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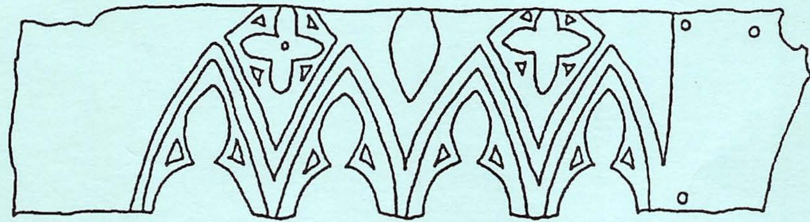
NORTH WANSDYKE

PAST

AND

PRESENT



Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

No. 4, 1992

North Wansdyke
Past and Present

Journal of Keynsham & Saltford Local History Society

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Contents

Stanton Prior, *by B. J. Lowe & E. White*	3
The Doctors Harrison, *by Sue Trude*	13
Memories of Keynsham, *by William Sherer*	15
Postscript to 'The Good(?) Old Days', *by Margaret Whitehead*	18
Tales My Father Told Me, *by Dick Russell*	19
Demolition Discoveries, *by Barbara J. Lowe*	25
Roman Remains at Somerdale, *by Charles Browne*	26

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Stanton Prior

Barbara J. Lowe & Elizabeth White

Part 1

The village nestles in a hollow bounded by an east-west road on the southern ridge, and on the north by two major earthworks: the Iron Age Stantonbury Hillfort and Wansdyke earthwork of possible Dark Age date.

Land has probably been worked here since late Neolithic times. Evidence in the form of a flint blade (probably once accompanying a late Neolithic burial), sherds of Bronze Age beaker ware (c.1750 BC) and Roman pottery sherds and other artefacts indicate continuity of occupation.

The village boundaries of Stanton Prior, Corston and Marksbury, all converge on Stantonbury, but ignore Wansdyke, the other great archaeological feature here. This was a bank with a northern ditch but we doubt if it was a defensive earthwork. It passes through some pretty indefensible places like flat fields. As a defence some re-siting would have made it more valuable, so we think it was a boundary. The western part of Wansdyke runs from Maes Knoll for 12 miles to Horsecombe Vale, south of Bath. Most authorities see it as late 6th century, perhaps arising from the victory of the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Dyrham in 577 over the British tribes in the area. One authority has suggested it was a defensive control line, behind which people could seek refuge in times of trouble, so that Anglo-Saxons lived on both sides of it, but fled northwards if anything happened. In times of peace life for the British farmers continued as if it were not there.

Why do the boundaries of Corston, Stanton Prior, and Marksbury ignore Wansdyke? In pre-map days, boundaries had to be defined by roads, trees, springs, fords and even tree roots. Had a feature like Wansdyke then existed it would surely have been mentioned in the Saxon Cartulary of 965 AD which describes the boundaries of Stanton when King Edgar granted the Rectory there to the Abbot of St Peter's, Bath (hence the name: Stanton Prior). It has been suggested that Wansdyke dates from the 6th century: the parish boundaries are actually later, so if they ignore Wansdyke then they must be following the boundaries of an earlier land holding which was adopted for the parish boundary. M. Costen believes that these boundaries were based on estates that were created for the lands of the fort, during or

just after the Roman period. Certainly the whole area was populated in Roman times. There is evidence for this in the villas at Corston and Newton, odd coins at Stanton Prior, and pottery sherds from the northern slopes of Stantonbury.

In Domesday Book, Stanton Prior was worth £3, just as it had been before the Conquest. It paid tax on 3 hides of land, of which ½ hide was farmed for the Lord (the Prior of Bath) with 1 plough team and 5 slaves. The villagers, 4 villein and 3 small holders, worked 2 hides of land with 2 plough teams. The remaining ½ hide was probably worked by the freemen who were mentioned in the Geld Inquest of 1084, though some editors believe it was a scribal error and that the villagers had 2½ hides. It is interesting that when in 965 Bath Abbey had been given the land, it was not given all of it. There seems to have been land in Stanton Prior which was independent of the manor, from the earliest references down to the 19th century. The village is listed as having meadow, pasture and underwood, but no woodland, another indication that it had been cleared from an early period.

Other ancient features of Stanton Prior are two roads, one east-west and one north-south. The former runs above the southern slope of the village, from Wilmington to Bath and is described in Saxon Charters as a *Herepath* (Military Road) or *The Street*. The other road can be traced from Camerton to Saltford, and is described as the Old Dic (old road). This could have been a Saltway.

Records have survived because all through the Middle Ages Stanton Prior was held by Bath Abbey who preserved all their land transaction records and, fortunately, these were not lost at the Dissolution.

The Church, dedicated to St Laurence, is now largely Victorian having been restored in 1869 at a cost of £600. Restoration began with the removal of a western gallery, a plaster ceiling, and the thick coating of whitewash which covered all the sculpture. The walls were so decayed internally that they had to be faced with a new course of stone. (Hence the unusual coloured pointing!) Norman carved stones were discovered built into the walls. Two parts of incised ledger grave slabs, probably dating from the 14th century, were built into the outer wall of the north chancel, where they may still be seen.

The architect, C. E. Davis, found the original wagon roof timbers in good condition under the plaster and it was only necessary to clean them. The revealed bosses are foliate except for the two bearing the Arms of Bath

Abbey and the Hungerfords. The roof of the Early English chancel and the chancel arch date from 1869. Formerly there was no distinction between nave and chancel. All this indicates that the wagon roof-line is original, and that the church was single-celled and long and narrow, perhaps once similar to the first Saxon church at Deerhurst (Odda's Chapel), Gloucestershire. This was a simple rectangular structure with a western porch which has been dated to just before the Norman Conquest.

Fragments of a former stone screen may be seen built into the wall above the chancel arch, and the lectern is made of pieces of oak from the old pulpit. Other interesting features are in the Early English north porch: a curious recess in the east wall built to receive the bread dole which was the weekly gift of the Prior of Bath, and the remains of an old tabernacle above the entrance arch to the church. The former has a stone slab base into which roughly incised boards for *Nine Men's Morris* or *Mill* have been carved. The latter shows hammer and chisel marks where the ornamentation was hacked away. It would once have contained a figure of St Laurence or perhaps the Virgin.

One window commemorates a rector, James Phillott, MA, who was curate here for 11 years before his 50 years as rector. He died in 1865 aged 88 years. He was also the last of the Masters of St John's Hospital, Bath under the old system.

On the north side of the chancel is a 13th century lancet window cut from a more ancient fragment generally thought to be Norman but which is probably earlier. In fact the church is likely to be a great deal earlier than the date of the first rector, Rogerus, 1295. The Abbey of Bath is unlikely to have allowed a nearby village to continue long without a church. So if there was not a church here by 965, it had one soon after.

The church also contains some interesting monuments. One commemorates the family of Thomas Cox, son of Robert and Maria Cox of Corston. Maria was a sister of William Strowde (Strode) of Barrington, the Parliamentary Colonel who opposed "ship money" in 1635-40. (Ship money was a levy from maritime towns and counties to strengthen the Navy in times of need. It was made illegal by the Long Parliament in 1641.) In Robert Cox's Will, proved 1640, he left his wife his "mansion house in Keynsham". Thomas was one of at least 10 children and through marriages the Cox family became related to families such as that of Sir Thomas Pynney of Bristol, Buckland of "Hartrowe", of Tylley, Bisse, Wylett,

Webley, Hulbert and others. Thomas and his wife are represented kneeling by an altar with a skull upon it. She is cradling a baby in one arm. Below, the children are lined up, some with skulls denoting that they had also died. Maria died in 1644, as did their two-year-old daughter, and Thomas died in 1650, as did their seventeen-year-old son. Another memorial in the tower is to Robert Long who died in 1697.

The church has a dainty silver chalice and cover of 1574 which is the twin of one at Chelwood.

Stanton Prior also has ancient registers. The oldest dates from 1572, and the early entries have much interesting information, and entertaining spelling: *dafter* for *daughter* and *Gartery* for *Gertrude.* The 17th century produced wonderful names: Patriarch Attwood, Polydore Evans, Aquila Lippiatt and Flower Lansdowne. During the Interregnum, 1649-1660, marriages were solemnised before the Justices, and the Register gives only the intention of marriages. John Long was appointed *Register* for the parish in 1653. It was a very law-abiding village. Only once was an offender arrested and taken before the Justices in the period covered by the documents. There were very few illegitimate births -- only 12 in 220 births between 1764 and 1812, almost all in the later years. Sadly, they seem to occur to different women in the same families.

The Abbey of Bath used Stanton Prior to provide a pension for superannuated officials and the living was granted to servants of the Abbey. They did not appropriate the greater tithes, as did Keynsham Abbey, so the living was Rectorial, not Vicarial. The Abbey held Stanton Prior until the Dissolution, leasing it out to local families. No one family held it all; even the Abbey never owned the whole. It had two Freemen in Domesday Book and continued to have ½ hide owned by someone else. (An article detailing the descent of this manor and village will be included in the next issue of this *Journal.*)

In 1520, John Richmond leased the manor from the Abbey and built himself a mansion house on the site of an older house. The family continued to live in Stanton Prior for the next 200 years -- a very prolific family. There were Richmonds in Corston, Saltford, Marshfield, Bath Easton, Chewton Keynsham (where one died of smallpox in 1717 at Conyger Farm), and many in Wiltshire, and scores of their descendants in America. The mansion was Church Farm. There is a date, 1737, over one door, but the house is much older than that. Stone mullioned windows were very old

fashioned in 1737 and sash windows widely used. At the rear of the house are more gables and a blocked-out older window.

Some of the Richmonds were real characters. William, son of Thomas, caused a lot of trouble. He refused to contribute, in 1609, to the building of a parish poor house. His nephew, John, was a Clerk in Holy Orders and Rector. Both of them refused on the grounds that the house was in Wilmington, not Stanton Prior, i.e. the boundary of the parish. William claimed to be Lord of the Manor, but he would not pay and so was bound over to appear at the next Assizes. His son, William, caused the biggest scandal of all. In 1632 a George Vaughan went to the Assize and informed the court concerning "William Richman of Stanton Pryor" that "13 of his mayde servants had been gotten with child in the house of the said William Richman and was worthy of punishment if it be true". Mr John Harrington and Sir Francis Popham were ordered to examine the case and the court "desired them to take paynes therein. And if the said Vaughan shall not prove to the said Sir Francis Popham and Mr Harrington that 7 of the mayde servants of the said Richman have been begotten with child during the time of their service, then the said Vaughan is to be bound over by them to the next Assizes and in the meantime to be of good behaviour". What happened? There is no trace in the Baptismal Registers and nothing further in the Assize Records. Was it just scandal-mongering?

Opposite Church Farm are interesting barns. The 18th century barn has a central threshing floor between opposing doors which allowed a draught to winnow the corn. The large cow byre to its left has cast iron posts supporting the king-post construction and is very well ventilated by barred window openings. George Taylor, son of Charles, who farmed Church Farm for many years, had a fine herd of pure shorthorns but he removed with them to Middlesex early this century. Behind Church Farm and the neighbouring Old Rectory are two fishponds (or perhaps one original one divided). They are dug out of the Lower Lias clay and stone lined. They are possibly fed by seepage or drainage from the hills, but more likely are spring fed. There are many underground streams in the area. They are possibly of 13th century date. Fish were reared and kept in the pond and would have included tench, bream, carp, roach, pickerel and eel. Fish was a very important part of the diet and the ponds were usually constructed near the house for fear of theft. A fish pond was often a status symbol of wealthy 17th and 18th century manors.

The Old Rectory is a fine late 18th century house with a mansard roof and dormer windows. It looks rather like a dressed-up earlier building with inserted windows of a later date. The first reference to the rectory is in 1606. "One dwelling house contayninge 3 fields of housing, one stable conteyninge one field, one little house for haye, one barne conteyninge three fieldes, one pigeon house". By 1636 the rectory is described as "conteyninge fower bayes of building, one barne, one stable, one dove house". What happened to the little house for haye? Obviously neither is the first house but these lovely descriptions of the rectory might be the nucleus of this building.

To the east of the church is Priory Farm. It has 17th century mullioned windows and an 18th century wing, but shows older features at the rear. In the 19th century this was owned by the Hooper family but ended up in the hands of the Gore-Langtons.

On the left-hand side of the road leading to Priory Farm a portion of the wall of the animal pound can be seen. This was not the first pound. That was opposite the church in 1840. As this second pound was built subsequently this means that in the mid-19th century Stanton Prior still had some open grazing land from which beasts could stray. This was, of course, the Bury.

Lower Farm is another interesting building--it could be anything from late 17th to early 19th century in date. We know that John Richmond owned this farm from 1520--but not this building. Perhaps it was the much older building abutting it on the left. This cottage looks 18th century with its little casement windows and hooded door. But look around the back: the chimney appears to have gone straight through an earlier window. Another has been blocked-up and the windows are large for bedrooms. They are 17th century stone mullioned with drip mouldings right under the eaves. One wonders what happened to make the kitchen below the level of the road. On the end wall the 17th century windows are blocked, and one has been given an 18th century casement. We suspect that this house was originally 16th century and had an undercroft with a large hall over. In the 18th century it was divided giving two upper floors accessed from the other side. This is all surmise, but something similar happened at Saltford Manor.

The Malt House has recently been tastefully restored. In 1851 Richard Woodham is listed as a Maltster and between 1861 and 1872 Charles Taylor of church Farm was described as Farmer and Maltster. It seems to have ceased as a malt house by 1875. Perhaps this coincides with the

closure of the local coal pits. We know that coke from the Newton pits was used to dry malt for brewing, and that the brew house at The Globe, Newton St Loe, produced 210 pints a day.

Poplar Farm is the fourth of the Stanton Prior farms. Since the Lord of the Manor did not own all the land, here there were other prosperous families. The Vannans, mentioned in John Richmond's Will in 1569 were still there in the mid-18th century and owning this house. The Coates lived in this house from the mid-18th century. They were worthy men--Church Wardens and Overseers. During the 18th century the Langtons had been buying property. In 1840 they owned two of the four farms here, were Lords of the Manor, and held the advowson of the church. But they did not own this farm, and with this farm went the common rights on the Bury, pasturing animals and rabbit shooting. The Coates family was hit by several blows in succession. In 1863 Charles Coates came home ill, discharged incurable from the 1st Royal Dragoons. He began land exchanges with Joseph Langton. In 1870 James Coates had an accident and was unable to shoot and, one presumes, also unable to be active on the farm. In 1871 he mortgaged the farm for the first time, then in 1874 he mortgaged it to the National Provincial Bank. It was, of course, the most depressed period of English farming. In October 1874 the farm was sold to William Gore-Langton who took the common rights on the Bury which thus disappeared. It became part of the Newton St Loe estate, and an area dedicated to hunting and shooting. It had been pasture but was now allowed to grow or planted with trees and became a pheasant preserve. The public right of way over it all but disappeared. The Duchy of Cornwall, which now owns all of it, has opened up the footpath, restored the stiles and put up way markers. It is a beautiful walk, so please use it.

Stanton Prior, like Keynsham, recorded its charitable appeals or *Briefs*. They seem to have been very generous indeed for such a small parish. In 1670 they gave 10s-6d to the seamen captured by the Turks, and £1-12s-1d to Irish Protestants *(Eirish Prodistants)*. French Protestants gained a mere 3s-10d a few years later. They gave generously to towns that had suffered fires, such as Warwick, Mere, Luton, Nether Wallop, Heston, and the Sugar House, London. The Richmonds, Vannans, Coxes, Longs and Brookmans were all noticeable for their generous giving.

Like all parishes, Stanton Prior was responsible for maintaining its own poor. In this they seem to have been conscientious in the operation of the law, and caring in its execution. For example, in 1728 Mary Cole had to

enter the Poor House (probably a cottage on the Wilmington side of the village). As the law allowed them, they sold her household effects, a bed, a bedstead, two plates, one tub, one crock and other things. She was ill for quite a long time. Ann Parsons was paid 6d for sitting up one night with her. They bought a breast of mutton, half a pound of bacon, and 1s worth of cheese for her, and three horse-loads of coal. Mary recovered and was still receiving a weekly pension in 1754 when she died and was buried "on the parish". In 1739 the parish paid the wedding expenses for Mary Wilton whom they had maintained for several years. They had paid for "petty coats" and a "paire of bodis" and cleaned her clothes. She was probably an orphan. They gave her £6-11s for a marriage portion, 10s-6d for a ring, and 10s-6d for a gown and hat. Orphans were usually boarded out. John Holbrook's children were paid for when he was taken to the Justices and then to Box in 1752. There was a private lunatic asylum there so he had probably gone insane. The two sons of Robert White were maintained, and one, Robert, was apprenticed to Charles Coates of Poplar Farm. The parish also used its Poor Rate for any other parish expenses (this happened in many places). The cost of "cleaning the trows on the Berry" appears annually. In 1749 they used the Poor Rate for refreshments ("liquire") when the highways were repaired, and paid John Lansdowne to repair the bridge. Edward Blake was paid for a lantern and post.

By the end of the 18th century the cost of the Poor Rate had risen dramatically. The Rate yielded £2-3s, but could be collected as many times as was necessary. In 1801-2 it was collected 55 times. Poverty had increased and food prices were high. The parish, in 1799, paid 12s-6d for barley meal for the poor, and in 1800 they paid £2-4s-4½d for rice sold to the poor. They had to pay local parishes who sent a volunteer to the navy or militia in the Revolutionary Wars. By 1797 they were paying 3s a week to High Littleton to keep and support the man's children. A man called John Bishop received medical attention at Bristol Infirmary, though it is not clear if he had been a soldier. Finally his leg was amputated and the parish paid 14s for a wooden leg, and shortly afterwards another leg was bought costing 12s. The burden of supporting nearby militia men's children was considerable and caused great friction. The parishioners of Stanton Prior believed they were paying too much, and it needed a Parish Meeting and the intervention of the Justices to settle the dispute.

The number of parishioners signing the accounts diminished; by the early 19th century it was signed by only a handful, who were wealthy people. The

attitude to the poor had hardened. In 1819 they agreed that any poor "still capable of labour, who are out of regular employment and apply to the Overseer for relief shall be employed by the several occupiers of land within the parish". So the parish Poor Rate subsidised the landowners, who received cheap labour. The situation was ended when the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 created workhouses, and Stanton Prior became part of the Keynsham Union, and its poor went to the workhouse for relief.

East of the church is a Methodist Chapel, built by William and Mary Hooper of Priory Farm for the use of the inhabitants in 1853. For a long while their employees were obliged to attend, but when this condition was abolished attendance dropped dramatically.

Stanton Prior ended up as a Gore-Langton estate village, but without the benefits conferred on Newton St Loe by the family. After all, the family did not pass through it--so it had no improved cottages, and no school, but the Earl Temple gave £5 per annum to keep the church solvent. Children from Stanton Prior started to go to Marksbury School at the end of the 19th century. There are mid-century references to a school but nothing more.

The links with Newton St Loe became even more tenuous. By 1901 the population was down to 81 from 159-- the decline had begun with the agricultural depression of the 1870's.

Stanton Prior was one of the five Somerset "Thankful Villages", all of whose service men returned safely from World War One.

Collinson states that this was, in 1598, the birthplace of Gilbert Sheldon who, after having been Fellow and Warden of All soul's College, Oxford, became Bishop of London (1660), Archbishop of Canterbury (1663) and Chancellor of the University of Oxford (1667). The Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford perpetuates his name. Unfortunately, parish records prove that Gilbert was not born in this Stanton but at Stanton in the parish of Ellastone in Shropshire.

By the end of the 19th century the Gore-Langtons were in financial difficulties, and in 1940 the estate was sold. It was purchased by the Duchy of Cornwall, which brings us full circle, because it was a royal estate given to Bath in 965.

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The Doctors Harrison

Sue Trude

Dr Charles Harrison first appeared on the scene as early as 1889, according to Kelly's Directory. He was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons. He held a variety of offices in Keynsham, such as Certifying Factory Surgeon, Medical Officer to the Workhouse, and Medical Officer and Public Vaccinator No.1 District, Keynsham Union. He resided at Tregare House, 44 High Street. His son, Claude Charles Harrison, followed in his footsteps qualifying as a Bachelor of Medicine and a Bachelor of Surgery. He worked at the Bristol Royal Infirmary in the capacity of Honorary Surgeon, Honorary Physician and resident Obstetrician. In 1916 he joined the Territorial Force as a Lieutenant in the RAMC. He rose to the rank of Major during the First World War and was awarded the Military Cross. After the war he went into practice with his father and so began the father/son partnership well remembered by the older Keynsham residents who recall their exploits with affection and some amusement.

They visited their patients using various forms of transport according to the times. Starting with a pony and trap, followed by a Douglas motor bike, they progressed to a blue open Austin Seven. The doctors were available to their patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The remarkable thing about people's recollections is that nobody seems to have paid the doctors for their services. One gentleman recalls his father asking Dr Harrison for a bill and being told 'If I want you to pay me I will ask you for it'. One form of payment was in kind, although not all the food found its way back to the kitchen of Tregare House. Dr Claude would start his rounds in the morning - no doubt carefully considering the order in which he called on his patients. Those visited in the morning often gave the doctor apples, cabbages, potatoes, etc., until the back of the vehicle resembled a grocer's shop. Then followed the afternoon calls, when the doctor would leave some apples or a cabbage, etc., with a poorer patient.

The waiting room at surgery times was also rather interesting, especially when the room was full. Dr Harrison would come in, look round, then say 'Right, I'll see you and you now, you and you can come back tomorrow'. The remaining few, whom the doctor obviously thought were there under false pretences, were just told to go home. Some of the medicines the doctors prescribed they mixed themselves. They often tasted rather disgust-

thought was, I believe, that the worse they tasted the better they were. In the case of bad accidents the doctor was called first, then he would call the ambulance, travelling to the hospital with the patient and often assisting once there. Maternity cases always had pride of place. One Keynsham resident remembers going to the surgery after an accident that required stitches, only to meet the doctor on his way to a confinement and being told to wait until his return.

Both father and son were keen sportsmen, their interest no doubt heightened when Dr Charles's sister married a Dr E. M. Grace, brother of the famous cricketer W. G. Grace. On summer evenings the pair would adjourn to the garden for cricket practice. To enlarge the field of play both the front and back doors, which were in line, would be opened and if a particularly straight ball was bowled or hit things could get dangerous for anyone walking down the High Street.

When Dr Claude was having a clear-out he came across a signed bat that had belonged to W. G. Grace. Knowing of a young lad's keen interest in cricket he passed the bat over to him. It was rather too large so about four inches was cut off the bottom, enabling the lad and his friends to handle it more easily. Some people will probably hold up their hands in horror at such desecration, but I'm sure W. G. Grace would have approved of the use and enjoyment that it engendered. Dr Claude was not only interested in cricket by rugby as well, and was President of the club for many years.

When Dr Claude retired in 1953 the crowds wishing to attend a ceremony held in his honour was a measure of his popularity. Over two hundred people had subscribed to the presentation fund. Dr Denham, the Medical Officer of Health, handing over a cheque for £322 and a watch, spoke of his great admiration for Dr Claude Harrison and the esteem in which he was held by the people of Keynsham and the surrounding area. A tribute was also given to Miss Harrison who had kept house for her father and brother over the years. Following in the sporting tradition Dr Norman Gerrish took over the care of the people with the help of Dr J. D. Field and Dr J. Herapath.

This paper is based on extracts from tapes recorded at a symposium at Keynsham Library on 'The Doctors of Keynsham'.

See also: *The Weekly Chronicle; The British Medical Directory.*

Memories of Keynsham

William Sherer

I went to school at the age of five at Longton House private school for boys and girls, in the High Street. It was an enormous size house. There were 15 in our class, and 25 in the other. I stayed there until 9 years of age, when the school was closed down because the teachers went nursing during the First World War. Then I went to Redcliffe School in Bristol.

To be perfectly candid, the war didn't mean much to me. I had three uncles in it, but they came through safely. The schoolmaster used to explain about the war and why it was being fought. Sometimes it was very sad when boys came to school crying because their father or brother had been killed. I was with an old chap who used to do part-time work for my father on the farm. We were driving along the Bath road, for he had been down to milk some cows my father kept in a field down there. When we were coming back an elderly couple stopped us and said 'We've just heard the armistice has been signed'. I have a vivid memory of that moment. They were old Mr and Mrs Paradise. Their daughter, Miss Paradise was a methodist local preacher.

I attended Sunday School at the old Saltford Mission in Norman Road. It was run by Mr Stevens, with Mr Lucas and Mr Nichols. We were not allowed to ride bicycles on a Sunday, so we had to walk. In the winter the roads were very muddy, so then we had to transfer our allegiance to the Methodists at Burnett.

There were no clubs for youngsters in the evenings. I was never in the Scouts, but my brother was. And then there was the Band of Hope. I never remember any bullying and there was none of the vandalism we see today. Punishment for crimes by youngsters was severe - they were sent to the reformatory. My father had a lot of trouble with shoplifting in those days, but he never took any cases against anyone.

In the summer we used to go with the other village children black-berrying or picnicking at Burnett and Compton Dando. That was the usual thing for children in those days. Sometimes we would walk, and sometimes we went in our own pony and trap.

Life was hard for the farm workers. Bank Holiday was about the only holiday they had, but they were always had Good Friday to plant their

potatoes. The farmers used to give them a stretch in the plough field - a row all down through the field where they could plant potatoes for their own use. They used to grow potatoes where the spinney is, between Manor Road and Courtney Road. That land between Chewton Hill and Burnett was known land for growing potatoes.

I left school at 14. There were no leaving exams, and I went immediately to work at my own little poultry and pig farm in Courtney Road. Times were hard for small farmers in the years between the wars, so I later went to work for the Electricity Board in the office in Bristol, until I retired at 63.

During the Depression in the 30s there were long queues outside the Labour Exchange in the High Street. Trade wasn't so good, but it didn't affect our family a lot. There wasn't the dire poverty in Keynsham as in the larger cities and the industrial centres in the north. On the whole, in the years between the wars people became better off and things were looking up. It was a fairly happy period, as regards Keynsham, at least. People were very contented and happy, and were neighbourly one with another. There was no vandalism and no litter-strewn streets.

For recreation there were country walks, and the local church and chapel provided a meeting place. There were parties at home to which friends were invited, but there were no late night revels. Street lights went out at 11.00pm in Keynsham. People working in Bristol would catch the 6.30am train - and there was one at 5.28am for the very early workers. So people didn't stay up late in those days for the very simple reason they were too tired. There was a cinema in Keynsham, in the High Street, just before the First World War. My sister and I used to go to the penny matinee. But mostly we had to go to Bristol or Bath for social activities.

Elderly people were looked after by their relatives. My grandmother lived with us for years, and we took it for granted. Nowadays she would have been put in an Old People's Home. The Salvation Army and the Churches did a lot to help elderly people in need, but there was little government help. Sadly, some were put in the workhouse - and that was a grim place.

Frys did not come to Keynsham until 1921. Local employment was mostly in farming and horticulture, with some industry in the mills. I well remember the colour mills in the park. There was a lot of employment in the retail trade. There were 15 different grocery shops in the town, where today there are only two or three supermarkets. Shopping day was quite a social occasion. Some women used to walk into Keynsham with their prams

from Compton Dando to do their shopping. Friday (pay day) used to be the day for shopping. Some shops had delivery boys with carrier bikes, but most people fetched their own. It was generally the better classes who had their groceries delivered.

Today everybody drives a car, but then people used to walk - they had no option. Without the unpleasant fumes and traffic congestion of today it was much more peaceful. However, it is not generally known that traffic chaos started in the Keynsham High Street in 1915. Old London buses came through on the way to Avonmouth Docks, some with destination boards marked `Berlin'. Old buses, lorries and even cars were commandeered to carry supplies of ammunition and food. My father was ticked off for leaving his horse and cart in the High Street: he was obstructing urgent military traffic.

At the beginning of World War Two we took in evacuees from London. There were quite a lot in Keynsham. They all came from the centre of London, and they fitted in very well. Some evacuees stayed in Keynsham - they got jobs and never went back. Our evacuees worked out very well, they were well-behaved and clean. A boy and a girl stayed four years with us, and another girl stayed for five. Unfortunately we never heard anything more of them after they went back. They soon forget.

After the war the greatest change in Keynsham was the influx of people from other areas. Most fitted in all right, but the character of the place changed. It used to be a small Somerset country market town. I am dismayed at the destruction of old buildings, many of which could have been saved and put to other uses. The demolition of the Lamb and Lark coaching inn should never have been allowed, nor the Wingrove or the Court House and Library. That was the old Liberal Club, and election results were declared from the balcony.

Postscript to 'The Good(?) Old Days

Margaret Whitehead

In the previous issue (1990, No.3, 11-12) we published the 'Recollections of the Good(?) Old Days', by Rex Harris. The following notes on the author have been prepared by Margaret Whitehead.

King Oatway Harris was baptized in Keynsham Victoria Wesleyan Methodist Church in April 1903, the son of Samuel John Harris. He died in September 1989 a lifelong Methodist, and the hymn 'Fight the good fight' sung at his funeral service summed up his philosophy of life.

He was a property steward in the church for many years and exercised his stewardship in a devoted and exemplary manner.

It is fortunate that his recollections were written down in 1980, and we are grateful to his son Mr Brian Harris of Bristol, for kindly allowing us to reproduce them. He can also vividly remember his early days at Victoria, sitting between his father and grandfather. If he was good and sat still his grandfather would extract with some ceremony an aluminium shaving stick from his waistcoat pocket which contained boiled sweets. These were only dispensed during the long sermon. He can also remember putting the sweet papers between the dusty floorboards.

Victoria Church is considerably plainer (and cleaner) now. The coloured ceiling panels, the text which ran around the chancel arch and the ten commandments behind the communion table are all gone.

The memories end in optimism for the future generation of Methodists, which epitomised the life of the man affectionately known as Rex Harris.

Tales My Father Told Me

Dick Russell

R. D. Russell, is resident in Pensford; BSc (Hons Chem), Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, and Affiliate of the Institute of Biology. His career was as Soil Scientist in the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAAS) and its successor the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS). He has been Treasurer of the Avon Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group since its formation in 1981, and was a founder member of Avon Wildlife Trust.

Introduction

It is a commonplace that farming, in common with most other activities, has seen vast changes during the present century. At the beginning of the century some machinery was in use on farms, and traction engines were used to tow the threshing machine from one farm to the next to thresh the cereals. Most of the energy to do the work was provided by human muscles and horses. Light was provided by candles and oil lamps. My father used to tell us about those early days. These stories, which are anecdotal and not the result of rigorous historical research, do give a flavour of the time and may be of interest.

Family

My great grandfather *George Stocker Russell* (18 June 1809 - 2 December 1881) had a small holding at Whitchurch. His sixth child and fourth son *George* was born on 27 September 1850. On 31 March 1877 he married *Mary Jane Wolven* (5 December 1849 - 5 April 1907) whose father was a labourer. For some time following their marriage George and Mary lived in Blackfriars Road, London, where George managed a town dairy owned by Mr Thompson of Compton Dando.

In the mid-1880s several children died in infancy, supposedly in epidemics. George and Mary returned to Somerset in 1887. They lived with his brother James in Barrow Gurney that winter and then took the tenancy of Lane End Farm, Littleton (Grid Ref. ST 557641). They moved to Court Farm, Littleton (Grid Ref. ST 552647) in 1900, and to North Hill Farm, East Dundry (Grid Ref. ST 578664) in 1910. When he retired in 1929 his

youngest son *Frederick* (20 December 1896 - 11 August 1988) took on the tenancy until he in turn retired in December 1956. Fred was my father and I was brought up at North Hill Farm.

Dealing

As well as being a farmer my grandfather George was a dealer in farm stock. He dealt with customers from the North of England, The East Coast, South-East Wales, and areas around Bristol in Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire. Times were hard and the youngsters were expected to help. With virtually no telephones, one of my father's tasks as soon as he was old enough to be trusted on a pony was to ride to Winford Post Office from Court Farm to collect the mail before walking back to school at Winford by 9.00am. In this way my grandfather received his mail by 8.00am rather than 10.00am and so he had more time to visit farmers who were offering animals for sale.

What is now the Avon Livestock Centre had just started as Winford market. Important markets for grandfather were the ones at Bristol held on Thursdays and at Wells on Saturdays. Among other places, he also bought and sold stock at Farrington Gurney market. Some animals came by rail to St Philips station for the Bristol market which was held at the back of Temple Meads station. Many were walked to market and at busy times groups of animals would have to wait in the road until pens were freed by sales. Father told of bunches of cattle being held in what is now the A4 with the groups extending up towards the 'Three Lamps' junction. Those who travel to Bristol to work may feel that the situation has not changed much over the last 60 years or so.

The market site in Wells is now a car park and a few years ago I noticed rings and chains in the walls which had been used as cattle ties. Sometimes grandfather would travel to Wells by train. One of the boys would take him to Parson Street, Bedminster, for main line travel to Yatton and then on the Cheddar branch line to Wells. If he purchased any cattle he would send a telegram and a couple of his sons would set off to Wells in the pony and trap to walk them home.

A Long Walk

One Thursday in 1910, soon after they had moved to Dundry, grandfather met a friend at market who farmed at Horton in south Gloucestershire. He was looking for some sheep to purchase. It happened that grandfather had

purchased 50 that week and they had been delivered to his farm the day before. He took Mr Burdge home to lunch and sold the sheep to him. The arrangement was that they would be taken to Bristol the next day (Friday) and put on the train for Yate. My father was given this task and on arrival at the railway station he was told that animals were transported only on Thursdays. He enquired the way to Yate and walked the sheep through Stapleton Road, Fishponds and eventually nearly to Yate. There he saw a farmer, who recognised him as 'one of the young Russells', and told him to put the sheep in a nearby field which he owned. He undertook to inform Mr Burdge of their whereabouts and took father to Yate station just in time for the 5.00pm train to Temple Meads. He took a tramcar to Bedminster Down and walked home to Dundry. When he arrived home grandfather asked where on earth he had been all day! It is an open question as to whether father aged 13 or the dog were the more tired after walking nearly 20 miles.

No China Broken

It was necessary to get to the Bristol market early to make sure of a pen and to avoid waiting about. Often cattle were walked into Bristol on a Wednesday afternoon and stabled at the 'George and Railway' at a cost of one shilling (5p) per animal. Cattle are full of curiosity and an open gate is an invitation to explore. One afternoon a cow went into a cottage garden and through the open door into the kitchen. This visitation caused the housewife to scream in panic but father was very proud that he was able to manoeuvre the cow around the table and out again without breaking a cup.

More Journeys

Father and one of the farm men walked 150 sheep from Dundry through Bath and Box to Kingdown for a sheep fair. The sheep were put in a field overnight and the farmer allowed father and his man to sleep in the barn. His wife provided supper and breakfast. The next morning, after paying for their food, they took the sheep to the fairground. About half were sold and the rest were walked back to Newton St Loe. Grandfather, who had driven from the fair in the pony and trap picked them up there and took them home to Dundry. He had privately sold 50 of the sheep which had been unsold at the fair. The next morning grandfather drove father and the farm man back to Newton St Loe and then went off buying cattle. Father took the 50 sheep and walked them to the purchaser's farm at Clandown near Radstock whilst

the farm man walked the rest of the sheep home to Dundry. Having delivered the sheep to Clandown father walked to Farrington Gurney where grandfather picked him up and drove him home.

Cow Walks

When cows were purchased with calves at foot the youngsters were put in a cart which the cows were eager to follow. On one occasion eight cows, with their calves in the cart, were walked from Wells to Dundry. They were put in the home field and given a feed of hay. The usual inspection the next morning showed one of the cows to be missing. Grandfather surmised that she would walk back to her former home. Father was sent out on a pony to search and he found her at the top of Rookham Hill near Wells. He drove her back to Dundry where her calf was as pleased to see her as she was to see it. That weekend she had walked about 40 miles with no apparent ill effects.

One Thursday morning grandfather sold a couple of milk cows to a farmer from a village east of Bath. They were put on rail at St Philips station and collected by the purchaser at Bath. He drove them home and put them in a field with his dairy cows. The next morning they were missing. A couple of days later they turned up at Bristol cattle market. My father was always intrigued by this happening. He found it difficult to understand how animals could find their way back when part of the outward journey had been by train.

Hard Riding

One autumn evening father, on of his brothers, a cousin who farmed at Bishopsworth, and his man, left the market at Farrington Gurney about 5.30pm with the intention of walking about 30 cattle home to Dundry. Coming down through Stowey several animals went through an open gate into a field by the church. They managed to prevent the majority following and turned these into a yard. They then went in search of the strays. They had no lanterns and, of course, it was long before the days of electric torches, so it was not surprising that they did not find them. They decided to return to the yard and take the rest home, but were dismayed on reaching it to find that someone had opened the gate and all the cattle were missing. Grandfather was not at all pleased when they arrived home without any animals.

The next morning father and his brother were sent on pony-back to Farrington Gurney to obtain information from the auctioneers. They then

split up and rode to the various farmers from whom the animals had been purchased. Anticipating that the animals would walk home the farmers were asked to bring them to Farrington market the next week at grandfather's expense. After 12 hours riding the task was accomplished and all the cattle were returned a week later.

Sheep Shearing

Father, two of his brothers, and a couple of the farm men formed a sheep shearing team in the weeks before haymaking time. They travelled around to other farms and were paid one shilling (5p) for each sheep shorn. I assume that this work was done with hand shears, but by my childhood days father used mechanical clippers. Another person turned a large wheel over two feet in diameter. This had teeth on the circumference which engaged with a very small wheel connected by a flexible drive to the clippers. It is possible that they carried a couple of these machines around with them in a cart. I remember my father being skilled with both hand shears and mechanical clippers.

Grandfather often purchased the shorn fleeces. These were packed and dispatched by rail to Bevan's at Holt near Trowbridge. One day father was sent to Tickenham to collect three bales of wool. The farmer had a cow and calf for sale. Father made a purchase and tucked the calf in between the bales in the cart. He drove back to Dundry with the cow plodding along behind.

Veterinary Cures

Those who have read James Herriot and similar books and watched the TV programmes will realise that veterinary remedies were unsophisticated in earlier years. Grandfather had a sick cow and the vet was called. After examination and treatment he suggested a waterproof sheet and some straw should be placed around the cow to keep the wind off her. She should be closely watched and given a drop of whisky from time to time. A living-in farm worker was given the task of looking after her. The man and the cow were made comfortable for the night. When grandfather went out first thing the next morning he found the man fast asleep, the cow walking about and the bottle empty. Father said they were never sure who had most benefit from the whisky, but the cow recovered.

Prince

One of the horses on the farm was named Prince. By 1950 there were two

tractors on the farm and father decided that the horses who had served him well should enjoy their retirement. Prince died in the early 1950s. At that time my late father-in-law, *Dr F. S. Wallis*, was Director of the City Museum in Bristol and involved in establishing a group among museums in the south-west for the interchange of material. He asked my father for Prince's skin. Prince is now in a tableau at the Somerset Museum of Rural Life at Glastonbury. When we visit with our grandchildren they are fascinated to think that I used to work with him.

Recordings

A year or so before he died my father recorded some of these stories, and two tapes are at the Rural Life Museum at Glastonbury.

Acknowledgements

Times were tough in the thirties, but my parents provided us with a very good home life which father enlivened by stories of when times were even harder. I am grateful to them. I would like to express my thanks to my cousin R. S. Mortimer who has undertaken research on our family history.

Demolition Discoveries

Barbara J. Lowe

During the demolition of a 16th century, two-storied cottage, at the rear of *Buss's, Tastebuds'* and *Tripps'* shops in Keynsham High Street in November 1988, builder John Sheridan discovered two ancient bread ovens. The wall at the rear of *Tastebuds'* and *Tripps'* was 6 feet thick, and the main bread oven was in this wall. A short flight of steps between two levels had been constructed through what had probably been another, smaller, oven. Forming part of these ovens were several pieces of carved Bath stone. At the rear of *Tripps'* laboratory the upper portion of a carved oak screen (diagrammatic sketch below) had been used as a lintel above a window that had been blocked-in. Above the lintel were several courses of stone, and above those was the concrete cill of a doorway. The oak timber measures 52 x 9 x 4 inches. Mr Sheridan has treated the wood and has preserved it as a feature in his home, The Old Barn, Wellsway.

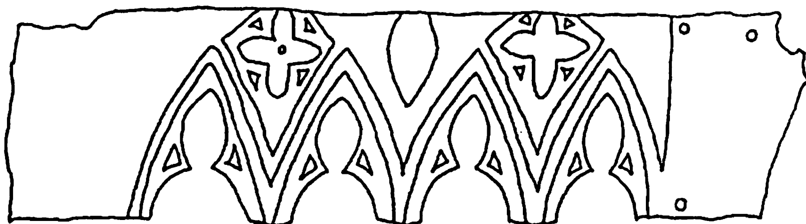

Fig. 1. Fragment of carved oak screen, probably from Keynsham Abbey.

Realising that both stones and screen may have come from Keynsham Abbey, Mr Sheridan contacted our Society and arranged to deliver the stones to the Abbey site for my inspection. All were of Bath stone, which had turned pink where subjected to heat. One is a charming, but damaged, corbel (13 x 5½ x 5¼ inches) with a head and shoulders carved into the squarish end. The flat topped head appears to be that of a woman with tightly scrolled curls in the nape of the neck. Her shoulders are draped with a garment of cowl-shaped neckline with a central, ornate, fastening. The

face is damaged, but seems to represent a young person. Another stone (11 x 3½ x 5 inches) is carved on the two long sides with a 3 inch sided, double-walled diamond alternating with a 1½ inch diameter double rose. A scrolled acanthus leaf is carved into the small end, undercutting it in the manner of a corbel. In addition there were three pieces of possible screen base, or box tomb, decorated with tiny pumpkin-like motifs on either side of a fillet. There were also several pieces of vaulting ribs. Most of the stone sculpture dates from c.1180.

We are most grateful to Mr Sheridan for rescuing these stones and donating them to the Abbey collection.

Roman Remains at Somerdale

Charles Browne

In April 1991 part of the rugby pitch at Cadbury's Sports Field was levelled, and in the process extensive Roman remains were uncovered. The site was near to Somerfields House, the former office block of the factory, and the area affected was about 65m NW-SE by 90m SW-NE. There was no notice of this work, and it is not covered by planning requirements. By the time the news leaked out the area had been stripped and the damage done. I took photographs of the site and made a plan of damaged foundations of a building. Barbara Lowe, Margaret Whitehead, Tony Brown and a small band of helpers set about recovering small finds.

Within a few days the stripped area was re-covered with topsoil and seeded with grass. So the foundations we saw remain under the new turf, as does a much larger area of building debris which presumably covers other buildings. At present these remain intact for investigation at some future time.

The spoil from the levelling work was dumped at a distant part of the factory, and ever since April Barbara Lowe and her helpers have worked over the huge spoil heap, recovering a rich haul of finds. The quantity of spoil has made the work arduous and protracted. Even after eighteen months finds are still turning up. When they are studied they will give some picture of the site, but it is deplorable that we do not have a record of their stratification from a proper archaeological excavation.

The clearest feature revealed was a building, represented only by the lowest part of its foundations. What remained was planned, but the SE end had been destroyed and flooring and internal features were removed. In this part of the site the difference between preservation of a foundation and its complete removal was often no more than 10cm. Other foundations are likely to be better preserved, under a layer of debris from the destruction of the buildings. This layer of stones extended over much of the area exposed. Parts of walls or foundations were visible; but could not be planned without removing the rubble covering which, in the circumstances, would have been unnecessarily destructive of evidence which will remain *in situ.*

After the topsoil had been restored the whole of the rugby pitch was cultivated for re-seeding with grass. This disclosed a fine Bath Stone column lying just below the surface in an area which had not been levelled.

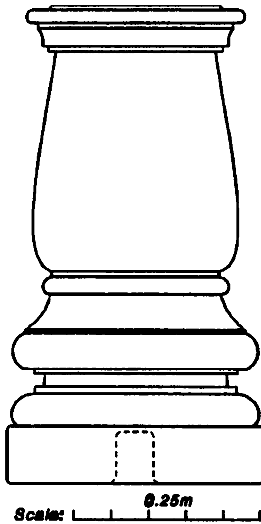

Fig. 2: Bath stone column

A striking feature of the site was a metalled trackway following a sinuous course between the areas of buildings. It was well-made with a stone base and a metalled surface of buff/orange gravel. It appeared to be heading towards the Keynsham Villa at Durley Hill, about 1Km away, but there is nothing to suggest that it did in fact extend that far.

The coarse pottery includes types from the 2nd to the 4th century, and there is decorated and plain samian ware. The bronze brooches include one similar to an earlier Somerdale find (Hod Hill type, late 1st/early 2nd century?). Many coins were recovered, bronze and bone pins, metal fragments, and a large number of iron nails. Several querns have been found. Architectural fragments include columns in Bath oolite stone, such as Fig.2 which was 63cm high (cf Wedlake 1958, 242 (1), Fig. 56 1F). Both ceramic and pennant sandstone tiles were found.

Of particular interest among the new finds are military belt plates. If indeed

they belong to the 1st century they support my suggestion that Roman occupation at Somerdale began as a small military post at the confluence of the rivers Chew and Avon, associated with the water transport of lead from the Mendip mines.

The finds reinforce the new picture of Roman Somerdale which I deduced from the unpublished finds in the former Somerdale Museum. They indicate a small settlement with a long history from the 1st to the 4th centuries, and including a shrine or temple and two cemeteries.

Incidentally, this new evidence lends added force to the efforts of North Wansdyke Heritage Trust to ensure the survival and accessibility of the earlier finds, which are now languishing in the basement of Keynsham Town Hall.

It has been suspected that much was destroyed or still lies buried under the factory and other parts of Somerdale. In postwar years various building activities have revealed Roman pottery over a large part of the area, but few structures. Service trenches dug not far from the site of this new discovery exposed walls. Work on a new sewerage pumping station at the end of Chandos Road revealed pottery, metal and coins, and inhumation and cremation burials. There is a strong possibility that one of the cemeteries of the settlement lies under the railway embankment here. None of these finds has been documented adequately. For the immediate future the remains of the settlement are now safely buried and protected by topsoil. If there is any prospect of building development the site should be excavated to determine its extent and history.

Taken with the new appreciation of the enhanced status of the nearby Keynsham Villa at Durley Hill, we may recognise that this was a site of some importance in Roman times. I have argued elsewhere (Browne 1987) that Somerdale fulfils many of the qualifications for identification as the *Trajectus* of the *Antonine Itinerary.*

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