BASSINGBOURN-CUM-KNEESWORTH LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

A CHRONICLE OF TWO VILLAGES

PAST Bassingbourn PRESENT

PAST Kneesworth PRESENT

1894 - 1994
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Introduction

The Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Local History Group has gathered together information in order to produce this book to celebrate the Parish Centenary.

Our aim is to record for posterity material and events which might otherwise be lost in time.

We hope you will enjoy the results of our efforts and that everyone finds something of interest within these pages.

We should like to express out thanks to the many people who have helped us with our research.

The celebrations are for the people by the people, a legacy for the future generations, of life in a rural village in South West Cambridgeshire.
A WALK THROUGH THE VILLAGES.

The area covered by Bassingbourn Parish in 1894 was much wider than we now recognise as the village. At one time, it stretched from Mackerel Hall and included the Railway Station and northern parts of Royston. This book only covers Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth as it is in 1994.

The visitor approaches from the south, and from the top of Clunch Pit Hill there spreads a vast panorama across fields to Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth. The road descends through farmland and nurseries to Kneesworth House and The Mill House. The Red Lion, which was a farmhouse 200 years ago, welcomes you to Kneesworth. There used to be a Working Men's Club just opposite, which was given by Lord Knutsford, the then owner of Kneesworth Hall. Continuing along the old North Road, past the Grange, Bassingbourn Barracks loom large.

We return to the crossroads at what was, until 1993, the Rose Public House and turn into the Causeway and continue for the first half mile to Cherry Tree House. The next place of note is the Cemetery and then the Hoops Public House and the remains of the Old Gasworks with it prominent chimney.

As we approach the Green with its pretty cherry tree, we can stop for a rest and admire the house which used to be the Red Lion Pub. We notice an often used short cut known as Backside Lane.
Passing Spring Lane and the Almshouses, we cross the High Street to The Limes which houses the Community Rooms for the residents of sheltered housing nearby. A building which hold memories for many villagers is the old Village School. Linked to it is the Headmaster's House. We now arrive at the hub of the village with its various shops covering the everyday needs of the local population. As we leave the busy High Street, we reach the staggered crossroads and we can look along South End towards the Recreation Ground, the old and new United Reform Churches and the Village College. Taking note of the road leading westwards where we would come to the Primary and Junior Schools, and Brook Bridge which is the natural boundary of the village, we turn into North End at the War Memorial which was donated by Lord Knutsford and dedicated in 1921. On the right is the Manor House with a 14th century Tithe Barn, and the Parish Church of St. Peter & St. Paul. Just off the road to the north of the church is a house which was the home of Elizabeth Lynn, stepmother to Oliver Cromwell. We cross the road to Mill Lane. At its junction stands the Pear Tree which offers well-earned refreshment, and we look across the wide expanse of fields from the Fillance to Fen Road.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local Government in Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth, recorded since the 13th Century, is another story, but from 1894 to the present day has seen many changes.

Bassingbourn had its own Village Constable from 1840, and in 1894 was incorporated with Melbourn District Council and then in 1934 into South Cambridgeshire Rural District Council. Finally, in 1974, Bassingbourn became one of the 101 villages which comprise South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Kneesworth held a Parish meeting twice a year but has never had an independent Parish Council, being linked to Whaddon for all civil purposes until 1966 when it was merged with Bassingbourn to become Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth.

The Parish Council consists of 13 elected members and the villages are represented by 2 District Councillors and 1 County Councillor.

FORMATION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

THE FIRST MEETING under the LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1894 for the purpose of Election of nine Parish Councillors for the North Ward of the Parish of Bassingbourn was held in the Infants School Room (Board School) on Tuesday evening on the 4th of December 1894 at seven o'clock when upwards of eighty Parochial Electors including some two or three ladies attended...

It was proposed by Mr. Thos. Goodwin, seconded by Mr. H. Huckle, and unanimously resolved that Mr. W. L. Clear be the chairman to conduct the first election of Parish Councillors for the North Ward of the Parish of Bassingbourn.

On taking the chair Mr. Clear asked that nomination papers be handed to him. When the nominations of sixteen persons in the following order were presented - Messrs. Henry Huckle, Oliver John McTrend, Joseph Potto Clarke, John Mulberry, Gabriel Worboys, William Wedd, James Green Russell, George Chapman, Frederick H. Bonner, George Saggers, John Willmott, Edward Turner, Thomas Goodwin, Walter E. Cocks, William Ivatt Willmott and Charles Cocks.
The names as above were then arranged in alphabetical order and exhibited in such order on a "Black Board" and a show of hands (as prescribed by the act) was taken in favour of each candidate resulting as follows: Bonner 47, Chapman 40, Clarke 63, C. Cocks 23, W. E. Cocks 45, Goodwin 17, Huckle 80, Mulberry 60, McTrend 74, Russell 49, Saggers 40, Turner 21, Wedd 54, John Willmott 27, Wm. I. Willmott 41, Worboys 58.

The following nine, H. Huckle 80, McTrend 74, J. P. Clarke 63, J. Mulberry 60, G. Worboys 58. Wm. Wedd 54, J. G. Russell 49, G. Chapman 40, J. H. Bonner 47, having obtained as above the greatest number of votes, in the event of no poll being demanded for which purpose an interim period of, exceeding ten minutes as prescribed was allowed and no poll was demanded, were declared to be duly elected as the "First Parish Council" for the North Ward of the Parish of Bassingbourn.

The first Parish Council Meeting was held in the School on the 17th December 1894.

When the Councillors elected at the meeting held on the 4th December 1894 were joined by those elected for the South Ward, namely Messrs. Thos. Nash, Harry Smith, Thos. Tookey and Rev. G. Packer, Mr. Smith proposed, seconded by Mr. Tookey that Wm. Thos. Nash be chairman of the Council. It was proposed as an amendment by Mr. J. P. Clarke and seconded by Mr. G. Worboys that Mr. W. L. Clear (from outside the Council) be the chairman. The amendment was carried by 9 votes to 4. Mr. Clear being duly elected as Chairman and not being present was sent for and informed of having been elected. He signed the declaration and took the chair. Mr. J. Elbourn, assistant overseer, was appointed Clerk to the Council. The question of remuneration to stand over to the Annual Meeting.

In June 1894 Mr. Charles Cocks was appointed clerk.

Albert Saggers was clerk from 1900-1921.

Edgar Hall was clerk from 1922-1958.

John Keith was appointed clerk in July 1958 until the present time.

In the centenary year of Parish Councils Bassingbourn can be proud that they have carried on their business with so few changes of clerk. Very few Councils can claim such an achievement.
KNEESWORTH HOUSE AND MANORIAL LANDS.

The principal Manor of Kneesworth, held in the manor of Richmond, dates back to the thirteenth century. The lands ascended with the Chamberlain family 1351. Thereafter it was also called Brache Manor. From the sixteenth century, the land of the manor was held by the Nightingale family, who by the seventeen hundreds held most of Kneesworth. A large gentlemanly house was built and became the Nightingale family seat. By the middle of the nineteenth century land passed to the Wortham family. The Revd. B. Wortham died in 1928, and the family trustees sold most of the farmland to J.R. and C.R. Jarman, whose family and its tenants have farmed since the 1880's to the present day.

Kneesworth Hall

KNEESWORTH HALL/HOUSE by the 1600's, was possibly remodelled by the Nightingale family, and in the 1890's was a three storey house with approximately 20 rooms. By 1900, a gentleman, Sydney Holland, who became the 2nd Viscount Knutsford, was the owner of the house. By 1904, Viscount Knutsford, who was locally known as Lord Knutsford, rebuilt the hall as an Edwardian mansion. Lord and Lady Knutsford lived in the Hall until the late 1920's, and are both buried in a private grave in the churchyard at St. Peter and St. Paul in Bassingbourn. In 1948 the Hall as sold and used as an Approved School for boys. By 1960, it was transferred to
Cambridge County Council to be used by the Children's Department. Today the Hall is a private psychiatric hospital and is now known as Kneesworth House Hospital.

**THE FIVE FARMS**

There were five farms in Kneesworth which belonged to Sir Edward Nightingale. These were called respectively: Lordship, North, Burnans, Turnpike and Lion; these were all administrated from farmsteads. The Red Lion Public house on the Old North road was a former farm house. Before the Enclosure Act of 1804, sainfoin was grown, but the main crops were wheat, barley, oats and rye. Also on the Kneesworth estate, clover, trefoil and tares were grown.

**KNEESWORTH CHAPEL**

St. Mary Magdalen, a chapel so named, stood north west of Kneesworth Hall in Chapel Yard; this was derelict by the middle of the sixteenth century. Thereafter, the Kneesworth inhabitants worshipped as Bassingbourn. For over two hundred years until the late 1800's Kneesworth, which lies along the Roman Road, Ermine Street, was turnpiked. A tollgate and weighing machine was installed across the road at the position of the wall of the Red Lion Public House car park. One resident can remember, when he was a small boy, drinking from a cup on a metal chain hanging form a water pump nearby. No doubt this was used by travellers stopping for well-earned refreshment. A windmill stood on Mill hill, owned by the Orables some 600 years ago. We can still see the site today, looking west from Mill house. A stream which rises from springs south of Kneesworth Hall still flows within a tranquil setting. A few seventeenth and eighteenth century cottages survive today, timberframed and plastered, an a pair of nineteenth century cottages face each other north of the staggered crossroads. Two cul-de-sacs, Wellington Place and Canberra Close, are built on either side of Chestnut Lane to the east of the crossroads; these commemorate the famous aircraft which were based at R.A.F. Bassingbourn during the Second World War.

**PUBLIC HOUSE**

The Red Lion, recorded in 1795 as a farm house, is still in use today. A two storey building, has a long jetty which overhangs the street, with three eighteenth century first floor iron casement windows with leaded lights. The Hoops Public House, which
stands on the other side of the road, a single storey building, was converted into a clubroom in 1910, and is now a private dwelling. The Rose Public House which stands on the west of the road, at the crossroads, was closed within the last three years, and is now also a private dwelling.

The Red Lion

THE GRANGE

This was formerly a farm house called North Farm. A long garden wall stands on the north side of the farmhouse. On the south side of the house is a pavilion style garden house. This magnificent building dates from the early to mid eighteenth century with nineteenth century additions. Today this building is a country hotel and restaurant.

TUDOR COTTAGES

These buildings stand opposite to the Red Lion. Once a row of three cottages, they have been converted into two houses. Like many more cottages, these can boast a range of original features dating back to the late sixteenth century.
THE VILLAGE OF BASSINGBOURN

Quiet within the country it lies
Rounded by green fields and azure skies
That lovely village, large but neat
Its houses mainly by one large street.

The War Memorial on the Cross
Its stone much dirtied by rain and frost
Surrounded by a little, but neat green
Where in spring almond blossoms are seen.

On the nearby trees which stand
By that consecrated land
And further down horse chestnuts bloom
Red and white in the sun of noon.

The old grey church stands tall and grim
The stained glass windows all fit in
And, amidst the surrounding grounds
Quaint old tombstones abound.

Up the brook tall poplars stand
Then- shadows thrown out o'er the land
Copper beeches grow within
Their stout old boughs are aged and grim

Still further on where the river bends
And willows form a shady pen
The old trout lurks beneath the weeds
And the drumming snipe is known to breed.

Tractors up and down the land
Make it one brown sea of bands
Soon to be yellow with ripe corn
Tall and upright, or flattened by storm.

To the north is the aerodrome
On land where poachers used to roam
All bare of trees this levelled land
Shows signs of science in a peaceful land.

And so this village is becoming fast
Modernised with a buried past
But one will surely never forget
That rural life is forever best.

P.O. Sell, 11th and 13th April, 1951
The Service history of Bassingbourn Barracks dates from March 1938 when the first RAF aircraft landed on the airfield on 2 May. RAF Bassingbourn became an Operational Training Unit as well as a staging post for operational aircraft. It retained that role at the outbreak of the Second World War and remained unscathed until 5 April 1940 when an isolated German raider dropped 10 bombs. In August that year, 11 men were killed and 15 injured by a bomb from an enemy aircraft which dropped on a barrack block. In 1941 work started on the construction of concrete runways and Bassingbourn continued its task of training aircrews and served as a refuelling base for bombers en route to targets in Germany and Northern Italy. May 1942 saw the famous "Thousand Bomber" raid on Cologne by 1,046 aircraft. In order to raise this number, Bomber Command employed every aircraft capable of taking to the air, including 20 Wellington Bombers from Bassingbourn used for training. Subsequently aircraft form here often contributed to major raids. The initial period of RAF occupation ended on 25 September 1942 when the OTU moved out to make way for the United States Army Air Corps (USAAC). The American 91st Bombardment Group occupied Bassingbourn on 14 October, and operations commenced the following month. Early in 1943 American "Flying Fortress" bombers started daylight attacks on industrial centres in Germany. Perhaps the most well known aircraft to operate from Bassingbourn was the Memphis Belle which was the first US aircraft to complete a full tour of 25 missions. It still exists and is located in Memphis, Tennessee. Until their departure from Bassingbourn on 25 June 1945, the 91st saw continuous action in the most active years of the War. The RAF resumed occupation of Bassingbourn on 26 June 1945 and the station became one of the main bases for the long range transport aircraft of the RAF. In 1948 and 1949 York, Lancaster and Dakota aircraft form here took part in the Berlin Airlift, a massive operation transporting essential commodities to that beleaguered city. During the Korean War, USAF bombers moved to Britain and for 2 years from September 1950 American B29s and B50s were based at Bassingbourn. In February 1952, RAF Bassingbourn received its first allocation of Canberra bombers and thus became the first jet bomber operational conversion unit (OCU) in the world. Canberras operated from Bassingbourn for 17 years; one of these aircraft is on display in the Barracks, as guardian of the RAF heritage. For 6 years until 1969 the Joint School of Photographic Interpretation was also based here. Thirty years of continuous flying from Bassingbourn ended on 29 August 1969 when the station was handed over to the Army. Since that date Bassingbourn Barracks has house the Headquarters and Depot of The Queen's Division.
On 1st January 1993 Bassingbourn became an Army Training Regiment, and now trains recruits from the Royal Signals, Royal Engineers and the Infantry.

BASSINGBOURN SKI CLUB

The Ski Club was constructed in Bassingbourn Barracks by The Royal Engineers in 1974 during the "Cold War", for the initial training of Soldiers, prior to sending them to Norway for the final preparation. In 1977 the Ivel Valley Ski Club (a group of keen skiers from the Gamlingay area) approached the Army, asking permission to use the slope. Being working civilians, they were only able to use it in the evenings, rather hazardous, as the only illumination possible was Tilley lamps stood on the ground and car headlights almost blinding the skiers on their run down the slope. After a year a small petrol generator was purchased, a great improvement but still the lights could not be sighted high enough to throw the light downwards. The Army used it less and less, and Bassingbourn Ski Club was formed, who replaced the old matting with Dendix (upturned nylon bristle set in diamond shaped steel clamps), and improved the lighting by mounting the lights on standards, throwing the light DOWN onto the slope. The Club is a non profit making organisation, run entirely by volunteers, whose aim is to develop skiing in the area by providing low cost facilities. All the instructors are registered with the English Ski Council and have to be revalidated every three years. Whilst most of the instruction is geared towards teaching beginners venturing onto the snow for the first time, we have a very strong Junior Club, and a number of our members have competed at regional and National levels for racing and Ballet (freestyle).

We also teach the blind, physically disabled and mentally handicapped. In 1987, after eighteen months instruction, three instructors accompanied a group of mentally handicapped children to Scotland for a week's skiing, having raised sufficient funds through sponsorship, some of this group have since competed in the Disabled Olympics. Now with the cooperation of the Army, we have a commendable slope, with Mains Water and Electricity, a reasonable Club House, housing the skis, boots etc.. and the facilities for making refreshments. And most important, a rope tow to take us to the top; even so, we have plans to widen the top of the slope and make further improvements.
LOCAL SURNAMES
CHAMBERLAIN

Chamberlain is one of the local surnames that has been researched through local records and publications. The reason it has done so is because of the many names that you see over and over again, the name always seems to be attached to some interesting little fact. Put all of these facts together and the Chamberlains stand out as particularly interesting.

Firstly, there was an area of land somewhere in Kneesworth known as Chamberlain's Lands and its ownership can be traced through various Chamberlains from 1269 to about 1400.

In 1791 when a William Chamberlain was one of ten people who signed the document concerning the formation of Bassingbourn's Independent Meeting House (The Old Chapel). He could not write and signed with his mark.

The chapel records for the 1840's list some names of people who had died in recent years who were "worthy of remembrance"/ It reads, "the aged John Chamberlain, and many more, of low estate, who by their exemplary lives and conversation would have done honour to any Christian society".

The 1851 census lists a 16 year old Elizabeth Chamberlain as a lacemaker. She lived with her family somewhere in Mill Lane. This census also shows a Samuel Kefford and his wife and two young stepsons, Jonas and Chamberlain Mole. In the 19th Century sons were often given their mother's maiden name as a Christian name so it is assumed that this was the case here and the wife Elizabeth was a Chamberlain before she married the first time. In 1852 the 8 year old Chamberlain Mole and his family emigrated to Australia!

The 1851 census also lists a William Chamberlain and along with other children, a son, 6 year old Charles Chamberlain. This is a name that crops up several times in later years, whether or not they are all the same one is not known. First in 1870 a Charles Chamberlain is the owner of Bassingbourn's first Hobby Horse, the forerunner of the bicycle. In 1875 the Chapel records show us that a Charles Chamberlain became a church member having been "gathered from the world" as opposed to another church. The 1891 census lists a 46 year old Charles living in North End, in the church side of Park Terrace. His wife Elizabeth was 47, he was an engine fitter and they had three children living with them; Elizabeth a 21 year old servant, Maria an 18 year old school teacher and Alfred a 16 year old apprentice engineer. Also listed was an unnamed grandson, 10 house old!

Stubbs Farm (down the track beside Myall's Coaches) was once known as Jubal's Farm after Jubal Chamberlain.
In the early 1900's there was a Joseph Chamberlain, who lived in the Tanyard and who was farm foreman for the Clears. His hobby was taxidermy and the house was full of stuffed birds.

At the Carpenters Arms in North End, the publican was John Chamberlain, a brother of Joseph. John's grandson, born in 1905, now an elderly Hollywood actor with the stage name John Abbot, used to stay at the pub as a child, just before World War I, and had many fond memories of his holidays in Bassingbourn. His real name was John Albert Chamberlain Kefford, and one of his more recent claims to fame is as the voice of one of the wolves in Jungle Book.

In the Royston Crow newspaper for 1911 and 1912, several references are made to the Kneesworth cricket team in which Lord Knutsford played and one of his fellow team members was a Chamberlain.

A 1913 Occupiers list shows five Chamberlains, the John and Joseph already mentioned as well as George and Simon in North End, and Wilfred at Church Farm. Ralph and Bert Chamberlain fought in World War I and Ralph's name is on the War Memorial as he was one of the unfortunate ones who did not return, he was the youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. S. (Simon?) Chamberlain of North End, and had served in France for not quite four months before losing his life. He was buried at La Brique. Bert was an experienced soldier who joined up about 1903 and served in India and South Africa before going to France. He was taken prisoner at Ypres in 1914. Ronald C. Chamberlain and Albert J. Chamberlain both served in World War II. Ronald is better known today as Ron, chairman of the British Legion and a member of the Parish Council.

Last but not least we have one of Bassingbourn's oldest residents, a leading light in the over 60's, Fred Dellar, whose mother was a Mary Chamberlain before her marriage.

How all these Chamberlains are connected is not yet known, but presents quite an interesting story of Village History has been told just by looking closely at one surname. There are probably many other local names just as interesting. Perhaps others might now be inspired to delve into the records in search of their own names.

**SOURCES.**

Victoria County History, The Black Book (Congregationalism in Bassingbourn), 1851 and 1891 Census, "Migrants from Cambridgeshire to Port Philip from 1840 to 1870", "Developments in Science in the last 100 years in Bassingbourn", Royston Crow newspaper, The War Memorial, "Our Local Patriots", Kelly's Post Office Directories and Local Memories.
GAS LIGHTING IN BASSINGBOURN

The Bassingbourn Gas Company came into existence on 16th February, 1866. This was a Limited Company with 400 shares being offered at £5.00 each, to give a working Capital of £2,000.00

Some quotes from the prospectus of the company make interesting reading: "Whilst other places of less note have succeeded in obtaining the benefit of Gas lighting, Bassingbourn remains in obscurity. It is now proposed to light this town with Gas. "There may be methods of illumination which for brilliancy are equal to the light obtained from Gas; but when the numerous advantages of the latter are considered, and particularly when its economy, and cleanliness are taken into account, no difference of opinion can exist as to the great superiority of Gas over every other method of lighting."

Another quote further on in the prospectus reads: "The introduction of Gas into Bassingbourn - in itself an evidence of the rapid progress now being developed in all parts of the kingdom - will gradually lead to the adoption of other social improvements; whilst it is certain that the value of house property in the village must be considerably enhanced, not only by the greater security and protection upon the roads being publicly lighted, but from the attraction the neighbourhood will offer to persons seeking residences, or contemplating building operations." And again: "The management will at all times be conducted with the strictest attention to economy, and the shareholders resident in the neighbourhood will not only be enabled to watch the progress of the undertaking, but will assist in increasing its profits, as many of them will be consumers."

The officers of the Company are detailed below:

DIRECTORS.

CLARKE HALE, Enq., Chairman.
Mr. DANIEL FLITTON, Bassingbourn.
Mr. J. H. WALDOCK, Bassingbourn.
Mr. JAMES JACQUIN, Rotton.
Mr. JOHN JARMAH, Bassingbourn.
Mr. JOHN JENKINS, Bassingbourn.
Mr. T. W. STAPLES, 3, George St., Hull.

(Bill with power to add to their number.)

BANKERS.

MESSRS. J. G. FORDHAM AND SONS, Rotton.

ENGINEER.

Mr. ARTHUR VERRIS, St. Margaret's, Here.

SECRETARY.

Mr. EDWARD MILLER.

REGISTERED OFFICES OF THE COMPANY, MELBOURNE, CHERKSHIRE.
An ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders was called on 6th June, 1867, and a statement of accounts was presented, for the period 16th February 1866, to 1st April 1867.

From the balance sheet shown below, we can see that the Company was making satisfactory progress.

BASSINGBOURN GAS COMPANY, LIMITED.

STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS, from 16th day of February, 1866, to 1st of April, 1867.

TRADE ACCOUNT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DR.</th>
<th>£ s. d.</th>
<th>CR.</th>
<th>£ s. d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Costs bought</td>
<td>£85 2 5</td>
<td>By Gas sold</td>
<td>£100 17 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Line</td>
<td>3 0 0</td>
<td>&quot; Rent of Meters</td>
<td>4 15 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Wages paid</td>
<td>15 0 0</td>
<td>&quot; Tar</td>
<td>0 5 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Interest</td>
<td>8 8 1</td>
<td>&quot; Fee</td>
<td>0 2 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Rate</td>
<td>0 2 6</td>
<td>&quot; Stock on Hand</td>
<td>20 17 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; Tools</td>
<td>0 7 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance carried down</td>
<td>216 16 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | £125 17 1 | |$

PROFIT AND LOSS.

To first portion of preliminary Expenses written off | 9 8 6 | By Balance from Trade Account, being profit | 36 16 5 |
Profit | 27 7 11 | | |
| | £36 16 5 | |

BALANCE SHEET.

I. Capital.
To 230 Shares at £5 each, £1150 | 0 0 |
Less, Calls in Arrear | 31 0 0 |
| | 1119 0 0 |

II. Debts of Company.
To sundry liabilities | 76 6 0 |
" Loan—Mr. J. Hopkins | 20 0 0 |
" Profit | 27 7 11 |
| | 1196 8 3 |

III. Expenditure on Works, &c.
By Stears and Co., Contract for Buildings, Mains, Meters, &c. | £1070 0 0 |
" Verney, Engineer | 70 0 0 |
" Land and Conveyance | 53 16 8 |
" Willmott | 117 7 |
" Rofford, Blacksmith | 0 14 0 |
Preliminary Expenses | 1196 8 3 |

By Law expenses on registration | 9 10 2 |
" Stationery | 31 0 0 |
" expenses on formation of Company | 15 15 0 |
Less, articialsold | 56 11 0 |
Less, written off | 9 8 6 |
| | 47 2 6 |

IV. By Sundry Assets, Debts due for Gas, Tar, and Rent of Meters | 45 16 0 |
Stock on Hand | 20 17 4 |
| | 66 13 4 |
Cash in Hand.
Balance in Secretary's hands | 29 13 9 |
" Bank | 21 1 1 |
| | 50 14 11 |

£1342 13 11

AUDITOR'S REPORT.

I certify that I have examined the several Accounts and Balance Sheet of the Bassingbourn Gas Company, Limited, and find them correct, and that this Balance Sheet contains a correct Statement of the Company's Affairs—WALTER BEALE, Auditor.

April 20th, 1867.
The Gas company went bankrupt in 1896 and the lamps were changed to oil. From a subscription list published for 1904 and 1905, there are some interesting figures:

From the Rev'd R. H. Boyd - 10 shillings, as also from Mr. J. G. Russell, Mr. G. Warboys, and Mr. J. Willmott. The amounts then decrease in value from 5 shillings, 2 shillings and sixpence, 1 shilling, sixpence and the lowest contributions are for threepence. With cash in hand standing at £4.16.11d, these contributions brought the money up to the grand sum of £10.7.2d.

Cash paid out in this period included:

Paid to: John Peters for lighten (lighting?) and cleaning lamps £6.17.4d

E. F. Huckle (shopkeeper) Oil, Lamp glasses and matches £1,15.10.5d

Peters and T. Wedd - repairs to lamps 2/- and 4/-

Another item of interest is a sale bill for the sale by auction at the Bull Inn, Royston, of 23 - £5.0.0 shares left in the Will of Mrs. Sarah Hopkins. This sale was held on 9th July, 1879, these shares were sold in five lots; 4 lots of five shares each, and one lot of three shares. Unfortunately, at this time we do not have a record of the prices that these shares realised.

Bassingbourn finally became lit by electric street lights in the 1930s, but the old gasworks buildings still remain, with the tall chimney, standing at the junction of Spring Lane and the High Street

THE BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY

It is certain the many Bassingbourn residents will have worked in and with the British Red Cross Society over the years, especially during the War Years. The Centre in Spring Lane was opened by the Director-General, Mr. J. C. Burke-Gaffney, in October 1988. The Opening marked the end of a period of intense hard work by our members and supporters.

The aim of the Red Cross is to provide skilled and impartial care to people in need and in crisis, at home and abroad and in peace and war.
They are very much the Society at its grass roots. Besides providing trained first
aiders for local and Country events, they also operate a medical equipment loan
service from the Centre. The fund-raising efforts are dedicated to supporting the
Society's activities more widely both at National and International level.

1ST BASSINGBOURN GUIDE COMPANY
1940-1977

It was in 1940 that Mrs. M.E.F. Jenner was approached and agreed to restart the
Guide Company, which had been in abeyance for several years, but a photograph
records those involved in the 1920's. The old colours were handed over and were
carried at the first parade held in the Congregational Church (in the recreation ground
and no longer used for worship).
Weekly meetings in term time were held during the winter, originally in the council
school (in the High Street and now no longer in use), and then in the Village College,
and in the Guide Hut in Spring Lane during the summer.
Annual Sports Days took place in the garden at Springfield, and during the war years
Guides, Scouts, Cubs and Brownies performed variety shows in the school. After the
war camping was resumed.
1953 saw the Company represented at the Coronation in Westminster Abbey by
Joyce Fyson. That year also saw the presentation of a new Company Colour, given by
Miss Lucy Clarke, the old one being "hung to rest" in the Guide Hut. Twenty one
years (1961) after restarting the Company, Captain commenced reunions of former
Patrol Leaders, with a supper in the Village College, these reunions were to continue
annually until 1983, the year before she died.
In 1963 the Company had reason to be proud of its Guides, 5 of whom had achieved
their "All Round Cords" and a further 4 were 1st Class Guides.
In 1964 Susan Sutton of Litlington became the Company's first Queen's Guide.
In 1968 the Company in Bassingbourn celebrated Mrs. Jenner's 50 years as a Guide
Captain, along with those who still meet annually to remember her and their guide
friends from the Company in London started in 1918.
1970 was Litlington Parish Church host the service to dedicate the new Union Jack
which replaced that which had been in use for 30 years. The flag, presented by the
former Patrol leaders and carried by Mrs. Audrey Newman, was handed over to
Shirley, her daughter, who accepted it on behalf of the Company. The old Jack was
later "hung to rest" with the old Company Colour in the Guide Hut.
By 1977 no fewer than 20 Guides had achieved their Queen's Guide Badge, but sadly following a very special service in the United Reform Church (originally the Congregational Church) where 37 years to the month the first parade had been held, Mrs. May Jenner retired at the age of 80 and the Company closed. There is however good news for Guiding in Bassingbourn. Pamela Wakeling from Meldreth restarted the Company at the Village College in January 1994. The colours kept by Mrs. Jenner's daughter, Margaret will be handed over for the rebirth of the 1st Bassingbourn Guide Company.

THE BASSINGBOURN SURGERIES

Over the years, there have been four doctors' surgeries in the village. These were located at Mill House in Brook Road, The Beeches, the Old Bakery and Lynton House. These last were all situated in the High Street. In October 1972, because of a general expansion in the Bassingbourn area of the practice, Lynton House, situated halfway between the Post Office and the garage in the High Street, was purchased by D. Fergus Moynihan, to act as a branch surgery which was open on two afternoons a week. The ground floor area was converted to allow one consulting room together with a waiting room and a dispensary/office.

Later he was joined by Dr. Ken Heaton and Dr. Martin Hoffman and by 1978 the opening hours of the surgery had increased and there was much greater pressure on its use. (Dr. Heaton was replaced by Dr. Rono Coladangelo in 1981).

By 1985 it became clear that as no possibility existed of extending Lynton House, a new surgery would be needed and it took a six year search as one site after another was investigated, only to be found that for a variety of reasons the building of a surgery could not take place.

By the late 1980s, a fourth partner, Dr. Caroline Russell, had joined the practice, and the need for development became acute and finally a site was found in Spring Lane where the present surgery was built. This building contains three consulting rooms, together with a fully fitted out treatment room and nurse's room, as well as facilities for health visitors and various therapists to work. The waiting area is much larger and more comfortable, as also is the increased office area. A great advantage has been the off road parking, which was always a problem in the High Street. The long search has proved worthwhile, and the surgery is now open five days a week, allowing much greater patient services in a far more comfortable environment with sufficient room to carry out that which is expected of general practice in the 1990s.
HISTORY OF ROYAL BRITISH LEGION, BASSINGBOURN AND DISTRICT BRANCH

The branch was formed on the 27th August 1929, having a strong membership for many years. A Women's Section was formed in 1932 and was very active until disbanded in 1963. The men's branch also deteriorated with few members until the mid seventies, when under the guidance of Arthur Ambrose from Area, a mixed branch began to re-emerge. The main aim is to help and support Ex-Service members and their dependants in Bassingbourn, Kneesworth, Litlington and Abington Pigotts. Membership reached 60+, with several social activities including sponsored swims, walks, games nights, annual dinners, outings and memorable supper dances when the branch hosted the visiting Americans from the 91st Bomber Group. During this time a number of awards for Small Branch, Efficiency and Progression, have been won under the encouragement of the late Brian Smith who was at one time Secretary, Chairman and President. We now meet in the Limes in the High Street on the 3rd Tuesday each months and we look to recruiting younger members who need have no service record; as associate members they can become officers and carry on the stalwart work of the many older members we have lost.

THE OLD RED LION

The Red Lion in the High Street was built around 1725 and became a Public House in 1788. It remained a Pub until 1960 when it was sold by Flowers' Brewery to Mr. Cousins. The premises were then used as a garden centre until 1979 when Mr. Cousins sold it to the present owners. The shop attached to the main house has been variously a fish shop, hairdressers and butchers. The garden had a long barn along the opposite side to the shop and during the War this was used to garage the village ambulance. Years ago, the Bassingbourn Feast was held annually in the gardens.
THE SCHOOL IN THE HIGH STREET

The School House was originally a thatched cottage, within a half acre orchard. It is mentioned in the title Deeds of the early 18th century. The building is of clay bat and timber; the brick facing was added at a later date to match that of the School buildings. The rear of the house gives an indication of how the cottage looked before it was faced. The cost of the facing was £47. The site was bought from Samuel Wilkerson for £470 by the School Board Commission and two specifications were prepared:

1) The School with a new Schoolhouse.

2) The School with renovation to the existing house.

The second specification was agreed and approved, and the contract for the building was given to Gabriel Worboys. The final cost for the work was £2,738.

In 1923 the bay windows were added to the Schoolhouse.

The School, which was established in 1877, provided education for children from Bassingbourn, Kneesworth and nearby villages.

Until 1912 there were separate departments for Infants, Boys and Girls. In 1963, when the new Junior School was built in Brook Road, the old School as used only by the Infants.

New classrooms were added to the Junior School to accommodate the Infants, and at the end of the Summer term in 1990 the old School finally closed.

The Old School and House
LOCAL TRADES, BUSINESSES AND OCCUPATIONS

Information for this article has been gathered from many sources; from local memories to everything in print which is available, as well as the resources available at the Cambridge Collection and the County Records Office. The information amassed from these sources has proved invaluable in obtaining useful additional memories from descendants of people who left the village years ago, who are tracing their own family histories. By helping them with their research, family memories, handed down through generations, enables "meat to be put on the bones" of characters in Bassingbourn and Kneesworth.

One such contact is an Alvin Turner of Port Glasgow, the great grandson of Edward Turner, owner of Bassingbourn's main bakery business from the 1860s to the 1900s. Edward's son, Oliver, born in 1876, went into the hat trade in Luton, and Alvin is his grandson. Another Turner descendant is Claude Standen of Clear Farm, South End. He is the grandson of Oliver's elder brother George, born in 1862. Between the two of them (Alvin and Claude), there has emerged a wealth of information on the family and the old Bakery (35 High Street), Alvin and Claude have only recently met. Another contact has been a Richard Kefferd of Bristol. Kefferd is an extremely old Bassingbourn name, the most notable being William and his sons, Owen, Prime and Elias, blacksmiths and wheelwrights by trade from the 1850s to the 1950s. Richard has traced virtually every Kefferd from the wilds of Alaska to the volcanoes of New Zealand and has passed on many useful contacts and photographs. Richard's great grandfather, Joseph, as a brother of William Kefferd, father of the blacksmith of the same name.

Research has now shown a reasonable picture of life in the village, but there are still gaping holes in the overall picture, especially where the trades and businesses are concerned. It is very easy to get sidetracked into other projects, as when one is researching into a subject, there are many documents which can be studied; for instance Kelly's Post Office directories which date from 1839 to 1937 and list all the local trades and businesses as well as the gentry, clergymen and schoolteachers. Another source of information are the local census returns. These start in 1841 and continue for every ten years until 1891 (they are not available to the general public until 100 years after the return was taken). At the present time some of the local people are involved in the transcribing of the 1851 and 1891 returns. This work is necessary as all of the originals are handwritten and are difficult to decipher and have
marks obliterating information. This work makes it much more easy for research to be carried out, both for local history and family research. The transcriptions so far have shown occupations of the village at that time of which may people would not be aware of the existence, for example: manure gatherer on the roads, sheepskin dealer and Brazilian grass worker. This last was connected with the straw bonnet industry in the village, the grass was imported from Brazil and plaited for use in the bonnet making.

Life in Bassingbourn 100 years ago was very different to that of today. Local tradesmen abounded and most essentials could be obtained in the village. Shoemakers and menders, butchers and bakers (but no candlestick makers) carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, dressmakers, milliners, saddlers, grocers and drapers, to name a few of these occupations. Some tradesmen called early in the morning for orders and then delivered later in the day, other traders from neighbouring villages called once a week. No bus services, but several carters who would fetch and carry to Cambridge or Royston, as well as taking the occasional passenger. No refrigerators, so purchases of perishable foods were made little and often. There would have been more hustle and bustle than in today's village when the bulk of the population is only visible in the rush hour. But the horse ruled, dictating a much slower pace of life, where many people kept their own chickens, and sometimes a cow or pig as well, and had an orchard providing excess fruit that was taken to market. That makes it sound as though people ate well, but this was probably not the case for a large number of villagers, as rural Cambridgeshire was amongst the counties low on the standard of living tables at that time.

One hundred years ago the village was entering a period of decline. The Coprolite industry and commenced in the 1860s and had brought much prosperity to the village, but the last coprolite was removed in 1896, the same year that saw the bankruptcy of the gasworks. Soon after came the changes caused by World War I, the depression, then World War II and the subsequent changes in lifestyle and standards that saw the end of rural trades and industries, not just in Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth but throughout the country. The villages do not sit on a main through route, and is located on the edge of East Anglia, an area noted until comparatively recently for its poor transport systems and accompanying isolation. This seems to be the reason why the village is comparatively unspoilt, and why there are still five village pumps, our gasworks and other 19th century industrial premises, our old school buildings, the moats and waterways.

Although this article deals with the 19th century, there are documents available for research which date back through the centuries, this highlights the timescale that is
involved in looking at one area, and the changes that have taken place. Criminals have sought sanctuary in the church, arrows and cannonballs have been shot through the air, there were feasts and fairs, the likes of which we would be hard pressed to imagine; fortunes, people and lifestyles come and go. All that remains constant it that it is a community where people live, work and play.

BASSINGBOURN VILLAGE STORES

The shop in the High Street, now owned by Mr. Patel, was owned by the Clarke family for 75 years.

The shop was originally owned by Joseph Potto Clarke, who sold it to John Williamson in about 1885. Mr. J.P. Clarke then bought the Mill in Mill Lane.

In 1908, Reginald Clarke married Ethel Williamson, daughter of John, who took over the shop. He was succeeded by his son, Harold Clarke who took over the business in 1942 and remained there until 1960.

In the 1920s, Ethel Clarke, wife of Reginald, sent telegrams using Morse code. Telegrams used to be delivered by bicycle. When Harold Clarke ran the Post Office, telegrams could be sent on Sundays, so it really was "open all hours". Telegrams were also delivered to Litlington and the Mordens when their Post Offices were closed on their half-days.

Not many people had a telephone in the late 1940s, and it was a regular occurrence for the late Mrs. Maud Attwood to wait in the Post Office house to receive a booked call from her daughter in America, who had married an American serviceman and had gone to live in America. There were usually some tears after the phone call.

The post van used to arrive at 6 o'clock in the morning, even on Christmas Day. Deliveries on this day was finally came to an end in the 1960s. The mail was sorted on the kitchen and dining room tables. The postmen and post lady delivered the mail by bicycle all around the village. One postman at that time, Mr. Stanley Oliver, cycled from Whaddon in all weathers, sorted, and then delivered the mail to Kneesworth, the RAF Camp and then on to Whaddon.

During the war and up until 1947, the post was collected and taken from the village to Royston each evening by bicycle.

The shop sold everything from shoes to soap and bananas to biscuits. One Sunday morning just after the end of the war there was a long queue outside the shop. The first bananas and oranges seen in the village for years were on sale. The allowance was 1 lb per ration book. Rationing continued until 1954.
Housewives did not have cars in those days, and so they had a weekly grocery order, delivered in the evening after the shop was closed. The orders were made up during the day at odd moments when the shop was not very busy, which wasn't very often, as it really was the centre of village life.

While Mr. Harold Clarke was out delivering the grocery orders, his wife had the Post Office accounts to do every evening, for about an hour. There were no calculators in those days, and the end of the month accounts took about three hours.

Neither of Mr. Clarke's daughters wished to continue in the family business and it was sold to Mr. John Croft.

BASSINGBOURN TAXIS

The first taxicabs on the streets of London, it is said, were made in Bassingbourn village - with coachwork by a Royston craftsman. This may well be true, for enterprising engineers began making cars in Bassingbourn at the turn of the century. Rationals the cars were called and the builders were Heatly and Gresham who had a foundry and engineering works on the North side of the High Street.

The project was rather short-lived and no-one today can say how many Rationals were built or what became of them.

About 20 men worked at the little factory and they did all the machining and drilling and fitting of all the parts of the cars. Cylinder blocks were cast in the foundry before machining and drilling. The engines were of the two cylinder, water cooled type with a bore of four inches.

The Rationals were high-backed 4 seater cars with solid tyres and carbide lamps.

With their aluminium and copper tube radiators, they were quite the latest thing in their day, and local people felt very proud of them. The cars were tried on the roads around Bassingbourn with Arrington Hill the toughest test of all.

It is not known how much they cost or how many were made but some were shipped to India.

Whether or not Bassingbourn might have become another Coventry, we shall never know, but the fact was the car project was dropped. Castings and materials had to be brought by road from Royston Station, three miles away, which made the whole business slow and uneconomic. In 1905, Heatley and Gresham transferred their engineering works to Letchworth and no more Rationals were made.

The yard, office buildings and some of the old workshops still remain as reminders of a time when Bassingbourn manufactured many things as well as cars.
'THE OLD SADDLERS', 17 HIGH STREET, BASSINGBOURN

The house now called "The Old Saddlers' along with number 19 - formerly 'The Red House' - is believed to have been originally a single house which early deeds describe as having 'barns, stables, buildings, yards, gardens and orchards'. It was later divided into three and later still the part which is now no. 19 was sold. It is a Grade II listed building and is thought to have been built in the 16th century. It seems likely that the west end of the house, now containing a garage, was added in 1675 since this date was on the outside of this part. An early 19th century extension has been added at the rear. The house is timber framed but the lower storey is considered to have been refaced later in brick perhaps when the jettied extensions were added. The exterior of the upper storey was plastered over the timber frame with pargetting in a geometric pattern, probably originally 1920s; the present pargetting is modern. A large inglenook fireplace is present at the centre of what would have been the original house; a former chimney and fireplace on the rear wall have been removed; the 1675 'extension' also has a chimney stack. Near the main chimney in the roof several old, battered shoes have been found; this was an old custom designed to ward off evil spirits when alterations had been made to an original building.

The house was part of the copyhold of the Manor of Richmond and rents were paid up to 1932 when it was dissolved. Ownership records are available back to Elizabeth Buckmaster in 1791 and four owners earlier than this were two members of that family and two of the Flitton family. In 1818 the property was sold by J. Strickland, 'common brewer' of Steeple Morden, to the Reverend Samuel Bull for £280 but he may have been a tenant here before that. Bull is well-known in the village as the first Minister of the Congregational Church from 1791 to his death in 1826 when he still occupied the house. The next owner after the Bull family is Daniel Morley in 1831 who is the first recorded saddler and collar maker and he is likely to have been the first to make part of the house into a shop. By this time no. 19 had been sold to William Elbourn who happened to be an early member of the Congregational Church and became a Deacon. After Daniel Morley's death in 1867 the property passed to his widow and to his son Samuel who lived in India and became the Bishop of Tinnevelly in the Madras diocese. The Morley family were the owners although not always the occupiers, until 1949 (118 years in total). One tenant during this time in the 1920s was Mr. Hagger who was a saddler and also sold goods including petrol. The last saddler and, probably increasingly, shoe repairer, was John Svensson who left in 1950. Svensson and more recent owners are remembered by older people in the village. In the late 1950s Miss Jolley ran a teashop and from 1961-65 yet another member of the Church, the Reverend Arnold de Quincey, was the owner.
Alfred Wing was a baker at what was at that time the "Crown" public house in the High Street. He wrote this poem which was printed on the bags in which the bread was wrapped.

HAVE YOU TRIED
Wing’s Bassingbourne Bread?
IF NOT, WHY NOT?

ALFRED WING’S BREAD you once should test,
Light and Wholesome, 'tis the Best;
Free from adulteration, please well,
Rich in nourishment, all can tell.
Each fresh buyer its worth has found,
Delivered each day by cart all round.

When Alfred the Great to the farm-house fled
In disguise, was told to watch the bread;
Not heeding that, thought of his throne,
Of the wife's fist for the burning scene,
She little thought, 'twas the Scots' King's own.

Bassingbourne Wing does not do that,
And when "HE" bakes, knows what he's at;
STRICT CLEANLINESS is his first law,
SUPERIOR FLOUR, BEST YEAST, and more,
Inspects himself, each daily bake,
Never forgets his name's at stake.
Guides the blend of husk and germ,
Brown Bread or White, the crumb is firm;
ONLY THE BEST, it's Crust tastes nutty,
Unlike some bread, (like half-baked putty).
Rarely is bread so fresh and sweet,
Ever tastes dry, needs little meat,
Ever alike, it's quite a treat.

BASSINGBOURNE BREAD by all 'tis said
Remains the best, for getting fed,
Easy digesting, within your reach;
And ALF. WING'S cart your friends please teach.
Delivers these loaves at two pence each.

ENQUIRE WHICH DAYS WING'S CART VISITS YOUR DISTRICT.
A WALK IN SOUTH END

South End is a pleasant no through road leading to the ancient trackway called Ashwell Street.
Walking southwards on the west side of the road, the first houses on the corner of the Cross and South End were originally one shop which over the years has been a draper's and grocer's shop and more recently a general village store. The shop was finally closed about eight years ago and the buildings converted into two houses. A few yards further along the road is a house surrounded by a high brick wall which was once the "Black Bull" public house. In the 18th and 19th century, this was the venue where auction sales of businesses, farms and private houses were sold by the then Royston auctioneers, Nash Son & Rowley. Walking past three more houses, we then see a long drive which leads to a large house built in the mid 1880s, the "Cedars".

The next buildings, which is of historic interest is the former Institute, which was the church hall for the United Reform Church. This church (of which more later) was declared unfit to be used for worship, and the Institute was repaired and extended and then consecrated to become the new United Reform Church for the village. Next to the U.R.C. is the former Manse, now also a private house. No-one can fail to notice the Village College which is next to the Manse, set in playing fields, with its outlook over the southern aspect of the village. This building was opened in 1954 by the late Rt. Hon. R.A. Butler. Walking to the end of the playing fields, there are three houses, converted in the 1970s from 6 small cottages, a small timbered house on the edge of the road, and at right angles behind this house is a large timbered house which was converted from three cottages. Further along the road there are some relatively new houses and bungalows; the rest of the dwellings in this area are much older buildings, namely the "Red House", and next to this at right angles to the road, another former public house which was named "Irish Yews" and also previously called the "Bushel and Strike". To the south of the trackway to the Wellhead Springs, there are four more houses, one of which in the early part of the century had the distinction of being called "the last house in Bassingbourn".

As we cross the road to return to the village a look southwards allows us to see over the fields and towards Therfield Heath in the distance.

The first house on the East side of South End was another Public House named the "White Horse". In the garden at the side is the only remaining oak tree in the village. Following on is a new bungalow, a small cottage, then two more bungalows. The next house contains part of one of the oldest houses in the village which stands endways to the road, at the front is a Victorian addition. Continuing on, we pass four more recent
buildings, a bungalow and three houses. Up the farm roadway by the semi-detached houses, there is a farm yard which contains a well-preserved dove-house. There is one more large new house standing well back from the road. We then come to South End House with its imposing facade, with steps leading up to the front door. On the South side of this building is a very large two storied barn, which has now been converted into three dwellings. The house belonged to the Clear family for many years, who were farmers in the village.

The recreation ground is next, this was given in 1936 and was officially called the "Willmott Playing Field", and has been used by the Football & Cricket Clubs apart from two years in the early 1950s when it was re-seeded. In the north east corner of this field is a children's play area, this piece of ground belonged to the Clear family, who originally gave it to the village. Also standing on the south side of the recreation field is the original United Reformed Church, the building which had been made redundant and de-consecrated as being unfit to be used for public worship. This has now been sold and planning permission has been granted to conversion to a dwelling house. At the north west corner of the recreation ground next to the road is a small square building which was on the British School, and is also a small private house.

Continuing on towards the centre of the village, the next house of interest is the "Tan House", which was the house belonging to a tanner in the nineteenth century. In some of the buildings at the rear of the house can still be seen the stalls where the animals were tethered. Looking along the driveway at the side of these premises, notice can be taken of the "Tanyard" cottages, now just two houses where there was a large group of cottages, some of them separated by a large archway which would easily allow horses and carts to pass through. There is a cul-de-sac road leading of South End which is also called Tan Yard; the houses here are all modern, built on ground which was once allotments. Carrying on to the crossroads, there are just two more buildings, one of which is a modern bungalow, the remaining one is a pair of semi-detached cottages, once a group of at least three, and further in the past is believed to have been one large Hall house.

**BASSINGBOURN FOOTBALL CLUB**

Bassingbourn Football Club first fielded a football team as early as 1905, which was a team formed by the then Ironworks industry in the village.

The Club which joined the Cambs Football league was formed after World War I, in time to compete in the 1921-22 season. Its first President, Mr. H.E. Worboys, held the office for almost 30 years until his death in 1950. Another of the Club stalwarts was
the first Hon. Sec. and Treasurer, Mr. E.M. Eayres, Headmaster of Bassingbourn Council School, who by his fund-raising efforts laid the foundations of the Club’s success.

The pitch where the club played in those days was up the Park, in a field known locally as 'Back Side'. The teams changed in the Church Room, which at that time was a Working Men's Club.

Within a year of its founding, the Club was so well trained that they were a match for any village club within a 30 miles radius. Outstanding players of the day were W. Robinson (who incidentally, played at inside left for Royston Town when they won the Cambs. Charity Shield in 1911-12), T. Watson, L. Lester, F. Wedd and N.L. Clarke. It was in the season 1926-27 that a friendly match was arranged between Bassingbourn and the Cambs. League Division champions, Girton. After a hard fought game, the match resulted in a 3-1 win for Bassingbourn. They still talk about that game in the village, because it proved what many thought at the time; Bassingbourn now had their feet planted firmly on the ladder. Round about this time the Club first competed in the Gransden Charity Cup, which they won, and in 1926-27 again reached the final, but could not bring off the double. It was in the 1935-56 season that the Club consolidated its position by winning the Barkway and District league championship. At this point it is of interest to note that for the first two or three seasons the away matches necessitated the use of horse-drawn wagons for transporting the team, but in 1926 Mr. H. Standen purchased a one ton truck, and the players travelled in comparative luxury, protected from the wind or rain (or both) by a canvas hood which he kindly rigged. Motor coaches were almost unknown then. The Club used this truck for nine years, and stout service it rendered too. One of the Club's really outstanding players was Sidney Bland, who for two seasons played at inside left for Letchworth Town, and despite better offers being dangled before his eyes, preferred to return to the village team that had given him his start in football.

In 1936, the new Wilmott playing field was opened, where the team still play today. At that time there was only a small pavilion, which was used mainly by the Cricket club; the visiting football teams changed into their kit at the Red Lion pub. At the same time of the new field coming into use, the secretary at that time, Mr. Cyril Starr, (who resigned in the late fifties) thought that it was time that the team made a bid for a higher league. His application to Division Two of the Cambs. league was successful, and there Bassingbourn remained until 1940.

After World War II, in March 1946, two friendly matches were arranged. In the following September, the Cambs. League recommended. At this time, players and supporters hired a coach from W.J. Carter of Royston. In 1948 a second team was formed, playing friendly matches for a while, entering the Cambs. league a year later.
At about the same time, the First team were making their mark in Division I(a), in the season 1948-49 they were runners-up in the Foster Cup, and again in the season 1950-51. Since 1948, the Clubs had transport provided by the local coach company, Cyril and Doug Loates, who were both Vice-Presidents of the Club. In 1950-51 season the First team won the Division a(a) championship, and were promoted to the Premier Division for the first time in their history.

The Reserves at the same time were also making great strides. They won the Division 4(A) championship, and in the divisional final beat Stetchworth by the odd goal and so won the Divisional Cup and Medals.

Soon after these triumphs, news came of a grant being given by the Playing Fields Association for the levelling of the Recreation Ground, so for two years all games were played at Kneesworth in Chestnut Lane. After being in the Premier league for two seasons, the first team were relegated. Matches were resumed on the recreation ground in 1954.

In the late fifties we saw the resignation of Mr. C. Starr, who had been Secretary and Treasurer for nearly 30 years. The Club had also recently lost the President who had died. Mr. A.P. Clarke stepped in to become President to help get the Club back in its feet, at the same time Mr. J.D. Bird was appointed as Secretary and Treasurer. After a while, Mr. Clarke thought it was time that a younger man should be appointed as President, Mr. E.G. Worboys was duly elected.

In 1962, the Parish Council purchased an American World War II wooden hut for use as a pavilion, which after having been erected had a verandah added to the front and fitted shower rooms for the home and away teams, and also a kitchen. A clock was donated by the Loates Bros, and situated over the front door.

In 1972, it was decided to have a separate Treasurer and Secretary, Mr. R. Francis and Mr. R. Tyler occupied these posts. In 1983, the Reserves won the Cambridge Cup. We lost our President, Mr. B. G. Worboys, in 1985, and Mr. T. Harris was asked to take over the position. Around this time there were discussions held in order to assess the possibilities of erecting a new purpose built pavilion for both the Football and Cricket Clubs.

There were several changes in the officers of the Club, S. Mather and D. Green both had short spells as Secretary. Mr. T. Harris moved away, and Mr. R. Francis became President, in 1989 Mr. M. Freeman became Chairman, when the First team won the Division 1A championship.

Talks began again regarding the pavilion, which was becoming to be in a sorry state, the roof was leaking and the windows along the front of the verandah were continually being broken by vandals. The Parish Council donated money, a grant was given by S. Cambs District Council, plus donations from several people, which
enabled a new brick building with shuttered windows to be approved by the Parish Council and work was soon in hand with the new building. The pavilion was formally opened on November 14th, 1990 by Mr. C. Bullen, Chairman of the Cambs. F.A. New officers of the Club were elected. Darren Lane came as player/manager followed by Brian Cannon. Mick Lewis became Secretary in 1990, Mr. R. Tyler still remains as Treasurer.

In 1990, the First team were runners-up in division Premium B, and the Reserves in Division 5A. The following season saw the Reserves win Division 4A, and the First team won the Premium League Cup, and last year finished 3rd in Premium A league.

Last year, Mr. R. Tyler was given an award for long service to the Club as treasurer, a post which he has held for 20 years. This award was given by the Cambs. F.A. To conclude, this article would not be complete without mentioning Doug Racher, who gives his time each week to mark out the pitch, puts up the nets and the ropes around the pitch.

Doug also clears up the pavilion after the matches and organises the kitchen, which includes making tea for players and spectators and supporters. As we look back over the 73 years that the Club has been in existence, we see that there have been ups and downs, players coming and going, we hope that the next 73 years will see the teams carrying on our traditions. There is one more group of people who deserve our thanks; past players who still support the teams, the supporters who turn out for every match and others who give their help in various ways to keep the club going. Thanks are due also to Mr. P. Sell and Mr. F. Standen (both past players), for their help in the loan of cuttings, and their memories for this project, plus the contributions of many other people too numerous to mention.

THE CRICKET CLUB

It is known that there was a thriving Cricket Club in the village prior to 1913 but there are no records of that time. The Minute Book shows that very eminent members of the community played an active part including such well-known names as Loates, Playle and Worboys. A Ladies Committee was formed and they were responsible for the arrangements for social events. A Children's Treat was held in the season and it was agreed that no cricket practice should take place during the children's races! In 1914, the Club was successful in winning the Webber Challenge Cup in its first season of competition. This was a great achievement and the Cup was exhibited in the window of one of the village shops for a fortnight before being put on show in the school.
There used to be a large willow tree on the Recreation Ground. This had been struck by lightning resulting in a large hole through which the batsmen tried to strike balls. There is no record of the club's activities during World War II but they did continue to play during those year. The club continued to flourish after the war and in 1977 had its best season to date, winning, the President's Cup, the Keatley Cup, the Webber Cup and the Datchworth Sevens.

Bassingbourn Cricket Club has played some teams for over 30 years - these include Barley, Hitchin West Indians, Letchworth Corinthians and Liverpool University Staff Tourists (known as LUST!)

It was not possible to play matches on Sundays for many years owing to the limitation on Sunday organised sport placed on the ground by the Donors when the Chapel was in regular use. However, in the 70's the rules were changed and so Sunday matches now take place. During the time that Sunday games were not allowed, Johnson Matthey and the RAF Camp loaned pitches as long as some of their personnel were included in the team. This resulted in gaining some new members when Sunday games started on the Recreation ground.

At last, together with the Football Club, the club has a new Pavilion. Previously, the little old 'Life-up front' shack that had existed, replace by a much better one in the 1960s were both well past their use when they were pulled down, now that brick building is much better still, having space in the changing rooms so that you can be sure that it is your own shirt that you are putting on! It also does justice to the marvellous teas which are put on by our ladies. For many years John Marriage QC was the Club's President and two long playing members were Groundsman and Treasurer respectively, Bill Keffors and Ron Ford.

The Club now plays in the Cambridgeshire League as well as Cup Competitions but like so many village clubs would welcome younger players - there must be some out there somewhere.

**BASSINGBOURN UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

Our history began just over 200 years ago (in 1791) as the result of a fierce row. Our forefathers (who called themselves Independents) had been gathering from many villages around here ever since 1694 for worship in Melbourn. They were strong enough to support a full-time minister and an assistant (revs. Richard Cooper and Samuel Bull). When Mr. Cooper died, somewhat surprisingly the congregation did not invite Mr. Bull to succeed him. A vocal minority from Bassingbourn were so incensed that they formed their own congregation here in 1791 and invited Mr. Bull
to be their first minister. Attendance increased and a piece of land was offered for a
new building, which was completed at a cost of £600. This remains as the core of the
former church alongside the Recreation Ground, now being converted to a private
house. Galleries, a porch and a vestry were later added as demand for more
accommodation grew.

At a later stage, the name 'Bassingbourn Congregational Church' was formed in
1972, the congregation voted to become a member. An official census in 1851
showed an attendance of 557 at the Morning Service and 711 at Evening Service.
Many would have been present at both Services. At about that time, an arsonist
named 'Broggie' Smith caused much fire damage in Bassingbourn. The church
building was nearly burnt down twice when pieces of burning thatch blew
dangerously near.

In the 1860s a Mission Hall was established in North End for the coprolite miners
who worked and lived in Bassingbourn, and this continued until the late 1930s. A
'preaching station' was also supported for many years at Haslingfield.

For many years the British School, situation in South End at the corner of the
Recreation Ground, was owned by the church and used as a primary school, later as a
In recent years this building was converted to a private house.

Around 1930, the congregation was given the building previously known as the
'Bassingbourn Institute', standing in South End. This was used as a church hall for a
variety of purposes, and included kitchen and toilet facilities.
The church building was found to be in much need of repair in the early 1980s, and it was decided to convert the hall into a sanctuary for worship. A purchaser was found for the old building in 1986, and in 1991 as part of the bicentenary celebrations, the hall was extended to its present shape. This now includes a sanctuary, kitchen, toilets and various rooms.

A full history of the church, entitled 'Crown Him Lord of all' was written in 1991 and a copy may be purchased from the church secretary (Mrs. Jill Saggers).

CLEAR FARM

Clear farm has been a part of Bassingbourn's history for several hundred years. It was named after the Clear family, local gentry with land in Bassingbourn, Melbourn and Shepreth. The Rowses in the east to the clunch pit and beyond in the west. Today, the Standen family are the tenants of the land, Clear farm, and the Marriage family own South End house, the home of the Clears.

The Clears probably came into the property through inter marriage with the Prime family, the previous owners. The Clears start appearing in the records in 1847, when John and Henry Clear are listed under Gentry in Kelly's PO Directories, then Samuel in 1851, Miss Sarah in 1858, and then Wilfred Samuel in 1864 until 1904 when the entry appears as Clear Brothers. Thereafter the only entry is for a Miss Clear in the 1920s and 30s.

Wilfred dies some time before World War I and the house was empty for a while, until it was used to house Belgian refugees during the war. Later a family of Clear nephews and nieces from Melbourn, moved into the house. Their names were Julian, Stanley, Isobel, Maude, Grace and Adelaide, formidable characters in an era when the gentry was just that and everyone knew their place!

The farm and surrounding land was bought by the County Council and split into small holdings to rent to the soldiers of World War I vast numbers of whom were desperate for work. The first tenants were Archie and Albert Cobb, Henry Billet, Leonard Hutchinson, Charles Ford and Albert Ridge.

Harry Standen later took on the Cobb holdings and his brother Fred one of the others. Then in 1937, Harry's son Frank with his sons Claude and George, became the tenants of the whole of Clear farm. Eventually Frank retire, George moved elsewhere in 1957, and that left Claude with his sons Frank and Brian. Today they also farm land at Arlington and Shepreth.

Their use of the land has changed over the years. Initially, as with most of the land in Bassingbourn there was a lot of livestock, in their case: horses, bullocks, cows, pigs
and poultry. No animals today, but they grow potatoes, wheat, barley and rape and sometimes onions.

In the meanwhile over at South End house, the Clearses were becoming aged and infirm. Like the uncle they had inherited from, they were all childless. Julian was the only one to get married and that was when he was about 80 to a bride of 60! Eventually this widow Clear was the only one left and she went back to her native Yorkshire, leaving the house empty. It was eventually bought by the Marriage family who have been there ever since.

Today in 1994, life goes on and we now have two new dynasties at Clear Farm. Four generations of Standens have been on the land and at South End house, three generations of Marriages!

MEMORIES BY F.W.P. THORNE FIRST WARDEN OF BASSINGBOURN VILLAGE COLLEGE

When I came to Bassingbourn in 1953, there were so few signs of impending change that a short survey of the village may be of interest.

Canberras from RAF Bassingbourn circled the village by night and day. Traditional farm buildings covered the site of Canberra Close and Wellington Place: subsequently a centuries old oak beam from the demolished barn was used to support the bell-cage in the parish church. Across the road a small toll-gate keeper's cottage stood on the corner of a field now occupied by Nightingale Avenue. The field was the last annual resort of the remnants of a children's roundabout and a few stalls of Bassingbourn's once great feast. Further along the Causeway an overgrown paddock, rusty iron track-way, ivy covered tower and solitary house offered no hint of the present development. Across the road, fields stretched to Spring Lane where an old cottage, with a sundial on the wall, occupied the site of 1 & 2 Pepper Close. The Hoops, wheelwrights cottage, carpenters shop and Red Lion, together with Wilkersons' agricultural stores and a group of old cottages gave the impression of a village centre. The Red Lion, then an attractive public house, was held by an ex-Army officer called Shakespears. The Elbourn Almshouse side had already been earmarked, but behind it, closes stretched to the Recreation Ground and, in Spring Lane were two cottages with attractive pargetting.

Continuing down the High Street, next to the School was the butcher's shop with its slaughterhouse still in use, then the Post Office and well-stocked stores with a well-
deserved reputation for service. On the other side the Co-operative occupied the place of the two present shops, followed by the fire-engine house, two Nissen huts and the Crown public house. Opposite was Mr. Svennson's saddlers shops with its date: 1673, boldly displayed. The Little Shop, a general stores, was kept by Mr. F. Wedd who cut my hair under his heavily burdened apple tree. I vividly remember the gleaming red apples with the blue September sky above.

The blacksmith's shop facing North End was closed, but the enamelled advertisements on its wall still proclaimed the virtues of Karswood Poultry Spice and Spratt's Dog Biscuits. North End seemed far away from the Cross, although linked to it by The Fillance; Bassingbourn Mill, the Pear Tree and Carpenters Arms together with a bakers, were still busy in this part of the village. Two bus companies had their stops at the Cross. The Cambridge bus started at North End and travelled via Arrington and Orwell. The other linked the village with Royston and Hitchin, and provided a late "picture bus" from Royston on Saturday evenings. Both Companies ran three buses daily each way.

On the corner of South End, Caton's Stores contained an unusually wide selection of provisions, including Gentlemen's Relish. Further along, the Black Bull, with its small panelled 'snug', enjoyed the distinction of being owned by Flowers, the Stratford-upon-Avon brewery. Across the road, in place of the Tanyard, stood a small cottage backed by open ground. Although not a bungalow was to be seen in South End, modern buildings were rising on two sites: the Clear Farm houses and, across the road, the Village College.

The Village College stands on land purchased from Daniel Flitton's estate: subsequently land bought from Mr. W. Howes almost doubled the original area. From the outset, a site on this land was earmarked for a new Primary School - some mills grind very slowly. Designed by the County Architect, Mr. Wilfred Wingate, the building contractors were Johnson and Bailey of Cambridge. Two local craftsmen were employed - Mr. Basil Baulk, carpenter and joiner, and a colourful local character, Mr. Jerry Willmott, who was responsible for the external brickwork. Trees were an essential part of the design: avenues of hornbeam, whitebeam and silverleafed lime were planted, a line of lombardy poplars was placed along Brook Road, an another of beech and flowering cherries faced South End, while flowering crabs and specimen trees were located in the grounds. The grounds were the responsibility of Mr. Charles Dilley, whose transformation of a desolate building site into rose and shrub beds, trim lawns and well-tended playing fields provided an attractive Sunday walk for local residents.

This involvement of the local community was at the heart of Henry Morris Village College idea, which at that time placed Cambridgeshire in the foreground of local
education authorities. Today it is too easy to forget the seminal character of his idea in an England submerged under a tide of Community Colleges. But, at that time, as the first post-war Village College, Bassingbourn attracted widespread attention. Before the building was completed gifts were received from prominent well-wishers. Mr. Ian Phillips of Charlton Mackrell Court, Somerset, sent a cheque for 1,000 guineas, which provided the statue of Youth on the external wall of the Hall. The sculptor was Harold Dow. J.B. Priestley gave his grand piano. Bernard Leach, the famous St. Ives potter, sent one of his splendid dishes for the Common Room. Mr. Wilfred Wingate gave and erected the four statues standing at the rear of the building. They are of particular historic interest as they originally stood on the corners of the old Assize Court on Castle hill, Cambridge. A member of the County Council, the Hon. Mrs. H. Pease and Mrs. C. Rackham, Chairman of the Education Committee were other donors.

When it opened in September, 1954, the Village College served twenty villages; several of these were later transferred to Melbourn Village College when it was built. The official opening ceremony in November was performed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt. Hon. R.A. Butler, who had commended Village Colleges in his 1944 Education Act. About 1,000 people attended the ceremony, which was relayed to crowds in the gymnasium and classrooms.

Visitors had already been arriving during September and October. A selection of these covering the first five years will possibly convey the variety and dimension of all this. From home came Lord and Lady Reity, Education Officers and committees from Cwm Bran New Town, County Durham, Leicestershire, Dorset and Jersey. During this period, I was invited to speak to Education Officers and Committees in the East Riding, Hampshire, Bristol, Somerset and Devon. From abroad came a French Minister of Education, followed by two parties of administrators; the Prime Minister of Indonesia, followed by two parties of officials; two parties of Russians; a group of twenty No. 1 wives from West Africa; (the first wives of chiefs, promoted to the post of advisors); an American Professor; the President of a bank in Vietnam who had read an article on the Village College in a Saigon newspaper. Most of the groups numbered 15-20 and as all were entertained to lunch some idea may be gained of the achievement of the Housekeeper, Mrs. Daisy Lester, and her staff in coping with all this during a normal school day. Finally mention must be made of a group of Indian students, led by a Princess, daughter of the Maharajah of Jaipur, who were accommodated in the College and catered for by members of the Youth Club. The princess left an open invitation to visit the Palace at Jaipur. To the best of my knowledge the invitation still stands!
CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE VILLAGE COLLEGE

LISA RUSAY DANCE SCHOOL

In December 1991, Mrs. Lisa Oakman took over the Dance School from Miss Penelope Cheshire who had run the School for 3-4 years after Laura Cross. The School teaches Russian style Ballet, Jazz Dance, Modern and Tap for all ages. Lisa attended Bassingbourn Village College for 2 years before going away to the Legat Ballet school in Sussex in 1980.

The children from the Lisa Rusay Dance School in the last two years have entered the Cambridge Music and Dance Festival and have done very well. They have also performed at various fetes and events in the area. They put on their first show with Lisa in May 1993 and are due to do their first Ballet Exams in May 1994. Lisa hopes that the School will go from strength to strength and continue to provide a service for local children.

BASSINGBOURN JUNIOR GYMNASISTIC CLUB

The Club was started by Penny Tuffnell, a movement specialist of Bedford College of Physical Education, in 1983.

The club was made possible by the kind support of Mr. John Pelling who made the school hall available for this purpose and when it began had just six members.

Enthusiasm and interest increased until the club was fortunate enough to become affiliated to Bassingbourn Village College under Community Education. Five classes continue in the gymnasium with Mrs. Tuffnell today.

The Junior Gymnastic Club aims to lay down an enjoyable and confident understanding of movement gymnastics at an early age which can be transferred and used in other sports and activities. It encourages a healthy life style.

During the last eleven years, pupils have enjoyed creative gymnastics and achieved awards of the British Amateur Gymnastics Association to Grade 1 standard and above. Excellence has been attained by gifted gymnasts but equally there have been those who have excelled in overcoming physical or mental challenges in the mastery of movement.
Several gymnasts have been taking part now for eight years in club activities having started at pre-school age.  

*The good success of the club has been and is due to the enthusiasm, hard work and fun of the young gymnasts and the support of many loyal parents.*

**Bassingbourn Judo Club**

The Club was started in the middle of the 1960s by John Bird as an evening class. After a brief lapse, the club was restarted by Glenda Stanway (now Chapman) in the late 70s. Round 1981/2 the club was run by Jannette Stainton and Geoff Klein until Jannette returned to Scotland and Geoff Klein took over the sole running in 1983. Over the years, club members have achieved awards and several have qualified as coaches. In 1987 the club won an Area Championship event held in Royston and continues to thrive under the guidance of Geoff Klein who now holds both Renshi (advanced teaching level) and 4th Dan.

**East Anglian Aviation Society**

The Society came to centre its activities upon Bassingbourn Village College as it was the centre of our members catchment area. Our primary role was to stimulate interest in aviation by gathering records, pictures and eventually whole aircraft. We had from the outset a close relationship with RAF Bassingbourn, although its life as an airfield was drawing to a close, but in 1963 when we started, it was a very busy station. We did feel that with so much aviation history surrounding this area, a Museum should be set up and this led to our proposal that the Imperial War Museum consider the use of Duxford to allow them to show their reserve collection. We also felt that this would be a plus for Cambridgeshire and provide much needed employment. The rest is history as it is now one of Europe's leading Museums, its operation a direct result of our ideas and efforts.

Although we no longer play any part in the Duxford Museum, we do have in the old Control Tower at Bassingbourn Barracks a Museum dedicated to the RAF and USAAF.

We meet every third Thursday in the month during the Winter and our lecturers over the years have been some of the most famous names in aviation. We have restored
aircraft and flown some and we also excavate crash sites with MOD approval. The major work at present is to gather together all the exciting history of the old airfield which is still a point of pilgrimage by both RAF and American airmen from the last War.

**BASSINGBOURN-CUM-KNEESWORTH WOMEN'S INSTITUTE**

The WI movement originated in Canada, when a young woman who had lost her baby, decided it had happened through ignorance and lack of education and set about trying to remedy this. The first British WI was formed in Wales in 1919 and our Bassingbourn one in 1924. Annual membership was 2 shillings (10p) and they met once a month, in the afternoons at the "Institute". This was and still is, the building in South End, belonging to the United Reformed Church, the one extended in 1992 to form their new church. The name derives, not from its use by the WI, but from a time in the 19th century, when it was used as a working men's institute. Evelyn Lawrence, one of the early members, can remember a wrought-iron arch over the gate, inscribed with the name and painted green and red in the WI colours. The arch must have been removed during the war years, along with the recreation ground gates, as part of the war effort.

From its formation in 1920 right through until the war years, the main organisers were the Clear sisters, Isobel, Maude, Adelaide and Grace. The four of them lived in South End house, with their two brothers, all unmarried. They came from Melbourn and had inherited the house from the uncle, the last in line of a family who had lived in our village throughout the 1900s. The sisters ran the Institute with a rod of iron, and among other activities they organised a choir which entered competitions and performances of the mystery play, St. George and the Dragon. Their production obviously did not benefit from the research that went into the 1992 attempt to restage the play, first performed in the village in 1511, as one of the characters was a Father Christmas!

The first secretary was Mrs. Peacock, wife of Harry Peacock, local garage proprietor of the day. Both she and their daughter Doreen, were long standing members. Elsie Dellar, a founder member, could remember attending these early meetings with her children sitting meekly on her knee.

During the pre-war years membership flourished and numbers were regularly in the 60s and 70s. We are not really sure how the WI functioned in the war years as all the members were very busy with war work. Member Evelyn Lawrence was Bassingbourn's only female fire warden, Mrs. Worboys of Poplar Farm was busy
with WRVS as well as organising a knitting circle making Guernsey sweaters for sailors, and other ladies were more than busy coping with farms, homes, or businesses, all suffering from a lack of manpower, as well as a considerable number of evacuees. Miss Peacock does have photographs of her mother, with the Clear sisters, making vast quantities of jam, so there was some organised WI activity. However, by 1948, they were struggling to form a committee, petrol was in short supply and although speakers valiantly made the effort to attend, arriving by bus after changing at Royston, they were getting harder to find and so it was decided to close for six months, from May to November. In those six months the situation must have improved considerably, as when they re-opened there were 31 nominations for the committee of 12! Membership remained at 2 shillings until the following AGM in April, when it went up to 3 shillings and 6d. They changed to an evening meeting and moved to the school in the High Street. Mrs. Gudgeon was the president, Mrs. Harcourt the secretary and Mrs. Peacock the treasurer. Mrs. Harcourt, wife of the headmaster was later to become President, and office she held for 10 years. Once the Village College was opened they moved again, and have been in the Morris room, on the second Tuesday in each month, ever since.

In 1965, the Cambridge Federation of WIs celebrated their 50th anniversary and to mark the occasion, a cherry tree was planted on the green at the east end of the High Street. In 1990, to mark the 75th anniversary, another tree was planted, this time a hornbeam at the primary school, and as this was the same year that two founder members died, namely Elsie Dellar and Clare Myers, it was planted in their memory also.

Presidents, committees and ordinary members may have come and gone, but for over 70 years the local WI has been serving the community. There have been many changes to our organisation and long gone are the "county lady" types, such as our Clear sisters, with their Jam and Jerusalem, but unfortunately WIs still suffer from this image. Over the last 10 years our local WI has made great efforts to update its image and appeal to new members, but despite village walks, cycle rides, pancake races, a fashion show, theatre trips, varied outings and an interesting range of speakers our membership stays in the 30s. The subscription is currently £11.60, a great deal more than the original 2 shillings, but this works out at £1.06 for an evening's entertainment and brings with many opportunities at a County and national level. What better value is there? We are waiting in the Morris room, every second Tuesday in the month (except August) to welcome the ladies of the village to our ranks.
Throughout 1993, a small group of people from the Village College and the Community met regularly once a month in order to make plans for the formation of a small local Museum. The basis for this museum already existed, this being the collection started in the 1960s by teacher David Billings as a resource for Rural Studies, when the College had its own farm unit.

Today, the collection is still housed in the same building, originally known as the Medway Hut. It was erected about 1951 for use as an infants' department when the Old School in the High Street first started to outgrow its original site. For those new to the village, this is the brown, weatherboarded building near the bend in Brook road, on the corner of the school site.

The aim of the group is to make the collection available, not only as a resource for the pupils at the Village College and its feeder Primary schools, but also for use by the community. The priority is to catalogue and display to best advantage the existing collection and eventually it is hoped to back this up with research into local history and people, and to record events past and present. One such event will be the 40th Anniversary of the foundation of Bassingbourn Village College which falls in 1994.

BROWNIES

Ladies in the village tell that there were Brownies around 1920 that met at the "Cedars", South End, but the records have not come to light.

1st Bassingbourn Pack was registered with the Girl Guide Association in January, 1941 with 17 girls with Miss Jessica Williamson as leader and Mrs. Grace Racher as assistant. In March 1952, Mrs. May Jenner is recorded as being Brown Owl, and in October 1969 Mrs. Lily Sproulle as assistant Brownie Guider. At this time the unit met at the Junior School. The present pack was re-formed early in 1978 with Mrs. Vanessa Powell as its first Brownie Guider. Since then the pack of twenty four girls aged 7-10 years has taken part in its varied activities. The Annual District Thinking Day gatherings and revels joining with other packs in the area, Pack Holidays and day trips, as well as joining in many money raising events and weekly pack meetings.

Assistant Brownie Guiders Mrs. Jane Bradford and Mrs. Marion Keith gave loyal service over several years and were succeeded by Mrs. Shirley Wardrop and Mrs. Jackie Oates who had assisted Mrs. Jill Saggers until her recent retirement after fifteen years as Brownie Guider.
The pack's enthusiasm continues with Mrs. Shirley Wardrop as Brownie Guider, Mrs. Jackie Oates as her assistant and Young Leader, Miss Hannah Reeve, meeting on Thursday evenings at the Junior School.

THE WAR MEMORIAL

The memorial, which is made of Portland stone, and stands at the crossroads in the village, was erected in November 1919.

At the dedication service, there were 1,200 people present. The ex-servicemen of Bassingbourn and Kneesworth were at the west side of the memorial enclosure, and the relatives and friends of the fallen men were seated on the east side. The combined choirs of the Parish and Congregational churches were at the front of the enclosure, whilst the bank, which was composed principally of ex-servicemen accompanies the hymns. The memorial was dedicated by the Vicar, the Revd. R.H. Boyd with these words: "To the honour and glory of God and in memory of those men from Bassingbourn and Kneesworth who gave their lives in the war, we dedicate this memorial in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen."

There then followed after prayers, an address by Viscount Knutsford. There is an inscription on the base of the south side of the Cross which reads as follows: "In memory of those who gave their lives for their country in the Great War 1914-1919. They showed us the way."

**There are 28 names of Bassingbourn men and 14 names of Kneesworth men from that war carved on the Cross. Many of these names are still known in the village today.**
A STROLL DOWN NORTH END

Having walked along South End, it is, perhaps, time to wander down North End. This stretches from the Cross to the northern limit of the village. Once North End was a hamlet in its own right, as was Shedbury to the west. Now both are part of Bassingbourn.

We pass Poplar Farm and Manor Farm towards the Church. In the spring the road is a mass of chestnut blossom. There used to be a sawmill at the rear of Poplar Farm but now both farmhouses are just homes and their use as farmhouses has passed into history. Also along here is Church Cottage which is reputed to have been the Guildhall.

The small building on the left is the Church Room which has had a chequered history. It was first used as a 1/2d per week school and then in the 30s became a Men's Club. When the evacuees came from Brompton Oratory during the War they used it as a school room, and then when the war ended, it became a venue for various events such as wedding receptions, until 1956 when as a result of bad weather, it collapsed. It was restored by Mr. Edward Russell the then owner of Manor Farm to be used for church meetings and as a Youth Club. For several years, it was used as a store but recently, after a 'wash and brush up' has become a centre for church activities such as the children's church and children's parties. Behind the Church Room stands the new Vicarage, built in the 70s on glebe land.

Now we reach the Pear Tree Pub opposite which is Park Cottage which used to be a brewery and ale house.

Continuing past modern housing we find several older houses of interest. One of these is still known as the Carpenters Arms although no longer a Pub. There were once several more pubs in North End but no signs remain.

In the wall opposite the Carpenters Arms is one of the few remaining Victorian post boxes and nearby a pump. Further on, by a row of old cottages, is another pump.

We turn the corner towards Abington Piggotts to leave the village, but the turning to the right - Guise Lane - leads down to the back of Bassingbourn Airfield where we can see the Control Tower and other signs of the days when the activities there involved the Royal Air Force.
MANOR FARM HOUSE

Originally part of the Manor of Richmond, Manor farm was the largest of the six manors in Bassingbourn. In the seventeenth century it was timber framed, and in the eighteenth century a five bay front with plastered doorcase was added.

The site was surrounded by a moat which incorporated the Parish Church and Church farm house. At the rear of the site there was also a medieval church and fishponds. The outbuildings, of which some parts still remain, also contain a late fourteenth century tithe barn, which was given a Conservation award in 1993, when it was lovingly restored. Eighteenth century cartsheds and stables and a thatched garden house adorn the courtyard.

Until early this century, the farmhouse was owned by the Finch-Hatton family, and had been for about two hundred years.

The estate as seen today was sold to its tenant farmer J.G. Russell in 1923. The last of the family, Mr. E. Russell, sold the farmland in 1949, but retained the house. After the death of Mr. Russell, the house was sold to Mr. Adrian Bridgwater, who then sold it to the present owners, Sir Charles and Lady Chadwyck-Healey.

The annual Parish Church fete is held in the grounds, as has been for about the last thirty years.
Church Farm house has a history spanning some five hundred years. It was known as the inappropriate Rectory and a parsonage in a much larger property than we see today. It is L-shaped in design, with a drawbridge over the moat to its west side. The driveway leads to what the architecture tells us, a Horse and Carriage entrance, with possibly coachman's accommodation above. Most of the property was destroyed by fire in the late eighteenth century; only the southern half remained and served as the farm house to Rectory farm.

Sheep were grazed on the parkland and "Backside" to the east by the Hatton family, but when the Worboys family acquired the farm in 1906, which they farmed until 1991, sheep farming declined, and pigs were introduced to replace them. Prize-winning pigs were reared and obtained Rosettes and Certificates of Excellence at Agricultural shows over a wide area. Bob Morgan, who used to live in part of Church Farm house was well known to take a prizewinning Saddleback pig for a walk along the High Street of Bassingbourn. Although farming has now ceased, and the pig sties are replaced by two bungalows, memories still linger.
Another resident of the Church Farm house, the late Ted Starr, was the Parish Church Organist for many years, a person much loved and respected, who played a very active part in village life.

Both Bob and Ted lived in the Farm house for many years, as the property was made into two dwellings earlier this century, divided on the ground floor by a locked oak panelled door, and on the landing by a hessian board. There are two staircases, one of which is on a grand style, and as there were then servants' quarters, there was a steep narrow staircase accessible through a small cupboard door leading from the utility room and dairy to the first floor landing. During the Civil War, Oliver Cromwell's stepmother lived in this property.

Church Farm House

**BASSINGBOURN PARISH CHURCH**

The Parish Church of St. Peter and St. Paul is a large imposing building pleasantly situated near the centre of the village. The first reference to the church is during the reign of Henry III (1216-1272). It was late in the thirteenth century that the oldest part of the present church was built. This was the west tower constructed in the Early English style of architecture.
Between 1340 and 1400 the rest of the church was built. There was a general restoration around 1500 then no further work until the period 1860-1880 when the church was left looking very much as it does today. It is a lofty spacious building well lit from the many large windows. The East window is highly coloured as are the nave aisle windows facing east, whilst the high clerestory windows flood the nave with sunlight.

The long history of the building can be traced through the architectural styles; decorated in the chancel and aisle windows; perpendicular in the clerestory; Victorian nave roof and seating the main part of the nave. How different is this seating from the ancient buttressed pews in the north aisle. The font is fifteenth century, but it rests on a Victorian tiled floor. Look in any direction and you will see carvings and monuments. Again these cover the centuries, fair women from the middle ages face scowling men; there are bats and goats and demons strange. The monument of a young man in his shroud is dated 1647; the Nightingale family history on floor and walls records the link with the church from 1664-1931.

The fine peal of bells has an equally long history; originally cast in 1650 they were re-hung as recently as 1977.

The South porch is where people have entered and left for hundreds of years; for both the porch and the huge oak door are at least five hundred years old. The porch is a remarkable timber framed structure, one of only two such in the country. The arches are carved and the porch has two bargeboard seats. It has been an entrance, an exit and a meeting place down the centuries for a very fine and much loved parish church.

St. Peter & St. Paul
Parish Church
BASSINGBOURN PARISH CHURCH

Twenty years of some Parish Church history from 1973.

The Rev. John Aitchison was instituted as Vicar in 1973. The Churchwardens Mr. Headley Marshall and Mr. Williamson and worked with their helpers to make a warm welcome. This was achieved with an augmented choir and later to the Village College Hall filled with well wishers. A coachload of parishioners from Kent came to the institution. On the first Sunday a few loyal choirladies were in the choir stalls but a larger choir was needed, and before long boys and girls, men and women were arriving to join. But there were no choir robes. A jumble sale was held in the school and enough money was raised to buy the robes. So on Easter Day 1974 a large fully-robed choir processed up the aisle singing "Jesus Christ is risen today". A wonderful occasion. Mr. Ted Starr at the organ, a faithful and loyal organist for many years. He started playing when he was sixteen and celebrated 60 years playing in 1986 with a party in the Vicarage garden. He played until two weeks before his death in 1991. His loyalty to the Church and the Community and recommended by the Vicar was rewarded by being a recipient of Maundy money by HM the Queen when the Royal Maundy Service was held in Ely Cathedral in 1987.

The Bells. The five bells had not been rung for 17 years. They had become unsafe. The wooden frames damaged the tower whenever the bells were rung. They needed to be rehung on new metal frames, and this needed money. A fund was started to include the Church room, also unsafe and unusable, and known as "The Bells and Churchroom Fund". Many and varied events took place to raise money needed, it is impossible to mention all the people involved. There was the fortnightly whist drive, the weekly cake stall with coffee in front of the Primary School in the High Street, The yearly Cheese & Wine Party at the Vicarage, dances with visiting pop groups, 'Burns Night' parties at the Village College, a Sausage Sizzle and swim at the pool in Royston, Carol singing, coffee mornings etc. etc. and a Gift Day in the Church.

Eventually the bells were removed from the Tower by voluntary helpers and taken to the Whitechapel Bell foundry for retuning and repairs to headstocks. A sixth bell was obtained and recast and dedicated to Mr. Ernest Tyler (in the year of the Queen's Jubilee) Secretary of the PCC for many years. They were rehung in 1977 and a sponsored 1/4 Peal was rung to celebrate under the direction of our new young Captain of the Tower Mike Tyers.

The Church Room. This had been unusable for a number of years. Originally a Church School, the floor had rotted through where the stream has risen, the little that was left was like walking on a raft. The squirrels nested under the patched roof.
Renovation was achieved by raising and renewing the floor, the roof reslated, a lavatory and hand basin built in small rooms; also a sink and new drainage installed and night-storage heaters. Mr. Russell Brown being the helpful and efficient builder. Mr. Faulkner doing much inside woodwork.
The Church room was completed and reopened in 1989 and used for small events and meetings which previously had been held in the Vicarage. Of the £12,000 required we are grateful to the late Churchwarden Williamson who left £5,000 in his will for the provision of a Churchroom.

Children's Church. This was started in 1975 at the request of some mothers who wanted some form of worship for children early on Sunday mornings. The Vicar agreed that this should take place at 9.30 in the church for about 3/4 hour under a leader. So with five children, a teenage girl who struggled with the piano, a teenage boy who played the guitar and Mrs. Aitchison as leader, in this small way Children's Church started. After a few weeks Mrs. Pratt arrived with her two children and offered to accompany the singing on the piano. This she did every Sunday for ten years, after which a rota of pianists played. Children's Church proved so popular that every week new children arrived, mothers, fathers and grandparents were welcome. The great success of this venture was that it was the children's own service where they took a very active part, different children each week leading in prayers and other help. Collective reverend worship for children of all ages is important. This act of worship must be a well prepared event, well presented and related clearly to the understanding and needs of the children. Using part of the Prayer Book leads on to adult worship.

Stamp Books with weekly stamps depicting the Gospel were uses. Short stimulating talks with teaching in the light of modern knowledge but most of all it taught of the glory of God and the love and teaching of Jesus. So many loyal and helpful children could be named. Mention must be made of Denise Racher who brought her four young brothers, - the youngest who came at age four till he was sixteen. Denise was killed in a car crash at the age of 20. Two flower stands were given and dedicated. A party was held in the Vicarage garden most summers sometimes with a barbecue. Children helped with the Church Fete giving toys for their own Toy Stall. They helped decorate the church for festivals. In Jubilee year a float was entered in the Village carnival. The theme was the Five Sovereign Queens of England, Elizabeth 1st, Anne, Mary, Victoria and our own present Queen. Each Queen dressed in period costume and each had two attendants. On another occasion a float was entered in conjunction with the Church Fete, this time the theme "All things bright and beautiful" with children dressed according to each verse. On several occasions a coachload was taken to the Pantomime, a grandfather
donating the tickets. A Good Friday service was held for children at 9.30 and afterwards hot Cross Buns, home-made were eaten in the church. On Rogation Sunday hymns and prayers sung in the Churchyard and wild flowers and seeds planted in God's acre, the churchyard.

Continuing Mrs. Aitchison's zeal for Children's Church a Bring and Buy sale was held at the Vicarage each year in aid of the Beethoven Fund for Deaf Children. Harvest gifts were sold and the proceeds sent to Blind Camps. A Nativity Play specially written was produced with many helpers, the proceeds sent to Great Ormond Street Hospital. These events keep sympathies wide.

The Harvest Supper. This was introduced into the parish in 1975 and on this occasion proved so popular that over 120 folk came, and the supper became an annual event. The St. George/Diocesan flag was donated by Mrs. Norah Jackson in 1984, the Vicar providing the fibreglass flagpole, the flag being flown at Festivals and Saints Days. A public address system was donated by the Vicar in 1988 additional to the amplifier system for children's Church. A flower festival was held in June 1987. Every organisation in the village was invited to take part - the theme being "O all ye works of the Lord" and held on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Many came to see the beautiful floral arrangements by the parishioners of Bassingbourn. The Bassingbourn wooden plough was used in a display. (Now housed in a museum) This is a brief part-history of twenty years during which the Churchwardens were Mr. Headley Marshall, Mr. Billy Williamson, Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey, Mr. H. Trewren, Mrs. J. Nelson, Mr. S. Brooker.

Finally a tribute must be paid to the Vicar, the Rev. John Aitchison for his quiet unassuming work for everyone and his generosity of gifts to the church.
The Jubilee Bell, dedicated to Mr. Ernest Tyler

John Aitchison, Vicar 1973 - 1992
Children's Church

Children's Church - Party at the Vicarage
The Church Choir on Remembrance Sunday

Jubilee Year - Village Carnival, The 5 Sovereign Queens
5 Queens

Organist, Ted Starr
THE VICARAGE MOAT

Many manors were moated for defence. The Vicarage moat belongs to the Diocese of Ely. It surrounds the Vicarage and Glebeland, incorporating a large rectangular pond with sluice gates and dykes at either end. The west end of the moat is fed by the brook or Bourn, and leads to the north east to where it meets the road leading north, called North End, then meets up with itself in Mill lane.

The moat and its ditches were also used for irrigation; two ponds within the moat were used to rear fish and eels for food. In 1455, Richard Lynn, who occupied a substantial house, (Richmond Manor house), made the moats and fish ponds. In the 1520s the site was recovered by the Crown, and became empty by the 1620s. At the Enclosure in 1804, it passed by exchange from the Hatton family, the landowners after the Crown, to the Vicar.

For as long as villagers remember, the Glebe land and Moat has remained unused, allowing natural flora and fauna to flourish, with numerous rooks nesting in its trees.
The long rectangular pond, known locally as Middle moat, was once used for skating in hard winters, and as one resident recalls, many happy hours in wintertime. Time has passed on, and the moat became overgrown, oblivious and forgotten, until a handful of people questioned what is beyond? These environmentally friendly persons got together, and the hard work began in Spring 1992. They toiled for days and we were all surprised by the width and size of the moat. Today a carpet of Daffodils now blossom in springtime along the North End moat adding ambience to the area. In the not too distant past, when horses were still used on Manor Farm, the horses were walked into the moat by the Church Room, to clean their hooves, before returning to the road at Pear Tree corner.

**BASSINGBOURN CASTLE**

In 1265 or 1266 Warine de Bassingbourn was given Royal Licence to crenellate his manor house as a reward for his loyalism during the baronial rebellion. This manor was that known as Castle Manor which stood to the north of Fen Road by the field known as All or Hall close.

When we were young, the drive to the castle was still in evidence, and we have photographs of it. The last remains of the castle above the ground were taken away in the last century. The complete lay-out of the castle and the drive to it can be seen clearly on photographs by the Aerial Photography Department of Cambridge University, a copy of which is in our possession.

It is thought the vicarage meadow surrounded by moats was possibly the area in which Richmond Manor originally stood, but there is no actual evidence for this, and the density of trees prevents anything being seen on aerial photographs. The present Manor Farm, with its large tithe barn, is probably that of a later building of Richmond Manor. Richmond Manor (including Church or Rectory Farm), and Castle Manor were joined. The 'castle' is sometimes wrongly referred to as John o'Gaunt's castle, but John o'Gaunt is more correctly associated with Richmond Manor. The John o'Gaunt public house in North End was a name given to it at a much later date.
THE FIVE MILLS OF BASSINGBOURN

Of the five mills, only one actually survives, the Water Mill in Mill Lane, which dates back to the thirteenth century, grinding bones and oil-cake. The Rolling Mill on the right is a late nineteenth century addition, which housed steam driven machinery. The steam was provided by a Cornish boiler which gave the power to drive three pairs of Burr stones, and was later refitted with roller machines to grind grain. The miller's house, Water Mill and Rolling Mill were converted into private dwellings around 1975. The other four mills, a Post Mill, Smock Mill, Lower Windmill and a Horse Mill all disappeared around the turn of the century.

"The Mill" at Mill Lane

THE CHANGING FACE OF NATURE IN BASSINGBOURN (1930s-1980s)

Peter Sell Botany School, Cambridge

Before the Enclosure Act of 1806, the land surrounding the village of Bassingbourn was basically a three field system, with the unenclosed hamlet of Kneesworth
adjacent, and the old medieval arrangement was still much in evidence in the 1930s. The main grouping of houses was around the High Street, South End and Spring Lane, with additional clusters of dwellings at North End and Kneesworth. All round the outside of this area, stretching from Royston in the south to Wendy in the North and from Whaddon and Meldreth in the east to Litlington and Abington Pigotts in the west, were the fields. Running from the houses and sometimes extending for some distance were the gardens, allotments, orchards and meadows. As well as the main roads, many footpaths intersected or even crossed the fields, and their rights of way were jealously guarded by the villagers. The people of the village were mainly old established families, few left it, and there were not many newcomers. Money was scarce and many of the buildings were in poor repair. Water was pumped from wells or dipped from a stream, lighting was by oil lamps, heating by coal and wood burnt on open fires. The people lived simply, but fairly happily, and, compared with the present day, life was very slow indeed, it is clearly portrayed in the recently published booklet on Bassingbourn by Evelyn Lawrence (1986).

The system of farming was mainly carried out by horses, with the occasional tractor or lorry, and was labour-intensive. The main cereal crops were oats, wheat and barley and occasionally rye. These were rotated with sugar beet, Brussels sprouts, beans and potatoes. Mangoldwurzels were grown in small plots to feed the horses and cattle, and lucerne, trefoil and sainfoin were sometimes grown for hay or seed. Harvest, for the cereals, started in late July with the cutting of oats, followed by wheat and barley. Rye was cut about the same time as wheat and beans last of all. Cutting rarely finished before the middle of September, often went on into October and very rarely lasted till November. I remember one field being cut when the ground was frozen.

As a boy with a stout hazel stick and as a youth and a young man with a double-barrel twelve-bore, I walked many miles round and round the fields after the binder, waiting for rabbits to come out. Rabbits were abundant in the village, but not in every field. Sometimes there were none at all, usually there were a few, occasionally a very large number. On one never to be forgotten evening, in a field on the Whaddon boundary, I shot 46 rabbits with 48 shots, and more got away than I shot. The villagers in nearby Kneesworth came to see what all the banging was about and all went home with at least one rabbit. The rabbit was the poor man's pheasant and an important item in his diet. The many miles I walked with no shots at all were spent observing the abundant flora and fauna. I have written of the cornfield weeds earlier (Sell, 1986). The fauna was also prolific - mice, voles, hares, the occasional fox, spiders and a multitude of insects. The sheaves were put into shocks, which formed a sort of house for the fauna. Rats came in from the hedgerows and house sparrows fed on the corn in hordes.
Walking into the fields in the early mornings of September, one would see the shocks and hedgerows festooned with spiders' webs and lines, thick with heavy dew and glistening in the morning sun. The sheaves were carted and built into stacks, and the stacks were often built together to form a stackyard, another haven for wildlife. The stubble fields often remained for much of the winter before they were ploughed. Many of the weeds were able to ripen and spread their seed. Finches fed on corn which had fallen during the harvest and equally, and sometimes preferably, on the weed seed.

The field of Brussels sprouts produced a slightly different crop of weeds, and, especially in very cold weather, multitudes of woodpigeons. Sugar beet and mangoldwurzels were lifted, de-topped and thrown in heaps. In severe weather both birds and mammals would feed on them. Skylarks came to the fields in winter in large flocks, sometimes immense ones. J.P. Nunn (1893) writes (under the pseudonym of Rambler) of 6 December 1892 at nearby Royston: "the larks began passing up in thousands from the north-east to the south-west." In the 1930s they were still common, and in snow horse-hair snares on long baited lines were put out to catch them for food, lapwings and golden plovers sometimes built up to enormous flocks of over a thousand of each. Partridges of both species were common, especially in fields on the chalk towards Royston, Pheasants were rather scarce. Hares were common, especially in the south of the parish. Some of the main sowing took place in spring, and hordes of rooks came to feed on the newly sown corn. Bassingbourn had very few breeding rooks in the 1930s, but nearby Abington Pigotts had several rookeries totalling upwards of 300 pairs and there were a fair number of pairs at Kneesworth.

Stone curlews still came to sugar beet and mangold fields on the chalk, returning by instinct to where the homes of their forebears used to be on the great heaths around Royston, where James I used to hunt and where great bustards roamed (Kingston 1906; Commbe 1987). Large numbers of corn buntings bred in these fields, and singing males could be seen at very regular intervals. Between 8 May and 2 June 1938, H.A. Course made a count of 72 singing males in the six square miles surrounding Royston (Course 1941). In the southern half of Bassingbourn there were about 16 pairs to the square mile.

The ditches and rivers held clear water and were full of minnows and sticklebacks. In spring frogs and toads spawned in almost every ditch, and later in the summer the young were frequently seen hopping about in the stubbleland. On wet evenings they often took to the roads and, despite little traffic, many were squashed. A good proportion of the fields had low-lying hollows, which were winter-wet. Almost every household grew some vegetables, and many a lot. The orchards, which
ran through the whole of the inhabited area, grew a great variety of fruit - apples, pears, plums, cherries and walnuts. The bullfinch was rather scarce and had not yet started its ravishing of the spring buds.

The meadows in early summer were a glorious sight, thick with buttercups (Ranunculus acris, bulbosus and repens) and intermixed with a good variety of the common flowers. Evelyn Lawrence called her booklet Knee deep in buttercups because her friend said she liked to walk into the Recreation Ground (Meeting Close) early on a summer morning and find herself knee-deep in buttercups. This profusion of flowers was persistent mainly because of the grazing by cattle and horses. With the ending of grazing, the profusion of flowers soon disappears, to be taken over by grasses. Many of the roadsides in the 1930s were also grazed and were as flower-bedecked as the meadows. Both roadsides and meadows, when cut for hay, were either mowed with a scythe or cut with a side-swipe. In grassy places in midsummer there was a characteristic hum of bees, flies, grasshoppers, dragonflies and other insects.

The farmyards had many cattle and horses and free-ranging hens. The littered straw, trodden down with the droppings, produced dung several feet thick, which often had to be cut with a large knife before it could be put on the carts to be taken into the fields, put in heaps and then scattered on the land for manure. Great faith was put in dung, and it was a not uncommon sight to see someone rush out with a shovel to have a first go at a pile of horse droppings for the garden. Many birds fed in these yards in winter, and in summer they bred in the old sheds, particularly house sparrows, starlings, swallows, robins and wrens. The dung and stubble ploughed into the soil rotted away with the help of living organisms and produced a reasonable tilth, although the thin light soil in the south of the parish and the heavy gault clay in the north could never be said to be good soil. A great number of the fields, lanes, ditchbanks and roadsides were lined with hedges. Some were old and contained a number of species of bush and tree, some were modern with almost entirely Crataegus monogyna. Some were hardly touched, some were trimmed short every year, and some were trimmed at intervals and occasionally cut to the ground. Hedge-trimming was one of the winter job of the farm labourer. I spent many hours with the hedge-trimmers, a wonderful way to become familiar with the trees and shrubs. The men knew them by the way they cut - hard, soft, rigid, springy, good firewood or bad firewood, or likely to whip in your face. The smoke from the scutch fires, rising through the dull red of a winter sunset against a snow-clad landscape, is one of my fondest boyhood memories. As schoolboys we found an immense number of birds' nests in these hedges; blackbird, song thrush, robin, hedge sparrow, greenfinch and linnet were certainly common, if not abundant. Whitethroat was common along the open hedgerows, but nested in the adjacent long herbage. Sedge warbler,
yellowhammer and reed bunting preferred the ditches, in the meadows were found willow warbler, chiffchaff, lesser whitethroat and blackcap. Mistle thrush, long-tailed tit, blue tit, great tit, tree-creeper, tree sparrow, chaffinch and goldfinch preferred the orchards, all of the choosing the apple tree as their favourite nesting site. The magpie was fairly common and most frequently bred in tall hawthorns. Almost all schoolboys collected birds' eggs, potted the birds if they could get hold of an air gun and fished for minnows and sticklebacks, while the girls were always picking bunches of wild flowers. I think it reasonable to say that they made no impression on either the birds, the fish or the flowers, which were all too numerous. The first major change in the village came about when the airfield was built in 1937. It took over a large number of fields in the northern half of the parish. The real turn of the tide, however, came with the Second World War, when many local men travelled far in the armed services, large numbers of our own airmen and later the Americans came into the village pubs from the airfield, farming became really profitable and mechanisation began to take over from the horse. During the 1950s and 1960s a number of major changes completely altered the face of agricultural practices. The advent of the combing harvester was probably the most important, followed by the mass use of pesticides, the replacement of dung with artificial manure, the grubbing-up of hedgerows and the filling-in of ditches to make larger fields for the combines, the trimming of hedges with machines and the mechanisation of almost every aspect of rural life. Whereas before the war the horse was important and a large number of village people worked on the land, by the end of the 1960s the horse was gone and very few people worked on the land. With more money in people's pockets, buildings were in better repair, fruit and vegetables could be easily bought and stored in the refrigerator, and completely new housing estates appeared, many of the orchards, even in the 1930s, consisted of mature trees, and after the war most of them became old and neglected. In the end, most were cut down, uprooted and either ploughed up or used for building sites. With the demise of the horse and cheap milk which could be stored in a refrigerator making it no longer worthwhile keeping a few cows, the meadows were no longer needed by hay and grazing. Most of them suffered the same fate as the orchards. The roadsides also were no longer grazed and, because of this and the use of rotary mowers two or three times a year, they lost much of the variation in the flora. (Last year a practice was started of cutting them only once, late in the year. It remains to be seen if this will make any difference. Cow parsley still thickly adorns many of the roadsides early in the year and hogweed has increased enormously. It has also become much more frequent along ditch and hedge banks which are regularly trimmed with mowers.) Tall trees were once frequent in the central area of the village and around
Kneesworth, and these included English elm Ulmus procera. Most but not all of the elms are dead and cut down, and many other species have been felled as well. Recent planting along fields and roadsides is rather pathetic, the young trees being pushed into the ground and left without attention, and many die or are vandalised. The selection of species if poor - sycamore Acer pseudoplatanus, abele or white poplar Populus alba, horse-chestnuts Aesculus hoppocastanum, grey alder Alnus incana and common lime Tilia cordata x platyphyllos being amongst the most common, none of which are native. One wonders why a few willows are not planted; all that has to be done is to cut a pole and stick it in the ground. One of the things about willows is that they need pollarding when they reach a certain size; otherwise they get top-heavy and blow over in a gale. Pollarding is no longer regularly carried out, so we are slowly losing all our tree willows.

It is of interest that the common osier willow in the village is the hybrid between goat willow and common osier (Salix caprea x viminalis). It has probably been planted in the past for its straight, slender, pliable poles. In a few places ash has been left in a hedgerow to grow into a tree, a recommendation made by Rackham (1986, p29) which ought to be more widely followed. There are two interesting facts about trees in Bassingbourn. All the trees of grey poplar Populus canescens are on ancient stream-banks and may be native, although of hybrid origin. The filbert Corylus maxima and the large-nutted form of the hazel Corylus avellana forma schizochlamys (cf. Sell, 1980) are clustered around the site of the old castle (13th century) by Fen Road. They could have been there a long time, perhaps even introduced by the early Normans. The old natives of the village called Corylus avellana form schizochlamys, the filbert, as do many gardeners, and referred to Corylus maxima as "the nut with the long hust".

The airfield became operational before the war. It was very active during it and remained operational until 1969, when it was taken over by the army. During the whole period that it was an airfield I had no access to it. The area was open, well-trimmed and full of active human beings. The only item of natural history interest of which I was aware was the enormous flocks of lapwings and golden plovers in the winter, which caused much damage to the aircraft. When the army took over, a large part of it was allowed to go wild, and there is now quite a profusion of common wild flowers and a colony of bee orchids Ophrys apifera. Wildlife became much more frequent, with numerous skylarks and meadow pipits as well as the lapwings and golden plovers. An artificial lake was created at the west end, which provided a site for the first breeding of the Canada goose. In winter up to eight short-eared owls have been recorded and kestrels frequent the area. The main Bassingbourn rookery, round about the old vicarage has increased greatly in the last thirty years and is perhaps the only rookery in the county to have done so. It is now more or less stable at about a
hundred pairs. I believe that the reason it has increased, while others have declined, is the availability of the old airfield and the Wendy meadows beyond as a feeding-ground when the young first fly in early summer. They journey out a few at a time, but in the evening as if from a given signal, they rise en masse and return over our house to the rookery. The army camp, like many others of its kind, is an ideal nature reserve. It keeps out most people, the army use it for manoeuvres, civilian weekend activities keep away from the wilder parts, and most of it is free of herbicides and pesticides. Wildlife and plants are thus able to flourish.

One of the most interesting areas for plants in the village is mill Homes (Holmes) by the Brook Road. Its origin lies in the past, when it was used as an area to store water when the Brook River was held back to work the water wheel at the Mill. The Mill was still working well into the 1950s. The area used to hold large numbers of southern marsh-orchids Dactylorhiza praetermissa, some narrow-leaved marsh-orchids D. traunsteineri, marsh valerian Valeriana dioica, marsh-marigold Caltha palustris, blunt-flowered rush Juncus subnodulosus, ragged-robin Lychnis flos-cuculi and yellow iris Iris pseudacorus. Since the Mill went out of use and the river is no longer held back, most of it has dried out and the orchids have nearly all gone.

Bassingbourn lies across an area of springs, which formerly supplied the village with crystal clear water. Spring Lane, earlier called Water Lane, was so called because of its abundance of springs. The ancient trackway, Ashwell Street, which runs through the village parallel to the Icknield Way, possibly existed so that cattle could be taken nearer to the line of springs; hence the name Water Lane, which connects it with the springs. Well Head with its mass of springs was a lovely place when I first knew it, with clear water and much water-cress and surrounded by bushes and trees, including three trees of the rather scarce willow, Salix fragilis var. fucata. Attempts by the County Council to 'clean it up' by cutting down all the trees and bushes and planting cricket-bat willows Salix alba var. caerulea was prevented by local action. A line of deep bores along the Chalk has recently stopped the natural flow of water into these springs, although it is still pumped through. Some rare flatworms occurred in the special habitat that the springs provide, but it is not known if they are still there.

Bassingbourn in the 1980s has lost nearly all its meadows, orchards and allotments and half its trees. Hedgerows are for the most part either trimmed very short by machine or cut to the ground, with the result that the fields are much more open and characterless. Harvest is usually finished by early September and most of the fields are ploughed immediately. Barley is now usually cut first, followed by wheat and beans. Oats are rarely grown.

Quite a lot of vegetables are now grown and oil-seed rape occurs widely. A dazzling
golden yellow in early summer, it later gives off a ghastly smell, especially if it is a wet season. Dense and matted, it is a desert to wildlife and flora. The soil, saturated with artificial manure, herbicides and pesticides, looks solid and lifeless. Everything on the farm is done by machine with as small a work force as possible. The work is done in short sharp spells, and for most of the year the fields are empty of human beings as well as wildlife. All the streams are polluted and frogs and fish are scarce. Government grants have allowed all the low-lying areas in the fields to be drained. More money is spent in the summer to pump the water back again because the ground is too dry. For many years straw was burned after harvest, an often spectacular sight, but filling the air with smuts. Objections to it have got stronger yearly and many farms now chop it up and plough it in, but is does not easily rot down in the soil. The droppings of pigs and cattle fall on concrete, are washed into great storage areas and are carted to the fields in tanks. The term 'country smells' has long been in the literature, and most were quite tolerable to the countryman, but the foulness of modern piggeries and battery hens had to be smelled to be believed. The old families of the village are dying out, the younger generation having gone away to get married or find work elsewhere. Many of the new and renovated houses are occupied by people who have come into the village and who commute to work. The decline of wildlife and flora in the village has coincided with the increasing affluence of man. In the 1930s farmers and farm labourers were very poor. During the Second World War they had their first taste of real money, and with the help of Government subsidies they have continued to do well ever since. Nevertheless, their return on capital outlay is considerably less than that of most large businesses. Birds have declined mainly through lack of food supply, brought about by the use of herbicides (reducing weed seeds) and pesticides (killing insect food), the early ploughing-up of stubble after harvest (removing dropped corn and weed seeds), the disappearance of stackyards (with the loss of corn) and the open farmyard, the pollution of ditches and the cutting-down of orchards (which provided fruit). The cutting-down of trees and hedgerows, the repair of old buildings and the building of more modern ones have reduced nesting sites. There are few boys with air guns and I see no bird's-nesting or catching fish. If these activities were as prevalent as they were in the 1930s, the birds would soon be extinct. The loss of the flora can be attributed to the use of herbicides, excessive drainage, the ploughing-up of meadows, different techniques of trimming roadsides and hedges, not allowing mature trees to grow, and the pollution of ditches. With the changes in habitat and pollution of water and soil, there is also a great loss of insects and other micro-fauna. Not all is yet lost. I can still lie in bed and hear tawny owls calling, roosting cock
pheasants joining one by one in a grand chorus, and dog foxes barking. Magpies have returned after being absent from the village for nearly twenty years, and kestrels are probably more numerous than they have ever been. Our cats bring in many common shrews, long-tailed field mice and short-tailed voles, and one morning, to my surprise, a water shrew, only the third time I have ever seen this species in the village. The bullfinch has increased, and there are still large flocks of lapwings and golden plovers. There may well still be a good stock of the seeds of some plants in the soil if they are allowed to grow and produce (cf. Sell, 1985). The areas put aside for pheasant-feed with buckwheat, sunflowers, canary-grass and a mass of weeds, particularly species of Chenopodium, provide one of the few places where an abundant supply of food attracts all the finches in the area. The best days of the farmer may well be over, and he may again have to let some of his land remain uncultivated. Even then it might take many years before birds were common again, but some plants might become established more quickly. Bird life is now most frequent around houses and gardens where people put out food for them and sometimes put up nest boxes.

References

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SOME FAMILIAR AND UNFAMILIAR PLACE NAMES IN
BASSINGBOURN-CUM-KNEESWORTH

Apple Tree Row, Kneesworth.
Backside Footpath.
The Black Bull, Bassingbourn, Former public house.
Blood Field. A field in Highfields, Bassingbourn near to where there was once a slaughterhouse.
Bowling Alley, Brook Road, Bassingbourn.
Butterfield Hill. A field in Highfields, Bassingbourn.
Chapel Yard, North End, Bassingbourn. Now called Guises court. There used to be a chapel in this yard, last used as a mortuary during the Second World War for the aerodrome.
Church Farm, near Church in Bassingbourn. Once was home of Oliver Cromwell's stepmother.
Dead Woman's Gate. In Ashwell Street. Origin of name unknown.
The Fillance, North End, Bassingbourn. Once known as Field Lands, believed to be site of market place.
Frog Hall, Kneesworth. Large house on the boundary of Whaddon.
The Grange, Kneesworth. Originally called North Farm, is now a restaurant.
Institute, South End. Bassingbourn. Now United Reform Church. Once used as a clubroom, and also during the War, a school for evacuees.
Kneesworth Hall. Once the home of the 2nd Viscount Knutsford, Sidney Holland. Now a private psychiatric hospital.
Manor Farm, Bassingbourn. Large house next to the church. Martin's Field. Now incorporated into the college playing fields. Peacock Ditches. A stream running through Kneesworth.
Pound Field, Kneesworth. A pound was the place where stray animals were kept. Richmond Manor, The site of this manor is believed to be in the chestnut tree filled meadow on the corner of Mill Lane. South End House, Bassingbourn. The Towers. The site of old Windmills, where Tower Close is now built. Turnpike Field. A field bounded by Ashwell Street to the North and the Old North Road to the East. This may have been the site of the nineteenth century toll gate. Water Lane. The original name for Spring Lane.
PUBLIC HOUSE AND BEER SELLERS IN BASSINGBOURN

Over the years, there have been various Public Houses and beer sellers in the village. The beer sellers were not public houses in the sense that we know them today, but more off-licences, the beer being sold from a room in the house. This would have been draught beer from a barrel, the customers would bring their own jugs to be filled and carried home. In 1883 for example the Public Houses were listed in Kelly's Directory as follows:

The Red Lion
The Hoops Inn
The Black Bull

There were also two wine and spirit merchants; Joseph Potto Clarke and Thomas Goodwin.

The list of beer sellers are is rather longer:

Moses Robinson
David Saggers
Emma Spencer
John Chamberlain
Simeon Course
Frederick Stanford
Lydia Willmott
Samual House
Henry Ingrey

These last were situated at various places throughout the village; some of them may have been made into Public house proper at a later date.

Kneesworth at the same time does not seem to have been so well provided for, there being only one Public House listed; the Red Lion, and two beer retailers: Mary Ann Muncey and Benjamin Turner.

In 1916, in Bassingbourn, there are only two Public Houses listed; The Red Lion and the Black Bull. There were still at that time nine beer sellers.
RECIPES THROUGH THE CENTURY

Pre 1900

Nottingham Pudding

6 large apples  2ozs sugar  1 pint batter pudding mix

Peel apples and remove cores. Place in a pie-dish and bake for 1 hour.

Montreal Pudding

3 eggs  1 wineglass milk  2 oz brown sugar
1/4 lb flour  7 oz breadcrumbs  nutmeg

Beat eggs and mix with milk, sugar and nutmeg. Add flour gradually and mix well. Stir in breadcrumbs. Put into a buttered bowl and boil for 3 hours. 1/2 lb raisins can be added to the mixture.

Quail-how to roast

Draw and truss bird. Cover the breasts with a slice of fat bacon and vine leaves. Secure with a skewer and roast on a spit over a fierce fire for 12-15 minutes. Serve hot with a little good gravy.

Oyster Fritters

1 quart of oysters  1/2 pint milk  2 eggs

Flour and butter

Open oysters. Strain liquid into a basin and add milk and beaten eggs. Stir in flour to make a thin batter. Add oysters, heat butter in pan and drop spoonfuls of batter, each containing an oyster in. Allow to brown, turning when necessary.
1900-1930

**Preserved plums.**

Cut plums into halves and take out the stones. Weigh plums and allow 1 lb loaf sugar to 1 lb fruit. Crack the stones, take out the kernels and break them into pieces. Boil the plums and kernels very slowly for about 15 minutes in as little water as possible. Spread them on a large dish to cool and strain the liquor, next day, add syrup and boil for 15 minutes. Put into jars and tie up with bladder. When cold cover with paper dipped in brandy.

**Collard Beef.**

Rub a piece of flank of beef weighing about 6 pounds with 2 oz brown sugar. Leave for 48 hours. Mix together 1/2 lb salt with 1/2 oz salt-petre. Rub well into beef. Leave for a week turning the meat daily. Wipe with dry cloth and sprinkle thickly with chopped parsley, a little lemon-thyme, all spice and pepper. Roll up and tie with wide tape. Tie up in cloth and place in saucepan, cover with warm water and simmer gently for 5/12 hours. Place beneath a heavy weight and leave for 24 hours. Remove cloth and brush with a little dissolved glaze. Serve when set.

**Macaroon Tarts or Conserves**

7 oz caster sugar 4 oz ground almonds 1 tablespoon ground rice
vanilla flavouring 2 whites of eggs strawberry jam

Mix together ground rice, almonds and sugar. Whisk the egg whites into a stiff froth, add the dry ingredients together with flavouring and a few drops of cold water. Mix all into soft paste. Prepare pastry and line tartlet tins. Put a little strawberry jam into each case and cover with macaroon mixture. Brush over the tops with cold water, put two pieces of pastry over the top in a cross. Bake in a moderately hot oven for 15-20 minutes.
**Imperial Pudding**

4 oz breadcrumbs 1 oz sugar 2 oz butter
3 oz chopped raisins 1 oz candied peel 1 egg
juice of 1 lemon 2 tbs G. Syrup

Cut the peel, beat the butter with the sugar and syrup to a cream. Add to dry ingredients, finally adding the beaten egg and lemon juice. Mix well and pour into a greased basin. Cover and steam for 1 1/2 hours.

**1930-1939**

**Exeter stew**

1 lb neck or shin of beef 2 sliced onions 1 oz dripping
1 tbs flour 1 tbs vinegar 1 1/2 water

Heat dripping and add onions. Fry to nice brown. Sprinkle in flour and let brown. Add vinegar, meat cut into cubes and water. Keep lid on and bring to boil. Simmer till tender - 3-4 hours.

**Suffolk dumplings**

1/4 lb flour 1/2 tsp baking powder pinch of salt
cold water to mix.

Mix dry ingredients, add enough water to make a dough. Roll into balls and cook in boiling water for 20 minutes.

**Lemon Pudding**

1/4 lb flour 6 oz breadcrumbs 3 oz sugar
1/2 tsp baking powder 3 oz suet 1 lemon milk

Mix dry ingredients. Grate lemon and add with juice, mix to soft dough with milk. Put in greased basin and steam for 3 hours.
OLD TIMES GINGERBREAD

1 lb. Flour 6 ozs Butter 4 ozs Sugar
2 ozs Almonds 2 ozs Candied Peel 3/4 Ground Ginger
1/2 teasp. Bicarb 1 teasp. Mixed spice 1 egg
4 tabsp. G. Syrup

Cut almonds and candied peel and mix with ginger, spice and flour. Beat butter and sugar to a cream and add egg and syrup. Dissolve soda in a little milk. Add all together and mix well. Bake in a slow oven for 2 hours.

DATE & WALNUT CAKE (WITH NO EGGS)

1/2 lb. Flour 4 ozs Brown Sugar 1/2 lb. Dates or large raisins

Sieve flour and rub in fat, add baking powder, walnuts and chopped dates. Mix Bicarb, with a little milk. Make well in centre of dry ingredients, pour in Bicarb. Mixture and add enough milk to make a soft consistency. Put into greased and papered tin and cook for 1 hour at 350f.

PLAIN SULTANA CAKE

8 ozs S.R. Flour 4 ozs Brown Sugar 4 ozs Marg.
2 ozs Sultanas 1 egg Milk to mix

Rub fat into flour. Add fruit and sugar Mix well. Stir in beaten egg and enough milk to make a dropping consistency. Turn into tin and bake for 1 1/2 hours at Gas Mark 7.

SPICY FRUIT CAKE (WITHOUT EGGS)

4 ozs Butter 4 ozs Sugar 8 ozs S.R. Flour
Pinch Salt 1 heaped teasp. mixed spice 1 tbsp. Lemon juice
2 tabs. Milk 12 ozs mixed dried fruit
Lemon rind 1 tabsp. vinegar

Cream butter and sugar together, add vinegar, lemon juice and milk, alternately with sieved flour, spice and salt. Fold in fruit and lemon rind. Mix well together and pour into prepared tin. Bake for 1 1/4 hours at 350F. Leave in tin for 30 minutes before turning out.
WARTIME RECIPES

GROUND RICE OR OATMEAL BISCUITS

4 ozs self raising flour
4 ozs fine oatmeal or ground rice
4 ozs caster sugar
4 ozs butter
1 beaten egg and a little milk

Add rice or oatmeal to flour, add sugar, rub in the butter. Add beaten egg and milk if necessary. Roll out thinly on a floured board, but into shapes and bake in a moderate oven for 15 minutes.

WAR TIME CAKE (1940)

Sift together 6 ozs self raising flour, a pinch of salt and grated rind of one lemon. Warm together and cream 4 ozs margarine, a tablespoon Golden Syrup or glucose and beat in two eggs, one at a time. Fold in the sifted flour, add a little milk, place in a shallow greased tin, and bake in a moderate oven for 45-50 minutes.

FAGGOTS

These were made when pigs were slaughtered on the farm.

1 lb pigs fry with veiling (Liver and other offal)
Breadcrumbs
Chopped sage to taste
Salt and pepper
3 medium sized onions

Simmer the fry in water for half an hour, then put through the mincer. Place veiling in cold water. Cut onions finely, add to the fry, add three cupfuls of breadcrumbs and chopped sage. Add salt and pepper to taste. Mix together, add a little liquid, form mixture into balls, cover individually with veiling, pour a little liquid over them and bake for an hour at 350 F.
**50 years of Bassingbourne Barracks**

**Flying Fortress at Bassingbourne preparing for take-off on the perimeter track of the "Country Club"**

**Flying all day every day**

AMERICAN B17 "Flying Fortresses" of the 91st were taking off on real or training missions every day during their stay at Bassingbourne "Country Club".

That meant a heavy schedule for the ground crew, who had to change engines and repair battle damage throughout the cold winter nights to have the aircraft ready for their next mission.

Mr Otto Meikle, 63, who now lives in Cambridge, with 81 bride Gladys, 64, was a crew chief in charge of four men who looked after one aircraft.

He arrived with the rest of the 91st Group at Kimbolton in September 1942 and was then transferred to Bassingbourne.

The barracks were permanent, all brick built compared with Kimbolton's Nissen huts, with plenty of showers.

"It was absolutely marvellous," he said.

"Engineers in the States were pretty primitive compared with Bassingbourne. We used to call it the "Country Club".

For each B17 there were three "shifts", the flight chief, the line chief responsible for the payload and the ground crew chief.

The planes had far better maintenance and inspection than the planes we fly in today," he added.

There were four squadrons in the group, consisting of eight planes each, making a total of 32 aircraft.

Weather permitting, the B17s would fly out every day, either on practice or real missions.

The men were changingpretty rapidly and each hour of how men had to be able to fly in flight formation," he said.

A normal day for him started with breakfast at about 6 am, although the flight crews had been up sometimes since 2 am.

We were told if there was a mission on by the orderly, or the engineering office," he said.

The plane was always ready. At 4 pm we used to give it its final run-up on all the engines, to get it ready for the morning.

The B17s would come back from missions from 3 pm to 4.30 or 5 pm.

We would be washing or doing our gunnery, and on some missions, he said.

"Those that did would taxi on to a dispersal area in the fields and you would have to assess the damage. You would speak to the pilot. If there was no damage he would tell you of any malfunctions.

If they were repairable then they were repaired. We used to change wing tips from one to another.

"Out of eight planes, two were always being cannibalized.

Working at night during the blackout was no easy headache.

The ground crew worked outside in the dispersal area unless there was an engine or wing change when the planes were taken into a hangar.

"We used torches, like a miner's lamp on the head," said Otto.

"We avoided the RAF mechanics. Their planes used to fly at night and they could work on them during the day.

"We had to work on at night. That was because the Yanks initiated daylight bombing.

Point of View

"We used to go for pinpoint bombing rather than saturation bombing.

"It was to save lives to start with because we were bombing occupied territory.

"Sometimes there were heavy losses, especially during a raid on a ball- bearing factory at Schweinfurt in Germany on October 14, 1943, which provoked the greatest enemy apposition and air battle of the war.

"We will always remember how they all went in regardless of the loss of almost 85 planes, from the 8th Air Force," said Otto.

Service was used to take at least until 10 pm if there was not much wrong with the planes. Many times we used to go to bed at midnight and get up at 2 or 3 am.

"That is when we had to do gunnery. We used to grab some powdered eggs and some spam and coffee and hit the line.

"We had to run all the engines up, check them all through and then refuel because we needed every thimbleful of fuel we could get in them.

"During the day we used to catch up on sleep. After lunch everyone was waiting for the planes to come back.

By kind permission - The Editor, Royston Crow Newspaper History Group Reference
Clark Gable joined the 'Country Club' Fortress air base

BASSINGBOURN Barracks, which has served as an RAF and an American air force base and is now a training ground for the soldiers of tomorrow, celebrates its 50th birthday in July.

The barracks in its heyday was the headquarters of the US 51st Heavy Bombardment Group and their squadrons of flying Fortresses during the latter half of the Second World War.

They called the barracks the "Country Club" because it was so comfortable.

Now the barracks is still in active service, as a training ground for the soldiers of The Queen's Division.

During their stay, the 51st Heavy Bombardment Group flew over 200 missions against targets in Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy.

The Fortress, which was a four-engine heavy bomber, was the primary bomber used by the US Eighth Air Force during the war.

The 51st Heavy Bombardment Group was based at Bassingbourn Barracks, which served as their home base.

The group flew a total of 215 missions, dropping over 19,000 tons of bombs on German targets.

As part of their training, the soldiers were also trained in urban warfare and had to learn how to adapt to different environments.

The barracks were also home to the 51st Bombardment Group, which flew a total of 186 missions.

The group was involved in many of the major campaigns of the war, including the Battle of the Bulge and the strategic bombing campaign against Germany.

The soldiers of The Queen's Division were also trained in urban warfare and had to learn how to adapt to different environments.

As part of their training, the soldiers were also trained in the use of various weapons, including small arms, heavy weapons, and explosives.

The barracks were also home to the 51st Bombardment Group, which flew a total of 186 missions.

The group was involved in many of the major campaigns of the war, including the Battle of the Bulge and the strategic bombing campaign against Germany.

The soldiers of The Queen's Division were the first to receive the new Swift Nephew.
BASSINGBOURN
CENTENARY 1894-1994

SATURDAY JUNE 11th and SUNDAY JUNE 12th

10.00 am - 4.00 pm
It's all happening at
Bassingbourn
Just off the A1198
outside Royston
Events will be
signposted

FUN FAIR SIDE SHOWS FUN RUN DOG SHOW
CHARITY STALLS BONNY BABY CONTEST GUESS
THE WEIGHT OF THE CAKE

JUDO DISPLAY CRAFT STALLS MAYPOLE
DANCING CAR BOOT SALE CLAY PIGEON SHOOT
MOTOR CYCLE EXHIBITION RED CROSS

FEATURING:- BASSINGBOURN BLUEGRASS
AND
LOCAL HISTORY EXHIBITION
THE CONCLUSION

Hopefully, this publication will help us to appreciate and understand our past, giving us the pride and motivation to make the most of modern opportunities, with the protection of planning laws and conservation areas to preserve all that is good about our heritage and plan sensibly for the future. Remember that at the end of the 21st Century there will be a bicentenary, when the people of Bassingbourn cum Kneesworth will again take a good look at their village!
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Any many other people of the village who contributed items from their memories.

On 17th May 1991, the present day History Group was formed. Sally Stratford, a founder member, with the Parish centenary in mind, gave thought to the publication of a History Book and a celebratory weekend of memorabilia and activities to mark the past 100 years.

HISTORY GROUP MEMBERS

Lynda Sutherland
Joan Robinson
Suzanne King Val
Bain Rev. Ted
Duckett
SIGNIFICANCE OF ITEMS INCLUDED ON BASSINGBOURN SIGN

1. Church: Traditional centre of village life, ours a very attractive one

2. Rational car: The first London taxis built in the High Street

3. Wellington Bomber: The British bomber that flew from the airfield during the war
4. Pigs: The pig population of Bassingbourn at one time was greater than that of humans, the prize winning pigs used to be exercised on the green adjacent to the church.

The Village Sign Competition

The Village Sign designed by C & S Merton, they won first prize of £50 in 1993.