FROM THE ROMANS TO ROCK-N-ROLL

A Short History of the Sibford-Swalcliffe-Epwell-Hook Norton District

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Miss Mary Baker, of Sutton-under-Brailes, kindly drew the map, and the sketch on the front cover.

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A Short History of the Swalcliffe—Sibford—Epwell—Hook Norton District

WHAT do we mean by history? History is rock-n-roll yesterday in Sibford Village Hall, and history is Roman soldiers of the army of occupation flirting with local girls at Swalcliffe 1,900 years ago. It is the behaviour of human beings any time in the past. It is khaki-clad Home Guardsmen watching on our hills in 1940 for parachute-invaders, and it is blood-stained cavaliers fleeing through our North Oxfordshire lanes from the battle of Edgehill in 1642. History is everything that happened from yesterday backwards to the beginning of life, when a warm sea flowed over where we now live. History is the story of change. In every stone wall hereabouts the fossils of sea creatures remind us of almost unbelievable changes.

This booklet is a summary of such events and changes. Much more remains to be told. Some things are still hidden in mystery. Historians and archaeologists try to lay bare the secrets of our ancestors, with more or less success. The motorist driving past Rollright Stones may see in imagination gangs of men clad in skins manoeuvring huge pillars of stone, but no historian can say why our prehistoric ancestors up-ended the stones in a circular fence on this hilltop, so dimmed is the story by the passage of thousands of years. When Daniel Defoe, author of "Robinson Crusoe," rode through Oxfordshire some 250 years ago he wrote: "We were shew'd Roll-Richt-Stones, a second Stone Henge . . . I leave the debate about the reason and antiquity of this antient work to the dispute of the Learned, who yet cannot agree about them."

Nor is there any certainty among the Learned in 1960. A likely explanation is that Rollright, the oldest building in our neighbourhood, was a meeting place, perhaps for worship, used 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. The adjoining road is of great age, too. It follows the line of an ancient trackway which linked south-western England with the region around Lincoln and York. It avoided the swamps and forests of the great Midland plain by running along the ridge of high ground of which the Cotswolds form the middle part. Four miles from Sibford, close to Hook Norton, it divided: one branch went north-east by way of Tadmarton Camp (Wigginton Heath) to cross the Cherwell near Banbury, the other struck north, over Oatley Hill, through Traitor's Ford, continuing up from there along the farm-track which is now the Oxon-Warwicks county boundary (Ditchedge Lane), and so on to Edge Hill.

Traitor's Ford . . . what is the origin of this dramatic name for a local beauty-spot?—perhaps trader's ford, so many pack-horses having trudged that way. But Mr. Fred Green, of Sibford, says that in his childhood old

men told a tale of how "traitors" (meaning people guilty of local offences against the community, such as burning ricks) were tried long ago at Traitor's Ford and hung at Gallow's Hill, nearby on the Brailes road. Is this a myth, or could there be some basis for such an unusual local application of the word "traitor"?

The two Sibfords, and their hamlet of Burdrop, stand on hill tops. This was natural siting in times when men and women lived behind barricades, fearful of wild beasts and marauding tribes emerging from the surrounding forests. Fear there was in "savage" times, just as there is in our "civilised" times, fear of sudden obliteration. Love there was, too: the care of the home, the husbandry of the crops. When Mr. M. R. Lamb was ploughing at Sibford not long ago he turned up two beautiful flint arrow-heads, made with great skill by another Sibfordian, in quest of food and for self-preservation, 2,000 years before Christ. Flint arrow-heads were also found south-west of Sibford Grounds Farm in 1871, and others near The Colony at Sibford Gower.

These things belonged to the Stone Age. Then came the Bronze Age. Near Rollright a few years ago Mr. Charles Haynes, of Sibford, found a fine beaker of that period lodged in a rock-cleft at a quarry. It is now in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.

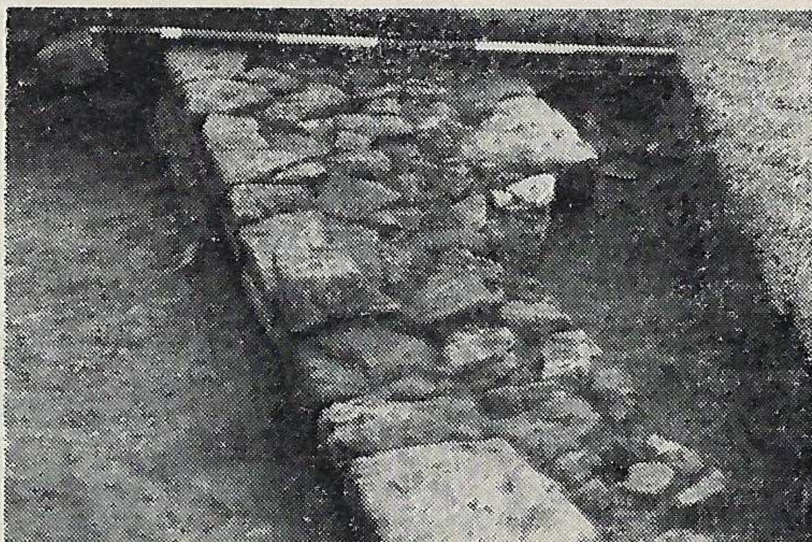
AT MADMARSTON 2,000 YEARS AGO.

Next came the Iron Age. When in 1958-9 a party of young archaeologists from Oxford University dug their trenches on Madmarston Hill above Swalcliffe they found the remains of human activity of some 2,000 years ago. They uncovered pits that were the dustbins of our Iron Age forefathers, the iron bars they used for money, the pots they made from local clay. They excavated the defensive ramparts thrown up round that hilltop. At the end of this booklet Mr. Peter Fowler, one of the leaders of the excavation, writes of their conclusions about the early dwellers in our district.

These people left the shelter of their ramparts by day, to cultivate and to hunt, returning at night to the safety of the hilltop. They used iron implements, though iron remained comparatively rare and valuable. They understood the simplest of mechanical devices, the wheel; they had carts, but their potters still made the household crockery by hand. Theirs was a simple, unmechanical age. What a contrast it is that the secrets of that long-deserted village above Swalcliffe were unlocked in 1958 by the use of a complex piece of modern electronic apparatus. This device, built by Dr. M. J. Aitken, of Oxford, was tried out at Madmarston with astonishing success. It is an ultra-sensitive detector of magnetism, and when carried across the site it indicated by fluctuations of a needle on a dial the presence beneath the turf of metal objects, and also of disturbances such as old pits or stake-holes in the clay subsoil.

For some reason or other the people who lived on the hilltop decided eventually to move house into the valley below, now called Swalcliffe Lea. They may already have done this before the Romans came, around 43 A.D. Though the Roman conquest elsewhere meant bloodshed, hereabouts it seems to have been peaceful: as Mr. Fowler says in the appendix, the recent excavations disclosed no evidence that Madmarston was sacked. We can

Traitors Ford, where the River Stour is crossed by a road of great age, certainly pre-Roman.



At Swalcliffe Lea the Oxford University Archaeologists found remains of Romano-British buildings and al o a 14th-century house. This part of its wall shows interior facing stones, rubble fill, and how the exterior facing stones have been removed, presumably for another building.

(Photo: P. J. Fowler)

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well imagine that the Roman soldiers fraternised with the "Swaycley" girls, and that the traders got busy; at any rate a new village grew up—Romano-British, the fusing of the old and the new. Here the archaeologists have laid bare the foundations of buildings, even to the village pub with its special drain, and under the turf of another part of Mr. Jack's farm is the tesselated pavement of a Roman villa.

Across our Swalcliffe-Sibford countryside the Romans threw their ruler-straight roads. The parish boundary on the north of Sibford and Swalcliffe runs along a Roman road, from Alcester in the west, past the foot of Madmarston Hill, and Mr. Fowler has now traced it further east to King's Sutton.

To the south of us, beyond Stow-on-the-Wold, the splendid villa at Chedworth displays the astonishing culture of these Romans: underfloor heating and constant hot baths! At Swalcliffe Lea and at Wigginton Heath many Roman coins and bits of pottery have been turned up. A rare Romano-British brooch in repoussé work, found at Hook Norton, is now in the Ashmolean Museum. All this is evidence of a civilisation that must have promised in its day to endure for ever. But by the year 410 the Roman legions had left Britain, and the Dark Ages descended on Europe. For several hundred years we know little of our local history, although it was during this period that most of our present-day villages began life as Anglo-Saxon settlements (probably including the Sibfords).

The Roman Empire had fallen. But life has a way of going on, though dynasties fall. Here is an example of that fact. Long after the Romano-British village at Swalciffe Lea had in its turn been deserted some of its stone was borrowed to build a mediaeval mansion, the foundations and hearth of which were uncovered in 1958-9. The hearth is about five feet square, of well-cut stone reddened by fire; it stood in the centre of the room, the smoke ascending through a hole in the roof. This house was built in the 14th century. When later demolished some of its stone went into the present nearby farmhouse (Mr. Jack's). Who knows how many of the old houses hereabouts may contain borrowed stone originally cut by mediaeval or even Roman masons?

A "SORE AND BLOODY BATTEL."

After the Roman collapse Saxons came in from the North Sea and fought their way across southern England. Often they settled, clearing the forest for their villages and fields. In this way Mercia came into being, a kingdom covering much of central England. Then came the Vikings. We can only guess what fearful things happened in this edge-of-the-Cotswold district which was the frontier-land between Mercia and the vast eastern part of England conquered by the Danes after 865. As the invaders advanced, plundering and burning, their aggressive drive westwards only died out as it reached these hills. At Hook Norton in 912 Rollo the Dane fought a "sore and bloody battel," says an ancient chronicler.

Between such horrors life went on quietly in our villages. The peasant tilled the soil, built his cottage of local stone, thatched its roof. This method of roofing had been handed down from primitive times (when it was a mere covering of grass or reeds); it persists today as a highly skilled craft, but in the last 20 years the thatched roof has tended to disappear

owing to the high cost of good-quality straw, and to the fact that substantial Local Authority grants for reconditioning old property are obtainable for tiling but not for thatching. While some tiles blend well with the local colouring, this trend will before long change drastically the appearance of rural England.

But meanwhile every time we see a thatcher we see a living link with ancient times. The same applies, of course, to every farm-worker in some degree: he is doing a job as old as civilisation, though his modern techniques are very different from those of even 300 years ago. Outside our villages are those long humps which corrugate the fields and which every schoolboy has learnt about in lessons on mediaeval strip-cultivation. Here the breast-plough was once used: an iron share, pushed by the ploughman. More usually, oxen and horses pulled the plough. The humps we see today were caused by the practice of ploughing inwards from the two edges of the long strip; the length of the furrow (furlong) was probably the distance a team of oxen could plough without pause.

Thus, in field and in village, the story of the past is to be read by those who have eyes to see, and the imagination to picture these things that have vanished. Beyond the villages lay forests, alive with deer and boar; marshes lay stagnant in the valleys; on the bare Cotswold slopes the sheep quietly grazed. The village fields were not yet enclosed by hedges. They were cultivated on three-yearly rotation, the work being shared out annually among the peasants by the manorial courts. There was common land where every man could graze his beasts, and patches of furze where he could freely gather fuel. These methods of rural life were already established when another conqueror came to England: William of Normandy.

SIBFORD IN DOMESDAY BOOK.

At Sibford we are less interested in the battle of Hastings, 1066, than we are in what happened soon afterwards. During the next 20 years William the Conqueror's great census and directory of England was made: the Domesday Book. King William rewarded with gifts of land many of the knights who had come over from Normandy with him; one of these was Henry de Ferrieres, and Domesday Book tells us that he owned something like 1,000 acres at Sibford Ferris, of which " there is land for 10 ploughs." There was also " in demesne 3 ploughs and 3 serfs " (" in demesne " meant kept in the lord's hands and worked direct—his home farm), and 7 villeins with 3 ploughs (the villein was the most important class of tenant under the lord of the manor), and also 40 acres of meadow pastures.

Across the valley at Sibford Gower there were two landowners. One, named in Domesday " William, son of Corbician," had about 1,000 acres. The other, with a similar amount of land, was Hugh de Grantmesnil (or Grentemaisnil): he had 2 ploughs in demesne, 4 acres of meadow, 13 furlongs of pasture, and a mill (Temple Mill?). A daughter of Hugh later married William de Say, a direct ancestor of the present Lord Saye and Sele, of Broughton Castle.

Whether the great Norman barons actually lived at Sibford, or even came for an occasional weekend's boar-hunting, is doubtful. Domesday

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Book shows that they let their lands to tenants. These sub-owners had great power over the serfs. They presided at manorial courts which dealt with both criminal offences and questions of agriculture, transfers of land, etc. The Sibford Gower Court House is said to have been somewhere in the vicinity of the present-day residence of that name.

The manorial court system continued for centuries. Among its duties were the upkeep of the roads and the village pound, where strayed animals were impounded. The Sibford Ferris pound was at the top of Mannings Hill. At Sibford Gower the name Pound Lane survives today after the pound has disappeared, but only a few years ago when Selina, the Friends' School pet donkey, strayed, she was found tethered in Pound Lane. So do old customs survive. From the Norman baron de Ferrieres came the place-name Sibford **Ferris.** The de Ferrieres family continued as lords of the manor for many years; Henry's son Robert was created Earl of Derby in 1138 by King Stephen. A charter of 1216 says that "Sibilla, Countess of Ferriers holds £10 worth of land at Sibford" (£10 in that currency would be worth probably £2,000 today). The same document says that "Thomas Goher holds land there" but Thomas Goher's land was actually at Sibford **Gower,** and this may have been how that village acquired its name. Probably Thomas could boast that his forefathers came over with William the Conqueror, for Goher was a French form of the old German "Guother."

Where the name Sibford originated is wrapped in obscurity: perhaps Sheep-ford, there being a ford between the two villages, or Sibba's Ford, the name given in a document of 1153. For centuries the locals have called the place Zibberd; this may be found on old maps.

Burdrop derives its name from the Old English for the hamlet near the burh (a fortified place or manor). Until times within living memory Sibford Gower and Burdrop were known as Broad Sibford; Sibford Ferris was Little Sibford. Swalcliffe probably originated from Swallow Cliff. Hook Norton was Hocca's Hill Slope and later Hoccanere, the village of the people of Hocca's hill slope. Epwell is named in a document of the year 1200 as Eoppan Wyllan (Eoppa's well).

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLARS.

Christianity had been brought to this country in Roman times (you can still see the sign of the cross cut in stone at Chedworth villa); then in the Saxon period many churches were built, but they were often of wood and perished; but the Normans built to endure. This we can see locally. At Hook Norton a Saxon church was rebuilt by the Normans in loftier style (but the tower was added 300 years later). The noble nave of Swalcliffe Church is Norman. Brailes has Norman foundations, though the present structure dates from 1350. Epwell Church is also said to be Norman in origin.

Sibford was part of the parish of Swalcliffe until 1840 when the present Church was consecrated; but nearly 700 years before that there had been a chapel of the Knights Templars in this village . . . which brings us to one of the most romantic chapters of our history.

King Richard I's crusade was fitting out to sail for the Holy Land, to fight the Turks. The year was 1189. Had you been in Sibford it is

likely that you would have seen knights wearing the famous insignia of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (red cross on white ground) riding through the village, and peasants leaving the land to take up the sword. The Knights Templars, a powerful military and religious order of knighthood, were large landowners. A charter of 1153 tells us that "William FitzRoger gave himself and his lands at Sibbeford (Ferris) to the brethren of the Temple."

Estates at Sibford later came into the hands of the Earls of Leicester and Winchester, and a daughter of the latter married Alan de la Zouch who transferred more land here to the Knights Templars. Agnes de Sibbeford also gave them the chapel of St. John the Baptist at Sibford Gower, more land, and a mill. Thus, Temple Mill at Sibford, where the mill wheel continued to turn until recent times, perpetuates the name of the Order, as does the Temple in London.

The chapel and community of Knights Templars at Sibford was a branch of a larger establishment at Temple Cowley near Oxford. But even at Sibford they owned well over 1,000 acres. They were here until 1312 when their entire international Order was suppressed for alleged scandals. Their lands and houses were handed over to the Knights Hospitallers, who then maintained the chapel at Sibford for close on two centuries. In 1520, they leased their Sibford lands, binding the tenant to keep the chapel in repair and to have a priest say mass there three times a week, for which he was paid £2 a year. The exact site of this chapel is now unknown; it could be anywhere between the houses now known as Temple Close and Gower's Close.

During the same period when the Knights Templars were at Sibford the Augustinian canons of Oseney Abbey, near Oxford, were landowners at Sibford, Epwell and Hook Norton. Oseney Abbey had been founded by a son of the Norman baron, Robert d'Oyly, who was lord of the manor of Hook Norton after the Conquest. It became rich, and by the 16th century derived much revenue from Hook Norton. Great wagons loaded with corn (the tithes) went from here to the Abbey barns by the river at Oxford.

Another monastic order, the Cistercians, or White Monks, were to be found for a period of about 150 years (1194-1349) living on the borderline between Swalcliffe and Sibford, near the present house called Swalcliffe Close, on the lane which leaves the Sibford-Banbury road at the old Sibford Elm and drops down to Swalcliffe Grange farmhouse. Canon and Miss Norris excavated foundations and stone carvings here some 25 years ago. Holwell (holy well) Grange, as the Cistercians called it, comprised chapel, farm, and living quarters for a small community of monks. They always sought solitude for their houses, and at Holwell they certainly found it. The visitor finds it today, walking across a field to where a spring gushes from a rocky outcrop: this is the source of the River Stour and was the monks' water-supply. It feeds a large stone-lined pool where the monks bred fish for the kitchen, and doubtless on a hot day they swam in it, for it is quite large enough.

By a decree of the Pope such houses were "sanctuaries for ever free and quiet from the violence and assaults of evil men." But, alas, the monks of Holwell Grange quarrelled with their neighbours, the Templars of Sibford. Friction arose over the working of adjacent fields. The trouble was settled

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by an agreement signed in 1242, now in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. The document promises that in future the two parties will either cultivate their adjoining lands simultaneously or let them lie fallow together, and the Templars agree not to molest the monks on their Sibford holdings.

A century after this fracas, the Cistercians fell on thin times and borrowed money from a landowner at Shipton-under-Wychwood. When the monks failed to repay, the angry moneylender raided the Grange and carried off horses, sheep and cows. Miss R. M. Marshall, to whose researches we owe our information on Holwell Grange, writes: "There is a special interest attached to this marauder, as his father, Eustace de Rokele, is said on good authority to have had an illegitimate son, William Langland, the author of 'Piers Plowman'." In 1349, the country was ravaged by the Black Death (typhus). This, and the scarcity of hired labour for farming, led the Cistercians to withdraw from Holwell Grange and to lease its lands.

England was a Catholic country until 1536 when Henry VIII turned against the Pope and dissolved the monasteries. The great abbeys were shut and despoiled; the monks and nuns turned out. This crisis of English history had its effect in our district. Holwell Grange was sold; later it became a ruin and its stones were raided for nearby farm buildings (Canon Norris found the carved head of a king or kngiht in the wall of a barn). But to this day local people call the lane from the Elm crossroads "Hollow Lane," a corruption of "holy lane."

The dissolution of the monasteries also put an end to the Sibford Gower chapel, formerly owned by the Knights Templars. The priest who had been paid £2 a year went away; the building fell into disrepair. By 1548 it was valued at £1 (perhaps £200 in present values), "the walls being very bad and rough stone, the roof whereof is much in decay." The two bells were valued at 13s. 4d.

Oseney Abbey's belongings were transferred to Christ Church College at Oxford, including the abbey bell Great Tom (which still rings from Tom Tower), and some of the properties in North Oxfordshire. Christ Church continued to own houses and farms in and around Sibford and Epwell until 1937.

So it was that in Henry VIII's reign the monks disappeared, after being for centuries familiar figures in our villages. But some went underground. At Brailes a Catholic family living in the house now called Rectory Farm managed to keep a priest in a secret attic-chapel. The place was raided; the priest was never caught. This attic was used up to 1726 when the present Roman Catholic church was opened in a nearby 14th century former malt-house.

PEACE AND ISOLATION.

Our little corner of England was always (and still is) off the beaten track. Generation followed generation in peace and isolation, each village looking after its own needs and trades. The ordinary villager rarely stirred from his place of birth. Why should he? Transport was bad; his needs were simple. One consequence of this self-contained life was that families were rooted here for centuries. A document called the Protestation Return which was signed by Sibford and Swalcliffe people in 1641, in the

Joe Alcock, last of the Sibford cottage-weavers, making plush for the mills at Shutford.

reign of Charles I, includes many local surnames of long familiarity here: Lamb, Wykeham, Hopkins, Loggin, Soden, Payne, Gilkes, Calcott, Padbury, Manning, Enoch, Heiron, Walford.

By a century earlier, in Queen Elizabeth's time, the trade in woollen cloth had become Britain's richest export, and the Cotswolds prospered. Fabulous fortunes were made by merchants living in luxury in towns like Chipping Camden. In Banbury there was a Wool Hall in Sheep Street, the western end of the present High Street. Every village which had sheep on its hills shared in the thriving business. A Sibford inn, the Bishop Blaize at Burdrop, is named after the patron saint of the weavers (St. Blaise, 4th century martyr). Legend says that wool-auctions were held on Burdrop Green, outside the inn, which bears on its wall the date 1640.

Plush-making continued long afterwards as a cottage craft in and around Shutford. William Wrench (born 1806) was a Plush Master; that is, plush woven in the cottages was brought to him for finishing and selling.

W. T. Wrench (born 1846) introduced power looms. In 1908 the last plush-making business in Banbury was bought up and the looms taken to Shutford. A serious fire destroyed the Shutford plush-mills in 1913, but after rebuilding they carried on until 1948 when the business was sold to a firm in Yorkshire.

Joseph Alcock, the last of Sibford's cottage-weavers, wove part of the red carpet on which King Edward VII walked at his Westminster Abbey Coronation in 1902. Mr. Alcock says he used to do three weeks' work at home, then took the cloth to Shutford where he was paid 11d. a yard.

GREAT HOUSES AND GREAT FAMILIES.

Serene country houses, built hereabouts in the Tudor and Stuart periods, bear evidence to the prosperity and elegance of the aristocracy in those years when Britain was establishing herself as a great trading nation. William Compton built in 1509 Compton Wynyates, that still-unspoilt piece of Tudor England which breathes in its red-brick elegance the spirit and richness of the age of Henry VIII, who stayed there. In 1618 James I visited the house and created his host Earl of Northampton. The present owner inherits that title.

Broughton Castle dates from 1306 but was much rebuilt in the reign of Elizabeth I, so that it is now a characteristic Elizabethan mansion superimposed on a mediaeval moated castle. To these great houses, and others, erected by local craftsmen, the gentry rode through our villages, and on their estates and in their kitchens the young men and women of the neighbourhood found employment. Others worked likewise for the yeomen farmers who, though much smaller fry in the scale of grandeur than my Lords mentioned above, were increasingly rich and powerful men in their villages, for the earlier mediaeval system by which vast stretches of land were vested in the lord of the manor was gradually breaking down as the big farmers managed to take more and more land to themselves. In Epwell village the dignity of the yeoman farmer may be seen in Yarn Hill Farmhouse, which has the date 1686 carved on its porch; and the elegance of Elizabethan craftsmanship is perpetuated in the silver plate and cup, given to Epwell Church in 1571 and still used today.

Many of the lordships of the manor continued in one family for centuries: the d'Oylys at Hook Norton, the Wykehams at Swalcliffe. Commander Wykeham-Musgrave, the present owner of the 13th century Swalcliffe Park (the house now used as a school), has an unbroken descent in the male line from a Norman nobleman named Walquelin who owned lands in Swalcliffe, Epwell and elsewhere. This is the only family in Oxfordshire (and one of few in England) which still holds in the male succession part of its Domesday land. There is uncertainty among historians whether this family of Wykehams, several of whom lie in Swalcliffe Church, were related by blood to the famous William of Wykeham (1324-1404), Bishop of Winchester, and founder of New College, Oxford. Certainly the Bishop had been in 1377, the owner of Broughton Castle (his great-great-grandneice Margaret married in 1451 Sir William Fiennes, second Lord Saye and Sele, and thus the castle passed into its present ownership). Some authorities say that William of Wykeham built the east end of Swalcliffe Church and also the beautiful tithe barn at the Sibford end of the village. Between church and barn is the house now known as Swalcliffe Manor Hotel, which has internal stone doorways dating from 1260, and stone vaulting and a fireplace of the 16th century.

The Wykham Arms at Sibford was (despite the spelling) no doubt named after the Swalcliffe Wykehams, or the Bishop. The inn's age is not known. During a recent alteration a coin dated 1537 was found built into a lintel. At Shutford local tradition says that William of Wykeham lived for a time in a house near the church.

Another long association of a family with a village is that of the Hopkyns. Dr. J. C. Wykeham Hopkyns, now living in Canada, is the 31st

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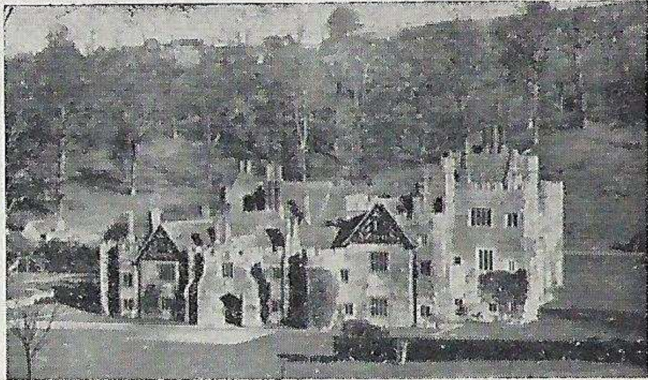

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holder of the family farm at Sibford Gower. Their original house was destroyed by fire in the 18th century, but its fine stone dovecote, built by John Hopkyns in 1728, still survives.

From Sibford the Hopkyns family sent its branches far and wide. For centuries they had notable connections with the city of Coventry. Similarly, the Gilkes family, originally rich yeomen farmers of Sibford, have found celebrity elsewhere, especially in education (the present High Master of St. Paul's School, Mr. Christopher Gilkes, keeps up the tradition). Many Gilkes were Quakers and several were noted clock-makers. Mr. John Gilkes gave the drinking fountain in Sibford Gower in 1848, and his cousin, the Rev. William Gilkes, gave in 1839 the land on which Sibford Church now stands. Mr. Michael Dix-Hamilton, to whose researches we owe these facts, is a member of the Dix family, owners of Burdrop House. Between 1756 and 1875 they owned a moity of Epwell Manor, and they are related through the Thame family to the present-day Sibford clan of Poultons.

An example of the continued service to the community by old families is provided in the cases of the present two Rural District Councillors for Sibford. Mr. Lewis Poulton, the Sibford Gower representative, is great-grandson of William Poulton, the last parish constable appointed by the Court Leit (manorial court) before the present County Police system was instituted. The old-time constable was an important functionary, not only dealing with misdemeanours but with the poor, collecting rates, convening meetings, etc. The present Rural District Councillor for Sibford Ferris, Mr. Fred Lamb, is a member of a family who have been farmers at Sibford for over 300 years. Jeremiah Lamb purchased their Home Farm in 1658. The house, in Sibford Ferris's main street opposite the Friends' School walled garden, is now occupied by Mr. Bernard Lamb. Mostly Quakers and farmers, the Lambs have long played a leading part in the social life of the community, while other branches of the family have spread to many parts of the world. They are closely related to the Harris family, and through marriage are linked with well-known local names including Dell, Herbert, Bishop, Gilbride, Wealsby and Stewart.

From such long-established family lines, with their deep understanding of the locality and its people, a community gains much in continuity, tradition, and solid character. From the new families that have joined it, and are still joining it, there comes the fresh approach and the new enthusiasm which is equally valuable. These two strains, the old and the new, are the warp and weft in the fabric of a strong village life.

A 400-YEAR-OLD RECORD.

While the Tudor period boasted its rich houses, there was much poverty among the common people, and widespread ignorance and disease. The labourer was still treated as little more than a serf; his children rarely received any education. It was a world dominated by the rich and the Church, while the masses enjoyed few of the liberties, powers, and opportunities which Englishmen take for granted now. But at Sibford there were enlighted people (their names are unfortunately lost) who took steps to modify these disabilities. In about 1560 the Sibford Gower Town Estates Charity was founded; it still functions 400 years later. It began with a bequest of land, the income from which must be divided one-third

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to the relief of the poor, one-third to "pious and charitable purposes," and one-third to the school and schoolmaster. The first village schoolroom of which we have definite evidence was built in 1625; but the fact that at the **foundation** (about 1560) of the Town Estates Charity one-third of its revenue was allotted to schooling indicates that there must have been an earlier village school.

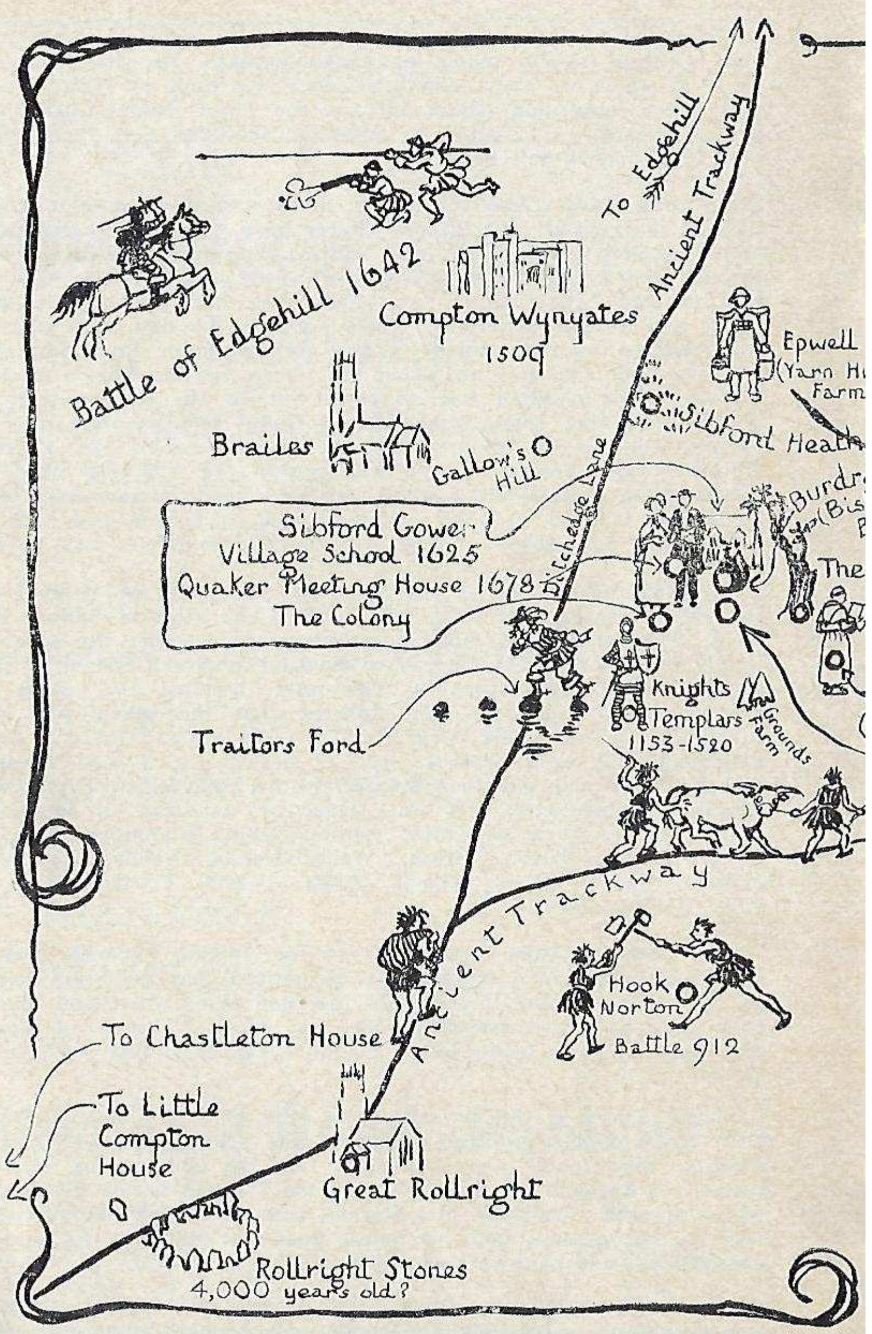
In those days a free school for children of the "working class" was unusual in England. At Sibford Gower boys were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic; girls also had knitting and sewing. So it continued through the centuries. A report by the Charity Commissioners in 1825 tells us that "the children are taught free, but they provide their own books and writing materials. There were at the time of our enquiry 59 free children in the school." These were children from Sibford Gower and Burdrop, the area to which the Town Estates Charity was limited. Sibford Ferris children had to pay. But in the 19th century, possibly because of rising costs, some Sibford Gower families were also required to pay: children of labourers earning not more than 17s. a week were still free, but tradesmen and journeymen—the "middle class" of the village—were charged 4d. a child per week, and farmers paid 6d. Some tradesmen rebelled at this, and withdrew their boys and girls, to the benefit of a dame-school run by Miss Shemeld in Bond's End Lane.

In 1866 the school was rebuilt on the same site as the 1625 building. In 1891 a dispute came to a head between the Vicar of Sibford (the Rev. E. T. Stevens) and the non-conformists as to whether the school should rightly be termed "The Church of England Endowed School." The Vicar was a dominating personality, vigorously dictating the affairs of both school and Town Estates. He insisted that the school was a Church foundation. The battle waged hotly. Wesleyans, Quakers and other dissenters, and even atheists, held a meeting in a barn adjoining the Bishop Blaize and put their signatures to a resolution of protest to the Charity Commissioners. It was signed by an array of long-established Sibford names such as: Inns, Barnes, Sabin, Woolgrove, Long, Oddie, Lines, Tarver, Barton, Green, Wells, Harris, Austin, Bishop, Spicer, Holtom, Enoch, Payne, Rimell, Webb, Golder, Lively, Lamb, Gaydon, Hone, Poulton and Dyer.

Mr. Robert Oddie, headmaster of the Friends' School, was passing the village school one night when he noticed that the Vicar had pinned to the door a notice bearing the detested title, whereupon the Quaker took his pencil and scratched out the words "Church of England"—and then wrote a polite letter to the Vicar explaining such pugnacious action.

The affair was finally settled by the Charity Commissioners ruling that, after looking into the origins of the school and the Town Estates Charity, they found no requirement that the children be instructed in Church of England doctrine, nor need the Trustees necessarily be members of the Church. Unhappy Mr. Stevens, thus to be rebuffed!—but his error was over-zealousness, and his defeat does not diminish his stature as a conscientious and hard-working priest.

As already stated, the Town Estate Charity was set up to be equally shared between education, the poor, and "pious purposes." The Rev.



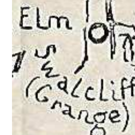
Battle of Edgehill 1642
Compton Wynyates
1509
To Edgehill
Ancient Trackway
Epwell
Sibford Heath
Brailes
Gallow's Hill
Sibford Gower
Village School 1625
Quaker Meeting House 1678
The Colony
Knights Templars
1153-1520
Grounds Farm
Traitors Ford
Ancient Trackway
Hook Norton
Battle 912
To Chastleton House
To Little Compton House
Great Rollright
Rollright Stones
4,000 years old?

Shutford
(Plush Mill)

Banbury

Madmarston Hill
(Iron Age Fort)
Swalcliffe Lea
(Romano-British town)

Brougton Castle
1306
Ancient Trackway
Roman Road


Elm
Swalcliffe
(Grange)
Tadmarton

To Kings Sutton

Holwell Grange
(Cistercian Monks 1194-1349)
Tadmarton
camp

Walford Manor 1666
(now Friends School)
Sibford Ferris
Lamb's Home Farm 1658
Wigginton
Mary Baker

Stevens' diary has frequent entries of allocations of food, doles, clothing, wooden legs, convalescent holidays, etc., but most usually the relief was in coal. Enormous quantities were distributed: in the Spring of 1877 Mr. Stevens mentions ordering 17 tons.

Since the village school was taken over by the County Council in 1951, and now that its entire cost is thus defrayed, the grants from the Town Estate have been modified. The third for education is used for maintenance of the schoolmaster's house, which still belongs to the Trust; the rest of the revenue (from letting of allotments and a farm) now goes in allocations of coal to old age pensioners, widows and widowers. Thus, from the reign of the First Elizabeth to the reign of the Second, Sibford Gower has seen the continued activity of a worthy Trust.

Sibford Ferris was remembered in a later charity, founded in 1726 by the Rev. John Loggin, of Swalcliffe, Rector of Long Marston. He bequeathed £200 to the villages of Swalcliffe, Sibford Ferris, Sibford Gower, Burdrop, Clifford Chambers, Quinton and Long Marston, to be given in bread and clothing to the poor, and to help apprentices. The Loggin Charity still owns land at Sibford, the income of which is now given to those most in need, irrespective of creed or status.

THE CIVIL WAR.

In following the story of the village school and the charities, we have skipped over other important events, so we must now go back to rather more than 300 years ago. Sibford village school was already teaching Sibford children when the "Mayflower" sailed for America and when Charles I ascended the throne—a reign which brought bitter conflict to our part of England. In a secret room at Broughton Castle was hatched the plot against the King which led to the Civil War. The rival loyalties of that contest are well illustrated by the fact that while Lord Saye and Sele was on the Parliamentary side, his neighbour, the Earl of Northampton, was for the King. Compton Wynyates was besieged by the Roundheads. Banbury Castle saw hard fighting. We can imagine what excitement and consternation the war caused in the neighbouring villages. One night a regiment of Parliamentary troops slept at Broughton, and next morning marched off with flying colours and beating drums to fight at Edge Hill.

The Earl of Essex led Cromwell's forces on that bloody day in 1642 when they clashed on the slopes above Kineton against the royal army led by Charles I himself, in full armour. Both sides claimed victory. The dead were said to number 5,000. After that day the sound of shooting to kill was not heard again in our peaceful Midlands until the Nazi bombers flew over almost exactly 300 years later.

At the end of the Civil War Lord Saye and Sele disapproved of the execution of King Charles and refused to sit in Cromwell's House of Lords. Bishop Juxon, who had attended the King at his death, fled to Little Compton House and the Bible given him by Charles on the scaffold he presented to Chastleton House, where it is preserved.

Tradition has it that a living link with the Civil War is the old Sibford Elm, and perhaps tradition is in this case the truth, for a

photograph of the tree taken 100 years ago shows it to have been a mighty landmark, and computations from its girth indicate that as a young elm it could have seen stragglers from Edge Hill passing below on the bridle-way to Wigginton and the south. The top of the Elm blew off in a great gale in 1893; even today, when only a segment of bark is left, it still bears leaves. The tree was adopted in 1904 as a symbol of endurance on the badge of the Sibford Friends' School's Old Scholars' Association.

THE QUAKERS COME TO SIBFORD.

After the brief puritan England of Cromwell's Commonwealth, Charles II, "the merry monarch," was restored to the throne. Among the puritan sects who persisted in disagreeing with the Church of England's interpretation of Christian practice were the Quakers (Society of Friends). Their leader, George Fox, stumped the country between terms of imprisonment, gathering a large following. In 1678 Fox preached at Sibford, on his way to North Newington, Adderbury and Banbury. In the same year a group of Sibford people bought a piece of land at Sibford Gower, and between 1678 and 1681 built a meeting house on it. Thus began a new phase in Sibford's story, which was to have far-reaching effects on the district; but more than a century and a half was to pass before the Friends' School was opened here. Meanwhile, a drastic change overcame the appearance of the countryside and the life of its people.

ENCLOSURE OF THE FIELDS.

The open fields and commons which had existed from pre-Norman days virtually disappeared, and with them went the right of every peasant to work the land. Over the centuries this ancient system had been whittled down. The old-time village had tilled its land merely to feed itself; now the nation's population was swelling and the masses were congregating in towns to work in the factories (the Industrial Revolution), and thus came a big demand for food, which could only be supplied by larger farms and more intensive cultivation. So the fields were enclosed, merging small and scattered parcels into bigger areas. The change was inevitable; the tragedy was that it was done in a way that caused misery to smallholders and labourers.

In the reign of George III (1760-1820) a total of 5½ million acres were enclosed in Britain; at Sibford Gower and Burdrop, 2,000 acres; at Sibford Ferris, 950. First the leading landowners brought a Bill before Parliament. As the Sibford Gower Bill said: "Whereas the land is inconveniently situated in respect of the several houses of the proprietors, the said proprietors are desirous of the land being divided and enclosed." The small men had little chance to oppose this. An Enclosure Act was then passed (Sibford Gower and Burdrop 1773; Ferris 1789), nominating Commissioners to investigate, to re-allocate lands, and to decide the financial liability. The Gower Commissioners appear, from their minutes, to have enjoyed using the Red Lion at Banbury for meetings. Finally, they made their Award. The bulky documents, prescribing the new field boundaries, are now kept in the parish archives. Much common and waste land was taken in for cultivation. But the cost of the enclosures was high. The smallholder often had to sell out to his prosperous neighbour because he could not afford the charges. At Sibford Gower the total cost was £1,879 (many times more in present values);

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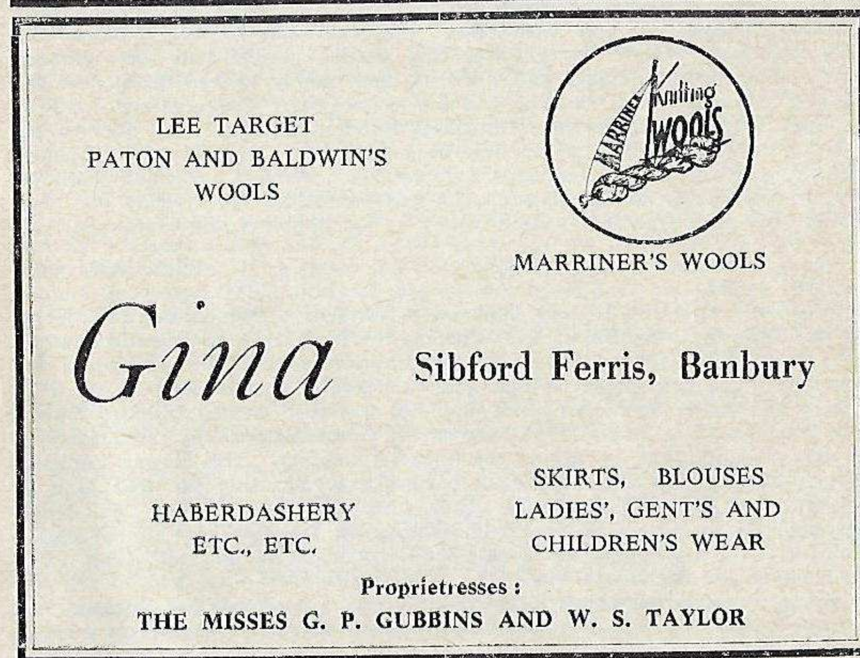

included in this was £325 for fencing, £338 for Commissioners' expenses, £596 for surveyors, clerks, labourers, etc. New College, though a large landowner, was exempt from payment under the Act. The largest payments were made by Thomas Walford (£224), the Town Estates Charity (£153), and Thomas Gilkes sweetbriar (£129).

Thomas Gilkes sweetbriar was so called because there were several other Sibford landowners of that name: they are identified in the Award by calling then Thomas Gilkes at the well, Thos. Gilkes Charlbury, Thos. Gilkes shoemaker, Thos. Gilkes Adderbury, and Thos. Gilkes slathouse (the slat—"slated"—house was presumably so named when all the rest were thatched).

A huge new class of poor dispossessed labourers came into existence, dependent on farm wages. "I had a cow," said one, "and an Act of Parliament has taken it from me." In some parishes half the men were soon on poor relief. In Sibford Gower the Town Estates Charity did its best to relieve the situation, though the Trustees had themselves to raise a mortgage to meet the £153 expenses charged against them, and this was not paid off for more than 100 years. But the Enclosure Act **did** increase the Charity's capacity to help the poor in this way: There was a patch of furze land at Sibford Heath (adjoining the Sibford-Tysoe road, near the present-day radio tower) which had since time immemorial been open to poor people to gather fuel; the Act now decreed that this right must cease and the land be taken into cultivation, but "being desirous that some provision might be made for the said poor people as a satisfaction for the loss and extinguishment of the privilege so enjoyed by them," the Act further ordered that the Town Estates Charity should receive a gift of not less than 10 acres from the former common field, and should let this additional land and "apply the profits for the purpose of buying fuel" for the needy.

Similarly, the Ferris Enclosure Act allocated some 20 acres to the Loggin Charity.

THE NEW CHURCH.

The remoteness of the villages in those days, and the difficulty of communication between them, especially in bad weather, is difficult to visualise today. In 1838, when a committee was collecting money to build a Church of England at Sibford, their circular asking for subscriptions said that about 800 inhabitants of Sibford were two miles from the parish church at Swalcliffe: "their road to the church is over a very hilly and exposed country, at all times impracticable on foot to the aged and infirm."

In 1839 we find Joshua Lamb (grandfather of the Joshua Lamb who died in 1943) walking to Oxford from Sibford to consider with other Quakers the establishment of an agricultural school in the Midlands. A committee representing the Society of Friends in Berks, Oxon, Bucks and Northants was formed to seek premises for a school, "to afford," as an old deed puts it, "a plain, useful, guarded, religious and moral education with board, lodging and clothing to children, both male and female." The house they finally chose was the "Great House," as it was locally known at Sibford Ferris, built by Thomas Walford in 1666, in the reign of Charles II. The front part of the house, on either side of the big front door, is to-day practically as it was in 1666 (the year of the fire of London),

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its beautifully-cut masonry unmarred by the passage of three centuries. At the rear were barns and a farmyard when the Friends bought it in 1842. During the intervening years the Walford family had left Sibford (the last "Squire Walford" went about 1800) and the house had passed through various hands; Joseph Harris now sold it to be turned into a school, for £1,200. Those signing the conveyance for the School Committee were Joseph Ashby Gillett and Henry Beesley, of Banbury, and John Enoch, of Sibford Gower.

EARLY DAYS AT THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL.

In its first year the Friends' School had 26 boys and 22 girls on its books (it now has 220, about equally divided between children of Friends and non-Friends). The first Headmaster, at £50 a year, was a young bachelor from Yorkshire, Mr. Richard Routh. As the school was for both sexes, a Mistress of the Household was appointed, Miss Rebecca Thompson, from Liverpool, at £30 a year. A few years later they married and had two sons, one of whom became in due course the village doctor and the first owner in Sibford of a motor-car. Elderly inhabitants still remember Dr. Routh's snorting horseless-carriage frightening their horses, and Mr. Oliver Dyer tells of towing it home behind his cart-horse from near Tysoe 50 years ago.

When the school was opened in 1842 the children travelled to Sibford over long distances, on highways roughly repaired with chunks of stone as big as a man's head, in jolting stage-coaches and slow carrier's carts (four carriers ran between Sibford and Banbury). The reminiscences of Jane Shemeld, one of the earliest scholars, tell us that she was a day and a half travelling from Northampton. Later, she writes: "In the winter of 1846 there was a severe famine in Ireland. We made a great many garments to send them. An opening was made in an imitation window in front of the School, and contributions solicited towards the Famine Relief Fund." In some ways history does not change.

Richard Routh seems to have been a disciplinarian and a humorist. Only a man of both qualities could have required the monitor, whose duty it was to keep order in the boys' bedroom, to report to the Headmaster each morning in these terms: "Please, Master, no boy has talked, half-talked, signed, whispered, hummed, or motioned."

The school was lit by candles. The girls helped with household duties. The boys worked part-time on the 25-acre farm. With so much labour done by the children the fees could be correspondingly reduced: they ranged from £6 to £16 a year, according to the parents' means. The children went home not more often than once a year. Jane Shemeld says of the last day of term: "Some of us had not seen our homes for two years, and we would stand in front of our desks opening the lids and slapping them down again, while we shouted in chorus:—

"Happy, happy is the day, packing up and going away,
Happy, happy is the hour, when we're free from Sibford power.
When the coachman smacks his whip, off we go and away we'll trip;
When the coachman says, 'Gee! whoa!' off we'll trip and away we'll go.
Farewell to meeting house, where we've oft sat;
Farewell to Richard Routh, and his broad brim hat;
Farewell church without a steeple;
Farewell all ye Sibford people."

Transport as it was before the first world war: a wagonette leaves the Friends' School at Sibford (the part of the building shown is the original Charles I mansion).

The school grew its own corn, which was carted to Temple Mill to be ground. The mill-pond was enjoyed as an unofficial swimming bath until a boy got his head stuck in the muddy bottom and was nearly drowned. Later the school built its own swimming bath (1853, roofed over 1898). The "agricultural bias" was dropped, and with the second headmaster, Mr. Robert Oddie, in 1880 came a stronger emphasis on games—football, cricket, tennis—and even a measure of co-education, which was far ahead of its time. Latin, French, woodwork and drawing were introduced, and even music which had been regarded as frivolous by earlier Quakers. When Mr. Oddie asked the School Management Committee for £20 for the first piano one of the members made the memorable remark: "And how many of these machines dost thou want?"

On Sundays, generation after generation, the boys and girls have walked across the valley to worship in the Friends' Meeting House in its lovely peaceful setting at Sibford Gower—at first in the old thatched building erected in George Fox's day, and later, when the school's growing numbers made that building too small, in the present Meeting House, erected 1866.

The influence on the life of a small village like Sibford of two such educational enterprises as the village free school and the Quaker school can hardly be measured. They have undoubtedly had a stimulating effect, mentally and spiritually, and also physically, for the example on the play-

ing fields of such Friends' School star players as Roland Herbert, Frank Parkin, J. W. Thorpe, A. G. Linney, James and Mabel Harrod, has been felt far beyond the School itself.

THE FIRST MACHINERY.

Farming prospered in the first half of the 19th century, with new methods and new machinery. The first reaping machine in Sibford arrived on Richard Lamb's farm in 1872, but for many years after this it was a common sight on many farms to see rows of men with scythes and sickles, cutting the corn as they walked in rhythm across the field, while the thud of the flail on the barn floor still meant that threshing was being done in centuries-old style.

In the period 1870-1900 came a calamitous decline in British agriculture, due to heavy competition from imported wheat and meat. In 30 years 300,000 labourers left the land, some to work in towns, many to emigrate. Then came the 20th century, and a more intensive use of agricultural machinery further reduced man-power requirements. High wages in town factories accelerated the exodus. Consider the population of four villages a century ago, before the decline began:—

Sibford Ferris	350	compared with	204	now
Sibford Gower	549	compared with	384	now
Swalcliffe	367	compared with	238	now
Epwell	330	compared with	190	now
	1596		1016	

—an average reduction of about one-third. There has very recently been a tendency for the Sibford population to increase.

Though our villages are now smaller than in the 19th century, they are certainly happier and healthier places to live in. The diary kept by the Sibford Vicar between 1874 and 1898 leaves no doubt about this. Mr. Stevens describes his calls upon parishioners: he records the poverty, the unemployment, the disease that bred in dark, insanitary cottages. There are frequent diary entries of people begging at the Vicarage for food, boots, clothing, and medical necessities; and references to his saying goodbye to young men off to seek better fortune in Canada and Australia.

On the other hand, the villagers in those days knew how to throw off dull care and make their own entertainment—they had to when there was no radio, no easy transport to the bright gaslights of the town. Under the oil-lamps in schoolroom and barn they danced their lusty country dances to fiddle and fife; they met for Penny Readings; Harvest Home meant a feast of plum pudding, rounds of beef, songs, and speeches. On Club Day they paraded through the village with banners and brass band. The villages of Swalcliffe, Tadmarton and Sibford had a horse show, at Sibford. At Sibford Wake the dancers danced up and down the stairs of the village inn. After the horticultural show the dancing continued until midnight, to the brazen beat of the fine brass band. One cold night after a Harvest Tea the band played outside the schoolroom and then, perhaps to keep themselves warm, marched to Sibford Ferris and back, up the hill and down again, like the grand old Duke of York's men. But, writes the Vicar, " I found them outside the Bishop Blaize. I thought that while the men played fairly well, the beer played very ill."

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The work of the old-established village school was too often ruined by parents taking their children away at an age when we now think of an education as just beginning: the Vicar writes of admonishing parents of boys of 9, 10 and 11 taken to work in the fields. A typical Victorian attempt at "improvement" was the establishment of a Village Lending Library, minimum subscription ½d. a week. At the inaugural meeting, according to the "Banbury Guardian" report, "The question of a night club with reading and refreshment room was started by Mr. Routh, of the Friends' School, but as it was too large a question for the present meeting it was postponed." Mr. Routh certainly did **not** mean by "night club" what we mean in 1960. As there were frequent complaints of youths hanging about on crossroads and getting up to mischief, perhaps his idea was what we call a youth club.

VILLAGE OCCUPATIONS.

Lectures and concerts at the Friends' School kept Sibford abreast of what was happening in the outside world. The School diary of 1877 reports: "A lecture on the telephone and microphone. Conversation was held with a place 100 feet away and the tune of a musical box was distinctly heard, also whispers." Nobody knew what this would lead to, the radio and television aerials of today's village.

The pace of the 19th century village was still that of the horse. The sawyer in his pit at Sibford Gower cut the timber to make the handsome Oxfordshire wagons; there were three village bakers, even though many people made their own; the travelling tradesman of today was unknown. A remarkable picture of the village occupations is given in the parson's diary. In 1878 he tramped from house to house and made his own census. We read with astonishment of 58 farm labourers; his other figures include 13 farmers, 4 dairy farmers, 6 independent ladies and 2 ditto gents, 3 servants, 13 paupers, 12 widows (but why no widowers?), 3 "ladies undescribed," 3 ditto gents, and a bailiff. The trade and craftsmanship of Sibford was represented by 2 blacksmiths, 3 masons, 3 sawyers, 3 butchers, 3 shopkeepers, 3 bakers, a plumber, a painter, 4 carters, 3 carpenters, a coal-seller, a sempstress, a tailor, a machinist, miller, clock-repairer, road-man, surveyor, 2 shoemakers, a "bread-seller and slipper-maker," and one "labourer and mole-catcher."

Most of these trades have died out. The 58 farm labourers have dwindled to perhaps half a dozen, additional to farmers and their sons.

Farmers hired their hands at the Michaelmas Fair in Banbury, thus described by the late Mr. Joshua Lamb: "Parson's Street was crowded with young men and maidens seeking situations and with masters and mistresses in request of carters, shepherds, and dairymaids. The labour exchange was as yet unkown. Intending shepherds wore a bit of wool in their hats while the carters were recognised by a twist of whipcord. They would board and lodge with their masters and it was usual for the master or mistress to hand over one shilling as 'earnest money' which was supposed to bind a contract, the greater part of the wages being payable at the expiration of the year of service."

The Michaelmas Fair is mentioned as early as 1677 in Dr. Plot's "History of Oxfordshire." All that is now left of it is the travelling fun-fair.

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THE VICAR AND HIS FLOCK.

The Vicar in Victorian days drove his flock to church as firmly as any shepherd penning his sheep. His diary records the scoldings he administered to those who strayed—and figures of 150 to 200 are frequently mentioned as his Sunday congregation. Fortunately, both villagers and Vicar had a sense of humour. For example: "Baptised Mrs. X, aged 79. Mrs. X begged her husband with tears to be baptised too, but he refused, saying he could not believe all the Quakers were going to hell."

There had long been a strong element of nonconformity in this part of England. Banbury was traditionally a puritan town. Next in size to the Quakers at Sibford were the Methodists, who had worshipped at first in a private house; then in 1826 they had made "an appeal to the benevolence of an enlightened and generous public" to subscribe for the building of a chapel. It was completed in 1827. At Epwell the Methodists have used their present chapel for about 100 years; previously it belonged to the Baptists.

Perusal of such a diary as Mr. Stevens' can reveal facts that might otherwise be lost. He writes in 1878: "Drove to Banbury. Broughton and Brailes toll gates done away with today." The turnpike road between Banbury and Shipston thus became free; the tolls had been levied by a private company which kept the road in repair. In 1880 the Vicar records the marriage of a Sibford man to a girl from Swalcliffe: "She had some chairs given by an aunt at Stratford, and as the carrier would have charged 5 shillings to bring them she borrowed a hand truck and fetched them herself." This was a walk of 36 miles, there and back, pushing a truck over the Brailes hills!

Perhaps the most telling revelation of "other days, other manners" in this diary is a note the Vicar made before interviewing George Burdon, of Brailes, for the post of groom and gardener at the Vicarage (14s. a week with cottage). Mr. Stevens wrote down and ticked off as Burdon agreed, these requirements:—

"Regular communicant . . . Sign pledge or promise never to visit public house . . . Touch hat when meeting ladies and gentlemen of neighbourhood whom you know . . . Touch hat when starting carriage . . . Yes, **sir** . . . No, **sir** . . . Behave kindly and respectfully to other servants . . . Any little jobs of painting, etc. . . . Lamps, carpets, mats . . . Top hat for driving . . . Clothes, black on Sundays . . . Always come to me and Mistress and ask if you are wanted before going home to bed . . . No smoking on my premises . . . A place for everything, and everything in its play . . . Church twice on Sunday with night service choir practice."

Rules of conduct for children were also somewhat different from those of today. Mr. Penny, the present Headmaster of the village school, has the logbooks of his predecessors. "In 1879," he says, "a certain young lady persistently refused to curtsey on leaving the schoolroom. She was reported to the Rev. Stevens, a School Manager, who explained to her the school rule that girls should curtsey and boys bow on leaving the room. Whether this had the desired effect or not we do not know, but after a week she announced her intention of not attending the school again. The subjects taught at that time were reading, writing, arithmetic, religious knowledge and

singing, and the girls and infants were given instruction in needlework. By 1893 grammar was taught throughout the school and geography had been introduced for the boys. Attendance in the last quarter of the 19th century was very irregular. Reasons for absence were many and varied, including helping with haymaking, bad conditions on the road, and 'earning pence by opening the road gates for visitors to the Examination at the Friends' School.' There is also evidence of much truancy, but despite these difficulties it is clear that those concerned with education here were able to achieve some success, and constant efforts were made to broaden and improve the curriculum."

THE WINDS OF CHANGE.

Though the villages at this period had their strict class-divisions, with the labourer touching his cap to his "superiors," the winds of change were beginning to blow through rural England. "Grand meeting of Agricultural Labourers' Union at which Joseph Arch was present," the Vicar of Sibford records in 1877. "After dining in Tennant's Barn, they paraded the village with brass band." The Vicar did **not** parade. He disapproved of the agitation conducted by the extraordinary man from Barford in Warwickshire who, himself a labourer, had become the agricultural labourer's champion. Joseph Arch (1826-1919) was by now a hedgecutting contractor employing his own men; he was a Methodist preacher and a pioneer trades union leader. Later he became a Liberal M.P. He had founded the Agricultural Labourers' Union five years before this visit to Sibford. After the parade he spoke to the Sibford Branch. "The labourer," he said, "has been deprived of his national birthright, he has been left to shift for himself, but now we have put into his hand a weapon with which he can fight. The time will come when you will have political power" (The labourer had no vote).

The Vicar wrote in his diary that a gentleman called on him and said the local farmers "ought to combine to withstand the demands of the labourers, but that Richard Lamb would not join."

A big change came in 1894. We have noted how in early years the manorial courts were the village government; then, around the 16th century, the Church began to supplant the manor, the vestry-meeting appointing officers to conduct the business of the parish: the constable, waywarden, etc. This continued for 300 years, until the Local Government Act of 1894 deprived the vestry of its civil powers and set up parish and rural district councils. At Sibford the village schoolroom was packed for the inaugural meeting of the Parish Council (but in 1960 only 6 people attended the annual parish meeting).

Mr. William Lamb was appointed clerk to the first Sibford Gower Parish Council in 1894; four generations later in the Lamb family tree, Mr. Peter Lamb now occupies the same office.

MODERN TIMES.

With social and political changes in the 1890's came other innovations. The first telegraph wires connecting the Swalcliffe-Sibford district to the outer world were fixed in 1896. The first motor-car came in the same eventful year; so did the first recital by Edison's phonograph (gramophone)

at the Friends' School. In 1898 the School diary records: "First cinematograph: pictures of babies quarrelling, a pillow fight, etc."

There was no bus service with Banbury until after the first world war, and the casual visitor to our villages might have imagined them to be sleeping through the years, as he looked at the thatched cottages and drowsy horses. But life in the Sibfords has a way of having something rather special about it. In 1906 a bold educational experiment was launched here with the appointment of Mr. James T. Harrod as the master at the Friends' School. Not only did he make the school fully co-educational, he believed that education was tending to become over-bookish, to the neglect of the practical skills and needs of boys and girls. To adjust the balance greater stress than was then customary was put on woodwork and metalwork, needlework, cookery, art and nature study: in fact, this was a pioneering venture in what is now commonly practised in the best of State "Modern" schools. For nearly a quarter of a century the Sibford experiment was followed with keen interest by educationists. When Mr. Arthur Johnstone became headmaster in 1930 he felt the balance now had to be adjusted in the other direction. The academic standards were advanced, and the new buildings at The Hill erected. In 1960, under the new regime of Mr. Hugh Maw, the school has again embarked on an extensive building programme to keep abreast of modern educational needs.

1960 also sees the Sibford Primary School being modernised at a cost of about £15,000—and a link with the past was forged when a lintel bearing the date 1625 was removed from a demolished wall and built into the new extension.

In 1947 the present system was started of transference from the primary school to a secondary school at 11-plus. Epwell School was closed, and Sibford now takes some 90 children from the villages and surrounding area. It is significant to note that this is about the same number as the school taught 60 years ago, and yet the modernised school will have almost double the area: which illustrates our changed standards in education.

That "something extra" which has so often characterised Sibford life, compared with the average village, certainly owed much in the earlier years of this century to the presence here of Frank Lascelles. This was the stage name of Frank Stevens, son of the former Vicar of Sibford. Lascelles achieved world-wide fame as a gifted producer of open-air pageants, such as the Coronation (George V) Durbar in India, the Tercentenary of Canada Pageant at Quebec, the Oxford Pageant of 1907, and many others, including the Empire Pageant at Wembley Exhibition, 1924. Between such achievements he came back to live in style at Sibford Gower, driving through the lanes in his carriage drawn by white ponies, and entertaining celebrities at his mansion.

In 1912 Frank Lascelles produced the comedy scenes from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in an unusual way. Living on the fringe of Shakespeare's country, he felt that what Shakespeare had conceived of the natives of his time might still be realised today: He cast young men of Sibford village in the parts of Shakespeare's rustic comedians. This was an immense success. His little company toured many towns, including Salisbury, Oxford, and Stratford-on-Avon itself. Lascelles reinforced his

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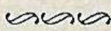 THE WYKHAM ARMS

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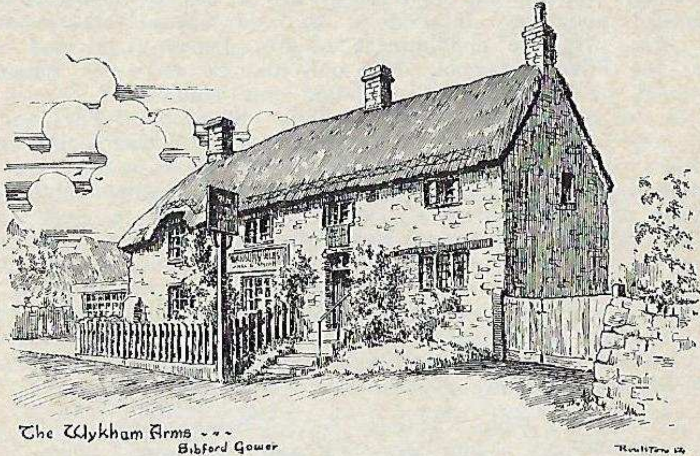

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local players with a few professionals, among whom was Ivor Novello, then unknown. But he became very well known immediately the 1914-18 war started, through his popular song "Keep the Home Fires Burning," said to have been composed during a visit to his friend Lascelles at Sibford.

The beauty of the Sibfords, and their lively reputation, attracted other people of ideas and enterprise to live or to visit here. In the summer of 1911 a party of actors from Birmingham who called themselves The Pilgrims made a country tour and visited Sibford Gower; among them were John Drinkwater and Barry Jackson. This troupe was in fact the beginning of what is now the Birmingham Repertory Theatre; Drinkwater became its secretary, Jackson its manager and producer. At Sibford they acted in the garden of "The House at the Cross" (now occupied by Dr. Davenport Jones) . Sir Barry Jackson's outstanding recollection is that "It was a very hot day and it was my lot to play Toby Belch with a false stomach made of hay. Standing stripped in the garden of The House at the Cross, buckets of water from the well were thrown over me until I recovered normality."

THE VILLAGE HALL.

Frank Lascelles was an enthusiast for Sibford's first Village Hall, now demolished. When money was being raised for the building of the present Village Hall one of the efforts, appropriately, was a new production in 1956 of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with the "rustics" played by a roadman, a lorry driver, a retired gardener, and an apprentice. The new Hall, one of the most attractive in Oxfordshire, was opened in 1957. Among its regular users is a dramatic society, as well as country dancing, Horticultural Society, choral singing, Women's Institute, badminton clubs, British Legion, and other activities of a lively village community. Village recreation, like everything else, has to keep abreast of the times. The Penny Readings of grandfather's day would hardly set the modern village on fire. Films are shown, the Hall is wired with up-to-date lighting for plays, it has its dances and its rock-n-roll. We have come a long way in this history, from pre-Roman times to the age of rock-n-roll, and of all the changes in 4,000 years some of the most drastic have come in the last 40, even in the last 15. Large sums of money have been spent to provide main water, sewerage, and electricity here in the depths of the country. Fifteen years ago many cottages and even council houses were without baths or flushing lavatories. Since then Banbury R.D.C. has spent £460,000 on bringing water to its villages. The Sibford sewerage scheme cost £32,000. With such improvements, and with better schools and more council houses to replace out-of-date cottages, the village of today is on a par with the town for civilised amenities.

Few village people now work in agriculture. Travel is quick and easy: many go to work in the towns, but continue to live in the country where they can get the best of both worlds—the amenities formerly associated with town life, **plus** clean air and the joy of living in one of the few remaining unspoilt beauty spots of England. Long ago the Cistercian monks regarded this place as "for ever free and quiet from the violence and assaults of men;" today, though so much has changed, and though what we expect of life is so different, our countryside has not lost its age-old tranquility.

Appendix

THE EXCAVATIONS AT MADMARSTON

By P. J. Fowler

THE hill fort of Madmarston is one of a large number of defended settlements dotted along the Cotswolds. The people lived on the hill top, protected by one or more banks and ditches. At Madmarston the inner bank was built simply of clay dug from the ditch in front. No stones had been used to face the rampart as was done at other Cotswold forts like Lyneham and Chastleton. Probably when first built the top of the rampart was about 20 feet above the bottom of the ditch, which is still 10 feet below present ground level. The defences had been strengthened by an outer ditch 6 feet deep around the southern and western sides of the hill. The main entrance was on the south.

We found many remains left by the people who lived there. The earliest was part of a stone axe, quarried from Langdale in the Lake District during the Neolithic period some 4,000 years ago. Its presence at Madmarston is a mystery, for we found no other evidence of human activity earlier than the Iron Age. It was then, in the last centuries before the Roman conquest, that the hilltop was extensively used. It went through various stages of development. First a wooden palisade gave protection, then the bank and ditch replaced it. The outer bank and ditch was probably built later still. Where the fort's builders came from is uncertain but on present evidence it seems likely that they were descendants of immigrants from Europe who had landed on the east rather than the west coast of England. No doubt they mixed with earlier Iron Age settlers in the area, farmers who already knew how to build single-banked refuges like Chastleton.

We found no evidence that Madmarston was attacked by the Roman legions. Indeed, little is yet known of the Roman conquest of the area, although a tradition that the Durotriges, the Iron Age tribe living west of the Cherwell, made peace with the invaders may well be true and thus explain the apparently peaceful desertion of the hill fort. Soon after the conquest a village was growing at the foot of Madmarston Hill. It may have continued a valley settlement founded just before 43 A.D.; it may have grown up beside an early Roman road running to the Welsh border; or the road may have come later to link up the new Romano-British settlements; we are not sure which is correct. But the village must have prospered, since it covered some 50 acres and contained at least one villa and stone-built houses. People lived in it until at least 400 A.D. and probably continued to do so after the legions had left England.

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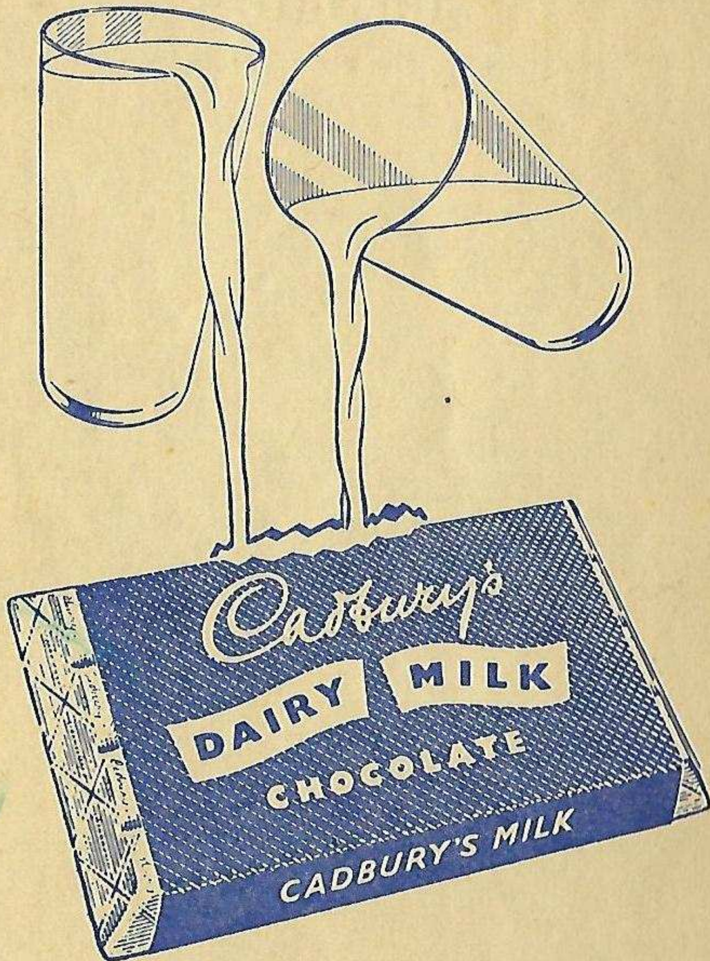

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