

*An essay written by Michal Clark whilst at teacher training college.
Michal was a pupil at the Village school and her mother was Head Teacher*

*This 'lost' account was reunited with the author thanks to Robert Ovens of
Rugby who found it whilst clearing old files and sent it through to the village.*



Picture shows Mrs Michel Seager (nee Clark) whilst visiting Bishopstone in 2009.

*A Saturday morning coffee party was held at the White Hart with those who remembered
'Bishopstone of old'!*

The Essay

An investigation into the historical and social background of two villages and their development to the present day.

Method of Investigation

- One day spent in the Bishopstone village school.
- One day in Salisbury Reference Library.
- One morning visiting friends and old people in the village and two evenings in “The Three Horseshoes” talking to the villagers; plus personal memories.
- Much material gleaned from school log books.

Bishopstone Village

Situation & Historical Background

Bishopstone is situated on the River Ebbles in the Chalke Valley, about six miles from Salisbury and eighteen from Shaftesbury, in Wiltshire.

It is a sprawling untidy village covering a large area, with solitary houses and farms dotted here and there, and a population (taken in the last census) of 473, though due to recent building developments this has almost certainly increased.

Near Winchester, Old Sarum, Stonehenge and other places rich in historical interest, Bishopstone too has a fascinating background. Iron and Bronze age remains have been found in profusion and one of the barrows has yielded the largest tub shaped burial urn (24½ feet high x 16¼ diameter) found in Wilts. Flint arrow heads can be picked up in almost any garden, and the Roman road which goes over the hills to Shaftesbury is easily followed although it is only suitable for walking or cycling as it has never been metalled.

It is from the Domesday Book that the first written historical facts concerning the village can be gleaned, and on reading these it becomes obvious why the Bishopstone of the twentieth century is so scattered.

There are many large farms in the village – Crouchston, Faulston, Flamston, Netton and Throope, and each of these, in the Domesday Book, is mentioned as a separate hamlet, along with Bishopstone.

The origin of their names is interesting. Faulston comes from the French name “Fallard” and is therefore post Norman Conquest, and similarly Flamston derives from “Flambard”. The name of Crouchston Farm is thought to come from the celtic word “cruc” meaning hill or

mound, but all these hamlets were in the Downton hundred, under the Diocese of the Bishop of Winchester.

During the 250 years following the Conquest there is evidence of a rising population and extension of land cultivation, which can be seen from the Domesday survey – a survey made in 1189, and from a thirteenth century rental document that was drawn up.

Carting and Packhorse services supply evidence of the custom of selling grain, and from Bishopstone grain was taken to the four nearest markets by the tenants of the manor. Wages were low – in 1282 a ploughman received three shillings and between five and six-and-a-half quarters of barley during the year, rising by 1415 to six shillings and five quarters of barley per year. Taxes were assessed in areas, and the sum collected was decided upon by local negotiations between the collectors and the communities.

In 1349 almost the entire population was wiped out by the Black Death and in the years following there was urgent need for local tax relief. In 1377 there is mention of Poll Tax – 4d a head (“poll”) for everyone over 14 who was not a professional beggar, and the combined hamlets produced 299 persons liable for this tax.

The countryside was ideal for such sport as coursing with hare and hounds; “there was an abundance of hares of great “stoutness”, and in such open country they frequently outstripped the greyhounds”, and this remained a popular sport with the “gentry” until it was replaced in the eighteenth century by fox hunting.

The River Ebble provided excellent trout fishing, there is a local legend that when Queen Elizabeth 1st stayed at Wilton House, she was regularly supplied with trout from the Ebble for breakfast.

One would expect the church to be the centre of the village, but in Bishopstone it is situated right at one end. This is explained firstly by the series of hamlets of which Bishopstone consists, and secondly by the Black Death. Near the church is a large field full of odd humps and hollows where now the cows graze, but this was the site of Bishopstone village before the Black Death killed so many people, and it was deemed wise by the remaining inhabitants to move away from the plague spot and build houses elsewhere.

The Church itself – dedicated to St John the Baptist – dates from Edward III and is built of Chilmark stone (the same as that used for Salisbury Cathedral) – from the quarry twelve miles away.

The list of rectors goes back to 1302, but many of the old documents and registers of the church are now in Trowbridge in the County archives and it was impossible to refer to them. There are several interesting features in the church – one being the priest’s door which is of a unique design, and, on the exterior wall of the south transept, and coeval with it, a cloister like construction, the purpose of which is unknown, although it has been suggested it is the founder’s tomb.

The chancel is stone vaulted and there is a beautiful sedilia; the font is fifteenth century and pulpit is French or Spanish woodwork. One of the other beauties of the church is some Communion Plate given by John Earle, Rector in 1663, who later became Bishop of Salisbury.

The church was in the Downton hundred until the Reformation, when it passed to its present owners, the Earls of Pembroke. From the Parochial Survey of 1650 we read "We present the Parsonage of Bishopstone to the Right Honourable Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery in Patron, and is worth £400 per annum".

The church walls are scarred with bullet marks reputed to be from the guns of Cromwell's army, and in the north transept of the church can be found a monumental figure of the seventeenth century and a large shield containing the arms of the Vaughn family – a name linked with the Royalist movement, and also associated with the Commonwealth Commission.

The Vaughn family lived at Faulstone House which was built probably in the reign of Henry V and described thus in the 17th century "Here was a noble old fashioned house with a mote about it, and a drawbridge, and strong high walls embattled. They did consist of a layer of free stone and a layer of flints squared. Two towers faced the South, one East and one West". Sir George Vaughn lived in this house and in 1642 commanded a regiment of cavalry in the King's service. He was wounded at Lansdown, but took the field again in 1644 or 1645. While he was away fighting, the Roundhead army, plundering the countryside, took over Faulstone House, and moved their headquarters from Malmsbury to this stronghold.

The Faulstone conclave dealt mainly with the southern half of the county; here the Commonwealth Commission set exacting fines from the Royalist gentry and paying the troops. Entries in the Faulstone Day Book make interesting reading. "On the 15th June 1645 John Drake of Lake House having been detained and secured at Faulstone for delinquency (that is for adherence to the King's party) hath subscribed upon the Propositions £50, twenty to be paid in hand, the rest by the last day of June".

On July 1st 1646 "Mr William Helmes of Chilmark hath taken the negative oath. Mr Thomas Coombes hath taken the National Covenant and is thereby discharged of the sequestration of his estate".

When the garrison had gone at the duration of the Civil War in 1649, Faulstone was sold to the Earl of Pembroke. The moat was filled in and the high walls and one of the towers pulled down.

The other tower still remains and is used as a pigeon house. This summer I talked to a local labourer who had, a few weeks before, repaired the "dove cot". He was intrigued by the structure of the walls which are double with a fairly large cavity between them and at intervals round the walls have stone shelves about 18" down the cavity which may have been used for storing ammunition.

He also mentioned an ancient iron ladder fixed over a runner so that it can be moved round the interior wall to give access to any part of the wall. The site of the old mansion, on the

borders of a stream, is now occupied by a farm house, and apart from the tower no vestiges of its former grandeur remain. There is, however, an interesting legend connected with the house.

On the far side of the stream, away from the house, is a small wood, called the “Wilderness” which for generations of children has been a place of mystery. It abounds with wild life and every wild flower of the neighbourhood grows there. One of the daughters of Faulstone House – the date of this incident is unknown – disappeared every evening into the Wilderness carrying a saucer of milk.

When this was reported to her father he commanded a servant to follow her, and he was duly informed that the girl fed a large snake there. In spite of her protestations she was confined to the house where she pined and died – and the body of a dead snake was found in the Wilderness. This is almost certainly the reason for the air of mystery which surrounds the place.

According to available records there appear to have been very few Charities of Bishopstone. In 1812 £100 was left by an unknown person to the Rector of the Parish, and it was laid out at five per cent interest to support a workhouse. The workhouse was sold about 1845 and no further mention is made of the capital. A copy of Dorothy George’s will in an old Parish Register reveals that in 1842 she left £500 to be divided among the poor for “binding young persons of this Parish apprentices, and for the help and relief of impotent persons unable to labour”.

Bishopstone School

The most interesting and far reaching development in the history of the village took place in 1843 when by Deed Poll the Right Honourable Robert Henry Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery – Lord of the Manor of Bishopstone – under the authority of the School Sites Act granted the Rev. Lear a piece of land measuring about ½ an acre to “be applied as a site for a school for poor persons of and in the Parish of Bishopstone, and for the residence of the school master and school mistress, such school to be under the management and direction of the officiating minister, subject to the inspection and control of the Lord Bishop of the Diocese and to be open at all reasonable times to the inspection of the inspectors appointed conformally with the Order in Council dated 10th August 1840.

By an indenture dated the twelfth of July 1843 made by Celia Montgomery, widow of the Rector, who had bequeathed £400 to Rector of Bishopstone to build a school in the parish of Bishopstone, £395 was invested in memory of him, the dividends and annual income from which should go towards maintenance and repairs of the school, payment of salaries or used at the trustees discretion as the school had already been built and the money therefore not needed for this.

The balance on a current account to the credit of the charity was on December 1st 1905 £17-12-7d.

In 1871 managers of the School were required by the Committee of Council to obtain an order of the Charity Commissioners establishing a new scheme of management for the School.

The school should at all times be open to Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools. The management of the school was to be in the hands of the Rector and curate and "six other persons continuing to be contributors in every year to the amount of 20 shillings each, at least". It was also stipulated that no person could be appointed head, unless Church of England.

The History of Bishopstone Elementary School as revealed from the School Log Books
The log books are kept in a high musty cupboard set into the wall of the larger of the two stone built classrooms which comprise the village school.

Built in Gothic style with high pointed windows it is typical of many schools of this period. There is no reference to any previous school in the village and one can assume that Lord Pembroke was prompted to provide facilities for the children by the growing awareness for the need of education which was gradually sweeping the country.

Men like Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster were exerting influence on the methods of teaching; trying to deal with the problems of the time – vast numbers of children to be educated, lack of experienced teachers and a small amount of money available – by introducing the monitorial or pupil teacher system.

Lancaster was a Quaker and therefore his religious instruction was undenominational and he taught no catechism; Bell, an Anglican, was supported by the Church of England, and this difference between the two educationalists resulted in the formation of two committees – The National Society supporting Bell and the Church of England, and the British and Foreign School Society supporting Lancaster and the nonconformists.

These two societies established schools all over England and by 1851 there were 17,015 church schools (one of which was Bishopstone) and 1,500 British Schools.

There had been, after the Reform Bill of 1832 some insistence on the right of the church to control education, while others felt it must be a secular education. In 1862 Robert Lowe, Vice President of the Department of Education, inaugurated the system of payment by results – the grant for the school depending on the findings of the H.M.I's when they visited the schools to examine the pupils' attendance and academic ability – and it is at this point, or rather one year later in 1863, that the log books of Bishopstone School commence.

In the front of the first book are given the dimensions of the two school rooms. The larger, built to accommodate 60 children has a length of 34½ feet a breadth of 17 feet and a height of 18 feet; the other room is 21 feet 4 inches long, 16½ feet wide and 16 feet high and would house 35 children.

The roll, in fact, in 1864 was 86 children but one of the main worries of the teacher appeared to be the poor attendance of the pupils, which at this time was not compulsory, although the head's salary was affected by it.

Many of the entries reflect the rural community in which the children lived and the necessary part they played in that community when absences for potato picking, wheat setting and so on are recorded; even the long summer holiday is referred to as “the Harvest Holiday”. Other reasons for absence are recorded.

July 1863 School closed early for Harvest Home.
October 1863 Few children because many went to Salisbury Fair.
1866 Children absent for Salisbury Races.
1886 Otter hounds attracted boys away from school.

There were also other circumstances which created irregular attendance. Some children only came in the summer when the weather was fine. These almost certainly lived on outlying farm cottages where fields and hills had to be crossed to reach school and in the winter months the children could not tackle the journey.

In November 1863 “An old scholar was readmitted this morning to come for a week alternately with her sister” This way two children could be educated for the price of one. In October 1865 “a girl went home on being told to go into a lower class after having been away from school for a long time and got behind”. The following week “Girl came to be readmitted and on condition that she remain in said lower class for a fortnight she was readmitted”.

The teacher was not above bribery for attendance, and in December 1869 “So many children were absent that I promised picture cards to the most regular”.

Some difficulty in obtaining school fees is apparent in such entries as in 1872 “The children are more mindful of their school money as I sent home two or three for it last week.” Payment by attendance and results weighed heavily on the teachers.

In June 1863 “Spoke to the children about going home and made this restriction that except in very urgent cases they will not be allowed to leave until lessons are over”.
1872 Made a rule that no child shall leave the school unless he brings a good reason from his parents.

Teaching methods were influenced by the necessity of results rather as the 11+ influences Primary Schools today.

July 1863. This morning I had to insist on a lesson being learnt which had twice been brought to me very imperfectly said. The children must not be allowed to do any other lesson till that one had been said.

February 1866. I observed they wanted much looking after in keeping their eyes on their books and keeping together in reading.

An entry in November 1864 gives in detail the results of a visit from the H.M.I.

Average Attendance 77

Presented for Exam 57

Passed in Reading	53			
Passed in Writing	53			
Passed in Arithmetic	49			
Infants under 6	29			
		£	s	d
Earned by examination	120 at 2/8	20	13	4
By Attendance	77 at 4/-	15	8	0
For Infants	29 at 6/6	9	8	6
		£	45	9 10

All through the log books right up to the present one frequent references to visits from the Rector, his wife and the curate are made and show how strongly the authority of the church ruled the school.

The Rector brings books for reading and writing, brings a stock of new pencils and sees a new desk is delivered, as well as doing a great deal of scripture teaching and listening in to many more lessons.

Needlework seems to have been the main interest of his wife and there is one entry in 1865 which shows how necessary it was to be a member of the church when attending school. January 20th 1865. "Took the children's bank money (this in itself is an interesting fact) this afternoon and issued cards. The curate was present and assisted, allowing no child to make a deposit who attended the chapel Sunday school".

The children made frequent visits to the church on every Saint's day as well as occasions such as Ash Wednesday. The Vicarage also provided them with the occasional treat.

July 13th 1863. A treat was provided for the children at the Rectory whither they marched in procession carrying garlands and banners, preceded by the band. After Divine Service they partook of an excellent tea and spent a very pleasant evening in the rectory grounds where games and other amusements were provided.

On December 7th of the same year "many of the children went to the Rectory to receive their awards". This was after an Inspection.

As a church school Bishopstone was subject to a yearly examination from the Diocesan Inspector, and much teaching time was devoted to scripture and catechism. The Rector did some doctrinal teaching and I remember vividly in the 1930's learning the catechism every Monday while milk money and national savings were taken.

"What is your name" "M or N" (what did that mean ? If it were M or F it could be masculine or feminine!)

"Who gave you that name" "My Godfathers and Godmothers in my baptism etc etc"

Year in and year out from 1860 to 1951 this ritual was repeated.

Various entries give insight into the organisation of the school. The rooms were obviously subdivided.

May 1865. "The dividing curtains were taken down and mended – made two tidy ones out of three".

Sections would be in charge of pupil teachers or monitors to whom various references are made.

January 1865. Two new teachers entered on their work.

January 1866. Pupil teachers attended examination in Salisbury. Monitors employed for some of the classes.

1868. List of teachers :-

Mary Mills – certificated teacher of 1st Division 2nd year.

Ellen Mullins – Pupil teacher of 3rd year

Lucy Cuff – Pupil teacher of 2nd year

In 1870 with 111 children on the books there still appear to be only three teachers though there may have been monitors.

One amusing complaint which occurs again and again right up to the current log book is the ineffectiveness of the large tortoise stoves which, when the wind is in the wrong direction smoke out the children from one room and force them to share a room with the rest of the school.

Some of the punishments mentioned in the first log book give a very clear indication of the liaison between church and school and the type of punishment considered suitable for children.

September 1863. Today the children were kept in to stand still for ½ hour for behaving badly in church the last few Sundays.

October 1863. Above punishment repeated every day this week.

December 1868. Children were denied their library books because of misconduct.

In 1870 after a stormy passage through the House of Commons an Education Bill was passed in which School Boards were given the right to make education compulsory between stated ages. In rural districts the Boards moved slowly but were compelled in 1880 to make some ruling on compulsory education between specified years and the school leaving age was raised in 1889 to twelve.

It was not until 1881 that a mention of a School Attendance Officer is made in the log books but after this date there is a frequent reference to his visits and in 1890 an entry reads "threat to report several children unless school attendance is better".

In 1902 a medical certificate must be produced if a child is absent from school. Fees were not entirely abolished until 1918, but the last reference to them in Bishopstone log books is in 1892.

Teaching methods were still largely mechanical, but gradually in the 1890's the curriculum was widened.

1886. "The payment of the grant for needlework and singing is made with great hesitation – these subjects require great attention".

1886. An outing to Knighton Wood to pick primroses. There are lists of "object lessons" given to the infants on "the pig, the fire, the bean" and so on – totally unrelated subjects but they must have brought a little interest into the classroom.

1892. Received form 523 from "the Department of Science and Art" stating that the school has again been awarded the "Good" grant for Drawing. The list of prizes given in 1905 seems to attach little importance to academic achievement.

They were given for Good Fellowship, Perfect Attendance, Holy Scripture, Good Conduct and Needlework – and the prizes themselves were the classics – Alice in Wonderland, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Swiss Family Robinson, Water Babies and the like. In 1903 a report from a H.M.I. states that "P.T. is not taught in accordance with an approved scheme. Model course should be adopted or alternative course equivalent in scope and aim substituted for approval of the Board of Education".

This Board had been formed in 1889 to superintend Educational affairs in England and Wales and a Consultative Committee to advise the Board was also established.

The 1902 Education Act brought education under municipal control; county and county borough councils became the Local Education Authorities and set up Local Education Committees responsible for administration but not for fund raising, so that local finances were under public control. Each school had six managers but a Voluntary Church School like Bishopstone (as opposed to the Council or Provided schools) had only two appointed by the Education Committee and the other four were foundation managers.

The managers in the non-Provided school had to provide a building free of charge and were responsible for repairs, but were supported a little by the rates, and the government grant was rearranged to help poorer areas. Thus denominational schools were given a definite place in the educational system.

The effect of the Local Education Authority is shown in the log books. In 1905 the Assistant Director of Education called and also the School Sanitary Inspector (the first mention of him) who "inspected" the offices and said "they were in a very satisfactory condition". In 1906 Timetables had to be approved by the County Education Department at Trowbridge to be approved by the General Education Committee and in 1907 there is mention of a quarterly attendance certificate.

There were at this time 121 children attending the school.

In 1907 an Act empowering L.E.A's to make provision for the health and physical condition of the children was passed and in 1908 there appears the first mention of a school medical examination. "20 children were eligible for the examination but only 7 were examined because the other parents objected. One boy was forbidden to attend school because of consumption".

In 1909 a weighing machine which travelled up and down the valley from school to school comes into existence, and subsequent entries confirm that the task of regular weighing and measuring of pupils was added to the duties of the teacher. In 1917 there is mention of the Parochial Nurses inspection and this is repeated regularly as is the visit of the school dentist, first recorded in 1918.

In 1919 the County Oculist visited the school and "found little wrong" and later, visits from the orthopaedic clinic are mentioned.

Although Education was compulsory, some children in rural areas were able to opt out of school attendance if their parents so desired. If a child had to travel over three miles to school then he was not legally forced to attend. A letter in the log book of 1914 illustrates this point.

Dear Sir,

I intend keeping Walter home now, as the magistrate told me if I could prove they were out of the limit there would be no compulsion. I have had measured the nearest allowed road from my house to school and find it 3 miles and 18 chains.

Yours truly, C. Fulford

A further example is found as late as 1935 when Billy Cooper, who lived at a farm cottage at Throope Bottom, elected to attend school only from Monday to Thursday and take Friday as a holiday. Nothing could be done about this and he continued to attend in this manner until leaving school.

Gradually the picture of school life as we know it today emerges from these log books. In 1914 a music festival was attended, and stock was ordered from E.J.Arnold. School outings to places of interest and seaside trips occur; visits from the County P.T. Organiser, the Drama Organiser and a Horticultural Inspector are recorded, together with mention of a Country Dance Party in Salisbury and in 1925 Swimming Classes and Domestic Science Classes took place though there is no mention of where these lessons were held. From 1923 onwards visits from students at Salisbury Training College first for observation only and later for teaching practice are mentioned.

In 1932 there is an important change in the school.

"From April onwards this school is for Junior Children only; the 11+ remove to Broad Chalke and three long desks and three large boxes of books are to be transferred with them to Broad Chalke School".

In the same year, 1932, the first free place to Bishop Wordsworth School won by Jack Dimmer, is recorded. The Bishop lived in the village at this time and his wife, Mrs Wordsworth, was one of the school managers.

In 1933 a school concert was given in the village hall and this became an annual affair.

On the 11th of September 1939 this entry is found. “Owing to the outbreak of war school has not opened today. In order to accommodate the evacuated children we have arranged to spend three hours a day in the School and two hours a day in the Village Hall. This week however we are only able to use the school because we are waiting for lavatories to be built at the Hall”. Gas mask inspections are referred to but there is little mention of war time conditions.

In 1940 an H.M.I’s report states “A better range of activities – percussion band, handwork, singing and practical work in history and geography”.

In 1947 the uncertificated assistant teacher left to take a year emergency training at Exhall Training College.

The effects of the 1944 Education Act are seen in the log book in the years that follow – the most far reaching being this “As from September 1951 Bishopstone School has been accepted by the Ministry of Education as a Church Controlled School”. Grants and the Montgomery Trust could no longer maintain the school and the house which were both sadly in need of a face lift. The managers therefore took advantage of the choice given to them of becoming a “controlled” or “aided” school. They chose the former, which meant they had no financial responsibility at all – this was now dealt with by the L.E.A. but they no longer had the right to hold denominational religious instruction except for 2 periods a week to those children whose parents desired it.

The Board of Managers did retain ownership of the school premises. Another consequence of the ’44 Act was that in 1951 School meals were served daily from the Central Kitchen at Wilton, and this is still the procedure at Bishopstone School.

Further Development in the Village

After the Civil War little is written about Bishopstone. Life became stable and the farm labourer went about his work, while the farm owners hunted, entertained and flourished. The farms were rich and the population of the village was split into two different sections; the “high-ups” as they were termed by the locals, and the villagers.

The farm labourer still earned a very low wage – it was 10/- a week towards the end of the nineteenth century, but he was housed in a cottage for which he paid a nominal rent if any, and often had free milk from the farm.

Of course he had his own garden and often an allotment as well, and grew all his own vegetables and fruit, and almost certainly kept a pig and some hens. Harvest time was the busiest time of the year, and though he often worked until 10’o’clock at night he was paid a bonus, perhaps as much as £3, and it is at this time of the year that employees changed jobs or moved house, if a change was necessary.

The bonus money had a special use and every Michaelmas the village shoemaker, Isaac Barter, was kept very busy making boots and shoes for the villagers which would last them until the following year when more money was available for this necessity.

There were two mills in the village, for grinding corn. "The Upper Mill" at one end of the village with its big water wheel turning the huge grinding stones was in use until the late 1930's, but the other one The Old Mill near Faulstone Farm went out of use far earlier, although a big cider press still worked when I was a child. Cider was the favourite drink of the locals and both the White Hart and the Three Horseshoes did a good trade.

On winter nights the poker was heated in the open fire and thrust into tankards where it sizzled and "mulled" the cider.

Mr Wort, at the beginning of the twentieth century was a carpenter and undertaker; I am not sure where his capital came from, but he later owned Crouchston Farm and his carpentry business developed into a building and decorating firm; his grandson still employs a large percentage of the village men.

The Mission Hall, together with the Rectory, was the centre of the village entertainment. Harvest homes were held there and socials and concerts. There were Empire Day and Coronation celebrations; jumble sales in the Hall and flower shows at the Rectory.

There was also a flourishing football team and the old minutes make interesting reading, particularly when there is a complaint from the village lads that Isaac Barter had taken over the common land on which they played football, and was turning it into a water-cress bed, by skilful use of the natural springs nearby! Nothing was done about this, and the watercress bed – one of many owned by his grandson – is still there today.

There were two shops in the village, one near the school and the other at the far end, this latter being the post office as well. These two shops sold almost everything except clothing.

My Personal Memories of Village Life

My family moved to Bishopstone in 1935 when my mother took the post of Head Mistress of the village school. The house was small – two downstairs rooms and a kitchen and 3 little bedrooms.

There was a small wooden room built onto the dining room, which held a bath. The sanitation was a bucket and wooden seat outside, the washbasin was the kitchen sink, and the water supply, pumped by my father daily from the well into two large storage tanks was heated by a nauseous coke stove in the kitchen. The fuel used for cooking and lighting was oil.

The school itself had no running water and so ink was made, tadpoles changed and paint and drinking water obtained from a sink and taps on the outside of the house, usually with 4 small children swinging on the high pump handle.

Many of the village wells worked on the bucket and chain system and our well must have been much deeper than most, for in time of drought many villagers came to us for water.

They also came for library books for one of the duties of the head teacher was to run the village “County Library”.

The school itself I remember as a typical “Miss Read” set up. The small playground was rough earth lacerated by the roots of the giant beech trees which lined the path at the side of the playground and afforded endless amusement, as well as welcome shade in summer. Beech nuts were collected and eaten in the autumn, and between the trunks of “double trees” (2 which grew close together) were robber dens, pirate ships and a home for “mothers and fathers”. The fence at the bottom of the playground was nice to climb on to wave at the convoys of army tanks or to shout derisively at gipsy caravans.

There were two teachers in the school, one for infants in the “small” room and the other for juniors in the “big” room, but for medical inspections, visits from the dentist, county examinations and so on the infants joined the juniors in the big room, to leave the other vacant. I remember the boys arguing over who should empty the bucket full of bloody water and teeth after the dentist’s visit.

The toilets were the wooden seat and bucket variety and by the girls’ toilet was the “ash heap” where every day ashes were emptied from the tortoise stoves. By the boys’ toilets was the “coke heap” used for feeding the giant stoves.

There was a sharp division in the village between the local farm owners or gentry and the villagers. The children of the former either went to boarding school or day school in Salisbury; those of the latter came to the village school. The school teacher held a rather unique position half way between the “haves” and the “have nots” and consequently had a foot in both camps.

Mr C. M. Wort (the erstwhile carpenter) was one of the school managers, and Mrs Wordsworth, widow of the Bishop, still lived at Netton House.

The Rector, the Rev. Beslase, more interested in fishing for trout than men, kept the church ticking over but took little interest in village life. His wife ran the Sunday School of which I was a regular member (of necessity, for this was a church school, and the family must support the church). I also pumped the wheezy old organ for the morning services and received £1 a year for so doing.

Throope Farm was owned by the Earl and Countess of Essex and Captain Dickenson ran a white turkey farm.

Stanley Barter employed two men in his water cress beds and also ran a thriving honey business.

The farms, Netton, Croucheston, Faulston, Flamston and other smaller ones employed a good 90% of the men, and those girls and women who worked found domestic employment in the village.

A weekly visit to Salisbury on one of the two market days – Tuesday or Saturday – was usual.

There were twelve council houses in the village – everyone else lived in farm cottages.

The war brought a lot more life to the village.

A boys' home from Portsmouth was evacuated – with a staff of teachers – to the village and housed in Mrs Wordsworth's mansion (she was now dead).

There was a searchlight station in the village and an American camp over the hill. Girls from the village started working in Salisbury as shop assistants or at the munitions factory, and with evacuees, the population increased.

Few of the village men joined up as they were employed in agriculture, but I remember Jack Dimmer (the first free place to Grammar School) and his two brothers joined the navy and came home on leave resplendent in bell bottoms.

Children were allowed time off school to go potato picking, and land girls and Italian prisoners of war worked on the farms.

Life never quite returned to normal after the war and a few men commuted to Salisbury every morning on the bus with the school children, working as sales representatives or shop managers and so on, and girls continued to be shop or office workers.

Electricity was installed in the school house, but it was not until 1951 when the council took over the school, that the house was modernised. Flush toilet and an upstairs bathroom were added and decent cloakrooms and toilets were built onto the school.

The pump was abandoned and the well sealed up. The play-ground was surfaced with tarmac so the children no longer tripped over roots, and some of the trees were cut down to give extra light. The Rector still paid regular visits to the school and the children still went to church on festival days, but the church influence over the school was not as powerful as it had been in former years.

Bishopstone 1967

I paid a visit to Bishopstone this year after a long absence, and the first thing that struck me forcibly was the development which had taken place. The main road had changed its shape – dangerous bends were ironed out and in places it was wider.

The Church is much the same although the pulpit has been moved and is now less remote from the congregation, and the bronchial organ of my youth has been replaced by an electronic one. A new rectory has been built – the other house, built in 1820 and said to be the Plumstead Episcopi of Anthony Trollope, is now called Bishopstone House and is the country establishment of Longman the publisher.

Two new council estates have been built; one where the village allotments were and the other near the village hall – which is at last being renovated. A further development – on what I always understood to be common land – of a housing estate of some 15 private houses valued at about £7,500 each, is bringing a new prosperous middle class element to Bishopstone.

The White Hart has been made into a roadhouse with a glassed sun lounge and a flashy air.

The locals don't go there anymore – the new landlord shortchanges they say, and doesn't welcome them into his renovated bar.

The Old Mill has burnt down, but the farms are as prosperous as ever and employing more local labour than before.

Mr Barter has given up honey, except as a side line, and is concentrating entirely on water-cress. He is just making a new bed (I was told that this time he'd bought the field !) and employs 10 men to help him.

I spent a day in the school, which has also undergone many changes since I was a pupil there. There are still only the two classrooms but large square windows have replaced several of the narrow pointed ones, and light modern furniture has replaced the old iron framed two-seater desks.

For a school of its size it has huge playing fields; the land occupied by two thatched cottages adjacent to the school is now a grassy area, and the allotments at the back of the school which survived the council estate have also been converted into a flat games field ideal for soccer and netball; a shed for storing P.E equipment has been erected in the playground.

There are 20 infants and 30 juniors in the school. The headmaster has been pressing for an extra classroom, as Wilts supply mobile classrooms which can be moved from school to school as the need arises.

He has been told that until his numbers reach 60 he does not qualify for the extra space. He is better staffed than ever before, as every morning he has an unqualified helper in his room, and all the clerical work formerly an extra task of the head – is done by a part time secretary.

There is no phone in the school and what is really needed is some sort of hall, for in the winter when the fields and playground cannot be used there is nowhere for P.E., music and movement and the like, and the classrooms have to be converted into dining rooms daily for the 35 children who stay for the school dinner, still provided from Wilton. There is a radio in the school, but no television.

Much of the teaching is still very formal – the infant teacher felt very restricted in her teaching method – a time table is kept strictly although gradually she is introducing more free activity. In the junior room the children are grouped according to their age, but little or no “group” work is done – each child works individually at his own rate. I felt the head was out of sympathy with the children although it was difficult to say how or why – apart from the sarcasm he frequently employed when dealing with them.

The type of child in the school has altered over the past 15 years. The farmers' and gentry's children still go away to school, but the new owner occupier estate, where the fathers are all professional men, have all sent their children to the village school with one exception and in this family the son was already attending the choristers school in Salisbury and has continued to do so.

Oxford accents mix with the West Country burr and I was very surprised to find a family of three Chinese children in school. Their father is the cook at Throope – now owned by Sir Antony and Lady Head – who came from Malaysia a year ago. The children had no knowledge of English but can now read and speak fluently and are an accepted part of the school.

The Rector still visits once a week on Wednesdays, but the children do not go to church – the walk of nearly a mile, along what is now a busy main road, is thought too dangerous; and the junior choir from the school no longer exists.

I enjoyed picking out familiar faces among the school children – children whose grand parents featured in the prize lists of the 1880's, and whose parents were my school fellows. The continuity and permanence of village life, epitomized in the village school is refreshing in this age of rapid change.

From the most recent Church Magazine I learned some of the activities which the village offers.

There is a Womens Institute, a Friends and Neighbours Club, a Womens Fellowship and a Young Wives Club – also a thriving Sunday School. The new Rector is obviously very much part of the village and runs interdenominational services with the chapel. He is also trying to make the services “truly congregational” with the congregation reading the Epistles in turn, and the sidesmen not only bringing alms to the altar but greeting the congregation and showing them to their seats.

There is a football club and a badminton club and a youth club, and the Three Horseshoes always has a full bar. One villager told me that by and large the men were no longer bothering to grow their own vegetables in this modern age of pre-packed and frozen foods.

For those who can afford it there is otter hunting, pheasant shooting and fishing – stretches of the river are let privately.

I spent two days and two evenings in the village; it may have been wishful thinking and sentimentality at revisiting old haunts, but there seemed to be a community spirit and “oneness” in Bishopstone which is refreshing to experience in this day and age.

There then follows a similar study on the village of Princethorpe which is between Coventry, Leamington and Rugby

Conclusion

These two villages – Bishopstone and Princethorpe – one in the South of England and the other in the Midlands, have a fairly similar background of a rural community farming its way through the centuries, but the modern products are widely diverse.

On the one hand is a village whose population is conscious of itself as a community; many of the interests of that community are centred in the village, and there is a loyalty to the village.

On the other hand is a group of people all living in the same area, but living as individuals with their own particular interests and occupations outside the area, having no feeling of unity towards other families living nearby – apart from a very small nucleus of old people. In fact I hesitate to use the term “village” when considering Princethorpe – it appears so on the map; its size merits the name, but in atmosphere and attitude it is a rural area rather than a united village.

There are several factors contributing to this difference in the two villages, but perhaps the most important is the presence or lack of a church. It is true that the influence of the church in the twentieth century is not as great as in the past, but never-the-less it is a central focal point in the village, it belongs to the village, and anyone who wishes has access to it.

The rector and his wife fill important roles in the organisation of village life and many of the functions in Bishopstone are supported if not actually run by these two. The youth club, the W.I. the old people’s club and the young wives to name a few, can all rely upon support from the vicarage.

At one time there was a slight rift between chapel and church goers, but due to friendly advances from both sides interdenominational services are now regularly held in the church. The church is old and there is a village pride in “one church” even among those who rarely attend.

It is where they were christened and married and where they will eventually be buried. Tied to the church – very closely tied until the last few years – is the school, which again serves as a common meeting ground for all but a few of the children living in the village, and so consequently provides another common interest among the villagers.

The fact that the gentry’s children do not attend the school distresses no one. There is still a smack of feudalism in Bishopstone and the differences between the “high-ups” and the commoners are readily accepted.

It has yet to be seen how the new higher middle class element from the owner occupier estate adapts, and adjusts, and is absorbed or not, into school and village life. When there is a school function almost everyone in the village has a personal interest in it, and what goes on “up the school” is a common topic of conversation.

I talked to an old man whose name I had seen in the school log book of 1886 as having won a scripture prize, (“Ah, they always said I’d end up vicar of Bishopstone”!) and the fact that we had both attended Bishopstone school as pupils was an unspoken bond in common – and this is a bond which unites many of the inhabitants and gives an almost inexpressible sense of continuity and inevitability which is part of the essence of village life.

Princethorpe has no church, but is in the parish of Stretton. Stretton is a thriving village, which has managed to retain its village atmosphere in spite of large new housing estates, commuter population and so on, but it is sufficient unto itself and all its societies and clubs do

not need the support of the Princethorpe people whose only chance of a village social life is to join in with Stretton.

Everything connected with the church is held in Stretton, apart from the two monthly services in Princethorpe old school, and in the four years I have lived in Princethorpe I have never received – or heard of anyone else receiving – a visit from the Vicar, who restricts such activities to his Stretton flock. There has been one coffee morning for raising church funds since I came – the Stretton people complain that it is too far (1¼ miles) and too difficult to get transport (this is true if one has no car) to support such functions in Princethorpe. I joined the W.I. in Stretton hoping to thus meet people, but everything is organised for Stretton, and outings leave from Stretton, and really the Princethorpe members are superfluous – there are plenty of Stretton ones.

Of course the fact that the Priory is in Princethorpe has attracted Roman Catholics to the village, but from the outsider viewpoint they do not seem to be a particularly united society, and I can recollect no gathering together of Roman Catholics for a social function apart from the opening of the new Catholic Primary School by the Bishop of Birmingham; and this of course was not just a village concern, but involved Catholics from surrounding villages.

The school is no centre of village interest, for as I pointed out earlier, many of the protestant Princethorpe children go to school in Stretton and many of the catholic pupils come from surrounding villages to Princethorpe – so again there is no village nucleus to be found in the school.

The village club serves many other villages, whilst the Three Horseshoes, certainly at the weekend, tends to become a road-house for Coventry people, rather than the village local.

In Princethorpe the vast majority of the population commute to one of the nearby towns, whereas the majority of Bishopstone people work in the village. “These people who earn their livings in towns and make their homes in the country may be thought to owe allegiance to neither world That they eventually will come to “belong” may be hoped, but for the moment it must be said that they only serve to obscure the values represented in the rural way of life” Obviously the Bishopstone villagers are more interested in what happens in the village.

They are very enthusiastic about their village badminton and football teams – there is no team for any sport in Princethorpe, all one hears from enthusiastic youngsters is “up the sky blues”. Instead of standing with a crowd of your own friends, watching Dad score the winning goal for the village, you catch a bus or cadge a lift to Coventry to be swallowed up in an alien crowd, to support people who are hero worshipped from afar.

In Bishopstone the fishing rights are let to the local gentry, but once again in Princethorpe the impersonal creeps in. Courtaulds own most of the fishing rights. There is no fun in cheating an organisation like that, by poaching a fish, whereas it is a village joke if little Johnny Cook tickles a huge trout out of the rector’s “stretch of river ! and as long as it doesn’t happen too often it amuses the rector too – to whose ears it inevitably comes.

Some people find the interest or inquisitiveness of villagers annoying, but as one is interested in the doings of a family member, so in a village the inhabitants are interested in the doings of any one of its community. This must be accepted if one is to settle to village life, and after a long absence from Bishopstone I found it particularly refreshing to go back and be accepted as someone who belonged, by people who had known me since I was born, and who were pleased to see me, and interested in what I was doing. Although I no longer live there I was “at home” as I suppose I shall never be anywhere else – and I felt there was no need to make an effort, they knew all about me, I knew all about them – I belonged.

I appreciate that I can hardly compare my feelings about Bishopstone with those about Princethorpe where I have lived for only four years.

Villagers are slow to accept newcomers – but many of the people here are not villagers anyway. They come and go fairly rapidly, and their attitude is that Princethorpe is where they happen to live, not that it is their village.

We hope to stay and are grateful that our children will grow up in the country, with the benefits such a life brings, although I am sorry in a way that their childhood background lacks the community spirit that mine had in Bishopstone.

I have particularly enjoyed writing this piece of work.

It gave me a motive for revisiting Bishopstone, and seeing it through new eyes – discovering more of its history than I had previously bothered to unearth – and reliving the past whilst renewing old acquaintances. But the work I did in Princethorpe has been of greater value to me personally.

I have become friendly with several delightful old people who I might not otherwise have known and have given them some pleasure in telling me of Princethorpe in the 1900’s. Among them there lingers the old village spirit, and they made very clear to me the picture of a thriving lively village making and enjoying its own entertainment – the village of their youth.

The old photographs I found particularly interesting, and it is fascinating to see how little has really changed beneath the veneer of modern times. It is satisfying to know some of the past history of the village – I feel I belong more to Princethorpe now than I did before, and I think this is important.

One man who has lived in the village for many years said he felt the trouble with Princethorpe was that most people who lived here didn’t wish to live here, and as soon as circumstances allowed would move on, but I feel this is rather a jaundiced attitude, and that some people are content, but have no wish to assume the responsibilities that community life involves, and prefer to keep themselves to themselves.

From the studying I have done has arisen a desire to investigate more into the value for a child of a country upbringing, and the advantages and disadvantages which result from such a background, as compared and contrasted with the life of a town child.

Though many villages are going the way of Princethorpe and are ceasing to be what they once were , “a place of security and quiet, the focal point of tradition, and gradual reconciliation of the old and the new ways of thinking”, there are still numbers which retain, like Bishopstone, their village essence, and these villages in particular can offer something unique.

Hand written by Michal Clark and re-typed by Trevor Long in 2009.