

8 Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands (Viatores)

- South-west of *Park Farm* [HER 9052] two areas of bloomery slag; both areas had a maximum density of 10-20 slag pieces per square metre and there was no evident soil colouration.
- At *Park Farm*, close to *Park Road* [HER 9053]: in a field of young crop. There was a maximum density of 15-25 slag pieces per square metre and slight soil colouration¹⁰.

One interesting later development in the region was the construction of a series of forts along the east coast. These were under the command of a Count of the Saxon Shore (*comes litoris Saxonici per Britanniam*), one of three commands covering Britain at the time, i.e. from about 367. Saxons had gradually sought employment in the

Roman army as auxiliaries and had started to settle on the East Coast. When Rome finally abandoned Britain in 410 not all Romans left. Those who remained assisted the native population to resist the Saxon invaders as the latter became more possessive. There is some evidence to suggest that in the two centuries following the Roman withdrawal from Britain there was some movement west by the native Celtic Britons. Nevertheless, they resisted the Saxons, notably at Mons Badonicus in 490. Although this halted the Saxon expansion for about a century, by the end of the 6th Century the new Saxon kingdoms had largely coalesced and had occupied an area south of a line from North Buckinghamshire to the Upper Thames Valley. Stevington at that point was under Saxon control¹¹.

1 Viatores: *Roman Roads in the South-East Midlands* (1964) p419. HER 58.2 *Op cit.* Bedfordshire Archaeological Series.

2 Salway, Peter: *Roman Britain* (1981) p243

3 Diocletian (244-312). Emperor 284-305

4 Simco, A: *A Survey of Bedfordshire - The Roman Period* (1984) p90

5 Wessex Archaeology: *Yelnow Villa. Colworth Science Park, Bedfordshire* (May 2009) para 1.3.2.

6 Emperor Julian the Apostate (331-63). Reigned 355-63

7 Odell. See Dix, Brian: *Bedfordshire Archaeology* Vol 14 (1980)

8 Newnham. Ingham, David, Oetgen, Jeremy and Slowikowski, Anna: *Newnham - A Roman Bath House and Estate Centre East of Bedford* East Anglian Archaeology 158 (2016)

9 Simco *ibid* p96 and pp107-8

10 Myres, J N L: *The English Settlements* (1987) p165

11 Bedford Borough Council: *Romano-British Stevington* (bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk)

4 ANGLO-SAXONS

In the year 410 four centuries of relatively stable and efficient administration under the Roman empire gave way to five centuries of change and, initially, considerable confusion. So far as Stevington is concerned its history for several centuries from that date is chequered; it is characterised by the advent of the Anglo-Saxons, the establishment of the Christian Church, the rise and fall of Mercia, the first Danish invasion, the consolidation of territory and power by the Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex and the second Danish invasion.

The End of the Pax Romana

The prime reason for the departure of the Romans was the threat to the Empire from the Visigoths led by Alaric¹ who eventually sacked Rome in 410. However, the leaving process had begun much earlier. In 383 Magnus Maximus² withdrew troops from northern and western Britain. In a document called the *Rescript of Honorius*, issued in 410, the Emperor Honorius³ told the Roman cities in Britain to look to their own defence⁴. It is likely he expected to regain control at a later date, but by the middle of the fifth century the commentator Procopius of

Caesarea concluded that Britain was lost to the western Empire⁵. The Celtic Britons then set about expelling the Roman magistrates and the rule of Britannia fell to a series of Romano-British *tyrants*⁶ and, subsequently, to the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. As order broke down Angles and Saxons joined Britons as mercenaries. However, the flow became a flood and pagan migrants began to predominate in a land where Christianity already taken a significant hold.

The Invasion of the Angles

Stevington was located in the south-eastern part of Middle Britain which has been called *the more highly civilised heartland of sub-Roman Britain*⁷. At some point between 475 and 500 the Britannic kingdom of Cynwïdion was carved out of an area which later became north and central Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. The Britannic kingdom of Caer Lerion⁸ lay to the north but was occupied by the Anglo-Saxons by 500.

Resistance

There was resistance. Mons Badonicus (thought to be in Wiltshire) was a famous but not isolated battle fought in 490 which brought the invaders to



⁹ Britain 575-600AD

Hastings and was wounded there. He is depicted on the Bayeux tapestry and it has been suggested that he was involved in the final despatch of Harold. The Count was not a Norman. His French estates at the time of the Conquest lay not in Normandy but in Artois, in the Pas de Calais.

At, or soon after, his coronation, William granted Eustace some 100 manors in England¹⁵ which made him the seventh richest of the new tenants-in-chief¹⁶. In all, the Count's estates in North Bedfordshire amounted to only 15 hides, i.e. some 1,500 to 1,800 acres of taxable land. For the purpose of military service his holding was assessed to three knights' fees of which the manor of Stevington represented one and a half¹⁷. For his service in France and at Hastings Eustace awarded Arnulf his Stevington manor as well as those in Bromham, Pavenham, Little Odell, Sharnbrook and Turvey (see Plate 21). Lands in the first three contiguous villis retained their link with Stevington into the modern era.

17 Count Eustace II from the Bayeux Tapestry



1 Pope Alexander II (1018/19-1073). Anselm of Baggio Pope 1061-73.

2 Harald Hardrada. Harald Sigurdsson (1015-1066). King of Norway (1046-66).

3 Edward Æthling (1051-1126), son of King Edmund Ironside and Ealdgyth. Elected King of England as Edgar II by the Witanegemot in 1066 but never crowned. He spent most of his life in exile in Hungary.

4 Stigand. Archbishop of Canterbury (d 1072) Archbishop 1052-70

5 Fowler *op cit* p79. §120

6 Fowler *op cit* p79. §120

7 Earl Edwine (d 1071) Earl of Mercia, brother of Morkere, son of Ælfgar, Earl of Mercia.

8 Earl Morkere (d after 1087), brother of Edwine, son of Ælfgar, Earl of Mercia.

9 Welldon Finn, R: *The Norman Conquest and its Effects on the Economy 1066-86* (1977) p94

10 Ralf Taillebois (1019-75) born in Orne, Normandy. Sheriff of Bedfordshire. Like Picot he built his fortune by acquiring the lands of royal sokemen. See *Anglo-Norman Studies XIX* (1996) p39

11 Loyn, H R: *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England* p180

12 BHRS Vol 2 pp 199-201. A knight's fee required the provision of one fully equipped mounted horseman with armour and weapons attended by a squire for the King's service.

13 Loyn *op cit*

14 Stenton *op cit* p479

15 Holt *op cit* p242. In 1086 Eustace's estates in 12 shires were worth £915 p.a.

16 Stenton *op cit* p542

17 Fowler *op cit* p92. §157(ii)

8 DOMESDAY BOOK AND BEYOND

Purpose

We now move from 1066 to 1086 and the compilation of the Domesday Book which, incidentally, tells one as much about the last days of Anglo-Saxon England as it does about the first two decades of Norman rule. It is one of the most remarkable surviving records of western civilization; there is no comparable survey in this or any earlier period of European history.

William I ordered it following a *deep* discussion at Gloucester after Christmas 1085. In form it is a *descriptio*, an assessment or survey. The purpose has been the source of much speculation among historians. However, it is instructive to note what contemporaries thought it represented. Robert Losinga¹, Bishop of Hereford was present at the discussion. He wrote:

In the twentieth year of his reign, by order of William, King of the English, there was made a survey of the whole of England, that is to say of the lands of the several provinces of England, and of the possessions of each and all of the magnates. This was done in respect of ploughland and habitations and of men both bond and free, both those who dwell in cottages, and those who had their homes, and their share in the fields; and in respect of ploughs and horses and other animals; and in respect of the services and payments due from all men in the whole land. Other investigators followed the first; and men were sent into provinces which they did not know, and where they were themselves unknown, in order that they might be given the opportunity of checking the first survey and, if necessary, of denouncing its authors as guilty to the king. And the land was vexed with much violence arising from the collection of royal taxes.²

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is more informal and rather scandalised by the whole enterprise:

After this (sc. holding his court for five days), the king had much thought and very deep discussion with his council about this country – how it was occupied or with what sort of people. Then he sent his men over all England into every shire and had them find out how many hundred hides there were in the shire, or what land and cattle the king himself had in the country, or what dues he ought to have in twelve months from the shire. Also he had a record made of how much land his archbishops had, and his bishops and his abbots and his earls – and though I relate it at too great length – what or how much everybody had who was occupying land in England, in land or cattle, and how much money it was



18 Domesday Book

worth. So very narrowly did he have it investigated, that there was no single hide nor a yard of land, nor indeed (it is a shame to relate but it seemed no shame to him to do) one ox one cow nor one pig was there left out, and not put down in his record; and all these records were brought to him afterwards.³

It is thought the Survey was substantially complete when the King met his barons at Salisbury on 1 August 1086, an achievement which would be unthinkable today.

The Commissioners were sent out to the shire and hundred courts and they took evidence from jurors in answer to *pro forma* questions. The questions were:

- The name of the place. Who held it, before 1066, and now?*
- How many hides? How many ploughs, both those in lordship and the men's?*
- How many villagers, cottagers and slaves, how many free men and Freemen?*
- How much woodland, meadow and pasture? How many mills and fishponds?*
- How much has been added or taken away? What the total value was and is?*

These questions help to reveal the purpose of the Survey but they do not tell the whole story. It has been argued convincingly that the purpose was threefold:

- 1 *Domesday is a description of economic resources and fiscal (geld) assessments.*
- 2 *It is arranged in a tenurial or feudal format which identifies owners and in so doing resolved disputed ownership.*
- 3 *In some ways, therefore, it has to do with recording*

(valued at 7d an acre) and 40 acres of arable (valued at 6d an acre); 24½ acres of meadow (valued at 2s an acre); and 12 acres of pasture (also valued at 2s an acre). It is interesting to note that the meadow and pasture is regarded as four times as valuable as arable. The total in demesne was 476 acres. The park is described as *small*; it was recorded as 40 acres in the Hundred Roll of 1278-9. There was the usual warren and a fishery, which is described in greater detail in the Hundred Roll, and a water mill which was probably the fulling mill.

There were 31 virgates valued at 17 shillings *with works* per virgate (930 acres valued at 7d an acre plus works) in villeinage compared with 21 in Domesday Book and 41 cottagers as tenants at will paying 10p a head *with works* compared with 11 in Domesday Book. There were free tenants, though the numbers are not given, whereas none were mentioned in Domesday Book. Their rents total £5 13s 1d, and, assuming they paid not more than 7d an acre, they probably occupied about 170 acres. There were no slaves compared with two in Domesday Book. The total acreage in occupation amounted to 1,572 out of a parish total of 1811.

It is notable that the rents of the free tenants are assessed while those of the villeins and cottagers are specified *with works*. The villeins and cottagers all owed services in varying degrees to the lord of the manor. The cottagers, each with their smallholding of (on average) not much more than five acres and often much less, would have been employed by the lord on demesne work¹⁷.

The *Inquisition* states that the Manor enjoys *Pleas and perquisites of Court with view of frankpledge*. This is a grant of royal jurisdiction to the lord of the manor, a liberty which was granted only to favoured tenants-in-chief¹⁸. View of frankpledge was overseen through the lord's Court Leet as part of the surety system which previously was exercised by the Hundred Court. The jurisdiction went beyond soke and sake¹⁹, toil and team and infangentheof²⁰. The lord of the manor in his manorial court, the Court Baron, did not enjoy criminal jurisdiction but he did in his Court Leet (see Governance, below).

The Hundred Roll of 1278-9

This is a much more detailed document than the *Inquisition* of 1264. It describes Baldwin Wake's holding:

*7¼ virgates*²¹
1 ancient park of 40 acres
1 other wood
A grove of 5 acres
1 Water mill
A fishery in the river Ouse in common (from Radewell hedge as far as the mere between Stevenron and Bromham)

24 virgates in villeinage each valued at 17s in works and services as in the Inquisition.

The demesne seems to have contracted considerably compared with the *Inquisition* and the loss in acreage appears to be balanced by a corresponding decrease in land in villeinage. Letting the demesne when it seemed less profitable to have it in hand was typical of the period. It was probably let to free men. Interestingly, the Roll states that the tenants of the virgates in villeinage *are serfs bound to redeem their tenure at the lord's will*. It goes on to list 76 tenants by name although some parcels are held jointly so that the number of villain tenures is actually 54. These tenants occupy strips in the common fields.

The cottagers are *in the same conditions as serfs*. There are 21 cottages and 21 cottagers who are named. They each owe the lord 9d or works to that value. Four additional cottagers are named who owe different sums and the Roll states *Each of these owes works to that value (the stated values) if the lord wishes and they are in the same condition of serfs like the others*.

Twelve free tenants are named in nine tenancies owing fixed annual service to the value described *and for foreign service and suit of court*²² occupying 185 acres. Their list includes seven villein women and five female cottagers. The free tenants include three women. This is the first mention of free tenants. As for Pavenham, 17 villeins are named tenancing five and one eighth virgates.

The rolls details 47 villeins, 25 cottars and 11 freemen making a total of 83 with an interest in land in the vill. Manorial lands in Pavenham, Little Odell and Bromham are dealt with separately. There were 54 tenancies of which 19 were joint. Of these 44 were tenancies of one half of a virgate (15 acres), an extraordinary uniformity. Six were for a quarter of a virgate and the remainder for smaller areas.

Manorial lands in Pavenham, Little Odell and Bromham are dealt with separately. The Roll states that in Pavenham Baldwin holds six virgates (180 acres) in 17 villein tenancies. The rents are not specified. In addition, there are four cottagers one of whom holds 15 acres at a rental of 8s 1d (6½d an acre) with suit of court and foreign service.

Little Odell and Bromham are mentioned but although of the same honour they do not by then, unlike part of Pavenham, belong to the Manor of Stevington.

Subsidy Roll of 1309

This Roll relates to the vill of Stevington, not the Manor. It is signed off: *Prob. Summa totius villate*. The fiscal value of the whole vill was £4 5s 8d. Local assessors were required by the Hundred Court to assess the value of movable assets. Those with assets of under 10s were



25 The Great Famine of 1315-17

exempt. The rate was 1/25th and the purpose of the levy was to finance the King's war in Scotland²³. 40 villagers paid the subsidy. Their names are Latinised in part. As one might expect, the lord of the manor, Johanna Wake, paid the most at 27s 7d, a very considerable amount. The next highest payer was Ricardo le Taylour, scion of a family on the way up, who paid 3s 3d. Roberto Mile (Miller) paid almost as much (3s 1¾d). None of the people identified in the Hundred Roll figure in this list, though there is continuity in family names viz: Ammory, Abraham, Alulf, Bartolf, Brid, Burgess, Carter, Child, Faber, Frankleyn, Gentleman, Glover, Hurlyfrench, Piscator, Polecroft, Stone, Taylor, Wold and White.

Subsidy Roll of 1332

This was a subsidy of 1/15th, a heavier impost than that of 1309. There are 35 names recorded and the product of the tax was £4 10s 8½d, slightly higher than in 1309. Given that the requirement was a fifteenth rather than a twenty-fifth, the return per head was rather lower. Again, the highest contributor was the lord of the manor, in this case Thomas Wake, but his contribution, 14s 8d, was almost half that paid by Johanna Wake in 1309, possibly the consequence of leasing demesne land. The family names which recur are Abraham, Alulf, Ammory, Brid, Carter, Child, Faber, Frankleyn, Glover, Huliere, Mile (Miller), Piscator, Polecroft, Taylor and Wold.

This was the last subsidy for which there was a specific assessment of the goods of individuals. In 1334 this basis was altered to an agreed figure that each community would pay provided it was not less than the value of the subsidy of 1332.

This is the last we hear of villagers by name before the onset of the Black Death.

The Great Famine of 1315-17

Titow wrote, rather controversially, that in the 14th Century *the two best things to have happened to the peasantry as a whole took place*²⁴. These were the great famines of 1315-17 and the great plague of 1349. ... *they emerge clearly as the turning points at which the downward trend in peasant prosperity was first checked and then decisively reversed*. The decline in peasant prosperity over the 13th Century lay undoubtedly in the great increase in population which took place in that period. Titow suggested that the manors best able to survive were those where land was still available i.e. *colonizing manors* to



26 The Black Death 1348



48 St Mary's Angel with initials of Nicholas Taylor

ends and carved poppy head terminals, the communion rail is of polished oak on ornamental iron standards, and the space within the rail paved with encaustic tiles from Messrs Maw & Co's Works¹³. The seats in the nave and aisle are in yellow deal varnished. The old pulpit and reading desk have been fitted up for temporary use. In removing the plaster from the walls of the tower revealed a Saxon doorway and two windows were discovered indicating the great antiquity of the building. On the eastern side of the south porch door an ancient stoop was discovered, and over the door a fresco¹⁴ representing a distinguished person in a sitting posture and a procession passing before him with an elaborate designed medallion having the words "1633 James V 9: Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye bee condemned: behold the judge standeth before the door"¹⁵. Near to the east end of the south aisle a lancet doorway was discovered, likewise a stone stair, which apparently at some period formed an approach to the rood loft. In the wall on the north aisle a very interesting and most perfect relic was found, a "low side window", the use of which is "vexata questio". It was a squint – an oblique opening in the Church wall affording view of the altar – believed to be either a place where one made confessions or when on arrival late for the Service one could ensure that entry did not disturb the sacrament. In the southwall of the Chancel a traceried window with a squint has long been brought to view, likewise the arches connecting the chapels with the Church and Chancel. The peal of bells, five in number was rerun¹⁶.

The cost of the works amounted to £1,927 and was borne by the Duke of Bedford, local landowners and other parishioners.

The Church was reopened with a special service on Wednesday 22 May 1872 at 11.00am with a reading by the Vicar, Rev Edward Cook, followed by a full communion service and a sermon delivered by the Bishop of Bedford¹⁷. At least 17 clergy attended and some 20 dignitaries. After the morning service the Church bells were rung with a *joyous peal* and the visitors adjourned to the Vicarage for luncheon. A meal was provided for the ringers and the choir and a tea was laid out in the School Room for parishioners. An evening service was taken by Rev S J



49 St Mary's Tenor Bell



50 Rehanging of St Mary's Tenor Bell

Ram with C L Higgins of *Turvey Abbey*¹⁸ accompanying on the harmonium.

The restoration works were extensive. Usher's report only touches on them. All the fenestration was restored. Some indication of its condition before restoration may be obtained from the fabric of the north porch and the external door to the south chapel. They were obviously considered to be worth retaining in their original state. An oil painting which came to light in 2016 shows the St south window before restoration and more or less intact,



57
Parish Chest

The Parish Chest

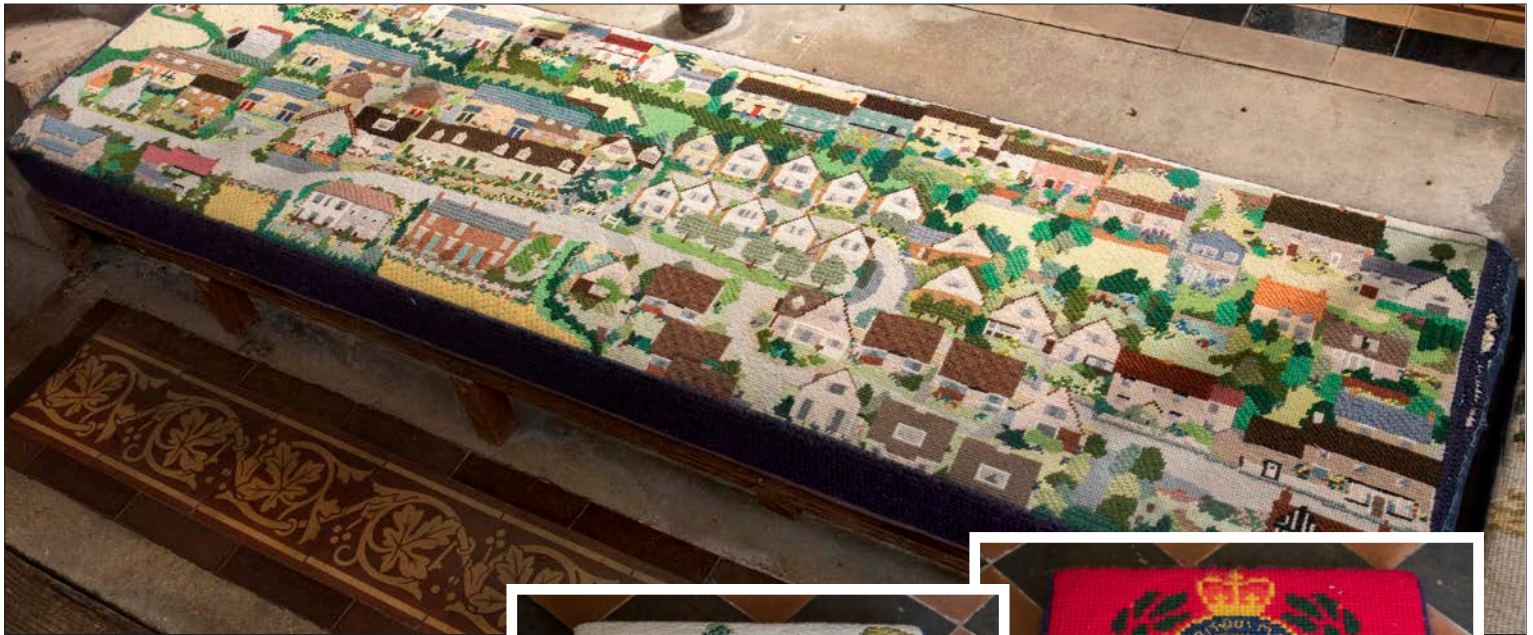
At the west end of the nave, opposite the entrance to the tower, sits the Parish Chest which dates from the 15th Century. With its iron strapping it is a fine example of its kind. Formerly, all the parish and Church documents were kept in it. The older documents are now held in the County Record Office; those in current use are held by the Secretary of the Parochial Church Council.

The Plate

The Church Plate includes an Elizabethan silver communion cup and paten²⁴ dated 1569 bearing the silversmith's mark, a horse's or ass's head, and a silver plated flagon of c 1780. Engraved on the top of the paten are the initials "S & T" indication of a gift from the Taylor family. A silver chalice of this type is quite rare and the Church uses it only on special occasions.

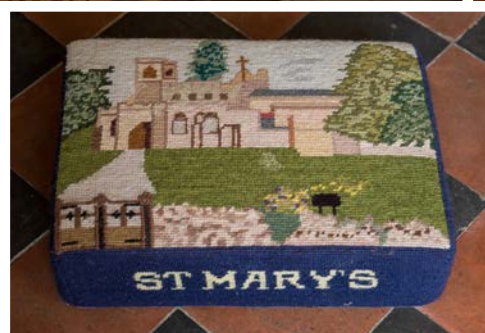


58 Church Silver

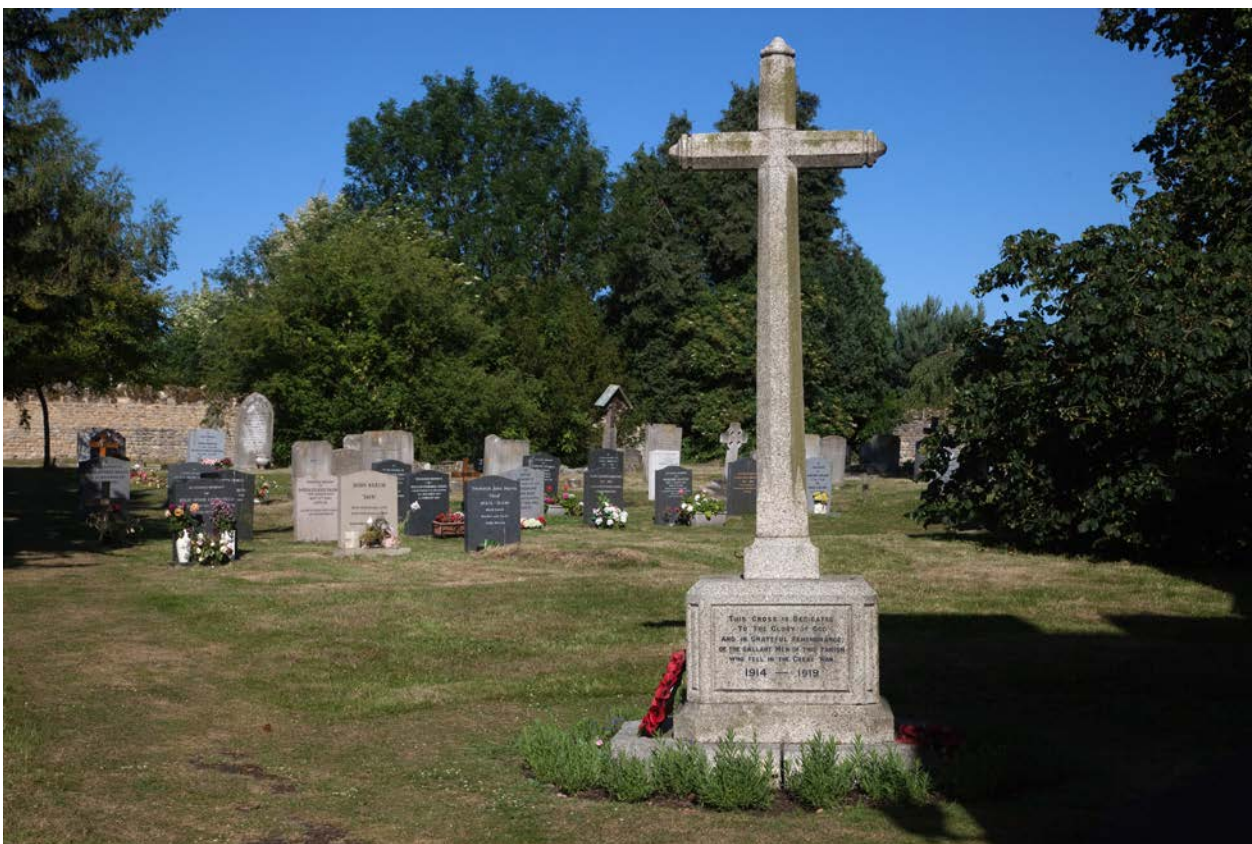


Kneelers

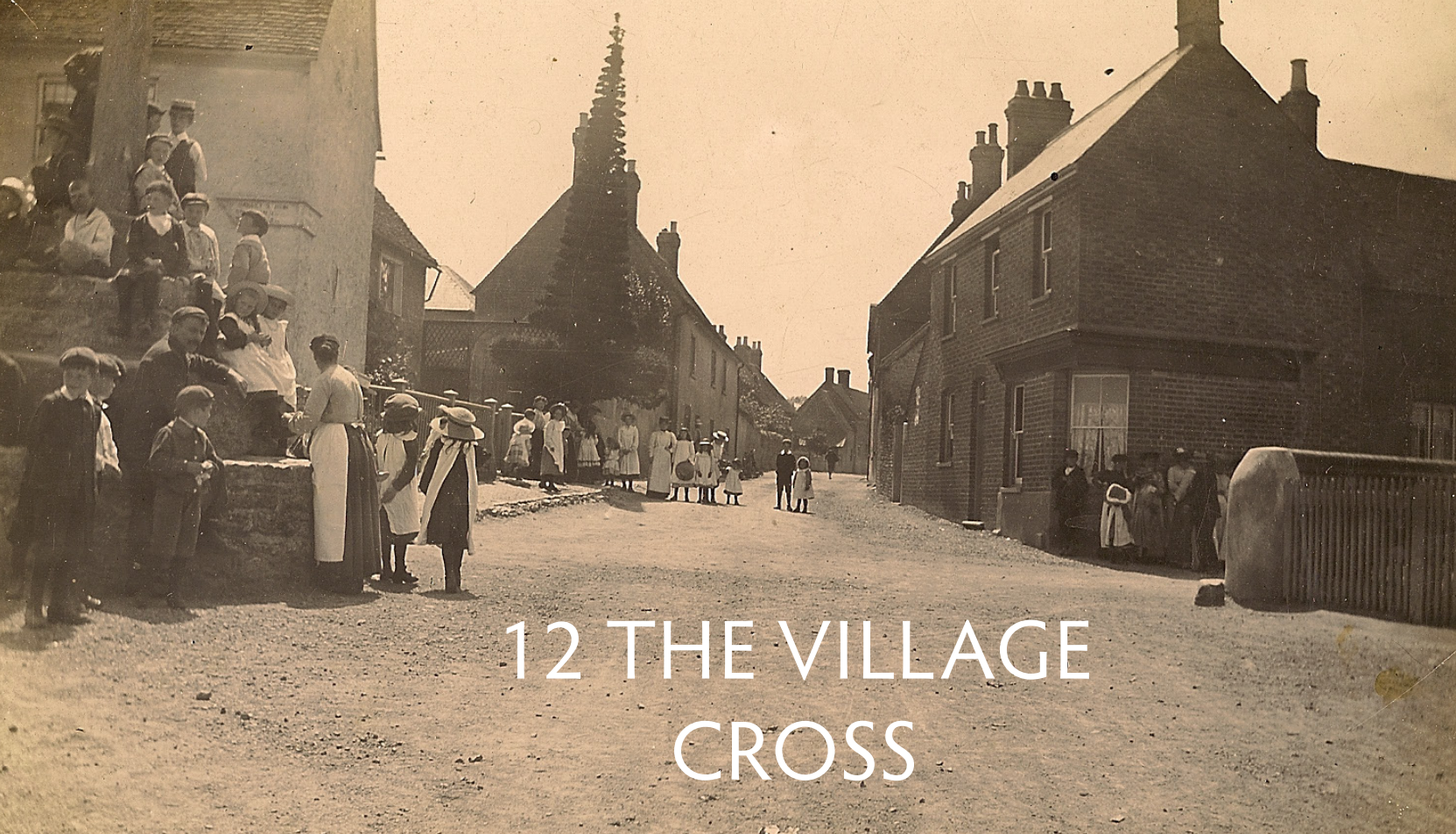
Since the early 1990s a number of ladies of the Parish have created new tapestry kneelers with blue side panels but otherwise each to her own design. This was a major project and the kneelers were dedicated in 1999 as the Millennium Kneelers.



59 Millenium Kneelers



60
Church
Graveyard



12 THE VILLAGE CROSS

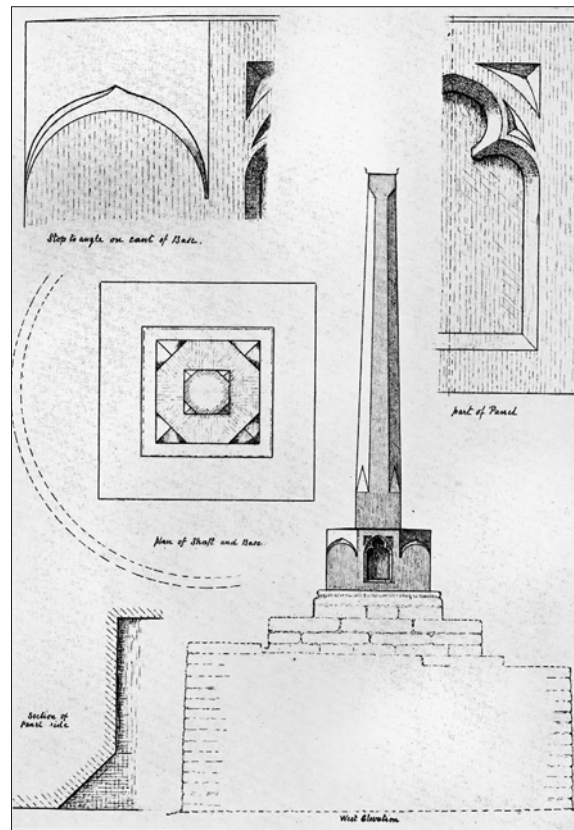
After the Church the Cross is probably the oldest artefact in the Village. There is no agreed date for its creation nor is there any clue as to its original location. Pevsner dates it probably as early 14th Century¹. It may be earlier. Bishop Hugh II of Lincoln² was keen on erecting crosses and he certainly visited the Village³. Dr Will Fletcher of Historic England considers that the lower base with the trefoiled carving is of Barnack Stone, an oolitic limestone from the village of Barnack just outside Peterborough and is identifiable by its characteristic shelly banding. It may be earlier than the main shaft which is of slightly finer limestone, probably from the Ancaster beds. The Barnack quarry was worked out by about 1460 at the very latest. The design of the Cross is illustrated in Aylmer Vallance: *Old Crosses and Lychgates* (1920) (see below). The Cross erected at Carlton Church was similar but little remains of it.

Whatever the case, the Hundred Roll of 1279 records two villagers: *Ada(m) ad crucem* and *Mable ad crucem*. In contrast Rimmer compares the Cross with a similar cross at St Mary's church, Cricklade, Wiltshire, though that has been dated reliably to the 15th Century⁴. As to its original location it is likely that it was near the Church and the Hospice. Simple crosses of this type were known as *preaching crosses* and were often erected near the church. If that is the case it is not known when it was moved to its present place at the crossroads in the centre of the Village. It may have been at the Reformation. At all events the Manor Court Roll of 1765 refers to a property ...on the corner of Silver Street next to the cross⁵.

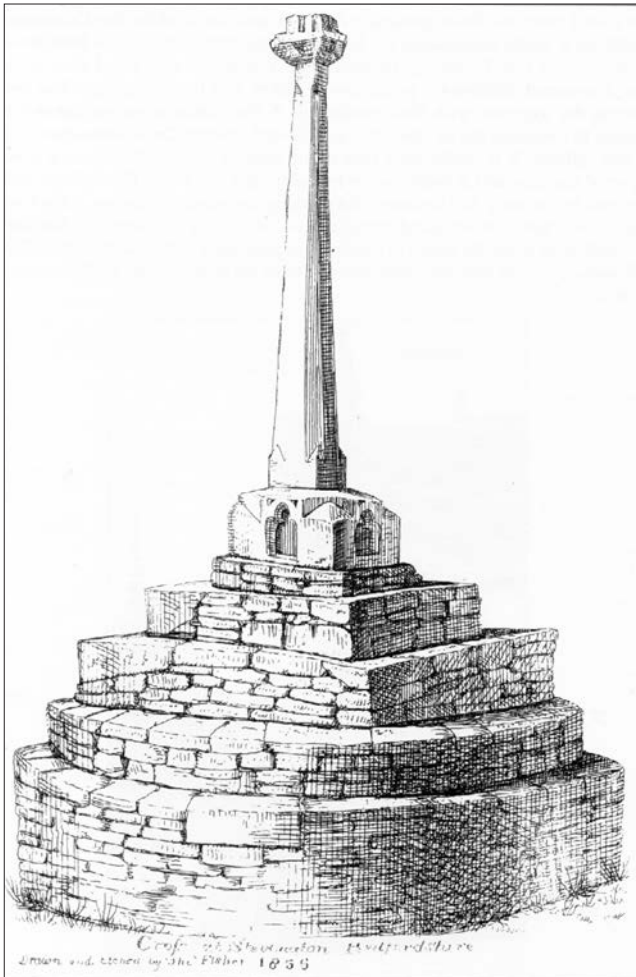
The first description of the Cross is in Lysons' *Magana Britannia-Bedfordshire* where he writes:

In the centre of the village is an ancient cross consisting of a tall shaft with a capital, placed on an ascent of steps⁶.

71 Children at the Cross 18XX



72 The Cross (Aylmer Vallance 1920)



73 The Cross (engraving by Thomas Fisher 1836)

In 1836 Thomas Fisher made an engraving of the Cross depicting it with a damaged or eroded capital mounted on a stone tier of five steps, three square steps on two round steps⁷. The tabernacle finial is missing on the illustration as is the spike which would have held it in place. Apparently, the vane was removed by Francis Green, a local landowner, when a new capital was fitted to the shaft and the steps reconstructed as a flight of three round steps as seen in the photograph of c 1910 (see Plate 75 below). The iron upright noted by Harvey was undoubtedly the standard fixing device for joining the capital to the shaft and no doubt is the origin of Stevington's nickname, *Spike Island*. There is another view, however, that the name comes from an island of that name nearby in the River Great Ouse. Some years later in 1872 Harvey wrote that the iron upright of the weather spike on the tower of St Mary's church was formerly on the Cross⁸. The whereabouts of the spike acquired something approaching totemic significance in the Village and was reported at various times to have been seen in Dick Ruffhead's front garden in Silver Street and at Meeting Farm. It is now lost.



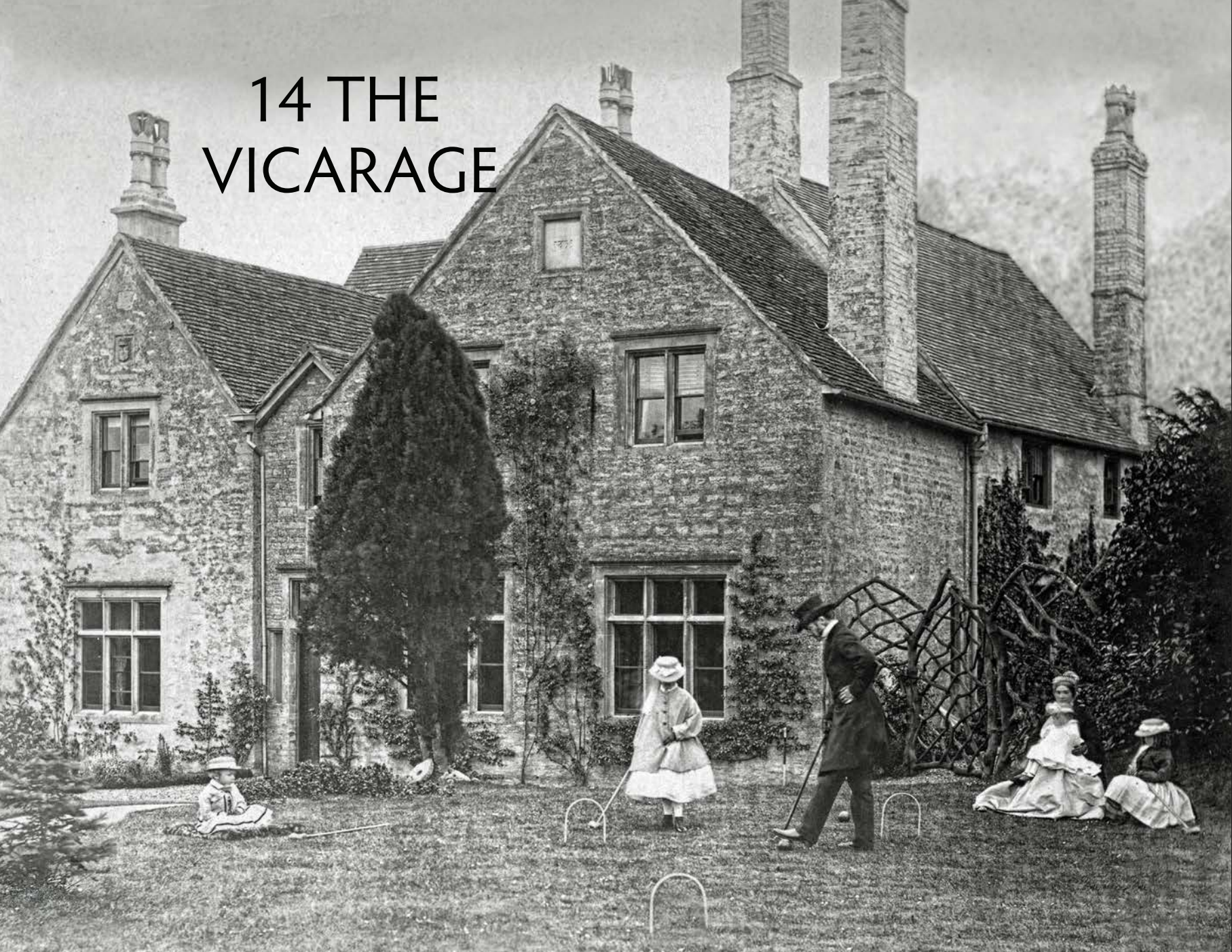
74 Rev Leonard Matson preaching at the Cross 1XXX

At the time of the refurbishment a newspaper of the day and a penny of the year were buried at the base. By then the steps contained a letter box. However, a new letter box was installed in 1877 following a discovery by police that Village boys had been opening the box with their penknives and studying the contents. A Post Office inspector came from London to condemn the old one. The Cross was then surrounded with railings to deter the urchins; (Note there were no railings when the photograph in Plate 74 was taken). The railings were removed in the last century, perhaps to be melted down to assist the War effort in 1914-18. Bella Warwick said that when Dick Ruffhead moved from Church Road to Silver Street he took with him the old iron railings with iron spikes that used to be round the Cross. The iron would be used for repair work.

In 1880 *The Archaeological Journal* noted:

...of this mediæval cross little more remains than the original shaft and the base with its rounded steps and trefoil headed panels...

14 THE VICARAGE



It is important to distinguish the vicarage as an ecclesiastical benefice from the building we know as *The Vicarage*.

The ownership of Stevington church and the advowson passed to Harrold Priory by grant of Baldwin of Ardres in 1142/6 (see page 50). However, the nuns could not perform divine office and they had, therefore, to appoint a vicar (*vicarius*) to act for them. The impropriation of churches by monasteries and nunneries in the 12th Century and earlier had been subject to abuse in that vicars were appointed with inadequate resources to perform the ministry. Impropriation required the consent of the ordinary, the bishop, and this process had been omitted or avoided in many cases. The Lateran Council of 1215 cracked down on this abuse and Bishop Hugh of Wells, bishop of Lincoln (1209-35), was zealous in ensuring that the benefices of vicars were properly

85 Rev Edward Cook and Family at the Vicarage

funded. The formal impropriation of Stevington church and the endowment of the vicarage with the consent of the dean and chapter of Lincoln was effected on 20 December 1214 - 19 December 1215¹.

The *Vicarage* as a building is a different matter. From the time a priest first arrived in Stevington he had to have somewhere to live. It was customary in the Middle Ages for the vicar to live above the church porch or on the first floor of the bell tower. However, it may be that the building excavated in *Tithe Field* (see Plate 83 above) was the early vicarage. The building which became known as *The Vicarage* was one of the first, if not the first, secular stone buildings in the Village. It is situated on the north side of *Church Road* to the immediate south west of the Church. The present fabric is principally of limestone

with one red brick gable on the west side. The roof is of clay peg tiles. The building was altered or extended on at least four occasions, 1678, 1835, 1863 and 2000, but as Joe Prentice, who conducted an architectural survey in 2013, commented: *Ultimately, the building has been given a surprisingly uniform appearance largely by the fact that most, though not all, of the windows have been altered or added using the same style...*² Its origins date to the 16th Century. This is clear from Prentice's measured survey.

The first written mention of the Vicarage is an inventory made under the incumbent Rev Ralph Culceth (1578-88/9) and taken on 3 March 1588/9 probably shortly before Culceth's death³ (see Appendix 8). The



86 1807 Award Map



87 The Vicarage 1900

Bedford, and Bedford Park Road. The Circuit provided administrative services for small chapels, particularly the supply of lay preachers, but also assisted in respect of financial and doctrinal matters. Each constituent chapel subscribed quarterly in a sum assessed according to its membership to cover Circuit expenses.

Every quarter the Circuit Committee held a meeting in one of the Circuit chapels. The meeting typically began with a minsters' meeting followed by a full Board. Hymns were sung at various stages in the proceedings. By June 1901 the Circuit membership consisted of 169 full members and 35 *catechumens*, prospective members under instruction. The community in Stevington, while small, numbering 35 members, was a thriving church which encouraged missionary work,

In December 1877 the Chapel celebrated its 25th anniversary with two sermons on Christmas Day followed by a tea meeting, both of which realised £4 for Chapel funds. On 6 June 1896 the Chapel celebrated another anniversary. Sermons were preached in the afternoon and evening followed by two services on the following Monday after which there was a tea attended by chapelgoers from a large number of nearby villages. Children's sports were held in the Manor Farmhouse field,

In 1901 approval was given for alterations and improvements to the Chapel of which the major element was the construction of an anteroom to the rear. In 1921 the Chapel contributed £5 towards the building of a minister's house in Bedford. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s services continued to be held on a Tuesday or Wednesday as well as Sundays. However, the congregation gradually began to fall off and that had an effect on the Chapel finances. In 1928 a Circuit deputation held a visitation to *adjust the finances*. By December 1935 the membership had fallen to 15 out of a Circuit total of 176. In the same year the Chapel suffered a severe loss with the death of Isaac O Hulatt. The record reads:

The church made note of the death of Brother Isaac O Hulatt after a short illness. Bro. Hulatt was our oldest local preacher and has left behind him a record of faithful Christian Service. He was a trustee of our Stevington Church. Approval was given to send a letter of heart-felt thanks to his bereaved family.



100 Foundation Stone

By 6 August 1939 the membership was 19 out of a Circuit total of 168. The Circuit designated 12 November 1939 as Temperance Sunday and the August meeting of the Circuit recorded:

A term of intercession was held at 8pm and business was suspended whilst a number of members offered fervent supplication at the Throne of Grace for the distressing condition of the World owing to the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Poland involving so much suffering and anxiety for all Nations of Europe. Parents and Children affected by our own Government's Evacuation Scheme were especially remembered in prayer and the needs of all commended to our Heavenly Father.

To mark the end of the War in June 1945 the trustees provided funds to repair the commemorative front wall and to repair the roof.

The membership fell further after the Second World War and on 9 August 1957 the licence was surrendered and worship ceased at the Chapel. In its time the Church's particular brand of Methodism had undoubtedly met a need.

The Chapel itself fell on hard times being used as a potato store until it was revived as the workshop of a local organ builder, the late Robert Shaftoe. After he died in 2011 the Chapel became, for a while, an emporium known as *Jack's* with Sebastian Blore-Rimmer's silversmith workshop in the old anteroom.



101 Dedication stones



102 The late Robert Shaftoe

1 Rodell, Jonathan: *The Rise of Methodism: A Study of Bedfordshire 1736-1851* BHRS vol. 92 (2014)
 2 BHRS: *Religious Census 1851* Vol 54 p115
 3 Robert A Schofield: *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 66, no 3 (2015) p665-6.

4 BARS Court Roil CRT 130 STEV 18
 5 **Moulder.** Made moulds (patterns) for castings.
 6 **Usher.** See above at p111

20 THE PARISH COUNCIL

Civil parish councils in England and Wales were established by the Local Government Act 1894. Unfortunately the early minute books of the Parish Council are lost and do not begin until November 1915. Some information can be gleaned from local newspaper reports. The *Bedfordshire Times* carried the results of the parish election in 1900: Rev John Duke (elected Chairman), along with Messrs Goldsmith, Tysoe, Parrott. Warwick (vice-Chairman), Thos. Panter (Barringer Trustee), Thos. Poole, Geo. Field and Ernest Fontaine, both Overseers of the Poor. Significantly, none of Stevington's farmers were elected at first, and it is possible that they still gave their support to the Vestry rather than the new-fangled body. There were some teething troubles initially. In May 1897 Councillors were summoned for the wrong day and in May 1899 there was no quorum as only three Councillors turned up for the meeting.

The membership of the Council in 1915-16 was Percival Keech (Chairman) and Messrs George Warwick, Arthur J C Mackness, Henry Harpin, Alfred J Hulett and Charlie Field. The Clerk was A E Adams who wrote minutes in an immaculate hand. The Council met three or four times a year and business usually revolved around the allocation of allotments, approving Parish and Barringer Trust accounts and nominating Overseers of the Poor for the year following. In 1916-17 George Field was elected Vice Chairman.; Percy Keech had joined the Royal Flying Corps as was in France. George was also first Overseer along with Harpin. The Poor Law rate in that year was £1.10s. Allotments continued occupy the time of the Council. The allotment land was owned by J C E Robinson and leased to the Council for £25 per annum. There were 32 plots varying in size from one acre to half an acre. The charge was £1 4d per acre per annum. Robinson was the District Agricultural Inspector and frequently complained about the state of the allotments, notwithstanding the fact that many Village men were away fighting in France and elsewhere.

The minutes note that the Food Production Department issued the following directive to Parish Councils:

1. *Recommended the formation of Rat and Sparrow Clubs.*
2. *The appointment of a Professional Rat catcher on a fixed wage.*
3. *The Rewards to be:*
 - 1/- per dozen for rats tails
 - 3d per dozen heads of fully-fledged Home Sparrows
 - 2d per dozen heads of unfledged Home Sparrows
 - 1d per dozen House Sparrow eggs

Two years later, in October 1919, the Council purchased five gallons of Hullers Extract of Squills¹ for National Rat Week. The treasurer of the Sparrow Club was James Turney who had also taken on the role of rat catcher.

The minutes of 1914-18 hardly mention the Great War, though they do note in October 1917 that Alfred Mackness was elected chairman when Percy Keech was called up. In 1919 the Council consisted of the following:

Charlie Field (Chairman)
Arthur H Coleman of West End, Horse Keeper
Alfred J Hulett, Carpenter
Andrew Davison, Court Lane, Platelayer
George Warwick, Silver Street, Farm labourer
Alfred J Mackness, Court Lane, Hayman
Arthur J C Mackness, Church Street, Platelayer



109 Percy Keech



110 J C E Robinson

The Council immediately set about organising the Peace Day celebrations of 4 July 1919.

The minutes record the progress of technical innovation. On 31 March 1920 the Clerk wrote to the County Council requesting three warning *motor signs* to be erected at the Cross and in August 1923 the Bedford Postmaster was asked to provide a Village telephone. This was installed in the Post Office.

In 1922 the Cross was in urgent need of repair and a fête was held on 8 August to raise the £28 repair bill. It was so successful that there was a balance of £62 19s which was divided equally between the three Village churches and the County Hospital.

In April 1923 after nineteen years of service A E Adams, the Parish Clerk, resigned and the Council decided to dispense with the post of a salaried Clerk. Initially, Mr Hawkins agreed to act in an honorary capacity though he became salaried in March 1925 with a stipend of £5 per annum. The matter of obtaining a Village telephone arose again in 1925 and it was agreed to install telephones in two private houses, presumably for the use of the Village generally, though it is not clear how the arrangement was intended to work. Obviously it was not a solution as in 1947 the Giles Gilbert Scott box was installed in its present position. It now houses a defibrillator.

The late 1920s and early 1930s brought change. In 1928 the Council made plans for the first council houses and canvassed the Village for applicants. XX houses were built on the field called *Ellis Meads* to the south side of *Court Lane*. A few years later the first of the public utilities arrived; in 1931 a Parochial Committee was formed to deal with the practical implications of a new sewerage outfall scheme to replace cesspits. Electricity arrived in 1931 and there was a strange application from Mr Field to provide a free light outside his house by the Cross. Some urgent problems arose with the water supply which were so acute that the Rural District Council (RDC) made preparations to supply the Village by bowser.

The depression of 1931 was reflected in the Parish Council's concern for the unemployed. The County Surveyor was asked to find employment for those out of work but none was forthcoming. In 1933 the Rural District Council asked the Parish Council whether they wished the streets to be named officially and the houses numbered. The offer was declined but two years later the decision was reversed so that the following thoroughfares were named: *Silver Street*, *Park Road*, *Church Road*, *West Street* from the Cross to the allotments, and *West End* from the allotments to *Hart Farm*. In 1936 a supply of water arrived in the form of standpipes with the characteristic lion head situated in the highway verge. The Council requested further standpipes for West End and Court Lane (as West Street was renamed).



111 Telephone Box



112 Standpipe



23 AGRICULTURE BEFORE MECHANISATION

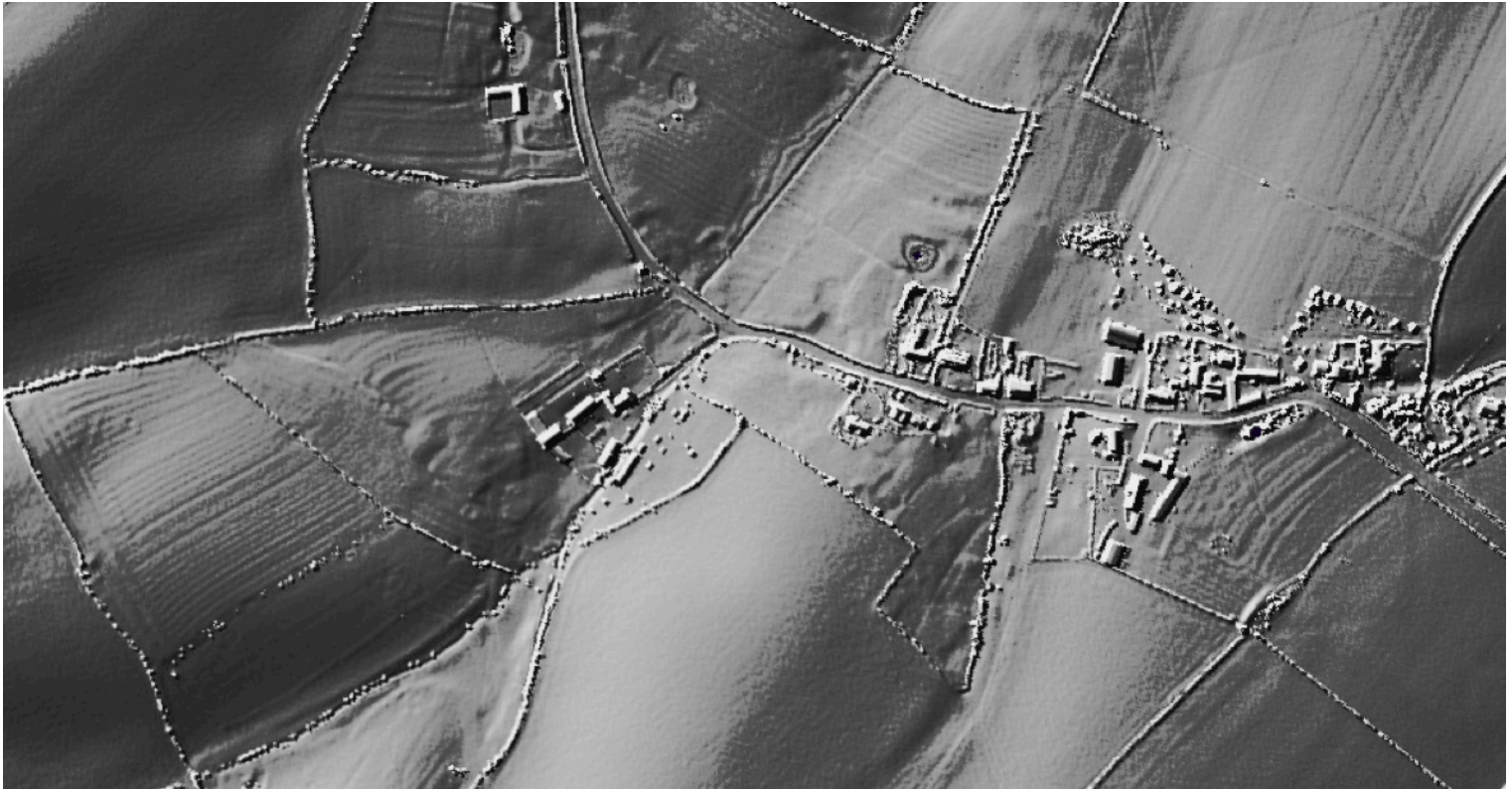
In discussing agriculture before mechanisation we refer to the period before the advent of machines which saved labour or, put another way, machines that did not require labour apart from an operator. Farm machinery before the 18th Century was limited to the plough, the harrow and the cart. All other tools were hand tools. Technological advance in the 18th and early 19th Century made agriculture more productive and scientific but, for the most part, they did not reduce the need for labour. That requirement was undiminished up until the Great War. The 19th Century Censuses are evidence of that (see [Appendix 6](#))

The recorded history of agriculture in Stevington begins with Domesday Book. The six ploughs recorded there represented six teams each of eight oxen. The

123 *Building a haystack*

ploughland was the area a team could plough in one year. It is evident from the text that the parish had been substantially cleared as there was only enough woodland for 20 pigs to rootle in by way of pannage¹. Accordingly, there would have been little waste i.e. non-arable land allocated to common pasture, although the Enclosure Award of 1806 does mention waste in the allotment to Thomas Alston as Lord of the Manor, albeit nowhere else in the text; and waste is also mentioned in paragraph 8 of the 1749 *By Laws of the Baron Leet* (see [Appendix 9](#)).

The cultivatable land in the parish can be described in this way. By the high Middle Ages the Lord's demesne probably amounted to about 300-450 acres. The



124 Medieval Sellons at West End (Lidar)

Inquisition of 1264 refers to 440 acres in demesne. The identifiable demesne acreage in the *Particular* of c 1630 is 431a 0r 11p. It is likely that by Tudor times much of the demesne had been enclosed. It was certainly the case by the 17th Century as is clear from the *Particular* (see [Appendix 7](#)). The leases set out there refer to distinct acreages of arable let to tenants. The greater part of the cultivated land consisted of the open or common fields: Backside Field, Barnsey Field, Drinking Bush Field, Great Field and Little Field, Haselwood Field, Lower Field, Mobbs Bush Field, Pixhill Field, Redland Field, Park Field and Woodcroft Field. These open fields belonged to the Lord of the Manor and the tenants who worked them held their strips as copyhold from the Lord i.e. the title was evidenced by copy of the manorial roll. They were customary tenants.

The Park, amounting to about 67 acres, consisting of the Great Park and the Little Park, was maintained as the Lord's hunting park.

In addition, there were 47 ancient closes, referred to specifically in the Award of 1806 as ancient inclosures. The acreage is recorded in the case of 30 of them. That amounted in total to 23 acres 2 roods 8 poles, so it is unlikely that the acreage of all the ancient enclosures amounted in total to much over 25-30 acres. Some of them were homesteads/cottages with some land which ran with them. If one plots the ancient enclosures referred to in the Award of 1806 it is clear that they sit sporadically

cheek by jowl with the open fields.

Other enclosures are mentioned simply as *inclosures*. The fact that they were not ancient probably meant that they were comparatively recent and that the owners had no rights in common in regard to that particular piece of land. Some small enclosures sprang up in the highway verge or on the waste as the population increased. This became a problem under the Tudors and led to the *Erection of Cottages Act 1588* which prohibited the erection of cottages on parcels of land under four acres².

The detailed use of the agricultural land in the parish, as distinct from its ownership, after Domesday is unclear. We know that from the 13th to the 15th Century sheep farming flourished in Bedfordshire; its wool was in demand and plentiful, assisted no doubt by the Cistercian flocks of Woburn and Warden Abbeys. Surviving records show that in assessments of wool to the King, Bedfordshire always provided its full quota. However, it was not until improvements to the heavy plough in the late 17th Century that cultivation of the heavy boulder clay became more practicable. The extent to which Stevington was ever a major wool producer is an open question. However, as late as 1749 the *By Laws of the Baron Leet* refer in a number of paragraphs to the keeping of sheep in the common fields³. That explains the construction of the fulling mill which was still in use in 1630 and weavers are mentioned in the records well into the 18th Century when weaving became mechanised.

and if fresh breezes sprang up in the evening lanterns would be made ready and the mill would be working all through the night if necessary. It was possible on good days i.e. with fresh winds, to grind up to twenty quarters²³ of barley. In times soon after harvest the mill would be working to capacity and providing the wind was right, all day and far into the night. While grinding was taking place it was not always possible to use the hoist at the same time, and if grain was running low sacks had to be carried up the steep ladder from the outside. This must have called for a weightlifter with the poise of an acrobat, as the sacks are reputed to have weighed up to fifteen stones.

There were also frightening times; on one occasion the mill could not be stopped with two men sitting on the brake lever; and blue smoke was coming from the stones which were grinding beans; after some fifteen minutes in which the mill rocked, lurched and shook like a ship in a storm at sea, there was a slight slackening of the wind which was sufficient to allow the mill to be brought under control again and rocking of the mill when in motion could have the same effect on some people as a sea voyage, and the late Mr George Field is said to have hurried down the ladder for terra firma soon after he secured the mill.

When the grindstones had worn smooth they had to be dressed with a mill bill (a double-headed chisel mounted on a thrift²⁴. First the iron wallower²⁵ driving the runner stone from the brake wheel had to be disconnected; the stone then had to be first turned on its edge, and then laid flat with the grinding surface face upwards. This was accomplished with helpers outside the mill turning the sails manually on orders from the miller in the top of the mill. He would attach a large rope carried on the windshaft, to the stone. The sails would then be turned just enough to bring the stones on edge, and then gradually ease down face upwards on to a wedge, and then by means of rollers moved to a position where it could be most easily worked on the mill-bill.

The stone was first tested with a staff as to its being level, and any unevenness rectified. New grooves were then cut in it to a well-known prearranged pattern. This operation usually took a day and a half. Having been re-cut, the stone was then put back into position by the reverse procedure. The lower or bed-stone was dressed in its fixed position. The mill had to be turned into the wind by means of the tail-pole;

normally this could be done by one man but there were occasions when it was necessary to harness a horse for the purpose. The late Mr Charles Field, brother of the former owner, who worked in the mill from boyhood, had a traditional belief that there had earlier been a second pair of stones behind the present ones²⁶.

Fred was a character. He fell out with his brother one day, tied him to one of the sails and turned the sail to the top so that his trussed up brother was upside down. It was said his cries could be heard in Thurleigh, five miles away. How long he remained inverted is not known. Fred also disliked cats and if he encountered a couple caterwauling it was his practice to tie their tails together and sling them over his washing line until the noise ceased.



154 George Field and Fred Harpin c 1935



155 Mill with Sails Removed 1996



156 Mill work in Scaffolding 2003

During 1929 Mr Thurston Hopkins, searching for material for his book *In search of English Windmills* (1931), encountered Stevington mill in its heyday. He describes it as the *pièce de résistance* of his tour:

I could scarcely believe my eyes. The cloth was furled neatly on all four sweeps as they arose over a little hump across the green fields. The mill was in perfect condition and freshly painted. The roof of corrugated iron as no curved or pointed but four-sided after the style of the old water mills; and the corrugated iron so carefully arranged is by no means a disfigurement. The body is black; the sail frames of unpainted wood while the roundhouse is white with a red roof and to complete the picture the tail pole is red and the steps unpainted²⁷.

George Field continued to operate the mill until 1939. When interviewed in February 1939 he said that the mill, though in perfect working order, had not been used for

three years. He claimed he was getting too old to work it himself and that the local farmers took their stock feed to be ground by larger mills nearby. Also, a number of farmers had begun to acquire small plate mills²⁸ installed in their barns driven by small stationary engines. He added, however, that given new sailcloth²⁹ he and one other could easily work the mill. When the mill was not in commercial use he ground his own flour, beans, barley or any sort of grist. The photograph (Plate 154) shows Charles Field and Fred Harpin lifting the tail on the yoke to reposition the sails. The last time the mill ground corn was in February of that year.

The reporter who spoke to Charles Field also spoke to another farmer who described the working of the mill. He said that as it swung round in the wind it would rock like a ship and shudder all over. His account was tinged with regret at the passing of the old days.

In 1951 the Bedfordshire County Council bought the



157 Mill with Sails Restored 24 September 2004

mill and renovated it as a contribution to the Festival of Britain. The restoration work was carried out by C Clayson & Sons of Harrold under the supervision of the County Architect with advice from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Bedfordshire Historical Records Society. Details of the repairs were set out in an article in the *Bedfordshire Times* of 3 October 1951. It was listed Grade II* on 24 May 1952.

By the latter years of the last Century the sails were again in poor condition and were removed in 1996 (see Plate 155). Plate 156 shows work in progress and on 24 September 2004 the restoration was declared complete (Plate 157)³⁰. Shortly afterwards canvas was added to the sails and the mill worked for the first time for 65 years. The mill is now responsibility of Bedford Borough Council.

By the latter years of the last Century the sails were again in poor condition and were removed in 1996. Plate 156 shows work in progress and on 24 September 2004 the restoration was declared complete³¹. Shortly afterwards canvas was added to the sails and the mill worked for the first time for 65 years. The mill is now responsibility of Bedford Borough Council which replaced the sails once more in 2000 as the previous work had not weathered well. Unfortunately that work did not last and the sails were replaced once more in 2020.

1 Vitruvius. Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (80-15 BC). Author of *De Architectura*

2 Fowler *op cit* p34

3 Three lyses. Leases of land in the Middle Ages were usually for a number of lives rather than a term of years.

4 Combing and carding are two related techniques for preparing cotton, hair or wool fibres. With respect to sheep's wool, the two techniques are used for making either worsted or woollen threads respectively.

Combing is a technique whereby fibres (usually cotton or wool) are passed through a series of straight, metal teeth in order to lay the fibres parallel to one another. The fibres are then placed together in a long line ('combed sliver'), which is used to spin a smooth, even thread. In this process, long fibres are separated from shorter ones (noils) and tangles are removed. Combed fibres are generally used for producing worsted threads.

Carding is a technique whereby two hand or machine cards are used. These cards have numerous wire teeth set into a paper, leather or metal ground. The teathed cards are used to separate the fibres, to spread them into a web (but not in parallel lines as in combed wool) and to remove any short or broken fibres as well as impurities. The web is condensed into a continuous untwisted strand of fibres called a sliver. Carded fibres are generally used for producing woollen threads.

5 BARS. Apprentice Records

6 BARS GA 2847 (AA14) Award

7 BARS. W Poole Probate 1812/46

8 James Passelow. The Passelows were an old Stevington family first recorded at the end of the 13th Century. See Appendix 2

9 Quarton loaves. A quarter loaf weighed four pounds.

10 BHRS Vol 71 p162

11 William Raban. ???

12 Handley Page. The first publicly traded manufacturer of aeroplanes. It went into voluntary liquidation and ceased to exist in 1970. The company was based at Radlett Aerodrome in Hertfordshire. It was noted for its pioneering role in aviation and for the production of heavy bombers and large airliners.

13 Cirket, A F: *Stevington Windmill* (1966)

14 Crowntree. The main timber which rests and pivots on the post and carries the weight of the body.

15 Windshaft. The shaft on which the sails and brake wheel are mounted.

16 Brake Wheel. Lever-operated device working on a rim of the brake wheel to prevent the sails from turning.

17 Lord Ampthill. Arthur Oliver Villiers Russell, 2nd Baron Ampthill GCSI GCIE JP DL (1869 –1935). Assistant Private Secretary to Joseph Chamberlain in 1895-97; Private Secretary, from 1897 to 1900. Governor of Madras 1900-04. Viceroy of India from April to December 1904. Educated at Eton and New College, Oxford. Rowed for Oxford three times against Cambridge (1889 to 1891), winning twice. He was president of both OUBC and the Oxford Union in 1891.

18 Crosstrees. Horizontal members in a timber trestle supporting the post mill.

19 Iron wallower. This is a driven gear at the top of the Upright Shaft in some Post mills. It is driven by the Brake.

20 Messrs Course of Bedford. The millwright may have come from Bedford but the main base of Thomas Course & Son, millwrights, engineers and brass founders, was Hitchin Street, Biggleswade.

21 Beam. It was repaired by Messrs C Clayson & Sons of Harrold, builders and leather workers, in 1951.

22 Cirket *op cit* p5

23 Quarters. In the imperial system a quarter was 64 gallons.

24 Thrift. A block of wood.

25 Iron Wallower. The first driven gear in a mill. It intersects with the brake wheel and transfers energy from the horizontal windshaft to the vertical upright shaft to drive the millstones.

26 The additional stones mentioned here may well have been those used in a former mill or they were the old stones replaced in the 1951 repairs.

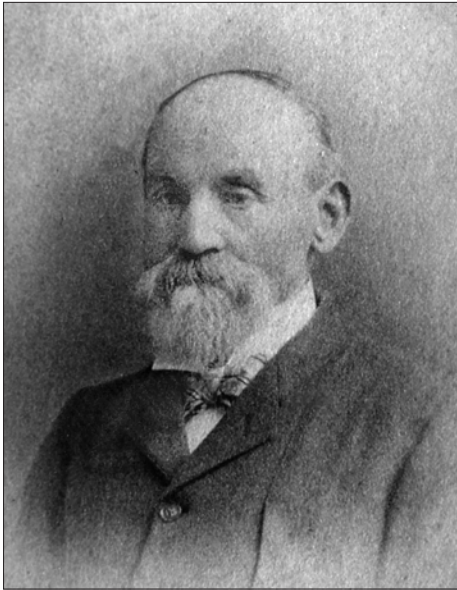
27 Hopkins, T: *In search of English Windmills* (1931) px

28 Plate mill. Plate mills grind the grain between two abrasive grinding plates, one rotating and one stationary. The plate distance is used to adjust the fineness of the flour. In some cases, the grain must be passed through the mill a second time to achieve the desired fineness. Plate mills are relatively easy to maintain, but the grinding plates wear out.

29 Sailcloth. The sailcloth was stored in the loft of the old slaughterhouse annex to *Yew Tree House* by the Cross, owned by the Field family.

30 C Clayson & Sons.

31 See also SHT: *Stevington in Pictures* (2004) Plates 152-157



160 Samuel Harker



161 Jane Harker

The bobbins were usually of bone or wood and the lace was sometimes called bone lace. The bones used were usually the shins of cattle. The lace was created through weaving, plaiting and twisting the threads which were held in place with pins following the pricketed pattern and fastened to a pillow. The bone or ivory bobbins used in lace manufacture were often finely crafted and the best



162 Bedfordshire lace

examples are collectors' items (see Plate 159).

We have identified some early Stevington lacemakers: Israel Pake (d 1690), Thomas Pake (d 1701) Thomas Hoton (d 1702), Thomas Hopkins (d 1732), John Bowyer (d 1746) and Benjamin Odell (d 1747). Before 1800 only one female lacemaker is mentioned, Elizabeth Woodard (d 1708). Paradoxically the mid-18th Century Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire had become the centre of the production of Bedfordshire lace. In 1801 six lace fairs were being held there annually. Olney was also an important centre.

Later, Bedfordshire pillow lace became famous and the income supplemented the wages of agricultural

labourers tiding many a family over during periods of agricultural depression. This became important during the 19th Century as the survival rate of children at birth and in infancy improved and family size increased. It is estimated that at its height lacemaking provided employment for three quarters of the female population of Bedfordshire and that was certainly the case in Stevington. There were 115 lacemakers in 1841; 68 in 1851; 143 in 1861 and 181 in 1871. The low figure in 1851 may be explained in part by emigration to Australia and some good years in agriculture when the need to supplement income may have been less important. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 made attendance at school compulsory and that radically affected lace production which gradually declined: 1881: 135; 1891: 126; 1901: 79; and 1911: 30. The industrial production of lace affected the Bedfordshire cottage lace production relatively late because of the difficulty in reproducing the intricate edgings.

Most villages had a lace school though these were very informal and often amounted to no more than a collection of children working in a cramped cottage. We cannot identify the location of a lace school in Stevington, though there was a well-established school at Cranfield.

Lace arrived at market via lace dealers. They would work the villages selling thread and the latest patterns as well as buying the finished product. The dealer or buyer would visit villages every two or three weeks and the day of the visit was called a *cut-off day*; the lacemakers would cut off their work in progress and bring it to the pub. The first reference we have to a dealer is to Ralph Harvie who died in 1682. He also minted his own token coinage (see below). Oliver Scott who died in 1687 was a dealer but also a tobacconist.



163 Mary Prentice with the Queen

Aquila Stratton who died in 1697 is described as a *laceman* in the Parish Register. As was the case with many of the dealers at the time, Stratton had a London connection and in 1694 he made mention in his will of *all my debts in London*. Walter Foot and Abraham Little are described lacemen in Rev John Draper's list of Stevington residents holding land of the lord of the manor in Pavenham. In the 19th Century Samuel Harker of Stevington who lived in what is now *Yew Tree House*



164 Mary Prentice at Work

with his wife, Jane, and their two children was a dealer who came here originally from Crowland in Lincolnshire. (Insert photographs). He left Stevington after some years in order to expand his business. He described himself as a *designer and manufacturer*. Thomas Lester was a well-



165 Ann Prigmore



172 Thomas Burrige outside the Red Lion

The Red Lion

The earliest reference to the *Red Lion* is in 1781 after it was owned by Ann Hide. In 1817 her son, William, sold the premises to the Bedford brewer George Peregrine Nash. Much later, in 1990, the Nash family took in William Pitzler Newland as a partner and accordingly the firm became Newland and Nash. It was taken over in 1922 by the Biggleswade brewers Wells and Winch and by Greene King in 1961. Greene King sold it to a building company in 2010 which operated *The Lion* as a free house for a short time before closing it and attempting, unsuccessfully, to obtain permission to build three executive homes on the land. The pub changed hands once more before Andrew Stuart Jones bought it in 2018. Three rooms were added in an annex in 2020 and a pair of semi-detached cottages was constructed on land to the rear with access on the east side of *Church Road*.

At some stage, probably in about 1870, the old building known as *Pug's Hole* was demolished and the present building was constructed of soft red bricks made by Alexander Field who owned the brickworks field on the south west side of the *Carlton Road*. (The foundations of the old pub were revealed in the course of building works in 2020.) In March 1880 the newly built *Red Lion* was licensed. An early tenant of the new building was Martha Field, Alexander's widow. She eventually married her



lodger, Thomas Burrige who held the tenancy from 1892 until 1940. The list of tenants is at [Appendix X](#). The rating officer who visited the premises in 1926 concluded: *The best (public) house in Stevington*. He noted the clubhouse (The Club) which backed onto *Church Road*. This was a building of two storeys which was the venue for many Village events and was the base for the Village Home Guard in the Second World War. The last event to be held there was the wedding reception of David and Janet Litchfield. The top storey was removed soon afterwards as it had become unsafe

The Cock

The Cock at *West End* was originally called *The Catherine Wheel* and that was its name when sold at auction in 1801⁸⁰. The name of the vendor was not given in the sale notice. The premises were copyhold, stood in one eighth of an acre with an orchard and enjoyed rights of common. It was probably bought by the brewer, Peregrine Nash of the St Mary's brewery, Bedford; certainly, it was later

173 David Price Landlord outside *The Cock*

owned by Newland and Nash. The name was changed to *The Cock* as early as 1822 when the only licensed premises in Stevington at that date were *The Cock* and *The Red Lion*.

The story that the *Royal George* was formerly *The Cock* and that it gave its name to the *Catherine Wheel* in a swap of name when it became *The Royal George* is apocryphal.

The Cock closed in 1958 and became a private house as *The Old Inn*.

The Royal George

There were licensed premises called *The Cock* in *Silver Street* in 1788, but it appears they closed some time before 1822, probably in 1809 when owned by George Peregrine Nash who sold them between 1809 and 1822 to Richard and Mary Pool, whose son William inherited them. On his death his trustees sold the premises to Robert Newland⁸¹ who opened them as a beerhouse. In 1865 Robert's son, Bingham Newland sold the beerhouse to Thomas Jarvis

State Intervention

From 1870 to 1903 there were significant changes in the national education system and these affected Stevington School. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 required all schools to have a management board. The Stevington Board was elected on 20 May 1874. The Vicar, Rev E W Cook, was chairman and Mark Sharman the Clerk²⁷. The Act also required all children aged three to 14 to attend school. To secure compliance, the Education Act of 1876 stipulated that each school should convene an Attendance Committee and appoint an Attendance Officer whose duty it was to visit the school weekly and check the attendance register. These measures effectively curtailed child labour, at least during the week.

The School was financed by fees and government grant. In 1878 these were respectively £23 3s 8d and £154 4s 3d; the balance in hand was £81 8s 7d; making a total of £269 6s 8d. Expenditure was £259 6s 8d which included salaries of 143 1s 5d²⁸. The Board paid the School fees of the very poor, but in 1888 decided to stop paying school fees to parents when the child failed to attend.

In July 1872 the School was officially designated as accommodating 85 pupils. Further accommodation was required for a further 39 pupils making 124 in all²⁹.

The Board met monthly to consider a report from the Attendance Officer. His job was to compile attendance statistics for submission to the local education authority. Sergeant Mardlin became Attendance Officer after he retired. He was vigilant and in January 1980 Fredrick Cox, Joseph Cox and Matthew Lacey were summoned by the Petty Sessions at the instance of the Board's Clerk, Mark Sharman. In 1893 Mardlin asked for his fee to be increased to £5. The Board chaired by W H Robinson offered only £4 which Mardlin declined³⁰. He was succeeded by a Mr J Adams who was no less vigilant than Mardlin in checking on those absenting themselves through alleged sickness. One pupil who tried it on was dragged back to school by his class mates to save him from punishment. In 1887 Mark Sharman prosecuted Mary Hulatt and Mary Parker for withholding children from school. Mary Hulatt was fined five shillings and an attendance order was made in regard to Mary Parker³¹. It is interesting that it was the mothers who were prosecuted and not the heads of household.

In 1898 the School Board of five consisted of T Burrige, W Hensman Robinson (Chairman), W Hulatt, C Batham Smith (vice Rev Hare Duke) and J Teasdale. By 1870 School numbers had risen to 85 but the new legislation meant that the numbers were expected to increase to 124. To meet this need the fabric of the school was extended twice over the next twenty years. The first extension, carried out in 1875, enabled the School to accommodate 140 pupils. The further improvement of 1898 added an



189 Harry Read and son

infants' classroom and raised the capacity to 190 although in that year only 119 were attending. However, despite provisions of the Act of 1870 this was only YY% of the children who should have been attending.

The legislation of 1870 also prescribed a national curriculum of which religious education was an essential element. In 1878 the School Log noted:

The school is opened in the morning with prayer, the reading of a portion of the Bible and the singing of a hymn, and closed in the afternoon with a prayer and a hymn. The Bible is read, and questions asked upon the subject read at 11.30 to 12 every day³².

Those who elected not to attend religious instruction could opt out but had to receive secular instruction in its place. By 1902 when Bedfordshire County Council assumed control of the School as an elementary school. It was well equipped to face the challenge of the new century.

Some Stevington girls sat the examinations to become pupil teachers. Fanny Hulatt succeeded in 1879 and Louisa Poole in 1881.

On 9 December 1893 the School, and indeed the Village, was shocked to learn that the Headmaster, John Sneath, had suffered a paralytic stroke. In consequence of this but also because many children were absent through illness at the time, the school closed for one month. On the following 12 January Sneath sustained a further stroke

and died, aged 52. He had taught at the School for nearly 25 years. He was organist and choirmaster at St Mary's and registrar for births and deaths. Also, he was an active member of the Sharnbrook branch of the National Union of Teachers, founded in 1870. All the children in the upper school attended his funeral at St Mary's.

Finding a successor proved to be no easy matter. Sneath's son, John, who was also a teacher, took charge for three months until a successor could be appointed. Harry Read who came from Cheltenham Teachers' Training College was chosen, quite young at the age of 27³³. He was born in Quainton, Bucks, but his parents had moved to Pavenham. He quickly involved himself in Village life. Ten days after his arrival at the School he introduced *drill* which was his name for physical education. Read was an excellent cricketer but an even better rugby player. He played for Bedford Blues for two seasons and had an England trial. In November 1895 he advertised for an assistant schoolteacher; a Miss Waldrige obtained the post³⁴ (see also page 166). In 1902 Read, aged 35, married Helen Smith, aged 31, eldest daughter of T Waring Smith, of *Duck End*. The wedding was a major Village occasion³⁵. The wedding gifts were listed in the press and were numerous and generous. The couple later had three sons.

Read was Secretary of the Stevington Relief Committee formed to assist Belgian refugees at the outset of the First World War. This committee became the vehicle for maintaining contact with Stevington men serving abroad. He knew them all, was devoted to them and wrote to each man regularly about life back home. His *My Dear Lads*³⁶ letters are a social gem (see page 256).

By 1904 Read had two assistants, William J Goodman (£50 per annum) and Lily Bowyer (13 shillings per month). In 1906 the caretaker's salary was increased to £10 10s in consideration of extra work in connection with the Evening School. Various improvements were made to the fabric of the School in that year especially improved ventilation and repairs to the windows.

When Read left Stevington at the end of the War after nearly 25 years in post to become headmaster of Biggleswade Boys' School, he was given a farewell party and presented with a *Handsome Clock in an Oak Case*. In return he presented each of his pupils with a copy of the latest School photograph.

Tom Ruffhead as Senior Pupil was one of Read's



190 American Servicemen outside the Baptist Chapel

assistants and was greatly influenced by him. He remembered his former master as a strict disciplinarian who never hesitated to wield the cane but, as many would testify, he was a most able teacher and known with affection as *Daddy Read*. A typical School ditty went like this:

*In Stevington School there was a stool, and upon that stool there sits a fool,
Whose name is Daddy Read;
Reading, Writing, Arithmetic; He never forgets to give you the stick. When he does he makes you dance, out of England into France, Out of France and into Spain,
Over the hills and back again.*

For the first fifty years of the last century the School had made steady progress. Numbers fell slightly as the population of the Village declined, but the School carried on in a regular fashion. The daily routine was enlivened by various excursions organised by the Band of Hope and the Primitive Methodists' Sunday School treats. However, serious illness remained a recurrent problem: scarlet fever in 1901, 1907 and 1922; whooping cough in 1905 and 1910; ringworm, jaundice, chicken pox and mumps in 1914.

Gardening classes were introduced in 1914. The girls practised budding while the boys were taught simple woodwork for making garden frames.

The School became successful in a number of ways. In 1896 Jesse Cox obtained a technical scholarship tenable at the Farm School. In 1927 the School won first prize in a singing competition in Northampton. There was

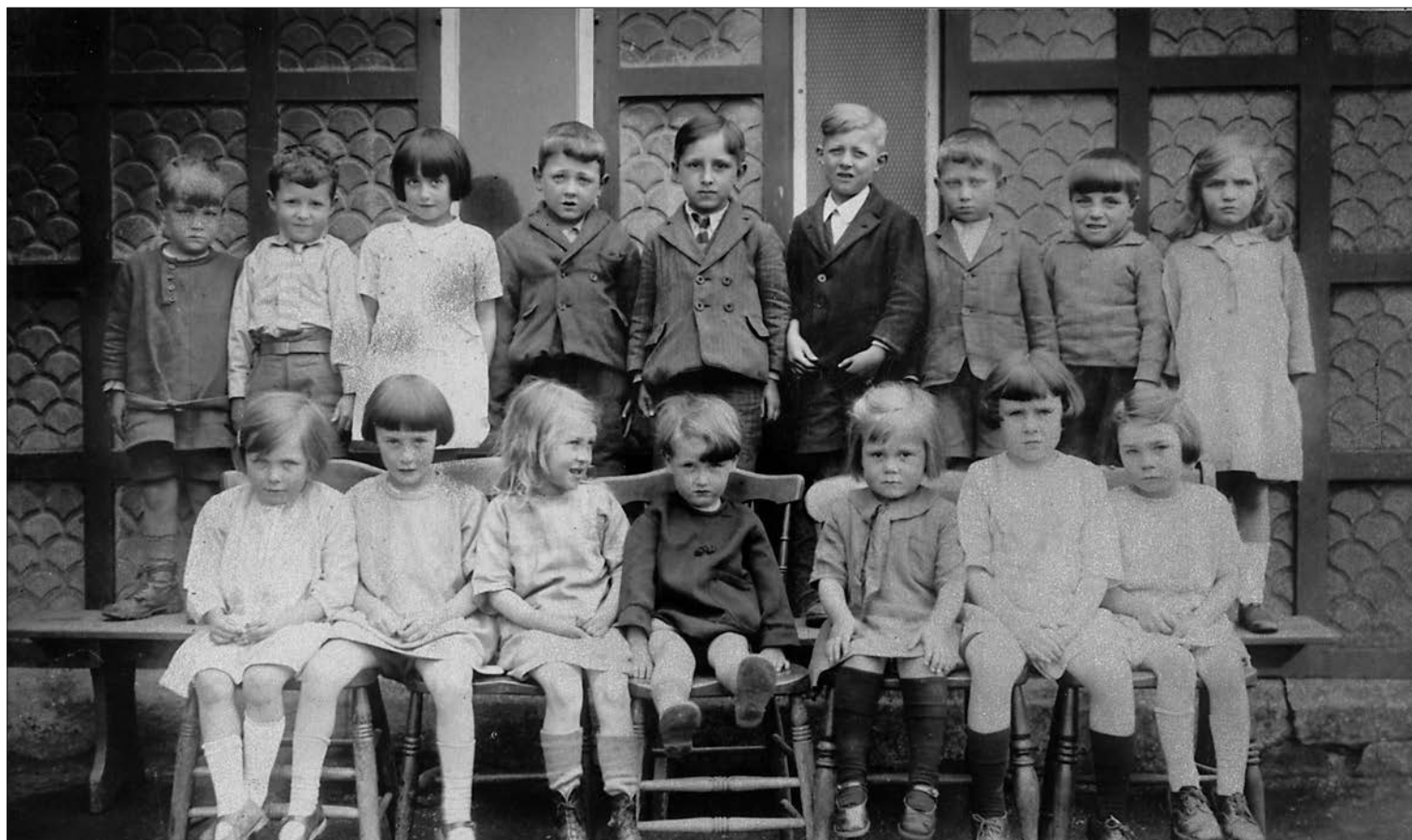



191 and 192 Stevington School photographs: 1905 (above) 1912 (below)





193 and 194 Stevington School photographs 1928





SOME THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW IF WAR SHOULD COME

PUBLIC INFORMATION LEAFLET NO. 1

Read this and keep it carefully. You may need it.

Issued from the Lord Privy Seal's Office July, 1939

IF WAR SHOULD COME

The object of this leaflet is to tell you now some of the things you ought to know if you are to be ready for the emergency of war. This does not mean that war is expected now, but it is everyone's duty to be prepared for the possibility of war.

Further leaflets will be sent to you to give you fuller guidance on particular ways in which you can be prepared.

The Government are taking all possible measures for the defence of the country, and have made plans for protecting you and helping you to protect yourselves, so far as may be, in the event of war.

You, in your turn, can help to make those plans work, if you understand them and act in accordance with them.

No-one can tell when or how war might begin, but the period of warning might be very short. There would be no time then to begin to think what you ought to do.

READ WHAT FOLLOWS, and think NOW.

(1) AIR RAID WARNINGS

When air raids are threatened, warning will be given in towns by sirens or hooters, which will be sounded, in some places by short blasts, and in other places by a warbling note, changing every few seconds. In war, sirens and hooters will not be used for any other purpose than this.

The warning may also be given by the Police or Air Raid Wardens blowing short blasts on whistles.

When you hear the warning, take cover at once. Remember that most of the injuries in an air raid are caused not by direct hits by bombs, but by flying fragments of debris or bits of shells. Stay under cover until you hear the sirens or hooters sounding continuously for two minutes on the same note, which is the signal " Raiders Passed."

If poison gas has been used, you will be warned by means of hand rattles. Keep off the streets until the poison gas has been cleared away. Hand bells will be rung when there is no longer any danger. If you hear the rattle when you are out, put on your gas mask at once and get indoors as soon as you can.

Make sure that all members of your household understand the meanings of these signals.

(2) GAS MASKS

If you have already got your gas mask, make sure that you are keeping it safely and in good condition for immediate use. If you are moving permanently, or going away for any length of time, remember to take your gas mask with you.

If you have not yet received your gas mask, the reason may be that it has been decided in your district to keep the masks in store until an emergency is threatened. If, however, you know that your neighbours have got their gas masks, and you have not got yours, report the matter to your Air Raid Warden.

The special anti-gas helmet for babies and the respirator for small children will not be distributed in any district before an emergency arises.

(3) LIGHTING RESTRICTIONS

All windows, sky-lights, glazed doors, or other openings which would show a light, will have to be screened in war time with dark blinds or blankets, or brown paper pasted on the glass, so that no light is visible from outside. You should obtain now any materials you may need for this purpose.

No outside lights will be allowed, and all street lighting will be put out.

Instructions will be issued about the dimming of lights on nights.

(4) FIRE PRECAUTIONS

An air attack may bring large numbers of small incendiary bombs, which might start so many fires that the Fire Brigades could not be expected to deal with them all. Everyone should be prepared to do all he can to tackle a fire started in his own house. Most large fires start as small ones.

Clearing the top floor of all inflammable materials, lumber, etc., will lessen the danger of fire, and prevent a fire from spreading. See that you can reach your attic or roof space readily.

Water is the best means of putting out a fire started by an incendiary bomb. Have some buckets handy. But water can only be applied to the bomb itself in the form of a fine spray, for which a handpump with a length of hose and special nozzle are needed. If you throw a bucket of water on a burning incendiary bomb it will explode and throw burning fragments in all directions. You may be able to smother it with sand or dry earth.

(5) EVACUATION

Arrangements have been made by the Government for the voluntary evacuation from certain parts of the London area and of some other large towns of schoolchildren, children below school age if accompanied by their mothers or other responsible persons, expectant mothers, and adult blind persons who can be moved.

Parents in the districts concerned who wish to take advantage of the Government evacuation scheme for their children have

already received or will receive full instructions what to do, if the need arises.

Those who have already made, or are making arrangements to send their children away to relations or friends must remember that while the Government evacuation scheme is in progress, ordinary railway and road services will necessarily be drastically reduced and subject to alterations at short notice.

Try to decide now whether you wish your children to go under the Government evacuation scheme and let your local authority know: if you propose to make private arrangements to send your children away do not leave them to the last moment.

All who have work to do, whether manual, clerical or professional, should regard it as their duty to remain at their posts, and do their part in carrying on the life of the nation.

(6) IDENTITY LABELS

In war you should carry about with you your name and address clearly written. This should be on an envelope, card or luggage label, not on some odd piece of paper easily lost. In the case of children a label should be fastened, e.g. sewn, on to their clothes, in such a way that it will not readily become detached.

(7) FOOD

It is very important that at the outset of an emergency people should not buy larger quantities of foodstuffs than they normally buy and normally require. The Government are making arrangements to ensure that there will be sufficient supplies of food, and that every person will be able to obtain regularly his or her fair share; and they will take steps to prevent any sudden rise in prices. But if some people try to buy abnormal quantities, before the full scheme of control is working, they will be taking food which should be available for others.

If you wish, and are able to lay in a small extra store of non-perishable foodstuffs, there is no reason why you should not do so. They will be an additional insurance. But you should collect them now and not when an emergency arises.

(8) INSTRUCTIONS TO THE PUBLIC IN CASE OF EMERGENCY.

Arrangements will be made for information and instructions to be issued to the public in case of emergency, both through the Press, and by means of Broadcast Announcements. Broadcasts may be made at special times, which will be announced beforehand, or during the ordinary News Bulletins.

43-4194

IMPORTANT NOTICE

AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS
Night of 8-9th July, 1939

Your Council have agreed to hold a "Black-out" on the night of 8/9th July, 1939, and it is desired to secure that no lights are visible from the air between midnight and four o'clock in the morning of 9th July, 1939.

The darkening of areas exposed to air attack may be expected to be an essential feature of the defence of this country in time of war, and useful information on the best means of effecting this may be derived from the present Exercise.

HOUSEHOLDERS AND ALL OTHER OCCUPIERS OF PREMISES ARE ACCORDINGLY ASKED TO ASSIST BY ENSURING THAT LIGHTS IN THEIR PREMISES ARE EXTINGUISHED OR SCREENED BY DARK CURTAINS OR BLINDS, BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE EARLY MORNING OF 9th JULY, 1939. IT IS PARTICULARLY DESIRABLE THAT EXTERNAL LIGHTS AND OTHER LIGHTS DIRECTLY VISIBLE FROM THE SKY SHOULD BE EXTINGUISHED OR SCREENED.

As lighting in streets will be restricted, vehicles should, so far as possible, keep off the roads during the darkened period.

It is emphasised that there is no intention, in connection with the "Black-out," of cutting off lighting or power supplies at the mains.

219
Official Notice
Preparing for WAR



220 Stevington Home Guard

Local Defence Volunteers

The Home Guard

On the evening of 14 May in a BBC radio broadcast the Government called for volunteers to go to their local police station to enrol for the Local Defence Volunteers (the LDV). For the next few days station desk sergeants were inundated by the hundreds reporting for enrolment. Lords lieutenant of the counties were confirmed in their ancient role for raising local forces. Each county was divided into zones, each with a commander and a devolved structure descending through sections to platoons at a parish level. By the end of May there had been at least 400,000 enrolments nation-wide. The normal dress was civilian clothes with an LDV armband. Eventually khaki field caps and overalls were issued but uniforms came much later. On 31 July 1940 the LDV was redesignated the Home Guard. It retained a localised rank structure until 6 November when Army ranks were introduced. The Home Guard had three specific roles:

- 1 To patrol and guard the local area and any key local installations;
- 2 To support the Civil Defence organisations;
- and

- 3 To create the nucleus of and support for auxiliary units in coastal areas to form embryonic resistance units in the event of invasion.

As its war progressed specialised Home Guard units were formed, but after late 1943 the role was modified as the threat of invasion receded. By 1 November 1944, with Allied Forces well established in Europe, the order was given to stand down.

Stevington's Home Guard platoon, with a strength of 34-44 in the ranks, was one of six platoons forming D Company of the 5th Bedfordshire Battalion (formerly the North Bedford Sub-Division). The other platoons were based at Radwell, Felmersham, Oakley, Clapham and Pavenham. The Company Commander was Lt Colonel Babcock of Carlton and the other officers were Major Rogers, second in command, a bank manager of Pavenham, and Captain Oldfield, the Administrative/ Training officer (see [Appendix 22](#)). The Stevington platoon was commanded by 2nd Lieutenant Charlie Cox of Silver Street who had seen service in the Great War (see [Appendix 21](#)). He was commissioned on 18 October