

WOOTTON, DRY SANDFORD AND DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

WOOTTON VILLAGE - HISTORY TRAIL

Compiled by Mary Gray in 1991

Original type setting - Peter Mayo in 1991

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This walk goes through Wootton village and the hamlet of Old Boars Hill, pointing out on the way some of the interesting features relating to the houses, farms and families who have lived here since the sixteenth century. Following the dissolution of Abingdon Abbey (1538), the two ex-Abbey estates of Wootton and Boars Hill were merged into one manor, forming a small farming community, which even today has retained its rural character, despite the many changes of the past hundred years. The walk starts at the Community Centre and proceeds through Wootton Village. The numbered features on the map correspond to the numbered paragraphs in the text.

1. Manor Farm

The Manor House was built in the early 18th century by William Hawkins, of Abingdon, who acquired the Manor estates in Wootton and Boars Hill from the Sutton Courtney branch of the Hyde family who had held them since 1546. This house replaced the original Manor House at Blagrove Farm, which was leased out by the Hawkins family, and gradually fell into disrepair during the 18th century. His son, also William, lived there from 1728, and it was he who built the Hawkins Chapel at St. Peter's Church, and was buried in Wootton in 1761. During the last century it was occupied by Farmer Bunce, a village character, who was not only the village baker but also taught children to read and write in the Wesleyan Chapel before the 1870 Education Act, charging them 2d per week.

2. St. Peter's Church

When the church was founded in the 14th century, it was as a small chapel, and was dependant on the church at Cumnor for practical purposes, such as burials, baptisms and marriages until about 1735. Although it acquired its own curates in the 18th century, it did not legally become an independent church until 1885. The Chancel and Nave are the earliest parts of the building. The Hawkins Chapel on the north side of the Chancel was built on in the mid-eighteenth century by William Hawkins (see 1) who was a church warden in 1736. His cousin set up the Elizabeth Hawkins Endowment in 1780 to provide money for "ornamenting, beautifying and improving the church". The Endowment is marked by a plaque on the north wall of the nave.

3. 'Two Chimneys'

This is a 16th century cottage marked on the 1794 Enclosure Map. It is typical of the farm labourer's cottages of the period, having just two rooms. Most of the cottages in the village were occupied by farm labourers, and other examples to look

out for in the village are Tommy 's Cottage, the cottages near the village green, and those on Old Boars Hill.

4. 'The Old Bakery'

The village bakehouse lay behind the existing builder's workshop, (White and Bennett) with the oven in the workshop. The baker's horse and cart were kept in the building converted to a garage in 1930. The house, built in 1850, was originally two cottages built back to back.

5. The Methodist Chapel

Originally built as a Mission Hall in 1850, it became a Methodist Chapel in 1887. It was closely associated with the Mathews family, with Angelo Mathews as its first steward and his wife, Emma, as organist and Sunday School teacher.

6. Bond's Farm

now Wootton Manor House Elizabeth Hawkins (see 1) lived in this Restoration Period house from 1728 until she died in 1780 at the age of ninety. She inherited Bond' s Farm from her father and the house is probably built on the site of an earlier farmhouse belonging to the Bond family who lived at Cumnor in the 16th and 17th centuries. The family appears to have died out or left the area at the beginning of the 18th century.

There are many recorded references to the families of Bond, Mayo, Badcock, Richards, Broughton and Busfield during the 150 years following the dissolution of Abingdon Abbey. They were yeoman farmers who became prosperous enough to build themselves large houses. The Enclosure award of 1794 changed the pattern of land ownership in the village, and during the 19th century many farms in the village passed into the hands of outsiders' living in Oxford or Abingdon. By 1847 it is clear from tithe map that Mr James King was farming three-quarters of the land in the village, and most of the villagers lived in small cottages and worked as farm labourers.

7. Wootton School

Built in 1869 as a Church School on the site of the farmyard of the old Richard's farm. Originally it consisted of the small school house with a large school room attached: additions were made later but it clearly could not cope with the increased numbers of children after the Second World War, so in 1959 it was rebuilt on modern lines, and is now a Church Primary School. The old school house still survives.

8. Wootton House

Formerly the farm house of Richard 's Farm, though now considerably altered. The Richards family and the Stones were the two freeholders who survived the enclosures of the 18th century. There were many Williams and Thomas's amongst the Richards family, and perhaps Tommy's Farm, near the Manor Farm, and Tommy's Cottage were so called after one of the Thomas Richards to distinguish it

from William's house further up the village. On the OS map of 1876 the house is marked as The Rectory.

9. 'The Hermitage'

Built in 1934 as a house for the village nurses, it is now owned by two former village midwives, Miss H Donovan and Miss Martin, who bought it when they retired.

10. 'Winterbourne'

This modern house (1979) stands on the site of the old village Post Office and sweet shop, which was still operating in the 1970's. It was attached to the cottage next door. This group of cottages date back to the 17th century, and the one with the thatched roof is believed to be the oldest surviving cottage in the village.

11/12/13. The Village Green

At one time the centre of the village and site of the Village Hall, which was replaced in the 1950's by the Community Centre. The bridle path leading off across the fields to Cumnor was known as Church Way, as this was the path along which the villagers carried their dead to Cumnor for burial before 1735. It is believed that a coffin maker once lived in 'The Butts' (12). The village smithy stood on the far corner, part of 'Vine Cottage' (13), originally two 16th century cottages. The Minns family are recorded in the 1854 Trade Directory as the local black-smiths. The fields on either side of the village street show the typical 'ridge and furrow' features formed by the ploughing from medieval times.

14. Mayo's Farm & Stones Farm

Continue the walk passed the Council houses, built in the 1920's, to Mayo's Farm on the left and Stones Farm on the right. The farms date back to the original Abbey estates. The Mayos of Cumnor and Wootton probably had a common ancestor in "H. Maeyo de Witona" mentioned in the 12th century as holding land at Henwood. The family died out in the 18th century. Stones Farm was originally owned by the Busfield family in the 16th century, and then by the Stone family, who survived the 18th century enclosures and remained resident freeholders.

15. Sandy Lane

At the top of the village is Sandy Lane, the site of an old track to Boars Heath, where villagers used to graze their animals until the 1794 enclosures. The trees and houses on Boars Hill today are the creation of the last hundred years, when a lot of tree planting was undertaken largely by Sir Arthur Evans and Lord Berkeley.

Now take the path to the right and cross the stile into the water meadow field, where there is evidence of the many springs which led to early settlement in the area.

16. Black Copse Lane

The footpath running to the left of the field was an old track to Chilswell Farm and Oxford.

Continue through the second field, Matthew Arnold's Field, so called because it was here that the poet wrote his famous poem "The Scholar Gypsy". At the next stile, turn left onto a metalled road and then turn right onto an unmade road which forms part of the triangle of the hamlet of Old Boars Hill, so called because three trackways converged there.

17. Jarn Mound

An interesting diversion is to take the path to Jarn mound through the wooden gate at the corner, and see the view of Oxford and the Vale from the top of the mound, which was built by Sir Arthur Evans in 1931.

18. Jack's Well.

Continue down the short unmade road to the Old Boars Hill Road, passed houses built in the 20th century on the site of earlier farm cottages. Joining the road continue down the hill passed Violet Bank Cottage, noticing the footpath which runs behind the cottage. This led to Jack's Well in Orchard Lane, one of the drinking wells used by the hamlet.

19. Badcock House

On the right, further down the hill, pass Badcock House, a 16th century stone cottage, associated with the Badcock family living in the area in the 16th century. It is thought to be the drinking house for Oxford students referred to by Evelyn Waugh in his novel "Brideshead Revisited".

The steep part of the hill was known as Cotmore's Hill or the Hay Way, which the carts bringing the loads of hay from the meadows near Iffley had great difficulty in negotiating. Hay could not be grown successfully in Wootton, so the villagers were granted a concession at Iffley Meadow.

20. Linen's Field Cottage

This is a converted agricultural labourers' cottage built on the site of a field where flax was grown to be used for cloth for the villagers. Further along, on the left, are two more cottages, known as Middle Way. The stream in the ditch flows from the source of the River Stert on Boars Hill, and flows under Stert Street in Abingdon to discharge into the Thames at Abingdon Bridge.

21. End of the Trail

Re-join the village at Middle Farm on the right, and opposite the old entrance to Tommy's Farm, where the hay wagons turned in at the end of their journey.

