviours Road and one in Northfields. It now meets in Downing Drive, Evington.

Gospel and children’s meetings were held on Sundays and Wednesdays in the meeting room, but it became increasingly difficult to sustain these during the last war, because petrol rationing made it difficult for the Leicester church members to give their support.

However, the meetings did continue and it was only in the early 1950s that they ceased altogether. During all this time the meeting room was still used for all the normal village activities, but was gradually allowed to fall into dereliction as the present village hall assumed its role.

The factory

In 1963 a small factory called Welland Valley Woodcraft was built on a scrap of land behind the Bell Inn, producing household furniture and kitchen units. This later became Thorp’s Woodworking, and amongst other things produced the interior fittings for a canal narrow boat, which was on the premises. She was called the Burton Belle, and took an awful lot of manpower and manoeuvring to get her out of the yard again and on to a lorry.

When Thorps left, the factory was used for textile knitting but it accidentally burned down. The whole site was eventually bulldozed and sold for housing.



The Burton Belle being persuaded out of the factory on Main Street

Grass closes

The attractive little grass closes within the village, many of which have been built upon in the last 50 years, date from medieval times, when farmers did not keep all their livestock over the winter.

There was a great autumn slaughtering and sharing out of the meat which was preserved by pickling and salting, and only a nucleus of animals was kept close to home to produce next year's stock.

These closes produced hay in the summer, and in the really bad winter weather, the stock that was left was kept there for ease of feeding and attention. The large open medieval fields were not the place for the last precious stock in the worst weather, such as the winter of 1657, when there were 102 days with continuous snow on the ground in the Midlands, the Thames froze over and the famous fairs on ice were held in London. That year there was hard frost into May, and all the young spring shoots were frosted and killed.

The two bungalows opposite the present post office and shop, are on one of the old closes, and the heather nursery in Main Street, is another (this is known as Pinfold Nursery, a pinfold being where stray animals were kept until claimed by their owners). The actual pinfold is probably the corner where the small woodland is now.

The village telephone box is a separately listed building. It is a cast-iron type K6 designed in 1935, and was listed in 1987. The silver maple and the red hawthorn to the south of the telephone box were planted by the Women's Institute in 1974.

The field behind the telephone box is all that remains of another close. Planning permission was sought in 1963 to build 18 houses on all of its 3^{1/2} acres, but the village protested vigorously against this and eventually some of the field was given up to the five houses on the new Bailey's Lane. The tiny area that remains is earmarked by the present Market Harborough District Council as a permanent green space.

*The village telephone box
is a separately listed
building*

Another close similarly earmarked by the council, lies between Scotland Lane and Elms Lane. This was threatened by development in the 1990s, when an absentee owner sought building permission and a public meeting was convened to oppose this. In the end a number of households banded together as the Burton Overy Land Co., and bought the field to keep it as a green space. Later the council decided to include it as one of the three permanent green spaces within the village.

The workhouse

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Burton Overy ran its own workhouse under the auspices of the Billesdon Union. A Union was a group of



The old post office in the early 1900s with the workhouse on the extreme right

between 15 and 20 local parishes. The workhouse was situated next to the post office, where there is now a tarmac drive. It was sited at right angles to Main Street, and can be seen in the above photograph.

Between 1731 and 1831, it is recorded that 31 families applied for parish relief, which could either mean living in the workhouse (usually the option for the old, disabled or otherwise infirm), or having “outdoor relief”, which gave a family extra money whilst living within the parish boundaries, but working for the workhouse outside its environment.

Many of the children of these poorest families were apprenticed out, and went to live with their masters when they were old enough – some as young as eight years old – thereby ceasing to be a cost on their parents or the parish.

In the overseer’s book of 1761, regular payments of four shillings (20p) per month were made for the workhouse, which was run by a workhouse master working under contract from the overseers, for a lump sum plus regular weekly payments. Seven such contracts between 1774 and 1806 have survived.

By 1802–3, twelve people were permanently “relieved” in the workhouse, whilst 69 adults and 88 children received “outdoor relief”. In 1806 Esau Pierce, a woollen manufacturer from Kibworth, agreed to run the workhouse for £430 per year, paid in weekly instalments. The village workhouse became fully integrated into the

Billesdon Union in 1836, and after that date Burton Overy people went into the Billesdon workhouse.

In 1921 all the village charities were united into one, which, in 1956, received a total income of just over £19. The church contains some interesting wooden notice boards detailing other charities operating in the village in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The old workhouse was divided into a terrace of three small cottages which one village man remembers visiting as a child and “stepping down into the house at the door”. One of the last babies born in the cottages still visits the village pub with her partner, to this day, in the year 2000. In 1962, however, we read of “the poorhouse, recently pulled down”.

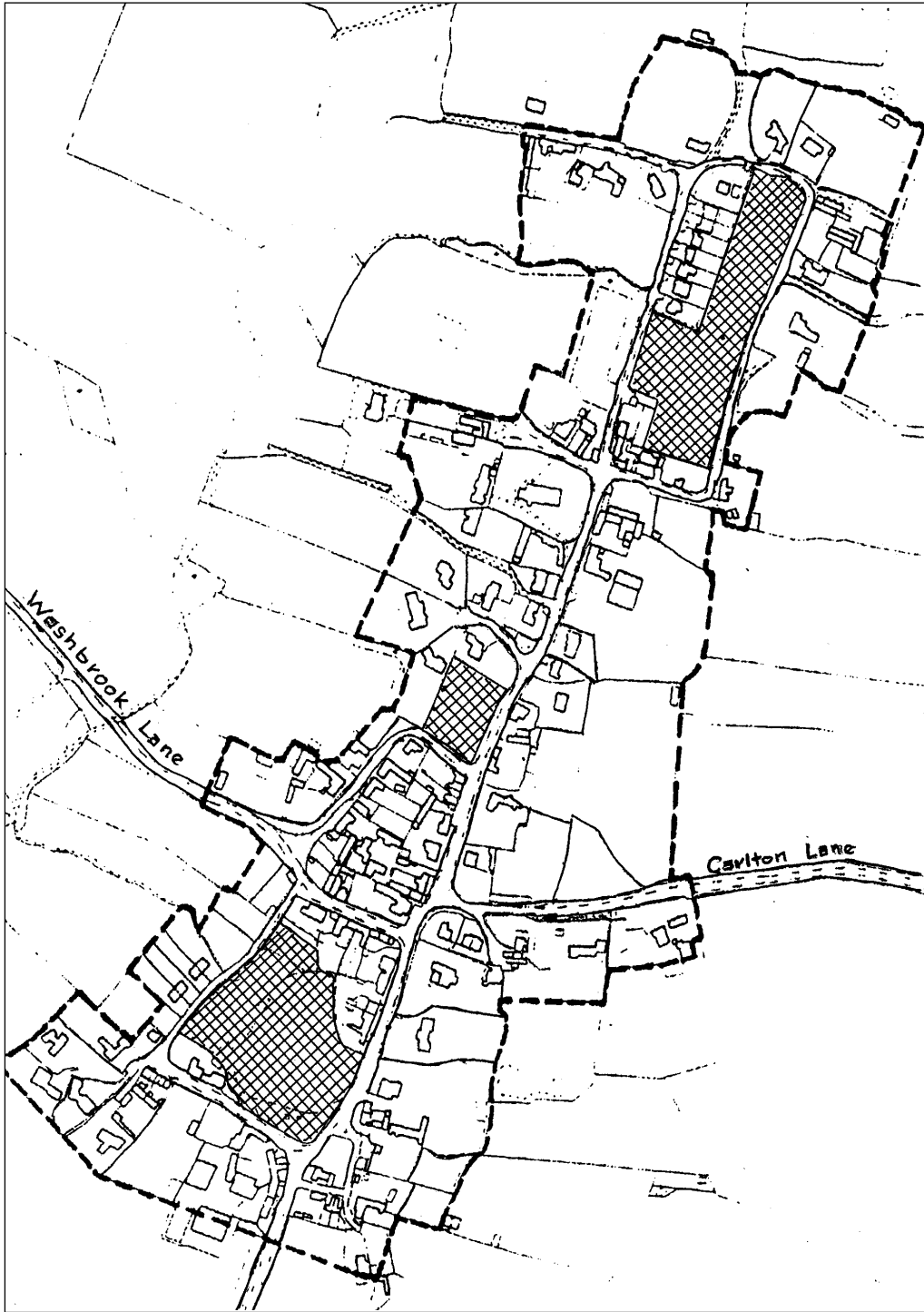
Other buildings which no longer exist but are nevertheless worthy of mention, are the windmills and watermill which were once part of village life. The watermill apparently had a short life and is not mentioned after the 15th century, but two windmills stood at the time of Enclosure in 1766 (see Chapter 2).

As the eastern-most open field of medieval times was called Mill Field, it is perfectly possible that the earliest mills of all, wind or in those days cattle (oxen) powered, may have been situated between Burton and Carlton Curlieu, but no trace remains.

It is possible that the remains of the leather tanner’s yard were in the premises used until recently by Burton Bros Builders in Back Lane. The tanned skins were taken down Back Lane, to be hung to dry in the small enclosed yard opposite the end of the lane, on the other side of



The Old House in the early 1900s, when it was the village store



The three grass closes to be retained as permanent green spaces



Mrs Allen, who lived in Higher House when it was a poultry farm. It was Mrs Allen and the Rev Cory who raised most of the money to build the village hall

Washbrook Lane.

The old cobbler's shop is now used by Mr Julian Swain (who remembers the last cobbler's name being Mr Mattocks), as a storeroom. It is near the Gravel, at the southern end of the village. The village store and bakery was in the Old House on Main Street.

An old diary has turned up illustrating fond memories of the baker here cooking the Sunday roast "with Yorkshire pudding on top" for nearby houses. The roast was put in the oven after the early morning baking was finished, and cost 2d to cook.

The cottage in Back Lane, known as Fair Green, was at one time also a bakehouse supplying the villagers. As already mentioned, the village smithy and forge were at the top of Bell Lane on the south side, and the present village shop started up as the Postal and Telegraphic Office.

Fortunately the village has now been granted Conservation status, something of a mixed blessing to people who wish to do work on their houses. This now involves completing piles of forms and attending planning meetings, which takes a good deal of time, but it does protect the village's green areas and prevents a rash of uncon-

trolled new building.

4

St Andrew's Church

St Andrew's Church is the most ancient building in Burton Overy. There was probably a site for Christian worship there from around 680 AD. The Romans had returned home by 450AD, leaving the village its earliest bypass – the Via Devana, now known as the Gartree Road, which linked Chester and Colchester, and which skirted the settlement known simply as Burton or Burtone (which meant a settlement near a fortification).

When the Normans arrived, they took over the church building they found there, and installed the tapered circular font which dates back to the 13th century. Fittingly, it still stands at the foot of the tower, the oldest part of the present church building.

The Victoria History of the County of Leicester dates the tower as late 13th – early 14th century:

The narrow tower arch has moulded capitals and bases. The rest of the church also appears to have been rebuilt from c.1300 onwards, although some mixed rubble masonry near the west end of the north aisle may be part of an earlier building.

However, a local amateur historian of church architecture who visited St Andrew's in the 1980s, thought some of the stone brackets, known as corbels, now inside the building, might be as early as 12th century. He speculated that the corbels had originally been external features, and were used on the inside of the church when the earlier Saxon building was rebuilt and extended. He thought investigation of the rubble walls might bring to light squared off blocks of stone, which could be re-used corbels.

(At some stage a spire must have been built on the tower – Diocesan records show that in October 1706, Archdeacon Rogers of



A general view of the church prior to 1963, showing the South doorway and the now demolished Victorian wing of the Rectory (reproduced by kind permission of the Leicester Mercury)

Leicester requested permission to take down the steeple “which is greatly decayed”. Nothing appears to have been done for half a century: the records refer to a petition to take down the spire and repair the tower in 1777.)

1066 and after

Before the Norman conquest, the diocese of Mercia had been divided into five bishoprics, of which Leicester was one, and presumably included Burton. After 1066, Leicester became part of the diocese of Lincoln. The Domesday survey of 1085 confirmed Hugh de Grantemesnil as the lord of the manor, who owned both the village and the church (see Chapter 1).

Almost 200 years later, in 1204, the church at Burton belonged to the monastery of St Evroul in Normandy. Hugh de Grantemesnil was one of the founders of the monastery, and may have handed over ownership of the church to the religious foundation. St Evroul retained the

advowson, or right to appoint incumbents in Burton during the 14th and 15th centuries, by which time the village had become known as Burton Overy. In 1271, Robert de Noveray (also known as Robert de la Warde), is recorded as holding lands which included the estate. Burton de Noveray, meaning Burton belonging to de Noveray, in due course became shortened to Burton Overay, later Burton Overy. At that time, incumbents were usually appointed by the Priory of Ware, which was a daughter foundation of St Evroul.

The church building

It was during this period that the church as we now know it was built. The bell openings, north aisle, main doorway, arcade and the west window are all 14th century and perpendicular or English Gothic in style, as are the screen, chancel and lady chapel. Interestingly, the piscina (the basin used for washing the communion vessels which has a drain leading out into the churchyard) and the three stone seats (the triple sedilia) in the south wall of the chancel, have ogee arches, which were popular in the 13th century.

The aisle has a west window with forking tracery, and two buttresses which probably dated from the 14th century have been removed from the outer wall, which has been raised in height. In the



A view of the church interior showing the sixteenth century oak screen and early electric lights (reproduced by kind permission of the Leicester Mercury)

15th century, a low clerestory was added above the arcade, which has three bays and circular piers with moulded capitals.

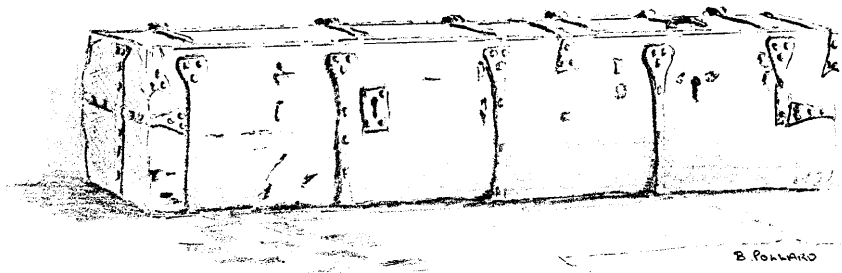
The entire east end of the church was remodelled and raised in height when the north chapel was added in the late 15th or early 16th century. The chapel forms a continuation of the north aisle, as the east wall of this aisle was completely removed. The tall, spacious chapel and chancel are divided by a two-bay arcade and to the east of this arcade a square headed doorway with quatrefoil ornament connects the sanctuary with the chapel – there is a second smaller piscina in the chapel's south wall.

Standing room only

Pevsner, the art historian, describes the richly carved oak screen, with its rood, or cross over the central arch, as “an impressive Perpendicular piece. Three one-light divisions each side with elaborate tracery heads.” Of course, when the screen was put up, there were no pews in the nave – the congregation stood or moved around, though there were probably a few primitive seats along the wall for the sick and the elderly. Pews were installed a century or so later – an archdeacon who visited the church in 1639 ordered alterations to be made to the pews of a number of the leading parish families, including the Nedhams: the archdeacon deemed these pews to be excessively large!

The impressive iron-bound oak chest was used by the churchwardens, who were also civil officers, for the safe keeping of church and parish documents, apprenticeship indentures, settlement certificates and so on, and probably parish money too.

Because of the ongoing troubles with France in the 14th and 15th centuries, property belonging to French religious houses was, for long periods, in the hands of the King of England, so that from 1339 onwards, it was the monarch who appointed the incumbent to Burton



The ancient iron-bound chest where important parish documents were stored

Overy. In 1415, Henry V granted all possessions of Ware Priory to the new Carthusian monastery at Sheen, near London, and the monastery retained the St Andrew's advowson, or right of appointment, up to the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the 1530s.

Preacher to Mary Tudor

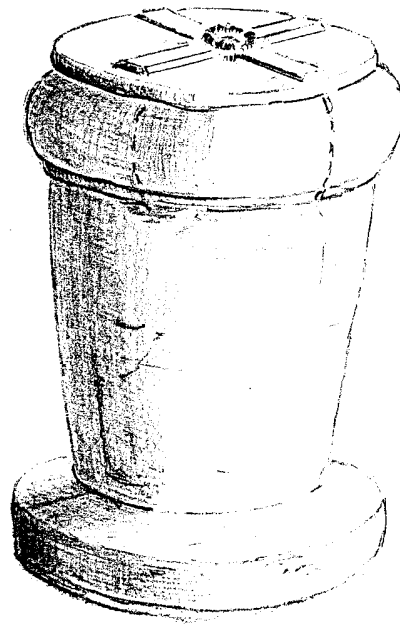
One of Burton Overy's most famous rectors was Hugh Weston who was born in the village and baptised in St Andrew's church in 1505. He became Dean of both Westminster and Windsor, was preacher to Mary Tudor, and confessor to the Duke of Somerset and Sir Thomas Wyatt (who had espoused the cause of Lady Jane Grey) at their execution in 1554. He was an examiner at the trial of Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, and a year or so later presided at the trial of Archbishop Cranmer.

Weston famously told Latimer:

Your stubbornness is all vainglory and that will do you little good when a faggot is in your beard. If you go to heaven in this faith, then I will never come thither.

John Foxe, in *Foxe's English Martyrs*, called Weston: "This ruffling prolocutor with his jug at his elbow". Weston became rector of Burton Overy in 1546, but was deprived of the living in 1557 after a charge of adultery was alleged against him. He was, however, one of the best preachers of his time and when he died in 1558, it was noted that he "bestowed most of his wealth on pious and public uses" (*Victoria History of the County of Leicester*). He also left money in his will for Masses to be said for his soul in St Andrew's Church.

It was a descendant of Weston's, John Weston, a London tallow chandler who, a couple of centuries later, gave a chalice, paten and alms dish to the church – although the *Victoria History* notes that the cost of the alms dish was met partly by the sale of the existing communion plate. Some of John Weston's gifts are still in use today.



B. POLLARD

The 13th century font in which Hugh Weston was baptised

Burditts and Boscobel

After Weston, the next notable incumbent was William Burdet (spellings of his name vary – Burdit, Burditt, Burdett) who became rector in 1582, when the church had 217 communicants.

William's grandson, Theophilus Burditt, was rector during the Civil War, and was expelled by the Parliamentarians. In the list of rectors on the internal north wall, opposite the door, which begins with Ralph in 1204 and comes right up to the present day, the rector who took Burditt's place is noted as "an intruder". Burditt, a staunch Royalist, returned to Burton Overy after the departure of Cromwell's supporters, and managed to obtain an acorn from the tree in Boscobel Wood in Worcestershire, where Charles II hid from Cromwell's men in 1651. He planted the acorn in the garden of his own rectory, where the resulting oak tree stands to this day, not far from a much younger oak, grown from one of its own descendants, and planted to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

The next Burditt rector, Henry, son of Theophilus, died at the ripe old age of 84 in 1709. His wife pre-deceased him, and they had no children. His curate, Chapman Dolby, who was married to one of Burditt's nieces, claimed that on his deathbed, Burditt had made an oral declaration (known as a nuncupative will), leaving everything to Dolby's three children.

However, two of Burditt's sisters, and a nephew, went to law over his estate, claiming that the rector had been too ill and senile to make a will, that he had "in great measure lost his memory... and was managed as a person with no understanding." Despite their claims the Archdeacon's court eventually decided in Dolby's favour. Dolby became trustee of Burditt's estate on behalf of his children, got himself presented to the Burton Overy living, and built the most fashionable rectory in



The Rev. Chapman Dolby who had the handsome Burton Overy rectory built early in the 18th century

Leicestershire. Nichols notes that in 1722, the village contained 90 dwellings “amongst which are some good houses, particularly the rectory.” When Chapman Dolby died in 1742 his son-in-law, Paul Southworth, inherited both the living and the rectory. (The great 18th century hymn writer, Dr Philip Doddridge (1702–1751), lived in Burton whilst studying at the Kibworth non-conformist academy which adjoined the Congregational chapel on the A6. He would have taken the footpath across the fields to attend his daily lessons. Among his well-known hymns are *O Happy Day That Fixed My Choice* and *Hark the Glad Sound*.)

Royal connections

It was early in Dolby's incumbency that the beautiful Royal Arms was installed over the tower arch, probably during the first quarter of the 18th century, in the reign of George I (1714–1727). A royal edict decreed that every church must display the royal coat of arms, and the one in St Andrew's is particularly splendid.

However, what may be termed Burton Overy's “royal connection” dates back to this period, and the village's connection with the Sherard family of Bushby. Mary and George Sherard had three children, and their only daughter, Mary, married Robert Freeman. When George Sherard died in 1710, his widow came to live with her daughter in Burton Overy – the Freemans lived at the Manor House in Back Lane. The Freeman's eldest daughter, another Mary, married John Edwyn of nearby Baggrave. Their daughter, Anna, married Andrew Burnaby, Archdeacon of Leicester. It was their great grand-daughter, Celia Cavendish Bentinck, who married the 14th Earl of Strathmore and, in 1900, gave birth to a daughter, Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon.

Lady Elizabeth was to marry the Duke of York, who became George VI after his brother, Edward VIII abdicated in 1936. Thus in a direct line via Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Church of England, has ancestors who both lived and worshipped in the parish of Burton Overy.

Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Church of England, has ancestors who both lived and worshipped in the parish of Burton Overy

The Thorp windows

Some of them would certainly have known the Thorp family, who provided a series of St Andrew's incumbents, commemorated in the three stained glass windows in the south wall of the chancel.

Thomas Thorp held the living from 1811 until 1851. John Nichols notes that among the charities administered by the Rev Thorp were “a

distribution of bread in the church on the day after Christmas Day among all the poor in the parish (about 80 families).” Under another bequest, the Rev Thorp gave money to “six poor widows not residing in the workhouse and who are selected by the churchwardens”. Bibles were also distributed to the most deserving of the Sunday School children at Easter.

After Thomas Thorp died, one of his sons became rector but was killed out hunting, and another son, the newly ordained Frederick Thorp, became rector. This meant that a father and son were incumbents over a record period of more than 100 years.

A remarkable clerical dynasty

Interestingly, the clerical dynasty which ended with Frederick Thorp’s departure in 1916 (his 64-year long incumbency is the second longest recorded in Leicestershire) was 10 generations deep, and is thought to be unique – Frederick was the great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandson of William Burditt, who, as we’ve seen, was presented to the living in 1582.

This dynasty came about because rectors handed the living down by becoming patrons, and allowing daughters to “inherit” the patronage in default of sons. Once a family acquired the advowson, or living, probably around the mid-1600s, they could present who they liked. The names of the ostensible patrons change in a kaleidoscopic way, but these patrons were probably only trustees acting for the family, and they always presented the “right” candidate – a son or son-in-law of the last rector.

On four occasions in Burton Overy, there was either no son, or no son willing to take Holy Orders, which is why the surname of the rectors changes four times – from Burditt to Dolby to Southworth to Lee to Thorp. If there was no son or son-in-law to hand, a locum tenens was put in to work the parish until either a son was old enough to succeed, or a daughter found a suitable husband. Then the locum was called upon to resign the living, under the terms of the bond which he had signed before his presentation.

Frederick Thorp was a 19th century hunting parson. All his life he rode out regularly with the Billesdon Hunt always, we are told “receiving a warm welcome and friendly greeting at the Meet.”

When someone once advised him to ride more carefully, in case he broke his neck, he retorted that his brother had broken his in the hunting field, and it was unlikely the same fate would befall two people in the same family, so he would continue to “shove along”!

During Frederick Thorp’s incumbency a good deal of restoration of the church building took place. The chancel and chapel roofs had been renewed between 1830 and 1832. Then, two decades later, and despite non-conformist opposition, the parish raised several church rates for

repairs to the church fabric. In 1851 and 1852, these rates – 6d and 7¹/₂d respectively – raised £77 and £96.

Between 1864 and 1869, more work was undertaken, reflecting the changing taste of the times. A gallery was removed, the west end of the aisle was restored, the west window of the tower replaced, and stucco was stripped from both internal and external walls. No wonder one observer reported that the “war” against stucco had broken out at Burton Overy!

The present pews, the pulpit and reading desk date from this restoration, and the organ, presented to the church by Captain Sutton, dates from 1874.

The priest's desk was given in memory of the Rev Frederick Thorp. His son, Charles Thorp, was First Lieutenant of the gunboat Thirsk on the North American Station in 1890–91, when it was commanded by Prince George (later George V). Charles later became Admiral Thorp and it was he who presented to St Andrew's church the Union Flag from the jackstaff of the Thirsk – it hangs in the chancel to this day.

Memorials and gravestones

Among several memorials within the church building are a number to members of the Coleman family, once Lords of the Manor in Burton Overy. The most prominent of these is the very handsome one by Firmadge of Leicester on the south wall – it is surmounted by the Coleman coat of arms.

Outside in the churchyard are many gravestones of Swithland slate which provide an impressive and peaceful setting to the medieval



The priest's desk, given in memory of the Rev Frederick Thorp

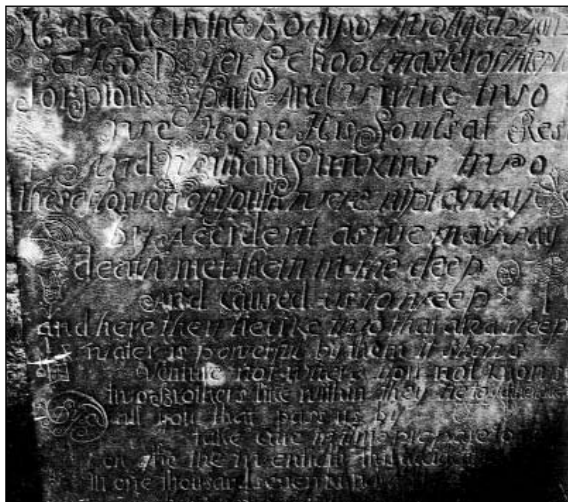
church. Most of these are beautifully inscribed and several repay particular study. For instance, a headstone to Thomas and Mary Neale, near the East window, has magnificent carving and biblical extracts with musical references. At the foot is an excerpt from Handel's Messiah – which the Neales might have heard when a famous performance of this work took place at St Peter's Church, in Church Langton, towards the end of the 18th century.

In previous centuries, many children died in infancy, and there are poignant reminders of this in St Andrew's churchyard – the Selby gravestone, also near the East window, records three infant deaths.

A watery grave

Nearby is a curious gravestone bearing non-Christian symbols and hieroglyphics, which are difficult to interpret. The epitaph runs:

Here lyeth the bodys of two, aged 24 and 22,
 THOMAS DYER, schoolmaster of this place,
 For pious parts and virtue too,
 We hope his soul□s at rest, and WILLIAM SIMPKIN□S too;
 These flowers of youth were swept away
 By accident as we may say,
 Death met them in the deep
 And caused us to weep,
 And here they lie like two that are asleep;
 Water is powerful by them it shows;
 Venture not where you not knows;



Part of the hieroglyphics on the gravestone of Thomas Dyer and Will Simpkins

Two brothers like within they lie, together liv□d
 All you that pass us by,
 Take care, in time prepare to die;
 On June 20th this accident was done,
 In one thousand seven hundred and twenty-one;
 Here you see we are born to die,
 When God sees good, we cannot put it by.

The phrase “death met them in the deep” must refer to an accident in the Burton river or pond. The burial register for 1721 does record that Thos Dyer and Will Simpkin were buried on June 22, which is two days after the date of their death as recorded on the tombstone, suggesting that the accident occurred in the parish, although what exactly happened remains a mystery.

The 20th Century in St Andrew's Church

The first military incumbent of St Andrew's was the Rev Alexander Cory, who served in World War I, and became rector in 1919 after leaving the Army. An enthusiastic engineer, he turned the rectory out-buildings (now the Coach House) into workshops, where, among other things, he converted his Model T Ford (only the second car in the village) to run on paraffin. The Rev Cory left the village in 1924 to join a parish in Northamptonshire in the Peterborough Diocese, and eventually became Archdeacon of the Isle of Wight.

His successor in Burton Overy, the Rev Benjamin Lloyd, came in 1924, and was the first of two rectors during the century to bring about a dramatic reduction of the church congregation. In the 1920s, local people resented their rector drinking in public houses. In Burton Overy this led both to a running down of the old Bell Inn, and to a decrease in the church congregation, as many members transferred to the chapel. The churchwardens resigned because they could not condone Rev Lloyd's “pilgrimages”, i.e. trips to the West Country to drink cider!

Modernising the rectory

After the War, the Rev Harold Jerwood became rector of Burton Overy, after resigning from his post at Oakham School where he taught for many years.

His successor, in 1958, was the Rev Lancelot Foster, who recorded in his memoirs that the Archdeacon at the time was keen for the rectory to be modernised. The three storey house with its open hall, lofty rooms and fine staircase, was built around 1710, and an extra



*The former rectory, build by the Rev Chapman Dolby
early in the 18th century*

wing added in Victorian times. One of the churchwardens in the Rev Foster's day was keen to sell the house and use the proceeds to build a modern rectory on the adjoining Glebe Field. The rector recorded: "The Bishop was against it, and so was I."

In 1963, part of the kitchen garden was sold as a building plot, and some of the proceeds spent on the rectory itself. The Victorian wing was pulled down, and the interior of the house restored and modernised. "Our Patron, Miss Barwell-Ewins, generously gave us a beautiful stainless steel sink, the joy of my wife's life", wrote the Rev Foster.

A skilled DIY man, he liked to leave something he had made himself in churches where he had been incumbent. Thus the heavy oak font cover in St Andrew's bears the inscription "LW Foster, Rector, made me, 1960." The wrought iron handle came from a previous vicarage gate.

From single parish to part of a group

Burton Overy retained its own rector until 1976, when the living became part of a larger group created by the formation of the Benefice of Burton Overy with Carlton Curlieu, Illston-on-the-Hill and Shangton, with a former police officer, Richard Westbrook, as rector. This group was further enlarged in 1982, to include Gaulby, Kings Norton and Little Stretton, when the Rev Roger Wakely was appointed

to the living.

In 1987, the Parish of the Gaulby Group was formed, combining the seven churches of the three former parishes.

A year later, the Rev Wakely was succeeded by the Rev Ashley Cheesman, whose rectorship was marked by considerable dissent among the parishes within the Gaulby Group. It was during this unhappy stage that churchgoing in Burton Overy fell to an all-time low, and the Bishop of Leicester asked the Church Commissioners to study the situation with a view to possible reorganisation of the Benefice. The Church Commissioners recommended reorganisation in a number of other Benefices in the Leicester Diocese, including the Gaulby Group.

The proposed changes eventually came into effect in 1999. Burton Overy became part of the Benefice of Great Glen, and the Rev Graham Spencer, Honorary Chaplain to Leicester City Football Club and a former police officer, was appointed rector. In the year 2000, Burton Overy and Carlton Curlieu form one parish within the Benefice, and Great Glen the other, with Great Stretton.

Repairs and improvements



A general view of the church showing the South doorway



The square-headed doorway connecting the sanctuary with the lady chapel (reproduced by kind permission of the Leicester Mercury)

With regard to the church building, the 20th century saw few major changes, but many repairs. The roof was restored in 1907, the north chapel in 1932. Electric lighting was installed in 1933, and in 1939, the oak screen, which now forms the vestry at the end of the aisle, was given to St Andrew's by the Swain family in memory of Audrey Bennett (nee Swain). The screen was originally erected near the lady chapel.

Following a restoration appeal launched in 1949, the roofs of both the chancel and the lady chapel were replaced with copper, and the work completed in 1952. The tower roof was replaced a year later.

The three bells, dating from 1616 and 1632, were all re-hung in 1956, and the oldest bell re-cast – the bells weigh respectively 8.5 cwt, 6.5 cwt and 5 cwt. Incidentally, much later when bellfounders Taylor's of Loughborough, were building the famous Carillon, they asked the rector of Burton Overy for one of the bells from his church as it had a particularly good tone. Despite their promise of new bells, the rector declined.

In the early 1960s, £1,000 was raised to re-wire the church and install infra-red heaters. Loose plaster was removed from the west

wall, which was cleaned and treated with preservative. Coping stones on the two eastern gables were replaced.

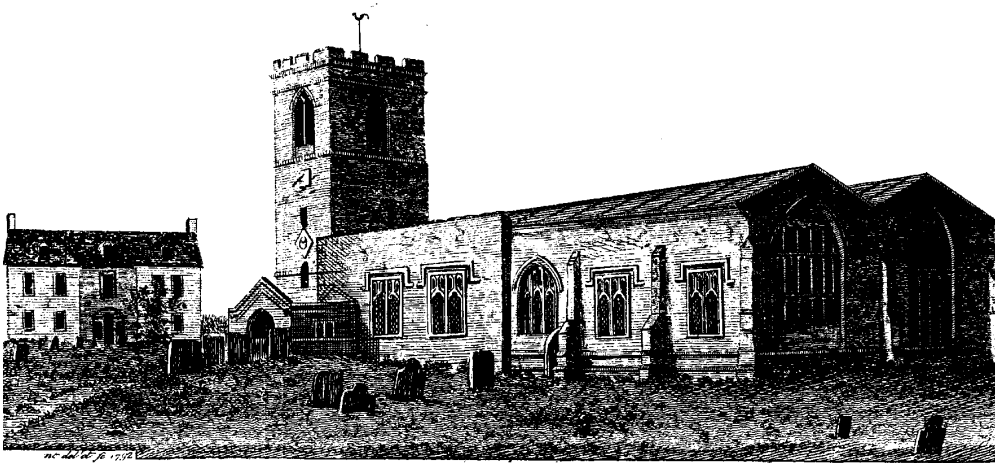
The three south windows in the chancel all commemorate members of the Thorp family. The one dedicated to the Rev Thomas Thorp, rector from 1811 until 1846, and his wife, Frances Topp, the daughter of a former St Andrew's rector, was designed by Powell, and installed in 1857. It is a fine example of early Victorian stained, painted and etched glasswork, and the three main lights each have four panels depicting scenes from the life of Christ.

By 1987, this window had become bowed, the lead work weakened, and some panes of glass were cracked. Following an appeal for the £1,600 needed for repairs, the money was raised by the village and the window restored.

The Year 2000

In this new Millennium, the church in Burton Overy has again become a focal point of village life. Attendances at all services are increasing, every effort is being made by the rector and the District Church Council to attract more people into the church, and with 45 children under 15 in the village, there are plans to re-launch a Sunday School for children within the Benefice.

The churchyard has been consistently well-managed and maintained, and is regularly mown during summer months. In 1999, crocus bulbs were planted along either side of the path from the main gate to the church porch, to mark the Millennium. More bulb plant-



St Andrew's Church in a lithograph of 1792

ing is planned for Autumn 2000.

Inside the church, following the Quinquennial Inspection, radical repairs to the tower have been carried out. New steel ladders have been installed to conform to European safety regulations, and these allow easier and safer access to the clock, which is regularly wound by a DCC member.

Despite the risks inherent in keeping the church open, the DCC has adopted an open door policy so that people tending graves in the churchyard, villagers and occasional visitors to the village, may enter the building during daylight hours, to appreciate its many interesting features, and the tranquillity and beauty of this ancient place of worship.



Aerial view of St Andrew's Church

5

Wartime and Warriors

First World War 1914–1918

Casualties

In common with most other small villages in Great Britain, the First World War took a toll of the young men of Burton Overy who had willingly taken up arms in the defence of their country. From its small population a total of eight young men perished:

Harold Cox	John Cox
George Cox	Walter Cox
Alfred Fox	Walter Herbert
Alexander Hubbard	Harry Newton

Their sacrifice is recorded on a memorial plaque in St Andrew's Church. The plaque was paid for by public subscription, at a cost of £40, and following a resolution of the Parish Council on 23 January 1920, it was purchased from Robert Bridgeman and Sons, Lichfield.

Women at war

Because of the absence of so many men on military service, the role of women in society began to change as they were recruited to work on the land and in industry. Paddy Swain, who came to the village with his parents in 1920, remembers his elder sister Audrey, who was born in 1900, working as a land girl in Houghton-on-the-Hill during the hostilities.



*Audrey Swain at work on the land
during World War I*

Prisoners of War (POWs)

During the war, and for sometime afterwards, enemy soldiers captured in France were brought to England as prisoners. John Holman (b. 1913) recalls that as a little boy he visited them at Illston Grange where they were detained and lived in the stable block – some of them were employed on the land at Barbour's farm in Burton Overy.

Second World War 1939–1945

Casualties

Britain's entry into the war was followed by persistent heavy aerial bombardment of industrial cities in the Midlands and elsewhere. Fortunately, Burton Overy was spared both the bombing and the tragedy of the huge civilian casualties that marked this conflict, but still paid the price of losing three of its sons who were killed in action.

Donald Burton John Hill Ken Alloway

Once again a memorial plaque in the local church records their sacrifice.

Bravery in action

Bert Ashby, MM. (b. 1917)

Bert, who has lived all his life in the village, enlisted in the Royal



Ken Alloway (left), who was killed in action, and his younger brother Donald, who was a member of the Home Guard

Berkshire Regiment when he was 23 years old and saw service in South Africa, India, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt, before taking part in the invasion of Sicily. On the fourth day of that campaign he had a narrow escape from death when he was hit by an enemy bullet, which went through his mess tin, was deflected by the bakelite map cover he was carrying around his neck, and ended up embedded in his left thigh. Following a period of hospitalisation he was returned to his unit, now The King's Own Royal Regiment, on the Adriatic coast. It was there whilst a sergeant, that he earned his Military Medal: he bravely carried one of his men, who had been severely injured by a landmine, away from the minefield. Relating this incident, he recalled feeling his way out of the danger area by using his bayonet to prod the ground to locate other hidden mines. He finished his war in Italy and travelled home across Europe on the back of a lorry.

Tony Laundon (b. 1922)

Tony enlisted in the Royal Air Force in November 1941 and trained as an air gunner/wireless operator. On completing his training, he was promoted to sergeant, and flew missions in the UK and the Far East during the Burma Campaign. He further qualified as a navigator, and was promoted to the rank of Flying Officer before being repatriated from the Far East in July 1947, and later demobbed.

Joy Longhill (1920–2000)

Josie Bolton-Carter (b. 1926)

Beryl Baker (b. 1920)

Perhaps the best kept secret of the war was the Enigma project. From Bletchley Park near Milton Keynes, the British Government's Code



and



Sergeant Bert Ashby. MM

Tony Laundon as an RAF sergeant

Cypher School began successfully to unravel the Germans' secret Enigma codes, which were considered by the Third Reich to be unbreakable. That work is now thought to have been of paramount importance in bringing about the ultimate Allied victory in 1945. Both Joy Longhill and Josie Bolton-Carter worked on the project, the former in Egypt.

Mrs Bolton-Carter, who moved to Burton Overy after her marriage in 1960, has described how she was recruited into the Women's Royal Naval Service whilst still at school, and went to live at Woburn Abbey with other Enigma personnel. At Bletchley Park, she was in the German section, which was mathematics-based and top secret. It was, she says, 20 years after the end of the war before her parents became aware of her role.

It was while they were both on military duties in Cairo that Beryl and Alan Baker first met. Beryl was a sergeant in the ATS and spent two years at Catterick with the War Office Selection Board, before being sent to Egypt to work for the brigadier in charge of British troops there. Her late husband, Alan, worked in the same office, and they married after they both returned to Britain when the war ended. Despite her service in the Army, the only bombing Beryl experienced was in Leicester – she was walking down Humberstone Gate when a bomb fell nearby.

Civilian war effort

As more and more metal was required for the manufacture of ammunition, armaments, ships and aeroplanes, the Government set about

encouraging householders to donate aluminium kitchen utensils, and requisitioned the iron railings which surrounded many of the larger village houses. Paddy Swain well remembers the occasion when the railings were taken from the front garden of The Paddocks, his father's house in Main Street, but for some unknown reason the front gate was not taken and remains there to this day.

He also recalls that, when war broke out, he was having a house built on Carlton Lane, now The Springs. Although the walls were complete, he was not allowed to continue building. However, as the rafters were then delivered, he was given permission to put the roof on, but nothing more. The house was not completed until the end of the war.

Evacuees

Flora James, nee Barbour, a farmer's daughter who was 20 years old at the outbreak of war, recalls that in 1939, in the run-up to war being declared, a number of women and children from elsewhere in the country occupied Hawthorne Cottage on Main Street, then the property of Joseph Swain. However as the "phoney war" proceeded most of them returned to their former homes but then other evacuees came into the village. One of these, a young boy named David, stayed with Flora's family and she recalls the difficulty her mother had in getting him to write home each week.

Home Guard

On Tuesday 14th May 1940, the Secretary of State for War broadcast an appeal for men to join a new force of Local Defence Volunteers, later to become the Home Guard. Response was immediate and Burton Overy soon had its own platoon, recruited from men living in the village. One of them, Don Alloway, whose brother Kenneth was killed in action, recalls how he served at the age of 17, and used to go on manoeuvres each Sunday morning at Gumley. Initially the recruits did not have rifles and had to drill with broomsticks. Eventually they were given rifles but the ammunition for them was not delivered until much later.

Flora James and John (Knocker) Holman both remember that the Home Guard was responsible for guarding the Burton Brook bridge on the A6 road, and had a hut nearby in which they would sleep – or rather, from the stories that Flora recalls hearing about the confines of the hut, try to sleep.

Air raid precautions

With the enemy bombing raids came national concern for the black-out. No light whatsoever was allowed to be shown from buildings or



Burton Overy Home Guard in 1944, outside the rectory.
Back row, left-to-right: Edgar Hill, Archie Hill, Eric Marshall, Charlie Hill, Sammy Morris, Frank Wichham.
Middle row, left-to-right: Frank Williams, Donald Alloway, Denniss Chandler, Billy Easom, Stan Wells, Albert Coulman.
Front row, left-to-right: Charley Holman, Charles Simons, Rev Bower, George Ashley, Jock McKie, Thomas Burton

elsewhere. Flora recalls that Vincent Taylor, a farmer who lived on Back Lane, was an Air Raid Warden and was very strict when he was on duty. “You dare not show a glimmer of light when he was about”, she says.

Prisoners of War (POWs)

As the war continued enemy troops captured by the allies were brought to Great Britain. As in the First World War, the absence of our own countrymen in the armed forces meant that prisoners were put to work on local farms. Two Germans, Otto and Wilhelm were brought to Barbour’s farm each day from their camp and Flora James recalls how her mother would supplement the prisoners’ own food because she thought their rations were insufficient for the heavy work they had to do. The Women’s Institute scrapbook contains a sketch of Stanley Wells working on a tractor, by one of the prisoners.

Special Constabulary

John (Knocker) Holman, who was 26 at the start of the war, volunteered to join the Special Constabulary rather than the Home Guard and continued to serve for a total of 35 years. He graphically describes some of his experiences of policing this rural community, as it accommodated members of the Royal Marines at Carlton Curlieu, and members of the Royal Air Force, The Parachute Regiment and the American forces at Stoughton. The troops would often attend dances held in the Burton Overy village hall and he recalls as many as six or seven Marines on one motorbike coming from Carlton Curlieu.

Another duty he recalls concerns four prisoners of war who escaped from Derbyshire and stole a car which they abandoned in Kibworth. A major search was organised, in which he was required to search all outlying farm buildings in the area. The prisoners were eventually arrested at East Norton.

Women's Institute

Burton Overy WI was particularly active helping with the war effort and their Minute Book of that period records their production of hand knitted garments, blankets and homemade jam. They organised collections of rosehips, foxgloves and herbs, of books for salvage and of eggs, potatoes and onions for the Leicester Royal Infirmary. In addition they provided cigarettes, magazines and postage stamps for those local men who were serving in the armed forces.

They organised collections of rosehips, foxgloves and herbs...

Their Minutes also record that in 1943, with food being rationed, the regular meetings had to dispense with serving biscuits, as members could not afford the food coupons.

Land girls and others

Once again, women were recruited to work on the land. As members of the Women's Land Army, in their distinctive uniform of green sweater and khaki trousers, they were a familiar sight in and around the village as they provided assistance on most of the farms. Knocker Holman recalls that at harvest time there would have been as many as 16 Land Girls helping on his farm.

The ladies of the village also worked to help the war effort and could be found in factories and offices in Leicester. Flora James recalls travelling by bus to work in Leicester and the buses having conductresses rather than conductors. Some of the conductresses, she says, used to hate to go on the route between Burton Overy and Houghton-on-the-Hill, as there were seven gates on the road, each of

which had to be opened by the conductress. Their greatest concern was the cows which would congregate around the gates and had to be moved out of the way. A daunting task for a city girl.

Victory celebration

Victory in Europe in 1945 was celebrated with a large bonfire and village party on the paddock, which used to be opposite the post office on Main Street. Paddy Swain recalls that he had acquired some rockets from somewhere and he set light to them at the VE party. He had been advised to place the rocket sticks in bottles, but unfortunately one bottle fell over so that its rocket flew just above the ground, straight up Main Street, narrowly missed a few spectators, and landed near the butcher's shop, causing no little alarm.



The former tithe barn

6

Leisure and Celebrations

Diversions during the 20th Century

Music and May Queens, drama and dancing, croquet and cricket – in the years between 1900 and 2000, Burton Overy can claim to have enjoyed them all – and more.

Musically, the century began with the formation of a village band, and closed with a drum-led procession to the New Year's Eve bonfire and fireworks on December 31st 1999.

Back in the early days, Band of Hope meetings were a popular diversion. Young men willingly lined up to sign the pledge – although how many of them kept it is not recorded! The village band played at celebrations such as those to mark the Coronation of George V and Queen Mary in 1910, and also gave concerts. The younger singers and musicians went straight from school to Banks Farm to practise their songs: *Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam* was reported as a prime favourite.

Burton Overy on the ball

Sport in the village flourished in the past as it does today. The first village cricket team was formed in 1855, when the lads played on a pitch off the road from Great Glen to Kings Norton. Members mowed and rolled the pitch for fixtures, and on match days, the ladies fetched water from Oaks Farm (now demolished), in order to provide teas for the players.

In the 1920s, Burton Overy boasted a Ladies' Cricket XI, as well as a men's side, and the village football team was a force to be reckoned with. The Girls' Guild played croquet at The Paddocks, and there was even a village tennis club, with its own grass court and a small hut

near the Washbrook, on land belonging to the Misses Oswin of Manor Farm. The club remained in existence until 1939.

Several decades later, in the 1980s, Anne Bloor began offering tennis coaching sessions on her court at The Springs. These were very popular with children of all ages. Occasional parent and child tournaments were arranged, and a Millennium Tournament produced some keenly contested encounters at both singles and doubles.

Other racket sports were played too: the only wooden squash court in England was built next to Ivy Cottage by the then owner, a Mr Stuart.

A mixed badminton group played regularly in the village hall until 1962, and a ladies' group, launched in the 1980s, is still going strong. Plans for a rebuilt village hall include a full-sized badminton court.

Children's hours

Efforts have always been made to cater for children in the village. Back in the 1930s, the rector, the Rev Benjamin Lloyd, ran games and activities for the younger villagers in the village hall, on Thursday afternoons, after tea.

A regular sewing class was run by Miss Tyler of Higher House.



The Burton Overy football team

Standing, l-r: Harold Mattock; Frank Cox; unknown; Goalkeeper, Mr Harrison; Laurie Harris; Bob Druce; Don Smith; Walter Beet.

Front row, l-r: Fred Beet; Reg Hill; Mr Higginbottom (Bunker's Hill); Horace Smith;



*A cricket team from pre-war days (circa 1938).
Back row, l-r: Reg Beet; Stan Forryan; Frank Williams (capt); Fred Pateman (umpire).
Middle row: Eric Beet; Bert Ashby; Tom Bond; Jack Hill.
Front row: Dick Betteridge; Len Betteridge; Jack Cox;*

Sessions took place in a cottage she owned opposite her home. While the children stitched away, she read to them, and items they made were sold to provide money for the care of a leper child. The class ended after war broke out in 1939.

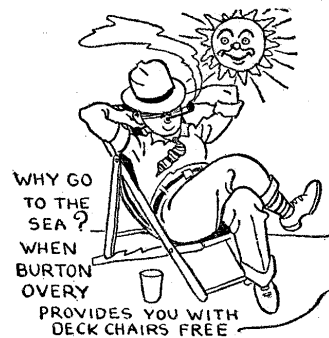
In the 1960s, two young mothers in the village launched a playgroup in the village hall, and held a jumble sale to raise money to buy toys and equipment. The group ran one morning a week, with mothers helping on a rota basis, and functioned for several years.

For older children, there was a flourishing Youth Club in the 1970s and 80s, with teenage members from Burton Overy and some of the neighbouring villages. Some of the youngsters worked for and gained the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award, and activities included swimming, working parties in the chapel, in the church and churchyard at Burton Overy and Shangton, organising jumble sales and so on. More ambitiously members were taken on two self-catering weekends, one to Derbyshire and another to Norfolk.

Brownies, Guides, and Cub and Scout groups in Great Glen attracted children from the village, whilst teenagers often joined the Norton and Gaulby Young Farmers' Club. Visits to neighbouring villages for Saturday night dances were popular, as were trips to that favourite weekend venue, the Oadby Cinema, where seats cost one shilling and ninepence (just under 10p), and the bus fare was 10 pence.

Friendship, drama and dance

At the other end of the age scale, the formation of Burton Overy Friendship Club for



the over 55s was initially a means of securing visits from the Chiropody Service for people in the village. The club continues to meet regularly, holds coffee mornings, an annual strawberry tea and a Christmas lunch – its popularity remains undiminished.

The village drama group was revived in the 1960s, and was well supported. A decade on, Sarah and Katie Harris of Chestnuts Farm wrote and produced pantomimes. They and other village children made up the casts, and performances were organised to raise money for charity as well as to entertain villagers at Christmas. Once, when rain threatened to drown the summer production of Bluebeard, the performance was staged in a Chestnuts Farm cowshed.

Old time dancing lessons were held in the village hall in the 1950s, and in the 80s, a folk dance group, the Burton Overy Dancers (BODS) was launched. They meet every Wednesday, performing traditional dances with both skill and enthusiasm.

The Women's Institute

No account of social life in Burton Overy would be complete without mention of the role of the Women's Institute, founded in 1918, and one of the earliest to be formed in Leicestershire. Its contributions to village life began early, with the inauguration of the Library Service in 1919. The library van continues to visit the village on a regular basis.

The WI began organising children's parties, also in 1919, and this



*WI members in costume for their guest evening in February 1937.
Back row, l-r: Mrs. W. Beet; Jane Roberts; Kate Barbour; Mrs Davenport;
Kath Smith; Kath Simmons. Front row: Connie Bailey; Flora Barbour;
Ruth Warner; Mrs. Matthews*



The Village Produce Show, August 26 1950.

Left to right: Mrs Jerwood; Mrs F. Smith; Mrs Barbour; Mrs Beet; Mrs C. Holman; Miss M. Fox; unknown; J. Betteridge; Miss Dencher; Mrs Alloway

annual event continued for many years before being replaced by a summer outing or a pantomime trip at Christmas.

History does not record whether it was formed as a response to the WI, but a Men's Institute did meet regularly in the Reading Room in the 1920s.

Having helped to fund the village hall, the WI has continued to help maintain it by providing curtains, chairs, crockery and so on. At the start of the new Millennium, it is one of the most regular users of the hall.

In 1923, the WI inaugurated an annual produce show, held in conjunction with a garden fete and a dance in the evening. The Show is still a popular event, with cookery and craft classes, fruit, vegetable and flower classes, and categories for children. Competition for the prize for the biggest marrow or the longest runner bean is always particularly keen.

Classes in basket weaving, folk dancing, keep fit, drama and patchwork, as well as whist drives, a drama group and monthly guest evenings for the entertainment of villagers were popular WI events in



The May Day procession pictured circa 1930, with May Queen Hilda Cox and her attendants

the 1930s, and the Institute's important contribution to the war effort during World War II is mentioned in Chapter 5.

In 1998, the WI celebrated its 80th anniversary with a party in the village hall. Regular monthly meetings, with speakers and demonstrations on a wide variety of topics continue, and members never fail to respond to pleas for them to provide teas and refreshments at village events such as the fete and the millennium midsummer party.

Celebrations

When it comes to celebrations, opportunities are not neglected. May Day festivities were an annual highlight during the 1930s, with a May Queen leading a procession which wound its way from the village up to Carlton Curlieu.

Commemorative plates were commissioned to mark the Silver Jubilee of George V and Queen Mary in 1935, and other items marked the Coronation, two years later, of George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

The 1975 village fete was a memorable occasion held in the garden of Higher House. Teas were served in the gardens of Bailey's Lane houses, there was an exhibition of veteran cars, and rides on John (Knocker) Holman's steam engine. "Thousands of people came," recorded one of the organisers.

The Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977 was celebrated with an eventful day. A wheelbarrow race and a tug-of-war across the Washbrook provided the morning's entertainment, and in the afternoon a service in St Andrew's Church was followed by sports and a tea party, at which all the children under 16 were presented with a commemorative mug. In the evening a Ladies v. Gents cricket match preceded supper and a social evening in the village hall.

An end and a beginning

The close of the 20th century found Burton Overy in festive mood. A series of workshops in the village hall produced some spectacular lanterns, which lent colour and variety to a drum-led torchlight procession up to the huge bonfire lit in an open field on the road to Carlton Curlieu.

Villagers, families and friends all joined in, cheering as the sky was lit up with a series of rockets, one for each decade of the century, which soared up into the sky and whooshed down in showers of



Burton Overy and Illston WI Cricket team in the 1930s



Millennium celebrations on New Year's Eve 1999

sparkling gold and silver.

This was a truly memorable event. New Year's Eve celebrations continued in private homes and at The Bell, and at midnight the church bells pealed out over the village to ring in the year 2000. The new millennium had begun.

I Remember When...

Oral History

This chapter is derived mostly from material taken from interviews with some of Burton Overy's longest-standing residents. In the cases of Hannah Barbour and Charles Newton, both of whom died some years ago, they had written down their memories of life in the village and it was thought appropriate to include some of them here. In the case of Bert (Son) Ashby, he was interviewed only a few months before leaving the village after 81 years. All of the interviewees have been very generous with their time, and their memories create a wonderfully vibrant picture of Burton in days gone by.

FLORA JAMES was born in Burton Overy, at Kingarth Farm. She has lived in the village all her life, currently at Curlieu Cottage. Her mother, **HANNAH BARBOUR**, was born in Scotland and came to Burton in 1913 with her husband, who farmed at Kingarth Farm. She died in 1974.

PADDY SWAIN moved to Burton Overy as a schoolboy with his family around 1920 and lived originally at The Paddocks. He began building the house now named The Springs in the 1930s, and today lives at Bunkers Hill.

JOHN [Knocker] HOLMAN was born in Hallaton, but moved to Burton when he was 13 months old. Though his parents had briefly left Burton just prior to his birth, his family history in the village goes back several generations.

JACK LANGTON moved to Burton from Great Glen shortly after the War. His father had been farming Manor Farm, and Jack eventually took over the farm and the Manor House.

BERT [Son] ASHBY was born and raised in the village, and was a distinguished war veteran. He moved away from his life-long home in Scotland Lane at the end of 1999. His brother **GEORGE**, always known as **KELLY** handed down many of his own memories to his nephew, Roger Holt of Kibworth, who has shared them with us.

DOROTHY BURTON and **MOLLY DURHAM** are sisters who have lived in Burton Overy all their lives.

CHARLES NEWTON was born in Burton Overy in 1894, and lived here for many years. He died in 1981, but extracts from his journal are published by kind permission of his grandchildren, Roy Newton and Janice Allsop.

Tales of long ago

Several people remembered stories of Burton Overy from before their own time, both from local legend and as handed down by their parents.

John (Knocker) Holman

My grandfather walked from his home in Welford to Burton Overy at the age of nine. He worked on a farm at Carlton Curliou for Mr Oldacres. He was paid nine shillings a week, and because he was a good worker and could lay hedges and thatch as well, he was paid an extra shilling.

My mother, Sarah Holman [nee Winkle], worked as a cook for the Duchess of Hamilton at Glen House. She was allowed a pint of beer a day — but she always gave her ration to the gardener. When my dad (Arthur Holman, b.1873) was 11 or 12, and Uncle Tom was 14, they used to call in to The Greyhound pub in Great Glen and for three pence each, they could have as much beer and bread and cheese as they wanted.

Before 1900 there was a drum and fife band, in which my father and my Uncle Tom played. They played at fetes and dances, and at the big houses at Christmas.

Charles Newton

Father had a very old single key flute, of the type normally made in the early part of the 18th century. He used to play it at village feasts, which I remember very well. He also had a fife, and we children used to love to listen to him playing it, especially at Christmas.

Bert Ashby

This house (1 Scotland Lane) was one of the village pubs, The Old Crown, though that was before my day and my mother couldn't

remember it either. This room here [the sitting room] was the bar and that little room over there was the snug.

They told me years ago there was a little house by the bridge that got swept away when the brook was in flood. It'd be a mud house, you see. Over the bridge on your left, there's a little bit of a garden and it stood in there. That brook can get flooded. There's a tombstone in the graveyard with all little pictures on it, about two lads that got drowned in the Washbrook when it was in flood.

Paddy Swain

Thorp was the parson here some time before we arrived. He was known as the Hunting Parson — very famous. He had about a dozen horses down at The Rectory, and he used to hunt about three days a week.

Hannah Barbour

There is a legend connected with the farm yard (at Kingarth Farm): it is said that at midnight on Christmas Eve a carriage and pair are driven through the yard, but I have never seen it.



Burton Overy celebrated Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. Villagers posed for this photograph in Back Lane.

Several people remembered tales of Burton Overy from local legend, such as the story of the village woman accused of witchcraft in 1760:

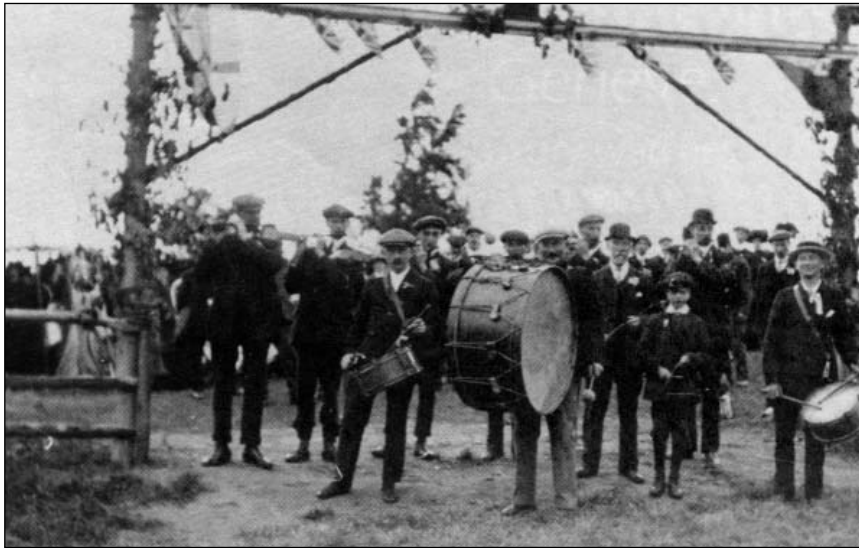
A Burton Overy woman accused of witchcraft in 1760 was tried by being thrown into a pond. If she sank she would be pronounced innocent, but if she floated her guilt would be considered proven. In the event, the trial was said to be inconclusive and she was left at the edge of the water to find her own way home.

Many good times

From school days to working life and leisure activity, Burton Overy has seen many changes. Life was often difficult, and work was hard, but social activity centred around the village and there were many good times. These memories provide a snapshot of what Burton must have been like in the first part of the 20th century.

Charles Newton

There were about 30 children in the class at school, and we sat on raised platforms in rows. Our school teacher was an old lady named Jenny Huff who sat at the front with a long stick and if we miss behaved (sic) she used to tap us on the hand with the cane.



Burton Overy village band in action

We were taught how to write by making what were called "pot hooks" (the proper shapes for copperplate handwriting). We had lessons in counting using a frame of coloured beads, and small mats in strips of different-coloured paper weaved into patterns.

Bert Ashby

There were a lot of kids in the school. There were much bigger families in those days. The kids walked from Carlton down to the school here as well. There used to be 60 children in the school sometimes.

Kelly Ashby

We had a young teacher, around the time of the First World War, that we played up. She would rush through the churchyard to fetch the rector, and he would come to school wielding his walking stick, and we'd all become quiet.

John (Knocker) Holman

There were two teachers at the village school, Mrs Thomas, a vicar's wife from Kibworth, and Mrs Bebbington. I remember using slates in the infant's class. At threshing time, there were always mice in the corn stacks. We used to catch them and put them in paper bags and let them out in school, which made the girls scream a lot!

Charles Newton

The playground was very small. We used to play at marbles, and various other games like rounders and Tick Tack. This was a game using a piece of round wood six inches long and pointed at each end. Someone hit the point with a stick, it flew into the air, and if it dropped into the ring nearest the centre then they were the winner and each person had to forfeit some sweets to them.

We children used to go into the rectory garden and sing on the anniversary of Boscobel [the rectory garden's oak tree is reputedly descended from the Boscobel Oak].

Hannah Barbour

Sheepwashing, before shearing, was done at the Washbrook and was a great attraction for the schoolchildren, as were the days when the steam mill came to do the threshing.

Flora James

We had a milk round and we used to take milk to an old lady who lived at Hawthorne Cottage. She used to ask: "Would you thread me some needles?" and we'd thread them and stick them

into the curtains for her. Then you'd get a ha'penny, and you could go to the shop and spend it. I didn't really understand at the time why she needed us to thread the needles — but I do now!

Kelly Ashby

In the early part of the century a curfew bell was rung each day, at 6pm in winter and 8pm in summer. It is said that one very foggy night a man who was lost found his way to the village by hearing the curfew bell. He was very grateful and gave some money to the church. There was also a pancake bell which was rung on Shrove Tuesday.

Bert Ashby

When I was a little lad I remember the death bell going out for Mrs Mattock. It used to ring two for a woman and three for a man, and then they'd ring their age on the bell. I remember my mother listening out for how old she was, and then she knew it was Mrs Mattock. Of course, you knew everybody in the village then.

John Holman

Before I'd left school, I remember walking sheep and cows into the cattle market in Leicester. One Saturday, one of the beasts went mad and got loose. In Sandown Road it went off down a narrow jitty and pushed the walls down. We got out of the way fast! There was another occasion when a sheep got away, ran into a garden near the tram house in Oadby, got into a greenhouse, and broke all the glass.

Paddy Swain

Everything was at The Paddocks in those days — garden fetes, the hunt, etc. Many country houses had a cook, two housemaids living in, a groom, an under-groom, a gardener, an under-gardener, and someone to look after the house cows.

My father had the first car in the village. Then Parson Cory came, and he had an old Model T Ford. He was very interested in engineering, and I spent a lot of time with him rebuilding it.

John (Knocker) Holman

In the early 1920s, there were still World War I prisoners living at Illston Grange. My two older brothers had the job of escorting them to village farms in the morning, and taking them back in the evening. I sometimes went with them in the summer. Occasionally the POWs would give us money to go to the post office and get them cigarettes.

Flora James

Hawthorne Cottage was used for evacuees during the war. It was

mothers and children at the start, but then the mothers went back and the children more or less found homes in the village.

Jack Langton

I remember farm machinery first coming in during the War. The first tractor I ever got on was one of those things you stepped on the back. No luxury seats or anything — you stood up on it. And the binder and things like that were quite new in my day.

Hannah Barbour

In 1913 ploughing, haymaking, harvesting etc were all done by man and horsepower. Now, with the use of mechanical machinery and implements, all that work is done with less labour and in a shorter time.

Milking was also done by hand at Kingarth Farm, taken to Leicester dairy and delivered shortly after 7am. Evening milk was cooled by placing churns of milk in large tubs of cold water. Milk was sold in the village for around 2d a pint.

Married farm workers always kept a pig and had it killed for home consumption. Lamb's tails for pies, pig's blood and beastings (the first milk given by a cow after calving, used in some places to make tarts and puddings) were in much demand by the wives.

Charles Newton

We always had pigs and cured our own bacon, hams, and so on. There were always two sides of bacon each side of the fireplace, with two home cured hams and a bladder of the pig full of pure lard. My father cured all the pig's frame with saltpetre in leaden troughs. Pork pies were made, and baked at the bakehouse.

After the corn in the fields was cut we used to go in the field



*Hannah Barbour pictured at Kingarth Farm
in 1915*



The Fernie Hunt gathering in Main Street

with a sort of perambulator and collect the wheat, together with blackberries, crab apples and herbs for making head beer.

The sanitation of the village was very bad. The refuse was collected at night by lorries. I and three of my brothers caught diphtheria, which was very common.

Hannah Barbour

When I first came to England I was disgusted at the dirty state of most of the cowsheds in comparison with the high standard of hygiene and sanitary conditions in a Buteshire shed. One farmer said to my husband: "No need to be so fussy about cleaning your sheds: the sanitary inspector, who keeps two cows, only cleans his out twice a year."

In 1933 foot and mouth disease struck the cattle, and all the animals except the horses, cats and dogs were slaughtered. We were not allowed to restock for several months; then, as Kipling's "If" says, we had to start again and build with broken tools.

Bert Ashby

I worked on the Co-Op Stoughton Estate, on maintenance, doing the painting and that kind of thing. I worked with the hunt when I was younger. People kept a horse out here for hunting...these were stables when I was a kid (*indicates Stable House in Rectory End*), but there were more horses down around Bowden.

Charles Newton

My father used to repair stable doors for a gentleman who lived in a very large house opposite the rectory (*now Ivy Cottage*). I used to help in the house, cleaning lamps and helping the butler and cook in the butler's pantry. This gentleman, Mr Stuart, was a stockbroker in London and a very great man in Burton Overy. He supplied parties in the schoolroom, giving presents to all the children and villagers at Christmas. He was a big follower of the Fernie Hunt.

Hannah Barbour

Years ago, many hunting people had houses here for the hunting season, but motor cars and horse boxes put an end to all that.

Paddy Swain

My sisters and I rode with the Fernie Hunt. From the time Mr Fernie started the pack at Billesdon, the Fernie foxhounds met at The Paddocks twice a season to draw the famous Glen Oaks covert. The hunt met at Burton House here a few times before the CWS banned the hunt from their land round the Strettons.

For a short time in the early 30s, the Bassett hounds were kennelled at The Paddocks when the Wallhampton became the Westerby.

It was not unusual for a household to have three horses, sometimes four, and they took a lot of looking after. The horses were always being exercised, and there was a lovely clatter of hooves all day long. A number of houses kept around six horses, and they were exercised every morning — that's how people were employed in those days.

My mother virtually started the WI here, and several of the WI events were held at The Paddocks.

Hannah Barbour

The Women's Institute was first held in the Reading Room or the schoolroom and afterwards in the village hall. It brought fresh interest to the village women with talks, demonstrations, competitions and other activities.

Flora James

I was involved in one ladies' cricket match, which was a WI thing down at The Paddocks. Mrs Swain was very big in the WI,

she was secretary. We were lucky because there was a tennis court at The Paddocks, and after Paddy and his two sisters were married, old Mr Swain used to let us use the court. My two sisters were keen, so we could always get a game. There was a tennis club as well.

Jack Langton

We had a grass tennis court at Manor Farm. People from the village used to play, and there was a little arbour at the end where the youngsters used to hold hands. The badminton club used to be full up two nights a week. You had to be there at 6 pm to get a court. We played cards in between games.

Bert Ashby

We had a good cricket team before and after the war. And we had a good football team quite a while before the war, when I was a little lad.

Hannah Barbour

There is a large barn at Kingarth Farm where festivities used to be held during Wakes Week holiday and other occasions.

Dorothy Burton and Molly Durham

We remember New Year's Eve very well. It always started with a service in the church from 6—6.30pm. This was followed by 12 hands of whist in the village hall for the old folks. From 7.30 to 8.30 pm there was a social with postman's knock, singing and The Lancers. 8.30 pm refreshments, followed by a dance which ended at 11.30 on Saturdays but 11 pm if it was a weekday. They sang *The Miner's Dream of Home*. There were five-minute bells and Mr Chandler played the drum, accompanied by Mr Wilson on the piano. The village had a similar programme for St Andrew's Day.

Paddy Swain

There wasn't much leisure time in those days, but then there wasn't much to do. The village fete was the major excitement of the year. As soon as one finished they'd begin planning the next one.

Flora James

In the early 20s there was a sixpenny hop every Saturday night. Whist drives and dances were very popular too. There was always the fete and the produce show — the fete in Bailey's Field, and on August Bank Holiday Monday the produce show in the hall and then a dance at night.

There were other things in the village, like concerts, but there

wouldn't be a lot — you made your own entertainment.

Bygone trades

Everyone remembered the many tradesmen, trades and colourful occupations which were carried out in the village, and regretted their passing. John Holman in particular has a remarkable recall of the various tradesmen and their places of business.

John (Knocker) Holman

Joby Mattock ran a boot and shoe repair business near Hawthorne Cottage, in what was formerly the blacksmith's shop. Harry Smith was a stonemason, painter and decorator at The Old House. Eulo Cox was the baker, in a house near the post office. Cock the butcher was next door to George Pears's house, and George's father was apprenticed to him. When Ernest Pears set up as a butcher, he bought the house next door.

Tom Easom, nicknamed Stoaty, operated from what is now Overton Cottage and was a carpenter, wheelwright, glazier and undertaker. Sandy Williamson, a fellmonger — that is, dealer in hides



*The village baker, Eulo Cox, and his wife are in the centre of the group.
The young boy in front of Mrs Cox is Roger Harris, aged six*

and skins — operated from what is now the Palfreymans's paddock.

Mrs Wardle, a dressmaker, lived at the end of Scotland Lane in what is now Scotland House (north). Wilson's the carriers operated from a house next to the present pub. Miss Read ran the post office, and also sold sweets and stationery. Walter Allen, the blacksmith from Great Glen, used to spend two days a week in Burton.

There were the travelling tradesmen as well. A Mr Garner from Fleckney used to come to the village weekly by motor lorry selling greengroceries. A trader who sold hardware used to bang on a basin with a spoon because he refused to pay for the licence to have a bell! Another trader, called Humphrey, was nicknamed Mr Pinwire because he said his material would wear like pinwire. He called every fortnight with fabric, hats, and so on. As children we used to hang on the back of the cart to slow it down.

Charles Newton

An Italian peasant used to come round the village with a barrel organ and a monkey on the top, and used to play tunes with the script on rolls of paper. My father was a carpenter and an undertaker. He used to make all kinds of things such as gates, furniture repairs, including coffins. He actually made his own mother's coffin.



George Pears in his butcher's shop

Flora James

The man who did the gravestones was Mr Smith and he lived in the end of the Old House. He had two sons, and I remember he was a great crossword fiend!

Quite a few people had little sweetshops that they just set up. We used to cycle round to the one in Bell Lane for dabs and suckers. Son Ashby's wife's mother had one in the house where Knocker [John Holman] lives now. I can remember we were playing, and the youngest daughter came and told us, "Mother's got a sweet shop now, and we've got so-and-so..." and when uncles and aunts came and gave you two bob [10p] or half a crown [12^{1/2}p], you nipped straight round to the sweet shop.

Then of course there was the post office. Mrs Cox was the postmistress, and it was Miss Read before the war. There was the butcher's, the baker's — we even used to have a travelling chemist! Surprising, really, when you think about it.

Charles Newton

The baker next door was our landlord and gave us a good supply of bread and cakes. On Sunday we used to take our joint of meat to be baked for 2d with Yorkshire pudding on top. The baker was also a grocer and confectioner, then lower down was the village post office.

Bert Ashby

The old smithy was in Bell Lane, across from the pub car park. The blacksmith used to come up once or twice a week from Glen and shoe the horses.

The cobbler — Mattock was his name — lived in Hawthorne Cottage, and at the green round the back, the shed there was the cobbler's shop.

Paddy Swain

The cobbler's shop was like the village parliament. The men would gather there in the evenings and set the world to rights.

Memorable characters

Certain village residents really stood out in people's memories, and were fondly recalled.

Jack Langton

We bought the manor from the Misses Oswin, a pair of spinsters who had fallen out of an Emily Brontë book. I don't know if they

were short of money or not, but that was a very big house, and they used to have two lumps of coal in the grate, and they'd really be huddled right over it, trying to keep warm. And their old nanny had a hob on the kitchen fire and she kept filling hot water bottles to bring them because they were cold.

Flora James

Miss Nellie Oswin ran the Sunday school, so we used to have cups of tea at the Manor House, particularly if the apples and pears were ripe. There was a hammock between the trees, which I thought was absolutely marvellous.

I always remember that Miss Annie once came up to me, wearing her coat, and she said: "My dear, do you know what I've done? I've put my modesty vest on, and I've forgotten to put on my dress!"

Bert Ashby

George Pears kept a real old fashioned butcher's shop. He was the last of the old tradesmen, was George. Never had a till — he used to give you your change out of half an old coconut!

Paddy Swain

In the 1920s, the old church sexton, Tom Lewin, used to shuffle about the village in this bowler hat. He was always in this bowler hat — part of the scenery. He was also getting on a bit, and mentally he'd obviously deteriorated somewhat. Well, the pond in the Glebe (the field next to the village hall) is very deep, and one day someone noticed Tom's bowler hat floating on the surface, and they thought he'd fallen in the pond. They soon got excited, trying to figure out how they would fish out the body. This had been going on for about two hours when I arrived. A nice little crowd had gathered round the pond, and it went on for some time. Suddenly, someone noticed Tom standing right there in the crowd — but no one had recognised him without his bowler hat!

Changing times

The Burton recalled in this chapter is gone forever. There have been a number of ways in which the village has changed, and many were mentioned with some sadness.

Bert Ashby

There were a lot more farms in the village then. A lot of little men with one or two cows. They made their own butter and farmed for the family.



The Fernie Hunt Meet outside The Paddocks

They used to drink a lot, and of course some of them would get drunk. They used to play a lot of long alley skittles down the old Bell, and you could always hear them.

Paddy Swain

You used to see the farm hands going home at night with their jug of milk. Now that's all gone. Recently I've been country walking with a group in the village, and I couldn't make out what seemed so odd when we were out in the fields. Then it occurred to me: I realised you never saw anybody!

When I was a boy, virtually every field you went into there would be farmhands working, and in the winter they'd be fencing...but now it's entirely different. Even in the village, it's the same. All the cars are on the move at around eight in the morning, and at about 4.30 they start to arrive back. In the meantime, there's hardly anyone about. You could walk from here to the church right now and not see a soul.

Flora James

I had a friend whose mother was a Scot, like mine, and she used to come and play with me in the fields — but of course you

could then, couldn't you? People didn't worry so much. We used to give lifts to strangers, cycle round the countryside to dances. You'd want to be careful now.

Jack Langton

The village has changed. Before the War, you knew everyone. One of the main changes is that there used to be so many farm workers living in the village and now there are hardly any. It's very hard for young people in the village.

Hannah Barbour

During the years, farm land has been split up and farm houses sold away from the land. Mechanism has certainly taken the hard chore out of work, but I think it has destroyed part of the charm of the countryside. To me, a plowman (sic) with a pair of well groomed horses ploughing a straight furrow and a horse-drawn drag with a load of timber had always a fascination, but these are only memories now.

Glossary

Assart	A piece of land converted to arable by the grubbing up of trees and scrub from forest land
Bordar	A villein of the lowest rank who rendered menial service for a cottage held at the will of his Lord
Carucate	As much land as could be tilled with one plough and eight oxen in a year, about 120 acres
Cordwainer	A shoemaker
Demesne	An estate in Demesne is held by the owner himself and not by any sub-tenant
Fellmonger	A dealer in skins or hides
Fine	A contract or agreement
Furlong	220 yards
Glebe	A portion of land assigned to a clergyman as part of his benefice
Manor	A manor comprises the Lord's demesne and lands from the holders of which he is entitled to exact certain fees and fines
Perch	1/160th of an acre
Rood	A varying measure of land area, but usually 1/4 of an acre
Selion	A ridge or strip lying between two furrows in an open field
Serf	A slave or bondman
Socman	One who holds land by certain services [Sokeman]
Terrier	A register of landed property
Villein	A peasant occupier entirely subject to his lord
Wong	A Leicestershire word for selion