FLITWICK

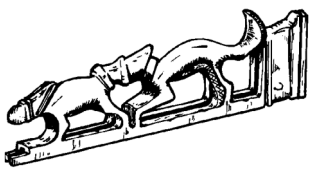
A Short History



FLITWICK

A Short History

T. Russell Key



Ampthill and District Archaeological
and Local History Society

MCMLXXIII

Chairman's Note.

FLITWICK: A SHORT HISTORY was produced by the Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society in 1973, written by the late Russell Key assisted by members of the Society. All copies sold out very rapidly and it was proposed to print an updated edition after a suitable time, unfortunately this did not happen. We now take this opportunity to republish it on our website with an update of the Prehistory and Roman sections by myself and inclusion of more photographs which are now available. The original text was copied out by the late Peter Wood who was Secretary of the Society for many years and we dedicate this edition to him.

Kevan Fadden FSA

June 2020

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COVER ILLUSTRATION:-

Or two leopards sable– the shield of arms of
David Rufus de Flitwick.

FLITWICK: A Short History.

FOREWORD

It is not easy to write a local history but the desire of an individual or a team of workers to face such a task is met frequently. To have it completed is indeed rare. The History of Flitwick presented here is the result of the work of a group of local historians who felt the need to supplement what was already known of the village in the past. It became necessary for them to collect further information and to check local legends, which appeared to contain more than a grain of truth. Both would prove to be slow as well as at times discouraging operations. As is so often the case with co-operative ventures of this nature there was a mainspring holding the team together encouraging its members to feed in still more to add to the completeness of the work. This was provided in the person of T. Russell Key.

Mr. Key is not a Bedfordshire man and has no roots in the Flitwick neighbourhood. He was born in Newnham, in nearby Northamptonshire, a village which was always near to his heart, and to Newnham he returned after he had lived in Flitwick for the brief space of ten years. It will be no surprise to any who may have known him that a history of Newnham will, in the course of time, most certainly appear. He was a schoolmaster and as a colleague it was my pleasure to observe in him all the qualities of the good teacher drawing the best from those he taught by encouraging them to do still better. His teaching took him to industrial Lancashire and finally to Luton Grammar School where in 1952 he became Senior English Master. This brought him nearer to Newnham and to the remaining members of his family. In 1959 he came to live in Flitwick.

Village life, as a relief to that in busy towns, appealed to him bringing with it the desire to know more of his new surroundings. He made preliminary studies of the history of Flitwick finding that others in their own various ways were also interested. This led him to become one of the prime movers in the formation in 1961 of the Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society. With work already done by Mr. Key the Society made an early decision to complete the task so well begun. He would be the first to disclaim that this is his history, but his fellow workers are well aware that without his researches and his encouragement to them it would have been impossible to present it here. Above all he faced the formidable, but to him enjoyable, burden of piecing together all that he and his co-workers had found of so much interest in the history of the village into one continuous and connected story.

JOHN G. DONEY.

INTRODUCTION

Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society decided, soon after its foundation in 1961, to collect material for a short history of Flitwick. The basis for this already existed in "Flitwick, The Story of an old Bedfordshire Village", published by the Rev. J.L. Ward Petley in 1910 but now, unfortunately out of print. The Society is particularly indebted to Mr. Edward Ward Petley for permission to incorporate a great many of his father's invaluable researches and comments.

The Society members have, however, also attempted to investigate the progress of the village from the earliest times by consulting especially the record of archaeological discoveries, the manuscripts and maps in the Bedfordshire Record Office and the documents published by the Bedfordshire Historical Society and by local journals. They gratefully acknowledge the help they have received from these

sources and also from the many local inhabitants who have told of the district in the early twentieth century.

Nevertheless, much remains to be done to show adequately the development of Flitwick into the present large community. The Society hopes that this narrative may encourage others to undertake the further research needed to write a full and authoritative history of the village.

I

PRE-HISTORY, LATE IRON AGE AND ROMAN INFLUENCES

The discovery of a Mousterian "Early Stone Age" hand axe at Ruxox shows that Neanderthal man was moving in the Flitwick area about forty thousand years ago. It is very doubtful if human beings stayed there during the ensuing ice age, but the many flint blades and other stone tools provide evidence that at least from 7000 BC the lightly forested lands at Ruxox and Priestley were inhabited by families of the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age peoples. They were Homo sapiens (modern man) and nomadic, living by hunting and fishing. The presence of large numbers of flint tools and arrowheads on several sites indicate that their successors the Neolithic people were by 4000 B.C. settled and farming on the moor, Ruxox and at Priestly. The pastoral way of life continued through the Bronze Age and into the Iron Age. Pottery and storage pits found near the river at Ruxox prove that these primitive agricultural communities continued until the coming of the Romans in the first century B.C.

The Belgic or Late Iron Age people quickly adopted Roman ways and culture. Wheel turned pottery of this period was made in Kilns above Do-little Mill and a cemetery with cremations in pottery urns have been found at Ruxox, adjoining a group of Roman inhumation burials. The proximity of the late Iron Age and Roman cemeteries suggest the area was considered to be sacred for some considerable time even though burial practice and undoubtedly religious beliefs had changed. The Romans opened the Flitt valley with a road linking the Watling and Ermine Streets. It ran from the direction of Woburn through Flitwick Wood on the line of the path from Wood Farm to Windmill Road, then along



Upper Paleolithic Mousterian Hand Axe



Neolithic and Late Bronze Age arrow heads found at Ruxox Farm

the present Ridgeway and through the fields at Ruxox to Maulden. Just off the line of the road by the modern Manor Way a curious square enclosure ditch was excavated by the Society in 1974. Its purpose remains obscure, but the infill contained second century Romano British pottery. Similar enclosures elsewhere have been described as religious, but no supporting evidence was found in this case. In the centre of the square the remains of a corn drying oven with second century pottery was found, together with carbonised wheat grains surviving in the flues. This proved to be one of the earliest drying ovens recorded in Britain and was made entirely from materials found locally i.e. wood, clay, and sandstone for the hearth. Later structures normally contain reused Roman brick and tile. Religious sites of this period are often found near agricultural complexes. The excavation was carried out in advance of the building programme, which undoubtedly covered more archaeology.

In the fields surrounding Ruxox there are the remains of extensive settlements, chiefly crude dwellings of wattle and daub construction but with at least one major villa with sandstone walls, central heating, a painted plaster interior and a tiled roof. Here families of Romanised Britons enjoyed a high standard of life until the beginning of the fifth century. The many discoveries at Ruxox over fifteen hundred years later show that they ate beef, mutton, pork, and oysters, which were served in elaborate Samian ware pottery imported from central France as well as in pottery obtained from the Nene and Thames valleys. Their clothes were made with bone needles and their leather shoes studded with iron. Recent excavations have shown evidence of extensive iron and some bronze smelting, the pits resulting from iron ore extraction leaving a complex pattern in the ground. The bronze safety pins which fastened their garments, their arm bangles and rings set with intaglios, indicate the wealth created by the sale of iron, corn, and other produce, from the fertile fields of the Flitt valley. These were paid for with coins struck at the mints of Arles in France and Trier in Germany.



(i) Belgic pot from the kilns above Dolittle Mill



(ii) Roman bronze cloak pin and shut knife handle depicting a dog chasing a boar—4th Century



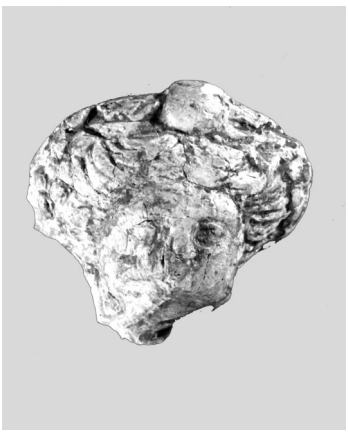
(iii) 3 Roman Intaglios (carved finger ring stones) found on Ruxox Farm



(iv) 1st Century Roman fibula (or safety pin)



(v) Part of a Samian Pot with a lead rivet showing it had been repaired



(vi) Head of Bacchus, from a pipe-clay figurine

Many fragments of pipe-clay Venus figurines were found believed to have been made in Central Gaul, a head of Bacchus, probably fashioned by Servants a modeler who worked in Cologne in the third quarter of the second century. suggest a site of some importance with religious overtones. One of the intaglios found at Ruxox is carved to show the god of good events, “Bonus Eventus" another is engraved "Mercurius", the patron saint of merchants. These give a slight indication of the beliefs and culture of the first civilized inhabitants of the area, who unhappily vanished as the Saxon settlers took over the district.

II

SAXON FLITWICK

We do not know what happened in our district after the Roman occupation ended but if any descendants of the Romanized Britons continued to farm the Flitwick fields, they were absorbed, ousted or enslaved by the Saxon settlers who, possibly before 700 AD, had established a community centred on the house of their leader or thegn in the fields above the stream now called the Flitt. The name of our village thus derives from *"fleot",* meaning a stream and *"wic"* meaning dwelling or farm. We cannot identify the site of this house, but it cannot have been far from the present Manor. A Mill was built and a *"tun"* or stockaded farm developed to the east of the lord's house at Easton, as East End was called for centuries. In the fields on the Flitwick side of the Ruxox stream at a good distance from the ruins of the Roman farm, a Saxon called Hroc cultivated land marked by a large oak tree; in time the "Hroces ac", i.e. the oak of Hroc, became the modern Ruxox. It may well be significant that an oak tree large enough to be a named centre in the Saxon period was in the general area of a Roman site that has produced religious objects in the nature of pipe clay figurines. A large oak tree would have survived both cultures. The open country on and near the slopes now called High Street and Windmill Road was called "Dunhill", and the Saxon farmer who settled near the site of the present Denel End was known as "of Dunhill".

It seems probable that a thatched wooden building dedicated to St. Peter was erected where the present church stands, but the only evidence for its existence are the *"preost leas",* the priest's meadows that lie almost a mile west of the church and of the thegn's house and provided an endowment for a priest, presumably at Flitwick. So, the Priestley estate was created and before 1086 had developed sufficiently to be divided between at least five thegns.

III

NORMAN TIMES

When Doomsday Book was compiled in 1086 AD the Norman, William Lovet, had displaced Alwin, the last Saxon owner of Flitwick. He farmed over two hundred acres himself; the rest of the open land, perhaps five hundred acres, was sufficiently cultivated to support three small farmers, *"villeins",* and seven cottagers, *"bordars".* All these paid rent by working on the lord's land. Priestley was divided between an unnamed bailiff of the king and the great lord of the district, Nigel d'Albini, of Cainhoe Castle, who let his share to another Norman, named Turgis. The land there seemed more intensively cultivated, as it supported two villeins and four bordars. Both the Flitwick and Priestley estates had large woodlands, which fed between them 140 swine, while Flitwick Mill, presumably at East End, as at present, served the whole village.

At Flitwick, William Lovet almost certainly lived in a small castle surrounded by a moat, the remains of which still exist in the so-called "Temple Field" north of the church. He or his immediate successors replaced the Saxon church on his estate with a stone building consisting of a small chancel and a low-roofed, aisleless nave entered from a door in the north wall facing the castle. (This door with characteristic beak head decoration was utilized when then the north aisle was added in 1857-8). William Lovet's land was cultivated as in Saxon times. On the higher ground there were two great open fields, probably separated by a rambling "greenway" that followed the line of the present Avenue and continued towards Ruxox. These west and east fields were ploughed in alternate years, the fallow ground and the stretches of unreclaimed land being grazed in common by the sheep and cattle. The meadows on the lower land



North door of Flitwick Church, from an etching by Thomas Fisher 1813

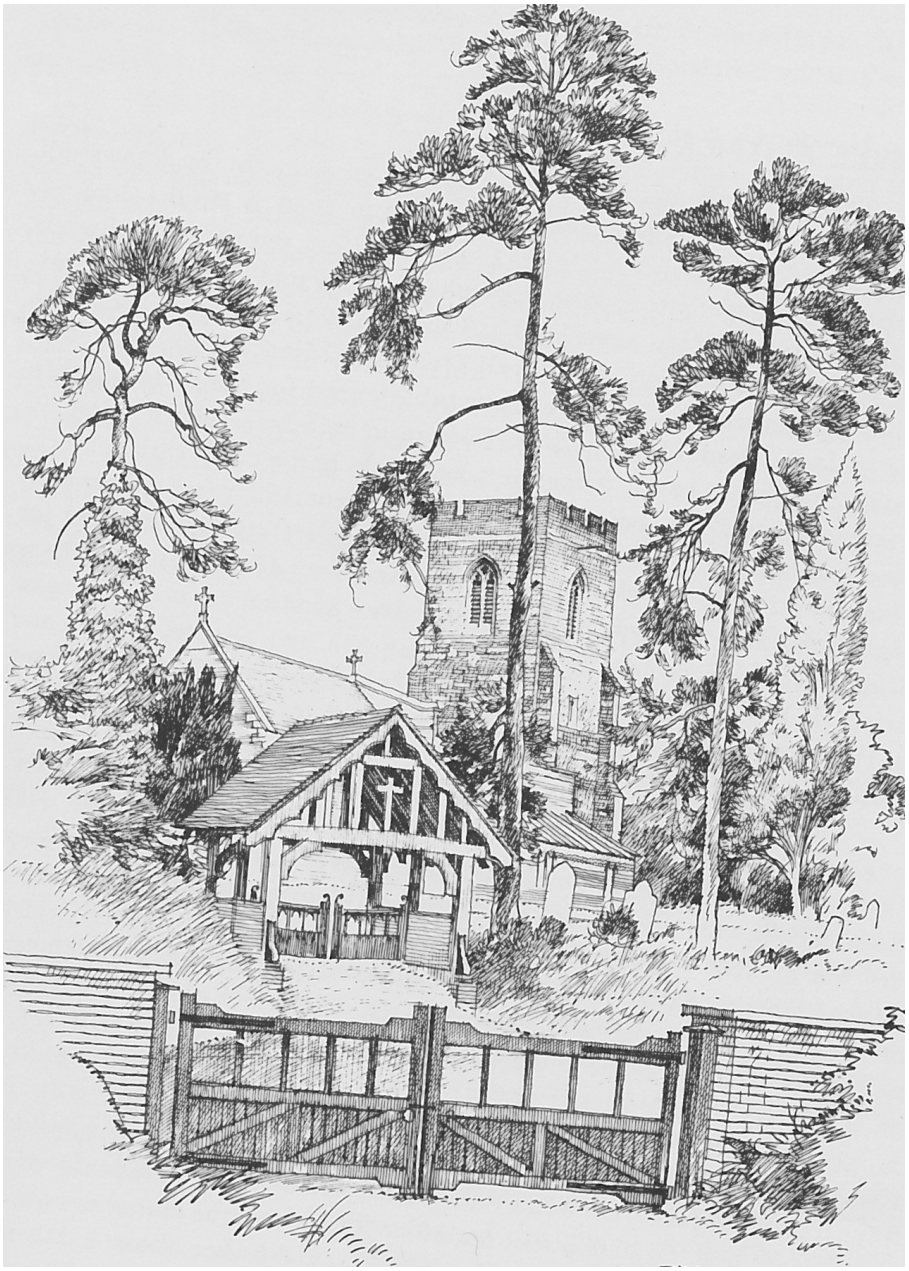
Norman Beak Head decoration

provided hay, the woodlands provided food for the pigs, building material for the houses and fuel for the fires, the latter being largely supplemented by turf from the moor.

IV

MEDIEVAL FLITWICK

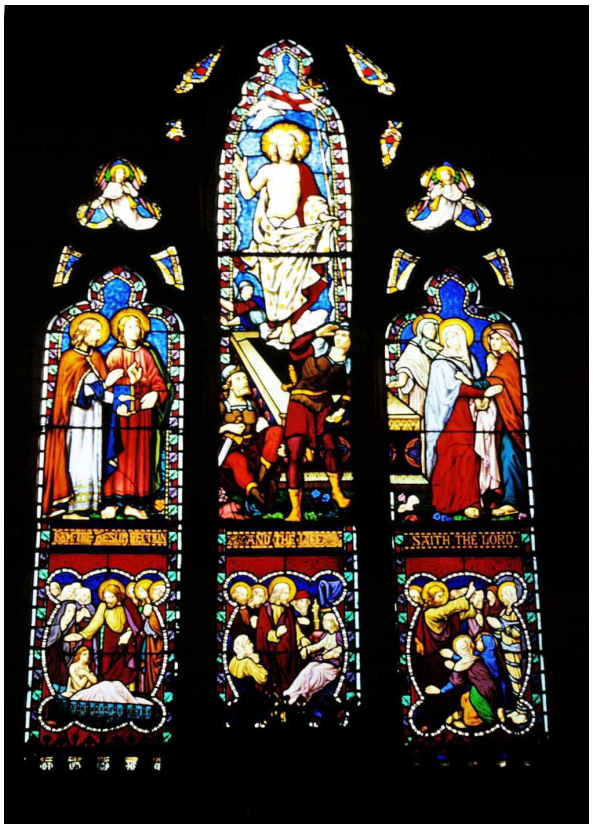
The first authentic details of Flitwick are found in the documents of Dunstable Priory, which record that about 1150 the lord of Flitwick, Philip de Saundreville, gave to the Priory the mill at Flitwick and the churches he controlled at Husborne Crawley and Flitwick. He had already given the Priory some land at Ruxox on which to build a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas and a cell for monks. Henceforth, for nearly four hundred years, the Priors of Dunstable cared for the religious life of the village. Gradually the little Norman church was rebuilt, first by widening the chancel and adding the south aisle in the early 14th century, and later, about 1380, building the tower. About 100 years afterwards the porch was built, and the roof of the south aisle flattened to allow for the continuation of the three clerestory windows. After this period, no change in the structure was made for over three hundred years. The monks



Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, drawn by Bernard West October 1960

at Ruxox provided priests to serve the church and people, though the mention in 1240 of the house of Simon "clericus" of Flitwick shows that the canon appointed for this work lived in a house of his own, probably near the church.

The cell at Ruxox prospered for at least two hundred years, though not always smoothly. About 1185 Gilbert de Saundreville tried to take back the charter his father Philip gave to the priory; he vexed Alexander the canon in charge of Ruxox until he regained all his father's gifts but shortly afterwards he became a leper and, at a Synod held at Woburn, repented and made full restitution of the churches and lands. His heiress, Osmunda, and her husband, William Fulcher, confirmed the grants and gave the Ruxox monks grazing rights on the common lands of the village. Leprosy remained in the community, for we read of Osmunda's son, Ralph, and, also of a freeman at Priestley with the disease about 1225. Osmunda's other son, Gervinus, became a monk at Ruxox, which received extra land from William to provide food and clothing for him. Osmunda was buried at Ruxox and the manor descended to her daughter Anabil who had married David Rufus about 1210, thus founding a family who were lords of



The East widow raised in memory of John Thomas Brooks who died in 1858. Removed since the current text was written and replaced by a clear glass window with the arms of the Rufus family inset.



Arms of the Rufus family as it was in the south window of the chancel, now inset in the east window. The leopards were in fact painted on medieval glass, probably in the 19th cent. Similar paint can be seen on the stained glass windows in the north aisle

Flitwick for the next 150 years. The arms of the Rufus family may be seen in the window in the south wall of the chancel, being fragments of fourteenth century glass carefully pieced together to show the two heraldic leopards that must once have been familiar to all the neighbourhood.

The many grants to support Ruxox which were made during the thirteenth century provide valuable information about the whole village. Roger de Denhill gave land situated in front of the gate at Ruxox; the canons were given rights to graze cattle and cut turf on the moor; Robert the Clerk, son of David Rufus, gave the canons 2 strips of 1/2 acre each in the East Field, 1/2 acre in Wodesnap furlong in West Field; the grandson of Gilbert, Nicholas of Tingrith, sold to the canons, William, son of Walter the Newman, with all his goods and chattels. Thus, Ruxox prospered; in 1248 a new house was commenced there, with a dining room, a cellar, a kitchen, a room in the middle for beer making: in 1257 a great new barn was added.

By 1270 the land acquired for Ruxox and his control of the church at Flitwick gave the Prior of Dunstable a small independent farm in the village. Frequent disputes then arose between the monks and the lord of the manor, David, grandson of David Rufus. David de Flitwick bought from his cousin, Nicholas of Tingrith, a wood in Flitwick called "Le Mentel". The Prior bought from another cousin of David's, Simon, son of Sylvester, an adjoining wood and land to the south and east "below Le Stockinge". David destroyed the boundary hedge and ditch between the woods and made a cart track through Prior's wood. The Prior made a ditch across the track to prevent David from using it and, also made a 10ft. ditch to separate his wood at Ruxox from David's land. David complained that the Prior had taken an acre of meadow let to J. Capucio, that should belong to the manor. When a Ruxox tenant, Galfridus Damessone (a bastard - the son of a dame), died, David took the corn from his land before the Prior

could prevent him. Worst of all, perhaps, the Prior persuaded David's villeins and free men who were tenants of Ruxox to exchange their land, without their lord's permission, with Ruxox men who were tenants of David. Formerly, the prior had remitted the tithes of milk, lambs, and calves that David and his tenants should have paid for the upkeep of the parish church. When they quarrelled the Prior ordered David to continue paying these tenths of the produce of his estate.

For a time, these differences were composed by compromise. The fences and ditches remained as before; David agreed that the exchange of holdings benefited his men; he agreed to pay his tithes in silver and henceforth not to trouble the Prior unnecessarily, nor to abuse his kindness or oppose his church. Nevertheless in 1281 disputes again occurred. David complained that the monks were taking rabbits from his warren - at the present Warren Farm? - but a jury meeting at Bedford decided that he did not own the warren, whereupon the Prior and "several nobles" immediately hunted the rabbits there without interference. In 1286 David formally gave the Priory the advowson of Flitwick church but four years later refused to pay the church his tithe of hay. These quarrels seem finally to have ended with David's death in 1296, when the Prior received his arms and palfrey as a heriot, a payment made to a feudal superior. Succeeding lords of the manor lived in comparative harmony with the Priory and the monks at Ruxox, probably because the descendants of David de Flitwick owned other manors, their Flitwick lands being managed by stewards. The "de Flitwick" family sold the manor in 1361, but not until the early 17th century, when the Blofield family took possession, and the manor house seems to have been rebuilt, do we hear of an owner again resident in the village. The Ruxox lands of 56 acres were in 1537 leased by the Prior to Robert Hewet, on condition that he provided a roll of bread yearly at Ruxox, rushes for the floor of Flitwick Church and Dunstable Priory on feast days and straw for Flitwick Church in winter. Three years after the agreement Henry VIII dissolved the Priory and sold its lands.

V

THE TUDOR PERIOD

The overseers and churchwardens took over the care of the poor who had formerly received relief from the monks, the fields known as the Town Lands being acquired to provide funds for this purpose, yet in appearance the village had changed little during the centuries. The descendants of the villeins who could be bought and sold with the land they rented, were now freemen paying a money rent to the manor, but they still farmed their land in strips in the two great East and West Fields, made hay on the strips of meadow by the streams and cut turf on the Moor for their fires. Priestley, with its manor house, cottages, and recently enclosed fields, remained, like Ruxox, a self-contained and prosperous farm. Elsewhere the three "Ends" made up the main village whose centre was the Green with its pond and stocks and circle of houses; of these only the sites now occupied by the Home Farm and the former Swan Inn can be identified. Cottages stood at intervals on both sides of the road to Woburn, which at that time ran south of the church and directly in front of the Manor. A gate into the Manor grounds shows the line of the old road, and a house dated "circa 1590" still remains nearby to remind us of the normal dwellings there and elsewhere in the village. On the opposite side of the road and nearer Home Farm was the Vicarage, described in 1708 as having four downstairs rooms and bedrooms above, one being "Seeled"; the kitchen and buttery had earth floors, the hall had bricks and the parlour boards. Near it was the Church House, a building probably erected in late medieval times for the meetings and social affairs that formerly had been held in the nave of the

church. These houses have now disappeared as has the great tithe barn at East End, which still in the 17th century held the tenths of the farmers' produce payable to the church.

VI

THE 17th CENTURY

We seem to have very few records that tell of Flitwick during the Commonwealth period. Edward Blofield, Squire of Flitwick, was in 1652 fined at Bedford for *"opprobrious and scandalous words"* he had spoken against the Government. Perhaps the Squire's attitude may account for the purchase of two bells for the church, one dated 1653, the other 1654. The Puritans disliked bells and forbade ringing; the order for a new bell was an exceedingly rare event throughout the country at this time. That a strong



Church Road

puritan group existed in Flitwick is suggested by the statement in the ' Victoria County History' recording that a Baptist chapel existed at East End in 1660 when, presumably, the Parish Church reverted to the Anglican form of worship.

Court cases show something of village life during this period. At least three fights took place between the millers of Flitwick and Greenfield, caused by the former diverting some water of the Flitt so that less was available at Greenfield Mill. Henry Collop, gentleman, a descendant of the first vicar of Flitwick after the Reformation, was fined a shilling for violent assault on Robert Gale. Another gentleman of Flitwick, Charles Poulton, was not only fined for assault, but also was summoned for killing the Earl of Bedford's deer by hunting them in Woburn Park with greyhounds.

By the end of the seventeenth century much more information about the village was being preserved in church registers and in overseers' and churchwardens' accounts. Especially valuable is the 1674 list of all Flitwick houses, with the number of fireplaces in each. Samuel Rhodes, who had recently inherited the Manor from the Blofield family, had ten; one house, probably Priestley, had seven; the eight dwellings with three or four hearths were the substantial farmhouses, possibly the forerunners of the Home Farm, Denel End. Wood Farm, Warren Farm, the new building at Ruxox, the Old Farm, now Flitwick Lodge, and perhaps a house at East End and the old Swan Inn or the Manor House at Denel End.

The remainder of the village consisted of 59 cottages with one or two fireplaces; about fifty of these were grouped at the three Ends or near the bigger houses, but sixteen of the householders were too poor to pay the tax levied on each hearth at that time. The Vicarage, with two hearths, was let; indeed from 1673 until 1845 Flitwick did not have a resident Vicar, though curates lived at the old Vicarage from about 1770 until the Rev. Dawson built a new house in 1843 and settled in the parish.

VII

THE 18th CENTURY

Documents show the Churchwardens and Overseers controlling the parish. Generally, the offices were held by substantial farmers, such as Henry Collop of Home Farm, Church End, but at times by a husbandman such as Edmond Farey. The Overseers spent the parish *"levy"* on helping the orphans, the aged, the sick and the poor; boys were apprenticed, poor travellers helped on their way; flax and hemp provided to enable the destitute earn a living. Local housewives - always called "Goody" - were paid to care for sick neighbours; relief in the form of food, clothes, firing - turf, furze and wood - and occasionally weekly payments, sustained all those who could not work. The Churchwardens, having some funds at their disposal, assisted these village charities, but their chief concern was the care of the parish church and its furnishings. We also find them repairing the pound, the enclosure for stray animals, then situated near the junction of the Dunstable and East End Roads. Overseers and Churchwardens joined in paying for the destruction of foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, moles, and polecats. In 1707 the shilling paid for a fox's head equalled the cost of a blanket and sheet for a poor man. These village officials were not paid but were allowed expenses, chiefly beer, and tobacco, at their frequent meetings.

The records for the eighteenth century show little change in the pattern of life at Flitwick. After the Rhodes family died out in 1735 the Manor passed first to the Dell family, then to the Fishers and finally in 1789 to George Brooks whose descendants remained in possession for almost 150 years. However, the house was let during the whole of the second half of the century, when Flitwick seems neither to have had a Squire who took a real interest in the village, nor a resident Vicar, the living being combined with neighbouring villages. Nevertheless, the church was kept in repair, as the frequent churchwardens' bills show. The bells were frequently rung for national and local celebrations, such as the royal birthdays and village feast days, the five ringers being paid chiefly in beer money, custom being divided between the three inns, one at each "End", though the Swan, being the largest and nearest the church, had the major share.

The population of the village gradually increased during the eighteenth century. By 1798, compared with 1674, the number of dwellings had risen from 69 to nearly 90 and the population at the first census in 1801 was 436. Many families had moved, died out, or survived only in the female line in a little over one hundred years, only seven names found in the 1674 Hearth Tax returns being identifiable in 1798. Perhaps the gradual alteration in the ownership of land in the parish may indicate the cause. Although the open field system continued in over half of the land, the strips originally held by many individuals were now owned largely by George Brooks, Lord of the Manor, the Duke of Bedford, and Mr. Joshua Wheeler of Ampthill. Each landlord let all his strips in the various "fields" to one or two farmers only, who thus became the largest employers in the village. The Moor remained common ground for turf cutting and coarse grazing, but nearly all the other commons were enclosed by the end

of the eighteenth century and the woods were privately owned. Only a few owners of their houses and home closes, with some strips in the open fields, could remain at all independent. R. Goodman and W. Farrer at East End and T. Bushby and E. Farey at Denel End were the main small proprietors, but even they had also to rent from the three chief landlords.

A map of 1798 gives a clear picture of the whole village. The Duke of Bedford owned the ancient manor of "Prisley" divided into Wood Farm, Warren Farm and Priestley. Little Priestley, now "The Lodge" was a farm owned by the Squire. The old manor of Ruxox also belonged to the Duke. These formed five compact farms, old enclosures of arable and pastureland centred around their farmhouses and apart from the main village. Nearly every cottage at each "End" had either a home close, croft or pightle surrounded by a fence, sometimes providing a five- or six-acre field but more generally sufficient only for a garden and orchard. Altogether there were 360 acres of enclosed arable and 680 of enclosed pasture.

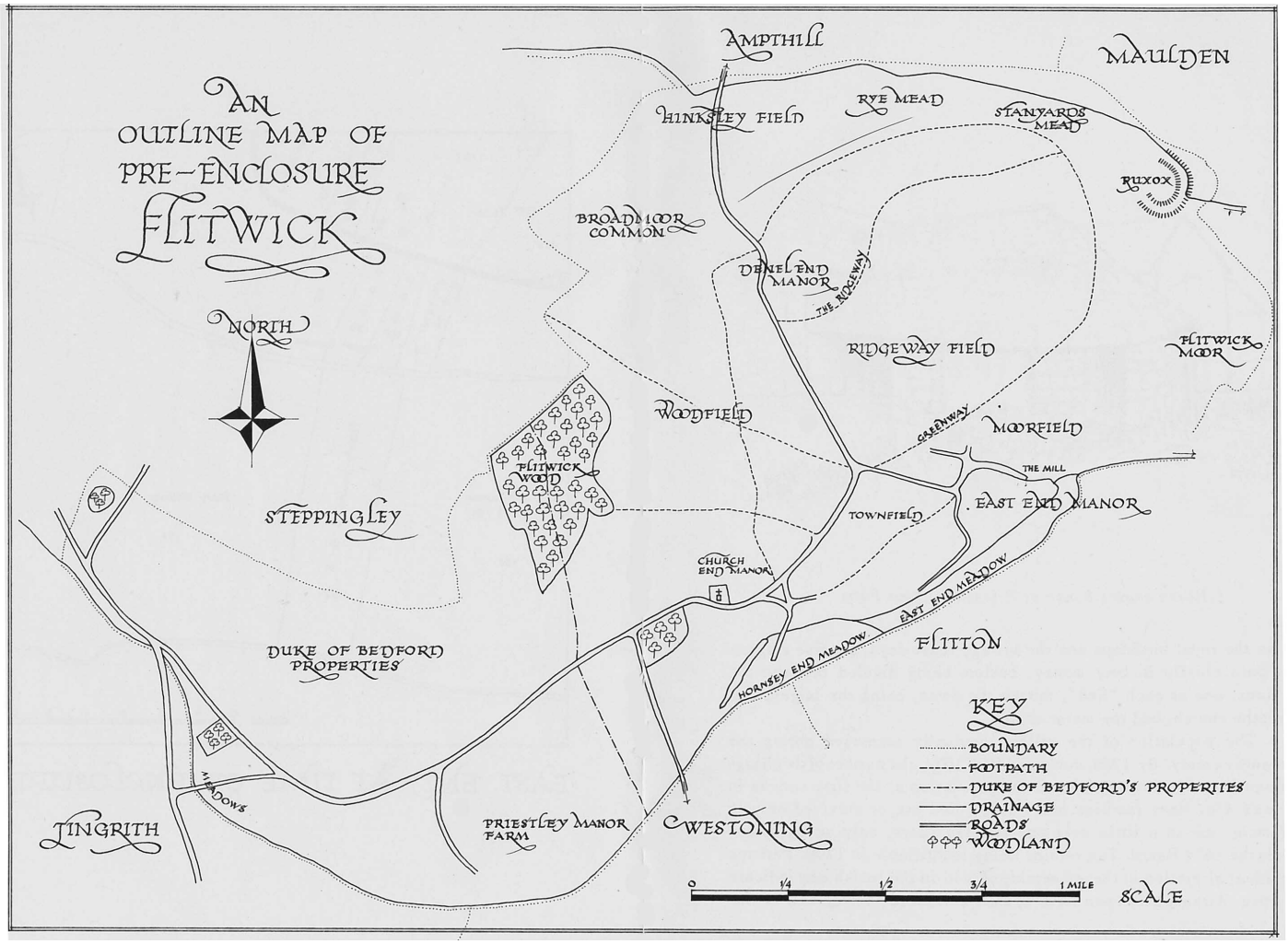
The rest of the village land was unenclosed and over 600 acres were divided into five great fields: Townfield to the east of Dunstable Road, Hinksley to the north of the parish, and Woodfield, Moorfield and Ridgeway Field in the quarters indicated by their modern names. Each contained many "furlongs" which were again divided into half acre, one or two-acre strips, each with a different owner, and some larger areas belonging to one of the principal landlords. Only ridges or banks separated the individual holdings and it is now difficult to trace even the exact boundaries of the fields. Nearly all of the five fields were ploughed, sheep and cattle being grazed there when fallow, but the main pasture land stretched along the two streams to the north and south of the parish where the great Stanyard meadow, the Hornsey and East End Meadows were divided into large and small strips to enable each farmer to gather his own hay. Otherwise these meadows, with the Moor, perhaps Broadmoor common west of Steppingley Road, and a few small pieces of common elsewhere, 470 acres in all, were open pasture where the tenants' animals intermingled, only distinguished by their brandmarks.

VIII

THE 19th CENTURY

The disadvantages of these open fields had long been recognised and in 1807 the Flitwick landowners followed the example of many neighbouring parishes by promoting a bill in Parliament for enclosing all the open land to form compact farms or smallholdings. The three Commissioners appointed by the Government surveyed the whole village, held frequent meetings with the proprietors and finally presented an agreed plan that divided the open fields into farms that could be fenced and then cultivated without reference to the condition of the adjoining land.

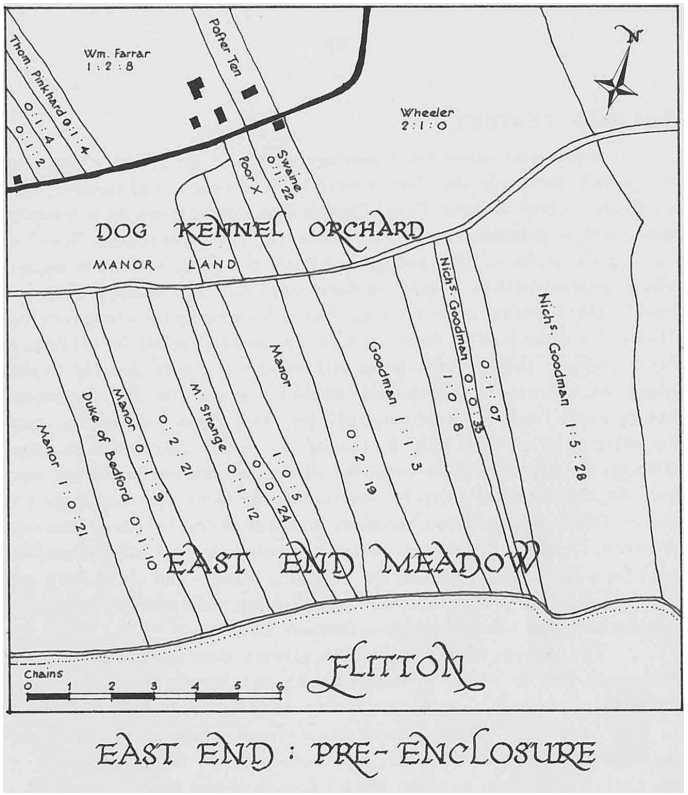
The Enclosure Award consolidated the Manor lands into the principal estate covering the central part of the village, stretching from Priestley to East End and north west to include the great Woodfield west of the Steppingley Road. John Carrington, who had previously bought the right to levy the great tithes, and the Vicar, who relied on the lesser tithes for the greater part of his income, now received land in lieu of their right to collect either a share of the produce or its money value from each farm. The former was allotted 227 acres, including Folly Farm, on both sides of the newly made road to Maulden; the latter received four houses and nearly fifty acres, most of it in the former Townfield. Richard Goodman, who had held strips in at least nine of the ancient furlongs, was given 56 acres with his homestead opposite the Mill. John Morris, the Ampthill brewer, now owned 253 acres and houses at Denel End,



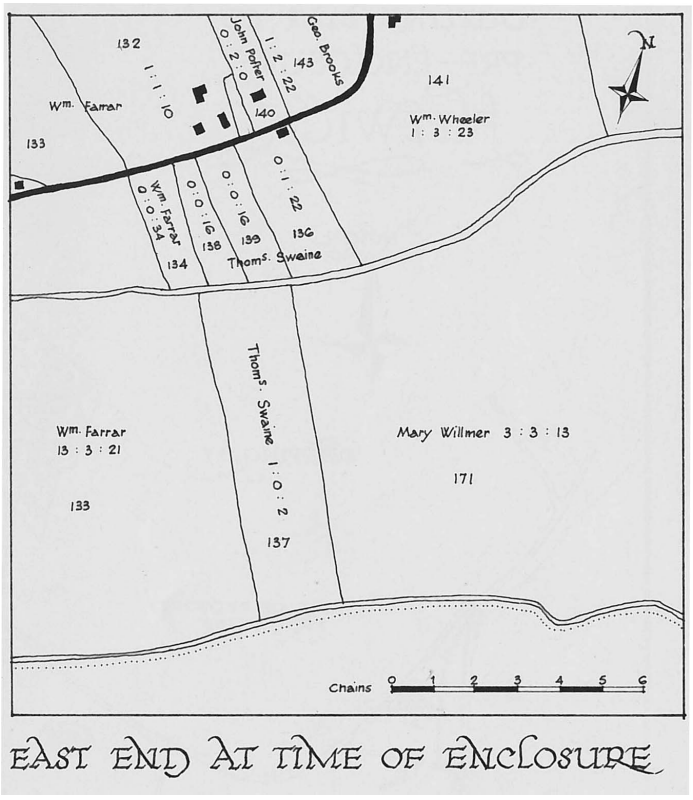
instead of the fields and strips he had gradually acquired in various parts of the parish during the ten previous years. The Duke of Bedford, who had also owned many separate strips, was awarded 51 acres lying on each side of the Maulden Road to enlarge the already enclosed Ruxox Farm.

Twenty villagers received almost all the remaining 174 acres of farmland, parcelled out according to the extent of their original holdings. For instance, in place of strips he held elsewhere, Thomas Swaine at Water End obtained three allotments totalling 1.a. 34 poles in Dogkennel Orchard near his cottage and garden. One of these allotments, measuring 16 poles, formerly belonged to the Trustees of the Town Land which they let for the benefit of the poor; for them the Trustees received in exchange the 1.a. 24 poles they still hold by the side of the Steppingley Road. Another allotment of 16 poles was previously Manor land. The third allotment of 1.a. 2 poles was in the East End meadow on the other side of the stream. Further along the lane at Water End, William Farrer had 15 acres adjoining his homestead and a cottage nearby. In addition, the twelve cottagers who were confirmed in possession of their homes would normally work on the large farms as usual, but they no longer had any rights to cut wood and turf on the Moor or to feed geese or a few animals there or on the small pieces of common land that were formerly free to them.

During the previous centuries land and dwellings had been acquired and managed by the Overseers for the benefit of the poor of Flitwick. The Enclosure Award settled all the charities more or less in the form they exist today. The Trustees of the Town Land were confirmed in possession of two cottages; one, at the corner of Ampthill and Windmill Road, has 1½ acres of land and may have been used as the parish workhouse; the site of the other cannot be identified, but probably it was near the



EAST END : PRE-ENCLOSURE



EAST END AT TIME OF ENCLOSURE

Green. In place of their former holdings in the open fields, the Trustees were allotted 10 acres north-east of Steppingley Road and near its junction with Windmill Road. The Trustees for the Poor of Flitwick received ten acres on the Moor to compensate for the extinction of the common rights there and elsewhere: it seems probable that the land was let for rough grazing, as now for shooting, and that the Overseers cut wood and turf for distribution to the needy.

The Award vested the Overseers with the right to use the two village gravel pits, one on Gravel Pit Lane, the other, east of the Ridgeway. Nearly 33 acres were set aside for roads and tracks in the parish, but the gravel would be used only for the cart tracks between wide grass verges. The marl pit remained for common use at the corner of Flitwick Wood adjoining the track from Windmill Road; the Squire's agent, Thomas Gostelow, judged the competence of the tenants by the way they marled their land.

Thus, the land of the largest of the three Manors became similar in appearance and organisation to that of the two estates of Priestley and Ruxox enclosed in previous centuries. The lives of the villagers, however, continued without significant change. The population remained steady; 436 in 1801, a slight fall to 413 in 1811 and subsequently a gradual rise. In 1815 twenty-seven householders were listed as poor and received blankets at Christmas from the Squire. Of this gift a letter records *"The oldest man in the parish never nowed such a gift in Flitwick--even some of them with tears in their eyes for rejoicement."*

By 1830, however, the low wages of the farmworkers and the lack of steady employment were causing great discontent in many villages in Bedfordshire and elsewhere. In December about 30 men with sticks and bludgeons went round Flitwick threatening the labourers who would not join them in asking for more money. As a result, some 100 men made a great noise and disturbance in the village for two hours until the ringleaders were arrested. They were accused, among other offences, of not being content to work for their usual wages and to trying to extort great sums of money from the masters who employed them, as well as causing great terror to the inhabitants of Flitwick and to those



Horse engine house at Priestly Manor Farm

"passing and repassing." At the Quarter sessions the apparent ringleader, William Mitchell, received six months hard labour and William Barnes, John Ellis, and Thomas Kingham 14 days. Thus, the first strike recorded in Flitwick was crushed and poverty persisted with a great deal of outdoor relief until the Poor Law Act of 1834.

Nevertheless, in contrast with many of the surrounding areas, Flitwick seems to have been a fairly prosperous agricultural community. In 1832, sixteen farmers employed over a hundred labourers between them and there were also fourteen tradesmen in the village. We have records of a tanner, wheelwright, smith, carpenter, taylor, shoemaker, butcher, grocer, besides a sievemaker, calico glazier, the miller etc. and a "higler" (dealer); women are mentioned as mantua maker, lace maker, straw plaiter. The miller and the landlords of the Swan, Crown, and Bird in Hand (Blackbirds) public houses were almost certainly included as tradesmen in the Overseers' census returns, to make the total of 14. In 1807 a travelling “chair-bottomer” had a child baptised at the church. Of these craftsmen at least George Burrows, the 18th century sieve-maker, must have sold his products outside the village, thus establishing the first Flitwick industry. This population dwelt in 123 houses, approximately 35 at each End and the remainder at the five outlying farms. These Ends remained as well-separated groups until the end of the century, being connected by two main paths, one from Gravel Pit Lane to the Green and the other from what is now Chapel Road across the fields to meet the Dunstable Road opposite the present Vicarage.

Before the Enclosures, only one road, the way from Ampthill to Eversholt and Woburn ran through the village. The present Station Road went to East End but was not continued to Maulden before the beginning of the 19th century. The Westoning Road was cut across the Moor soon afterwards to replace the old track which had formerly turned south beyond the Manor to run past Little Priestley to firmer ground west of the Flitt. Steppingley Road was also made about the same time. The "greenway" was gradually disused, though remaining as a modern road name, but the Ridgeway still retains its ancient use as a road and path from Denel End towards Ruxox.

Many fresh names appear in the 19th century records, but several 17th and 18th century families can still be traced. The Cooks had lived at Wood Farm from the early 18th century, the Goodmans

owned the Mill and the surrounding land as they do today, the Brinkler family at the Swan had become farmers and dealers as well as victuallers and H. Brinkler was a "plait-dealer" in 1850. The descendants of George Swayne, blacksmith of Flitwick in 1671 remained in the parish as farmers, as did the Farey family who are similarly noted as paying hearth tax for two fireplaces in 1671. Two other 18th century farming families, the Fanes and the Farrers, who had farmed large strips in the open fields, still rented land from the Manor as well as possessing a house and a few acres of their own. Gradually throughout the century even these few families tended to disappear, though the population continued to rise, reaching 900 by 1891. Of the 36 children who attended the village school in 1872 only 7 still lived in Flitwick in 1911.



The Manor at the turn of the 20th century home of the Brooks family

The appearance of Flitwick, as well as the number of inhabitants, changed rapidly after the construction of the railway from Luton to Bedford and the building of the station in 1868. Yet the Green, surrounded by thatched houses and cottages, remained unaffected for some time. The pound and the stocks sited there fell into disuse and were eventually removed and in 1852 the first National School was built on the north side, but the large open space was still the centre for village life. There Flitwick Feast was held during the week following the day consecrated to St. Peter, 29th June; this was the parish holiday, the survival of the holy-day that marked the feast of the patron saint of the church. The roads near the Green were lined with stalls and a booth was erected between two large elm trees in the field adjacent to the Swan Inn. Here there was dancing until midnight on the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday of the Feast, the music being provided by a fiddle, a dulcimer, and pipes. By the end of the century these celebrations had dwindled to a customary holiday on the Monday only, the inns being the chief beneficiaries. Accordingly, in 1894 the new Vicar, the Rev. Bill Lipscomb, organised sports in the newly acquired recreation ground and these became an annual event on or near the first Monday in July for many years. As the population moved away from the Green and Station Square became the new centre of the village, the open space lost its usefulness and it gradually disappeared under a variety of buildings, some of which still remain.

Many of the changes of the second half of the 19th century are connected with the Rev. Dell Brooks, whom his father presented to the living of Flitwick in 1855. During his 25 year ministry he restored the Parish Church, building the north aisle and the vestry and removing the old pews and floors; he built the School House and improved the School, which was taken over by a School Board in 1872; he instigated the further draining of the glebe land and the construction of the new road over the Moor to



The late Mr. R.L. Billington, with Windmill Road and the Windmill in the background. C. 1890

Greenfield. After his retirement he settled in Flitwick in 1896 and in 1901 we find him suggesting that the Parish Council should write to Alviston, Warwickshire, and other villages with a population similar to Flitwick's to discover how they managed the bathing places they had constructed. Soon after this, however, the Rev. Brooks left the village for the last time and interest in the project was not revived until the late 20th century.

IX

THE 20th CENTURY

Throughout the 19th century the Brooks family were the most prominent in the life of the village. In 1806 we find George Brooks, then living at Mortlake, writing to tell his agent that John Fane could rent East End Farm if he undertook to attend church more regularly. This paternal interest is not again directly recorded but George Brooks' son Mr. J.T. Brooks, and later his son, Major J. Hatfield Brooks, remained the principal inhabitants of Flitwick until the latter's death in 1907. Major Brooks was churchwarden for over 40 years and the chief supporter of the social and charitable activities centred on the church. The family owned the advowson of the living until 1934 and contributed largely to the upkeep

and improvement of the church and to the building in 1903 of the Mission at St. Andrews to serve Denel End. In 1889 he offered to let three acres of land to a committee to run as a village recreation ground. Major Brooks' only surviving child, Miss Catherine Brooks, who inherited the Manor, continued to show the same interest in the welfare of the village until her death in 1934, when Col. and Mrs. Lyall took over the estate. The names Brooks Road, Hatfield Road, Catherine Road and Lyall Close still commemorate the former squires of Flitwick.

The activities associated with the District and Parish Councils, as well as the voluntary efforts connected with the Church and the Manor provide striking evidence of the changes in Flitwick during the late 19th and early 20th century. A post office was set up, first at Church End and then, after great trouble and an appeal to the local M.P., transferred to Station Square. In 1921 the village presented the sub-



Mr. Deacon the miller standing in the windmill with Mrs. Deacon and two of her nine children in the foreground. The mill burned down in 1903

postmistress, Mrs. Carr, with a £45 testimonial in recognition of her 30 years service; in 1911 the postman, Mr. J. Dilley, had likewise received a testimonial after 33 years service, dating from the time when he could carry all the mail in one hand. During the headmastership of Mr. Abbott, from 1872 to 1911, the number of children at the village school more than doubled and he was encouraged to arrange evening classes at the school and at the Church House at Denel End in arithmetic, English, needlework, carving and other subjects. The "Iron Room" erected in 1894 in Station Road by the Rev. Bill Lipscomb as a Church Hall, was used for many years in the winter evenings as a reading and recreation room. A Library of some 400 books was provided for a 1d. a month subscription in the Parish Room attached to the Vicarage. These supplemented the increasing variety of recreations organised in the village. In 1902 the Feast Day Sports gave place to a Flower Show and Sports held in August; a Football Club was started

in 1903 and a cricket and a quoits club the following year. Miss Brooks ran a branch of the Girls' Friendly Society for over 30 years and a Boy Scout Troop was formed in 1910.

The raising of money by entertainments became part of the village life. In previous centuries this was done only by "Church Ales", when the churchwardens, having begged the ingredients, brewed, and sold ale on feast days at the Church House, the proceeds helping the poor of the parish. In the early 20th century the charity fetes at the Manor, the sales of work and jumble sales were regularly supplemented by lantern lectures and the concerts organised by Mr. Sylvester Stannard, an artist whose paintings record much of the attractiveness of the neighbourhood. The record was a fete in June 1909 which raised £75 to hang the church bells. Flitwick was even a centre for the large-scale entertainment of others; in



Hay making at the turn of the 20th century

1902 over 800 people came from Luton in a special train to enjoy themselves in Mr. Abiss's fields near Home Farm and later as many came from a Bedford Sunday School to the Manor Park and Gardens.

Much was done to alleviate hardship in the village. The sick and poor received the offertories at the Church communions; in 1911 nearly 200 families were helped by the funds provided by the rents of Town Lands and Poors' Moor, and occasionally a youth was apprenticed and a girl outfitted for service as in previous centuries. In 1725 Thomas Deacon had left 5/- a year to provide bread for the poor of Flitwick who scrambled for it as it was thrown from the window over the porch of the Swan Inn. However, by 1911 the Rev. Ward Petley records that it was distributed more fairly and decorously to the "deserving poor". The poor of Flitwick also received 100 shillings provided by the Brooks family and distributed at the Manor on St. Thomas' Day each year. The District Nursing Association took over the care of the sick from the Overseers of the Poor. Provision for the future was encouraged by a Penny Bank, and Clothing, Coal and Blanket Clubs, but the Vicar's appeals for donations show that these attempts to foster self-help never consistently flourished in the village. An exceptional treat was provided in 1911 to mark the coronation of George V: the Parish Council voted a penny rate to feast everyone in the Temple Field and to entertain them with sports, fireworks, and dancing to Sundon Band.

From the time of its establishment in 1894, the minutes of the Parish Council show that there were constant discussions on improving the amenities of the village. In 1897 the Councillors stopped bad language on the Station Bridge on Sunday nights by providing help for the parish constable, P.C. Kempston, whose thirteen years of office, they decided, had made him too well known. They controlled allotments



Goodman's water mill about 1900, the chimney for a supplementary engine has since been demolished

at Station Road, Denel End and the Ridgeway; they managed the Recreation Ground after the village committee resigned in 1911; in 1897 they discussed the bringing of electricity, in 1907, gas, and in 1928 main water and sewerage to Flitwick, but rejected all the schemes as too costly. The Medical Officer of Health had reported that the land was so highly manured that all the centuries-old wells were polluted. Finally, however, only the well at the corner of Windmill and Ampthill Roads was declared unusable and individual householders installed hand pumps or continued to draw water as before.

More pleasant Council business was in 1928 the congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Goodman of the Mill on the occasion of their golden wedding. Mr. Goodman was a Councillor for 30 years; even so he did not equal the record of Mr. P. Dix, who served from 1894 to 1931. In 1930 the Council also congratulated Mrs. Rachel Swain and presented her with 100 shillings on her hundredth birthday: Mrs Swain lived to be 108.

In 1899 the Council surprisingly took note of international affairs; it carried unanimously a resolution that "The members of Flitwick Parish Council having heard with great satisfaction of the Emperor of Russia's proposal to hold a conference of the representatives of the Great Powers, trust that the English Government will give their warmest support to the proposal, so that a stop may be put to the increase in armaments that is constantly going on". No other minute of this kind is recorded and there are few references to the impact of the First World War on the Parish, though the Memorial shows that the village lost 29 young men from 1914-18. The "Victory Hall", the first undenominational public building in the village, was erected in 1919 on the recreation ground and was not replaced until the Village Hall was completed in 1969.

Between the two wars Flitwick developed as a dormitory for workers in Luton and Bedford, but still remained essentially a village community. Houses joined the three Ends by ribbon development along Dunstable, Station and Ampthill Roads. The Methodist Church was erected in 1873 in the lane to which it gave the name of Chapel Road; in 1905 Mr. R. Goodman provided the land and much of the



Peat cutting on moor

money for the Baptist Church in another lane which some thirty years later became Kings Road. The bringing of electricity, gas and finally main drainage to the village increased its attraction for residents and the population continued to rise from 1029 in 1901 to 1424 persons living in 380 houses by 1911. By 1960 the number of inhabitants had nearly reached 5000.

For many years at the beginning of the 20th century, however, industrial development remained negligible. The 19th century cottage industries of lace making, and straw-plaiting gradually died out and even an attempt by F.J. Elliott and Co. to establish a hat factory in Station Road in 1912 was unsuccessful. The milling industry showed signs of expansion when a windmill was built at Denel End in 1843 on the road now named after it, but this was unfortunately burnt down in 1903 and not replaced. Nevertheless, one business did develop in Flitwick as a successor to the individual craftsman of the 19th

century.

In 1899 Mr. E.J. Pepper moved his sawmill and blacksmith's shop to a site in Windmill Road, still identifiable by sheds behind No. 14 to the north of the road. There, wheelwrights, a blacksmith, and carpenters made coffins, wagons, gates and all the smaller requirements in wood and iron needed by the local farmers. The chief blacksmith, Joseph Scott, was a real craftsman; besides horseshoes and other agricultural ironwork, he supplied the early motorist with spare parts not easily obtainable in the neighbourhood. A familiar sight soon after dawn of frosty mornings was the line of perhaps twenty horses waiting to have shoes roughed; this work would be completed before the men sat around the forge for their late breakfast of tea and fat pork.

Under Mr. Pepper and his three sons the business flourished for many years, until by the beginning of the First World War, about thirty men were employed in the various departments. The firm kept its own horses in a field near the works, and bought, felled, and carted trees over a wide area; a major undertaking was the clearance of timber for the first electric grid through the district. Gradually steam and, later, electricity, replaced manual labour in the sawpits and shops and the locally grown wood was used in a greater variety of ways. The claw legs for the stands in dress shops were produced in large numbers and an eight horse-power steam engine was installed to carve blocks of elm into faces for the models in the London hairdressing shops.

The manufacture of charcoal was developed as a sideline during the early part of the present century. A skilled craftsman came to Flitwick during the summer months to burn spare wood from the sawmills in the special ovens erected on the site. These were watched day and night to ensure that they never burst into flame. Most of the charcoal produced was sold in London, but some warmed the food in the Woburn Hospital during the 1914-18 War.

In the 1930s wood was less and less used in farm buildings and implements, while the demand for the other lines Mr. Pepper had developed also declined. The business was sold in 1946 and finally closed down soon afterwards.

The only other industry in Flitwick during the early part of the century was centred on its unique asset, the Moor. In 1891 Mr. Henry King Stevens, who had lived for some time as a "bird-stuffer" and smallholder at "The Folly" on the edge of the Moor, obtained recognition in the medical journal, The Lancet, that he possessed on the Moor a spring of remarkable chalybeate water with exceptional medicinal qualities. *This was somewhat inaccurate, for in fact. Mr. Stevens pumped ordinary water twice through bags of peat dug from a site in the Moor at three spades depth and dried for a year. The peat, being strongly impregnated with minerals, produced the sherry-coloured liquid that seemed likely to bring fortune to its proprietor.* He set up a purifying and bottling plant, laid out gardens and an avenue from his house to the Moor and advertised "Flitwick Water" far and wide. It was "The most invigorating tonic in the world ", good for anaemia, rheumatism, indigestion, debility, and neuralgia.

The enterprise flourished and further developed when, on Mr. Stevens' death in 1898 the property was bought by R.W. White & Co., of London. Demand for the waters increased and twice a week cartloads of large carboys were taken to Flitwick Station; Flitwick Water was on sale in chemists' shops at least throughout the south-east of England. However, the demand gradually slackened and by 1930 very little was being prepared on the Moor. In 1938 the land was sold and the house and buildings soon afterwards demolished; now only the pumphouse marks the site of what at one time seemed likely to

be a Flitwick spa.

Another enterprise had its source on the Moor at the same time that Flitwick Water was prosper-



A peaceful scene from the Ridgeway across to Barton Hills c. 1914.

A watercolour by Miss E B Speck, a pupil of H J Sylvester Stannard 1870-1951, a local painter of high repute

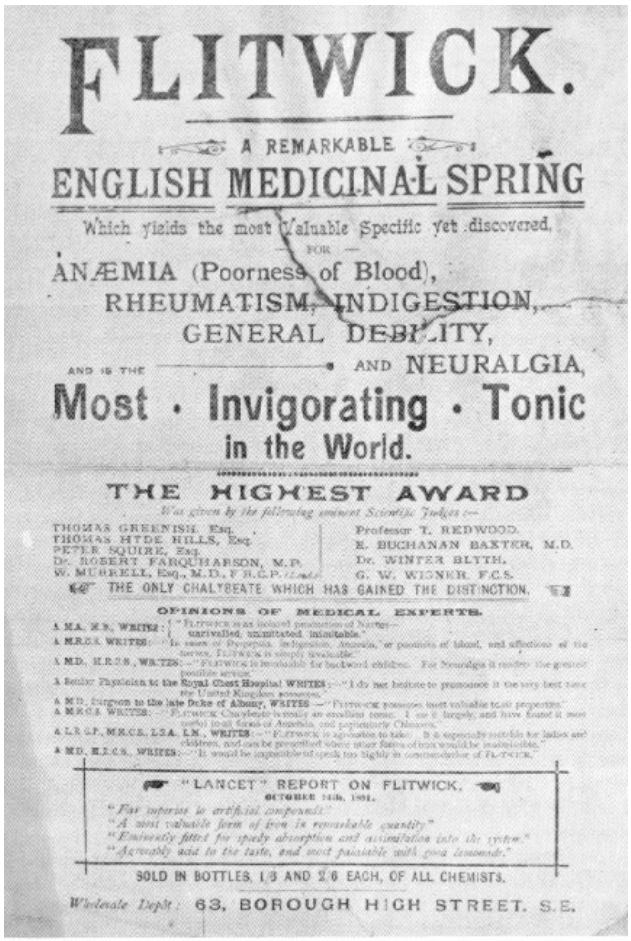
ing. From 1910 to 1967 peat has been dug there for transport to Leicester, Nottingham, Desborough, and other towns where it was used for the purification of coal gas. At first it was taken by horse and cart to the Station, but later a light railway ran from the workings by the Flitt to the edge of the Moor on the track past Folly Farm to Maulden Road. There it was loaded into lorries for the journey to the Midlands. The peat still remains but high speed gas does not need purifying and, except for the gathering of moss there by local flower-growers, what is left of the Moor has reverted to its original state, a home for rare plants now officially preserved and a reminder of what much of the low-lying land in the district was like thousands of years ago

Just before the Second World War and more frequently afterwards other industries have established themselves in Flitwick where they are still flourishing, but the village has had to wait nearly a hun-



A millstone being dressed in Goodman's mill in the early 1960's. Corn was only ground at that time for animal food.





Advertising in the London Illustrated Magazine

dred years after the arrival of the railway for the really big expansion that was confidently expected after 1868. As C. P. Wynter, bailiff to Mr. J.T. Brooks at the Manor wrote in 1869 with more fervour than skill:

Twenty years hence look forward and see it,

Flitwick! Thou in thy greatness shall be

If the Almighty vouchsafe to decree it,

Wealth and Abundance shall flow into thee;

Mansions shall rise where the plough-share has plied,

Commerce shall reign with an overflowing pow'r;

The lands all around shall hail with just pride

The advent of such a propitious hour.

Today, at least the sixth line of this prophecy seems likely soon to be realised. We can only hope it will bring the blessings Mr. Wynter so joyfully predicted. Certainly, the Flitwick we have described will be increasingly obliterated, remaining only in the church and a few other old buildings, and in the field and street names that commemorate places and people long passed away. The recording of what may soon be quite forgotten is, perhaps, the justification for this short history.

ILLUSTRATIONS — Sources and Acknowledgements.

Page	
2	Mr. K J Fadden.
3	Mr. B D Lazelle.
4	(i), (v), (vi) Mr. K J Fadden (ii), (iii), (iv) Mr. B D Lazelle.
6	Etching by Thomas Fisher (1813).
7	Drawing by Mr. B West—taken from BEDFORDSHIRE MAGAZINE Vol. 7 no 55.
8	Mr. K J Fadden.
10	Postcard from Mr. A Underwood's collection.
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