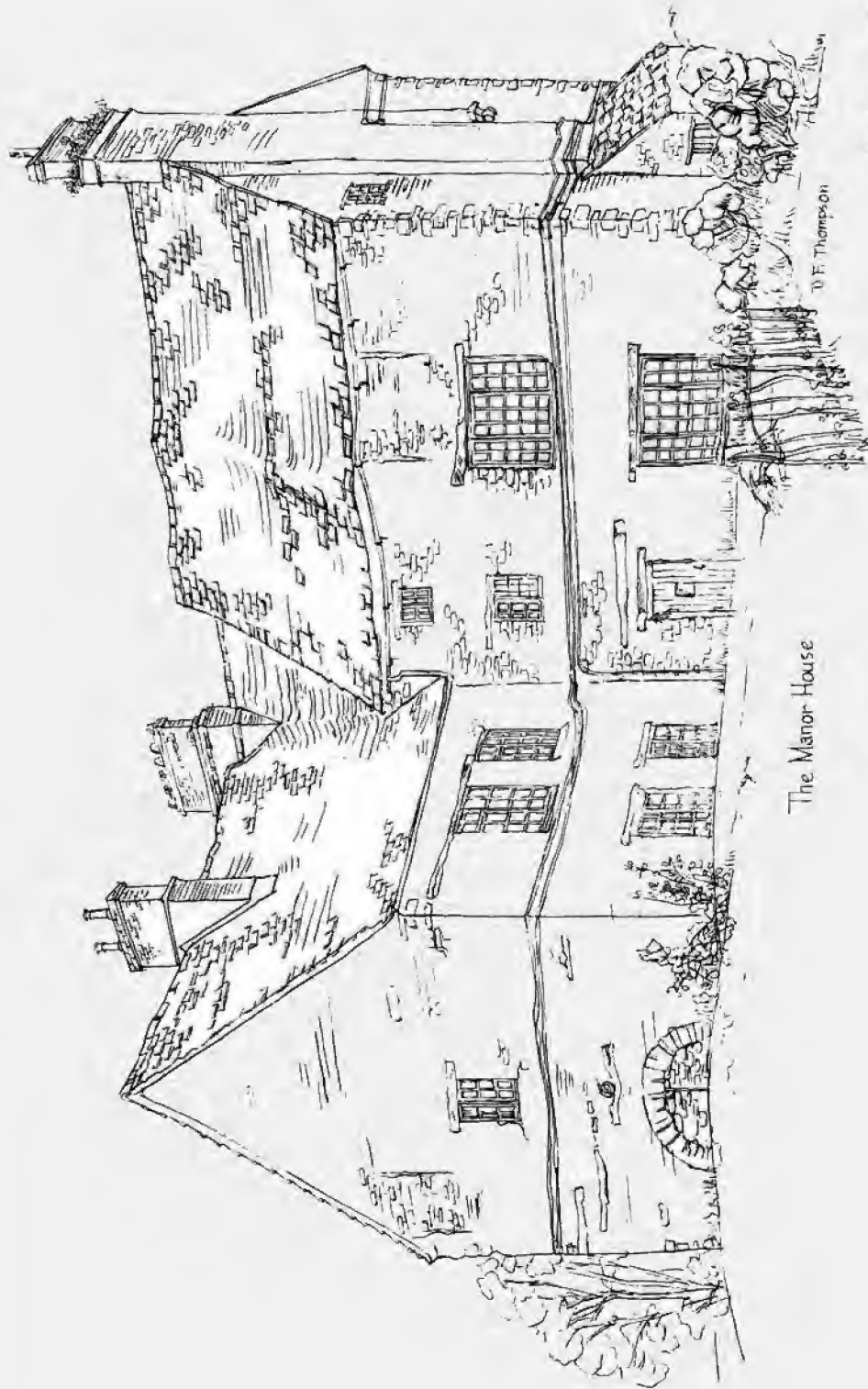


A  
SCRAPBOOK  
OF  
ASHTON  
1953

*compiled and published*  
*by the*  
ASHTON WOMEN'S INSTITUTE  
*and edited by*  
MARGERY FISHER



ASHTON, NORTHAMPTON, 1954  
PRINTED BY BELMONT PRESS, NORTHAMPTON



The Manor House

D. F. Thompson, 1954

D. F. Thompson



# A SCRAPBOOK OF ASHTON 1953

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

In 1952 eight members of the Ashton Women's Institute formed a sub-committee and entered for a competition, run through the Northamptonshire Rural Community Council and sponsored by the *Mercury and Herald*, for the best scrapbook of a village. Four members of this committee were comparative newcomers to Ashton; four had spent all or part of their childhood here. Of the newcomers, Betty M. Havergal, wife of the Rector of Ashton-cum-Hartwell, came to live at Hartwell Vicarage in January, 1947; though the Vicarage stands at the north end of Hartwell village, it is in the parish of Ashton, and Mrs. Havergal was a valuable link with the other extra-parochial houses and buildings in Hartwell. Gladys James, Secretary of our Institute from 1951 till June 1954, came to the village in October, 1947, from Gloucestershire, when her husband took a business appointment in Northampton. Margery Fisher, President of the Institute and editor of this book, is married to James Fisher, writer and broadcaster about birds; she is a Londoner, and she has been living, since April 1945, her first experience of living in a village. Laura Livett, another Londoner, whose husband works in a Northampton office, came here to live during the last war. These four had to learn many facts about Ashton which were taken for granted by the other members of the committee. Olive Patrick, wife of a signalman, was brought here in 1925 as a child, when her father moved from Yardley Gobion to work on an Ashton farm; her husband's family came here from Easton Maudit in 1913 for the same reason. Anne Smith, whose husband works at Wolverton Works, was born in Little Ashton; her father was brought here as a child from Roade, two miles away, and her mother's people migrated from another neighbouring village, Stoke Bruerne, in the late nineteenth century. Emily Bennett, whose husband is an insurance agent, goes back further still in village history. Her grandfather, John Evans Adams, came here in about 1840 to work on the railway, and married Maria Webb, whose family had lived here probably since the late 18th century; though much of Mrs. Bennett's life has been spent away from the village, she has a notable memory for events and reminiscences of the past. Oldest of us, historically, is Kathleen Lever, whose husband works as a saw-doctor in Northampton. Both her grandfathers and her great-grandfathers worked as farm labourers in Ashton, as well as several of her uncles. Her mother's people came originally from Hartwell, and her father's from Lamport; her great-great-grandmother belonged to the Coles family, a name which appears first in the church register in 1699 and which probably goes back further still.

When we had pooled our resources, we set to work to collect more information about Ashton. The competition being designed to elicit history "within living memory," the major part of our work consisted of asking questions of people who lived in the village, finding out about others who had now left,

and supplementing our findings with whatever printed material we could discover relating to our parish. When our account of the village had been written, and when we had brought together various kinds of illustrative material—maps, photographs, drawings, paintings—the book was inscribed by hand. The finished sheets were bound on a home-made apparatus consisting of a wooden box and some miles (as it seemed) of black thread. A cover was designed, and embroidered on linen and then stitched over cardboard. The completed scrapbook (like many others) was finished at midnight on the day before entries closed.

In November 1953, entries were judged by Miss Joan Wake and Mrs. Alan Turner of our own county and Dr. Hassall of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The Ashton scrapbook was awarded second prize.

When the book returned to the village again it was shown at the houses of each committee member in turn, and a large number of people in Ashton, as well as some from outside, were able to see it. We received many requests for copies, and early in 1954 the committee met to discuss the possibility of printing it. The present volume has been floated by whist-drives and jumble-sales and by many generous donations. The Ashton Women's Institute has given its complete support to the project, and all proceeds from the sale of the book go to our Institute funds.

We have given details of the origin and making of the Ashton scrapbook in order to define the present volume. It is a revision of the original scrapbook, with some additions, and with the illustrations, for reasons of economy, considerably cut down. All the same, we present it as a *scrapbook*, not as a history. We have tried to put on record our village within living memory. Of course we have not confined ourselves strictly to any period of time. It was impossible, for instance, to discuss our farms without reference to the Enclosures of 1816 and the Manorial Court; or to discuss the railway at the end of Victoria's reign without referring to it as it was at the beginning; or to trace family histories without going back to our earliest church registers. So the reader will see glimpses of an older Ashton behind the village which lives in the recollections of our oldest inhabitants.

Our sub-committee has now become a regular sub-committee of the Institute, and Mrs. Sladden, Mrs. D. Gardner and Mrs. Morris have joined it. We have planned to keep a log of village history year by year, and so make a small contribution to the growing fund of local history in this county.

Besides the committee of eight, many other Ashton people had a hand in the original scrapbook, and we would like to thank them. Our Rector, Rev. D. E. Havergal, wrote the section on the parish church, and Mrs. Priestley, Headmistress of Ashton School until August, 1954, wrote part of the section on the school and contributed much material towards it.



Two schoolboys, Robin Livett and Crispin Fisher, wrote an account of Ashton's natural history as they saw it in the last two years, and illustrated this with paintings and sketch maps. Miss Dawn Thompson of Hartwell, whose mother is a member of our Institute, painted the Manor House as a frontispiece, and subsequently drew a black and white version of this for the present book. She designed the original cover, too, and for the present book she has done four other drawings. Martin James devised the ruling scheme for the original book, and contributed three maps; these have been redrawn as two, and appear on pp. 39 and 49 herein. Mr. S. Watson collected information about the wells and springs in Ashton and summarised this in a map. Clifford James, then a pupil of Roade School, was responsible for line drawings as head and tail pieces for each section in the original scrapbook, as well as for a drawing of Ashton Church. Miss Marion Temple, assistant teacher here from September 1952 till Easter 1954, contributed drawings to both books, and also did some lettering for us in the original book.

Most of the modern photographs in the first scrapbook, some of which we use here, were specially taken for us by Mr. Frank Patrick and Mr. James Fisher. Other photographs, both old and modern, as well as many postcards, were lent to us by Mrs. Bennett, Mrs. Corfield, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Malcher, Mrs. Mills, Mrs. Patrick senior, Mrs. George Richardson, Mrs. Tom Richardson, Mrs. Stamp. The embroidery on the cover, which unfortunately we could not afford to reproduce in facsimile, was the patient work of Mrs. Lever.

In the inscribing of the original book we had the help of Mrs. D. Malin, Mrs. Somerton junior, Rev. D. E. Havergal, Mr. R. H. James and Mr. Joe Mills. Miss Temple and Mrs. Priestley, besides helping with the writing, allowed the following children to have a share in the school section—Christopher Leah (aged 5), Malcolm Tyrrell (6), Christine Hackney and Susan Griffiths (8), Melissa Bues and Margaret Watson (9) and Evelyn Hayward and Raymond Griffiths (10).

Of the many people who answered our questions, we should like first to thank those who no longer live here: Mr. and Mrs. Jack Curtis and Miss Jessie Curtis; the two daughters of James Shakeshaft, Mrs. Ernest Malcher and Mrs. Cook; the two daughters of James Malcher, Mrs. George Richardson and Mrs. A. Wilkins; Mr. A. Wilkins, whose father brought him to Ashton at the age of three; Mr. Percy Tew; Mrs. Tom Richardson; the two daughters of Alfred Clarke, Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Fisher.

We were much helped, too, by the following Ashton people—Mr. and Mrs. W. Adams; Mr. and Mrs. Tom Adams; Mr. Bertram Dooley and "Benson Dulay"; Mr. Charles

Eales; Mr. Evans; Mrs. Green; Mrs. Arthur Gardner; Mrs. Grace Hayward; Mr. Charles Hayward; Mr. R. H. James; Mr. and Mrs. Joe Mills; Miss Mills and Miss Amy Mills; Mrs. D. Malin; Mr. George Malin; Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Senior; Mr. Frank Patrick; the late Mr. Charles Robinson, and Mrs. Robinson; Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Summer-ton; Mrs. Sladden; Miss Joan Sunley; Mr. Derek Tarry; the late Mrs. George Tew; Mr. S. Watson; Mr. F. Wetherill; Mr. Albert Wilson.

We are grateful to Miss Catlin and Mr. C. D. Cripps for allowing us to see the title deeds of Longcroft and Home Farm. The staff of the Northampton County Library have been most helpful in suggesting and finding books. Two manuscript sources of information have been particularly valuable. First, the one nearest home. To the Rector and churchwardens we owe our thanks for allowing us to investigate the church registers and other papers and to quote from them; we are pleased to be able to pass on some details which parishioners might not otherwise see. We would like to thank, too, Mr. P. I. King, archivist to the Northamptonshire Archives Committee, for his generous help and advice about the Grafton estate records, which are now in the possession of the Northampton Record Society and on deposit with the Committee in the Northamptonshire Record Office at Lamport Hall. These papers, which include bills, charity records, deeds, court rolls and maps, have been of immense interest, and we are indebted to the Northamptonshire Record Society for permission to quote from them. Reference to such quotations throughout the book will be to "the Grafton Collection."

We owe special thanks to Mr. Ainge of the Belmont Press, who has been responsible for the production of this book. From the beginning he has taken a warm personal interest in the enterprise, and his encouragement has been no less valuable than his experience. We would also like to thank Mr. George Hoare, of Messrs. Hoare & Cole Ltd., who so carefully made the blocks (some of which were reproduced from seventy-year-old photographs and old hand-made maps) and who kindly lent us the block of Ashton Church.

For readers who do not know our parish, we hope the maps on pages 39 and 49 will help them to orientate themselves. Those who remember Ashton in the past may find mistakes in our pages, or may be able to add fresh details; if so, we hope they will write to us.

MARGERY FISHER  
THE OLD RECTORY  
ASHTON  
NORTHAMPTON

\* \* \* \* \*

*Hail, scenes obscure ! So near and dear to me,  
The church, the brook, the cottage, and the tree :  
Still shall obscurity rehearse the song,  
And hum your beauties as I stroll along.*

(JOHN CLARE : Helpstone)

The name of our village has been variously spelled. In Domesday it is Asce or Aceshille, in early records, Esse, Essene, Esston. Bridges(i), who records these versions, himself writes, under a picture of one of our tombs, "*in the church of Ashene or Aston*," though in his text he uses the spelling Ashton. In two mortgages on church property, dated 1868, it is "alias Ashley" and "alias Ashney." Within living memory it has been called Ashen (pronounced Ayshen(ii)). The ash tree was held in veneration by the Saxons and there is little doubt that this was the origin of the name. Two villages now bear this name in Northamptonshire ; the other is in Polebrook hundred, near Oundle.

The lowest point in the parish of Ashton (235 feet) is at Bozenham Mill, a few yards from the border of Buckinghamshire and close to the banks of the river Tove. The highest is one of 426 feet, at the cross-roads in Salcey Forest which forms the eastern corner of the parish. There are probably points a foot or two higher than this in Hartwell Clear Copse, that part of the forest lying in Ashton parish. The visitor to Ashton can ascend nearly 200 feet if he walks from one end of the parish to another : if he remains within the parish, and does not take a short cut through the parish of Hartwell, this distance is about 3 miles.

Ashton lies at the entrance to the valley of the Tove, its outlying houses on the north side standing high on an escarpment with a magnificent view of part of the Ouse basin. From the Manor, which commands most of the village, the houses slope gradually down to the valley floor. The hub of the village (Manor House, Church, Rectory and Manor Farm) is sited on the spring-line where limestone lies on clay. The soluble limestone is permeated by much underground water, and there are springs at the Manor, the Rectory and other places ; the village is rich in natural water. Bridges(iii), writing early in the eighteenth century, said, "The town, consisting of about sixty houses, lies in an oblong form from east to west, and in a low watery situation."

The L.M.S. main line, constructed largely with the aid of picks and wheelbarrows over a century ago, flies almost dramatically from a deep cutting over the village of Ashton, across which it is supported by a high embankment penetrated by a brick bridge at each end of the village. Under one of these bridges runs the direct road from Ashton to Hartwell ; the bridge is not high enough to allow double-decker buses to run between the two villages. The same road connects Ashton at the north side of the village with Roade, and so with Northampton. A secondary road runs westwards from the village to Stoke Bruerne, cutting across the main Northampton-Stony Stratford road after about a mile. Another secondary road at the east end of the village turns south to Bozenham Mill and thence by a gated road across the Grand Junction canal to Grafton Regis. Until the Enclosure of 1816, Ashton, Hartwell and Roade shared much common land, and these three villages have always intermarried and had many mutual interests. The connection with Shutlanger seems always to have been less close, though perhaps we had more to do with

Stoke Bruerne a hundred years ago than we have now. Neither Grafton (nearly two miles away across the canal) nor Quinton (our neighbouring parish to the north-east beyond Salcey Forest) are near enough to be concerned in our affairs.

The shape of Ashton is rather peculiar, suggesting a grotesque, curved thigh-bone. It is dictated by ancient interests, customs and rights which have not become extinct but fossilized—notably rights to lop, top and graze in the western piece of Salcey Forest known as Hartwell Clear Copse. On the south the parish is bounded by the river Tove, on the west by a brook, on the north by field boundaries, on the east by the edge of Hartwell Clear Copse and on the south-east mostly by the road from Salcey Forest through Hartwell and Ashton to Bozenham Mill, taking in a group of fields south-east of this road by Ashton and losing some houses and small fields north-west of it by Hartwell to that parish. This has the odd result of placing Hartwell Vicarage, the sawmills of E. Whatton and Sons, Sunnyside Farm and a row of cottages(i) on the north-west side of the road in the parish of Ashton. On the other hand, the farm at Bozenham Mill lies in Hartwell parish, and so does the small-holding on the Hartwell Road belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Buckingham, though it is barely a quarter of a mile outside Ashton.

Because of this awkward shape, we have had to limit the shape of the parish artificially for the purposes of our book. Since we are concerned with the village of Ashton as a working unit and as a community, we have not discussed those houses in the village of Hartwell which in fact belong to our parish. First and foremost of these houses is Hartwell Vicarage, from which the Rev. D. E. Havergal directs the two parishes, and we think of him and his family as being members of Ashton village just as much as of Hartwell.

Farms do not always confine themselves conveniently inside parish boundaries. We have written only of those whose farm houses lie within our parish. This means we include Sunnyside, property of Mr. Charles Jackson, with most of its land in Ashton, but we omit Home Farm and Woodland View, two farms which have some fields in Ashton but whose farm-houses lie in the parish of Hartwell. Cottage Farm, Ashton Lodge and Ashwood Farm belong to our story, too, though all have extra-parochial land, in Roade, Hartwell or Quinton. Two other outlying groups of buildings are discussed as sources of employment for Ashton. The sawmills of Mr. E. Whatton lie in our parish, though the house is in Hartwell parish ; and the R.A.F. Unit in Salcey Forest has several sheds in our parish, for which they have paid rates in Ashton for the last year or more. The only remaining outlying land belongs to Manor Farm, which has some fields in the parish of Roade ; the farm, however, is run from a cottage in Ashton Manor.

Ashton village two hundred years ago is surprisingly like Ashton today (see map on page 38). In most respects the main lay-out of the village does not differ radically from that in ordnance maps of 1900 or, indeed, of today, and the number of houses does not seem to have increased inordinately. The striking point is, of course, the absence of the railway, which has virtually cut the village in two.

A hundred years ago the railway dominated Ashton as it does today, and the village leaned up against the embankment and Roade Hill, sheltered from the worst winds and frosts, a cup filled with mist on autumn mornings and evenings, and only too easily cut off by deep snow. From our great-grandmothers' time to the present day the weather in its

- (i) The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire compiled from the Manuscript collections of the late learned antiquary, John Bridges, Esq., by the Rev. Peter Whalley. 1891. Vol. I, p. 284.
- (ii) Miss Mills remembers the old people pronouncing it thus in the '90's.
- (i) Bridges, vol. I., pp. 282-3.

- (i) Originally five : one has recently been pulled down and the other reconditioned. Another house has recently been built within Ashton parish, next to Whatton's sawmills.



violent moods has provided the village with many incidents to remember. In the old days they talked of the bad floods of 1885, when the stream which runs through the Green rose over the small culvert and over the road, and the water went right up to Orchard Cottage. On that occasion the small Brices were ferried over the water in a washing tub, with a line prop to steer by. This flood caused tragedy ; for a man working at the Warren crossed the railway line to go home to Little Ashton, to avoid the water, and was killed by a train(i).

The great snow of 1908, when many sheep were lost, was recorded by the Rector in the middle of the churchwardens' accounts for that year :—

*"This is the year there was such a heavy fall of snow. Trees much broken with the weight. On Sunday 26th April 1908—Low Sunday—the Clerk had to clear about six inches or more of snow from the path. This note is made for the benefit of those who come after us and may be interesting fifty or a hundred years hence. W.H.B."*

During another deep snow in March, 1917, telegraph wires were broken, and soldiers billeted at Wakefield helped to clear the railway lines. John Bliss, who farmed nearly all the village at that time, lost many sheep(ii). 1925 was a notable year for floods.

*"I was five when I came to Ashton,"* Mrs. Frank Patrick told us.

*"My first impression as I sat on the basket that held my pet cat was the floods at Bozenham Mill. I wondered how far the water would come up the cart as the horse plodded his way through. Also I remember the house we came to live in, an old stone house with a thatched roof (now pulled down). The ceilings and doorways were very low whereas the ceiling upstairs was high with the eaves coming right down to the floor; I remember having to kneel down on the floor to look out of the window, a very uneven wooden floor it was, the boards went up and down and creaked well."*

Many remember the heavy snow of 1930, when old Mr. Hales, after delivering his bread from Shutlanger, tried to get his cart across the fields below the Stoke Road, for the snow "towered above the road like two walls of salt." As he was trying to open a half-buried gate he was waylaid and knocked on the head—but was happily soon discovered(iii).

And there was the great flood of 1939, when the village was cut neatly in two for three days. It was one October morning when Mr. Charles Eales, who was working at the time on Bozenham Mill Farm, in the most low-lying part of the parish, realised the waters were up. He got up early one morning in his cottage on the north-east corner of the Green.

*"I didn't know a thing about it until I came downstairs and stepped into water up as high as the first step of the stairs, at least six inches deep. It was dark and I managed to grope until I found my Wellingtons and opened the front door. I could hear the water swirling over the bridge as I felt my way down to the gate, nearly getting swept off my feet as I opened it, the rush of water was so great. I called Mr. Frost, who was living next door, and he said 'I'm not going out without a cup of tea.' After we'd had it, we called for Bert Godfrey (he was working at Rectory Farm at the time). He said 'I haven't any Wellingtons, you'd better go without me,' so I said 'Come on, get up on my back,' and I carried him all the way down to Bog's Island. When we got there it was just as bad as in the village. I said 'I can't carry you any more, Bert' and he replied 'That's alright, mate, put me down, it's O.K. now we're here.' Anyway, I came back at breakfast time and swept the*

(i) Mrs. Jack Curtis of Roade.

(ii) Mrs. Patrick, Mrs. Mills.

(iii) Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Mills, Mrs. Grace Hayward.



*Ashton as it was fifty years ago*

*water out of the kitchen and hung the mats out to dry. Fortunately it turned out to be a sunny and windy day, the water went down very quickly, and in two or three days I was straight again."*(i)

The snow and floods of 1947 were perhaps less spectacular than some of these past incidents ; but because of the shortage of coal we can all remember them with painful vividness. This time the village was completely cut off for three days ; after that, one or two vans struggled through from Roade, and the buses soon opened the roads, but the Stoke road remained impassible except on foot for over a week. This particular freak of the weather is already part of our history.

The shape and position of Ashton village makes it vulnerable to weather changes such as these ; and in this respect, as we have seen, it has changed little in the past seventy years. In other ways our grandparents would find the general appearance of the village unfamiliar—most of all in the openness of the streets. A century ago Ashton must have seemed very shut away, enclosed on all sides by fine trees, chiefly elm, which have long since disappeared. When we showed the photograph on this page to people who have only lived here for a few years, they could not believe it was a picture of Ashton.

*"Ah, yes,"* the older folk said, *"you see, there were three or four great elms there on the left, in the Rectory field opposite the shop ; you're looking up Roade Hill from below the shop, you see. There were more trees at the end of the Rectory drive—there's only one big one now ; and the sexton's cottage they pulled down fifty years ago stood out*

(i) Described by Mr. Charles Eales to us in 1953.



*where the church wall is now, so you couldn't see clear up the hill."*

It's the same story everywhere in the village. Coming here from Roade, the traveller would walk under a roof of green, so nearly did the elms meet across the road in some places. Those which stood just over the border in Roade parish on the north side of the road were cut down about four years ago; there were some opposite which were felled soon after the first world war. At about the same time a good many trees were cut down along the road to Stoke Bruerne, including a very large oak which stood by the stile at the bottom of the Manor Field right of way. There were many great elms on the road alongside Home Farm which disappeared long ago, and the last three were felled in June and July, 1954. More elms were cut down in the drive to Vale Farm, where an avenue of poplars now stands, planted at the end of the last war. From Bozenham Mill into Ashton the roads on both sides were shaded by trees, where now you look across flat meadows to the clustered houses. In the village itself, too, there used to be many roadside trees. In Cook's Close, towards the embankment, some magnificent elms are remembered; while the spinney there of chestnut, ash, willow and fir is gradually being whittled away. Through the railway bridge, in Little Ashton, the closely-packed cottages faced a row of elms on the edge of the allotment field, with a large ash opposite The Paddocks; while on the road to Hartwell several oaks were felled long ago just outside the village, and some elms nearer to Hartwell.

Elm and ash, with a few oaks, have for centuries protected Ashton from gales, and also, no doubt, made it damper and darker than it is now. Today, except for a small spinney beside the railway to the east of Little Ashton, our only concentrations of trees are the large coppices on the edge of Saley Forest which lie in the parish, while there is only a scattering of oak, ash, elm and hawthorn in the hedge rows(i).

On the credit side, beside the poplars mentioned already at Vale Farm, there is another row along the road wall of Orchard House, planted by Mr. F. Wetherill during the last war. A large chestnut in the school yard was planted about 80 years ago (cf. p.25), and a single conifer next to it was planted as a bush 60 years ago by the daughters of Alfred Clarke to mark his grave. Many lime trees were planted in the Rectory garden during the early part of this century by Mr. Baldock, and a row of plane trees a few years earlier in the churchyard. We must also remember the constant and unremitting care of the Duke of Grafton's wood-warden for the woods in this parish over which the estate had control; bills for young ash trees and for the planting of them are numerous.

Tree-felling brought probably the most drastic change in our village in the last fifty years, greater even than the gradual switch from thatch to slate, tiles and even corrugated iron, which has so greatly affected the appearance of the old cottages, or the replacement of many of these cottages by council houses and privately built modern dwellings. The Duke of Grafton's thatching bills used to be considerable; today there are only eight thatched roofs to be kept in order.

Here is Mrs. Ernest Malcher's picture of Ashton sixty years ago:—

*"My earliest recollection was of muddy roads, deeply rutted by horse and cart wheels, and horse manure everywhere along the centre of the road. Motor cars were never seen. Solid tyred bicycles were used. The safety cycles (as they were called then) with pneumatic tyres were only in their infancy, and only for the very fortunate. The brook running along the*

*bottom of the garden in our house (this was the last house at the Stoke end of Ashton) used to flood two or three times every winter, water pouring through the house leaving filth behind, and we as children having to stay upstairs for hours until it had subsided and been cleared up. (Although I remember sitting on the stairs more than once, sailing paper boats in the water). The slow-witted council in those days, after years of speculation, decided that large pipes through the bridge under the road would take the surplus water. This was accomplished when I was about 15 years old and we had no more trouble."*

Mrs. Sladden, who came to live at Orchard House in 1953, gave us this impression of the village as it is today:—

*"Our invasion into Ashton was a rushed affair and there was little time to weigh the pros and cons of country life. According to my friends there were plenty of the latter. However, in spite of some trepidation on my part we duly arrived and we find Ashton seems to have an air of solidity and peace which is a marked contrast to the feeling of impermanence and lack of roots which is the chief feature of life in the London suburbs. There is a feeling of strength from the thick old stone walls of Northamptonshire, charm in the trim thatches, peace in the wide surrounding fields and beauty in the trees. These impressions have been made all the more pleasant by the friendly help which we met on settling down to our everyday life in Ashton."*

But now it is time to take a closer view of the village, and of the fields and lanes that make up our parish.

\* \* \*

... *"birds and flowers and insects are its heirs."*

(JOHN CLARE: *Shadows of Taste*)

Unfortunately for our scrapbook, no Gilbert White has ever lived in Ashton Rectory, and, so far as we know, no amateur naturalist has ever kept a diary for our parish. The older people in the village remember the wild life of Ashton as being much the same in their childhood as it is today. The hawfinch, for instance, a rarity now, was a rarity sixty years ago; the occasion when James Richardson shot one has been faithfully remembered, and the stuffed bird is still preserved by the family.(i) One or two of the larger mammals in the parish seem to have decreased with the years. The stretch of the Tove between Bozenham Mill and Stoke Bruerne was a favourite place for otter-hunting until just after the first world war; a pair has been seen there within the last four years(ii), but they seem to be rarer. At the time of writing we have no badger sett in the parish. Until 1954 there was a sett on Spinney Hill, a couple of yards over the parish boundary, which was apparently a very old site, and badgers frequently ranged our fields from here; but the spinney was cut down in 1953 and the sett is now deserted. A second sett in the railway spinney, in a steep bank under the hedge, was used until four or five years ago, but was so much disturbed and dug about that the badgers left it(iii). Foxes are only too abundant for a village with many chicken runs, and in the days when the Grafton Hunt frequently visited this area, the Spinney Hill cover could be relied on to provide some sport.(iv)

To give some idea of what is going on in our fields and spinneys, we asked the schoolboy sons of two of our members(v)

(i) Mrs. T. Richardson, Mrs. Lever.

(ii) Mrs. Smith, Mr. Albert Wilson.

(iii) Mr. James Fisher.

(iv) Mr. Evans.

(v) Robin Livett, aged 17, & Crispin Fisher, aged 14. The account was written by Crispin Fisher, from the notes of both boys.

(i) Details about trees in the past came from Mrs. Grace Hayward, Mr. Albert Wilson and the late Mr. Charles Robinson.

to beat the bounds of the parish and record what they saw. Naturally they could not do this all in one journey, so they devised five stretches, which all together made up the perimeter of the parish. Their five routes were A, from Spinney Hill to Bozenham Mill; B, from Bozenham Mill to Mr. Buckingham's pig farm on the Hartwell Road; C, from this farm to Salcey Forest; D, from Salcey Forest to Ashton Lodge; and E, from Ashton Lodge back to Spinney Hill. This is their account:—

"It was a fine afternoon in mid-September, 1953, when we started Tour A. Walking through the village and along the Stoke Bruerne Road, we turned left along the brook that runs along the bottom of Spinney Hill. Passing through the first field, we had the spinney on our right; we noticed that this was full of wood-pigeons and stock-doves, but there was little sign of life otherwise, except for the yaffle of a woodpecker and the reedy note of a greenfinch. Past the barns in the next field, blackberries were abundant, already ripe, on the opposite side of the stream.

"As we entered the third field (barley as opposed to the pasture of the last) we noticed a kestrel sitting on the peak branch of a dead ash tree. As we approached it flew off with beautifully spread tail, edged in black. In this field small tortoiseshells were abundant, with an occasional skipper or small copper. Suddenly the distinct pipe of a bullfinch attracted our attention; sticking close to the hedge, we followed up to a crab-apple tree where we had an excellent view of two females and a splendid male. As we got near they flew off, still repeating their monotonous mellow note, accompanied by the alarmed ticking of two wrens. On a telegraph wire we noticed three dove-like birds, one of which we identified in flight as a rook. It had been sitting in perfect peace between two wood-pigeons, which we considered most unusual.

"We left this field to cross another, in which we noticed a great number of passerines in or around the hedges; a pair of great tits 'seesawing' in an ash, a blackbird flying from the hedge, four swallows in a dead tree, a magpie and a green woodpecker feeding side by side on the bank of the stream, and a sedge-warbler skulking in the reeds. After this came a marshy field whose edges were riddled with rabbit-burrows; in this we flushed a couple of snipe from the reedy area fringing the marsh.

"Passing through the next four fields, we reached the bank of the Tove, where a kingfisher flew off as we approached, whistling loudly. Several snakes and lizards were basking in the sun, while three red admirals, two painted ladies and a small copper flew about. When we reached Bozenham Mill along the Tove, we took the road home, seeing nothing of interest except one sedge-warbler hopping in and out of the hedge.

"It was not until July 1954 that we went on the stretch from Bozenham Mill to the pig farm (Tour B). On the 30th of July, a dull, sultry day, we set off down the Bozenham Mill road. The swifts were flying high—supposedly heralding good weather—and the yellow-hammers sang incessantly in the hedges of the first two fields along this road. In the third field (containing quantities of bladder campion, mustard and ragweed choking the basic crop of clover) we turned off to the left towards the railway. Singing from the ground in this field was a corn-bunting whose few bars of song were repeated at the rate of about four times a minute. Soon we entered the next field, which had the same vegetation as the last, with a little more campion and an occasional poppy. A magpie flew away when we climbed into the next field; this was the only thing of interest there. Then we went round the railway by the Park Lane bridge to rejoin the parish boundary opposite the plantation (which in spring contains a rookery, usually of

about 22 nests). Here the embankment was covered in scabious, with both purple and yellow vetch. It was here, too, that we learnt that the swifts' weather prophecy was optimistic, for there suddenly broke a heavy shower which lasted for every bit of ten minutes. We made our way home through three ploughed fields and one meadow, seeing nothing of interest. Summer is not the ideal time for observing mammals and birds, though it is good for plants and flowers.

"On the following day we went round Tour C backwards, starting at Ashton Lodge and finishing at Salcey Forest. As we passed the Buckinghams' farm, a turtle-dove flew from a dead tree across the road, displaying clearly the white tail-rim. Nearing Hartwell village, we turned off on the road leading to Roade; here whitethroats abounded—hopping, hanging, flitting, hissing and whistling in and out of the hedge. In vain we searched for a lesser whitethroat among them, an altogether greyer and rarer species. All along this road, meadow-sweet grew plentifully.

"Nearing Ashton Lodge, we were attracted by harsh notes of many kinds coming from a small lime grove across the road. When we looked more closely we found the noise came from a flock of tits—great, blue and others.

"When we reached Ashton Lodge, we turned off to the right into a barley field. Beyond this was another with wheat, barley and oats. Here we saw meadow-pipit and skylark, with the usual whitethroats and wrens. In the corner of the next field we found a wood-pigeon's nest with two eggs.

"After this, we left the parish boundary to join a lane leading up to Hartwell village itself. This lane flanks part of Rowley Wood, a well-cultivated fir-forest with an occasional birch. Where we joined the lane, there was another wood-pigeon's nest, containing the usual number of eggs. As we followed this lane, a lovely hare lolloped across the road to enter Rowley Wood. All along the track we followed a flock of finches and warblers—blackcap, chiffchaff, willow-warbler, goldfinch, chaffinch, greenfinch and linnet. These were all seen at close quarters—a very pleasing sight.

"At the top of the lane we added a cock bullfinch to our finch tally; this bird flew out of a hedge into some allotments, where it perched on a pea-stick and preened itself for about ten minutes, after which it flew off in the direction of the Midslade Sawmills. Walking up through the village that way, we came across it again—still preening—with a flock of goldfinches in the manager's garden.

"In Hartwell Clear Copse, a stretch of oak trees with a thick undergrowth, there were tits, thrushes and robins and—best of all—there was a small family of garden-warblers. There were three tiny young ones perched on a sycamore branch; their parents were continually visiting them with food, which they gave to them as they hovered above almost like humming-birds. They secured their insects by hurling themselves off branches, tumbling, hovering, turning and twisting in pursuit of their prey. We watched them from about six feet away, and could see clearly the yellow legs and tiny eye-rings of the parent birds.

"This tour provided records of birds rather than of other animals, and all passerines of some kind. The finches were beginning to flock, the warbler season was in full swing and the wood-pigeons were having their second broods.

"Back in mid-September, 1953, the last tour, E, was also made backwards (i.e., from Spinney Hill to Ashton Lodge). It was a close, unsettled afternoon. We walked down towards Stoke Bruerne and turned right where the boundary begins to follow the stream towards the Roade road. The banks of the stream were covered in hemp-agrimony, round which small tortoiseshells flew plentifully. There was no sign of life other than of butterflies during this part of the route. When we



reached the road to Roade we turned right. All along this stretch of road we saw green-veined white, small tortoiseshell, small white, brown argus, peacock, red admiral and common blue. In addition to this, there was a speckled wood close to Ashton Lodge. But the day was a complete failure as regards birds and mammals.

"On the next day we went over this stretch again, this time after a heavy shower, early in the morning. A wren and a robin were singing together on the same branch of a pine tree, encouraging the ancient belief in their being husband and wife.

"When we reached the parish boundary, we again followed the stream, where we watched a reed-bunting for a long time. When at last two linnets flew over uttering their alarm note, the bunting took to flight.

"At the junction of the stream and the road, mares-tail grew in plenty on the bank. From a dead ash tree here a wood-pigeon flew up, then did a short glide downwards, repeating this process seven times before flying direct to a copse. Along the road home we saw a great many slugs come out after the rain.

"So ends our tour of the parish. We could only manage to survey the boundary, and we only have a tiny part of Salcey Forest (which is full of interest for naturalists) in the parish. Nevertheless we hope we have given some idea of what our natural history is like."

Hartwell Clear Copse is little known to most of us, important as it is in our natural history. Many species of flowering plants and fungi are found there which grow nowhere else in Ashton. Some of the common parish birds, jackdaws and jays in particular, forage from there over the neighbouring parishes. It has a larger population of warblers than the rest of the parish, and is the headquarters of the nightingale. There are, of course, nightingales in Ashton's small woods, Rowley Wood and the railway spinney, and one or two pairs nest in thickset hedges, notably along Hurcomb's Lane. But the density of the nightingale population round the edge of Salcey Forest is as great as in any part of Britain, and people come from miles around to hear them.

No wild fallow deer seem to have been seen in the forest within living memory, but one species of introduced deer, the muntjac, has lived there; these little creatures were originally released in Bedfordshire and have spread from there, and now and again they may stray on to Ashton farm land on the edge of the forest. The stags which some people remember being hunted in this parish (cf. p.58) were boxed red deer stags.

If we were to draw up a formal list of the animals and plants of the parish, our hundred acres or so of Salcey Forest would probably turn out to be the most important part of Ashton. Meanwhile, to most of us, it is a dark line of trees on the skyline, trees from which the ancestors of some of us used by ancient right to supply themselves with warmth and comfort, and from which warmth and comfort are still often supplied through the sawmills of Hartwell.

\* \* \*

"For from his cottage door in peace or strife  
He ne'er went fifty miles in all his life."

(JOHN CLARE: The Cottager).

Three hundred years ago, if you were born in Ashton, you probably married in Ashton and were buried in the churchyard there; or so our earliest church registers suggest. Of 43 marriages recorded between 1700 and 1750, 26 were of two Ashton people; in 17 other marriages, one partner came from outside Ashton (Hartwell was the favourite village, and only Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire are represented).

This proportion stayed much the same until towards the end of the nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1850 the register shows that one man came from Bloxham in Oxfordshire to marry an Ashton girl. Between 1850 and 1880 one girl found a husband from Leicester and another, one from Derby. From this date onwards, both men and girls of our village looked outside far more for their partners.

The church registers, if they give an incomplete picture, are useful for comparison, and they reflect what must be true of most small villages. Ashton, isolated for hundreds of years, has undergone, in the last hundred, very quick expansion and change. We can no longer say, with Clare, of anyone in the village, "He ne'er went fifty miles in all his life."

Yet, with all these changes, the population has been surprisingly constant. In about 1720, according to Bridges(i), there were "about 60 houses." In October, 1953, there were 108 houses and 377 people. The table below gives all the information we have about our population:—

YEAR(ii)	POPULATION
1801 ..	292 persons (55 houses) (59 families)
(beginning of year)	(140 males, 152 females)
1811 ..	270 persons (52 houses) (52 families)
(May)	(119 males, 151 females)
1821 ..	341 persons (69 houses) (69 families)
(May 29)	(167 males, 174 females)
1831 ..	380 persons (78 houses) (86 families)
(May 30)	(185 males, 195 females)
1841 ..	417 persons
1851 ..	383 persons
1861 ..	374 persons
1871 ..	331 persons
1881 ..	324 persons
	(June 1887.—The total population was 270.—A.C.N.).
1891 ..	255 persons
1901 ..	240 persons
1911 ..	280 persons
1921 ..	283 persons
1931 ..	266 persons
1939 ..	284 persons (National Register)
1953 ..	377 persons, 108 houses

There are many reasons why populations should change in villages such as ours. Up to fifty years ago families were regulated by a shocking infant mortality, and in particular the words "smallpox" and "diphtheria" appear often as marginal notes in the burial registers. There was an epidemic of smallpox in Ashton between July and December 1838, which affected at least six families. Six children died, four old people, two in their thirties.

This epidemic was not large enough, however, to affect the population directly, though we can guess at the misery in Ashton in that year. The steady rise in population between 1801 and 1841 might be partly accounted for by the building of the railway, which started in the early 1830's, for between 1837 and 1840, 7 children were baptised in our church who belonged to ganger's families, and the official census figures came from the incumbent. These particular families moved on after a few years, but at least two railway workers stayed here with growing families.

(i) Bridges, vol. I, pp. 282-3.

(ii) The population figures are those of the official census. The church register gives additional details which are added in brackets. The figures are for the ecclesiastical and civil parish and include those households in Hartwell village which belong to Ashton parish. The official census for 1951 is not yet available, but we add our own count, made in October, 1953.



One lucky find has helped us to follow some of the changes in population in the last century, and the movements, too, of some Ashton families. In November 1853 the new incumbent of Ashton, Andrew Craig Neely, drew up a list of his parishioners when he had lived here for seven months; he wrote it at the back of one of the early registers.

*Inhabitants of Ashton according to a Census taken by myself in the end of Nov. 1853. A. C. Neely.*

#### ON THE SIDE NEXT STOKES BRUERNE

James Shakeshaft and wife with 7 children (3 adult males & 2 of the remaining 4 females)

Mrs. Martin, with a son-in-law adult, 2 daughters & a son nearly grown up.

William Shakeshaft

Charles Shakeshaft wife & 2 children

James Clarke wife & one daughter

David Clarke and 2 daughters.

Geo. Burton wife and child.

Mrs. Cooke and daughter, also a son with his wife and one child.

#### BLUNTS COTTAGES

Mr. Blunt and wife, daughter-in-law and her son.

Widow Webb, 1 daughter & 2 sons

Geo. Webb, wife & 3 children

Wood & wife.

Cook wife & 3 children—

(C.W.) Mr. Weston wife son and daughter—one female servant

Opposite him Mr. Blunt of the Moate & 3 grand-daughters

Wickens widower and 2 daughters.

#### BY THE CHURCH WALL

Molsher wife & 4 children

Watson & wife, nephew & niece called Malcher

#### OPPOSITE CHURCH GATE

George Blunt, wife & niece

#### CARVILLE'S YARD

Mills & wife 4 children

In same house Mrs. Brice & 2 boys.

William Welch wife & 2 children

Shoulter & wife, niece Ward

John Robinson & wife

in same house Wm. Clarke & wife 1 child

Scaldwell wife & 4 children

Freer Baker & wife with her mother.

John Tibbett & wife 4 children.

Mrs. Ashby publican and six sons, with her father-in-law.

(C.W.) Mr. Linnell, Mrs. and 4 children, one son grown up, 2 female servants.

(Baptist) Mr. & Mrs. Dunsby, one daughter.

Robert Jones wife & 6 children.

Daniel Welch, wife & 2 grown-up, with 2 grand-children.

Richard Welch and wife.

(Baptist) Timms & wife 5 daughters.

Clarke & wife 3 children

James Lambert & 2 daughters

Brogden wife & two sons & two sons (Watson) by her first husband

Job Hodgkins wife & 3 children

(Methodists) Cook & wife

William Blunt & wife

John Blunt widower 3 children grown up at home.

Hodgkins & wife with niece.

Mrs. Skollick & son.

Luke Welch & sister

James Elmes & wife

Goodrich wife & daughter

Somerton wife & 3 children

Mrs. Mills & child living with her Father

Mills (clerk) wife and six children

#### LITTLE ASHTON

Wm. Clarke & 3 daughters

John Ward & wife 2 children

Cook (carrier) wife & one daughter

Geo. Clarke & wife & in same house George Cooke wife & one child.

John Webb wife & one son.

James Penn wife & daughter.

Fearn & wife (lace school)

(Methodists) Edmund Elmes & wife with a daughter & child.

Joseph Warren wife & son

Esther Fearn (widow).

Geo. Elmes wife & 4 children Four in my service.

James Leper & wife with grandchild Eliz. Robinson

Thomas Cole wife & 2 boys

Josiah Stimson wife & 5 children

(Methodist meeting held here).

#### OVER THE BROOK

Wm. Geary wife & one child.

John Timms wife & 3 children.

Brisco wife & child & wife's mother

Wm. Cook & mother, with a daughter of Somerton.

Charles Webb wife & two sons & one daughter.

Ben Mills wife & son.

Thos. Welch wife & child.

Ben Marriott & wife.

Mrs. Geary & 2 sons.

Adams & wife & her mother.

In the rest of this chapter, with this list as a point of departure, we give what information we have collected on all the families Mr. Neely mentions(i). Unfortunately we cannot be certain how complete his list is. He mentions 297 people, whereas the official figure for 1851 is 383 persons. The family of Jonathan Robinson, farming at Ashwood at this time, is not on the list, and it seems obvious that Mr. Neely excluded the households in Hartwell which belonged to our parish. He does include, on the other hand, William Linnell at Ashton Lodge and Henry Weston at Rectory Farm, both farms some distance from the village. Since he distinguishes the Nonconformist families, it seems that his aim was to make a census of the village proper. From our fairly full information about the number of houses in Little Ashton a hundred years ago, we think it likely that he has put down all its inhabitants, and it seems reasonable to suppose that he did the same for the rest of the village. There is one notable omission, of his own family—himself and his wife (his eldest child was born in 1854). With reservations, then, Mr. Neely's list has been of great use to us in trying to trace the changes in Ashton's households from his time to the present day(ii).

Almost thirty years after he came to Ashton, an event took place which swept away at one time five of the families he knew. This event was commemorated in the same register by his son, Andrew Cavendish Neely, while he was acting as his father's curate.

*"In the years 1882 and 1883 a number of the inhabitants emigrated to America (U.S.) and Australia. The following are the names(iii) :—*

#### America

*\*James Elmes his wife Rebecca and three sons \*Charles, \*William and \*Frederick.*

*Mary Timbs her son George and three daughters Eliza, Harriet and Louisa.*

- (i) Many of the details about old Ashton families in this chapter came from the church registers; we have checked them wherever possible, and added to them, with the help of memories handed down, and, in a few cases (Shakeshaft, Malcher, Clarke, Burton, Cooke, Robinson) of family records.
- (ii) Mr. Neely's is the most complete list we have of Ashton people. In the Grafton Collection at Lamport there are lists dated 1727, 1731 and 1773 among the Ashton Court Rolls which give the names of householders; a tenants' list of 1727 attached to a terrier; numerous militia lists of the late 18th century and early 19th; and some Land Tax returns between 1732 and 1777 which give names of occupiers of land and house property.
- (iii) The name of William, eldest son of Mary Timbs, is omitted; he also went with the party. He came back to visit his old home on two occasions. Also, Harriet Timbs was really Hannah. This information comes from Mrs. Jack Curtis of Roade, grand-daughter of Mary Timbs.

*Mary Tebbutt and her grandson George Tebbutt.*  
*Australia*

*\*Henry Jones his wife Jane son in law J. Johnson, five sons,  
\*William, George, Frank, Charles & \*Arthur ; & two  
daughters Ada, and Elizabeth (Johnson).*

*America*

*George Jones, Louisa his wife, daughter Alice & son Joseph.*  
*\*denotes member of the Church choir.*

A very small child sitting in a corner of her grandmother's sitting room, in a cottage in Little Ashton now demolished, heard her aunts discussing this tremendous undertaking just before they set out. Her grandmother was the widowed Mary Timbs, who at the age of 60 ventured cheerfully across the Atlantic in a sailing ship. The Timbs and Elmes families were friends. Both went to Ohio, where they worked on the land, and where one of the Elmes descendants has made a museum of Ashton and family relics. Recently Mrs. Curtis, the little girl referred to above, who has regularly corresponded with both families, sent some of her mother's lace bobbins for this museum. Hannah Timms visited her Ashton relations in 1924, and members of the younger generation have also been to England. Miss Emma Shakeshaft, daughter of James Shakeshaft, whose mother Clara was the only Elmes daughter who stayed behind in Ashton, spent many years with her relations in the United States. Her father and his cousin went to America at about the same date as the families we have been discussing. (*cf.* p.16).

On this enterprise, families set off whose great-great-grandfathers had lived in Ashton. The Timbs family, which seems to have come here from Hartwell in the late eighteenth century, died out in the village. (Of another Timbs family that appears on Mr. Neely's list, only one member remained in the nineteenth century, William Timbs, a foundation trustee of the Methodist Chapel, but known to Mr. Neely as a Baptist).

The redoubtable Mary Timbs left a daughter Charlotte behind, who married Charles Brice. He was probably one of the two boys living in Carville's Yard with his mother in 1853. There had been Brices in Ashton since about 1700. The Brice children inherited the adventurous spirit of their grandmother Timbs. Charles Brice junior, the eldest of a family of ten, went to America in about 1895, and shortly afterwards returned to fetch his younger brother Arthur. Charles was a farmer, and Arthur, after a period as a soldier in the U.S.-Spanish war, worked with him for a time. Another brother, George, went to Australia at the age of 18, and had a successful life as a hotel-keeper. He came home for a visit for King George's Jubilee, and again in 1935, when he did much visiting on behalf of his town council. Another Brice brother left the village for Nottingham, and two sisters who lived here as young married women left the village in the early 1900's, being the last of their family here(*i*).

When he first came to Ashton, Mr. Neely knew three Elmes brothers with their families ; they were grandsons of Richard Elmes, who appears in the church registers in the 1750's. Besides James, who took his family to America, the families of Edmund and George had scattered by the end of the last century. The Tebbutts, too, died out finally here when Mary Tebbutt took her grandson overseas, for she had outlived her husband and six children ; when Mr. Neely first knew her, she and her husband lived in Carville's Yard. Finally, the emigration of 1882/3 considerably reduced the enormous family of Joneses which had already been here for 50 years when Mr. Neely entered them on his list—though there had been so many Joneses that there were a few left until 50 years

ago. Henry Jones's wife was an Elmes, and there is no doubt that the emigration was a Little Ashton affair ; we can picture the family gatherings that must have taken place in the old cottages which, some of them, still huddle along the stream beyond the railway embankment.

This sudden departure from the village of five families—including eleven young men—must be reflected in the drop in the population from 324 in 1881 to 255 in 1891. This situation occurred on a smaller scale in 1911, when William and George Arthur Scaldwell, and Joe and Will Curtis, went to seek their fortunes, the Curtises to Canada and the Scaldwells to Australia. Fred Curtis followed his brothers to Canada in 1913. The two who went first, returned and fought in the first world war. Another Scaldwell son, Oliver, went to Birmingham to work soon afterwards, and the family died out with the old couple George and Charlotte, who for many years kept the village shop, and whose parents had been known to Mr. Neely in his early days here, when Thomas Scaldwell was a shoemaker(*i*).

In 1911 lantern lecturers were touring Britain on behalf of the Canadian government, offering a piece of land free in return for land clearance work, and it is easy to imagine how attractive the prospect seemed to young men in the village. Ashton was not forgotten, however. The Curtises visited the village when they came to England with the Canadian army in 1914, and one Scaldwell did the same ; William Curtis and two sons came here in the second world war, and William Scaldwell returned with the Australian contingent.

Emigration was the solution, too, for some young men in 1918, when they found themselves out of tune with village life. It was then that George Wilkins, for instance, left Ashton for Australia. Since then, other Ashton people have been attracted to a life overseas. Miss Elsie Watson, for example, daughter of the late Samuel Watson, went to Canada in 1947 as a housekeeper, and married out there ; she has visited her old home more than once.

Apart from the people who have emigrated, there has been a constant change in the composition of the village in the last 30 years, as some of the young men from old established families like the Summertons or Gardners or Patricks or Tews sought work outside, and new families came here, some of them to retire to the peace of the country.

One special cause for leaving the village must be mentioned here—namely, war. Before the 1914-18 war, national disasters can have affected the village very little. After 1918 the men who returned were unsettled. Farm labourers did not have their jobs kept open for them and their wages were not made up (though the railway company paid 1/- a week to the families of its employees who were fighting, and Wolverton Works made similar concessions to men in Kitchener's Army). A number of young men left the land after 1918. Five, for instance (Frank, Arthur and George Richardson, George Wilkins and Jabez Allen) went to a firm of clothiers in London, and only one, George Richardson, returned to work for John Bliss as a shepherd. In 1945, however, when employers made special provision for their men in the services, there was no marked drift away from the village(*ii*).

The coming of the railway undoubtedly took some people away from Ashton, but it also brought some here ; for if some of our young men were tempted, in the 1830's, to go as gangers nearer London, others came here from the north. At least one of the families on Mr. Neely's list must have settled here because of the railway—the family of James Broden, "labourer on the railroad," who married Rachel

(i) Information about Curtises & Scaldwells from Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. T. Richardson and Mrs. Stamp.

(ii) Information from Mrs. Mills, Mrs. T. Richardson.

(i) Information from Mrs. Jack Curtis.



Watson, whose first husband died of smallpox in 1838. James Brogden's sons do not seem to have settled here, but other families which came here to work on the railway when Mr. Neely was an old man have established themselves, and some of their descendants still do the same work. Thomas and James Gardner, who lived at Shutlanger, both married Ashton girls, and Thomas settled here partly because of the railway ; and his son, Arthur, left a large family here(i). One branch of the Tew family came from Stoke Bruerne about the middle of the last century, when George Tew senior, a platelayer, was moved from Nerton to Ashton. Another branch of the family moved here from Stoke when W. J. Tew senior took over Home Farm in the late 19th century. The Malins from Paulerspury, the Wardales and Taylors also came here originally for railway work, and John Evans Adams, who came here in 1840 as a ganger and married an Ashton girl, has descendants in the village(i).

Families might come here, too, at the request of their employer, the Duke of Grafton. The Hayward family moved here from Heyford in Gloucestershire nearly eighty years ago, the elder Charles Hayward being a thatcher in the Duke's employment(ii); his son, Mr. Charles Hayward, worked for the Duke after him, and today there are three branches of the family here.

A similar circumstance may explain the presence of the mason, James Leper, and his wife on Mr. Neely's list of 1853. The family seems to have belonged to Paulerspury, where John Lepper (as the name was often spelt) was working in the 1840's, though one bill from the Grafton estate in the late 18th century records a John Lepper at Stoke. (Two Leper brothers worked as builders and bricklayers in Paulerspury 40 years ago, and one is believed to be there still.) James Leper (who, since building and stone-mason's work seems constant in the family, was probably related) appears on Ashton militia lists of 1826 and 1827, and this is presumably the man whose bills appear among the Grafton estate papers for building and plastering between the 1840's and '50's. This James Leper and his wife, then were probably the ones Mr. Neely knew ; they left no children, and the name does not appear in Ashton again.

In this category, too, may belong James Briscoe, a shepherd, given in the church registers as "of Didcot," whose family seems to have come here not long before Mr. Neely wrote down his name. James married Charlotte Geary, whose family had been here for more than a hundred years, and two of his daughters, Mary Anne and Fanny, married into the large family of Shakeshaft here ; but the name of Briscoe was not heard here after James died.

Finally we should perhaps include, as a family which may have moved at the instigation of the Grafton estate, the Martins. There were Martins in Ashton in the middle of the 18th century, but we cannot connect them for certain with the Thomas Martin who is remembered here as a hurdle-maker. His father, Jabez Martin, worked for the Duke as a carpenter with a Thomas Martin of Stoke, for many years the Duke's woodward in Ashton, and possibly brother to Jabez. Jabez makes no appearance in the registers till his marriage with Amelia Dunsby, daughter of the owner of Home Farm, in 1828 ; there is a strong possibility that he came here from Stoke(iii).

(i) Information from Mrs. Arthur Gardner, Mrs. Bennett.

(ii) Information from Mr. Charles Hayward.

(iii) A bill of 1850 in the Grafton Collection (G 1827) reads : " Allowance, towards pulling down old walls and rebuilding a small Barn and repairing walls at premises in my occupation at Stoke Bruerne as agreed."

After the Duke of Grafton gave up his land in Ashton, the farms continued to attract people from outside. Albert Shackle moved from Yardley Gobion in 1925 and worked as cowman at Vale Farm until his death in 1952, and Mr. Samuel Watson moved from Surrey in 1929 to work for Mr. Rogers on the same farm, just as the families of Mills and Patrick had come here to work on the farms while they were still under one landlord.

In the last fifty years other local occupations have arisen which have attracted people to the village ; the factories, for instance, at Roade and Wolverton, the sawmills in Hartwell, and the R.A.F. Unit established at Hartwell during the last war. The development of Vale Farm, too, since it became the property of Mr. Bernard Sunley, is an important factor, for he has built eight new houses for his employees, and a ninth has been privately built by one of his foremen. These families, and the many people who settled here during and after the last war, are enough to account for the striking rise in population between 1939 and the present day.

Mr. Sunley is one of several people coming recently to Ashton who have a considerable reputation in the outside world. His rise as a building contractor has been a rapid one ; starting as a boy of 14 carting earth, he soon acquired a lorry and driver, and by degrees built up an extensive business, in which he owes much to the loyal support of his wife, a director of his company. Prosperity increased during the last war, when the firm built many aerodrome sites. In 1946 Mr. Sunley entered upon a contract with the American firm of Blackwood Hodge for an agency of their heavy earth-moving equipment, and he has similar contracts with other firms in the States. During the war he and his family lived at Upton Lawn in this county. Today, as well as his house in Regent's Park, Mr. Sunley owns much property in Northamptonshire, notably Wakefield Lodge, which he bought in 1952. Many overseas visitors come to Vale Farm and have their first introduction to the English countryside from its peaceful and productive fields(i).

A reputation of a different kind belongs to Mr. James Fisher, who is well-known as a writer and broadcaster on birds. Although he comes of north country stock, he has spent nearly all his life in this county. His father was headmaster of Oundle from 1922 to 1945, and his son did much of his field work along the banks of the Nene. He was determined to stay in Northamptonshire if possible, but it was not till 1945 that he and his family settled in Ashton. Here he spends half his working time, the other half being spent chiefly in London, where he is natural history editor to the publishing firm of Collins, and where he does much sound broadcasting and lately some television work. For the last eight years he has spent some time each summer travelling to increase his knowledge, especially of sea-birds. A monograph on the Fulmar (1952) and a book on seabirds in general (1953) written with Ronald Lockley, are the outcome of many journeys. His travels have taken him to Spitsbergen, Iceland, Lapland, Italy, Newfoundland, the United States, Mexico, Alaska, and to most of the islands round Britain : but one of his favourite spots for bird-watching is Salcey Forest. He hopes one day to win his right to call himself a Northamptonshire man by writing a book on the birds of the county(ii).

Mr. Henry Bradley is one of the many people whom the last war brought to Ashton, and his final departure for Kettering this year has brought to an end a happy association with Ashton and especially with the church, where he has often acted as organist. Mr. Bradley is Director of the Boot and

(i) Details from Miss Joan Sunley.

(ii) Details from Mrs. James Fisher.



Shoe Research Organisation, which in 1940 was moved to Satra House in Kettering(i).

Major and Mrs. Corfield settled so quietly in 1951 in their cottage at Bozenham Mill, that it was some time before we realised what an artist we had acquired in the parish. Mrs. Corfield has made her name in a few years for her exquisite miniature gardens, which she began to make during the war for the Red Cross, and which she and her husband show all over the country. Women's Institutes in this county know Mrs. Corfield as an able demonstrator of this comparatively rare but most attractive art.

We leave to the last in our list of public figures the one who has lived here the longest, for Benson Dulay, the Slick Magician, came to live here with his parents just after the first world war, and the two families still live here. Billy Dooley, to give him the name we all know him by, comes from a family well acquainted with show business, for they have been travelling for over a hundred years with their own shows. His father, Mr. Bertram Dooley, started travelling when he was nine, with a boxing booth owned by his uncle, "Professor Sam Roper." Young Bertram and his cousin sparred round the country as "Roper's Midgets," working fairgrounds in summer and music halls in winter. Bertram's son, Billy, a self-taught conjuror, started entertaining at local concerts and clubs at twelve years old; his name makes frequent appearances in Ashton parish magazines. His first appearance in Northampton's New Theatre was in Harry Day's revue, *Business as Usual*, when he was 15. He joined the army during the first world war and after it was over, went into a furniture firm as a cabinet maker, but he kept his hand in by entertaining whenever he was asked. At the beginning of the second world war he joined E.N.S.A., and since then he has never looked back. He has travelled all over the country with his daughters, Mollie and Dinah, with his clever act. He has appeared twice at the London Palladium, and several times in television programmes. His professional name of Benson Dulay was adopted while he was with E.N.S.A.

Mr. Dooley's son Peter has not broken the family tradition. He works on the stage with a comic turn called *The Fun Salesman*. He has appeared on the television screen and at the New Theatre in Northampton. During the last war he joined the army, and, like his father before him, gave endless pleasure to the troops with his entertaining(ii).

Many other people have made their mark on Ashton in recent years. Mr. Frank Wetherill, who came to live at Orchard House in 1940, will always be remembered as one of the best chairmen the village has ever had on its various committees, and as a tireless captain of the cricket club, while his wife helped many people with advice and sympathy; it was a loss to the village when they moved to Loddington in 1953. Two retired schoolmasters, the late Mr. C. R. Badman and Mr. Horace Catlin, have both given generously of their spare time to help village affairs, and particularly to help the cricket club and other outdoor sports. Mr. and Mrs. James, who came here in 1947, have been most energetic in the village, especially on the committee of the Recreation Room, and Mrs. James has done fine work as the foundation secretary of the newly constituted Women's Institute. These are only a few of the families coming here from outside who have contributed to the well-being of the village.

With so many new people coming here, it sometimes seems to the older folk that none of the families they once knew are represented any longer; and it is true that only one of the

names on Mr. Neely's list—the name of Summerton—still belongs to the same family as it did a century ago, while only 6 of the families which he put down on record still survive in the female line, so far as we can discover. Yet some of these families were very substantial ones.

For instance, there were no less than six families of *Clarkes* in Ashton in 1853, no doubt most of them related; fifty years ago there were still three families, but all are dispersed now: the name had been known here since the early 18th century. Of only one of these families have we any certain knowledge. The William Clarke who was living in Carville's Yard had early in 1853 married Eleanor, daughter of John *Robinson*, who was living with the young couple when Mr. Neely made his list. (These Robinsons had seven children, but we can trace none of them). A son of William Clarke, Alfred Robinson Clarke, married Phillis, daughter of George *Burton*, who appears with his wife and eldest child on the list. George Burton had only one son, who died in infancy, so his name, too, died out here. Alfred Clarke likewise had no sons. Two of his daughters, Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Fisher, live in Northampton, and to them we are indebted for some unravelling of a most complex skein of family relationships. For their Burton grandmother was Maria *Cook*, who belonged to the most interesting of the six Cook families known to Mr. Neely. The family came originally from Gloucestershire, and was of some importance in the village. A handsome marble slab in our vestry commemorates the death of John Cook, Esq., and his wife Anne in the seventeenth century. Another member of this family, a widow, Elizabeth Cooke, presented a silver flagon with a lid to the church in 1673. C. A. Markham wrote, when describing this, "*There were many members of the Cooke family in Ashton, the earliest recorded being in 1568*"(i). A widowed Mrs. Cooke, too, held a mortgage on part of the manorial property from Lewis Rye early in the 18th century (cf. p. 27). Maria Cook's brother John emigrated to America in the 1880's, and the old parents are remembered in a cottage on the Stoke road some seventy years ago(ii). The only other Cook family we have any information about is that of William Cook the carrier, who gave his name to Cook's Close (formerly Welch's Close, cf. map on page 40) and who is represented today by the Summerton family, descended from his daughter Anne.

Another very large family, the *Webbs*, had three related households here in Mr. Neely's time, and one separate family. There had been Webbs in Ashton since about 1710. Fifty years ago an old couple living in Bozenham Cottage were the only members of the single family here(iii), and two old men were the only ones left of the larger group. They were Thomas Webb(iv), whom one or two folk remember as an old man at the Manor, and George Webb. This last, a man of parts, was spare time barber, and a fiddler in great demand on such occasions as the Ashton Feast. Of him Mr. Baldock wrote under the entry of his burial: "*Village barber. He once said 'I could'nt listen to yr. sermon for looking at yr 'air, it wor so long.'*" The only Webbs now remembered, these: yet, two centuries ago, the Webbs, with the Clarkes and the Cookes, must have accounted for nearly half the children in the village.

The *Blunts*, another enormous family, will be dealt with more fully as farmers (cf. page 46). Mr. Neely probably knew Charles, who appears under the heading *Gentry* in Kelly's

(i) The Church Plate of the County of Northampton: Christopher A. Markham. 1894. pp. 21-2.

(ii) Miss Mills, Mrs. Stamp.

(iii) Mrs. T. Richardson.

(iv) Miss Mills, Mrs. Stamp.

(i) Details from Mr. F. Wetherill.

(ii) Details from Mrs. Bertram Dooley.

Directory for 1854 : William, at Manor Farm (or The Moat): and George, who had a grocer's shop, probably at Longcroft (cf. page 32). The other William, and John, noted by Mr. Neely we cannot identify. There had been Blunts in Ashton since the late 17th century, but the line ran out here when old Cecilia Clarke died in 1914, at the age of 80 ; born a Blunt, she lived on at the Manor, an eccentric who once nearly set fire to herself in bed with her clay pipe(i).

Another large farming family, that of *Hodgkins*, which goes back at least to the beginning of the 18th century, was represented by two families in Mr. Neely's first year here. One was the family of Job Hodgkins, carrier, whom a few people can remember living on the Green, in a cottage now replaced by Council houses, and tending his donkey in a hut by the stream ; he was the last of his name here(ii).

How often we have to tell the same story about the large families of the past. The *Mills* family, for instance, which went back to the early 18th century (Longcroft is said to have been rebuilt by a Mills in 1719) is remembered by old Moses Mills, parish clerk for many years, who was so bent that the children used to watch for his chin to touch his knees. He appears as clerk in Mr. Neely's list, and his father, Benjamin Mills, is also recorded there. This Mills family has been replaced by the family of William Mills, coming originally from Brixworth(iii).

William Geary, who was known to Mr. Neely as a young man, still lived in Little Ashton some sixty years ago, where for many years he had mended and made shoes ; his daughters, who left the village as young women, were the last of a line which went back to the early 18th century(iv). The *Stimpsons*, whose father Josiah was a chapel trustee when Mr. Neely first came here, gradually left the village, mostly for overseas, till there were left only an old man and his wife who died at Rose Cottage fifty odd years ago(v).

Other very old Ashton families died out soon after Mr. Neely came here, and no members of them are now remembered. Such were the *Fearns*, one household of whom kept the lace school ; the family, which was here from the early 18th century, died out in the 1850's. Such, too, were the *Goodridges*, blacksmiths for at least three generations at Orchard House and going back to the middle of the 18th century in Ashton. James Goodridge, who died in 1880, was the last of his name here, and was probably the Goodrich of Mr. Neely's list. Another family which had served the village for two generations and perhaps more is that of *Shouler*, a name often mentioned in the churchwardens' accounts. James Shouler lived here early in the 19th century and handed on his mason's business to his son George, who is probably the Shouler on the list. The family of *Warren*, which again goes back to the early 18th century, died out in the middle of the last century, when Worthy, only son of the Joseph Mr. Neely knew, went to work in London(vi). Of the *Coles*, who go back to the middle of the 17th century here, there are descendants in Ashton, for Kitty Cole married a Richardson, and her great-great-grand-daughter, Mrs. Lever, is one of the people making this book.

There was a large family of *Wickens* here in the 18th century, the head of the family, Thomas Wickens, being described as "shopkeeper" in the church registers. Three of his four sons had families and one, Jeremiah, probably carried on the family business ; but all the sons of the third generation were

dead when Mr. Neely came here, except for Thomas, Jeremiah's son, who is probably the Wickens he mentions ; there is no trace of any family of this Thomas in Ashton, and the two Wickens, Smith and Joshua, who farmed here in 1898(i) were apparently Hartwell people.

Matilda *Ashby*, named as publican by Mr. Neely, was widowed in the year he came to Ashton. Her father-in-law, Richard Ashby, the first of his name, apparently, in Ashton, had been first a farmer, as also his brother Stephen(ii), and from about 1827 an innholder(iii), presumably of the Old Crown, which licence his son took over. Of Matilda Ashby's six sons, the eldest, another Stephen, married and had two daughters, but the other sons seem to have left the village.

The *Watson* and his wife referred to by Mr. Neely was most likely to have been Thomas Watson, who married Hannah Malcher in 1833; we cannot precisely relate him to the large family of Robert Watson, a baker who died of smallpox in 1838. Robert Watson had six sons ; three died in infancy, but two others, Daniel and Henry, born in 1828 and 1833, lived to be old men here and are remembered by older Ashton people, so that one would naturally expect to find their names in Mr. Neely's list—unless they had, as young men left the village for a time to work. Daniel as sexton and Henry as parish clerk served the church faithfully till the early years of the present century and when they died, there were no Watsons left of their line here.

Three other families mentioned by Mr. Neely were important in our farming history and are discussed more fully elsewhere. William Dunsby, the Baptist, recorded by Mr. Neely, came of a family which for many years had been associated with Home Farm and which was to continue so till nearly the end of the 19th century (cf. page 46). Mr. Weston, who is designated churchwarden, must have been John Weston, who in 1853 occupied the Glebe Farm and also ran Bozenham Mill ; his service as Rector's Warden ran from 1838 till 1863. The other churchwarden, who served from 1834 till 1858, was William Linnell, at Vale Farm, whose family was an old one here, going back certainly to the early 18th century and almost certainly before this : the name is well remembered in Ashton still.

There remain four families whose history, being of special interest, will be reviewed at some length ; and a few more about which we know very little. Two of these last, indeed can have been in Ashton only a short time. John Freer is listed as a baker by Kelly in 1854, but he does not appear in the church registers. Nor do we know anything of *Wood and wife*, except that in 1830 a child was baptised of that name, and William Butlin noted "Gent. Received. into the church of Ashton. N.B. Having been Privately Baptised Feby 26th 1817 at St. Pancrass Old Church. London." Mrs. Scollick, widow of Joseph, lived on till 1878, but of their son, John, born in 1830, we have no details : the family appeared in Ashton, perhaps, late in the 18th century. The *Penns* go back a little further, to the 1770's ; James died an old man in 1861 and the name ended with him. The *Lamberts* (also spelt Lamburn and Lamburd) seem to have come here from Roade early in the 18th century ; James's two sons died, but the family continued here for a time, for his two daughters married Ashton men (Henry Jones and Thomas Webb). John Ward, who lived in Little Ashton, had a son Joseph, of whom there is no trace, and he seems to have been the first person of his name here. Lastly, the William Adams Mr. Neely knew was probably William Adams, son of Thomas, a labourer who

(i) Mrs. Stamp, Mrs. T. Richardson

(ii) Mrs. Jack Curtis

(iii) Mrs. T. Richardson, Mrs. Mills, Mrs. Stamp.

(iv) Mrs. Pickering, Mrs. Fisher, Miss Mills,

(v) Mrs. Stamp, Mrs. Curtis.

(vi) Mrs. G. Richardson, Joseph Warren's great grand-daughter.

(i) Kelly's Directory of Northamptonshire, 1898.

(ii) cf. : London and Birmingham Railway map of 1832, on deposit in County Office, Northampton.

(iii) Churchwarden's Accounts.



seems to have come here early in the 19th century. William was first a groom, and later probably the first tenant of the new farm, The Paddocks ; he apparently had no children, and we do not know who his wife was.

Now for the four important families—important because of their unusual tenacity in Ashton.

One of the best-known names here is that of Shakeshaft, about which name James Shakeshaft wrote, fifty years ago or more, the following verses :—

*Two hundred years in Ashton our family name has been.  
It is in the Parish Register quite plainly to be seen.  
It is printed on the sign-board of the village Inn.  
There's lots more ways of finding it, if you will now begin.  
The proper name is Shakeshaft in letters plain and black.  
I can't think why, when one can read, should then  
pronounce it SHACK.*

In spite of the rhyme, which was written down for us by James Shakeshaft's daughter, Mrs. Ernest Malcher, some of the older folk still say Shackshaft, and it was often spelt thus in the past. Mr. Albert Shakeshaft, the last of his name to live here, left the Old Crown with his family in 1952, and is now living in Roade, but we still think of them as an Ashton family. One house (now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Bennett) is still the property of Mr. Albert Shakeshaft ; previously the family also owned the spinney field on the Stoke road, Cooks Close and Orchard Cottage, the first row of cottages in Little Ashton, a small strip of land beside Victoria Bridge (now the property of the R.D.C.), the field opposite the Crown (which was once glebe land), and the Old Crown itself.

The Shakeshafts trace their descent from Robert Marriott, Lord of the Manor of Ashton in the sixteenth century, whose tomb is in our vestry. Two other memorials in the church and two more now lost show that the Marriott family continued to be important in the village in the next century, though the Manor House had by then passed to the Goldsmiths ; and though the family cannot be traced without a break through the 17th century, there can be little doubt that the Marriotts of the early 18th century are descendants of Robert Marriott. Among the ten separate holdings existing in Ashton in 1650(i), one was held by John Marriott of the Spout, also described as John Marriott, Gent. Three Marriotts at least were living here in the early 17th century—Anthony, John and Richard(ii). An indenture of 1708 mentions Richard Marriott and his son, John Marriott the elder, as tenants of the Duke of Grafton, and names them as of Ashton(iii). A John Marriott, presumably son of the above John, is listed as a jurymen in Ashton in 1749(iv), and one Marriott held much land between Ashton and Roade, and many fields between Ashton and Bozenham Mill, at this date(v). One John Marriott had five daughters and three sons baptized in Ashton between 1745 and 1762. The eldest son, another John, had six sons and two daughters. His fourth son, Benjamin, united Ashton's two most important farming families of the time when he married Sarah Blunt ; they had only one son, who himself had only a daughter ; it was this Benjamin who appears in Mr. Neely's list and he was the last of his name here. But it is this John Marriott's elder daughter who concerns us here, for in 1801 she married James Shouler, and their daughter married, in 1833, James



*James Shakeshaft and Mrs. Mary Anne Shakeshaft  
outside their house in Ashton.*

Shakeshaft ; thus connecting the Shakeshafts with the Marriott line.

James Shakeshaft's grandfather Thomas is the first of this family to appear on the church registers ; we do not know how long he had been in Ashton. But with William, father of James, who died in 1864 at the age of 78, the true character of the family began to emerge, for William Shakeshaft turned from farm-work to carpentry(i), and from his time the sons have followed in the tradition. The names of William Shakeshaft, of his son James, his grandsons George and James, and his great-grandson Albert, are closely associated with the history of the church. Many houses in the parish, too, have been built by Shakeshafts, among them Sunnyside, home of Mr. Charles Jackson ; while for the two brothers, George the builder and James the carpenter, there was plenty of work on the Grafton estate.

The family house, at least from the time of the first James Shakeshaft, was the last house in Ashton on the Stoke Bruerne road. This pleasant stone building originally had a thatched roof, but about 1875 the house was burnt down (when a child playing in the carpenter's shop set fire to some shavings) ; it was restored soon afterwards, with a tiled roof. In this house James Shakeshaft, and his son James after him, acted as carpenters to the village and undertakers to Ashton, Stoke

- (i) Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History, vol. 5. Rural Northamptonshire under the Commonwealth : Reginald Lennard. 1916, p. 93.
- (ii) Northants Subsidy Rolls. 1609-1629. Isham Longden MSS. Varia vol. 38 (2)—in the possession of the Northamptonshire Record Society.
- (iii) Indenture in Grafton Collection.
- (iv) Ashton Court Roll, as above.
- (v) Private maps made for Duke of Grafton, in Grafton Collection.

- (i) Labourer in Militia list of 1808 ; carpenter in Grafton bills of 1845 and 1849.



and Shutlanger ; and it is this elder James Shakeshaft who appears as the first person on Mr. Neely's list, with his wife and seven children and his father William ; while the Charles Shakeshaft also mentioned was his brother. The daughters of the younger James well remember helping their father to pitch and line coffins. He used to take the coffins to their destinations after dark on a wheelbarrow. "*He was taking one along the lane one very dark night, when there was a terrific wind. He was along the bottom of the Manor field, when to his horror away went the lid over the hedge, also the shroud and pillow contents. He came back home very worried for a lantern, found the lid about midnight, but did not recover the shroud until daylight next morning. It was hanging all muddled and torn on the hedge surrounding the moat of the Manor.*"(i)

James Shakeshaft the younger was a man of great character. After serving an apprenticeship in carpentry in Northampton, he emigrated in about 1882, and with his cousin Thomas, son of Charles, he worked his passage over to America. There he made his way down the Mississippi working in lumber camps.

He had not been in America for long when he heard his mother was ill ; he returned home and carried on a carpenter's trade in his father's workshop. During his lifetime he turned his hand to various inventions, among them a washing machine which he worked at while he was in America. He took out a patent for this in England but was not able to exploit it ; only later did he hear that the machine was being sold widely in the United States.

After his return to Ashton, James Shakeshaft courted Emma Elmes, but she died suddenly and later he married her sister Clara ; their son Thomas died young, and their daughters Emma and Elizabeth are now living in Northampton. Clara Shakeshaft died when the youngest child was three years old, and James afterwards married Mary Anne Briscoe ; two of their four children live near Ashton. James lived to a good age, a notable figure in the village—parish councillor, a school manager for many years and a bellringer. The pews and choir seats in the church were all made by him personally, and he told his children that he had put a golden guinea somewhere in the wood-work of the pews. His second wife contributed the beautiful altar-cloth of pillow-lace which is still used, and she made and tended the flower border round the church.

When James's son Edwin left Ashton to go to London, his nephew, Mr. Albert Shakeshaft, carried on the carpentry and undertaking business until he left Ashton, and many houses here can show examples of his work.

James's brother George, who had previously worked in Northampton, took over the Crown Inn in 1879, and in the large barn in the yard he set up his workshop and for many years employed Ashton men to work for him, building and bricklaying. Like his brother, he was an important man in church affairs, being churchwarden for nearly 25 years ; and his wife was prominent at church occasions, as was her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Albert Shakeshaft, after her.

William, second son of the elder James, lived with his wife and family on the Green. He worked a good deal on Ashton farms, besides making posts and rails, and also did carrying between Ashton and Northampton(ii). His sons all left the village—William for London, Francis for Manchester ; Mr. Charles Shakeshaft, who worked as a signalman, still lives in Northampton.

With so many members of one family in the same trade, it was inevitable that the younger men would look for work

outside the village. Of the sons of George Shakeshaft, two died in infancy. The younger George went to Yardley Gobion, where he and his wife kept the grocer's shop, and where he and his son Denis worked as carpenters and builders ; he died just after Easter, 1954. Robert, another son of the first George Shakeshaft, went to Little Addington, also as a carpenter. James Edwin, son of James, still lives in London ; the rest of this family has not scattered far. Besides the daughters of his first marriage, living in Northampton, there are two daughters of his second—Mrs. Ernest Malcher and Mrs. Cook—living in Hartwell. We owe our knowledge of the Shakeshaft family to all these daughters of James, and to George's son, Mr. Albert Shakeshaft.

Mr. Ernest Malcher, who for 28 years farmed Gordon's Lodge, between Ashton and Hartwell, belongs to another of Ashton's largest and oldest families. The name of Malcher first appears in the church registers in 1739 with the marriage of William Molsha to Mary Hodgkins of Ashton. The registers give the name variously as Molsha, Molshaw, Molcher, Malshay and the spelling used now, Malcher. (Things are confused further by a second family, apparently not connected, which occasionally indulged in variations of spelling, though it usually appears as Molcher. John and Susan Molcher are remembered living on the Green seventy years ago ; this family is not in Mr. Neely's list, and the children had all left Ashton by the end of the last century).

The family we know today started on the land, but the younger generations tended to look outside Ashton for work. Of William Molsha's two grandsons, William, the elder, went to London ; Daniel became sexton here and lived in a cottage in the churchyard (now demolished). This is the "Molsher" referred to by Mr. Neely as living "*by the church wall.*" He married Mary Anne Bethune, who had been one of the Ashton Warrens, and they had twelve children. Mr. Neely would have known, in 1853, Dennis, Elizabeth, Henry and either Hannah or Caroline ; while the nephew and neice Malcher living in the same house could be two of the children of Daniel Malcher's brother William. The Watson and his wife who lived with them may be Hannah Malcher, their sister, and her husband, Thomas Watson.

Of Daniel Malcher's large family, five died young. Four of the five surviving sons went from the village at various times, most of them to work on the railway in the London district. Frederick, who went to fight in Egypt, returned to marry an Ashton girl, but settled in Croydon. James, the ninth in the family, stayed here and began work as a boy in the Merry's bakery, where he returned later after some years' apprenticeship in Northampton. He married a girl from Banbury, and brought up his eight children, first in a cottage in Little Ashton, just beyond the railway bridge. When Mrs. Merry died in 1890, he took a bakery in Hartwell ; but later returned to Ashton to farm the Paddocks, till his death in 1914. James Malcher is remembered with affection by many Ashton people. His pony-cart was an important item in our transport before the bus service began. Two of his sons were killed in the first world war. Three of his surviving children live near Ashton—Mrs. George Richardson and Mr. Ernest Malcher in Hartwell, and Mrs. A. Wilkins at Bradwell, near Wolverton ; his son Dennis and daughter Edith are both living in Northampton, and there are fifteen(i)

(i) Mrs. E. Malcher.

(ii) Kelly, 1864, lists James Shakeshaft as carrier and coal-dealer, but this is an error.

(i) These descendants of the Malchers are Mrs. Walter Wilson: Mrs. Denby and her children Linda and Martin ; Mrs. Len Hayward and her children Geoffrey, June and Terence: Mrs. Okey and her son Kieron : Mrs. Griffin and her children Patsy, Pamela, Peter and Philip. Our information about the Malcher family comes chiefly from Mrs. A. Wilkins and Mrs. George Richardson, James Malcher's daughters and from Mr. Ernest Malcher.

descendants of the Malcher family living at present in Ashton, though the name itself must be sought now in Roade and Hartwell.

People used to say "Ashton is nothing but Welches and Malchers." We can trace descendants of the Welches certainly for seven generations and possibly for nine, back into the 17th century, when Anthony and Ann Welsh left at least three sons in Ashton. Of these, the second son, John, married Anne Hodgkins. They had three sons—Thomas, Anthony and John—and it seems likely that one of these was father to the John Welsh who had a large family at the end of the 18th century. Of his seven children, four sons are mentioned by Mr. Neely, as well as a daughter and a grandson. Indeed, this family is of special interest because, in contrast to many of the others, it found room for all its members in the village and inter-married with many other old families here. Of the family of the third John Welch, the eldest daughter, Mary, married Thomas Scaldwell, and became the mother of George, first proprietor of our present shop; the youngest, Charlotte, married Thomas Sturgess of Wolverton. Since the second daughter, Sarah, died young, it must be either Mary or Charlotte who is mentioned by Mr. Neely as living with her brother Luke. This Luke, the third son, married Sarah Summerton; their surviving daughters married into the old Ashton families of Warren, Elmes and Clarke. Thomas, the eldest son of John Welch the third, married a Hanslope girl, and he was living in Little Ashton when Mr. Neely came here, with his wife and one child (three sons and a daughter having died in infancy). Daniel, the fourth son, also on Mr. Neely's list, had in his household, his wife, Sarah Cole, two grown-up children and two grandchildren. Of Daniel's seven children, William, by 1853, had his own cottage in Carville's Yard, where Mr. Neely met him, with his wife and two eldest children. He was a well-known figure here for his exploits in the Crimean War (*cf.* page 59) and is still recalled in Ashton as "Soldier" Welch. The last of this large family whom Mr. Neely wrote down was Richard, the second son, who lived with his wife near the centre of the village in 1853. His daughter, Eliza, married Thomas Cook of Ashton; his sons, Jonas and William, both died here in old age. We know nothing of Jonas, but William, cousin of Soldier William, had three daughters. Mary Anne, the eldest, made a romantic marriage in middle age with an old sweetheart, Tom Shakeshaft, whom she met by chance in America. The second daughter, Rachel Elizabeth, married Charles Clarke and lived in the lane opposite the Green. Her sister, Emily, who lived in Northampton, used to send her daughter to visit her aunt in Ashton. When this daughter grew up, she married William James Tew the elder, and returned here to live. After his death she married Mr. J. Stamp, and they still live in Ashton. Her son, Mr. William Tew, succeeded her at the village shop, and his son Ivor represents the eighth, and possibly the ninth, generation of the family in Ashton; the longest line we have been able to trace(*i*).

As we said, the only name on Mr. Neely's list which still persists is that of Summerton; it has been known in Ashton for nearly two hundred years. But we should perhaps rather say Summerthorne, for so it was often spelt and pronounced in the past. Older people in Ashton speak of "the Thornes" and Mr. Baldock, we have been told, tried to persuade the family to go back to this form of the name. Young Jane Summerton is the sixth generation of the name. Her grandfather, Mr. Henry George Summerton, has been working

here on the land since he was thirteen, and is still doing some work on Vale Farm. Many of the Summerton daughters married into old-established Ashton families, like Mills, Welch and Stimpson; while Mary Cook and Charlotte Clarke, who married Summertons, were both Ashton born and bred. Many of the men of the family, however, unlike the Welches, left the village to work; but with Mr. Summerton and his son Harry living here the direct line still goes on in Ashton(*i*).

When Mr. Neely wrote, in his tantalisingly bad handwriting, his list of the parishioners he had got to know in his first few months in the village, he was no doubt doing it mainly for his own convenience; but, perhaps, some thought of his successors crossed his mind, and perhaps he wondered how many of *their* parishioners would have the same names in a hundred years' time. Be that as it may, he has given us a useful guide to the changing population of Ashton, and has shown that the remark we often hear on the lips of the older folk—"There's nothing but new people in Ashton these days"—is not the whole truth(*ii*).

\* \* \*

- (i) Material from Mr. H. G. Summerton.  
(ii) In case we have given the impression that the families of our village have changed only during the last hundred years, it is worth noting that there seem to have been considerable changes spread over the period from our first register (1682) to the year of Mr. Neely's list. The following list of names from a Court Roll of 1727 (G3328a) shows the proportion of families which continued till 1853, and occasionally later. The surnames which also appear on Mr. Neely's list are shown in italics; of these, only 4 appear in the church register before 1713 (this may not be as important as it seems, however, since before 1713 the register may not have been consistently kept.)

*"A list of the names and surnames of all persons within this liberty of Ashton summond to appear this 16 day of October 1727 at ye court leet and court baran holden for his Grace the Duke of Grafton at ye manner hous in Ashton."*

Edmond Houghton	Jerimia Wait	Richard Linell
John Brittain	John Gees	Mary Fearn
Jonathan Ratlif	An Billing	Hanah Fearn
Thomas Bell	Henery Cras	Elizabeth Linell
Jasper Hillyard	John Read	Jonathan Hogskin
Charles <i>Blunt</i>	John Mould	An Sansom
Thomas Frost	George Kingston	Richard Travell
William Capell	Francis <i>Blunt</i>	Edward Clark
Joseph Hadly	William Surage	Edward Church
John Simkins	Daniell Rodes	Edward Clifton
An Travell	John Underwood	Alexander Brice
Elizabeth Chivall	Elizabeth Dunkly	William Brice
Thomas <i>Hogeskin</i>	Mary Read	Elizabeth Ansell
William Craft	Elizabeth Read	Mark Travell
Henery Brittain	John Tite	Petter James
William <i>Blunt</i>	John <i>Blunt</i>	Mary Travell
George <i>Wickens</i>	Richard <i>Blunt</i>	William Stoaks
John Huchens	Thomas Gees	John <i>Welsh</i>
Petter Cooper	Thomas <i>Brice</i>	Richard Win
John Larance	David <i>Blunt</i>	John Kingston

(i) Material from Mrs. Stamp.



ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS' CHURCH, ASHTON

*The bell, when knoll'd its summons once or twice,  
Now chimes in concert, calling all to prayers ;  
The rustic boy that hankers after vice  
And of religion little knows or cares  
Scrambs up his marbles, and by force repairs,  
Though dallying on till the last bell has rung :  
The good man there his book devoutly bears,  
And often, as he walks the graves among,  
Looks on the untravell'd dust from whence his being  
sprung."*

(JOHN CLARE : Sunday)

He was on a walking tour, was the young man, Daniel Hyde, when he came to Ashton. We do not know from which direction he came, but whether he came from north, south, east or west, it is evident that the first thing that caught his attention was the fine old church standing near the centre of the village. For to the church he went, and not even taking much notice of its exterior, he was soon inside, enjoying the feeling that the old building welcomed him, and looking with interest at the things it contained.

Weary he certainly was. He had looked at the crumbling wooden effigy and the sadly mutilated alabaster one, reading the descriptive notes placed upon them ; he had penetrated to the vestry and read the names of the former rectors whose portraits hung there. He seated himself in one of the pews

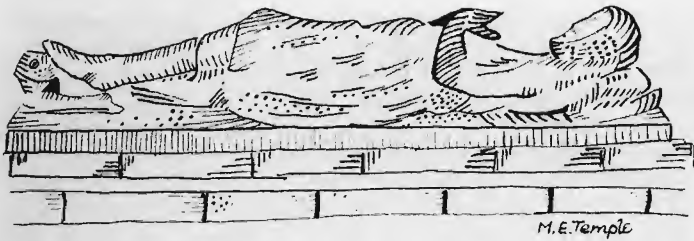
in the nave, noticing vaguely the excellent quality of the furnishings ; and the names he had just read—Philip le Lou, John de Hardreshull, Parson Moore, Parson Neely and Parson Baldock—became curiously jumbled up in his head.

There he sat, and soon someone was sitting beside him. Ashton folk will quickly recognise that this was the Spirit of Ashton Church.

"You were wondering about the story that these old walls have to tell, isn't that it ? Well, I have a remarkably long memory, and you couldn't have come to a better person. I could tell you of happenings here before they buried Philip le Lou, whose armoured figure lies over there carved in oak. He was Lord of the Manor in 1315, having inherited it from his father John, whose father Robert had been the first of the family to live here. The Lou or Lupus family held the advowson of the chapel of Ashton but it was annexed to that portion of the church of Roade which was in the patronage of the Lords of Ashton (Roade church having been founded by the families of Lupus and Hartwell). For it was only a chapel then, small and rectangular, perhaps as old as the Normans ; but soon after Philip le Lou's effigy was put there, a new church was built in the Decorated style on the south side of this chapel, and the two were joined by an arcade.

That other knight (p. 26) opposite Philip le Lou, Sir John de Hardreshull, was one of the family next to hold the Manor of Ashton ; he also held the advowson of the church—that





*Sir Philip Lou, or Lupus, Lord of the Manor of Ashton in 1315, one of the very few oak monumental effigies remaining in England.*

is, the right to appoint the parish priest. While he was alive the church had many fine old windows, but all but one, in the chancel, were replaced by others in the Perpendicular style.

Throughout the 15th century, when the family of Colepeper held the Manor, the greater part of the church as it now stands was completed. In 1537 the Colepeper family exchanged the manor of Ashton with the King. Together with land in this and other parishes, Henry VIII thus obtained the advowson of Ashton, and a share in the advowson of Roade. The advowson of Ashton has been held by the Crown ever since Henry VIII acquired it, and since in recent years the benefice has become united with Hartwell, Rectors are appointed alternately by the Lord Chancellor (for the Crown) and the Bishop of Peterborough, as Patron of Hartwell. But the position of Ashton church had changed when Henry VIII became concerned with it, for early in the 16th century it was made a separate parish, and that part of Roade church to which it had been subordinate became in turn subordinate to it. The first incumbent was John Day, who was first chaplain of Ashton, and then Rector in 1535(i).

That fine brass in the vestry commemorating Robert Marriott, his wife and nine sons and six daughters, belongs to the period of royal tenure of the manor. The Marriotts were one of several families to whom the king leased Ashton in turn, before it was granted by Charles II to Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton (cf. page 27). You can read the praises of Robert Marriott in the inscription on the brass.

*Robert Marriott here doth lie, a yoman bleste with good  
Whose soul doth dwell with God on hie redeemed by  
Christe's bloude.*

*For why by Christe in time of lief before he came to grave  
The free forgiveness of his synnes by faith he hoped to  
have.*

*In England bred in Ashton dwelte an ancient married man  
Where goodes he lefte and now is gone to earth from  
whence he came*

*Having children by his wief fiftene before he died  
And was in Ashton Manor longe to them a living guide.  
And then when death came steling on his farwell he did  
make*

*And we are taught by prooffe in him the same way we shall  
take.*

*God graunt for Love of Christ His sonne when death  
shall us arreste*

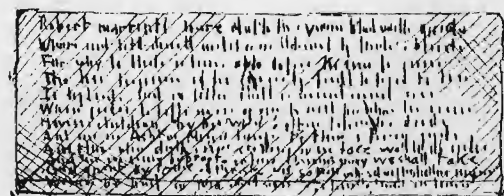
*We maie be founde as Marriott was with faithful hartes  
in breste.*

On the floor of the vestry, too, you can see three stones, side by side. One commemorates Francis Goldsmith, whose

(i) Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy from 1500: Rev. Henry Isham Longden. Vol. 4. p. 39.

family succeeded the Marriotts as Lords of the Manor; he died in 1655, his wife in 1675 and his daughter, Lady Dacres, in 1684. Next to this stone is one to John Cooke, "descended by his father and Grandfather of ye same name from the Antient family of ye Cook's of Hynam in ye County of Glocester"; he died in 1695 and his widow in 1720. The third stone, upon which a cupboard partly encroaches, is to one of the Marriotts—a John who died in 1661 at the age of 38. And if you look on the floor just outside the vestry, you will see another much worn stone to members of the Marriott family—Mary, wife of John the elder, who died in 1661, and Mrs. Elizabeth Tibbs, her daughter, who died in 1707—for the family stayed and farmed here long after they had ceased to be lords of the manor.

No doubt you noticed, too, the fine marbles at the east end of the chancel, one to Captain Richard Lestocq, a Middlesex Justice of the Peace who died here in 1713, the other to



*DF Thompson '54.*

*Brasses on the tomb of Robert Marriott, in the vestry of Ashton Church*

John Whitford, one of our rectors, who died in 1667. His wife, who survived him for many years, was also a Marriott. John Whitford's father had been bishop of Brechin in Scotland, and being dispossessed during the Covenanters' upheavals, came south to become rector of Walgrave in this county. His son was ordered to leave his living by the Parliamentary Committee at Northampton in 1645, and took refuge with his father at Walgrave. But it was not long before his father, too, was obliged to give up his living, and John Whitford the younger retired to a neighbouring village until the Restoration, when he returned to be Rector of Ashton for two years(i). "One William Clewere was put into his place, a boy about eighteen years of age, who greatly misbehaved in his office."(ii)

We had other fine memorials, too, which have since been lost. Even two hundred years ago a Colepeper inscription in a window on the south side of the chancel was almost worn away. There was a wooden frame containing a shield, too, put up to the memory of Francis Goldsmith, and no less than three other marbles put up during the seventeenth century to various members of the Marriott family.

In the century and a half between Henry VIII and Charles II, this church, like most others in the land, suffered the loss of most of its accumulated treasures, and a good deal of wanton damage was inflicted in the name of "enthusiasm for pure religion." In connection with these religious dissensions, it is interesting to notice that when the Restoration Parliament of Charles II ordered a religious census to be taken, it was found that Ashton contained 115 Conformists, no Papists and 10 Non-conformists. So it looked as if there would not be in this parish many loyal adherents for James, the heir to the throne, who just at that time (1672) was publicly received into the Roman Catholic Church.

The 18th century was notoriously a time of weakness and corruption in the Anglican Church, but Ashton Church was faithfully preserved and its registers kept. At this time the oldest of these went back to the middle of the sixteenth century, but now our earliest begins in 1682. The system of pluralities which flourished during the 18th century was in general a great evil. One man (often the younger son of a noble family) would obtain appointment to several benefices, draw the income from them, and appoint a curate-in-charge at a small salary to carry on his parish duties. This system operated in Ashton during the 18th and up to the middle of the 19th centuries. Far from being a time of weakness or neglect, it was the beginning of a period of notable improvement to our church building. The first Rector whose improvements we know of was John Risley, Rector of Ashton and also of Tingewick beyond Buckingham. During his incumbency, John Moore was curate-in-charge of Ashton, between 1841 and 1853. You will see, if you look at the brass tablet on the wall of the chancel, that it was in memory of John Moore—nearly sixty years after his departure from Ashton—that the sanctuary was paved and panelled; and you will see, too, a small brass which he put up himself in 1850 in memory of his son Edward, who died in infancy. The chancel had been rebuilt in 1843 at John Risley's expense (the contracted sum being £60 with the use of the old materials); and in 1848 the tower was rebuilt. William Shakeshaft was partly responsible for this work—the first of many members of his family to work with his hands to beautify our church. When the tower was rebuilt, the south wall of the nave was also buttressed; the cost of the whole work was £500, £100 of which was contributed by the Duke of Grafton, and

the remainder was raised by a church rate over forty years(i).

In 1853 the Rev. Andrew Craig Neely became resident Rector of Ashton, and his long reign of 42 years saw a steady succession of improvements. He put it on record a few months after he came here, at the back of one of the old registers, that on the second Sunday after his institution "*the wind instruments in the choir happily ceased, and no instrument allowed but a violon-cello. I undertook to teach them psalmody two evenings a week in the church, providing light at my own expence. The pulpit which stood in the nave . . . I had removed at a cost to myself of £5 to where it now stands. The work was done by Goodrich of Roade.*"

This seemingly small matter of moving the pulpit was part of a much larger programme carried out in 1854 by Goodrich, when the nave was re-roofed, and the arch which marks the division of nave from chancel was inserted. Fourteen years later even greater operations were carried out: the north aisle was restored and re-roofed, the oak pews throughout the church were provided—and very excellent pews they are, as you see—and the flooring was laid. James Shakeshaft, William's son, assisted Goodrich in these considerable alterations. No other year has seen such a notable advance as the year 1868.

Rector Neely did not settle down and let things drift as old age came on. In 1876 he saw that lamps were provided for church and chancel, and from this date, afternoon services were discontinued. In 1883 the choir was moved from seats under the tower to the chancel, chairs being provided; and in 1887 the singers were for the first time vested in surplices. In 1887, also, the seating of the church was completed with the placing of oak stalls in the chancel for the choir, the work being done by the two Shakeshaft brothers, George and James. In this year, too, the vestry was screened off in the north aisle.

From 1887 till 1894 Mr. Neely had as assistant-curate his son, Andrew Cavendish Neely; this young man wrote at the back of one of the registers a chronological account of all the improvements done in the church, and the principal events of the church year, during his father's incumbency. Mr. Neely's first and last work concerned the pulpit, this precious Jacobean possession being restored and placed on a new stone base in 1888. The contract for this work was again taken by George and James Shakeshaft; and George Shakeshaft gave the oak credence table at the same time.

In 1890, towards Christmas, the Rev. Charles Winter visited Ashton and conducted a parochial mission; in spite of cold, and heavy snow, the services were well attended, and Mr. Winter made a deep impression on the people. When news came in 1891 that he had died of yellow fever in Rio de Janeiro, there was much regret in the village. The stained glass window at the east end of the chancel was put up in his memory, dedicated and unveiled in March, 1892.

The year before this the church tower was struck by lightning: there are still some parishioners who remember seeing this happen when they were at school. Happily the schoolmistress was quick to ring the bell and help was soon at hand, so there was no extensive damage.

(i) Details concerning the church fabric and furnishings as well as the bills we quote in this chapter and the names and dates of churchwardens and parish clerks, come from the churchwardens' account books, and sometimes from flyleaves and back pages of the earlier registers, where there are notes in various hands. All this material is used with the kind permission of the Rector and churchwardens. Other details of memorial and church history not specifically noted come from Bridges and from *The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton*. George Baker, 1836-41, vol. 2, pp. 123-128.

(i) Isham Longden. Vol. 15. (1943). p. 47.

(ii) Bridges, vol. I., p.284.

At this time the bells were rung from high up in the belfry loft, but in 1893 new bell-ropes were provided which were brought down to the ground floor, and the gallery which a few can remember across this part of the church was removed(i). Much later, in 1931, during the incumbency of Canon Martin, the bells were cleaned, tuned and furnished with new fittings ; the opportunity was taken to hang them with stronger bolts and brackets. A new fifth bell was added, a small priests bell, to complete the peal, and the bells were dedicated by the Bishop of Peterborough at a special service. The bells were used more in the old days than they are now. The priests bell was always rung for gleanings, and on Sunday, the third bell was rung at 8.0, at 9.30 and again after Morning Service. But it is many years since this was done, though we still observe the traditional ringing before funerals(ii).

In the autumn of 1893 a fund was started for an organ ; previously there had been a harmonium, played for many years by Miss Lucy Linnell. In 1895, a single-manual organ was installed, made by two Northampton shoemakers, it is said, from portions of old organs from two Northampton churches, but with much new work as well ; they made the wooden pipes from new wood and cast the metal pipes—the whole cost being about £70(iii).

Many people in Ashton can describe to you Mr. Neely towards the close of his days here ; a fine tall old gentleman with a flowing beard, who always wore a small skull-cap, or a high silk hat. He and his wife visited the school very often and took a great interest in the progress of the children. He was an Irishman, was old Mr. Neely, a genial man, though with a somewhat hasty temper. He took a particular interest in the music of the church ; he taught several Ashton boys the violin, and his daughter, Julia, gave piano lessons ; they were a musical family indeed. His son formed a nigger minstrel troupe, with the help of Archie Wake from Courteenhall, and they used to give concerts in the schoolroom which are still recalled with pleasure. You will see a small tablet to the memory of Andrew Craig Neely in the chancel.

In 1895 Ashton had a new rector in the Rev. William Henry Baldock. He had not been very long in office when the need for additional burying ground was tackled ; and in March 1898 a parcel of land, 27½ poles in area, was given by the Duke of Grafton, making it possible to extend the churchyard eastward to reach the road. The gift of the land only partially solved the problem, as the sexton's cottage (which used to stand on the road above where the lych-gate now is) had to be pulled down, the water-supply to the village had to be altered and diverted from this piece of land, and some 200 yards of wall had to be built ; in addition, the plane-trees which enclose the churchyard were planted. £92 17s. was raised through the parish rate for this undertaking, £60 of this being contributed by the railway as chief ratepayers at that time. The whole project was completed before the turn of the century, and some people can tell you how the clergy walked to each corner of the new ground to bless it. Some of the old graves may have been disturbed during this work on the churchyard for when, early in 1954, part of the wall between the churchyard and the Rectory drive collapsed, four fragments of tombstones were found to have been built into the wall. Two belonged to stones erected to Thomas Waite in 1677 and John Waite ; a third piece bore the date 1695. You will only find one legible stone in the churchyard earlier

than Thomas Waite's ; this is a low stone sheltered from the weather by the south-east corner of the church, commemorating Thomas Read, who died in 1673.

In 1902 the lychgate you came in by was finished, the work of James and Edwin Shakeshaft, commemorating the coronation of Edward VII(i) ; there are people living here now who sang in the choir on that occasion, as it perambulated from the new gate up into the church for the dedication service. Before this, a small wooden gate led into the church yard, a wall sloping up in a curve to it from the Rectory drive and another wall running down to connect with the wall round the sexton's cottage, which stood just about on the site of the lych-gate(ii).

Another even more considerable change took place in Mr. Baldock's time, for the church land in the parish was gradually sold. Before the enclosure of 1816 the Rector of Ashton was entitled to glebe lands in Ashton, all tithes of open fields and old enclosures in Ashton except about 53 acres in Ashton and Hartwell, and other tithes in Roade ; besides certain annual quit-rents. The Commissioners, after the enclosures, gave the church of Ashton 150 acres in lieu of the old glebe land and tithes (cf. pages 37, 47). Some glebe land was purchased by the London and Birmingham Railway in about 1835, and more in about 1841. Until thirty or forty years ago the Rector administered Rectory Farm, some two acres of glebe land to the south of the Rectory garden (where the old Tithe Barn once stood) and a piece of land along the Hartwell Road, once called Rectus Field (now Ridgeway). The Rectory Field, as it was called, opposite the village shop, was sold early in this century to George Shakeshaft of the Old Crown. Rectory Farm and the Rectus field left church hands soon after the first world war, when labour was expensive and difficult to find. Rectory Farm became the property of the tenant, John Bliss, but soon afterwards was added to the Vale Farm property under Mr. Rogers.

You noticed, no doubt, the carved oak belfry screen, with its forty or fifty different passion flowers. This was given by Mr. Baldock in 1921, in memory of a member of his family, and as a thank-offering for the safe return of his sons from the war. It was carved by Edwin Shakeshaft, son of James. The war memorial for the village is on the inside wall not far from the belfry screen : the war memorial committee also presented the wheeled bier in September, 1920.

Mr. Baldock died in 1921, and is remembered by Ashton people with great affection. Many say that he would have made a good squire ; he was an exceptionally good shot, and liked particularly to go down to the osier beds near Rectory Farm at night to shoot wild duck. But his parishioners remember him, too, as a sincere, hard-working and most sympathetic Rector, with a deep interest in their affairs. And you will believe this better if you look into the registers, where you will find many friendly notes written by him about the special deeds and characteristics of Ashton people.

Mr. Baldock's successor, the Rev. H. H. Hurst, had hardly been instituted before the proposal to unite the benefices of Ashton and Hartwell took definite shape. Unquestionably, this proposal was viewed by the people here with great distaste. In the effort to prevent this union, it was argued that the Ashton benefice was well endowed, the Rectory a very desirable home for its Rector. Further it was alleged that on Sundays the normal congregation at Morning Service was about 40, that at Evening Service 100 ; this state of things would surely justify the maintaining of a Rector for Ashton alone. However, other considerations outweighed these in

(i) Mrs. G. Richardson, Mrs. Curtis.

(ii) The Church Bells of Northamptonshire : Thomas North. 1878. p.184.

(iii) Our County Villages, No. 40, Northamptonshire County Magazine, May 1932, vol. 5, No. 53, p. 124.

(i) Kelly's Directory of that date.

(ii) Mrs. Jack Curtis of Roade has a pen-and-ink sketch, showing clearly the old entrance to the churchyard.



the minds of the Commissioners sent to consider the question at the end of 1923. An Order in Council for effecting the union of the benefice was issued on January 16th, 1924, and this was published in the *London Gazette* of January 18th, 1924. The Ashton rectory was sold ; Mr. Hurst took up residence at Hartwell Vicarage. He and his three successors, the Rev. W. A. Beveridge, Canon E. V. Martin and the present Rector, have endeavoured to perform the duties of Pastor of Ashton from a house two and a half miles from Ashton Church.

Yes, there has always been so much going on in the church or for it. When I look back I seem to see a procession of all the people who have been concerned with it. The wives of Ashton's rectors and curates holding meetings of the women of the parish, organising the Sunday School, perhaps running clothing clubs, teaching sewing to the children or lace-making to the women, organising sales of work and working parties. The churchwardens watching over the church fabric ; the vestry meeting, before the time of the Parish Council, administering many of the civil affairs of the parish. The parish clerks, like bent old Moses Mills and Daniel Roddis, who served for so many years(i). The sexton, whose cottage for so long watched closely over the church, The choir, sometimes large and sometimes small, practising the pointing of psalms, and, under Canon Martin, tackling anthems. The boys who blew for the organ, peering round for their cues, before the electricity was installed. The many Ashton folk who have rung the bells for services, for gleanings, for weddings and funerals, for pleasure. The women of the parish who down the years have gone on their hands and knees to keep the church clean. The boys who caught sparrows, the men who replaced tiles, and cleaned gutters, the bricklayers and carpenters and plasterers who have been concerned with the building, inside and out. The farmers who have driven so many children to Confirmation services in other villages. The organists and, before them, those who led the congregation with their bassoons and 'cellos. The teachers in Sunday School, and the children with their clean Sunday faces. Yes, in all these years there has been much to see and much to remember.

Daniel Hyde bestirred himself from his seat in a pew in St. Michael and All Angels' Church. He marvelled at his own power to retain in his memory all the mass of information revealed to him ; and as on succeeding evenings he committed it to paper, the thought came into his mind that perhaps he had some share in the gifts of his Old Testament namesake, Daniel the Interpreter of Dreams. On the following Sunday he returned, expecting to see the congregations of 40 in the morning and 100 in the evening worshipping in Ashton Church. Whether this expectation was fulfilled he has not recorded.

#### INCUMBENTS OF ASHTON

Unless stated otherwise, details come from *Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy from 1500* by Rev. Henry Isham Longden.

JOHN DAY. Chaplain of Ashton in 1517, having previously been instituted Rector of Roade. During his time, Ashton became a Rectory, and after him, incumbents of Roade were designated Vicar. He appears as Rector of Ashton in 1535, and served here till at least 1561.

- (i) "Daniel Rodis, many years Parish Clerk of Ashton. A man famous in his time for jumping, and as famous for his integrity and honesty ; and whose memory will be always revered by those who knew him, was buried April 14th, 1800. Wm. Butlin." Of Parish Clerks, Richard Bishop served 21 years; Benjamin Mills, 31 years; Moses Mills, his son, 19 years; and of Churchwardens, William Linnell, 25 years; Thomas Rodis, 13; Henry Linnell, 9; George Shakeshaft, 24 and a half; John Bliss, 14; George Malin, 30.

JOHN SYBTHORPE. Rector of Ashton 1564-90. Also Curate or Vicar of Roade for a time.

WILLIAM WHALLEY. Rector of Ashton 1591 (having previously been Vicar of Hardingstone) until resignation in 1611.

EDMOND EASTON. Rector 1611 till his death in 1621. Rector of Quinton also from 1619.

ROBERT LANE. Rector 1622 till his death in 1634.

HENRY WILDE. Rector of Ashton 1634, having previously been Rector of Alderton. Instituted at Pitsford in 1635, and held Ashton and Pitsford till his death in 1640.

THOMAS BUNNING. Allegedly presented to Rectory of Ashton in 1640, while Rector of Grafton, but Bridges (vol. I, pp. 301-2). thinks unlikely, as would overlap with Whitford (below).

JOHN WHITFORD. Rector of Ashton 1640-41, 1666-7. cf.p.20.

JOHN CLARKE. Rector 1667 till at least 1682. "To the poor of Ashton he gave £5."

- ? THOMAS COX. Signs church register occasionally as curate between 1682 and 1718 ; no mention by Bridges, Baker or I.L.

BENJAMIN KING. Rector of Ashton 1700, after being Curate, later Vicar, of All Saints, Northampton.

ROBERT CROSBLEY. Rector of Ashton 1712 till his death ; buried here.

- ? PETER DRINKWATER. Signs register between 1718 and 1723 as Curate. I.L. notes him but does not refer to any duties at Ashton. Baker and Bridges do not mention him.

WILLIAM BURCHINSHAW. Curate, 1722.

- ? SAM LANCASTER. Signs register 1724-1727, Curate.

- ? HUGH MEES. Signs register 1728, Curate.

HENRY GALLEY. Son of a French Protestant refugee minister. Rector of Ashton 1731, resigned in following year and became Chaplain in Ordinary to the King in 1735.

RALPH BROOKES. Rector of Ashton 1732, resigned 1739.

- ? JOHN WALLER. Signs register as curate in this year, but is not mentioned by Bridges, Baker, I.L.

ROBERT HARDING the elder. Rector of Ashton 1739 till his death in 1767. Previously Vicar of Potterspury. Married Felicia Arundel, daughter of landowner in Hartwell. His son was at various times Rector of Grafton, Potterspury and Alderton.

JOHN RISLEY the elder. Rector of Ashton 1767 till retirement in 1799. Also Rector of Tingewick in Buckinghamshire from 1758. Became chaplain to Duke of Grafton after retirement.

- ? JOHN BACKHOUSE. This signature appears in the Ashton registers, as Curate ; the only possible identification in I.L. is with Joseph Backhouse, Rector of Alderton 1764-74.

RICHARD HEBBLETHWAITE. Curate of Roade and Ashton, 1775.

- ? WILLIAM BUTLIN the elder. His signature appears in the Ashton registers between 1782 and 1831, but only sporadically from 1812, when his son became Curate here. I.L. makes no mention of any connection of the elder W. Butlin with Ashton. He was Vicar of Roade, licensed Perpetual Curate, in 1783, and Perpetual Curate of Hartwell from 1791. Mr. J. Gould, who discusses the somewhat tangled question of the various incumbencies of the Butlins in his *History of Hartwell* (privately printed, 1951, p. 2), thinks it reasonable to suppose that Butlin served Ashton either from Roade or Hartwell until his son became our official curate ; evidently he then continued to help out from time to time.

JOHN RISLEY the younger. Rector of Ashton 1799 till his death in 1853 ; like his father, he also held the living of Tingewick together with Ashton.

WILLIAM BUTLIN the younger. Curate of Ashton 1812 till 1831.

- ? F. S. EMLY. I.L. makes no mention of any service in Ashton under this name, but Emly signs the registers as Curate between 1831 and 1834. In 1833 he evidently made a survey of the registers, for various notes on their condition are initialled by him.

R. B. BURGESS. Curate of Ashton 1834-6.

JOHN MOORE. Curate-in-charge, 1841-1853.

ANDREW CRAIG NEELY. Rector of Ashton (resident) 1853 till 1895, when he retired.

ANDREW CAVENDISH NEELY, his son. Curate 1887-94, his father being still resident.

W. H. BALDOCK. Rector 1895 till his death in 1921.

H. H. HURST. Rector, 1922-31.

S. A. BEVERIDGE. Rector, 1931-35.

CANON E. V. MARTIN. Rector, 1935-46.

D. E. HAVERGAL. Rector, 1947- (present incumbent).

## ASHTON RECTORY

In the larder of the Rectory(i), large pinkish-brown flagstones contradict the date of the house, for they may well be 300 years old, whereas the house was rebuilt between 1800 and 1841, in the incumbency of John Risley, junior(ii). We know nothing of the earlier house, with the tithe barn and outhouses, but it is marked on maps of 1727(iii), though inadvertently omitted by the surveyor from that reproduced on page 38. Mr. Neely made some additions to the rebuilt house; he certainly built the kitchen, and may have added the whole west end of the house(iv).

He made other changes, too, one of which he recorded in the register in his first year here. *"In October 1853 I removed the trees in the garden and formed a carriage entrance there being none before."* The Rectory was presumably approached then, as it is now, by a path from the church yard. The Enclosure map of 1816 shows that a drive ran from Roade Hill to the first corner of the present drive, obviously leading from the village to the tithe barn. There seems to have been another approach to this barn from the Stoke road. Seventy years ago there was still a big gate almost on the corner of the Rectory field opposite the Crown, from which a path ran towards the farm buildings of the Rectory, next to the barn; a stile opposite Home Farm led into another part of the Rectory field, which was divided from the Rectory garden only by a fence, the present thick hedge of limes and lilac being probably planted by Mr. Baldock(v).

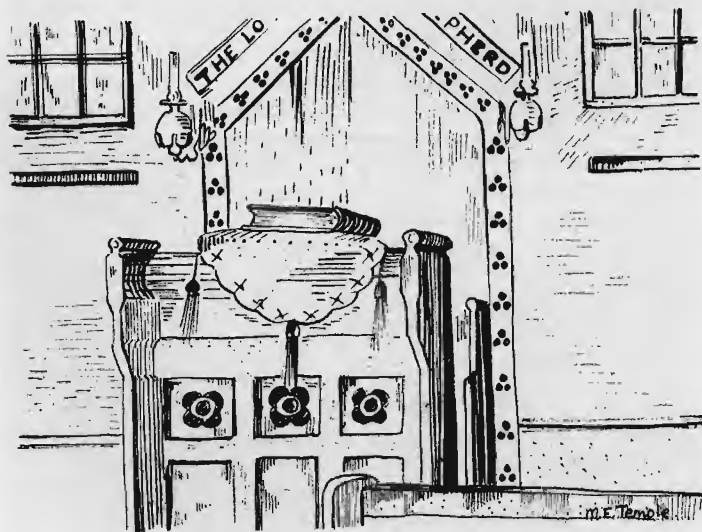
Some kind of path must have existed to take the Rector from his house down to his farm buildings and the tithe barn, which adjoined the garden on the south side of the house, separated by a wall in which the bricked-up shape of a gate can still be seen; no doubt his carriage drive followed the course of this path and linked up with the already existing drive or pathway. Largest and most impressive of these old buildings, the Tithe Barn, after the abolishing of tithes at the time of the enclosures, seems to have been taken over for village gatherings; but it fell into disrepair and in 1893 was demolished with the Bishop's permission. Mr. A. Wilkins, who as a boy of 8 used to weed the Rectory drive, remembers Mr. Neely's students kicking footballs over the old barn.

A few years later it became his duty to look after the Rector's beasts, which were kept in sheds round a courtyard, some of which had been restored at the time when the tithe barn was pulled down. Mr. Neely kept his horse there and his tub-cart; there were two cows, besides pigs and chickens. Indeed, the Rectory in his day was a considerable establishment, for besides the wash-house and stable adjacent to the house, he had (at least early in his incumbency) a bakehouse. Mr. Baldock used the farm buildings for many years, but when, in about 1920, he sold the land below the Rectory garden (the pieces of ground called Flaggy Close and part of Square Field, cf. map on page 40), some of the hovels were pulled down. Some still remain in use, for in 1931 a small house called Tithe Barn was built on the site of the old barn, and with this house goes the two fields named above.

The Rectory and its garden were sold by the Church Com-

- (i) Two orders from the Bishop (1834, 1837) in the church chest refer to the "Rectory House," and one (1841) to "The Glebe House." In the Enclosure Award it is "Parsonage Homestead." It is now known as "The Old Rectory."
- (ii) Baker, vol. 2, p. 124.
- (iii) In the Grafton Collection.
- (iv) "The Rectory House . . . has been enlarged by the present Rector by the addition of a wing." Whellan, 1874, and information from Mrs. A. Wilkins, whose aunt worked at the Rectory in the middle of the last century.
- (v) Mrs. Arthur Gardner, who worked for Mrs. Baldock.

missioners when the living of Ashton was amalgamated with that of Hartwell. The property changed hands many times. Probably the owners most vividly remembered are the first of them, Mr. Jackson, in whose time there was a fire on the north side of the house, and Dr. Morrice, a retired clergyman of considerable taste, who added many embellishments to the house, including a fine moulded window in the drawing-room, and who impressed Ashton people by his enormous reproduction of Raphael's Last Supper, which occupied the considerable chimney-breast in the same room. The house was empty between 1939 and 1942, when it was bought by Mr. James Fisher.



Inside the Methodist Chapel

## NON-CONFORMITY IN ASHTON

We do not know when the first non-conformist meeting was held in Ashton. Mr. Neely notes beside the name of Josiah Stimpson, living in Little Ashton, *"Methodist meeting held here."* At that time there seem to have been three Methodist families and three Baptist families here—that is, if he noted them all.

Possibly there was a chapel for the Baptists at this date, for Ashton was one of the villages in which William Heighton started regular Baptist worship between 1786 and 1827, when he was pastor of the Roade Baptist church(i). In one of the Ashton church account books there is some mention of notices about repairs which are to be *"affixed to the church and 2 chapels' doors"*—in 1867. Whellan (ii) notes *"a place of worship for Baptists"* in 1874, and this is mentioned as still existing in 1899(iii). This last record does not square with the fact that we have found only one person who can remember the Baptist chapel—Mrs. Turvey of Wolverton, who went there with her mother nearly eighty years ago. It stood on the Stoke Bruerne road, between the orchard of the Crown and the farmhouse of Home Farm. Many people in their seventies remember hearing about it, but they all agree that it must have been demolished about eighty years ago.

A Wesleyan Chapel was built here in 1858, at a cost of £280, and opened in 1859 with sixteen trustees(iv). It stands

- (i) Roade Baptist Church, 1688-1938: Ernest A. Payne. 1938. p. 14. We are grateful to Mr. Bertram Godfrey of Northampton, and Mr. Ray Lineham, present pastor of Roade Baptist Church, for drawing our attention to this pamphlet.
- (ii) Whellan's Directory of Northamptonshire, 1874, p. 51.
- (iii) A Topographical Dictionary of England: Samuel Lewis. 1899, under "St. Michael's Church, Ashton."
- (iv) Whellan, 1874 and Chapel Account Book.



back from the Stoke Bruerne road, at the end of the village. Mrs. Smith and her mother Mrs. Mills have written this description of it.

*"It has a warm and rather cosy appearance after the vastness of the church. It will seat between eighty and a hundred people, including the gallery. The pulpit is set in the centre of the choir stalls and, being raised, it is quite easy for everybody to see and hear the preacher quite well. Congregations used to be very large, and thirty or forty years ago it wasn't large enough to hold everyone, so forms used to be placed in the yard for some to sit on. Apart from Sunday School in the morning, we had to go to service in the afternoon and evening. We were always accompanied by our parents in the evening. Sunday School was very pleasant. The teacher was Mr. Thomas Gardner; later Miss Swannell took over, and she also played the organ. A childrens' anniversary was held every year in the spring, when children attending Sunday School used to sing hymns and anthems and read the Lessons, and prizes of books were given for the best attendance. The children's outing took place in the summer. We used to go to Abington or Wicksteed Park. Every year, on Christmas Day, a tea was provided for the price of 6d. a head. Mr. Noble of Northampton used to come about once a year with a magic lantern, showing slides about the work of missionaries; the children greatly enjoyed these. The chapel was always crowded for Harvest Festival. Piles of fruit and vegetables were given, and little cottage loaves were placed among sheaves of corn. The sale of produce was held on the Monday evening following, and the proceeds given to the chapel.*

*"Ashton has never had a resident chapel minister. Preachers used to travel from miles around for the sermons, and still do. As a rule they come from Towcester and Paulerspury (we are on the Towcester circuit), and before the days of easy transport, they would walk cheerfully, whatever the weather. Prayer meetings were held in private houses once a week, usually ten or twelve people would attend these.*

*"Among the social activities of the chapel, the favourite was the 'Pleasant Wednesday Evenings,' social evenings when everyone went to the chapel to sing and recite and enjoy refreshments and friendly conversation; these evenings were not confined to chapel people but were free to everyone, and a good many were sorry to see them stop."*

\*     \*     \*

*"Oh, dear to us ever the scenes of our childhood,  
The green spots we played in, the school where we met,  
The heavy old desk where we thought of the wild wood,  
Where we pored o'er the sums which the master had set."*

(JOHN CLARE : Childhood)

In November, 1854, Thomas Tew, a builder from Stoke Bruerne, sent in a bill to the Duke of Grafton(i).

*"To work to Aston School. Getting out foundations for School mound walls and building the same getting out drains and laying building 3 privies taking down old school building(ii) dry walls making good ground to yard in front of School."*

Eleven men worked to build our school, of whom five were probably Ashton men (James Lepper, George Burton, William Webb, George Richardson, Joseph Mills). Thomas Tew was paid at a rate of 3/6 per day; the wages of his labourers ranged from 3/2 to 1/3. The total work cost £60 8s. 3d. The casement windows and other ironwork were supplied by Brettels and Roberts of Northampton. James Ratliff, another

of the Duke's workmen, did the slating, for £1 19s. 9d. William Linnell contracted for two Ashton men, William Clarke and Thomas Watson, to break stones and level the school yard for £6 4s. 0d.—they were paid 1/- per day!

All this was done by order of the Duke, who had previously founded schools at Greensnorton, Grafton, Hartwell and elsewhere. At first a rental of 1/- a year was paid to him. Later he made over the school to the village, to be administered by the Rector and churchwardens as trustees, and so it continued until in January, 1952, it became officially a Church of England controlled school. Until this school was opened, Ashton children could learn to read and write only at Mrs. Fearn's lace school, unless their parents paid a penny a day and sent them walking across the fields to the grammar school at Courteenhall—where a few boys continued to go after the age of 10, even after the building of Ashton School. At first the children paid at Ashton, 2d. a week for older pupils and a penny for younger, and Mrs. Curtis recalls the teacher sitting on a dais, now disappeared, to collect the money before school began; but in 1891 fees were abolished.

The school register starts in 1886. The first teacher named there, Miss Krauss, had only about thirty pupils and needed no assistant(ii). Neither she nor her successors stayed very long. One of the reasons may have been the salary; for the teachers at this time were paid £10 a year from the Duke. The matter of the teacher's salary was discussed more than once at vestry meetings, and at the end of the last century, besides receiving higher pay, teachers were given board and lodging at Orchard House, the arrangement lasting until the Duke's sale of 1918. The house was divided into two; the front door was common to both tenants, but the school rented the right-hand side (a sitting-room downstairs and a bedroom above). In 1900, and probably throughout the school's tenancy, the housewife who occupied the other part of the house cooked for the teacher as well as for her own family(iii).

In return for the improvement in her circumstances, the school-mistress undertook to attend Divine Service and look after the girls, and also to give an hour to Sunday School (which was held in the schoolroom). There were now more pupils, and from 1892 it was necessary to have an assistant teacher (a post which was filled more than once from Ashton or Hartwell). Under Miss Evans (1900-1906) and her assistant Miss Doe, a notable needlewoman, the school prospered. Miss West, who came in 1906 and stayed until 1924, is remembered with affection by many of her old pupils here. When Mrs. Green (now our post-mistress) came here as assistant teacher in 1908, there were thirty-seven children; and by 1923 numbers had increased so much that children began to go to Roade School from here at the age of eleven. This made a second teacher unnecessary for the time being, but by 1932 numbers had increased so much that an assistant was engaged for the younger children.

Miss West was succeeded as headmistress by Miss Sibley, and after her came Miss Forester, who is remembered for her musical gifts and for the concerts given by her pupils. She retired in 1931 and Mrs. Priestley came in her place. Most people in Ashton, when they think of the school, think first of Mrs. Priestley, for she taught here continuously from 1931 until her retirement this summer, except for eighteen months between 1951 and 1953, when Miss Milburn took her place;

(i) James Malcher was one who went there, as his daughters told us.  
(ii) Kelly's Directories give a few school attendance figures. The average in 1885 was 36, in 1894, 34, in 1898, 30, in 1910, 36, in 1903, 39. Mrs. Pickering remembers 42 children in about 1889 and about 28 in 1899.

(iii) The arrangements about sharing Orchard House were explained to us by Mrs. T. Richardson, who lived there for a time with the teacher as co-tenant.

(i) G. 2024.

(ii) We have no evidence of any earlier school on this site. Either the phrase refers to a lace school or to an older cottage.



Mrs. Priestley's long and loyal service is much appreciated in Ashton. Under her the school had many academic successes, gaining scholarships to grammar and high schools in Northampton; one pupil went from here to Christ's Hospital. Mrs. Priestley has seen the school grow in her time here; at the time of her retirement she and her assistant had 39 pupils.

Ashton School stands near the top of Roade Hill, directly above the church and with the Manor behind it, a stone and tiled building with leaded windows and a large porch opening on to the playground, and with cloakrooms behind at right angles to the main building; the porch was added about 60 years ago. At first the school had little space round it. Until 1938 the playground consisted of a small piece of steep, uneven, gravelled ground just outside the school-room door, and the grass where cricket is played now was a sunk garden belonging to Hill Cottage. When the houses in Rogers' Site (next to the shop, along the Hartwell Road) were pulled down, the rubble was dumped here, and at that time the fence and gates were taken down; the gate was only replaced in 1954. This piece of ground then became part of the school playground, and in 1938/39, through the efforts of Canon Martin and with the help of the local education authority, the levels were adjusted and the whole playground concreted, except for the present grass plot. Lime trees shade the playground pleasantly, and a horse-chestnut which was planted by a pupil of the school, Jessie Briscoe, some eighty years ago: four laburnums which ran in a line down the yard, relics of the old garden, have long ago disappeared.

Inside there is one large classroom; suggestions from the school managers in 1911 and other years that a separate classroom should be provided for the younger children was never followed up. A platform at the west end of the room, however, provided variety seventy years ago, and was used for the teacher's desk and also for concerts and entertainments; the space underneath was sometimes used as a place of punishment for naughty children!

"Old Mr. Neely always started school in the mornings. The handbell was rung at 9.0 and when we were in our seats he would come in and lead us in singing 'New every morning' and in prayers. Then he would take a writing class for the older children, and sometimes spelling as well. I remember more than once he gave us the word 'Constantinople' and told us to make words from it. We didn't do much besides reading and writing, sums and Scripture. Sometimes we hemmed pillow-cases, but there was no fancy work except cross-stitch. The boys had a few drawing lessons. In the summer we had a General and a Scripture examination, the latter taken by Mr. Neely. I remember that one of the teachers, Miss Bailey, held night-school classes in Orchard House for the bigger girls, but most of them left school at eleven. There was no May Day then, and no school treats, but we often got up concerts, and enjoyed them too."

That was Ashton School seventy years ago; move on twenty years, and we find things somewhat different. By now, a thick curtain has been hung down the middle of the room, dividing the little ones at the west end from the older children.

"We always curtsied to the headmistress when we came out, and the boys saluted. We wore white pinafores in school, and dark ones for playing—one white one had to last most of us a week. Black stockings, of course. Every school day began with a hymn and a prayer, then followed reading, writing or arithmetic. Miss Doe, the under teacher, was a wonderful needlework teacher. We used to enter for the school exhibitions held at the old Corn Exchange in Northampton. One year my nightdress got second prize—it would have got first, only I used



(Top) Rev. A. C. Neely, Miss Krauss, and the caretaker, Mrs. Warwick, with the pupils of Ashton School, about seventy years ago.  
(Bottom) Mrs. Priestley, Mrs. Kelly and Miss Temple (visiting) with the pupils of Ashton School, 1954.

bought embroidery; so next year I used my own pillow-lace and got first prize. I was twelve then, and left school the following year to go into service; some children left when they were eleven. There was no piano in the schoolroom in those days, but we sang to a harmonium, and sometimes we'd walk down to Bozenham Mill in winter, singing to keep warm. 'Firm as a rock the lighthouse stands,' we liked best. We all went home to dinner, except for the children from Bozenham and Rectory Farm, who brought something with them. Holidays were much the same as they are now—a week at Easter, a week at Whitsun, May Day and Ascension Day, two weeks at Christmas, and four or five weeks in summer for the harvest."

In the 1930's the children enjoyed a greater variety of interests.

"Some children went very young; I remember one of just three. There was plasticine for the little ones, and bricks, and beads for counting. Miss Forester used to get up concerts to raise money for the children's party. We held these in the Recreation Room, and we used to sing and dance and do sketches. I remember Golden Slumbers was one song we enjoyed singing, and Sweet and Low. The mothers would make clothes for the sketches. Dr. Jackson, who lived at the Rectory then, gave parties for the school-children. The best scholars had books as prizes from him, and he often sent up sweets and fruit."

And now for the present generation.

"We start the morning with prayers and hymns—we choose the hymns ourselves—and then we have Scripture. We have a percussion band with drums and triangles and whistles. The little ones have plasticine and counters, and they learn to knit. They helped Miss Temple last year to make pictures of all the wild flowers and their seeds, and these were put up right across one wall of the schoolroom. The older children have drawing

the Francis Goldsmith who died here and whose memorial slab in our church we have already discussed (*cf.* page 19). This Francis Goldsmith had some reputation among men of letters during the 17th century. Son of Francis Goldsmith, styled, "of St. Giles in the Fields in Middlesex, Esq.," he was educated at Merchant Taylor's School, went to Pembroke College, Oxford, and later to St. John's; he took a degree in Arts and afterwards read law at Grey's Inn, "*but other learning more*" as Colley Cibber wrote(*i*). Goldsmith's claim to fame rests largely on a translation into heroic verse, published in 1640, of a Latin tragedy, *Sophompaneas* or *The History of Joseph*, by Hugo Grotius. He also translated Grotius's consolatory oration to his father, with epitaphs; and his Catechism into English verse.

In 1675 the Manor of Ashton passed with the rest of the land in the Honour of Grafton to Henry Fitzroy, Earl of Euston, natural son of Charles II by the Duchess of Cleveland, and newly created Duke of Grafton. Whether the Goldsmiths were still holding the manor property in Ashton at this time we do not know, but Bridges(*ii*) noted, early in the 18th century:—

"It is now in the hands of Lewis Rye, esq. of Blakesley, but the reversion is settled on the Duke of Grafton. The whole town is also held by the same tenure, except an estate belonging to Mr. Lane. This gentleman hath here an old mansion-house, formerly in the possession of Sir Robert Osborn, which descended to him from his ancestor, William Lane, servant to King Charles I."

The terrier of 1727 reproduced on page 38 shows a building on the Stoke Bruerne road, opposite Lords Close, which, in view of the naturalistic technique of the unknown draughtsman, could well be described as "an old mansion house." We suggest this was in fact the Lane mansion mentioned by Bridges; this seems the more likely because the field next to it is described as "Mrs. Lanes land." The field in which the house stands has the Duke's name on it, with Mrs. Arundel evidently as tenant or occupier; whether these names apply to the house as well as to the field, we cannot tell.

By the time Baker wrote his section on Ashton (that is, before 1836) this house was part of the Grafton estate, together with the estate belonging to it(*iii*); but he does not say when the transference took place. The building is marked on a private map made for the Duke in 1768(*iv*), but not on the Enclosure map of 1816. There is no inherited knowledge of this building in Ashton, but the mounds and ridges to be seen in the field might well hide its foundations.

Lewis Rye was steward of the manor of Maidford in 1718(*v*). Somewhere about 1715 the Duke of Grafton bought out Rye's interests in the Manor property in Ashton; much of it was sublet and mortgaged. In the document recording this transaction, the Manor House is not expressly mentioned. We know that manorial courts were held there early in the 18th century (*cf.* page 45) but perhaps not for long; for Baker wrote early in the 19th century(*vi*):—

"The Manor House stood north of the church. It has long been deserted: a broad deep moat still surrounds great part of the building."

The last tenant of the Manor we know of was Mrs. Horton (or Houghton), whose name appears in the map on page 38.

- (i) The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, by Mr. Cibber and other hands, 1734, Vol. 2 pp. 13-15.
- (ii) Bridges, vol. 1, p. 283.
- (iii) Grafton Collection.
- (iv) But some Lane property had passed into the hands of the Dunsby family during the 18th century; *cf.* p. 47.
- (v) We owe this information about Lewis Rye and his tenure of the manor of Ashton to Mr. P. I. King, Archivist at Lamport Hall.
- (vi) Baker, vol. 2, p. 125.

We do not know just how the old house was restored to life, but early in the 19th century it became a farmhouse. In Mr. Neely's list of his parishioners, written in 1853, he refers to "*Mr. Blunt of the Moate*," and it is clear from the Grafton accounts and from Whellan's first Directory(*i*) that the Manor at this time was known as the Moat House or Moat Farm. But if it is impossible to say when the Manor started as a farmhouse, it is possible to date the end of this period, for among the bills in the Grafton collection is one from Thomas Tew, the receipt dated 5 December, 1856:—

"For Mason work covering (sic) the late Wm. Blunts farm house into four cottages . . ."(*ii*)

Besides his four brothers, Thomas Tew also employed four other Stoke men, and three from Ashton—James Leper, Benjamin Marriott and George Ashby, a young son of the licensee of the Crown, who received 1/- a day for his services. James Leper was paid, separately, 5/- "*for Watching on 5 Sundays during the turning the Moat House into Cottages*."(*iii*) The total cost of the conversion was £99 2s. 9d. This work was done under instructions from the Grafton estate after the death of William Blunt, tenant at the Moat Farm. One of the first families to occupy a cottage at the Manor after the conversion was Thomas Martin the younger, who took after his marriage, the cottage now occupied by Mr. Charles Hayward, on the north side of the house; this cottage was made from the kitchen and dairy quarters of the farmhouse(*iv*).

The Manor House remained the property of the Duke of Grafton until 1919, when "*the very substantial stone built and tiled Manor House with large garden, barns, and pump of good water*" was offered for sale by Pierce, Thorpe & Marriott. It was bought by an Italian and resold to Miss Hannah Savage, who came to live in one of the Manor cottages shortly afterwards, in 1932(*v*). Miss Savage died in 1953, and the house is now the property of her nephew.

As far back, then, as anyone can remember—possibly for as much as three hundred and fifty years—the Manor House has housed no resident squire. The squire's duties as a landlord naturally belonged to the Duke. "*If you lived in one of the Duke's cottages*," the old people told us, "*you felt you were safe for the rest of your life*." His ownership of nearly all the houses and land in Ashton(*vi*) gave the village a unity which it lost when all his property here was sold in 1913 and 1919. This sale was undoubtedly one of the most important events in Ashton's history within living memory. Many of the Duke's tenants were able to buy the houses they occupied; many more, who were not so fortunate, moved on elsewhere at once, or felt unsettled under new landlords. New people came to live in the village, many of them retiring from work, and thus some of the houses in the village became divorced from the land. The farms, too, suffered a great change, for John Bliss, who as the Duke's tenants had farmed nearly all the land in the parish, employing twenty men or more, left Ashton at the time of the sales, and the farms were disposed of separately.

Certain other duties and characteristics proper to a squire were undoubtedly supplied by two of the last resident rectors of Ashton, Mr. Neely and Mr. Baldock, with their almost patriarchal interest in their parishioners. Other needs of the parish have certainly been supplied by farmers and resident

- (i) History, Gazetteer & Directory of Northamptonshire: William Whellan & Co., 1849, pp. 568-9.
- (ii) G.2033.
- (iii) G.2034.
- (iv) This information comes from Mr. Charles Hayward, and also from Mrs. Turvey of Wolverton, whose aunt lived in one of the cottages soon after the conversion.
- (v) We received this information from Miss Savage early in 1953.
- (vi) Except for Longcroft, the shop row and Home Farm.



and sewing to do. We have milk at lunch-time, and some of us went down to the Hut for our school dinners until a few months ago. Last year we learnt about the different parts of the Coronation Service and about the Regalia, and we had two special songs, 'Elizabeth of England' and 'In a Golden Coach.'"

Each generation has to come to terms with the three R's, but Ashton children today enjoy a variety in their lessons which their grandparents find astonishing. Nature study is a firm favourite with the younger children, and their interest in birds especially is encouraged by Mr. James Fisher, a very near neighbour. For the older children, History and Geography are made more real by discussions on current events.

The oldest and best tradition of the school is as strong as it ever was. Ashton is a church school, and the relations between school and rector have always been cordial. Mr. Neely's visits to the school have been continued by his successors.

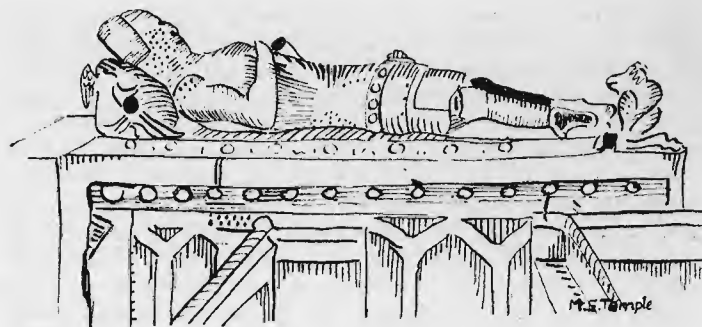
In the midst of all the activity in the schoolroom, high days and holidays are not neglected. Outings, concerts and Christmas parties are a vivid memory in the minds of pupils past and present. Probably the festival which has changed least is that of May Day, from the time when it was revived by Miss Evans, some fifty years ago. The children would make their flower head-dresses the night before, in the playground, and next morning, the girls dressed in white and the boys in their best suits, they gathered outside the school to crown the Queen. Then her maids and knights pushed her round the village in a push-chair, singing outside the houses and going even as far as Ashton Lodge. In the afternoon the mothers would prepare tea at the school, and the maypole dance would take place. This was in the playground in the early days, but later the Rectory Field, opposite the shop, was sometimes used—as it was in 1945, when the last May Day was celebrated here. Favourite songs for this ceremony for many years were "Now is the month of Maying" and "Come, Lasses and Lads."

The school has often been used for village gatherings in the past. Before the Recreation Room was built, it was regularly used for whist drives, and often for meetings, and Sunday School was always held there in the old days. Since 1931 there has been a branch of the County Library in the school, books being distributed on Monday afternoons; before this, Mrs. Neely, and Mrs. Baldock after her, ran lending libraries at the Rectory.

For just a century now our school has played a valuable part in forming the character of Ashton village; and the present generation of parents hopes that their descendants will continue to acquire their early education on their own home ground, and with teachers who know and understand at first hand the pattern of the village(i).

\* \* \*

(i) Dates, names of teachers and other details have been collected for us by Mrs. Priestley from the school records. The reminiscences of the past are put together from conversations with Mrs. Pickering, Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Jack Curtis, Mrs. T. Richardson and Mrs. G. Richardson, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Frank Patrick, Mrs. Bennett, and many of the present children.



Alabaster effigy of Sir John de Hardreshull, Lord of the Manor of Ashton, who died in 1365

"The deep-sunk moat, the stony mound,  
Brought o'er my mind a pensive fit . . .

(JOHN CLARE : Narrative Verses)

The decline of the Great House and the disappearance of the village squire are being observed today in many English villages. Ashton is unusual in this respect; for though we have an old manor house, we have had no squire for a hundred years and probably for much longer. Before we write specifically about the Manor House, it will be convenient to summarise the history of the manorial unit of Ashton from the time of the earliest records of it, in Domesday Book(i).

The manor of Ashton was in the fee of Winemar, or the Barony of Mauduit. At the time of the Domesday survey it was divided into two portions. The larger was held, under Winemar, by Dodin, the smaller part by Bondi. In the reign of Edward the Confessor, Ashton was held as freehold by Alden, then by Robert Fitz-Anketill. Under Henry III, it was held by Philip Lovell, who conveyed it to Robert le Lou; he held the property as *mesne proprietor*, but in 1315 Philip le Lou (or Lupus) was certified as the first lord of the manor of Ashton. This is the Philip le Lou who is buried in our church. From this family the manor was transferred, after considerable dissension, to Philip de Hardreshull, from whom it was again transferred to Sir John de Hardreshull, of the elder line of the family, whose alabaster effigy faces Philip Lupus's wooden one in Ashton church.

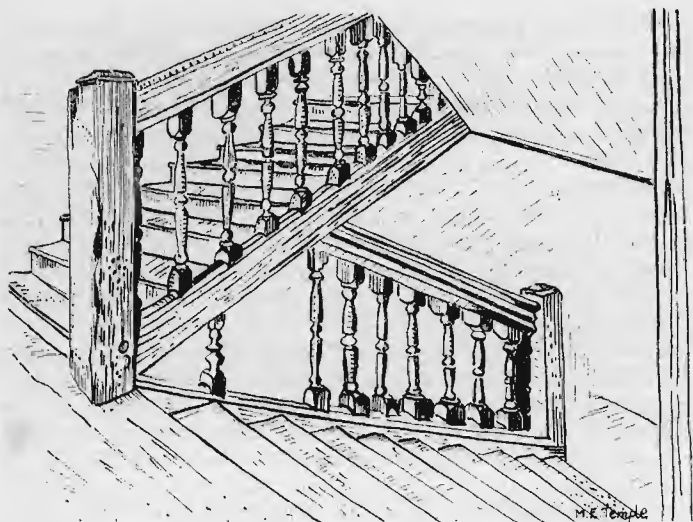
Sir John de Hardreshull left three daughters, and when his estate was divided, Ashton was included in the allotment of Elizabeth, the eldest, wife of John Colepeper. The Colepepers continued lords of the manor of Ashton till Sir Alexander Colepeper, and his son Thomas conveyed it to Henry VIII in 1537, in exchange for other lands. It was then annexed to the Honour of Grafton, an estate which stretched from Hardingstone to Haversham, and from Whittlewood to Yardley Chase. From this time until the late 17th century the manor was held on lease from the Crown.

During the 16th century, the family of Marriott provided the lords of the manor, and the brass to Robert Marriott and his family is one of the most interesting antiquities in our church. The wording of the rhyme suggests that he did actually live in Ashton, and at the manor house; but we do not know how old this house is, or whether the previous lords of the manor used Ashton as a place of residence.

During the 17th century, the Marriotts gave place to the Goldsmiths. To what extent this family resided in Ashton we do not know, since the only information we have concerns

(i) Material from Bridges and Baker; also A History of the County of Northampton (Victoria County History Series) edited by W. Ryland Adkins and R. M. Serjeantson, 1902 . .





*The old staircase in the Manor House, Ashton*

land-owners, many of whom for very many years have been lending fields and buildings and generously giving time and money to promote the well-being of the village. The fact remains that ours is a village without a definite centre ; although many occasions, the last being the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, have proved to us that we can all work together none the less.

In spite of its discontinuous history, the Manor House has its special place in Ashton. By its position it dominates the village, set on top of Roade Hill, a fine old building with a beautiful irregular roof of faded red tiles. It appears on most maps as "Remains of Manor House" and it seems likely that part of the building on the south side has been lost. Perhaps it is no longer, technically, a manor house, but it is in no sense a ruin, and its fine oak staircase, four flights high, and reputed to be a very ancient one, particularly attracts the attention of antiquarians.

The conversion of the Manor into cottages has made it almost as complicated as a rabbit warren inside. Several large rooms have been divided. No. 13 has an extra bedroom which runs over the sitting-room of No. 11 ; this cottage is only partitioned from No. 7, which has the original staircase. If the partition were to be taken down, there would be two rooms of about 25×25 feet, on the ground floor and first floor, with high ceilings.

The projecting south wall of the Manor has one window high up on the first floor, and shows below the shape of an archway, with the end of a large beam coming out above it ; the beam is not continued inside the house. This archway was used at one time as an entrance(i). The outline of the arch now shows it to be too low for this, and the ground has evidently been gradually raised in front of it.

The most notable feature of the Manor outside is the moat, parts of which were drained a hundred years ago or more. For instance, William Linnell acted as contractor for the labour of J. and W. Cooke in draining the moat in 1854. There is no indication of which part of the moat they worked on, but the two men did seventeen days' work on the job, at 2/- per day(ii).

The last remnant of the moat must have been the horse-pond, where the top of the school playground now joins the

garden above—the pond where Thomas Webb remembered seeing the farm labourers washing the horses' feet when they came in from work(i). The part of the moat adjacent to the school was filled in within living memory. It had been used as a refuse pit for Ashton, Hartwell and Roade, the rubbish being fired every month ; after many complaints had been made, the dip was filled in about 1933 or 1934(ii). There used to be a path across from the Manor to the Church, and Mrs. George Richardson remembers that her father, James Malcher, who was brought up in the old sexton's cottage, used to talk of seeing the remains of a drawbridge across the moat by this path, when he was a child, in the 1850's ; the path was not being used then. A bridge, not necessarily the same one, is marked on the map reproduced on page 38.

Also marked on this map is a small building shaped like a pepper-pot, in a line between the School and the Manor House, which may well be the Dove House demolished in 1854. Another of Thomas Tew's bills for work at Mr. Blunt's Farm, itemises "*For Stripping and taking of the timber of the old Dove house and taking Down the Wall and ridding the stuff.*" Four Stoke men and two Ashton men worked on the job, wages being between 3/6 and 1/6 per day ; we can deduce from the bill that the building must have been a sizeable one(iii).

We must now mention two of the most persistent stories about the Manor—namely, that it was once a monastery, and that a tunnel led from the north side of the building up to the old Manor of Hyde in Roade, and thence (some say) to Northampton. There is no evidence that Ashton Manor was ever a monastery ; but we can suggest how such a belief could arise. Throughout the occupation of the Lupus family, the rents and use of several parcels of land in Ashton were given to St. James' Abbey in Northampton, as well as other fields belonging to the de Rode family which lay in Ashton(iv). The rights in these lands were made over to the Fermor family at Easton Neston in the 16th century(v) and passed back later to the Dukes of Grafton. The various histories of Northamptonshire make no clear distinction, in writing of Ashton, between the Manor House and the manorial property, and it seems only too likely that a magazine article, or more than one, encouraged a misunderstanding till it was accepted as truth. The story of the tunnel is less easy to explain. Thomas Martin, while he was trying to dig down to the spring outside the Manor garden in a dry season, uncovered, so many people tell us(vi), part of a tunnel which led in the direction of Roade Hyde. There is no other evidence to support this story, but it is a very persistent one.

As we write, the fate of our Manor House is obscure. Architecturally, it is not of great value, but it is a focal point for the village, which would seem shapeless and straggling without it ; we can only hope that the twentieth century will not see the end of its usefulness.

\* \* \*

(i) Mrs. Adams, who lives in No. 13, was visited in 1953 by two elderly ladies who had lived at the Manor as children and used the arch as an entrance ; they did not give their names.  
(ii) G.2024.

(i) Miss Mills, from Thomas Webb when she was a child.  
(ii) Mrs. Priestley.  
(iii) G.2024.  
(iv) Baker, vol. 2, p.125.  
(v) Northamptonshire Notes and Queries, vol. 3, No. 443, p.80.  
(vi) Among them Miss Mills, Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Fisher, Mr. Charles Hayward.

*"At even's hour, the truce of toil, 'tis sweet  
The sons of labour at their ease to meet,  
On piled bench, beside the cottage door,  
Made up of mud and stones and sodded o'er ;  
Where rustic taste at leisure trimly weaves  
The rose and straggling woodbine to the eaves . . ."*  
(JOHN CLARE : Rural Evening)

Cottages have their history as well as manor houses. Today there are tiles or slates instead of thatch ; there are far fewer people in the old houses which survive ; there are 33 television aerials. Let us see how some of these changes came about in Ashton.

The two newest houses in the village stand at the top of Roade Hill ; the furthest and most recent, built by Mr. Burnham during 1954, stands almost opposite Victoria Bridge ; a little below it stands the house of Mr. Goodingham, built in 1952. At the first turn of Roade Hill into the village stands Dale Cottage and its adjoining, separate dwelling ; these are said to have been built in 1850(i), but this must have been a rebuilding, for one cottage appears here in the Enclosure map (cf. page 40)(ii). On Roade Hill, too, at the road edge of Manor Field, a private contractor put up three bungalows in about 1920. These were intended to be temporary dwellings, but they are still in good order. Opposite these bungalows stands The Warren, and below them Hill Cottage ; we write of both these houses elsewhere (cf. pages 32-3). Before we go on down Roade Hill we should mention a house built behind Hill Cottage, on the lane leading to the Manor House ; this was built by Mr. Darbishire in 1951, and is now the property of Mr. Burnham, senior.

Lower down the hill is Longcroft, with its group of out-buildings at the north end. The date 1719 is cut on the front of the house, and the initials R.T.M. Longcroft is one of the few buildings in Ashton which were not Grafton property—or at least, not from the end of the 18th century, when its documentary history begins. In 1795 the property, which then consisted of two cottages together, a barn, garden and small close of about an acre, belonged to an Ashton carpenter, Banbrook Sanders, whose wife belonged to one of the oldest families, the Reads. After his wife's death, Sanders sold the house, which had now been turned into one, to Robert Smith of Brompton in Middlesex. John Carvell, who at this date owned the row of cottages below (Carville's Yard as Mr. Neely called it), stood as trustee for Smith. Smith left the property to his niece, who in her turn left it to a Fanny Kelly, and in 1861 Fanny Kelly sold it to Mr. Neely as additional glebe land. This purchase seems to have been made to compensate for the loss of glebe land to the railway in the twenty years before(ii). At the time of this sale, George Blunt, the grocer, was living at Longcroft. He gave place as tenant soon afterwards to William Geary, the shoemaker, who in 1876 bought the property from the church. Geary's ownership was as short as that of the church, for in June, 1877, he sold to Robert Sparks, a Hartwell carrier, who in his turn, five months later, sold to an Ashton carrier, William Addington. Addington kept the property till 1885, when he sold it to John Jacquest, a wheelwright from Paddington who retired here with his wife. Henry Gosden of Greens Norton, who bought the property in 1896, raised the roof, which greatly



(Top) A view of Stoke Bruerne Road thirty years ago.  
(Bottom) and today. The pear tree remains.

changed the appearance of the house ; several people remember the uncomfortable low ceilings in the upper rooms before this.

Gosden was a hawker and carrier, who ran a small hardware shop at Longcroft ; but in 1902 he too moved on, to a public house at Helmdon, and sold Longcroft to a Northampton man, Charles Dunkley. Five years later Dunkley sold to Josiah Baylis, a seed agent of Silverstone, and he in his turn, ten years later, in 1917, sold to F. H. Pearson, an iron and steel merchant of Northampton. A year later Longcroft became the property of Frank Green, a market gardener, also from Northampton, and from him it passed to F. J. White, a coach-builder from Middlesex, in 1923. At this date the house apparently had some land attached to it—a field on the Hartwell Road and another near Bozenham(i).

From White the house passed to Job Swannell, a retired insurance agent from Blisworth, and in 1940 it was bought by Mrs. and Miss Goodyear, who lived for a short time at Orchard House. From them, the house was purchased in 1942 by Mr. Horace Catlin, a retired schoolmaster from Daventry, who changed its name from Woodbine Cottage to the present Longcroft. Eight years later he built a modern house in the orchard, and the property was divided ; Longcroft and the outbuildings and a long piece of garden became the property of Mrs. L. K. Gray, while the close and part of the garden remained in the hands of Mr. Catlin.

- (i) Mrs. Bennett, from the late Mrs. George Tew ; the two houses were her property and are now owned by Mrs. Bennett.
- (ii) Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Fisher, daughters of Alfred Clarke, think that Dale Cottage was one dwelling when their grandmother Robinson lived there, before 1850.
- (i) The land round Longcroft is marked *Glebe* in the 1727 map reproduced on p.38.

- (i) It has been said that Longcroft was once a farmhouse, and that the shop row was attached to it ; this seems to be borne out by the map of 1727, p.38.

Next to Longcroft stands the old Carville's Yard, with the shop in front, and of this we write more fully elsewhere (*cf.* page 32). In the paddock opposite (called at various times Flaggy Close and Rectory Field) stands "Tithe Barn," a small house built in 1931 by Mr. Robinson on the site of the old tithe barn of the village. It looks on to the Stoke Bruerne road, a road which has changed more than any other in Ashton.

A row of three cottages which stood right on the road, opposite the Methodist Chapel, disappeared about 30 years ago, to be replaced by Council houses later; a pear tree in one garden marks the end of the original row. More recently, eighteen more Council houses, nine on each side of the road, nearer the centre of the village, greatly altered the look of the road; these were completed in 1951. Behind Vale Farm house, in the fields, a row of five cottages used to stand. These were condemned nearly twenty years ago, but evacuee families were allowed to use them in the 1940's. They are demolished now, as is another cottage which stood beyond them, in the direction of Rectory Farm; while a bungalow to the east of Lords Close has now become the cricket pavilion, being the gift of Mr. Bernard Sunley to the Ashton Cricket Club.

The natural centre of the village is now at Stoke Bruerne Turn, with the shop almost in one corner, and the Old Crown diagonally opposite. But in earlier years the Green must have been just as much a centre of village life; and in the days when it was the site of the Ashton Feast—let us say seventy years ago—it must have presented a picture we should scarcely recognise today.

The dominant house on the Green is still Orchard House, which stands in its own grounds on the east side, the stream flowing at the bottom of a sloping garden. This pleasant thatched house has had a varied history. It was built about 1700 as a farmhouse, being part of the Grafton estate. Foundations of buildings, probably barns, have been unearthed on the north-east and south sides of the house; these are three to four inches thick in places and of considerable length. In addition to these farm buildings, two cottages, known now as Orchard Cottage, a hundred yards to the north on the edge of Cooks Close, belonged to the farmhouse. During the 18th century, Orchard House was approached by a ford across the stream below Orchard Cottage, there being no bridge, and was almost encircled by two roads. When the railway was built the road across Cooks Close, Watery Lane, was broken up, and survived only in the path through the Green across to the Recreation Room; but in 1954 the projected building of more Council houses against the stream in Cooks Close has made a new road necessary, and this partly follows the direction of the old one.

Orchard House had much land on the north-east side of the railway until the estate was broken up. The house was occupied by the Goodridge family during the 18th century and up to the death of James Goodridge in 1880 (*cf.* page 34), when the house was divided, half of it being rented as a school house. It became one house again when it was sold by the Duke of Grafton in 1819. It has since been in many hands. When it was bought by Mr. Frank Wetherill in 1940, a strip of land on the east side of the stream, which had previously been part of the garden of Orchard Cottage, was taken into the Orchard House garden. The steep thatched roof of Orchard House and the fine espalier pear on the front wall make it one of our most attractive houses to this day(*i*).

On the west side of the stream, opposite Orchard House, another strip of ground has, as long as anyone can remember,

been hedged off from the Green. This at one time belonged to the small cottage near the stile by Cooks Close; it now goes with the large house next door. This thatched house, which in the past has been called Rectory Cottage or Glebe Cottage, was originally two; in about 1915 John Frost, farming Rectory Farm from here, made it into one dwelling. On this small strip of land previously mentioned, Job Hodgkins, the carrier, kept his donkey in a tiny hut with faggots piled on top for a roof(*i*). The row of four cottages, next to Rectory Cottage, where Job Hodgkins lived 70 years ago, was replaced by a group of four Council houses in 1939; two more were added in 1947 next to the first four along the Hartwell Road, and four more had been built in 1939 beyond these two; these four occupy what used to be the garden of the original four cottages, a garden which ran almost up to the outbuildings of the shop yard, and of which one fine old apple tree is now the only trace(*ii*).

All these houses stood on the Green proper; but the lane which runs southwards on the other side of the Hartwell Road was always included in the Green in the old days(*iii*). Opposite Orchard House, stables and outbuildings stood backing on to the stream; their foundations can be discerned in the gardens of two new houses recently built on this corner of the land by Mr. Sunley. He has also built (in 1950-52) two more blocks of two houses each, opposite the orchard of Orchard House, and a bailiff's house (1953) on the corner of the Hartwell and Bozenham Roads, and a cottage at Bozenham Mill was reconditioned by him some years ago and sold in 1950.

To return to the lane, which runs towards the Vale Farm cow-yards, one corner of it, on the Hartwell Road, is now open, and marks the end of the garden of The Cottage, an isolated house on Hartwell Road against Poplar Close. Originally two cottages, it was turned into one by Thomas Gardner some years ago. On the corner of road and lane, seventy years ago, there stood the stables of Jeffcut the carrier with his cottage lying back from the road behind. Two more cottages, further along the lane from Jeffcut's, have lately been considerably altered by their owner, Mr. Bladon Peake; and two more cottages at the end of the lane were replaced by a modern house a few years ago by Mr. Sunley. Of all the houses on the Green, Orchard Cottage, tucked away in its corner across the stream, a low, thatched building of great charm, has probably changed least of all in its outward appearance.

Little Ashton, the hamlet on the Hartwell side of the railway bridge, must have seemed, seventy years ago, very far from the main part of the village, for Cooks Close was then a grazing field. This field was the site of our first Council houses, built just twenty years ago, the Council having previously considered sites on Roade Hill, in Chapel Close and Lords Close. As we write, nine or ten more houses are beginning to go up behind the older ones, with a new road already mentioned.

Little Ashton, in which thirteen families live today, had about twenty-four households a century ago, when Mr. Neely wrote his list of parishioners. Its first row of cottages was originally seven; but in 1886 a spark from an engine set fire to the thatch of the cottage nearest the railway. A small girl had come home from school and was sitting down to her dinner "*when Harry Jones opened the door and put his head in and said 'Charlie, come quick as ever you can, the houses are on fire over the railway.' I was late for school that day—I ran*

(i) Mrs. Curtis.

(ii) Mrs. Mills, Mrs. Grace Hayward.

(iii) The much greater extent of the Green in the past can be seen on the 1727 map on p. 38.

(i) Many of these details of Orchard House come from Mr. F. Wetherill.





*Little Ashton seventy years ago (top) and today*

across Cooks Close and watched the fire instead. I remember all the furniture was thrown out into the gardens. What stuck in my mind was a little round table outside one of the cottages, with a dumpling on a plate steaming hot. Years later I went to see my neighbour at Orchard Cottage, old Mrs. Anne Garrett, and there in her cottage I saw a round table and I thought I recognised it. 'Yes, it's the same table,' she said, 'and that was my dumpling, my girl.'"(i). Another unfortunate tenant, Mrs. George Tew senior, came home from Northampton to find her home in flames; she put her handbag on a chair in the front garden, and the fire preyed on her mind far less, her niece says, than the possible fate of a golden sovereign she had left in her bag!(ii).

When these three cottages were rebuilt, the first four were made into three, and were roofed with tiles instead of thatch; later, the thatch was removed from the end cottages as well. Next to this row, further back from the road, stood the two cottages now the home of Mr. George Malin and his family. The 24 Little Ashton families on Mr. Neely's list were almost all housed in the cottages existing now, for most of them were then sub-divided. The house belonging to Mr. Dooley senior, on the north side of the Pykle, was originally two; behind it, at right angles, at least two more cottages stood on the banks of the stream; they were pulled down between fifty and sixty years ago(iii). On the other side of the stream, at the bottom of Follies Close, stood a row of four cottages, the last of which was demolished this year. Next to this

site, Mr. Griffin's house was originally two, and so was the late Mr. Wardale's beyond it. Finally, a cottage stood on the far side of Hurcombe's Lane, next to the farm buildings which now belong to The Paddocks; this cottage was pulled down at least half a century ago, and the stone was used to repair other cottages(i).

A map and plans made for the London and Birmingham Railway Company in 1832(ii) show a barn, shed and rickyard on the west side of the Ashton-Hartwell road, in Little Ashton, which stood directly in the line of the railway; also, on the north-east of the railway bridge, a house, garden, croft and buildings, and next to it three cottages and gardens. These buildings were all pulled down on account of the railway. The barn and shed, which stood right in the path of the proposed line, would have gone at once, that is between 1833 and 1837; the other buildings would not be affected, until the widening of the railway, and the reminiscences of Mr. A. Wilkins' grandfather, who had actually taken a horse and cart below the embankment to deal with the rubble from these buildings, make it clear that the buildings did not go, in fact, till the 1840's. Thus The Paddocks, the farmhouse which now stands last in the village on the Hartwell Road, may be dated in the late 1840's; it was built in compensation for the buildings already described, and William Adams, the first tenant of this new farm house, is listed in Whellan's Directory of 1849.

The isolation of Little Ashton (which has its own post-box) contributes to the oddness of our long, unwieldy parish. The hamlet is also remarkable in that only one house, The Paddocks, has been built there within living memory. For Ashton has increased since Bridges noted early in the 18th century our sixty odd houses. But if the maps on pp. 38 and 39, are compared, it will be seen that the growth of our village has been less spectacular than that of our near neighbours, Roade and Hartwell. While they are fast approaching the size of country towns, we can still call Ashton a village.

\* \* \*

(i) Mrs. Curtis.

(ii) Mrs. Bennett.

(iii) Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. T. Richardson.

(i) Mrs. T. Richardson, Mrs. A. Wilkins.

(ii) Deposited at the County Offices, Northampton.



Ashton's post office, Hill Cottage, formerly Church Cottage.

*"When he may buy, almost without a stint,  
Sweet candied horehound, cakes and peppermints,  
At the gay shop, within whose windows lie,  
Things of all sorts, to tempt his eager eye."*

JOHN CLARE.

In the economy of our village, church, school and manor house have played their part; and if the particular role of the manor is finished, church and school are as important as ever. There are other buildings, too which have been indispensable to Ashton. Let us take the newest institution—the Post Office.

Eighty years ago Ashton had a wall letter-box (probably alongside the shop) which was cleared at 4.15 on weekdays only. Letters were received by foot-post, from Northampton, at 9.15 a.m.(i). In 1894 and possibly earlier, George Scaldwell, at the shop, acted as sub-postmaster(ii), and this continued when William James Tew took over the shop. There was one delivery from Northampton at 7.30 a.m., one despatch at 5.5 on weekdays. Postal orders were issued but not paid, and money orders and telegraph service were only to be had at Roade. For this service to the village Mr. Tew received 2/6 a week. About 1903 he gave up the post office, and there remained only the wall letter-box, which, at this time certainly, was let into the wall below the shop(iii). The inconvenience was much discussed privately and in the Parish Council, but it was not until 1932 that we had a post office again. This time it was at Hill Cottage, where Mrs. Green fitted up her front room. This old cottage, with its deep thatched roof and fine stone work, had previously served the village in another capacity, for it was rented by the church from the Duke of Grafton for the sexton, after the churchyard cottage had been pulled down. Its earlier name, Church Cottage, was changed by Mr. and Mrs. Green when they bought it in 1919(iv).

In March, 1932, then, Ashton had a post office once more, and was no longer dependent on Roade. The postmistress's salary was 10/- a week. Mrs. Green, who is still our postmistress, finds changes in this and in other respects since she took on the job. A telephone kiosk (the first of the Jubilee concession) was erected; and on the Post Office's twenty-first birthday last year a new large letter box replaced the old one, which bore the letters V.R.!

- (i) History, Topography and Directory of Northamptonshire: Francis W. Whellan & Co., Second edition, 1874.
- (ii) Kelly's Directory of that date.
- (iii) Mrs. Stamp.
- (iv) Mrs. Green.

The shop which had previously housed the post office has also served the village, for a century and possibly longer. There have been earlier shops in Ashton. Thomas Wickens, who died in 1780, and his son Jeremiah and grandson Thomas, all appear as shopkeepers in the burial register, and Jeremiah appears as "grocer" in an Ashton militia list of 1796/7(i). Just over a century ago, William Blunt was gazetted as grocer here(ii). He may have done his business at Longcroft, where his son George, also a grocer, certainly lived in 1853(iii). At Longcroft, too, in about 1896, Henry Gosden had a small shop, with counters in the front hall, and one window full of glass jars of raspberry drops and other delicacies(iv). At about the same time Robert Graves, who lived in one of the houses in Follies Close (now demolished) sold cottons, pins, tapes, shoe laces and similar goods in his house, besides peddling these on a small cart through the village(v).

At this time, however, the true village shop was Scaldwell's, run by George Scaldwell whose father had kept the shop before him(vi). This was the shop we know now, just below Longcroft, the first of a row of cottages which was remarkable in not being the property of the Duke. In 1853 Mr. Neely knew it as Carville's Yard; it was then the property of John Carvell, who also worked Bozenham Mill, a member of a large Hartwell family which had farmed in Ashton and Hartwell as far back as the mid-seventeenth century(vii). From the Carvells the row may have passed to John Hillyer; later it certainly belonged to the Sturgesses, from whom it was bought by W. J. Tew senior. When the Scaldwells gave up the shop in 1897 or 98, Mr. Tew, who had been at Home Farm, took it over and ran shop and post office together. After his death the shop was carried on by his widow, now Mrs. Stamp. She retired in 1947, and her son, Mr. W. J. Tew and his wife, now have the business. In the last few years the shop has been considerably altered. A second window has been added, and more accommodation found inside. With its green-grocery licence, frozen foods, shoe-repair and newspaper agencies, and other sidelines, it is a valuable amenity in Ashton.

One of the sheds in the shop row contains a baking-oven, which was used during the first world war for communal cooking(viii). Before the Scaldwells occupied Ashton's present shop, it is possible that it was run by John Freer, a baker who lived in this row in 1853(ix). Mrs. Stamp recalls that when she first lived there, the cottage had a divided door with a round knocker at the bottom, and she thinks the top hatch had been made for the convenience of customers buying bread.

Ashton has other baking-ovens. Orchard House has two in an outbuilding (which for many years has been known, however, as "the brew-house.") Longcroft has an oven, and there is at least one in Little Ashton, in the last cottage of the row next to the railway, where in the 1890's, Mr. and Mrs. Hadland sold bread and cooked Sunday dinners(x). Our chief bakehouse, however, was at The Warren, a fine 17th century farm house on Roade Hill. About ninety years ago

- (i) G.269/4.
- (ii) Whellan, 1849.
- (iii) This is made clear in Mr. Neely's list of 1853.
- (iv) Mr. A. Wilkins, Mrs. T. Richardson.
- (v) Mrs. Pickering, Mrs. Fisher.
- (vi) Kelly's Directory of 1877 names Thomas Scaldwell as shopkeeper.
- (vii) The connection of the Carvells with Ashton was so close that some members of the family were buried here, at the time when Hartwell parishioners, lacking a burying ground of their own, were customarily buried at Roade. cf. A History of Hartwell: Jack Gould, 1951. p.2.
- (viii) Mrs. Stamp, Mrs. T. Richardson.
- (ix) Mr. Neely's list; also Kelly's Directory for 1854.
- (x) Mrs. Pickering, Mrs. Fisher.

the bakehouse at the Warren was worked by the Merrys(i). When the house passed to the Linnell family, the bakehouse was not used, but Mrs. Green remembers the Checkleys, retired from a confectioner's business in Leamington, running a bakery there in 1908. From 1912 Mr. Dudley of Hartwell ran it for them, lodging in Little Ashton. He tells us that the baking was all done in one oven, in one of the barns, and that he baked only for Ashton. There was also a daily delivery, at that time, by Mr. Hales from Shutlanger. The only assistant at the Warren, Henry Scaldwell, who worked mornings and evenings only, was paid 2/6 a week. Both white and brown loaves were made, and prices ranged from twopence halfpenny to sixpence a loaf. The Warren bakehouse also adopted the custom of cooking meals for a penny or three-halfpence a time, and many people sent up their Sunday dinners, and even the materials for a cake. The bakehouse continued till after the first world war, when the Warren became once more a smallholding(ii).

The flour used by Mr. Dudley came from mills at Blisworth, Wellingborough and Olney, for by this time Ashton's own mill had stopped working. Bozenham (or, as it was once called, Bosenho(iii)) Mill stands in the south-east corner of our parish, opposite Bozenham Farm, which is in the parish of Hartwell. The wheel was turned in a backwater of the river Tove. We cannot date its beginning as a mill, though the building, now half ruinous, is clearly very old. John Carvell was miller there in 1813(iv), and James Barford later in the century(v). Towards the end of the century it was in the hands of the Westons, whose family had farmed in Ashton and Hartwell for many years back, and members of the Weston family occupied the Mill house itself. Many remember the mill working. It was used by most of the farmers, and people who grew wheat or barley in their allotments used to take it down to Bozenham to be ground(vi).

Just before the first world war, George Shakeshaft did a good deal of renovating for the Westons at the mill, and his brother James made a new mill-wheel. As this was too big to go in a cart, it had to be rolled from James's workshop, at the Stoke end of the village, down the Bozenham road, a distance of more than a mile. Mr. Albert Wilson was on this job with Joseph Malcher, a bricklayer from Hartwell.

"There were a big old pike," he told us, "used to come out under the arches in the early morning when we were working on the roof. Old Joe Malcher he got a bit of wire on the end of the shearing hook and dropped it in very slow but he got never a bite. So I took out a bullet and got me catapult and he said it would'nt be no good, but I hit the old pike square in the head and he come up, and Joe he took it home to cook. It were out of season, so I told him not to shout it abroad. Next morning Mr. Baldock (the Rector) come down to Shakeshaft's yard. 'That was a good shot of yours yesterday, Wilson,' he says. 'What shot were that, sir?' 'You need'nt make it so strange,' he says, 'old Shakers told me all about it.' Westons had an engine outside the mill that run with coal, so when the water was low they could carry on. When they gave up a chap called Cave came, from Northampton, but he did'nt stop many years, he couldn't make a do of it. There was'nt enough water, and he

- (i) James Malcher, who worked for the Merrys as a boy, was born in 1855.
- (ii) We owe these details to Mr. Dudley, who still lives in Hartwell and well remembers his days at the Warren bakehouse.
- (iii) Bridges, vol. 1, pp.282-3.
- (iv) This is clear from the church registers.
- (v) Melville's Directory of Northamptonshire, 1861, pp.124-5. It is well to note that other points in the entry on Ashton in this volume are almost certainly inaccurate, and the directory as a whole has a bad name compared with Kelly and Whellan.
- (vi) Mrs. Tom Richardson, whose father worked at Bozenham.



Ashton's shop past and present. (Top) William James Tew senior and his family. (Bottom) The shop today, in the hands of William James Tew's son who bears the same name.

couldn't afford the coal, and he couldn't get the men to take the stuff out to Hanslope and Grafton and Yardley and all about—so he packed up."

After the Westons stopped working the mill, and before it had been taken over by Cave, Dr. Ryan still brought corn down from Roade to be ground for his own bread. "The present-day flour is nothing but rubbish" he used to tell the Westons, more than thirty years ago!(i).

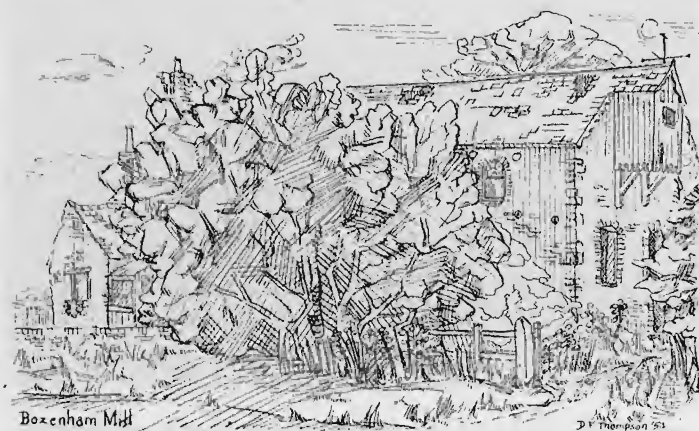
It was probably twenty-five or thirty years ago when Bozenham Mill finally stopped working. Since then it has been inhabited from time to time. Thomas Rhodes was the last person to live there, but he left about six years ago, and the mill now stands empty and deserted beside the reedy Tove.

We have seen where the people of Ashton got their bread; but what of that other village staple, beer. So far as we know, there has never been more than one public house, the Old Crown, which has a fine position along one side of the Stoke Bruerne turn. Probably little changed for a century or more, in 1953 the Crown was drastically altered inside and partly altered outside. The old building was long and low, with a roomy yard in front shut in on the east side by a large barn, on the north by sheds which have now been pulled down. A kitchen garden lay, and still lies, behind the main building, and an orchard between the Crown and Home Farm. The field beyond the kitchen garden, called Poplar Close at least two hundred years ago, was rented as a recreation ground

- (i) Mrs. Curtis.



Bozenham Mill



until last year. The barn still remains, where generations of Ashton folk have leaned while they waited for the bus to Northampton; new cloakrooms have been built to replace the old sheds in the yard.

Inside, there used to be a wide passage running the length of the house, ending in a tap-room some feet below the level of the passage at the east end, and a living room at the west end. Opening off this passage, two small low rooms contained tables, skittles, dart boards, and capacious deep ingle-nooks; the small low windows of these bar-parlours looked out on the kitchen garden.

This passage has now disappeared, the only sign of its existence being two wooden supporting pillars incorporated into a new large public bar made from two small ones. A bar counter has been placed across what was the east end of the passage, and the taproom floor has been raised. The windows have been enlarged and new tables and fittings put in, including a piano; the ingle-nooks remain. The living room has become a lounge, and a scullery, the lounge bar: the living quarters are now upstairs. Undoubtedly some of the charm of the old building has gone, but the pleasing shape of the house is so far untouched.

The first licensee of the Crown we can trace was William Willcox, who died in 1810. His widow seems to have carried on for a time, for a note appears in our churchwardens' accounts, dated March 28, 1823,—

*"To Mrs. Willcox, for Beer for the Glasure Lattemore when he was at work at the church."*

Richard Ashby, a farmer, took over from 1827 or perhaps earlier<sup>(i)</sup> until about 1849; his widow Matilda held the licence then, according to Kelly's Directory of that date, and she continued to hold it for many years.

From the Ashby family the licence had passed by 1874 to Henry Wilding, a grazier<sup>(ii)</sup>; but in 1879 he returned to the land, and George Shakeshaft succeeded him. The licence remained in the Shakeshaft family for nearly seventy years. After George's death in 1919, his widow took over for eight years, and their son, Mr. Albert Shakeshaft, continued for twenty-four years. In 1945 the Crown, which had become the property of the Shakeshafts at the Duke's sale, was sold to the Abington Brewery Company. Mr. S. Bailey was licensee from 1951 till 1954, and was then succeeded by Mr. Ferris.

This brings us up to date, but it is not the whole story, and in the course of these pages the Old Crown will appear not only as a centre for Saturday night conviviality, for weekday

(i) Churchwardens' Accounts.

(ii) Whellan, 1874.

dominoes or darts; but also as a place where rents were paid to our last lord of the manor, and where on many occasions within living memory Ashton folk have crowded to dance and make merry on festive occasions.

Besides Bozenham Mill and The Warren, Orchard House has also retired from a commercial life. For over a century it housed the village smithy. This was in an outbuilding close to the main gate, now a garage, where the Goodridges not only shod horses but also did ironwork under the Duke's orders for Ashton and neighbouring villages<sup>(i)</sup>. Jonathan Goodridge, who was paid by the Duke's steward for providing ironwork for a bridge over the moat in 1763<sup>(ii)</sup>, was probably related to the William Goodridge who was working here at the end of the 18th century, and who appears in a militia list of December 13, 1777, alongside his son, another William: both are put down as blacksmiths. Another William Goodridge, recorded as aged nineteen in 1826, and a blacksmith, may have been a grandson. Another militia list of 1822 refers to John Goodridge, aged twenty, a blacksmith, who was certainly a grandson of William, and brother to James Goodridge, who was carrying on the trade at Orchard House in the 1850's<sup>(iii)</sup>. When James Goodridge died in 1880, his anvil and some of his tools were acquired by James Shakeshaft, and were still in his barn up to a year or two ago.

\* \* \*

*"On steam's almighty tales he wondering looks,  
As witchcraft gleaned from old black letter books."*

JOHN CLARE: The Cottager.

The Goodridge family, as we have seen, worked in Hartwell, Stoke and elsewhere at the Duke's orders, as well as doing all the ironwork and shoeing for our village. The same can be said of other Ashton men who provided essential services a hundred and fifty years ago—William Shakeshaft, the carpenter, for instance, or Thomas Somerton the thatcher; William Willcox the cordwainer or George Shouler, the stone mason. Similarly Ashton was supplied, from time to time, by men from other villages under the Duke's direction. In the early 19th century, thatching in Ashton seems to have been mainly done by Charles Webster, probably a Stoke Bruerne man<sup>(iv)</sup>. Thomas Tew, who did much building in Ashton, lived at Stoke, whence some of his family migrated here; and in that village, too, lived the elder Thomas Martin, the carpenter and woodman, who watched over the Ashton coppices.

It is clear that there was a continual exchange of craftsmen and tradesmen between Ashton and neighbouring villages, and that the unifying power behind all the movement was the Grafton estate and the Duke's steward. Northampton hardly came into the picture even a hundred years ago, when the family businesses of the Goodridges, the Shakeshafts and the Shoulers were firmly established. For tradesmen we had then in Ashton baker, miller, grocer and publican, and more than one shoemaker<sup>(ii)</sup>: it is possible, too, that we had a butcher,

(i) This is made clear by numerous bills in the Grafton Collection. G.2350.

(iii) Kelly's Directory for 1854, as well as bills in the Grafton Collection. cf. many accounts in the Grafton Collection.

(iv) Among them, three members of the Timbs family appear in militia lists as shoemakers (John, 1813; Edward, 1822; and William, 1827.) William Travel is listed as a shoe-closer in 1827 cf. G271/10, 272/5, 279/2. From 1864 William Geary and Joseph Warren mended and made shoes here (cf. Kelly's Directory for 1864) and in the 1890's William Clarke, who lived beyond Vale Farm in the fields, did some cobbling.

for Thomas and John Geary, and John Smith, are set down as butchers in the 1820's: while meat, eggs, milk and butter could be obtained from the farms.

But it was not long after this that Ashton people began to do some of their buying in the county town. There may have been a Clothing Club in Ashton early in the nineteenth century. The success of such a club depended on two factors. First, the organisation, which, eighty years ago, came from Mrs. Neely at the Rectory. Secondly, the goodwill of certain shops in Northampton (chiefly Brice's in the Drapery and Greenow's in Gold Street) in taking checks and making reductions. Clothes, dress materials, hats and unbleached calico and linen came through the club (*cf.* p. 54). Newspapers and magazines began to come from Northampton, too. And fifty or sixty years ago the exchange of craftsmen we have spoken of earlier can be matched by an exchange of tradesmen, for three butchers were delivering here—Martin and Watts from Roade, and Capel from Shutlanger—besides two travelling grocers, Young from Blisworth and Withers from Northampton.

Many housewives preferred to go on getting their meat from the farms, as they had always done; milk continued to come from local sources until 1940, when Mr. Rogers left Vale Farm. Miss Linnell's butter was famous sixty years ago, and after that Mrs. Woods' at Home Farm. Mrs. Bennett as a child used to walk across the fields to Ashton Lodge "for a quart of skim milk, costing a penny. I was sent before breakfast, and when I came back I'd be given a bowl of bread covered with water and warmed in the oven. Grannie would take it out, put a drop of milk on it, and that would be my breakfast."

One commodity has always constituted a special problem—coal, and paraffin. Before the making of the Canal in 1805, wood from the fields and the forest provided heat for cooking and fires. We have little information about coal deliveries in the early days after the opening of the canal had brought coal into the county. Job Hodgkins is listed as a coal dealer in Kelly's Directories of 1849, 1864 and 1869, and James Shakeshaft is also named in 1864(ii). At the end of the 19th century John Bliss the farmer ran a coal delivery(iii), and in 1908 one was started by Thomas Mills, which continued till about 1925, his sister taking over after his death in the first world war(iv). Since then we have depended for our coal and coke supplies on firms like Cross's of Hartwell and Chaplin's of Roade. Wood of course was plentiful even sixty years ago. The top of a tree could be bought for 10/- or less when felling was in progress, and this could be sold cheaply again as logs. Jeffcut, the carrier on the Green, sold faggots, and many others besides, no doubt.

Before the first world war, paraffin, and before that, benzene, were brought to the village by Arthur Gardner, who ran an oil business for W. J. Tew senior at the shop. The oil drums were transported on a four-wheeled trolley with two horses, and a stable in the shop yard was used. Mr. Gardner and his son, Mr. Kenneth Gardner, who carried on the business until 1942, also supplied oil drums to the farms before the coming of electric light. Besides the oil business, Arthur Gardner acted as a general carrier, and is registered as such in Kelly's Directories of 1914 and 1928. Orders would be taken on Friday night and the carrier would leave early on Saturday morning for Northampton, putting up at the Bell in Bridge Street, where he could collect all the goods

- (i) The two Gearys were exempted from serving in the militia in 1808 as apprentice butchers; *cf.* G.271/5.
- (ii) An error for his brother William, as Miss Emma Shakeshaft pointed out to us.
- (iii) From Mrs. Curtis; one of her brothers drove a coal cart for John Bliss for a time.
- (iv) Mrs. Joe Mills.



*The Old Crown Inn (Top) and today.*

he needed. His deliveries were made within a radius of fifteen miles, and the routine was a regular and exacting one. On Monday Arthur Gardner did Ashton, Stoke, Shutlanger, Paulerspury and that district: on Tuesday, Ashton and Roade: on Wednesday, Hartwell, Hackleton, Piddington, Quinton, Preston Deanery: on Thursday, the local farms: on Friday, Courteenhall, Blisworth, Collingtree, Milton, Hardingstone, Potterspury(i).

Herbert Wilkins, who started on his rounds just before the first world war, ran a similar carrier's business, selling a small amount of paraffin, and small goods, and executing orders for people. His round, too, extended to villages as far afield as Paulerspury, Yardley Gobion and Gayton. He lived on the Green, in one of the cottages now replaced by Council Houses, and in the lane opposite he stabled his horse and kept his two carts—a low one with a black hood for winter and a high open one with large wheels for summer(ii).

In fact, though Ashton has often had the services of carriers from outside, we have usually been able to supply our own. From the beginning of this century until 1914 we used Abbott of Roade, but we also had, besides Arthur Gardner of Ashton, the occupier of Home Farm, Franklin, who did some carrying at weekends. When Joseph Skears of Roade and Jackson from Stoke were at our service, between fifty and seventy years ago, we had Finch, who lived at Longcroft for a time, and who would fetch goods from Northampton on Saturdays; Henry Gosden (*cf.* p. 29), who supplemented his shop with a travelling hardware business; and Jeffcut on the Green, who did a roaring trade with the faggots and sausages he brought

- (i) Mrs. Arthur Gardner.
- (ii) Mrs. Joe Mills, daughter of Herbert Wilkins, and Mrs. Grace Hayward, whose first husband was his son.





Transport then and now. (Top) The second stage in Mr G. Richardson's bus service in the early 1920's. (Bottom) A United Counties bus, 1953.

back from Northampton on Saturday nights(i). In mid-century, we had William Cook, who lived at Orchard Cottage (ii). A hundred years ago, in fact, though contact with Northampton was rare, people had the choice of two carriers, for besides Cook, they could have their purchases brought by Job Hodgkins in his donkey cart. James Malcher used to tell his daughters how he and his school friends would push Job's cart up Roade Hill when the donkey turned obstinate(iii). Job Hodgkins inherited his job from his father Samuel, who is set down as carrier in the church registers; but what Samuel carried and where he carried it from, we do not know.

It is a far cry from Job Hodgkins' donkey to the motor-truck used by Mr. Kenneth Gardner. But long before he had given up the carrying and oil business, modern transport had ousted the old-fashioned carrier from his important position, and made him, as it were, an extra. The railway, our first modern form of transport, had served Ashton since 1837 (cf. p.43). Mrs. Anne Garrett, who was born in 1812, used to talk about the past to an Ashton girl, now over seventy herself; she told her that when the railway was first opened the Sunday School children were given a ride along to Blisworth and back in an open truck(iv). But Ashton has never had a station, and it was not always convenient or possible to get to Roade to catch a train; probably the railway has always been more important to our village as a source of employment than as a means of travel. When the first bus drove through Ashton on June 1, 1922, it was a very important occasion indeed. This bus was the property of Mr. George Richardson of Hartwell; his wife told us—

(i) Kelly's Directories for 1885, 1894.

(ii) Kelly's Directory for 1854, also Mr. Neely's list of parishioners.

(iii) Mrs. G. Richardson.

(iv) Mrs. Jack Curtis. Mrs. Garrett was her next door neighbour during her early married life.

"We ran a service through the Forest to Northampton and when Mr. and Mrs. Dooley bought their house in Little Ashton they used to walk down from Hartwell. It was mainly for their convenience that my husband started taking the bus down to Ashton. Then a good many people wanted to use it. Old Tin Lizzie was a Ford ton lorry, with a tarpaulin cover, home-made, and seats along the side. It was a work of art getting in; you had to climb up a step at the back. Passengers were picked up wherever they happened to be."

A rival soon appeared when Tomkins of Far Cotton, a horse-dealer, set up a service from Hanslope to Northampton which ran through Ashton; this service was bought up later by the United Counties Omnibus Company, who continued and still continue the same run. Tomkins' first bus had its seats crossways, with a door to each row of seats; the bus was open, and the conductor climbed over the seats to collect the fares(i). There are no longer any private bus services through our village, but Mr. Richardson and his son-in-law, Mr. Griffin, run a bus once a week to the Roade Clinic, as well as a private taxi service.

The first world war, like the second, gave an impetus to mechanical inventions, and to public services of many kinds. But it was as long ago as 1895 that our Parish Council put forward a proposal to light the village—at a time when Ashton was still under the Towcester District Council. At the meeting a representative sent by the L.N.W. Railway (at that time the largest rate-payer in the village) opposed the motion, and as it was carried by only eleven votes to eight, the project had to be abandoned(ii). It was not until 1951 that we got our street standards.

A water supply was of course more important. Ashton found its natural water adequate seventy years ago; but as the population increased, it became less so. Inhabitants of Little Ashton had a good brook to draw on; the same brook supplied the houses round the Green, besides a public well in the bank outside Orchard House; there was a well with chain and bucket on the grass verge outside the Recreation Field; the stream at the Stoke end of the village had the best supply of all, except for the Manor, which could rely on the springs that fed the moat. Many houses had their own wells, most of which are still known today. But in a dry summer first one well would fail and then another. "When this happened, you would have to take a milk-can up to the Manor spring or down to Jim Shakeshaft's, and one year every stream ran dry, and water-carts came from another village to help out"(iii). This happened nearly thirty years ago, and Mr. Jackson, representing the village at a meeting of the R.D.C. at Potterspury, pressed for a proper water supply. Eventually Ashton was connected, in 1934/5, with a public supply from Hartwell; but after Roade came into the same scheme, the source of water was changed to a larger reservoir at Harpole.

These and other improvements in our standard of living were brought about largely through the determination of the Parish Council, a body which for more than fifty years has borne much of the responsibility for the physical well-being of village. The old people in Ashton can look back to a time when most of the amenities came from the landlord; and the accounts of the Grafton estate from the middle of the 18th century show how the Duke of Grafton, through his steward, maintained the prosperity of Ashton parish. Houses were repaired and new ones built; wells were dug and parts of the moat drained; land on the edge of the forest was cleared to help farmers; the woods were maintained by constant lopping and planting; private farm roads, bridges and stiles were

(i) Mrs. Lever, Mrs. Patrick, Mrs. Smith.

(ii) In writing of public affairs, we owe much to Mr. C. Jackson, who has been one of our Parish Councillors for nearly thirty years.

(iii) Mrs. Curtis.



kept in repair. In all this the steward, up to 1877 at least, could work partly through the manorial court, where agricultural and village affairs were regulated. After the court ceased to function(i), some at least of its duties passed to the vestry meeting—a self-elected body of parishioners with civil as well as ecclesiastical powers. It was through the vestry meeting that the overseer of the poor dealt with the question of poor relief, and this body administered our only surviving charity(ii). An allotment of five and a half acres along Hartwell Road was given to the minister, churchwardens and overseers of the poor of Ashton by the Enclosure Award of 1816, in lieu of some lands held immemorially for the poor(iii). The rents and profits of these pieces of land were to be used for the benefit of the poor of the parish, and were duly converted into wood and coal, which were distributed through the churchwardens. At one time part of this land, the Twelve Pole, was let out for allotments, ninepence for nine poles, but towards the end of the last century, another plot, Happy Land, by the embankment, was substituted, and is still in use.

On December 4, 1894, a meeting was held which was to alter radically the civil organisation of the parish. At this meeting it was suggested that a Parish Council should be formed. It took two more meetings before opposition to the scheme was overcome, and in 1895 our Parish Council was formed, taking over the civil duties of the vestry meeting. One of the most important functions, the maintaining of stiles, bridges and rights of way, was faithfully performed until about two years ago, when the County Council took over the responsibility.

Soon after the first world war the Parish Council rented part of Cooks Close as a children's recreation ground. When Council houses were built there, the field behind the Old Crown took its place, and in 1938 the Council employed Mr. Albert Shakeshaft to put up swings there. In 1952, however, the licence changed hands, and the field being needed for stock, the Parish Council approached Mr. Sunley, who gave permission for the lower part of Lords Close to be used instead.

In the matter of the building of council houses, which has already been discussed, the Parish Council acted as advisers and intermediaries; they have pressed for other public services too. Main electricity came to Ashton in November, 1941, though the supply was not available to the whole village till 1945. The telephone service came to a few houses during the war, and in 1953-4 was installed in many more. Finally, main sewerage reached our village in 1952-3.

One service remained, until the National Health Act, a matter of private enterprise: the supply of doctors to the village. Within living memory, Ashton has never had a resident doctor, and there was no regular surgery here until Dr. McGuire from Roade, who had been visiting Ashton for years, started one in the back room of the shop in the early 1900's(iv). Before this, the nearest doctor seems to have been in Hanslope, four miles or more away by the fields and more by road. For many years now we have had two doctors attending here. Dr. Cooper from Hanslope has been coming to Ashton for over 25 years; at one time he had a surgery in the bungalow, Fair View, on Roade Hill. Dr. W. Clements from Blisworth and his son, Dr. Stephen Clements of Roade had a surgery twice a week in the cottage next to the shop.

(i) The last court roll in the Grafton Collection is dated 1777, but this does not necessarily mean that the court did not continue.

(ii) "The sum of 50l. which arose under a gift for the poor by Catherine Chivall and Elizabeth Chivall in 1708, has been lost many years ago, through the insolvency of a person to whom it was advanced on loan." Reports of Charity Commissioners, 1815-1835, vol. 24, p.47.

(iii) As (ii).

(iv) Mrs. Stamp.

Our first district nurse was Nurse Rose, who began a long life of service to Ashton 41 years ago, walking from Stoke in all weathers to attend her patients(i). Again, we have never had a resident nurse; Nurse Bracken, who attends Ashton at present, lives at Yardley Gobion. A Welfare Service was started in this district in 1947, and now many of Ashton's babies are taken to the clinic in Roade on Thursday afternoons. All these essential services make life more comfortable and secure for the people of Ashton: but more valuable than any organised service could ever be is the mutual help between neighbours which is still a tradition in our village.

\* \* \*

*"... Can but the little which his labour brings  
Make both ends meet, and from long debts keep free  
And neat and clean preserve his numerous family."*

(JOHN CLARE: The Woodman)

Few things in Ashton can have been so noticeably changed in the last hundred years as the scope of employment. The bills in the Grafton Collection from the mid-18th century give a picture of our village as a single, complex agricultural unit, directed ultimately by the Duke of Grafton through his steward, and finding security (as well as some lack of freedom, perhaps) in this fact. In the parish each skilled man—thatcher, hedger, wheelwright, smith, mason, carpenter, shepherd—made his particular contribution to the welfare of the land, directly or indirectly, while the labourer, who provided steady day to day work in the fields, was willing to act, if necessary, as builder's mate or thatcher's assistant. Thomas Martin the Elder and Thomas Tew the builder, both of Stoke, employed some Ashton men when they worked in our village, as well as bringing some labourers with them. James and George Shouler, Ashton stone-masons, were also employers of labour, as was James Lepper in the mid-19th century—the rate for labourers being then 1/6 a day in these parts. Thomas Summerton, thatching here in the 1850's, paid Moses Mills 1/8 an hour to help him; the same Moses Mills worked on cottage repairs with Jabez Martin at the same date for 1/4. The Shakeshafts, as a rule, kept their carpentering work in the family, though the elder James Shakeshaft used occasional outside labour, and in the early 1900's George Shakeshaft usually had two or three men working for him in his building business.

Some Ashton men seem to have contracted for labouring jobs in groups. At least, Libeus Clarke seems to have acted as spokesman for one such group when he sent in a bill for road work early in the 19th century, and the first William Linnell of Vale Farm more than once appears to be acting for another group.

The carpenters and masons and builders we have written of were craftsmen, whose skill often passed from father to son. The iron-work of the Goodridges was known in Ashton for over a hundred years. Thomas Martin the younger, a notable craftsman who is remembered as an old man at the Manor(i), learnt his technique from his father Jabez (and possibly also from the elder Thomas Martin, who worked often with Jabez making gates and hurdles for Stoke and neighbouring parishes). The younger Thomas Martin not only supplied hurdles to Ashton people, but he also sent a drayload to Northampton once a week for sale.

(i) Mrs. Mills, Mrs. Curtis.

(ii) Mrs. Bennett, Mrs. Curtis, Miss Mills and others.



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First and foremost among rural craftsmen, of course, come the thatchers. Ashton has, until recently, been able to provide her own. Thomas Watson in the 1790's, William Peasnall in the 1820's, Thomas Summerton in the 1850's, were all Ashton men(i), and in the 1870's came Charles Hayward from Gloucestershire, to pass on his thatching skill to his son, the Charles Hayward we know, who attended to roofs in this part of the world from about 1910 till 1941. He has done work in Hartwell, Hackleton, Preston Deanery, Hardingstone, Wootton, Milton, Collingtree, Blisworth, Roade, Stoke Bruerne, Shutlanger, Alderton, Grafton, Yardley and Deanshanger. Since he retired, the few thatched roofs in the village have been repaired by Mr. Clarke of Courteenhall, Mr. Dunkley of Yardley Hastings and Mr. Abbott of Roade.

The Grafton Collection has provided much information about the costs of this specialised work. In a bill of July 4, 1795, sent in to the Grafton estate, Thomas Watson charges 3/- for two days' labour, and 2/6 per square yard for materials, plus a beer allowance of 2/6. In 1822 William Peasnall rated his labour at 1/8 a day; Thomas Summerton was paid 2/- a day in 1849, and in the following year Charles Webster charged 2/3 a day, rising to 2/6 in 1874. The following bill from Thomas Summerton is worth quoting in full, as it gives some interesting details(ii) :-

Dec. 28th/49

*His Grace the Duke of Grafton*

*Dr. to Thomas Somerton, for Thatching the Cottages in the Parish of Ashton.*

*Base Work 3d. per Sqr. Coating 2.6d. per Sqr.*

	sqr. ft.	£	s.	d.
<i>Danil Malcher's Barn, Base Work</i>	4 45	0	13	4
<i>John Blunt's Barn Coating</i>	1 95	0	4	11
<i>Jonathan Hodgkins' Cottage, Do.</i>	6 8	0	15	3
<i>Daniel Welch's Cottage Do.</i>	5 10	0	12	9
<i>Benjamin Mills' Cottage Do.</i>	2 94	0	7	4
<i>Wm. Clark's Cottage Do.</i>	8 15	1	0	4½
<i>Jon. Fearn Jon. Webb James Pen's Do.</i>	18 50	2	6	3
<i>Banjamin Marriott's Cottage Do.</i>	3 20	0	8	0
<i>Jane Geary's Cottage Do.</i>	3 20	0	8	0

<i>Self 6½ days repairing at 2. per day</i>	0	13	0
<i>Man 6½ days Do. at 1. 8d. per day</i>	0	10	0

*Dirt Carting* .. .. .

8	7	9½
0	5	0
8	12	9½

The cost of materials seems to have been fairly consistent through the 19th century; stubble straw, for instance, remained at £1 5s. 0d. a load for most of that time, but it had risen to £2 15s. 0d. a ton by 1912, when Mr. Charles Hayward was working for the estate, and from that time the rise in price was steep, good straw today costing about £7 a ton. Mr. Hayward reckons that in the 1920's a small cottage would cost about £20 to thatch completely, and that the same job would today cost about £100. He compares his 5/- a day before the first world war with the 30/- a day which a craftsman would get today.

The nearest we have ever got to an industry in Ashton was in lace-making, which may have been a considerable business one and two hundred years ago. It is given as a profession by both men and women in the church registers; Whellan's Directory states that "lace making is carried on to a great extent here," as late as 1874.

(i) Charles Webster, who did most of the Ashton thatching in the mid-19th century, seems to have come from Stoke Bruerne.

(ii) G.2027.



*Lace-making seventy years ago :  
Mrs. Charles Brice and Mrs. William Shakeshaft*

William Fearn's lace school in Little Ashton(i) was in the row of cottages below the railway—the last cottage of the row, where a side window gave a little extra light to the children who went there, and who, no doubt, learned to read and write there as well as to make lace. We know two Ashton people by name who went to Fearn's school. One was Anne Garrett, who was a pupil there before the railway first came to Ashton(ii). The other was Joseph Warren, who once threw his lace pillow in the brook when the pattern wouldn't go right. "That was the best day's work I ever did" he told his grand-daughter when she was a child(iii). The Fearn's lace school closed soon after Mr. Neely came here; since then, a few Ashton girls have learnt in Roade and Blisworth, while many more acquired the art from their mothers and aunts. Later, many had lessons at the Rectory, where in the 1890's and after, Mrs. Baldock arranged for a teacher to come once a week from Paulerspury. A general exhibition of lace in Northampton in 1891 included several entries from our village.

A hundred years ago the women who collected lace from the children at the lace school would walk to Northampton in their wooden pattens to meet the laceman and show him their wares. Miss Mills and her sister, who still make lace here, learned the art from their mother, and their brother used to go very early to Roade when he was a schoolboy, to take her lace to customers and to collect orders before school(iv). Patterns like Trees of plaits or the Ninepins which Miss Mills makes now were made by her mother, sitting with Mrs. James Shakeshaft from the house opposite, seventy years ago and more—for lace-making could be a sociable affair, as can be seen by the photograph on this page.

Most constant of all employments, of course, was work on the land, and the designation "labourer" in the church registers was by far the most frequent until a few years ago. At the turn of this century John Bliss, farming nearly all the land in the parish, employed twenty men or more, some coming from outside the village. Today three of Ashton's farms are run as family businesses, employing extra men for seasonal jobs or for part time work. Vale Farm has eight tied houses to offer, and employs many people. Several old age pensioners do part time work on the land, and 5 lads are land workers, 1 in Ashton and 4 in nearby parishes.

Discussion of wages is a complicated business, but a few figures may be of interest. In the late 18th century, a farm

(i) cf. Mr. Neely's list of 1853.

(ii) Mrs. Curtis.

(iii) Mrs. George Richardson.

(iv) Mr. Joe Mills.

labourer in Roade (which, presumably, had then much the same character as Ashton) was paid 1/- a day in winter, with breakfast and beer ; in hay harvest, 10/6 a week with beer ; in corn harvest, 40/- a month and board. In 1820, a horse-keeper was paid, in Ashton, 9/- a week(i). Some accounts from Ashton Lodge in 1879 show that seasonal work in harvest time was paid from 1/6 to 4/6 a day, some of these rates being evidently for skilled labour ; a shearer at this time was paid 5/- a day. There was also 8d. a day beer money for the men, while the women got 10d. a day and boys 6d. Of the part-time employments, surely one of the strangest was that witnessed by a small child in the 1880's. "*I remember my grannie and grandfather cutting feathers for Mrs. Linnell at the Warren, for making quilts and pillows. They sat beside a huge heap of feathers, and cut up the spine both sides, then cut off the hard end, and put the feather into a sack beside them ; a big sack packed full and pressed down would earn them sixpence(ii).*"

Wages at the turn of the century were still very low in Ashton. A boy of 13 in 1898 was earning 3/- a week at Ashton Lodge, and the same boy at 15 earned 6/- a week taking coal round for John Bliss. This boy returned to Ashton Lodge when he was 17 ; he earned 7/- a week then, and rose to 8/-(iii). By the end of the 19th century, the weekly wage on farms round here was 14/- to 15/- a week, with a penny or twopence an hour overtime ; and on Sundays an extra shilling for tending the sheep. Until the first world war, beer money was paid as well.

Rents of agricultural cottages were low ; they did not rise, as a rule, above 3/6, and were commonly 9d. or 1/-. Hours of work were 6.0 a.m. to 5.0 or 6.0 in the evening. This rate had not changed at the beginning of the first world war ; in 1921, as a complete contrast, the fixed wage was £3 5s. 0d. During the slump, wages fell again to £1 10s. 0d. in Ashton, but rose again slowly to their present £6(iv).

Children have always been able to find part-time work on the land. The potato-picking or harvesting of today can be matched with similar occupations a hundred years ago. There were, too, such jobs as crow-scaring, when the boys took their home-made clappers, three pieces of wood tied together at the bottom with a leather shoe-lace, and spent the day in the fields warding off crows and jackdaws. They went pig-keeping, too, two or three of them together, each watching the litter he was in charge of in the field after beans or corn had been carted, and driving them home at night ; often, too, the same boys would tend cows on the grass-verge(v). All these employments are remembered in Ashton, though they have now quite died out. After the first world war, more than one child helped with a milk round or fetched medicine from the surgery in Roade ; and the newspaper delivery is a well-recognised way of earning pocket money today. But for modern children the part-time phase lasts longer. Boys of thirteen, fifty years ago, and of eleven, seventy years ago, would be working full time with threshers or carpenters in Ashton, earning half a man's wage, while girls of the same age would be out in service.

A hundred years ago a single woman, or a woman wishing to supplement her husband's earnings, could go into domestic service, or she could sew or make lace. Apart from seasonal work on the land, she was offered no greater variety of employment than this, and up to and after the first world war it was still exceptional for women to earn money here except

in domestic employments. The Rectory, the farms and the public house were probably for a long time the only places where domestic work could be found in the village, and no doubt many girls had to go further afield. The change to the variety of work today is even more striking in the case of women than of men. Shop work, canteen work, factories and schools, a wide variety of domestic and administrative posts, work in transport—it is very different from the entries of a hundred years ago of "Lacemaker" and "Domestic servant."

What were the hours and wages for women in the past ? Seventy years ago, a child cleaned the school for her pocket money (seven days a week, for Sunday School was held there as well). For this she received a shilling a week. At this time her mother cleaned the church, which meant some scrubbing nearly every day ; her wages, sixpence a week, had to be collected from Henry Linnell, one of the churchwardens, who lived down at Bozenham Farm, nearly a mile from the village. This money she put towards the rent of her cottage, which was paid half-yearly to the Duke of Grafton, being 1/- a week, with 11/- a year rates ; when she took the money, she would receive a tin of corn, or a pint of beer or vinegar, as she chose. When the child who had cleaned the school grew up, she was employed at the Rectory. Here she would do a week's washing for ten people, walk down to the bottom of the long garden into the paddock beyond to hang out the clothes, and receive 1/3 in payment(i). It is worth saying a little about the Rectory, as a fairly constant source of domestic employment. The cook here, some fifty years ago, was paid 2/6 a week(ii) ; the nurse at the same time, 3/6(iii). A girl of thirteen who came to scrub then was paid 4d. an hour with meals, or 6d. without. At the age of 21 she returned to work there for £18 a year ; during the first world war she lived in and was paid £22 and board(iv).

The gardener, a young man of eighteen, working at the Rectory fifty years ago, was paid 9/- a week. "*I got there at 6.0 in the morning. I had to look after the garden, mow the lawns and everything. Then there were two cows, the pigs and chickens, and, of course, the Rector's pony. I had to light the copper for the woman who came in to do the washing, and then there were boots and knives on top of that, before I ever got to the garden(v).*" Just before the first world war another young man came to the Rectory as gardener. His duties were very much the same, except that the cows and pigs were gone, and he was paid 15/- a week(vi). After this, wages rose steadily, and a nurse-maid in 1952 was earning £2 10s. 0d. a week and full board.

All the occupations discussed so far belong inside the village. But more than a century ago a series of events began which were to change our pattern of employment drastically. The first of these events, the opening of the Grand Union Canal, probably did not affect Ashton very much. The canal runs within 200 yards of the parish boundary, but at its furthest point, at Bozenham Mill. We know of only two Ashton men who worked on the waterways, early in the 19th century, Thomas Smith and Edward Snoxall ; both were lock-keeper.

The building of the London and Birmingham Railway, however, may well have been the most important single factor in the history of Ashton. Surveying for this enormous project began in 1825, but there was such fierce local opposition, especially in the district between Hanslope and Northamp-

- (i) Mr. A. Wilkins.
- (ii) Mrs. Curtis.
- (iii) Mr. A. Wilkins.
- (iv) Mr. H. G. Summerton, Mrs. J. Mills.
- (v) Mrs. T. Richardson.

- (i) Mrs. Curtis.
- (ii) Mrs. A. Wilkins.
- (iii) Mrs. A. Gardner.
- (iv) Mrs. T. Richardson.
- (v) Mr. A. Wilkins.
- (vi) Mr. A. Wilson.



ton, that the necessary Act of Parliament was not passed until 1833. Work on the line began then, and Ashton and many other villages were thrown into confusion by it—literally so, by the throwing up of the embankment.

The pompous but racy editor of *Osborne's London and Birmingham Railway Guide*(i), makes us see the confusion in Ashton, and in particular one scene, when, during the building of the bridge over the Hartwell Road, some trucks carrying stones from the Blisworth quarry, were derailed on the embankment. The picture is a vivid one. The man with the broken arm walking six miles across the fields to his home : another being dug out from the pile of clay and stone : the youth whose foot is shattered, grey-faced and weeping : the curious and sympathetic housewives who have climbed the bank, "each evincing a great desire to touch with their fingers the mangled limb": the rough-looking foreman, smoking his pipe and offering blunt words of condolence.

We gather from Osborne that accidents of this kind were numerous, and Ashton men must have been involved in them. For the village was affected by the coming of the railway in two ways. First, there was an influx of Scottish and Irish navvies, a few of whom settled for a time in the village. In 1837, Mary Anne Warren ran away with one of them, Alexander Bethune, a Scot—her father having forbid the banns. Bethune was killed on the railway not long after their marriage, and Mary Anne returned to Ashton, to marry her former sweetheart and rear twelve children here(ii). No doubt this was no isolated incident during the construction of the railway. In 1906, for instance, when the loop line was made to accommodate about four wagon trains, of about 70 wagons each, the work took two years or more, and a great number of men came from outside and lodged in Ashton, as in other villages(iii). But during this period and afterwards, if outsiders came to the village, Ashton men were tempted away from it.

The original two lines of track were opened in 1837, and in the same year George Mills appears in the church register as a "labourer on the railroad."

In the next twenty years at least four Ashton men followed him, and the number slowly increased. At the present time nine men from our parish work on the railway in various capacities. Mr. George Malin was employed by the company for nearly 56 years ; he retired in 1948.

"I started on the permanent way in 1893, when we lived at Roade. Hours were 6 a.m. to 5.30, for 17/6 a week and 5d. insurance. Later I went into a signal-box ; that was in 1897. There was only one box then between Roade and Castlethorpe ; it was this side of the bridge at Gordon's Lodge, some way from Ashton, but the following year they put the Hanslope box in, and after that they put another against the bridge just outside Roade station. This was moved later to its present place in Ashton. The loop line was built in 1907, for trains to pull in between Roade and Hanslope. About 38 years I've worked in signals. We used to communicate with a telegraph instrument, then we got telephones. We worked ten-hour shifts, two regular men worked ten hours and the split man did four hours in each box. This was just before the first world war. There were far more trains stopping at Roade then ; they cut them down after the buses started."

Work on the railway here has always called for an elaborate knocking-up system, especially in time of emergency. To put fog precautions in operation, for instance, there used to be

a bell, about fifty years ago, at Dale Cottage, where the ganger George Tew lived, and up to twenty years ago a fog bell was connected from the signal box to another house, Ben Freeman's. Now the telephone operator from Roade signal box calls a platelayer living in Roade, and he has to come to Ashton to call the ganger, who in turn calls the other Ashton men. After eight hours of duty these men are relieved by others from neighbouring villages who have been warned by the ganger to be in readiness. During the heavy snow the men are called out in the same way, to clear the points and cover them with salt, and to see the signal lights are kept free from snow(i).

The Ashton length is one and a quarter miles, and five men keep it in order ; three of these live in Ashton. In 1952 they received the prize for the best kept length in the Bletchley area.

Immediately after the opening of the railway came the establishing of the railway coach works at Wolverton ; these were originally locomotive works. We do not know that anyone at Ashton worked there till the end of the last century, but from that time onwards it became increasingly popular employment. Mr. A. Wilkins went to work at Wolverton from Ashton in 1906 ; he is still working there, from Bradwell. When he started he was one of six Ashton men at the works, and since then there have always been a few ; at present there are five.

The factory in Roade, which in October 1953 accounted for eight of the wage-earners of Ashton, has its origin in a workshop built by Masters and Shuter about the turn of the century, for the manufacture of Simplex polishes. In 1912 they sold out to Thomas Henry Dey, but neither he nor his successors prospered, and for a year or more after the first world war, the factory was left deserted.

Mr. C. T. Cripps took possession of the Simplex Works in 1923. He had been employed by the company, and had afterwards set up his own business in London, making component parts for pianos. Starting with five men and a few pieces of machinery, he gradually built up the works at Roade into a flourishing concern. A fire in 1933 gutted the original building, but through his energy and determination, the business was gradually put on its feet again. By 1938 Pianoforte Supplies Ltd. employed 400 men and had contacts all over the country ; they were now making metal components for motor and aircraft industries and the cabinet trades as well as for pianos. During the last war, the factory made parts for aircraft and army vehicles. At the present time, its productions are chiefly designed for the motor industry. The business is expanding rapidly, and is very important to our village, as to many others in this part of the county(ii).

Other sources of employment have become available to Ashton people since 1914. The sawmills of Mr. Eric Whatton and Mr. David Chapman in Hartwell have employed some from time to time ; at present one Ashton man works for Mr. Whatton. This successful business, which started with the sale of lopped tops from the forest, belongs in a sense to our parish, and employment with Mr. Whatton seems a logical substitute for the work in the woods and coppices a hundred years ago.

Motor traffic has affected the village, in the direct way of employment, comparatively little, but at the time of writing, one man works in a garage in Roade and another in one in

(i) pp.147-150.

(ii) Mrs. George Richardson.

(iii) Mr. A. Wilkins.

(i) We are indebted to Mr. J. Mills and Mr. F. Patrick for these details.  
(ii) Material concerning the factory at Roade comes from Mr. S. Watson, who has worked there for many years ; also from an unpublished scrapbook of Roade, whose interesting account we have made use of by kind permission of the editor, Mrs. Malin of Roade.

Hartwell. Since 1940, too, the R.A.F. Unit at Hartwell has been a fruitful source of employment.

Finally, there is Northampton. We cannot be sure how long ago the town had any influence on our employment. It is possible that some of our Ashton shoemakers in the early 19th century were outworkers, supplying Northampton factories. We do know that lace was sold in Northampton a century ago and possibly earlier. But there could be no

great rush for town jobs until regular transport was available, and here our lack of a railway station has been felt. It was not until after the bus service started that the office, shops and factories of the county town began to absorb Ashton people, and perhaps it took the second world war to make the daily journey a matter of course. At present about 16 work in Northampton, and one of our inhabitants travels to London once a week to work. Things have changed indeed.

## EMPLOYMENTS IN ASHTON

The table below, compiled from the church register and from our personal knowledge of Ashton today, gives a comparative (not complete) view of Ashton's employments for the past 150 years.

Order of frequency	1800-1850	1850-1900	1900-1950	October, 1953
Many ..	Farm	Farm	Farm	Farm worker, 16
6 or 8 ..	Labourer	Labourer	Labourer	Farm bailiff, 1
	Farmer or grazier	Farmer or grazier	Farmer or grazier	Farmer, 8
		Railway worker		Railway 9
3 or 4 ..	Shoemaker	Shoemaker	Railway worker	Factories (local) 14
	Carpenter	Carpenter		Factories (N'ton) 4
	Mason	Mason		R.A.F. unit., 4
	Railway worker	Builder		Roads, 2
Once only	Shopkeeper	Shopkeeper	Shopkeeper	Sawmill, 2
	Blacksmith	Blacksmith	Blacksmith	Shops, 7
	Butcher	Butcher	(not working in Ashton)	Offices, 6
	Exciseman	Innkeeper	Publican	Building and decorating, 2
	Innholder	Baker	Clerk	Music Hall, 1
	Lock keeper	Clerk	Clerk	Transport, 1
	Baker	Miller	Warehouseman	Insurance, 1
	Hawker	Policeman	Carpenter	Innkeeper, 1
	Paper maker	Mechanic	Timber-dealer	Postmistress, 1
	Draper	Watch-maker	Metaller	Coal round, 1
	Bricklayer	Gamekeeper	Packer	Schoolmistress, 1
	Clerk	Gardener	School-teacher	Shoe research, 1
	Miller		Electrician	Miniature-gardens, 1
			Wireless agent	Writing and broadcasting 1
			Grocery assistant	
			Sheet-metal worker	Part-time domestic work, about 12
			Welder	

The following document, from the Grafton Collection, is an interesting index of employment in Ashton nearly two hundred years ago.

Decbr ye 13th 1777

"A true List of all the Men now Dwelling in the Parish of Ashton in the County of Northampton between the Ages of Eighteen and Forty five Years by Me, John Hodgkens, Constable.

Robert Cook ; Farmer  
 William Webb ; Servant Man  
 William Linnel ; Farmer  
 Jasper Blunt ; Servant Man  
 Thomas Wickens ; Lace maker  
 Edward Clark ; Labourer  
 Robert Waite ; Farmer  
 John Welch ; Labourer  
 John Penn ; Labourer  
 William Morris ; Labourer  
 James Sturdidge ; Labourer  
 Robert Smith ; Lace maker  
 Henry Linnel ; Farmer  
 James Chrouch ; Servant Man  
 William Ferne ; Lace-maker  
 William Goodridge Senr, Blacksmith  
 William Goodridge Junr, Blacksmith  
 John Marriott ; Farmer  
 Daniel Dencher ; Servant Man  
 Henry Ferne ; Labourer  
 Robert Raws ; Servant Man  
 William Dunsby ; Farmer  
 Thomas Marris ; Servant Man  
 (crossed out in document)

Thomas Bull ; Labourer

Edward Blunt ; Farmers son

If any Person in this list shall think himself Agrieved You may Appeal on Wednesday next at the White Horse Inn in Towcester being the 17 Day of this Instant December."

\* \* \*

*"A distant notice of some nestling farm,  
Crowded with russet stacks that peep between  
Huge homestead elms or orchard's squatting trees."*

(JOHN CLARE : Footpaths)

*"And the said Commissioners do hereby further order and direct that all Rights of Common in over and upon the Land and Grounds by the said Local Act directed to be divided allotted and enclosed and every part thereof shall be and the same are hereby for ever extinguished."*

This sonorous sentence marks the end of a long series of changes in the farming of Ashton parish. It is the concluding sentence of the Enclosure Award for the parishes of Ashton and Roade ; it is dated 1819 and represents the final stage in the Parliamentary legislation which in 1816 ordered the enclosing of all our remaining open fields.

The enclosing of common land had been going on in Ashton long before this, of course—perhaps for hundreds of years. The 18th century accounts of the Grafton Estate make many references to old and new enclosures, to be fenced, ditched or drained ; none of these can be identified. A Court Roll(i) of April 30, 1724 reads :—

*"We order that the Comons lately tooke inn by Joseph Horten : Gent. shall be laid open as formerly ; forthwith on the penalty of 3s. 4d. for such neglect."*

The map on page 48, too, has several notes about enclosures.

Enough common land remained in the 18th century, however, together with those arable fields which were common at certain times of the year, to make some kind of control necessary. The old system of open field farming was a communal one, and this meant careful organisation. Certain tenants held "farms" in the sense that they farmed a good deal of land in the parish, with a farmhouse, farm buildings and cottages for labourers ; the Blunts, Hodgkins and Marriotts were such farmers, renting their land from the Duke, while the Dunsbys, as we shall see, may well have owned their land. The rest of the men who worked in the fields of Ashton, while earning a wage from men more prosperous than themselves, could and did live by subsistence farming. They would have their own strips of land in the open fields, and enough use of common and commonable land to be able to keep some stock.

The disadvantages of this system are obvious and well known. Crops sown strip by strip in an open field were less likely to be rich than a crop sown over a large area which had been consistently prepared. When tenants held strips in various parts of the parish, much time could be wasted in getting from one to another. Stock which was run together in the common fields could not be improved by selective breeding. The technical advances and experiments in farming in the 18th century made it inevitable that all common land should eventually be enclosed. But the strip-farming, if it was not progressive, was far from haphazard.

The organisation of agriculture in our parish in the 18th century and earlier was conducted through the Duke of Grafton's Court Baron(ii). This was an assembly of the householders of the parish, presided over by the Duke's steward, representing the Duke as lord of the manor. The

(i) G.3383a.

(ii) We cannot give exact dates for the beginning and end of the Duke's Court in Ashton. The Court Rolls referring to our parish in the Grafton Collection begin in 1724 and end in 1777. The need for organisation certainly went on till the time of the enclosures, but it may be that in Ashton, as in many parishes, the functions of the manorial court gradually merged into and gave way to those of the vestry meeting, and officers like the constable may have continued to see that agricultural orders were carried out, under the direction of the church.

courts were sometimes—though 'probably not always—held at our Manor House(i).

The existing court rolls of Ashton are dated April or October or November, and in some years two courts are recorded ; whether this was a general practice we cannot tell. At the manorial court each year a jury would serve, consisting of the most considerable men of the parish ; from the jury would be chosen the Constable, the Thirdborough—his second in command—the Hayward and two Field Tellers. The business of the court, when the jury and officers had been presented to the steward, was to lay down orders for the regulation of the succeeding year's (or half-year's) farming ; besides this, men concerned in any change of land-holding did fealty publicly to the lord of the manor and paid the customary fine or due.

The Ashton court orders are of various kinds. Some deal with the marking out of the various strips of land, so that each man's boundaries may be perfectly clear. On 21st April, 1768, the following order was made for the parishes of Ashton, Roade and Hartwell(ii) :—

*"We order baulks to be layd down too foot wide in Ashton Hartwell and Roade Fields a baulk between evry single land and Rood and a baulk between every acre wheare peeces ly together to be don by St Michal next Penalty ten shillings to each man for a default to the Stuard."*

and an order of 1766 concerning the same parishes states(iii) :—

*"Also we Likewise agree to send out a jury to regulate the head lands and to lay down joynts ways between the furlongs in the aforesaid parrishes . . ."*

It was essential, too, to see that the common fields were properly used. Here is a typical set of orders, dated October 16, 1760, relating to Ashton and Grafton(iv) :—

*" . . . Hogs to be rong when turnd into the stubble and to continue till St Andrew if not the Howard to Pound them and pay two pence for each. Pigs to be rong at Eight Weeks old All Meadows in the three Parishes to be haind of all sorts of Cattle by Lady day. Platt South Field and the Parkfield and Hartwell Brook Field to be haind from the sheep till the tenth of October. Penalty 3s. 6d. to the Steward. that all sorts of Cattle to be kept out of each Wheat and Barley Field till barley rid Penalty as above no Mare with a Foal to be flitt in the Wheat or Bean Fields after the Foals are six wicks old. Penalty the same.*

*No Horses to be flitt on the highways or slades till old Midsummer. Penalty as above."*

Another very common order requires cows to have their horns tipped, with a penalty of 3/4 for default.

There was always the danger that the common land would be over-used. The following preamble to a court order of 1764 shows this clearly(v) :—

*"Whereas the Occupiers of the lands within the several manors and parishes of Ashton Road and Hartwell in the County of Northampton parcell of his Honor of Grafton have put on and stocked the common lands common fields and commonable ground in the said several manors and parish-*

(i) Of the Ashton Court Rolls, six specifically mention the Manor House (1726, 1727, 1731, 1732 (2) and 1736 : one of May 26, 1736 reads "You Gentlemen of the Jury you are to apear att the Menner house in Ashton att nine of the clock in the morneing." Two court rolls note the court is to be held "at Grafton" (which presumably means the Blackamoor's Head at Grafton Regis, where courts of that village were apparently held). The other Ashton rolls omit the place of the court. It may be significant that all the dates specifically mentioning the Manor House are early, since we know that at some time during the 18th century this house was left empty.

(ii) G.3470b.

(iii) G.3542a.

(iv) G.3519d.

(v) G.3626b.



es with an unlimited number of horses mares cows and sheep by which means the common grounds and fields and commonable landes of the said several manors and parishes are so much over-stocked with cattle that most of the occupiers of the lands can make no advantage of their stock of cattle and in case all the occupiers of the lands within the said several manors and parishes of Ashton Road and Hartwell stocked the said fields in a fair and equall manner and with such a number and proportion of cattle as the sd common fields and commonable lands would support such occupiers of the lands would be enabled to breed and keep such a number of cattle as would be much to their benefit to remedy which inconveniencys and to reduce the number of cattle to be put on the said common fields and commonable lands by the occupiers of the lands in the severall parishes of Ashton Road and Hartwell to an equal just and advantageous stint and Number of cattle in proportion to the number of acres each person occupys in these several fields we the jury appointed and sworn at this Court for the said several manors and parishes of Ashton Road and Hartwell have made the following orders and regulations . . .”

Each occupier is allowed three sheep for each acre of ley ground, one for each acre of meadow, 16 for every 20 acres of arable ; a lamb is to count as a sheep at Martinmas. He may have one gelding or mare, and one cow, for every 16 acres of arable. Each offence incurs the fine of £5. This kind of order occurs frequently, and on May 26, 1737, there had been a particularly determined attempt to get everything cut and dried, even to prescribing to what degree men could change their stock(i) :—

“ We do agree that what sort of cattle each person begins to stock with the beginning of the year he she or they shall keep to all the year long and not be allowed to change a horse for a cow or a cow for a horse or sheep for a horse or cow or a cow or horse for sheep . . . But we do allow any person to stock three sheep for one horse or cow and to abate three sheep for one horse or cow at the beginning of the year.”

In 1765 it was necessary to mention specially that no persons were to try to avoid the stint by turning into a common field one horse or cow in the morning and a different beast in the afternoon !

Certain duties also fell to the court which would nowadays be in the province of the Parish or County Council. Thus, there are many orders for ditches and brooks to be scoured ; on April 30, 1724, it was ordered(ii) :—

“ that the hoale at Gunnhole(iii) be filled up from danger by them that digged it open before the first day of june next on the penalty of 3s-4d for such default.”

and in the same year it was ordered :—

“ that the hedge belonging to flagy Cloass be cutt that it be no offence to the highway before the 11th day of May next by them that ought to do the same . . .”

The Ashton court rolls, taken as a whole, show a desire to allow each parishioner his chance of a good living. Nevertheless, there were, as we have said, some men who got on better than others. We cannot say what farms were in our parish in the 18th century, or what land was attached to them, though we can be sure that, of our present farmhouses, the

(i) G.3410.

(ii) G.3383a.

(iii) Many people believe that the name of this field derives from a battle, but its true derivation seems to lie elsewhere.

“ It is very likely that it is by the spot called Gunnildebrege in the 14th century. . . This would become Gunnelbridge. Gun Hole lies by a small stream, and Gun Hole is probably a corruption of the name of the one time owner of the bridge, a woman bearing the Anglo-Scandinavian name Gunhild.” The Place-Names of Northamptonshire: J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. N. Stenton. 1933. p.97, under Ashton.

Warren and Home Farm existed ; probably Vale Farm and Ashwood ; possibly Ashton Lodge. But if the farms were not as we know them now, there were two or three dominant names in the 18th, as in the 19th century. One or two of the estate maps in the Grafton Collection, dated 1727, contain names of tenants pencilled on the fields. From these names it is clear—and this can be confirmed from other sources—that the important names at that date were Marriott, Blunt, Hodgkins, Dunsby and Webb.

A Webb held land between Bozenham Mill and Ashton, chiefly along the Mill Road. The Hodgkins, a large family, are frequently mentioned as tenants of the Duke at the Hartwell end of the parish ; but in the 19th century the family dwindled, and no Hodgkins is concerned in the Enclosure Award. The Marriotts farmed land on both sides of the Bozenham Road, some of it in Hartwell parish ; but they too seem to have declined before the Enclosure, and the Benjamin Marriott whom Mr. Neely knew in 1853 was a farm labourer.

The Blunts, an enormous family, held land between Ashton and Roade, and between Ashton and Hartwell, and certainly at the beginning of the 19th century, a Blunt was farming from the Manor House. Kelly's Directory records William Blunt at Moat Farm in 1854, and we know this was another name for the Manor House ; but he died in 1854, and with the next generation the family died out, though the name is still remembered here(i).

The Dunsbys, who are still remembered here, go back to the early 18th century also. In a Court Roll of May 26, 1737(ii), William Dunsby was presented “to do fealty for lands by him purchased in Ashton which was late Mrs. Lanes(iii)”.

This was possibly the same William Dunsby who did fealty in 1749(iv) for a farm previously owned by John Dunsby ; and on 27 April, 1775, the jury presented “ that Ann Dunsby a tenant of this manor seised of an Estate in Ashton is dead since the last court and that the same is descended to her nephew William Dunsbey who appeared and did his Fealty.” This William was probably father to Denton Dunsby, a yeoman farmer whose widow Phoebe stood for her young son at the time of the Enclosure Award(v). This William Dunsby, a Baptist who appears on Mr. Neely's list, died in 1868. He is recorded as yeoman farmer at Home Farm in 1849(vi). On the 1727 estate maps already mentioned, the name of Dunsby appears on some pieces of land which correspond with fields of Home Farm today. Thus the Dunsbys form a link between the strip-farming of the 18th century, and the period after the enclosures of 1816 had paved the way for the modern farms. For a son or grandson of William Dunsby the Baptist lived in Ashton till about 60 years ago, when he was drowned crossing the ford over the stream, near the present Waterloo Bridge, on his way back from Northampton (where, we have been told, he had been celebrating his victory in a lawsuit).

(i) Deeds in the Grafton Collection give the following Blunts as tenants of the Duke of Grafton :—Francis, 1734 ; Richard, 1746 ; John, 1811 ; William, 1812.

(ii) G.3410.

(iii) cf. Bridges' note on the Manor of Ashton, quoted on page 87. It is tempting to suggest that these lands were those marked with Mrs. Lane's name on the map on page 38, since both pieces were confirmed as Dunsby property in the Enclosure Award ; and one is actually the Home Farm house, garden and home paddock, probably the centre of the Dunsby farm in the 18th century, as it was in the 19th.

(iv) G.3580a.

(v) A copy of the Enclosure Award of the parishes of Roade and Ashton, with parts of Hartwell, Stoke Bruerne and Alderton, was lodged at the office of the Clerk of the Peace of Northampton in 1934 by Mr. Elliott, Attorney at Law of Towcester.

(vi) Whellan, 1849.

The open fields enclosed and allotted by the Commissioners in 1816 were Southfield (stretching between the Stoke Bruerne road and Ashton village and Bozenham Mill); Ashton Field, on the east side of the Bozenham Road, covering the Backsides, Happy Land and other fields towards the mill; Breachfield and Horseley, on the north side of the village, on what is now Ashton Lodge land. By far the greatest number of holdings went to the Duke of Grafton, who, after some judicious rearrangement, received most of Breachfield and Horseley and a considerable share of the other two fields. Second in size was the allotment given to the Rector, John Risley, in lieu of tithes, which were now generally abolished. Risley received a substantial part of Southfield; this formed the Rectory or Glebe Farm which remained the property of the Church till after the first world war, and a separate farm till it was absorbed into Vale Farm in c. 1921. Risley also received Flaggy Close (opposite the Crown, later called Rectory Field), the paddock next to it along the Stoke Road, which was part of Square Field, and a piece of orchard ground adjoining the Rectory homestead and the churchyard, which had been his by right before.

Apart from these two men, few were concerned in the enclosures in Ashton. John Carvill of Hartwell, who previously owned the shop row, was now allotted the Mill and garden and some land on both sides of the Bozenham Road, near the mill. All these were old enclosures, except for two small pieces of Southfield, on one of which Bozenham Cottage now stands. William Dunsby already had Home Farm and its adjacent paddock. He received part of Southfield on the Stoke Road (land which is still part of Home Farm), and two fields where the farm Sunnyside now stands; also an old enclosure called the 100 Acres (perhaps Underacres), with a house and garden adjoining(i). John Blunt received two small fields out of Southfield, behind Vale Farm; these were added to old enclosures, apparently already in his possession—namely, part of North Close—and some cottages, also behind Vale Farm; and beyond these was a freehold already belonging to Henry Evans and now officially allotted to him. William Geary, who already owned Longcroft, received some property from the Ashton land in Hartwell village (perhaps the cottages which are still in our parish) and John Geary two small fields from Breachfield, on the Hartwell Road. In the same block of enclosures was the five acres given to the Rector and churchwardens of Ashton, land which was henceforth administered for the poor of the parish (cf. page 37).

The Enclosure Award makes clear a distribution of land which was not very different a hundred years later—a distribution by which the Duke of Grafton held most of the parish, except for the church land; with Home Farm, Longcroft and Carvill's Yard as the outstanding private property. The sale of all the church and Grafton property in the mid-1920's had, as we have seen, a drastic effect on the village, comparable in degree, though not in kind, with the effect of the Enclosure Award. As to that, we have no direct evidence of what Ashton folk thought of the enclosures, though we can have little doubt that the labourers felt as Clare did:—

*"E'en nature's dwellings far away from men,  
The common heath, became the spoilers pray;  
The rabbit had not where to make his den,  
And labour's only cow was drove away . . .*

while the tenant farmers must, on the whole, have benefited from the change.

Two families in particular became dominant in Ashton after the Award. These were the Linnells and the Westons.

(i) The house and garden, and part of the land, are now the property of the Misses Mills: it is this land which belonged to Mrs. Lane in 1727 (see footnote to p.46).

There were Linnells in Ashton at the beginning of the 18th century. Richard and Elizabeth Linnell were tenants of the Duke in 1727, and Richard was at the Warren in 1724(i). This family cannot be traced without a break through the 18th century, but a William and a Henry Linnell are mentioned in court rolls of 1727, and in 1802 there died William Linnell, baker and farmer, two of whose sons became the most important tenant farmers in Ashton in the 19th century. The family came originally from Paulerspury(ii). The eldest of William Linnell's sons, Henry, farmed at Bozenham Farm, and his son, another Henry, was churchwarden for many years in Ashton; a Henry of the third generation is remembered at Bozenham Mill with his wife in old age.

William Linnell, the youngest son, who was 25 years a churchwarden here, was at Vale Farm till 1859; his wife, Mary Anne, carried on after his death, and her daughter, Lucy, after her. William's son, another William, also churchwarden for many years, farmed at Ashton Lodge, and his widow lived at the Warren with her children at the turn of the century. John Bliss came as bailiff to the Linnell farms in about 1900, and married, in 1907, another Lucy Linnell, great-niece of the third William. After the death of Mrs. and Miss Linnell, John Bliss remained in control of all the land they occupied until after the first world war; he left the village soon after the Duke's property in Ashton was sold.

Bliss was a remarkable man, and in a short time made a deep impression on Ashton people, especially those who worked for him. He was very tall, and stern in his manner, but, "as straight as a spade handle; he wasn't a man you could lark about with, but he treated everyone fair"; and his wife was very good to the poorer folk in the village. John Bliss was primarily a sheep farmer, and in his time ran some 200 on his farms, with George Richardson as his shepherd at Bozenham Cottage. The change from so much grazing to the arable and dairy-farming of today is very striking. When Bliss left Ashton, after the farms were split up, each was farmed under a separate system; but Vale Farm, which later took in Rectory Farm, remained the largest farm in Ashton.

The Westons really belong to Hartwell, but members of the family took up land in the south-east and north-east corners of our parish in the 19th century. A John Weston worked the Rectory Farm about 1854-1858(ii); a John Weston and later, Robert Weston, farmed Ashwood from about 1903 till about 1919(iii); and Henry Weston owned and worked Bozenham Mill late in the 19th century(iv). After Henry's death, some land in Ashton was still held under a trust, but the family has now retired to Pindon End, between Hartwell and Hanslope. Mr. Neely found one family of Westons in Ashton when he came here, a widow with a son and daughter; we cannot be sure just who they were.

If we go back a hundred years, we find from Kelly's Directory of 1854 that there were six farms in Ashton(vi). These were Ashwood Lodge (Jonathan Robinson); Moat Farm (i.e., Manor Farm) (William Blunt); Rectory Farm (John Weston); William Linnell, farmer and grazier, seems to have had Vale Farm and also Ashton Lodge; and William Dunsby was at Home Farm. William Geary, who also appears in the Directory, was renting nine acres of Rectory Farm from Mr. Neely in 1858(iv). There seems to have been a farm at the time of the Enclosure Award, where the Vale Farm cowsheds

(i) G.3383b.  
(ii) Mr. Jack Linnell of Northampton.  
(iii) Kelly's Directory for 1854. A valuation of Rectory farm made for Mr. Neely in 1858, mentions John Weston as tenant.  
(iv) Kelly's Directories and ratebooks of 1911 in the possession of Mrs. Stamp.  
(v) Mrs. T. Richardson, Mrs. Curtis. Kelly's Directories.  
(vi) Valuation of Rectory Farm mentioned above.

# THE PARISH OF ASHTON

and parts of the neighbouring parishes of Roade and Hartwell in the eighteenth century, with field boundaries and names in contemporary spelling.

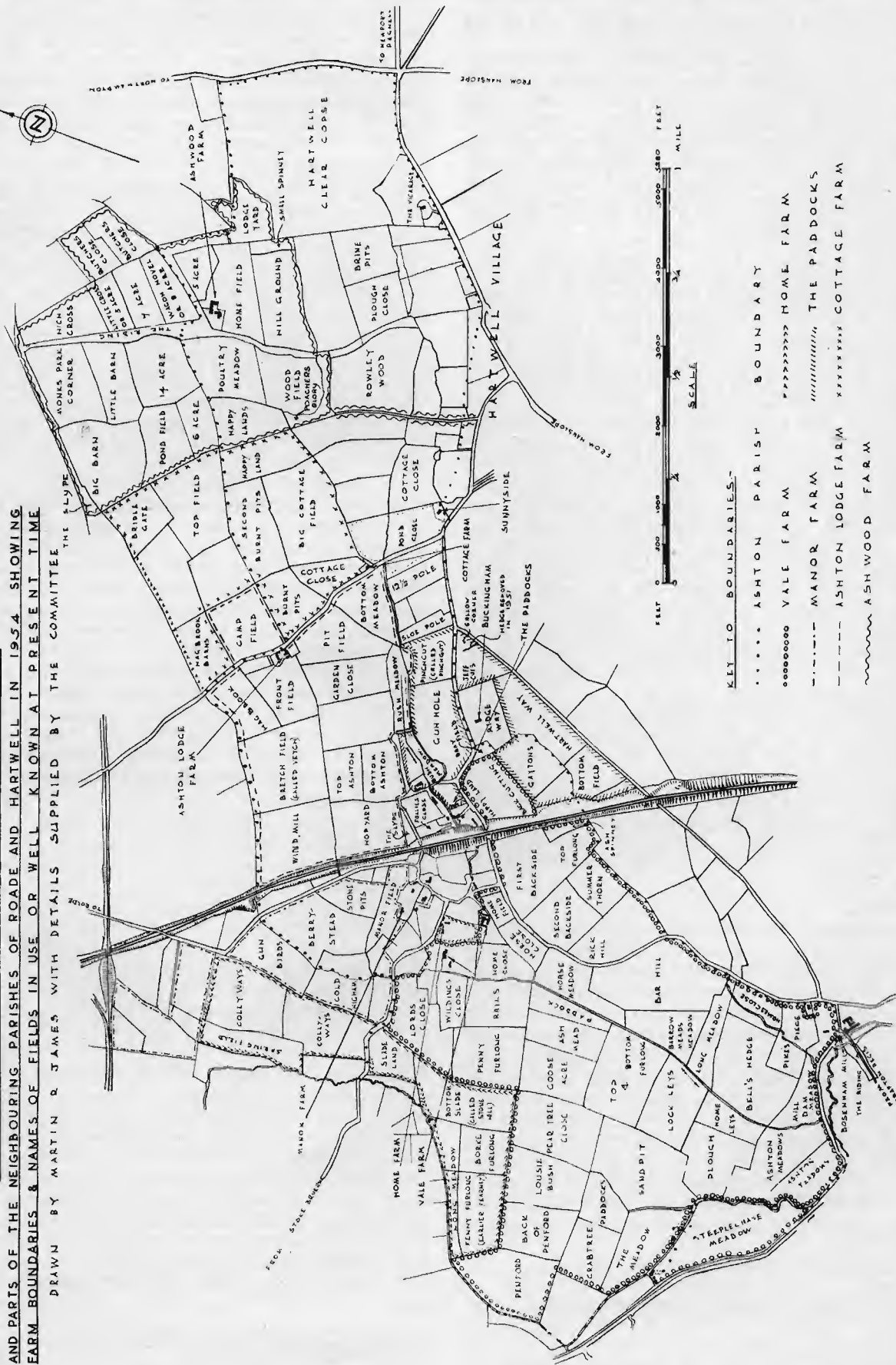
Redrawn by J.F. Trotter from private surveys made for the Duke of Grafton in 1726-28 and 1768.





# THE PARISH OF ASHTON

AND PARTS OF THE NEIGHBOURING PARISHES OF ROADE AND HARTWELL IN 1954 SHOWING FARM BOUNDARIES & NAMES OF FIELDS IN USE OR WELL KNOWN AT PRESENT TIME  
DRAWN BY MARTIN & JAMES WITH DETAILS SUPPLIED BY THE COMMITTEE



- KEY TO BOUNDARIES:-
- .... ASHTON PARISH BOUNDARY
  - \*\*\*\*\* HOME FARM
  - MANOR FARM
  - ASHTON LODGE FARM
  - ASHWOOD FARM

Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. Crown copyright reserved

now stand(i); it has not been a farm within living memory. One field behind what may be a farmhouse here was named Geary's, and possibly William Geary lived here.

Apart from these six farms, parts of which seem to be discernible in records 200 years ago, at least one farm which flourished in the 18th century, Orchard House, lost its land more than a hundred years ago. One other, in Hurcomb's Lane, was broken up in about 1899 (*cf.* page 31); and two farms we know today, The Paddocks and Sunnyside, did not exist at the time of the enclosures. Today there are seven farms and two smallholdings in our parish, and these will now be discussed in more detail.

### HOME FARM

This farm, with its agreeable old house, situated in the middle of the village, is interesting in that it may never have belonged to the Duke of Grafton. We have already discussed the Dunsby family, who appear to have owned at least some of the land now belonging to this farm. It is possible that the last Dunsby did not farm himself, but merely occupied the house(ii). After his death, a waggoner, William Jones, occupied the house(iii), and at this time it has been suggested that the farm was attached to Vale Farm. If so, this cannot have been for long, for from about 1885 it was owned and farmed independently by William James Tew (iv). From about 1894 the farm went for short periods to Finch and Mabbutt, and then, in about 1903, to Edward George Woods, who stayed till 1939(v). At first Woods was a tenant, but in 1920 he bought the land adjacent to Vale Farm, and the Home Farm house, from Franklin of Shutlanger. In the same year he bought from Mr. Baldock 76 acres of glebe land in Roade parish belonging to Ashton Rectory. Of these, the three fields on the east side of the Roade road no longer belong to Home Farm; but Springfield and the two Colleyways still remain as extra-parochial land.

In 1940, Woods sold the whole property to Frank Blackwell of Northampton, by whom it was sold to Mr. C. D. Cripps in 1953. The present tenant, Mr. Evans, who farms with his son Francis, came here from Paulerspury in 1939. He tells us that the farm has not changed much since then, except that 12 or 15 acres of grassland were ploughed up in 1940. The farmhouse, however, is at present being renovated outside and in, and new cowsheds are being built along the Stoke Bruerne road.

### THE PADDOCKS

This farm is centred in the solid, square house whose history has already been discussed (*cf.* page 31). The Paddocks started as a smallholding, with the field next to the house, and Sallow Corner; but shortly afterwards, more fields along Park Lane, belonging to Ashton Lodge, were added to it, and later, about 1899, when the farmhouse in Hurcomb's Lane was demolished, the farm buildings were attached to the Paddocks, and the land shared with Ashton Lodge(vi). Two more fields from Ashton Lodge—Gunhole and Pinch Gut, were transferred to the Paddocks at the time of the Duke's sale. This was when William Meakins was tenant(vii); he had been preceded for a short time by a Brayfield who may have given his name to a field in this holding; he succeeded William Adams, who had a long reign here(viii). Meakin was followed by James

Malcher, who farmed there from about 1900 till 1914(i). Some time after the Duke's sale, when the farm was sold as The Homestead, it became the property of George Collins, and then of Mr. Blackwell of Northampton, when the Bailey family of Ashton farmed it. The farm now belongs to Mr. Preedy, who came from Welford to farm here in October, 1950. Like Home Farm, the Paddocks has outlying fields in Hartwell parish.

### RECTORY FARM

At the south end of the parish, between the Stoke and Bozenham roads, a farmhouse made up of two cottages, and a number of fields, formed part of the living of Ashton Church until not very long ago. The greater part of this land came to the church by the Enclosure Award (*cf.* page 47); but a valuation made for Mr. Neely in 1858 gives the following field names—Far Colleyway, Colleyway Slade, First Colleyway, Lords Close, Fearney Furlong, Pear Tree Close, Lousy Bush, Penfold Hill, Back of Penford, Quickset, Meadow, The Lays, Ditch Acre, the Little Bogs, Home Close. Of these, the Colleyways seem to have been acquired after the Enclosure, and by the end of the 19th century they had been transferred to Home Farm. At the time of this valuation, Henry Weston was the occupier. About 70 years ago, the farm was rented by a farmer called Savage, who worked it from Stoke(ii), while one of the cottages was occupied from 1888 by Mr. Charles Hayward's father. His children well remember the long walk across the fields to get to school, for Rectory Farm was quite out of reach of either of its nearest roads, having nothing but a track leading to it. From about 1909 the farm was rented by Mr. Frost, who had a bailiff, Francis Glead, living there for a time. Later, when Frost found it impossible to get anyone to live over the fields, he used the farm for keeping chickens and also for making butter, as there was a very cold spring there(iii). The farm was sold by the church in the 1920's, to Mr. Frost; later he sold it to Mr. Rogers, who came to Vale Farm in 1921, and it became part of the larger farm. The farm buildings and cottages have now been pulled down and a new barn put up on the site.

### VALE FARM

Next to, and behind, Home Farm House, stand the Vale Farm buildings, with a long drive leading to them from the Stoke Road. We have already written about William Linnell, the first tenant of Vale Farm we can be sure of, an influential man in the village as well as on the land, being a churchwarden and overseer of the poor. After Vale Farm came under the control of John Bliss, it stretched to the Grafton Bridge and Park Lane, with Rectory Farm and Home Farm land to the west. In 1919 Vale Farm came up for sale as part of the Duke's property and was bought by Mr. Rogers. In 1942 he sold it to Mr. Bernard Sunley, for whom it has been worked since then by a bailiff.

Since this last change of ownership, the farm has been greatly changed in character. Under John Bliss it was a mixed farm, with the emphasis on sheep. Mr. Sunley has built up a fine pedigree dairy herd which forms the centre piece of a large and thriving farm. The barns round the farmhouse have been incorporated into the dwelling, and many more farm buildings have been put up in the rickyard to the east, including model cowsheds set round a yard of their own. To replace the cottages in the field behind the house, eight cottages have been built in Ashton to accommodate Vale Farm workers. The farmhouse itself has been greatly

(i) *cf.* map on p.39.

(ii) Mr. Evans.

(iii) Mrs. Curtis.

(iv) Mrs. Stamp.

(v) The following details have been compiled from the title-deeds of Home Farm, in the possession of Mr. C. D. Cripps.

(vi) Mr. A. Wilkins, Miss Preedy.

(vii) Kelly's Directories for 1890 and 1894.

(viii) Kelly's Directories for 1849, 1854, 1864, 1869, 1874, 1877, 1885.

(i) Mrs. G. Richardson, his daughter.

(ii) The late Mr. C. Robinson.

(iii) Mrs. G. Hayward, Mrs. F. Patrick.

altered and modernised, and the gardens laid out attractively; while the white slip-rails used in the home meadows greatly enhance the appearance of Ashton, especially from the windows of a train.

### ASHTON LODGE

This farm, which lies far from the village, is divided between the parishes of Roade, Ashton and Hartwell, and much land lies on either side of the road which links Hartwell directly with Roade. A solid block of fields runs southwest from the farm house to the Victoria Bridge just above Roade Hill. When Mr. Neely wrote his list of parishioners, William Linnell was farming at Ashton Lodge. In the 1870's it was farmed by Jonathan Simpson; Daniel Roddis followed him, a staunch churchman, parish clerk for many years; after him, a farmer named Treadwell; at some time during the 1890's the Duke farmed the land from Wakefield instead of taking a tenant. Then followed George Payne, who came in about 1903 and remained tenant until the sale of 1919, when the farm passed to Campion of Northampton. Soon afterwards, it was bought by Mr. W. Adams, who is still farming some of the land, for in 1948 this farm was divided. The road between Roade and Hartwell became virtually the line of intersection. The land on the Ashton side is farmed by Mr. Tom Adams, under the name Ashton Lodge; while Cottage Farm includes the land on the Hartwell side of the road.

### ASHWOOD FARM

Far in the north-west corner of our parish, on the edge of Salcey Forest, Ashwood Farm is in closer touch with Hartwell than with Ashton. It is a mixed arable and pasture farm, but the present occupant, Mr. Derek Tarry, is building up a dairy herd. The house seems to have been built in 1702, as a halfpenny of that date was found inserted, an old building custom, in one of the beams. One large barn is dated 1819. We cannot trace many certain tenants of Ashwood Farm; like most of the other farms in the parish, it was included in the Duke's sale of 1918. Between 1795 and 1797 some extensive building was done either at Ashwood Farm or at Ashton Lodge. Bills of the Grafton estate make reference to "the New Lodge" or "the new farm," which is sometimes "by Ashwood" and sometimes "Ashton Wood Farm." Once the place is called "Ashton Lodge" but the bill is superscribed "by Ashwood." It is impossible to tell which of these two farms is in question, and whether the bills refer merely to new farm buildings, or a rebuilt farmhouse, or an entirely new farm.

Jonathan Robinson and his family had a long tenancy here, from about 1849 to 1894 and perhaps longer(i). In 1895, Joshua Wickens farmed at Ashwood; he was a son of Smith Wickens of Hartwell, whose other son, Smith, was a grazier in Ashton parish(ii). Soon after this, in 1897, Henry Weston was recorded as tenant, and Robert Weston was farming there in 1911(ii).

### MANOR FARM

This farm presents a difficult problem, for the land under this title has at various times been worked from the Manor House, the Warren and from Manor Farm in Roade. The land lying between Ashton and Roade has been called Manor Farm, Moat Farm and possibly Warren Farm. In the 18th century the Manor, as we have seen, was used as a dwelling house, and for the manorial court; later it was deserted; during this time, and earlier, the enclosed land round it may have been worked from the Warren, which

- (i) Whellan, 1849 and 1874 and Kelly, as in footnote on previous page.
- (ii) Rate books in the possession of Mrs. Stamp, with entries for 1897, 1895 and 1911.

Richard Linnell, member of a farming family, occupied in 1724. In 1832 Stephen Ashby, living at the Warren, farmed the two Backsides, part of Cooks Close, Folly Close, Hop-yard, Windmill (besides other fields)(i); all this land, except for the higher part of Cooks Close, now belongs to other farms, not to Manor Farm. In 1832, also, William and John Blunt were farming Summerthorne, the Happy Land, the bottom of Cooks Close, Paddocks field, Manor Field, Stone Pits and Berrystead; the last three fields now belong to Manor Farm. The Manor House was certainly a farm house in 1816, when the Enclosure Award records it as Moated Farm Homestead, and as Moat Farm, as we have seen, it is mentioned in more than one bill from the Grafton Estate. When William Blunt, the tenant, died in 1954, and the Manor became four cottages, the land was finally attached to the Warren, and had thereafter an astonishing number of tenants, not all of whom were farmers.

Just after Mr. Neely came to Ashton the Warren was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Merry, who ran a bakery there as well as a farm. William Linnell, who took over from the Merrys, did not use the bakehouse. When John Bliss took up his residence in Vale Farm, the Warren left the Linnell family and was taken by the Checkleys, in 1908(ii). Again the bakery was shut down after their departure, and the house went to Mrs. Diver in about 1914. She sold to Mr. Peasland, and after him, Arthur Smith and his wife farmed the land, but sold Berrystead, Stonepits and possibly other fields to a Roade farmer. After the Smiths, Samuel Flood, followed by A. E. Collins, ran the Warren as a farm, but with much diminished land. For at the Duke's sale of 1918 three fields in Hurcomb's Lane (the Slype, Follys Close and the adjoining field) were sold separately, as well as the top part of Cooks Close; all these fields had previously been attached to the Warren(iii).

After the Collins family left Ashton in 1946, the Warren became a private residence. It was bought by Mr. Bladon Peake of London, and then passed to Mr. and Mrs. Kitchen of Northampton, who own it at the present time.

Meanwhile the remaining land belonging to Manor Farm (a name which is at present being used for the Warren) had gone to Mr. Giddings of Roade, together with some fields in Roade parish. Manor Farm was bought by Mr. C. D. Cripps in 1952. Besides the fields on the west side of Roade Hill which have usually been part of Manor Farm, 25 acres at Rush Hill, by the Roade railway bridge, are now included in the farm. The buildings in the Manor House lane are being extensively improved and added to, and since August 1952 the land has been worked by Mr. F. Chaplin from one of the Manor cottages. Thus this farm, which for some years was lost to Roade, has now returned to this parish, and is finally connected with the Manor House.

### SUNNYSIDE

This farm, at the Ashton end of Hartwell village, is our newest farm; it consists of about 22 acres, of which some 5½ lie in the parish of Hartwell, while the farmhouse and buildings and the rest of the land are in Ashton. The house and buildings were put up in about 1912 for Mr. William Butlin, a descendant of the William Butlin already mentioned in these pages, Perpetual Curate of Hartwell for 57 years. Before the building of the farm house, some of the fields

- (i) Plan made for London and Birmingham Railway in 1832, deposited at the County Offices, Northampton.
- (ii) For information about the various tenants of The Warren we are indebted to Mrs. Green, Mr. Dudley of Hartwell and Mrs. Arthur Gardner.
- (iii) See map of this farm in Pierce, Thorpe & Marriott's catalogue of this sale.



belonging to Sunnyside had been farmed by a Butlin in Roade, who left them to a relation. Mr. Jackson, present owner of Sunnyside, has been a member of the Ashton Parish Council for about thirty years, and although he lives on the outskirts of Hartwell, his experience and good sense have been used to our advantage for so long that we regard him as our property too(i).

Two smallholdings remain to be mentioned. The first, the pig and poultry farm belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Buckingham, is in the parish of Hartwell; but the Buckinghams have very real connections with Ashton affairs, and besides, the land they are now farming was glebe land until after the first world war. In 1919 it was sold (as Rectus Field) to a market gardener called Jones, and later to Mr. Buckingham(ii).

The second smallholding is the battery chicken farm in Stonepits Field, at the top of Roade Hill, which was started in 1948/9 by Mr. Darbishire. It became the property of Mr. Burnham in 1950, and was run for a time from a house in the Manor lane, but he has now built a house at the top of Roade Hill(iii).

The Ashton farms, today, and especially Vale Farm, with its up-to-date equipment and methods, are a far cry from the farms of 70 years ago. We have already mentioned John Bliss's sheep. These were dipped in a backwater of Bozenham Mill and sheared in a pen in the open fields. George Richardson, Bliss's shepherd at the beginning of this century, would do twenty in a day by hand(iv). At about the same date, Edward Woods did his milking in a cowshed behind Spinney Hill, and carried the milk back to Home Farm in two buckets on a yoke(v).

Mr. H. G. Summerton can remember seeing corn being sown broadcast in the fields, sixty years ago. When he worked for John Bliss, he drove a team of four draught horses. Bliss had about twenty altogether on the various farms, though they were later reduced to twelve. Sometimes there would be sixteen working at one time in a big field, four to a team. Today there are no draught horses in the parish, and only two working ponies. Mr. Summerton can remember binders being used, with horses, in 1900, to replace the old method of tying sheaves by hand; but it was not until much later that the horses began to give place to tractors. Mr. A. Wilkins, who was working on Ashton Lodge farm just after the turn of the century, remembers that reaping was done then with a sail-machine. This was horse-drawn; a knife low down cut the corn, and there were four sails, three of which gathered the corn on to a platform, while the fourth pushed it off in bundles. Men coming behind stooked the bundles as they fell. A little later, before the first world war, John Bliss had the first Massey-Harris reaper in the village. When Mr. W. Adams first began to farm Ashton Lodge, during the first world war, he had eight working horses, which he used with drills and hoes very similar to those used today with a tractor; but after 1930 he went over completely to machinery. Mr. Evans was still using cart horses on Home Farm till three years ago. Mr. Adams had some land tractor-ploughed in 1918, under contract with Mr. Harnwell of Roade; later he had his own tractor. It seems to have been on Ashton Lodge farm, too, that the earliest mechanical device we have record of was tried out; when in 1879, H. E. Whiting of Castlethorpe, brought his steam-cultivator there. His bill for £100(v) was

for "Steam cultivating etc. finding coal and carting same, 2 horses and men for water carting, as agreed." In the same year the Duke's agent paid to Elizabeth Martin, £9 6s. 0d. for work done at the same farm, by three horses with a man and boy, at 18/- a day. Modernising the land seems to have been rather an expensive process.

\* \* \*

*"The careful wife displays her frugal hoard."*

(JOHN CLARE : Sunday)

*Kate Oldmeadow* : I don't suppose your life is very like mine, even if your husband does the same job as mine did—and my father and eldest brother too. A ganger's job on the railway, in my childhood, was long hours and short pay.

*Susan Littlewood* : How long ago was that, then?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : I was born seventy-five years ago, but I was the youngest of a family of ten, and I don't think things altered much from the time my mother was first married. She'd always be up at 4.30 or 5.0 to get breakfast for them before they went up the line. Work started at six, and if they were working near Roade or Hanslope, it was a long way to walk. Bicycles were unheard of then; in fact it wasn't until after the first war, when my children were in their teens, that they were within the ordinary man's pocket. So it was up early to light a fire of sticks in the grate and boil the kettle for tea, and perhaps make some porridge.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I'm lucky, having a Raeburn that keeps in all night. Of course the older council houses only have fires in the sitting-room with an oven beside them, but some people rent electric stoves as well. Then we can get cereals in packets, so we needn't make porridge, though my husband would rather have it in winter. But I don't get up till quarter to seven. My husband has to be at work at 8.30, but he's got a bicycle if he's on a distant piece of line; and my brother, who works at Roade factory, can leave here at five minutes to eight and be in time, because he put an engine on his bike. My other brother is a signal man, so his wife has to arrange her life by his shifts—10 p.m. to 6 in the morning one week, then six in the morning till two in the afternoon, then from two round to ten again.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : In my young day the men who went to Wolverton to work had to walk to Roade for the workers' train at quarter past five—there was no Roade factory, of course. Does your husband take his dinner with him?

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Yes, usually sandwiches, and a flask of tea. He likes sardines and cheese, and eggs are easy just now. And I put in an orange when they're cheap, and our own apples when we've got them, and tomatoes, things like that.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : You certainly have more choice than we had. Tinned food wasn't seen in the village till long after I was married, and I don't mind telling you I still don't feel easy with it. My mother always liked to send my father with something hot. She'd bake a pie or make a pudding in a basin, and they were allowed to warm them up on the railway. Squab pudding was a favourite—apples, sugar and cloves boiled together in a pastry crust. When he worked at Bozenham Mill for a time, when I was about six, I used to take his dinner to him. I remember watching my mother wrap up a steaming hot stew in a basin, with greens and potatoes in a dish, covered with a plate, tie it all up in a cloth and off I'd run as fast as I could, to get it there hot. I did the same for my husband when he was working near—though he sometimes had cheese or bacon sandwiches.

- (i) Details about Sunnyside from Mr. Charles Jackson.
- (ii) Details from Mr. and Mrs. Buckingham.
- (iii) Details from Mr. Burnham.
- (iv) Mrs. T. Richardson.
- (v) Mr. Albert Wilson.
- (vi) In the Grafton Collection.



*A Sunday dress worn by Kitty Cole in Ashton in 1820, and now in the possession of her descendants, the Richardsons.*

*The dress is made of cotton print—old gold, purple, green and white. The bodice is tight-fitting, with a neckline off the shoulder: in the neck is a fine pique vest embroidered and buttoned down the front. The full sleeve has six rows of wide gathering at the top and is tight at the wrist. The bodice and sleeves are lined with unbleached calico. The dress fastens at the back with hooks and eyes. It is hand-made throughout. With it is worn a coal-scuttle bonnet and fine white mittens. A shawl would also be worn round the shoulders for out of doors. The dress can be seen also on p.59, worn in 1953, by Kitty Cole's great-great-grand-daughter, Mrs. Lever.*

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Sounds as if you worked harder than I have to. How about housework ? Did you have much to do ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : Well, our cottage was smaller than your council house. Yours is a three-bedroom one, isn't it ? My mother lived in one of the Pykle cottages.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : The ones that are gone now ? At least there's the lower storey of one of them left still in ruins.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : That's right. There were three in a row, and then a barn at one end. My mother's cottage had been her mother-in-law's before her, and my husband and I had it for a time later. The windows were arched downstairs, like church windows. You went in straight to a large room—we called it "the house"—and then on the left was the living-room, with the fireplace and a small oven beside it. We used to cook the whole meal, often, in one pot, to save fuel, with potatoes hung separately in a bag to keep them from smashing.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I saw a demonstration of one-pot meals at the W.I. last month. They had a big pot with a steamer inside. I know my mother used to do the one-pot trick often. I use a pressure cooker ; I can get a meal at night in twenty minutes.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : We had nothing like that, and no real kitchen, only a tiny lean-to at the back. Then upstairs we had just two bedrooms, one very small one where the children slept. The last house in the row was very tiny, with only one bedroom and no back door at all, and there was only room for one bed. So you might think there wasn't a lot to clean, but it seemed to take longer. The cottages were old even when my mother lived there, with uneven floors and ceilings, and not what you'd call labour-saving.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : And of course you'd no electric gadgets, no iron or sweeper or anything like that. Though we hadn't either till after the last war, in fact only a few years ago, because at first there wasn't enough power in the village for power fittings. And now it's very expensive, and you have to put up with power-cuts. We have an electric copper, and one or two people have washing machines. And we can use electricity for heating, too, to eke out the coal ; at 5/- a hundredweight we have to be careful with it.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : Yes, we paid ninepence a hundredweight, but that seemed a lot to us. I used to collect bundles of sticks and leave them for my husband to pick up on his way back from work. Most of us collected wood whenever we could. It's certainly easier to press a switch. We had a copper, of course, out at the back of our cottage. I lit a fire of sticks under it most mornings. And when we were very small, I remember, my mother used sometimes to take her clothes to old Mrs. Webb across the brook to be mangled—a penny for a dozen garments. It was a very long, heavy affair, that mangle, and the rollers were filled with stones, so you always knew when Lizzie Webb was mangling. Another thing, you can have linoleum, and that's easy to clean. Our stone floors were too uneven for anything but matting, or our own home-made rugs.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : We make rugs too, a lot of us. We don't get everything ready made, you see ! How did your mother make hers ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : She liked the rag-rugs made on sacking, but I've always made mats in Cumberland stitch, thrums on canvas.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I like the knotted kind of rugs, but my neighbour does hers with wool on a sewing machine. What else did you make ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : My father and brothers made some of our furniture—tables, cupboards and boxbeds, and our

chairs—though we had these caned by old Jimmy Loveridge, who came from Towcester with new rushes and worked at people's houses. My mother made all our sheets, towels, pillowcases and even our mattresses ; some were straw, some flock, and one she made from wool she'd collected from the fences and hedges—you can imagine how long that took. Ticking came from Northampton, like the unbleached calico and linen for bedclothes. My mother always paid into the Clothing Club, and once a year she took us all to Northampton by train to choose materials and to buy hats for us children. I'll never forget those days. We had to get up early to catch the train at Roade ; the fare was ninepence return on a market day. We'd spend all day choosing, and leave the heavy things for the carrier to bring ; but I can always remember having too much to carry even then, and staggering along the road home, almost too tired to move.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : There's none of that difficulty now, though we could do with more buses on our route. I couldn't make sheets or anything of that, but I do make all the childrens' clothes, and my husband mends their shoes. I reckon I'm lucky they don't wear as much as you had to wear.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : I think you are. When I first went to school—I was just four—I had on a woollen vest, a chemise, flannel stays, two flannel petticoats and a woollen dress, and over that a white pinafore with long sleeves ; black stockings and boots, or heavy shoes in summer. The brother next to me had a velvet suit for school, I remember, with a wide lace collar, my mother's own pillow-lace ; and my own children, though their skirts were shorter, wore very much the same things.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Very different from the cotton frocks and little woollen dresses they wear now, and the boys are even freer in their shorts and shirts. How about your own working dress ? Did you ever go without stockings like us ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : Never. My mother never wore anything thinner than black wool, and always boots. Her working dress was a black skirt and bodice, the bodice lined and with a piece of lace for a front ; over that a white apron, and a sacking one on top for dirty work. At least two petticoats would go underneath, heavy stays, chemise and vest, and black, spring-sided boots. I remember her best dress when I was small—black with a lavender sprig on it, and very smart I thought it, too. My own working dress was much the same when I first married, except that skirts were an inch or two off the ground. The only big difference was that I didn't wear a cap. My mother put one on as soon as she was married—usually a lace one, with a silk one for Sundays. And she would never go out without a bonnet on. Mens' clothes seem to have changed least of all, though we had none of the overalls and dungarees your men have, and everything was harder and heavier to wear.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I remember my father wearing corduroys for railway work, but it's certainly all lighter clothes now. Were smocks worn on the farms when you were a girl ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : There were one or two in my mother's day, but I think they must have stopped rather early in this district. I can just remember one old carter wearing one when I was tiny—Jones, the Waggoner at Home Farm.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : And did you wear all those heavy clothes for working in the garden, too ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : Certainly, and a lot of work I used to do, and my mother as well, when she could get time. Their garden, we had it after them, ran up beside the right of way across Follies Close, and my father grew excellent onions there, besides potatoes, of course, greens (cabbage mostly), carrots, turnips and runner beans. He kept a pig there as well, and chickens.



*Mrs. Littlewood* : Where did their food come from ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : We could get barley meal for the pig for ten shillings a hundredweight, and bran was only 6/- ; often we grew barley on our allotment. Our spare potatoes went to the pig too, and scraps—though I can tell you there weren't many of those

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Where did the pig come from ? Did you breed them ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : No, we hadn't really room for that, and pigs were cheap in my childhood. We had ours from the Vale usually, from Miss Linnell. It would cost about eight or ten shillings at eight weeks old. When it was ready, the butcher would kill it in the backyard, cut its throat, and my mother always had the blood in a jug for pig puddings.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : My father does that too. But you can't have a pig killed at home now without a lot of form-filling, and they use a humane killer. The Pig Club always helped a lot with the food, especially during the last war, when meal was strictly rationed<sup>(i)</sup>. Did you cure your own bacon and hams ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : No, our fireplace wasn't big enough for smoking. Sometimes we got a farmer to do a ham for us, but we usually sold most of our pig. I well remember as a child going round the village with a list, from house to house, and writing down "Mrs. Garrett, spare ribs, Mrs. Jones, half a leg, Mrs. Ward, breast and side"; and then my brother and I would take the joints round on a wheelbarrow.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I don't think there's many in Ashton now who do their own curing ; mostly they send to the butcher or to the Blisworth bacon factory. How did you feed the fowls ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : With our own corn, and scraps. My father had an allotment on the Happy Land, not far from our cottage.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : My husband has one there, too, but he only uses it for vegetables.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : We used most of the ground for corn, and in a good year we could feed the fowls off the allotment and perhaps even have a little for our own use. We took the corn to Bozenham Mill, to be ground. And, of course, in those days everyone went gleaning. We'd be told which field was to be gleaned and we'd all get there early. We weren't allowed into the field before eight o'clock, so we stood outside the gate until the sexton rang the small church bell (the ting tang, we called it). Then we had to wait, if they were still harvesting, till the bobby, the last sheaf, was cut down. If we were up in the Ashwood Farm fields, maybe some of the lads from Hartwell would push in, and there'd be a fight. We carried a bucksheet, a sack cut open to make a square, with tapes at each corner ; you put it on your head when it was full, and you had a short-ear bag as well, round your waist. There was a threshing engine used to stand at the end of the Pykle in gleaning time, waiting to beat the corn before we took it to the mill.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : That sounds like what my mother's told me. She often went gleaning, up to the first world war and

(i) During the second world war, Ashton and Hartwell formed a Pig Club under the auspices of the Small Pig Keepers Council, thus ensuring rations of meal. The Ashton secretary was Mrs. West of Orchard Cottage, who left the village in 1947 and was succeeded by Mr. R. James. Rations were brought in bulk and collected by members of the club from Mr. Albert Shakeshaft at the Crown. In 1948 Ashton formed its own club, the meal from that time being distributed from Orchard Cottage. The Pig Club not only made it possible to obtain meal during difficult times, but it also provided cheap insurance. Incidentally, no claims were made during Mr. James' office, which speaks well for the healthy state of Ashton's pigs. Since the end of meal rationing, members have been buying privately, but the club is still registered and affiliated to the S.P.K.C.

afterwards, and there are one or two men here who still do, for their fowls, though it isn't a village affair any longer.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : It was a good way of saving money. One year I remember, especially, when we went gleaning in Goose Acre, on the Mill Road. It was hairy-jack wheat, and it'd been a wet year, so the ears were very big—I counted 82 corns in one ear once. Mother and I got more by a sackful in one gleaning than my father had off his allotment in a whole year. But then we had to be careful with our money. My father earned less than a pound a week, and there were ten of us to bring up. When my husband started on the railway he had 18/- a week—that was in 1898 ; when he was 21 he was getting 20/- a week, for a 56½ hour week, and the wage rose, but very slowly.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I believe it was 18/- a week my father earned on the railway, forty years ago. My husband gets £5 10s. 0d. at present. But he's glad of the chance to do overtime, fogging or snow-clearing, and now he gets passes for all of us on any railway—even abroad. All this helps with the high prices. We pay 24/- rent and rates for instance.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : We paid 1/3 rent. Our cottage belonged to the Duke of Grafton, like most of the village. His agent used to come to the Crown each half year, and stop all day for people to take their money. You got a small check, for a pint of beer or vinegar or paraffin. My mother always had the vinegar to make pickles—it was dear in those days. A lot of the men would take the beer, towards evening. I dare say in some ways our food was easier to find than yours, though. We could get milk from nearly all the Ashton farms, a penny for a big jug of skim milk, when I was a child, and we had wonderful butter from Miss Linnell, firm and sweet.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Nobody sells milk or butter here now, though my mother had her butter from Mrs. Woods at Home Farm for about 11d. a pound, and milk from Mr. Rogers at the Vale. We all buy butter from the shop now, of course, though I do remember one or two made their own during the war, when rations were extra tight, by shaking up the milk in a bottling jar. And our milk comes from goodness knows where, by way of Northampton.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : I don't suppose you make your bread now, either, as we usually did. All the farms had ovens, of course, and most of them had brewhouses in my mother's young days, though when I was a child they mostly had beer from Manning's in Northampton. I remember the dray coming out to the Paddocks. But Mrs. James Malcher, who came there when I grew up, was a great wine-maker ; her blackberry and raspberry vinegar were well-known, and her elderberry wine, and she made metheglin too, with honey from her own bees. And I remember that when James Malcher died, his wife went and told the bees ; she said they would leave otherwise. That was in 1914, and I've never heard of anyone here doing that since then. Yes, we had a good deal of our food from the Paddocks farm—meat for as little as 4d. a pound, pork sometimes if we had none, or mutton, and eggs were 22 for a shilling. You could make a good cake in those days. But then again, there was no such thing as icing sugar to decorate it. My wedding cake had hundreds and thousands on it.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : And to think that last year we were paying fivepence halfpenny each for eggs, in the winter, and even in summer they're twopence halfpenny. And our butter costs 4/2, and sugar 7½d. a pound, and that makes jam-making quite dear if you have to buy your fruit.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : We made all our jam, of course, and sugar cost only ¾d. a pound. But we didn't do as much preserving as you do—in fact I can't recall my mother doing

any preserving, except that she sometimes put up blackberries and covered them with candlewax.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Surely she didn't make her own candles, as well as everything else ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : No, candles came from old Jeffcut the carrier, as well as needles and pins and such small goods. But she made soap, and a wonderful cure-all ointment, with groundsel simmered and home-made lard ; and then when we had chest colds she rubbed us with her embrocation—turps and vinegar, that was, and eggs. That was good for rheumatism and lumbago as well, we reckoned, and most people suffered from rheumatics.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I think they still do.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : But we didn't trouble the doctor much otherwise. Perhaps our food was fresher than yours, or perhaps it was just that when there were no telephones and the doctor had to ride on horseback from Roade or Hanslope, you thought twice before you called him out. People did pay in to a fund every month for the doctor, though ; one girl got 1/- a month for collecting the money.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : How about the district nurse ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : Not heard of when I was young. The only nurses my mother ever had were her neighbours, and many's the time I've known her go out in the afternoon to sit with someone who was ill, and I've done the same. One or two girls who were at school with me went out as companions or housekeepers to old people. If a married woman wanted to eke out her husband's earnings, it was a question of domestic work, of course. My mother used to go out cleaning, mostly at the Vale and sometimes to Mr. Henry Linnell at Bozenham Mill, and I used to help her sometimes. A penny an hour was the rate then, and later it went up to 6d. There wasn't much you could do, only cleaning.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : Most of us housewives try to earn a bit now, but we have more part-time jobs to choose from. I do half a day in one of the offices at Roade factory, and my neighbour does the same at the Unit in Hartwell ; then one or two do dressmaking and one does hairdressing. And most of us don't have many children to look after. I have two, and they're both at school now.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : I only had two ; but my mother, with her large family, had to wait till I was at school before she could go out to work.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : But your life sounds all work, to me. Didn't you ever have any fun ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : To be sure we did—though perhaps you wouldn't call it fun. We never went to Northampton except for our yearly shopping ; not till long after I was married, when the buses were running, did I think of going for the sake of going. And in our own houses we just sat and knitted or sewed ; my mother I remember always making lace, or on Sundays reading her Bible, which she knew well.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I couldn't work without my wireless, I know that, and we're all getting used to having television now. But didn't any entertainments ever come here ?

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : The fair on Feast day, of course—that was a great occasion always. I remember once or twice the Miss Neelys had a magic lantern show at the school and their brother had his nigger minstrel troupe.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I don't know how you stood such a quiet life.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : It's what you're used to, isn't it ? I think we enjoyed our pleasures more for having to make them ourselves. We didn't want much entertainment in the evenings, for we liked to go to bed early. I never remember my mother being up after half past nine or ten o'clock, unless she was helping someone ill.

*Mrs. Littlewood* : I'd rather live now than then, I can tell you.

*Mrs. Oldmeadow* : I think on the whole we were happy, though we were often anxious about our living and we hadn't any luxuries. I expect you'll be surprised to hear that I'd never seen a jelly till after I was married. But I can take you back to a past which will make even my childhood seem very flighty to you. When I was first married in 1901 I had as next-door neighbour an elderly widow, who was born in 1818. She seemed to me unbelievably old—she lived to be 86, by the way. Her black dresses touched the ground, and under her three petticoats she wore chemises made of unbleached calico, cut high in the neck and with an extra piece crossing over the front and tying at the back ; the sleeves gathered into a cuff and picot-edged. She used these as nightdresses too, but she used to show me her one linen one, with a calico dressing-jacket and a pair of white stockings, which she had put by for her laying-out. On Sundays she wore her best lace cap and a small silk apron over her black flowered dress, and she would get up extra early so as to finish her work by nine o'clock ; after that she wouldn't even break a lump of coal, but would sit warming her hands by a tiny fire of sticks. When she was married, her husband earned 6/- a week on an Ashton farm, but he had a 2/- rise after his marriage. She used to tell me that when the children were small she often had nothing to feed them on but a few small potatoes, which she cooked in a three-legged pot over the fire. I remember her coming in while I was bathing my boy in a tub by the fire. "What are you doing to that child ?" she'd say, "I don't know why you want to put him in water. I never had a bath, and I'm as clean as anybody else." And with that, she'd stalk out, bent over her stick ; but she always came back again. She belonged to a different world from mine. She could remember when the railway first came here, and she'd learned to read, as well as make lace, at Mrs. Fearn's in Little Ashton. We shan't see anyone like her again(i).

\* \* \*

(i) This dialogue is built on very many conversations, but we have been especially helped by Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. J. Mills, Mrs. Pickering and Mrs. Fisher.



*A chapel outing about 1910*

*"In busy motion here and there  
Like visitors to feast or fair . . ."*  
(JOHN CLARE: July)

*"Times have changed since I was a boy. There was no way of getting any amusement outside the village sixty years ago, unless you walked to Roade and got a train to Northampton. You couldn't go there at night anyhow, so people had to make their own amusements. There was something on nearly every week—socials, dances, whist-drives. But the young people want more now. They can't amuse themselves any more."*

No doubt something like this will always be said by an older generation about a younger, but there is no doubt that Ashton folk did amuse themselves well in the old days, individually and as a community. Until 1921, however, there was no building specially designed for village recreations. The old tithe barn was used for gatherings here, certainly seventy years ago and perhaps soon after the Enclosures of 1816, when it was no longer needed for the collection of tithes. Mrs. Curtis remembers celebrations held there for Queen Victoria's Jubilee.

*"There was a great archway over the gate leading from the Rectory drive, with evergreens all over it. Tables up the centre of the barn, and at the ends, and the side table was covered with food. Big pieces of silverside, hams and other kinds of meat, and every kind of pickle and sauce you can imagine. There were races in the Rectory field behind the barn before the tea, and dancing and free beer afterwards."*

This was in 1897. For the Coronation of George V, John Bliss lent the big barn at Vale Farm. There were races again in the field in front of the barn, with yards of calico as prizes among other things, and a huge tea afterwards. Last year we celebrated the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in Lords Close. The children ran races between showers of rain, and we all crowded into an outsize marquee for tea afterwards. We couldn't manage silverside, but we had plenty of ham, and with a few changes in our clothes, we could easily have imagined ourselves back in the reign of Victoria.

Bliss's barn was used more than once for occasions such as these, while for whist-drives the school could be borrowed. But Ashton needed a hall, and the subject was discussed in committee soon after the first world war. Mrs. Fanny Shakeshaft gave a piece of land in Cooks Close, under the railway embankment, and here, in 1922, the Ashton Recrea-

tion Room (more often known now as The Hut) was put up at a total cost of £160. Mr. A. Wilkins told us how he and Will Taylor fetched it from Wareham in Dorset. *"It was collected from Roade in Bliss's farm wagon, and put together in Cooks Close. People in the parish did all the work, except that we had a bricklayer to do the chimney stacks and put up the piers."* To raise money to pay for the hut, shares were taken up by people in the village, and lots were drawn for repayment at each annual meeting; besides this, money was raised in various ways. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. W. Adams held more than one fete at Ashton Lodge for the purpose.

At the opening ceremony, on December 20th, 1922, *"Mrs. Shakeshaft, in declaring the room open, said how pleased she was to give the site, and complimented all on the splendid room. She considered it was what had been wanted in the village for years, and hoped many happy hours would be spent there."*(i) Her hopes have certainly been fulfilled. The Hut has seen dancing, concerts, whist, games of all kinds, conjurors, cricket suppers, Christmas trees, meetings and jumble sales. It is administered by a committee elected annually by village residents, and is hired at the discretion of this committee. It can be hired for private parties, and during the war it was rented by the L.C.C. for the education of evacuee children. More recently, the Northamptonshire County Council rented it between 1949 and 1953 for the School Meals Service. The committee holds a weekly whist-drive which provides a small but steady income; for several years it has been possible for the committee to hold a children's Christmas party, at which every child of school age in the village receives a present from Father Christmas from a huge tree. At the present time, a scheme is under consideration for building cloakrooms for the Recreation Room. Since it was first put up, it has been a real centre of village life, and we can justifiably say that in it we still, in spite of the attractions of Northampton, provide our own entertainment.

Of clubs and societies to promote such entertainment, Ashton has had only a few. Fifty years ago a Girls' Friendly Society, which met at the Rectory, was very popular. At various times there have been Youth Clubs, principally boys; there was one flourishing in the 1920's under W. J. Tew senior. A community club was started by Mr. Goodingham soon after the last war, and this ran for a year or two. In 1953 a boys' club was started at the instigation of a group of

(i) Parish Magazine, December, 1922.



boys, headed by Gordon Wilson and Kenneth Malin. This club is run by the boys themselves through their own committee, but Mr. E. Shipman presides at meetings, and much of the undoubted success of this club is due to his enthusiasm and drive. As we write, the club is paying off the cost of a billiards table, purchased second-hand and put up by the boys with the assistance of Mr. D. Malin.

A Women's Institute was formed in Ashton in about 1925. Mrs. Hurst was its first president, being succeeded in turn by Mrs. Beveridge and Mrs. Martin; all three were the wives of Rectors of our parish. The Institute flourished for ten years, but membership had by then fallen below the required number, so it was disbanded. In 1951 it was re-formed by popular demand and has kept up a membership of between 30 and 40. Mrs. James Fisher has been its only president up to date. Four members of the Institute have contributed demonstrations and talks to the yearly programme, as well as a former member, Mrs. Ernest Malcher of Hartwell, who visited her old Institute to talk about pillow-lace this year. It is, in fact, the chief aim of the Institute to foster a community feeling in Ashton—a feeling which, we hope, can be found here and there in our scrapbook.

Among outdoor sports, cricket is undoubtedly the favourite, and it has been played in Ashton for a very long time, though sixty years ago quoits, played in the field beside the Warren, was more popular. An Ashton Cricket Club was formed soon after the first world war, largely through Mrs. W. Adams.

*"I suggested the men should play in the field opposite the house (Ashton Lodge). I used to provide tea, sugar, cups and so on, and a charge was made for cakes and sandwiches. I looked after the money. It became a tremendous success, and it was nothing to have to provide fifty teas or more at a time. The players used the first instalments of money to buy fencing to keep out the cows. They spent a lot of time levelling the ground. When they bought the pavilion, they put it up near the Warren, as Ashton Lodge was rather far from the village. The club flourished, and began to play matches away against other teams."*

Ashton was particularly fortunate in its first patrons, since Mr. W. Adams was a county cricketer (playing in 1920, 1921, 1928 and 1929) and his encouragement and help were invaluable. During the 1930's the club lapsed, but it was revived in 1945, largely through the energetic promotion of the late Mr. C. R. Badman. Mr. Bernard Sunley made it possible for the club to get going again by allowing members to make a pitch in Lords Close; in 1949, his gift of a bungalow, which was converted into a pavilion, was of great benefit to players, watchers and caterers. Expert advice was taken on the subject of the pitch, and the enthusiasts worked on it in their spare time, till it became something to be proud of. The club entertains many local teams, as well as some from further away, during the season, and makes a point of encouraging the boys to play in practice games and matches. Several wives have helped with teas, but the two regulars, Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Bill Godfrey, deserve special mention(i).

Ashton has its fishing enthusiasts, who are willing to bicycle long distances to find a good spot, while the boys get their apprenticeship by the Tove or the canal. Again, many enjoy shooting when it is available. The Grafton Hunt used to appear in this part of the world often, but the sport was only a spectacle to most people; since 1914 we have seldom seen the hunt this way. Mrs. Robinson, who lived at Rectory Farm as a child, remembers helping her mother to take out beer and bread and cheese to the huntsmen. Otters used to be hunted at Bozenham Mill; hounds were brought in a

van from Roade Station, or else the hunt would work down from Yardley Gobion, and Ashton people would crowd to watch them go past on the way to Stoke Bruerne.

One day stands out in people's memories, when three separate packs met on the towpath by Grafton Regis—otter hounds, stag hounds and fox hounds(i). Today if we no longer have many chances to watch or follow a hunt, there is county cricket in Northampton, football and other spectator sports. The horse races at Easton Neston, near Towcester, have been an attraction on public holidays for many years. Fifty years ago, traps and wagonettes used to drive through Ashton on the way to the course, the drivers sometimes tossing pennies to the children standing on the corner of the road(ii). Since 1951, too, there has been the added attraction of the motor-racing at Silverstone.

But on such occasions Ashton people were only spectators. Their own day was Feast Day, which must go back a very long time. *"The wake follows the feast of St. Michael,"* Bridges wrote in the early 18th century; as far back as anyone can remember, Ashton Feast has been held on the Monday following the 11th of October, with sometimes a Feast on the Saturday before as well. Those who can go back sixty years or more remember the Feast on the Green and up the lane opposite, or in the yard and orchard of the Crown(iii). Shepherd's travelling fair, with swing boats and coconut shies, and a roundabout worked by a pony, was anxiously looked for year after year. There were shooting galleries too, and old Mr. West brought along his home-made rock, while Ann Cook sold stewed pears, from her tree along the Stoke Road.

*"One year, about 1910 it would be, there were two fairs, one on the Green and one up at the Warren. But Shepherd was the man we all waited for. When he died in 1952 he was buried in Roade and there were a hundred cars at his funeral. People used to say he was the straightest man in England. On Feast Monday, Blind Bob was a familiar figure with his melodeon; he walked from Paulerspury, guided by a big black dog, which was usually shut in the barn at the pub, while dancing went on in the living-room. Sometimes on Feast Monday night there would be a dance in the schoolroom, with a piano (the Malchers') borrowed for the occasion, and old George Webb playing his fiddle(v)."*

In later years the Feast was held in the Recreation Field behind the Crown; but the good old custom has long ago died out, and in the last eight years we have only seen one travelling fair in the village; it seemed a poor thing beside the Feasts of the past.

Other traditional days are no longer observed. It is at least forty years since the young men of Ashton blacked their faces on Plough Monday and went round singing outside the cottages, and then going in and asking for food and drink(v), and the May Day celebrations have died out in the last ten years. Dancing seems to have been more popular in the old days than it is now—that is, dancing in the village; but since transport improved, outings have increased. Most summers see two or three bus loads being whisked off in the early morning to Clacton or Hunstanton or Skegness, or, perhaps, to London to see an ice-hockey match or to go to a theatre. The old people, and the children, have had their special outings, to the pantomime, or to Wicksteed Park.

The children, indeed, have always come in for treats, from the hot-cross buns in the church porch sixty years ago, made

(i) Mr. J. Mills, Mrs. T. Richardson, Mr. A. Wilson.

(ii) Mrs. T. Richardson.

(iii) Mrs. Pickering, Mrs. Bennett and many others.

(iv) Mrs. Curtis, Mrs. Bennett, Mrs. T. Richardson and others.

(v) Miss Emma and Miss Elizabeth Shakeshaft.

(i) Details from minute-book of the Ashton Cricket Club, by permission.

There is always plenty to do in Ashton. But, taking it all round, the two recreations which must have enjoyed the most continuous popularity are whist-drives, and that most English of sports, village cricket.

\* \* \*

(JOHN CLARE: *Cowper Green*)

"Murdered by Rebeckah her Daughter in Law, ye 7th in ye Night w<sup>n</sup> asleep."

But no village, however isolated, can remain so in time of war. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the men between the ages of 18 and 45 were duly listed by the constable, and required to give good reason why they should not serve in the militia. Some of the Ashton men drawn for service were allowed to fall back on a substitute; Jeremiah Wickens, the shopkeeper, did this, and William Willcox, a cordwainer, who afterwards kept the Crown. Others joined up, and perhaps their military duties took them at least some distance from their village. Some years later, another Ashton man travelled far as a result of war. In 1902, there died "Soldier" Welch, at the age of 72, a man whose service in the Crimean War was recorded in the burial register by Mr. Baldock:—

Crimea	Sebastopol	Turkish	Long service and good conduct
	Inkerman		
	Balaklava		

A black and white photograph of a group of women in traditional costumes, likely during a folk dance performance. They are standing outdoors in front of trees. The costumes include long white dresses with dark aprons and headscarves. Some women are holding small objects, possibly props or instruments.

To the Crimean veteran's record we can add, in the next generation, that of Thomas Richardson, who enlisted with the First Northamptonshire Regiment in 1906. He went to India in 1908 and transferred to the 64th Royal Garrison Artillery a year later. He was in Aden when the 1914-18 war started. After being sent to France, he won a French medal for bravery in the field, repairing communicating wires under fire.

Wives and daughters were drawn into these national emergencies. A Comforts for Troops Fund, from which parcels and money were sent, was organised in both wars. Sales of work, dances, a pony gymkhana, whist-drives and other activities, were carried on to raise money for these funds and for the Red Cross. Both wars, too, have seen a strong and keen working party making garments for the forces. Women took over men's jobs in Ashton, as they did everywhere else, in the last war. Mrs. Edwards and later Mrs. Summerton, did the postman's job excellently, for instance. In 1914, no evacuees came to Ashton, though some soldiers were billeted here and put to work on the farms. In 1939 the first evacuees of the war arrived, some from Kingsgate School in Finchley, others from Deptford. Later, children came here from Welling and Bexley Heath. They shared the school with Ashton children, and worked for scholarships along with them.

Pte. Joseph Robert Curtis. 1/10 Canadian Infantry. April 22, 1915.  
L. Cpl. Frederick Charles Malcher. Oxon. and Bucks L.I.  
Sept. 30, 1915.

Pte. Walter Brown. 6th Northants. Regt. March 13, 1916.  
Pte. William Thomas Mills. 3/5 Suffolk Regt. June 28, 1916.  
Pte. William Henry Wilkins. (Mons). 1st. L'ter Regt. Oct. 18, 1916.  
Brigadier Herbert James Malcher. R.H.A. Oct. 9, 1917.

page fifty-nine

The last of them went home in June, 1945, but Mr. W. Mason and his family, who came here as evacuees from Essex, have stayed ; and Mrs. Livett and Mrs. Griffiths came here to be near their parents, and have settled here with their families. Austrians came from Boughton to work at Vale Farm during the harvest, and one or two were still ditching in the parish some time after the war ended.

Every housewife in Ashton experienced the difficulties of catering during both wars. But in the first war women carried on with their normal lives, as far as it was possible, and the village atmosphere was, in that respect, unaltered. There was no Home Guard. Mr. J. Mills and others used to guard railway tunnels, but no bombs or aeroplanes broke our peace. The situation in the last war was very different. Many Ashton women went into factories, two into the Land Army, one into the A.T.S. There was the Home Guard, with A.R.P. and fire-watching to do, and two men went to an aircraft spotting post at Roade. But if Ashton's daily life was more markedly changed by this war, it quickly returned to normal. Victory was celebrated, as it was in most villages throughout the country, with a tea in the Recreation Room, which was attended by everybody, and a comic cricket match in Lords Close provided an outlet for people's feelings. This was on V.E. Day. V.J. Day was not given any particular celebration.

People sometimes speak of the night when bombs were dropped on the railway embankment—"fourteen of them, and one hit the sleeper at the side and lifted the rail. The sentries took shelter under the bridge (what a place to choose !) and people from Little Ashton ran out into Gunhole." They talk of the stick of bombs that fell in the Manor Field, and which some thought had uncovered part of the Manor tunnel; the unexploded one of this stick was let off in the field later, and Mr. Patrick's horse bolted while he was loading manure with a cart ; while bits of bomb clattered on to the roofs of the houses at the Stoke end of the village. People describe, too, how they stood at the top of the hill on the way to Roade and watched the glow in the sky of burning Coventry. But none of these events radically altered the parish of Ashton, and we must frankly say that they are less vivid to many of us now than are the day to day events of village life. Housewives gossiping over the wall and children shouting in the playground : the corn harvest saved from bad weather : the hams smoking in the chimney : the group of mourners in the churchyard, and the tobacco smoke in the Crown : the gig swaying up Roade Hill on the way to market, and the motor bike popping up the same hill, a century later, on the way to the factory : the sunrises over the railway lighting men to work, and the sunsets over the distant tower of Stoke as they come home again. These things are our history.

\* \* \*



# INDEX

- Abbott (carrier), 35  
 Abbott (thatcher), 41  
 Abington Brewery Co., 34  
 Abington Park, 24  
 Adams, Mr. and Mrs. W., 4, 51, 52, 58  
 Adams, Mr. and Mrs. T., 4, 51  
 Adams family, 14, 31, 50  
 Ainge, Mr. (Belmont Press), 4  
 Allen, Jabez, 11  
 allotments, 37  
 America, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17  
 Arundel, Mrs., 25  
 Ashby family, 14, 24, 34, 51  
 ASHTON  
   Chapels, see Baptist and Methodist Church, see St. Michael and All Angels  
   Clothing Club, 35, 54  
   Cricketer Club, 13, 30, 58  
   manor of, 15, 18, 19, 26-7  
   Manor House, 3, 26-8, 36, 45, 46  
   manorial court, 3, 27, 37, 45-6, 51  
   populations of, 9  
   Post Office, 32 (and see Hill Cottage)  
   School, 3, 24-6  
   shop, see General Stores  
   Women's Institute, 3, 13, 58  
 Ashton Field, 47  
 Ashton Lodge, 5, 8, 10, 26, 35, 42, 46, 47, 50, 51, 52, 57-8  
 Ashwood Farm, 5, 46, 47, 51  
 Australia, 10, 11  
  
 Badman, C. R., 13, 58  
 Bailey, Miss, 25  
 Bailey, Mr. S., 34  
 Baldock, Rev. W. H. and family, 7, 17, 18, 21, 23, 26, 27, 33, 41, 50  
 Baker, George, 27  
 bakers, 16, 32-3  
 Baptist Chapel, 23  
 Barford, James 33  
 Bedfordshire, 9  
 Bell Inn, Northampton, 35  
 Bennett, Mrs., 3, 15, 35  
 Bethune, Mary Anne and Alexander, 16, 43  
 Beveridge, Rev. W. A., 22  
 blacksmiths, 34  
 Blackwell, Mr. (Northampton), 50  
 Blind Bob, 47  
 Blunt families, 13, 14, 15, 27, 29, 32, 45, 46, 47, 51  
 Bliss, John, 6, 11, 21, 27, 35, 41, 42, 47, 50, 51, 52, 57, 59  
 Blisworth, 33, 36, 42  
 Boot and Shoe Research Organisation, 13, 17  
 Bogs Island, 6  
 Bozenham Cottage, 47  
 Bozenham Mill, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 25, 30, 32, 33, 42, 46, 47, 52, 55, 58  
 Bozenham Mill Farm, 6, 33, 42, 47, 56  
 Bradley, Mr. H., 12  
 Bracken, Nurse, 37  
 Brayfield (farmer), 50  
 Breachfield, 47  
 Brettels and Roberts (Northampton), 24  
 Brice family, 6, 11  
 Brices (Northampton), 35  
 Bridges, John, 5, 9, 27, 31, 58 and many footnotes  
  
 Briscoe family, 12, 16, 25  
 Brixworth, 14  
 Brogden family, 11  
 Buckingham, Mr. and Mrs., 5, 8, 51  
 Buckinghamshire, 5, 9  
 Bues, Melissa, 4  
 Burnham, Mr., 29, 52  
 Burton family, 13, 24  
 Butlin, Rev. Wm., 14  
 Butlin, Mr. W., 51  
  
 Campion (Northampton), 51  
 Canada, 11  
 Canal, Grand Junction, 5, 35, 42  
 Capel (Shutlanger), 35  
 carpenters, 15, 16, 34, 37  
 carriers, 35-36  
 Carvill family, 29, 32, 33, 47  
 Carvill's Yard, 11, 13, 17, 29, 30, 32, 47  
 Catlin, Mr. H. C. and Miss, 4, 13, 29  
 Cave, Mr., 33  
 Chapman, Mr. D., 43  
 Chaplin, Mr. F., 51  
 Chaplin, Mr. P. (Roade), 35  
 charity land and bequests, 37, 47  
 Checkley, Mr. and Mrs., 33, 51  
 children, employments of, 42  
 Church Cottage (see Hill Cottage), 32  
 Clare, John, 9 (and verses throughout)  
 Clarke (thatcher), 41  
 Clarke families, 4, 7, 13, 14, 17, 24, 37  
 Clements, Dr. W. and Dr. S., 37  
 Clewer, William, 20  
 Colepeper family, 19, 20, 26  
 Coles family, 3, 14  
 Colleyways, 50  
 Collins, George, 50  
 Commissioners for Enclosures, 21  
 Commissioners, Church, 21, 23  
 Cook, Mrs., 4, 16  
 Cook, Wm. (carrier), 13, 36  
 Cook(e) families, 13, 17, 19, 28, 58  
 Cooks Close, 7, 13, 15, 30, 37, 57  
 Cooper, Dr., 37  
 Corfield, Major and Mrs., 4, 13  
 Coronation of George V, 57  
 Coronation of Edward VII, 21  
 Coronation of Elizabeth II, 28  
 Cottage, the, 30  
 Cottage Farm, 5, 37  
 Council houses, 14, 30, 37  
 Courteenhall, 21, 24, 41  
 Covenanters, 20  
 Crimean War, 17, 59  
 Cripps, Mr. C. D., 4, 43, 50, 51  
 Croft, Mrs. R., 58  
 Cross (Hartwell), 35  
 Curtis, Mr. and Mrs. J. and Miss J., 4, 11, 24, 56  
  
 Dacres, Lady, 19  
 Dale Cottage, 29, 43  
 Day, John, 19  
 Diver, Mrs., 51  
 Drinkwater, Peter 59  
 Doe, Miss, 24, 25  
 Domesday book, 26  
 Dooley, Mr. B., 4, 13, 30, 36  
 Dooley, Mr. W. (Benson Dulay) and family, 4, 13  
 dove house, 28  
 Dudley, Mr. (Hartwell), 33  
 Dunkley (thatcher) 41  
 Dunsby family 12 14 45 46 47 50  
  
 Eales Mr. C. 4 6  
 Easton Maudit 3  
 Easton Neston see Towcester  
 Edwards Mrs. 59  
 electricity supply 37  
 Elmes family, 10-11, 16, 17  
 emigration, 10-11, 13, 16  
 enclosures and Enclosure Award, 3, 5, 37, 45, 46, 50  
 epidemics, 9  
 evacuees, 59  
 Evans, Miss, 24, 26  
 Evans, Mr. (Home Farm), 4, 50, 52  
 Evans, Henry, 47  
 Evans Adams, John, 3, 12  
  
 Fair View, 37  
 Fearn families, 14, 24, 41  
 Feast Day (Ashton), 30, 58  
 Fernor family, 28  
 Ferris, Mr. J., 34  
 Finch (carrier), 35, 50  
 Fisher, Mr. and Mrs. J. and family, 3, 12, 23, 26, 58  
 Fisher, Mrs. (Northampton), 4, 13  
 Fitzroy, see Grafton, duke of  
 Flagg Close, 23, 30, 46, 47  
 Flood, Samuel, 51  
 floods, 6, 7  
 Follies Close, 31, 32, 54  
 forest rights, 5  
 Forester, Miss, 24, 25  
 Franklin (Shutlanger), 35, 50  
 Freeman, Ben., 43  
 Freer, John, 14, 32  
 Frost, Mr., 6, 30, 50  
  
 Gardner, Mrs. K., 3  
 Gardner family, 4, 11-12, 24, 30, 35, 36  
 Garrett, Mrs. Anne, 31, 36, 41  
 Geary family, 12, 14, 29, 35, 47, 50  
 General Stores, Ashton, 17, 32  
 Giddings (Roade), 51  
 Girls' Friendly Society, 57  
 gleaning, 21, 55  
 Glebe Farm, see Rectory Farm  
 Glebe Cottage, 30  
 Gleed, Francis, 51  
 Gloucestershire, 12, 19, 41  
 Godfrey, Mr. Bert, 6  
 Godfrey, Mrs. W., 58  
 Goldsmith family, 15, 19, 20, 26-7  
 Goodingham family, 25, 57  
 Goodridge family, 14, 30, 34  
 Goodridge (Roade), 20  
 Gordons Lodge, 16, 43  
 Gosden, Henry, 29, 32, 35  
 Grafton, duke of, 7, 12, 15, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 27, 30, 32, 34, 36, 37, 42, 45, 47, 50, 51, 54  
 Grafton, estate and records, 4, 12, 15, 24, 26, 27, 28, 36, 37, 41  
 Grafton Hunt, 7, 58  
 Grafton Regis, 5, 24, 45  
 Graves, Robert (dealer), 32  
 Gray, Mrs. L. K., 29  
 Green, Mrs., 4, 24, 32, 33  
 Green, the, 6, 14, 16, 17, 30, 35, 36, 58  
 Greenow (Northampton), 35  
 Greensnorton, 24  
 Griffin family, 31, 36  
 Griffiths, Mrs., 60  
 Griffiths, Susan and Raymond, 4  
 Gunhole, 46, 50, 60  
  
 Hackney, Christine, 4  
 Hadland, Mr. and Mrs., 32  
 Hales (Shutlanger), 6, 33  
 Hanslope, 17, 37, 42, 43  
 Happy Land, 37, 47  
 Hardreshull family, 18, 26  
 Hartwell, village of, 3, 7, 11, 16, 24, 28, 31, 35, 36, 47, 55  
 Hartwell, parish of, 5, 21, 33, 45, 50, 51  
 Hartwell Vicarage, 3, 5  
 de Hartwell family, 18  
 Hartwell Clear Copse, 5, 8, 9  
 Hassall, Dr., 3  
 Havergal, Rev. D. E. and Mrs., 3, 4  
 Hayward, Mrs. G., 4  
 Hayward, Mr. Charles, 4, 12, 41  
 Hayward, Evelyn, 4  
 Hayward family, 12, 50  
 Heighton, William (Baptist), 23  
 Henry VIII, and manor of Ashton, 19, 26  
 Hill Cottage, 25, 29, 32  
 Hillyer, John, 32  
 Hodgkins, Job (carrier), 14, 30, 35, 36  
 Hodgkins families, 14, 16, 17, 36, 45, 46  
 Home Farm (Ashton), 4, 7, 12, 14, 23, 32, 46, 47, 50, 52, 55  
 Home Farm (Hartwell), 5  
 Homestead, the (see Paddocks)  
 Horse Ley, 47  
 Horton (Houghton) family, 27, 45  
 Hurcomb's Lane, 9, 31, 50  
 Hurst, Rev. H. H. and family, 21-22, 58  
  
 Jackson, Mr. Charles, 5, 15, 36, 52  
 Jackson, Dr. (the Rectory), 23, 25  
 Jackson (Stoke), 35  
 James, Mr. and Mrs. R. H. and family, 3, 4, 13  
 Jeffcut (carrier), 30, 35  
 Jones families, 10-11, 14  
 Jones, Wm. (waggoner), 50, 54  
 Jones (market gardener), 52  
  
 Kelly's Directories, 13, 14, 34, 35, 46, 47 and many footnotes  
 Kettering, 12  
 King, Mr. P. I., 4  
 Kitchen, Mr. and Mrs., 33, 51  
 Krauss, Miss, 24  
  
 lacemaking, 16, 22, 25, 41, 58  
 lace school, 14, 24, 41  
 Lambert family, 14  
 Lamport, 3  
 Lamport Hall, 4  
 Lane family, 27, 46  
 Leah, Christopher, 4  
 Le Lou (Lupus) family, 18, 26, 28  
 Leper (Lepper) family, 12, 24, 27, 37  
 Lestocq, Captain Richard, 20  
 Lever, Mrs., 3, 14  
 Linnell, Miss Lucy, 21, 35, 55  
 Linnell, William, 10, 14, 24, 28, 37  
 Linnell family, 33, 42, 47, 50, 51, 55  
 Livett, Mrs. and Robin Livett, 3, 60  
 Loddington, 13  
 Longcroft, 4, 14, 29-30, 32, 35, 47  
 Lords Close, 27, 30, 37, 57  
 Loveridge, Jimmy, 54

- Mabbutt (Home Farm), 50  
 Malcher, Mr. and Mrs. E., 4, 7, 15, 16, 58  
 Malcher, James, 4, 16, 28, 36, 50, 55  
 Malcher family, 14, 16-17  
 Malcher, Joseph (Hartwell), 33  
 Malin, Mr. George, 4, 31, 43  
 Malin, Mr. and Mrs. D., 4  
 Malin family, 12, 58, 59  
 Manor Farm (see also Moat Farm), 5, 14, 46, 47, 51  
 Manor Farm (Roade), 51  
 Manor Field, 7, 16, 29, 60  
 Marriott family, 15, 19, 20, 26, 27, 45, 46  
 Marriott tomb and brass, 15, 19  
 Martin, Canon E. V. and Mrs., 21, 22, 25, 58  
 Martin family, 12, 28, 37, 52  
 Martin (Roade), 35  
 Mason family, 60  
 May Day, 25, 26, 58  
 McGuire, Dr., 37  
 medical services, 37  
 Meakins, William, 50  
 Mercury and Herald (Northampton), 3  
 Merry, Mr. and Mrs., 16, 33, 51  
 Methodist Chapel, 11, 23-4  
 Midslade Sawmills (see also Whatton and Sons), 8  
 Milburn, Miss, 24  
 militia lists, 12, 32  
 Mills, Mr. and Mrs. J., 4, 24, 60  
 Mills, Miss, and Miss Amy, 4, 41  
 Mills, Moses, 14, 22, 37  
 Mills families, 12, 14, 17, 24, 35, 43  
 Moat Farm, or The Moat (see Manor Farm), 14, 46  
 moat, Manor, 16, 28  
 Morrice, Dr., 23  
 Morris, Mrs. E., 3  
 Moore, Rev. John and family, 18, 20  
 motor transport, 36  
 natural history of Ashton, 3, 7-9  
 Neely, Rev. Andrew Craig and family, 10-11, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 29, 35, 43, 58  
 Nene, river, 12  
 New Theatre, 13  
 Noble (Northampton), 24  
 Nonconformists, 10, 20, 23-4  
 North Field, 47  
 Northampton, 3, 5, 9, 16, 17, 21, 25, 28, 32, 34, 35, 42, 44, 54, 56  
 Northampton County Council, 57  
 Northampton County Library, 4, 26  
 Northampton Rural District Council, 15, 37  
 Northamptonshire Archives Committee (and Northampton Record Society), 4  
 Northamptonshire Rural Community Council, 3  
 Norton, Northants., 12  
 Old Crown, 14, 15, 16, 21, 23, 33-4, 37, 47, 58, 60  
 Olney (mill), 33  
 Orchard Cottage, 6, 15, 30, 36  
 Orchard House, 7, 13, 14, 24, 25, 30, 32, 34, 36, 50  
 open fields, 45-6  
 Oundle, 5, 12  
 Ouse basin, 5  
 Paddocks, the, 7, 14, 16, 31, 50, 55  
 Papists in Ashton, 20  
 Parish Council, 22, 32, 36, 37, 52  
 Parliamentary Committee of 1645, 20  
 Park Lane, 8, 50  
 Patrick, Mrs. Frank, 3, 6  
 Patrick family, 4, 11, 12, 60  
 Paulerspury, 12, 24, 41, 47, 50, 58  
 Payne, George, 51  
 Peake, Mr. Bladon, 30, 51  
 Peasland, Mr., 51  
 Peasnall, William, 41  
 Penn family, 14  
 Peterborough, Bishop of, 19, 20, 23  
 Pickering, Mrs., 4, 13  
 Pierce, Thorpe and Marriott, 27  
 Pig Club (Ashton), 55  
 pillow lace, see lace-making  
 Pindon End, 47  
 Pinch Gut, 50  
 "Pleasant Wednesday Evenings," 24  
 Plough Monday, 58  
 pluralities in Ashton, 20  
 Polebrook hundred, 5  
 Poplar Close, 33  
 Priestley, Mrs., 3, 4, 24  
 public house, see Old Crown  
 Pykle, the, 31, 54, 55  
 Quinton, 5  
 Railway (London and Birmingham, later LMS, later Br. (LMR), 3, 5, 9, 11, 12, 21, 31, 36, 42, 43, 52  
 Ratliff, James, 24  
 Read, Thomas, 21  
 Recreation Room, 13, 25, 26, 30, 57, 60  
 Rectory (Ashton), 5, 6, 7, 21, 23, 42, 50, 56  
 Rectory Farm, 6, 10, 14, 21, 25, 30, 47, 50, 58  
 Rectory Field, 6, 21, 23, 26, 30, 47, 56  
 Rectory Cottage, 30  
 Rectus Field, 21, 52  
 Rhodes, Thomas, 33  
 Richardson, Mr. and Mrs. G., 3, 4, 16, 28, 36  
 Richardson, Mrs. T., 3, 4  
 Richardson families, 7, 11, 14, 24, 47, 52, 59  
 Risley, Rev. John (Senior), 20, 47  
 Risley, Rev. John (Junior), 23  
 Roade, 3, 5, 7, 14, 15, 21, 28, 31, 32, 36, 37, 41, 42, 43, 45, 50, 51, 52, 58, 60  
 Roade Baptist Church, 23  
 Roade Church, 18, 19  
 Roade Factory (Simplex Works), 12, 19, 43, 52, 56  
 Roade Hill, 5, 6, 35, 29, 30, 51, 52, 60  
 Roade Hyde, 28  
 Roade School, 4, 24  
 Robinson, C. and Mrs. C., 4, 58  
 Robinson, Jonathan, 10, 51  
 Robinson families, 13  
 Roddis, Daniel, 22, 51  
 Rogers, Mr. D., 12, 21, 35, 50, 55  
 Rogers Site, 25  
 "Roper, Professor Sam," 13  
 Rose, Nurse, 37  
 Rose Cottage, 14  
 Rowley Wood, 8, 9  
 R.A.F. Unit (Hartwell), 5, 12, 44, 56  
 Rush Hill (Roade), 51  
 Ryan, Dr., 33  
 Rye, Lewis, 13, 27  
 St. Michael and All Angels, Ashton, 4, 18-22  
 advowson, 18, 19  
 bells, 21  
 church fabric and architecture, 16, 18, 19, 20  
 church property, 21, 23, 29  
 churchyard, 16, 21, 47  
 incumbents, Footnote 22  
 monuments and memorials, 18, 19, 20, 21  
 music and organ, 20, 21, 22  
 registers, 3, 9, 20  
 Sunday School, 22, 24, 26, 42, 59  
 uniting of benefice with Hartwell, 19, 21, 23  
 vestry meeting, 22, 37  
 St. James' Abbey (Northampton), 28  
 Salcey Forest, 5, 7, 8-9, 12, 51  
 Sallow Corner, 50  
 Satra House, 13  
 Savage, Miss Hannah, 27  
 Savage (Stoke), 50  
 Scaldwell family, 11, 17, 32, 33  
 Scollick, Mrs. 14  
 Sewerage, 37  
 Shackle, A., 12  
 Shakeshaft, James, 4, 11, 15-16, 20, 21, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37  
 Shakeshaft, George, 16, 20, 21, 33, 34, 37  
 Shakeshaft, Mr. Albert, 15, 34, 37  
 Shakeshaft family, 11, 12, 15-16, 17, 20, 21, 37, 41, 57  
 Shipman, Mr. E., 58  
 shopkeepers, 11, 14, 17  
 Shouler family, 14, 15, 34, 37  
 Shutlanger, 5, 12, 16  
 Sibley, Miss, 24  
 Silverstone, 58  
 Simpson, Jonathan, 51  
 Skears, Joseph, 35  
 Sladden, Mrs., 3, 4, 7  
 Smith, Mrs. F., 4, 24  
 Smith (lock-keeper), 42  
 Smith, John, 34  
 Smith (Warren), 51  
 Snoxall (Lock-keeper), 42  
 Southfield, 47  
 Spinney Hill, 7, 8, 52  
 Square Field, 23, 47  
 Stamp, Mr. and Mrs. Jack, 4, 17, 32  
 Stimpson family, 14, 17, 23  
 Stoke Bruerne, 3, 5, 7, 12, 15, 24, 34, 37, 50  
 Stony Stratford, 5  
 street lighting, 36  
 Sturgess family, 17, 32  
 Summerton, Mr. and Mrs. H. G., 4, 17, 52  
 Summerton family, 11, 13, 17, 34, 37, 41, 59  
 Sunley, Mr. Bernard and family, 12, 30, 37, 50, 58  
 Sunnyside, 5, 15, 47, 50, 51-2  
 Swannell family, 24, 29  
 Tarry, Mr. D., 4, 51  
 Taylor family, 12  
 Taylor, Mr. W., 57  
 Tebbutt family, 10-11  
 telephone service, 37  
 Temple, Miss M., 4, 25  
 Tew, William James (Senior), 17, 32, 35, 50  
 Tew, Thomas (Stoke), 24, 27, 28, 34, 37  
 Tew families, 4, 11-12, 17, 31, 43  
 thatching, 41  
 Thompson, Miss Dawn, 4  
 Tibbs, Mrs. Elizabeth, 19  
 Timbs family, 10-11  
 Tingewick, Bucks., 20  
 tithe barn, 21, 23  
 "Tithe Barn," 23, 30  
 Tomkins (bus service), 36  
 Tove, river, 5, 7, 33, 58  
 Towcester, 24, 36, 58  
 Treadwell (farmer), 51  
 trees, 6-7, 21, 25  
 Turner, Mrs. Alan, 3  
 Turvey, Mrs., 23  
 Tyrrell, Malcolm, 4  
 United Counties Bus Service, 36  
 undertakers, 15, 16  
 Vale Farm, 7, 12, 17, 21, 30, 41, 46, 47, 50-1, 52, 55, 56, 57, 60  
 Victorian Bridge, 15, 51  
 wages (agricultural), 41-2  
 wages (domestic), 42  
 Waite family, 21  
 Wake, Miss Joan, 3  
 Wake, A., 21  
 Wakefield Lodge, 6, 12, 51, 58  
 Waldegrave (Walgrave), 20  
 war, service in, 11  
 war, effect of, 11, 36, 59-60  
 Ward family, 14  
 Wardale family, 12, 31  
 Warren family, 14, 16, 17, 41  
 Warren, the, 6, 29, 32-3, 42, 46, 47, 51, 58  
 water supply, 5, 36  
 Waterloo Bridge, 46  
 Watery Lane, 30  
 Watson, Mr. Sidney, 4  
 Watson, Margaret, 4  
 Watson families, 11, 24, 41  
 Watts (Roade), 35  
 Webb families, 3, 12, 13, 14, 24, 28, 46, 54  
 Webster, Charles, 34  
 Webster (thatcher), 41  
 Welch family, 13  
 Welch, "Soldier," 17, 59  
 Welchs Close, 13  
 Welfare Service, 37  
 Wellingborough (mill), 33  
 Weston family, 10, 14, 33, 47, 50, 51  
 West, Miss, 24  
 Wetherill, Mr. Frank and family, 4, 7, 13, 30  
 Whatton, E. and sons, 5, 43  
 Whitford, John, 20  
 Wickens families, 14, 32, 51, 59  
 Wickstead Park, 24  
 Wilding, Henry, 34  
 Wilkins, Mr. and Mrs. A., 4, 16, 23, 31, 43, 53, 57  
 Wilkins, George, 11, 12, 14, 16  
 Willcox, William, 34  
 Wilson, Mr. Albert, 4, 33  
 Wilson, Gordon, 58  
 Winter, Rev. Charles, 20  
 Withers (Northampton), 35  
 Wood family, 14  
 Woodbine Cottage, 29 (see Longcroft)  
 Woodland View (Hartwell), 5  
 Woods, Mr. and Mrs. E. G., 3, 11, 12, 35, 50, 52, 55  
 Wolverton Works, 16, 17, 43, 52  
 Yardley Gobion, 3, 12, 16, 37  
 Young (Blisworth), 35  
 Youth Club, 57