

A
SHORT HISTORY
of the
Parish of
OFFENHAM

By
BENJAMIN G. COX
1953

God gave all men all earth to love,
But, since our hearts are small,
Ordained for each one spot should prove,
Beloved over all.

KIPLING.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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BENJAMIN G. COX.

Evesham.

September, 1953.

CHAPTER I

Derivation of Name and Early History

THERE is a good deal of doubt as to how Offenham got its name. Many learned writers of our Worcestershire history have given it as their opinion that Offenham derived its name from Offa, King of the Mercians—better known as Offa the Terrible (A.D. 758-796)—who was indeed very active in the area during his reign. Others quite rightly point out that this could not have been so because, in one of the earliest Charters of the Abbey of Evesham, i.e. that of 709 A.D., it is written that there was granted to Egwin (Bishop of Worcester and first Abbot of Evesham) 'Certain lands or manses including one at Offeham.' However, one cannot dismiss entirely the well known tradition that Offa the Terrible had a palace at Offenham. Even to this day we have that part of the village which we call the King's Bank and the King's Piece. The area known as the King's Bank has produced many evidences of foundations about 18 inches to 2 feet below the surface and coins of Saxon origin have been found there but, unfortunately for the historian, none of King Offa.

Many of the ancient documents relating to gifts of land to the newly-founded Abbey at Evesham say that Offenham was given to the Abbey by Offa, King of the East Angles, who, with Kenred, King of Mercia, gave up his throne and went to Rome to become a monk. Offa was a very common name in Saxon times and one is mystified as to how a King of East Anglia could have land in the Kingdom of Mercia to give away. There are many variations in the spelling to be found in old documents, namely Offeham (709), Uffaham (714), Uffenham (860) and Afanhamme (1058). It is correctly spelt as 'Offenham' in Domesday (1086) and the value clearly pointed out.

Although bones of prehistoric animals have been found in the parish, the earliest established human occupation of Offenham was by the Romans, which is proved by numerous finds of pottery, coins and domestic utensils of the period. The coins are varied, but are mostly of the second and third centuries A.D. Most of these have been found in the vicinity of Faulk Mill, but others have been found in the Bennett's Hill area and at the Leasowes.

In 1820 twenty skeletons were found near Faulk Mill and many Roman coins of bronze were found in the same earth. Several odd skeletons have been found in this area. Three of these were headless and one was found lying upon a slab.

Remains of the floor of a Roman dwelling were uncovered near Blackminster Bridge in 1938, and I think the principal Roman Settlement was along the banks of what we now call the Badsey Brook.

The Romans came to Offenham in the first century A.D. and were engaged primarily in agriculture and produced corn for

the Roman Legions in Gaul. The growers were permitted to retain a proportion of the corn for their own use—the system was much as it is in Russia today. Remains of Roman corn-drying rooms have been traced in the Evesham area, and the Evesham Historical Society have recently been engaged in the excavation of one of these.

There is no record of any serious attempt having been made to uncover the sites of these Roman dwellings in Offenham, but this is something which might well be done in the future and I am sure a great deal of valuable information would be forthcoming. The nearest Roman roadway of any size was the Icknield Street, which passed through Bickmarsh and Honeybourne. The late Mr. Tomes, who wrote a very interesting paper on the Roman Occupation of the Littletons, traced a secondary road from the Littletons through Offenham to Evesham.

With the departure of the Roman Legions in 410 A.D. life went on much as before. The people had become Romanised but they continued their way of life, making their pottery, growing their corn, feeding their cattle, etc., and providing a reasonably comfortable living for themselves. What they missed was the protection of the Roman soldiers, and it was not long before this part of the country was overrun by various invaders from the Continent. These invaders lost no time in carrying on and expanding the agricultural system brought into being by the Romans, and took full advantage of the vast corn-growing areas which had been brought into cultivation by their predecessors. Food production was as vitally important in those troublesome times as it is today and, as it was "grow food or starve," they needed no "War Ag." to urge them on.

In common with the rest of the country, little is known of events which happened in Offenham in the three and a half centuries following the departure of the Romans, but that the Saxons occupied part of Offenham is reasonably certain in view of the finds of implements, utensils and coins of the period.

Under the Saxons, the acreage under the plough increased. Many of the wooded areas, the rough grass and scrub were cleared and burnt. The land was ploughed with heavy wooden ploughs, sometimes requiring as many as eight oxen to pull them.

When the population increased, fresh clearings were made so that everyone had as much land as they needed. When enough had been ploughed up to meet the requirements of the population, it was parcelled out among them in more or less equal proportions according to the size of the family.

The two- and three-field rotation systems were adopted and in addition common land was set aside for grazing.

The Saxons were also known to have kept poultry, and pigs were reared in large numbers. The cattle and goats grazed on the common land and honey was produced in great quantity, there being, of course, no sugar.

CHAPTER II

Offenham and the Abbey of Evesham

THE Abbey of Evesham, which dominated the life of the Vale for over 800 years, was founded in about the year 701 by St. Egwin, a Benedictine monk who was then the third Bishop of Worcester. His foundation was richly supported by the Saxon Kings.

At the time of the endowment of the Abbey, Offenham seems to have been one of the smallest communities in the area, because we are told that when King Offa of the East Angles gave the village to the Abbey it included only one manse (or farm) as compared with 13 at Littleton, seven in Norton and 30 in Twyford. Twyford must have been a comparatively large place at the time, and the amazing thing is that, while the population of Offenham has increased greatly, there is now practically no trace of the village of Twyford. The land is, of course, absorbed into what is now the parish of Norton and Lenchwick and the northern part of Evesham.

At the time of its gift to the Abbey, Offenham consisted of probably one principal residence and a few smaller dwellings, all in what is now the old part of the village, and probably not many more than a dozen in number.

Apart from agriculture, fishing was of considerable importance to the population and added variety to their diet. It is interesting to note that the residents of Offenham had to supply fish and eels to the Abbey kitchens. This fact is recorded in the Chronicle of the Monastery of Evesham in A.D. 709—this, incidentally, is the first mention in writing of this country's fishing industry anywhere to be found, although, of course, the fishing industry existed long before that.

The Abbots of Evesham held Offenham continuously from then until the Abbey was dissolved in the time of King Henry VIII (1539). This was no doubt due to its being a favourite resort of the Abbots of Evesham. Cut off as it was from the north and west by the river, it offered great seclusion as, indeed, the old part of the village still does, with no road going through it.

The coming of the Normans had little effect on life at Offenham. The land was never given to a favoured Norman for services rendered, as were many villages. Although, after the conquest of 1066, the land was assumed to be held by the king, the Abbots of Evesham still maintained their control.

Apart from some curtailment of the Abbot's powers, the possessions of the Abbey were interfered with very little and the Abbot continued to receive what was due to him from the various Abbey possessions. In fact, under the influence of the Normans, the Church grew and the spread of Christianity and learning was great.

Many French monks came to this county and the number of monks at Evesham Abbey was increased from a dozen or two in 1066 to over 100 within a few years. This necessitated much rebuilding and extensions to Evesham Abbey, and the Abbey Church and the quarters of the monks. Many of our Vale churches were founded by the Normans.

It is recorded that soon after the year 1160, Abbot Adam enclosed a park at Offenham and erected a mansion there. The park is believed to have stretched from Bengeworth, over what is still called "The Parks," to somewhere north of the present Manor House and Court Farm—probably to the deep ditch still known as the Deer's Leap.

In the early thirteenth century, during the Abbacy of Abbot Randolf, the houses at Offenham were burnt to the ground. Whether this was by his command or otherwise is uncertain.

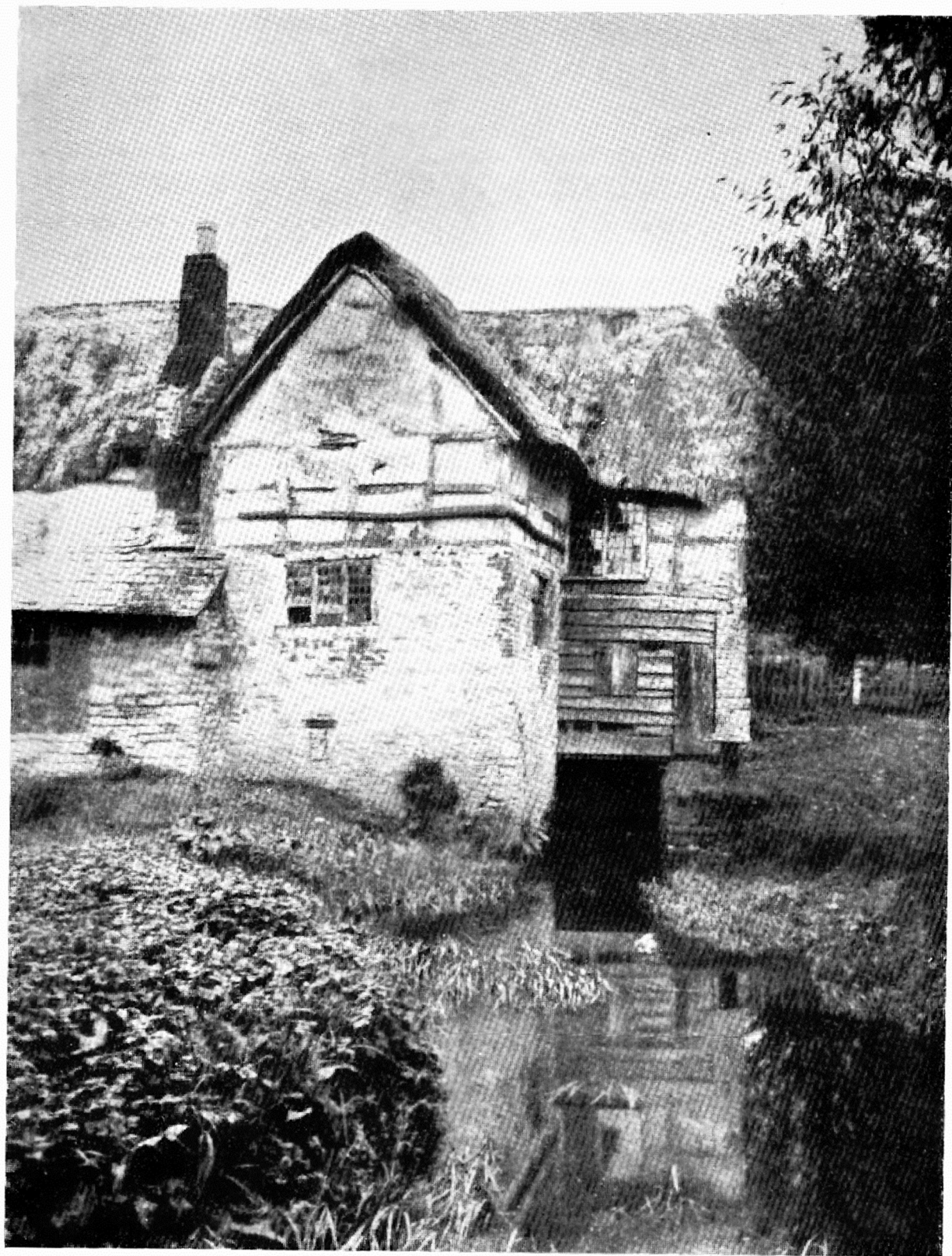
Abbot Roger Zatton (1379-1418) built the dovecot near Court Farm, which may still be seen. There were three others built at about the same time—one of these is at Lansdowne, one at the Priory, but much older than the Priory itself; and the third was behind the Old Manor. The Abbot kept these dovecots, or pigeon houses as they really were, to ensure a supply of fresh meat during the winter months.

The Chronicle of the Abbey of Evesham includes an entry noting that Abbot Norton, in 1483, provided that on the day of his anniversary the brethren should have one doe from the deer park at Offenham and wine from the cellar of the Abbot.

Abbot Adam also made an investigation of the houses at Offenham and scheduled the revenues which were to be received by the Abbey from the people—this schedule included corn from Faulk Mill and eels for the Abbey kitchen.

Between the years 1282-1316, Abbot John of Brokehampton erected eight costly barns, including one at Offenham and a very large one at Littleton. This latter is, of course, still standing and is reputed to be the largest in the country. These barns were erected to store the produce which hitherto was brought to the Abbey from the villages. The Offenham barn cannot now be traced.

When the chapelries in the Deanery of the Vale came to the Abbey to pay their pentecostals or Whitsun farthings, viz., a farthing for each householder in the parish, certain villagers were accustomed to repair to Evesham in distinct processions, with cross and banners, and were regaled with cakes and other refreshment at the Abbey. However, there was much jealousy as to the precedence when the parishioners of the various villages in the Vale approached Evesham, and in 1442 it is written that "many mutilations and even murders had occurred" and the trouble was complicated by the fact that the processions took place at a period of boisterous holiday festivity. In these tumults, the inhabitants of Church Honeybourne had been so conspicuous that Pope Eugenius IV ordained that this long-established custom should cease, but that the usual payment



Faulk Mill shortly before its destruction

from each householder should continue. There is a tradition that the householders of the Littletons used to pass through Offenham to go to the Abbey to pay their pentecostals, but there was always trouble through molestation by the inhabitants of Offenham. This resulted in an estrangement between Offenham and the Littletons which lasted for many centuries, and even now it is said that the Littleton men still keep their hands in their pockets when they come through Offenham!

The Abbot's House at Offenham must have been a very fine and comfortable one, for we find that in April, 1289, King Edward the First, on his journey from London to Worcester, broke his journey at Offenham and rested there for three or four days.

Another important visitor to Offenham some 70 years later was the Venerable Father Richard, Archbishop of Nazarus, who came to consecrate the Abbot's rooms at the Abbot's House.

Abbot Clement Lichfield, who was the last real Abbot of Evesham, retired to his Manor House at Offenham after being bullied into resigning his Abbacy, and it is recorded that he died there in 1546, but seven years after the destruction of his Abbey at Evesham—the Abbey he had loved so much and beautified so greatly. Abbot Clement was also responsible for building the present Bell Tower in Evesham and built the first Grammar School at Merstow Green, the porch of which may still be seen.

One can imagine the scene as his body was carried in solemn procession to Evesham for burial in his chapel in the church of All Saints. The route taken was most probably across the Abbey Deer Park, which I have previously mentioned, over the little footbridge at that part of Offenham which we still call "The Abbey," and then on to Evesham itself.

The Manorial Records

Offenham seems to have been an important manor at the time of the Domesday Survey (1086), for Littleton—probably South Littleton—Bretforton and Aldington were shown as appurtenant to it. It is shown in Domesday to have contained one hide, free from geld.

On 24th April, 1539, a month or two previous to the dissolution of the monastery of Evesham, a lease of most of the demesne lands (i.e., the lands occupied by the Abbot, the then Lord of the Manor) was granted, under the seal of the convent, to Arthur Collarde, Edmund Charlett and others, the Abbot retaining 116 acres in his own hands for the use of his house at Offenham. Shortly afterwards, by the suppression of Evesham Abbey in 1539, the manor came into the hands of the Crown, and was granted by King Henry VIII, with all other possessions of the Abbey in Offenham, to Sir Philip Hoby and Elizabeth his wife, as a reward for Sir Philip's success as a diplomatist abroad, to hold in tail by the service of a tenth

part of a knight's fee and the yearly rent of £7 3s. 0d. On 25th May, 1544, this grant was confirmed, and as it probably seemed unlikely he would have an heir, according to the above limitation, a further grant in fee of the reversion of the Manor of Offenham, was obtained by Philip Hoby, his heirs and assigns, by the same service and rent as before and on payment of the sum of £322 19s. 6d. On 22nd June of that year he had licence from the Crown to convey the Manor to Anthony Denny and Maurice Berkeley, gentlemen of the Privy Chamber, William Butt, senior, and Thomas Stanold of the household, in trust to the use of himself and the lady Elizabeth his wife, and his heirs male, with contingent remainder to his brother John and his heirs male, and then to the right heirs of Philip. Some years later a further settlement was made in which John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester, and Sir Richard Blount acted as Trustees.

For some years afterwards the Manor of Offenham followed the same descent as Abbot's Morton. Sir Philip Hoby must have had an heir because we find that in 1583 his son, Sir Edward Hoby, jointly with Margaret his wife, the daughter of Henry Cary, Lord Hunsdon, conveyed the Manor of Offenham to his cousin, Sir Thomas Cecil, afterwards Earl of Exeter, and Dorothy his wife. Sir Thomas Cecil acquired by this conveyance the Manor House, with the park, and a portion of the tithes, but the manorial rights probably remained with Sir Edward Hoby, who continued to hold property there. The manorial rights probably fell into disuse when the Manor House and demesne lands were conveyed to various people.

The next transaction of which there is a record states that in 1650, Francis, the son and heir of Thomas Hazelwood, conveyed the "site" of the Manor of Offenham to Samuel Dingley and Edwin Baldwyn, possibly for the purposes of a trust. The Manor House afterwards passed into the hands of the Freeman family, whose descendants may still be found in the village. The Hazelwoods occupied the Court Farm and remained in Offenham until the middle of the eighteenth century. About that time James Hazelwood disposed of the Court Farm and the remainder of his property in Offenham to various purchasers, the farm eventually coming into the hands of the Digby family, of Coleshill, and thence to the present owners.

CHAPTER III

Sixteenth to Twentieth Centuries

THE period following the dissolution of the Abbey of Evesham in 1539 was a very difficult one, and the lot of the ordinary villager deteriorated. The condition of the cottages became very bad, and the Church records show that many families lived in rough shacks and hovels—those cottages which were habitable were grossly overcrowded and disease and sickness were rife. There were many outbreaks of smallpox.

The gradual enclosure (or fencing in) of the land by the landowners in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries added further to the hardships of the people. Instead of each family having its share of the open fields, the land was fenced in by the owners, who farmed it for themselves, employing some of the people as labourers but leaving the majority to eke out an existence as best they could. Many people left the village altogether for the towns; others took up handicrafts and trades and gradually things began to take a turn for the better. The landowners granted tenancies to a few—others were eventually able to buy land and this resulted in smallholdings and subsequently quite large farms coming back into the occupation of the ordinary village folk. The better known of these were Sheaf's Farm, Bolton Farm, Field Farm, Gibbs' Farm, Bennetts Hill Farm, Skinner's Farm, Norvalls Farm and Laurels Farm.

It is not known to what extent the village was affected by the Civil Wars of the middle seventeenth century, but it is known that both King Charles' men and those of Cromwell were active in the area.

Offenham Bridge

In some of our general county histories, often compiled by people who have never been to Offenham, it is written that there was a bridge at Offenham which used to take the traffic of the old Worcester to London Road. I think what they have written is only partly true. There is abundant evidence of a documentary nature (and therefore reliable) to prove that the bridge at this point was only a stone footbridge.

Leland, in his famous Itinerary, written at the time of King Henry VIII, wrote as follows:—

“Twyford (Offenham) bridge situated a mile above Evesham a 4 mile lower than Bitford is a narrowe stone bridge for footmen at Uffenham over avon.”

We know this bridge was there in 1605, as it is mentioned in the Charter of Incorporation of the Borough of Evesham. Ten years later the Worcestershire County Quarter Sessions Rolls record “The bridge at Offenham is in a state of decay and it was not known by whom it ought to be repaired.”

Mr. Willis Bund, who had property in Offenham, wrote in his “Civil War in Worcestershire” that the liability to repair the bridge rested on the inhabitants of Offenham and they were on several occasions indicted for non-repair of the bridge.

The river from Evesham to Stratford was made navigable in the second half of the seventeenth century and to me this suggests the probable period of the final destruction of this footbridge, as it would have been an impediment to river traffic, and was probably replaced by a ferry. There is no record at any later date of the bridge being in use.

The wheeled traffic, which came down through Chadbury, and what is now known as Blayneys Lane, crossed the river at Offenham by a ford. The water there is still very shallow, as I myself have found when bathing there. The traffic was gradually diverted through Evesham on account of its growing importance, the final part of Blayneys Lane becoming extinguished. The foundations of the old footbridge can be seen at very low water.

Parish Records

In dealing with the period covered by this Chapter I have been greatly helped by the parish records which, compared with some parishes, are well preserved and in safe hands.

Until a few years ago there was a good deal of mystery about the whereabouts of many important parish documents and records, including the Overseers' Accounts, the Churchwardens' Accounts, Vestry Minutes, Parish Award, etc.

Early in 1948, however, someone became curious as to what was contained in a large black box which had reposed in a corner of the Schoolroom for many years. The Parish Council decided to look into the matter and, after dozens of keys had been tried on the lock, it eventually yielded, and a sub-committee of the Parish Council was formed to examine the contents and prepare an inventory of the same. These documents were eventually, and very wisely, handed over to the County Archivist for safe custody, and by courtesy of the Parish Council I have been afforded an opportunity of making a detailed examination of the more important of these documents.

I should say here that the very important and long lost Parish Enclosure Award was not among the documents found in this old box.

I have made a few notes and extracts from the documents which I hope will be of interest to those who should have got so far.

The Overseers' Accounts

After the suppression of the abbeys and the advent of land enclosure, the number of poor multiplied at an alarming rate and the Church found itself no longer able to cope with the multiplicity of duties and the volume of claims upon its funds.

As a result of this state of affairs a new poor law was found to be necessary, and by an Act of 1597, the appointment of Overseers of the Poor was first provided for. This was followed by various supplementary enactments culminating in the Poor Law Act of 1601, which was the governing statute for over 200 years.

The Overseers of the Poor derived their income from local rates, from the rent of land and other sources. The "Poore Land" at Offenham is still so called and is that triangular piece of land having its apex at the point where Boat Lane meets the lane running from the Norvals to the Bridge Inn.

The Overseers were appointed annually at a meeting convened for the purpose. In Offenham the Overseers were almost invariably the same persons as the churchwardens. In fact, they were "appointed Churchwardens and Overseers for the coming year."

Out of the funds available to them they bought clothes, food and necessities for those in need. They apprenticed poor boys to various trades, paying such premiums as were required, and generally dispensed their funds for the benefit of those of the parish in need. They also provided a house in the village for use as a workhouse and, where they thought fit, augmented the wages of those who needed it. This augmentation resulted in much abuse by the employers who paid such low wages to their labourers that the Overseers were bound to augment. As these employers were also the persons who paid the rates, it really meant that the wages they paid plus the rates they paid amounted to no more than the value of the labourers' services.

Crabbe, in his "Village" of 1783, described the Parish Workhouse as follows:—

"Theirs is yon house that holds the Parish poor,
Where walls of mud scarce bear the broken door,
There where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,
And the dull wheel hums doleful thro' the day,
There children dwell who know no parents' care;
Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there,
Heartbroken matrons on their joyless bed,
Forsaken wives and mothers never wed;
Dejected widows with unheeded tears,
And crippled age with more than childhood fears;
The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they,
The moping idiot and the madman gay."

In spite of these horrible conditions, the Overseers had power to refuse any relief to those poor who declined to enter such an abode.

Parish relief was also refused to those who had no legal "settlement" in the village and any such person found in the village without the means of subsistence was guilty of vagrancy and was condemned to the stocks or ordered to be stripped from the middle up and soundly whipped in public "until his back be bloody," and would then be despatched, with an ignominious pass, to his proper place of settlement.

In view of the constant difficulty of making ends meet, the Overseers were obliged to confine their expenditure for the benefit of persons legally "settled" in the parish.

The Overseers' Accounts for the Parish of Offenham are very interesting and run from 1633 to 1853, although Overseers continued to be appointed up to 1883.

The following extract from the accounts for 1678 is typical:—

*The accounts of Anthony Buggin and Thomas Spragge,
Overseers for the poore for the year 1678.*

Rect: Rent for the Poores Closes for the year 1678	02	00	00
By a levie at 2d in the Pound	04	10	00
Payed John Comyns what he was behind last year	00	11	00
Payed Enoch Franklin from the 15 of April to ye 29 July	00	18	00
Pd for Cloath to making his sons cloaths ...	00	12	06
Pd for a hatt for him	00	01	08
Pd him at Christmas	00	02	00
Pd to two poore people yet came with Passes ...	00	01	00
Pd for a paire of shooze for Franklins Boy ...	00	02	04
Pd to yr poore at Christmas beside what Enoch had	00	14	00
Payed to Thomas Dorrell to cure his Chile of ye Kings Evill	01	04	00

Other interesting items are:—

1768 To a ton of coal for the Fish and Anchor ...	1	1	0
Edward Nightingale		2	0
For attendance on old Mills when Sick ...		6	0
Taking Theopilas Bridges for Justice ...		10	6
Paid for Spinning Wheel for Mrs. Collet ...		4	0
Spent at The Bridge on Sal Lewis Act ...		1	6

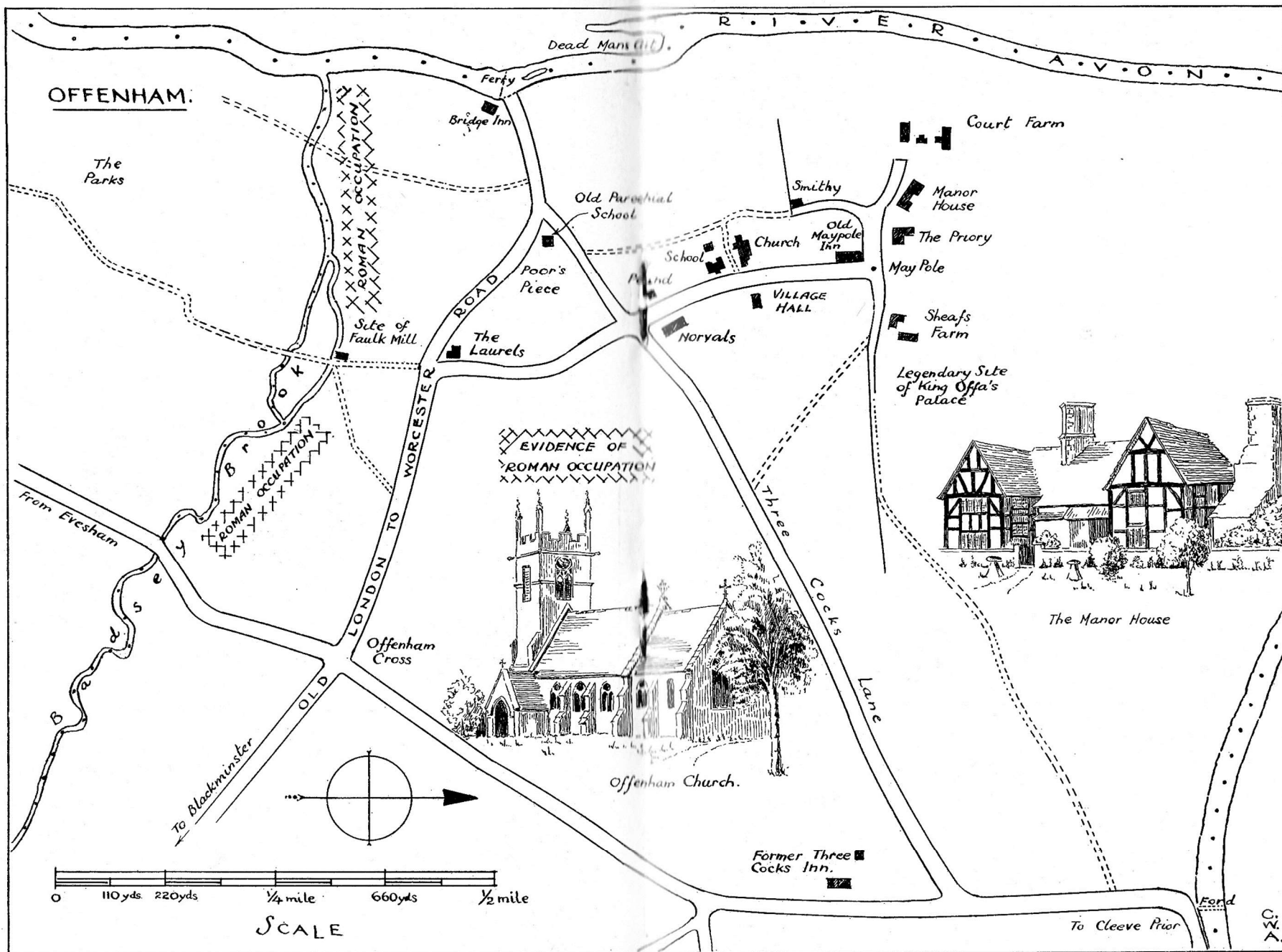
The following items relate to the Parish's expenditure on fitting out a poor boy ready for his apprenticeship:—

Paid for Jno Lewis clothes for a hat and briches ...	5	10
Shous	3	4
fower shirts and making	10	8
Cote and waiscote	10	6
Stockings	1	10
Paid for Indentures & filling for Jno Lewis ...	2	8

Every householder in the village had to accept the Appointment of Overseer if elected or find a substitute.

The Churchwardens Accounts

These are recorded in various parish books and some on loose sheets of paper. The earlier accounts are to be found in the same book as the Overseers' Accounts—this is probably because almost without exception the Churchwardens were the Overseers and books were expensive. The accounts mostly deal with expenditure on the Church, the Churchyard, etc., but occasional items, more applicable to the Overseers' Accounts, are found in them. The following is a copy of the Churchwardens Accounts for 1679 which are the earliest I have been able to trace:—



Ye accounts for ye Church for year 1679.

Received a Levie att 2 pence in the Pound	...	£4	5	6
Imprimis paid att the first visittasion	...		7	4
paid att the second visittasion	...		7	8
paid charges to Woucester and at the				
Quort [Court]	...		2	10
paid for Timber for ye Church	...		19	0
paid for workmanship	...	1	5	0
paid for nailes	...		1	8
paid for Bonds	...		1	0
paid for Bred and Wine	...		3	6
paid for ye transferring y parchment	...		4	0
paid for Orders for new oufisore [Officer]	...		3	8
paid at the last visittasion	...		10	7

The following are subsequent items which I have selected as being of some special interest:—

1733	Bread & Wine for the Sacrament	...	3	6
Whit	For Washing ye Surplice and table cloth	...	1	6
Easter	Paid Wm. Moore for work at ye Bells	...	1	6
	for a new cover for the font	...	3	6
	for mending the church windows	...	1	0
1748	Whitewashing the Church	...	1	10 0
1810	For repairing the Stocks	...	2	10 2
1813	Gave John Baylis for Whitewashing the			
	Band Room	...	1	6
	paid the Mole Catcher	...	2	2 0
1824	New Stocks labour & Paint	...	1	13 7
	Blacksmiths bill for do	...	6	1
1827	Paid Hopeful Skinner	...	—	6
1828	Paid Sarah Hudman for a new leg	...	—	6
	[I suppose for her table]			
1833	Paid Geo May for printing list of voters	...	10	6
	[This was, of course, the Geo. May who wrote a History of Evesham]			

The Accounts of the Highway Surveyor

Prior to the taking over of the roads by the local authority the parish was responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of its roads other than main roads, which were administered by Turnpike Trusts, and the parish appointed annually a Highway Surveyor who was granted a rate and, with labour supplied by the local farmers, did what he could to keep the roads in reasonable repair, but undoubtedly for centuries the roads were in a shocking state. The rent of the Parish Wharf near the Fish & Anchor Inn was also appropriated by the Parish for the maintenance of the roads. The Highway Surveyors' accounts, though very brief so far as detail is concerned, cover a period of over 150 years and are recorded in the same books as the Overseers' Accounts.

The Parish Constable

This is one of the most ancient of parish offices and in some parishes can be traced back as far as the fourteenth century. The appointment of Parish Constable can be traced back in Offenham as far back as 1650, but no doubt constables were appointed in the parish before that year. The constable was responsible for the maintenance of order, the flogging of those punishable by order of the parish courts, the service and execution of warrants, the supervision of the village stocks and other duties. He was appointed annually in Offenham. In the nineteenth century several constables were appointed annually, but it is doubtful if all of them had duties to perform.

I find that the Parish purchased new stocks as late as the year 1824. I expect these were erected near the Maypole, that being the most prominent position in the village, but I have no evidence to support this suggestion.

A Seventeenth Century Subscription List

Those who have lived in Offenham, as I have done, know how readily the people of Offenham respond to any worthy cause. I was interested to see recently a late seventeenth century subscription list giving the names of the Offenham parishioners who between them subscribed one hundred pounds towards the rebuilding of St. Paul's Church in London. This was a considerable sum of money in those days and the money was collected at a time when, if the accounts of the Overseers of the Poor are anything to go by, the village was far from prosperous.

Sports and Pastimes

The oldest form of village sport was hunting the deer, fox and hare. Wrestling and various forms of football were popular even in Medieval times. Bull and bear baiting and other cruel sports were indulged in up to not so many years ago. For the less energetic, fishing and cockfighting were favoured. Cockfighting is known to have been very popular in Offenham and matches were arranged with other villages. The Three Cocks Inn at Newtown was the venue for these events in Offenham until cockfighting was banned in 1850.

The annual "wake" or fair was eagerly looked forward to by young and old and has been held from time immemorial, the traditional date for the opening being the 29th of May. The "wake" was originally held in the village street and reached from the Maypole up to the church. Owing to the damage caused to the road, it was eventually transferred to the recreation field.

Although indoor entertainments were organised in the local inns and subsequently at the schools, the opening of the Village Hall in 1931 was the event which really made possible the great variety of indoor activities now enjoyed by all ages.

Offenham was once proud of its village brass band, and many will remember the enjoyable functions at which it was in attendance. There was a band in the village as long ago as 1813, as there is an entry in the Churchwardens' Accounts for that year concerning a payment for "Whitewashing the Bandroom." I understand the bandroom was where, until recently, the village blacksmith had his shop. Whether this payment related to the village brass band or the band which played in church on Sundays is uncertain. Perhaps it was one and the same.

Progress

The last 100 years has seen many changes in Offenham and much progress. Not only was the church rebuilt but new schools and a schoolmaster's house were erected.

As late as 1871, many of the people were living in dreadful conditions and the principal parishioners set up an Inquiry into the causes of the many epidemics occurring. The following extract from their report will give some idea of the prevailing conditions:—

"We find also after a careful inspection of the cottages and houses generally throughout the village a most unbelievable state of things. The privies, cesspools and Middens are in such close proximity to the wells from which the people derive their water supply that the filth and sewage must of necessity percolate into the drinking water. These circumstances, added to the wretchedly constructed cottages, produce conditions absolutely inimical to the health of the Inhabitants."

Following this Inquiry, Mr. F. P. Webb, of Hampton, Civil Engineer, was engaged and a proper system of drainage and outfall was planned and carried into effect.

Market Gardening in Offenham

The origin of market gardening in Offenham is somewhat obscure, but it can be traced back as far as about the beginning of the nineteenth century. Noake, the well known Worcestershire historian, wrote that at about 1868 Offenham was prolific in ordinary farm produce except about one-third, which was worked as market garden.

Offenham for centuries was noted for its sheep and corn and, even early in the present century, Offenham farmers were frequent prizewinners at the larger agricultural shows.

The land in Offenham is good, light and early but the factors that really brought market gardening into being were the repeal of the Corn Laws, the introduction of the Evesham custom of land tenure, the coming of the railways and, in Offenham particularly, the compulsory acquisition by the County Council of large acreages of farm land for letting off in smallholdings.



Church Street



The former Parochial School

One gentleman who did much to put Offenham on the map in market gardening circles was James Myatt, who occupied the Laurels Farm and later the Norvals Farm, Offenham. This Mr. Myatt was born in Camberwell, London, and came to Offenham in 1852. He, and other members of his family, raised in Offenham many new varieties of potatoes, cabbage, rhubarb, strawberries and other crops. I suppose he is better known for his Myatt's British Queen strawberries, which were grown commercially with great success all over the country for over 50 years.

His Myatt's Early Offenham cabbage are equally or yet more famous and are still extensively grown in the village, and throughout the Vale of Evesham and beyond.

Mr. Myatt won prizes at the country's principal shows and, on account of his improved methods on a field scale, did much to increase the popularity of market gardening in Offenham and the Vale of Evesham generally. He died in 1879 (some may still remember him) and lies buried in Offenham churchyard on the south side.

Offenham has also lent its name to varieties of Brussels sprouts and parsnips.

The present century has seen the almost complete change over from ordinary farming to horticulture and the village holds a very high reputation in the country for the excellence of its produce.

The present tendency is towards horticulture under glass and during the last few years the acreage under glass has increased immensely. A number of Dutch families have settled in the village and have introduced new ideas and put up very extensive glasshouses on land formerly used for ordinary market gardening, and the village is already being called "Little Holland" by people in Evesham.

Population Figures

1821	...	342	1891	...	563
1841	...	353	1911	...	644
1851	...	403	1931	...	917
1871	...	500			

At the time of going to press the figures for the 1951 census are not to hand but it is estimated that the population of the village in that year was 1,150.

The Loss of Blackminster

That neighbouring district which we call Blackminster was always part of Offenham Parish until April, 1949, when, at its own choice, it was absorbed into the Parish of Badsey. I hesitate to say whether this was a good thing or not for Offenham. I think it is a good thing for the people of Blackminster, as probably it is easier for them to be administered as part of Badsey Parish. Anyway, the change was made entirely of the Blackminster residents' free will after a Public Inquiry and with little or no opposition from the Parish of Offenham.

CHAPTER IV

The Parish Church — Past and Present

THE Parish Church of Offenham is dedicated to the Saints Mary and Milburgh. St. Mary is, of course, the Holy Mother of Jesus, but I am often asked for information about St. Milburgh as the name is very uncommon.

Milburgh or Milburgha was of noble birth and was born in 665 A.D. She was the eldest of three saintly daughters of Demneva, the wife of Mereward—her uncle was Wulfhere, King of Mercia. We are told that from her earliest years she dedicated herself to God and that the whole of her life was one of devotion and service. Milburgh founded a Religious House for men and women at Wenlock in Shropshire, and was consecrated Abbess there by Archbishop St. Theodore, and the House is said to have greatly flourished under her rule. She is also said to have had the power of miracles and a mysterious power over birds. She is usually portrayed driving a goose which is the symbol of Evil.

She was buried near the altar in the Church of the House which she had founded on the 23rd February A.D. 722. Her remains were discovered by some Cluniac monks in the year 1501 and on the 26th of May in that year her relics were enclosed in a costly chest and deposited in a conspicuous place in the same house where they remained until the destruction of the Abbey in the time of King Henry VIII. Some ruins of this building may still be seen at Wenlock.

It is most probable that the first Church at Offenham was built in Saxon times and was of wood—its dedication to St. Milburgh suggests that the original church was built soon after the foundation of the Abbey of Evesham which was during St. Milburgh's lifetime.

Soon after the Norman conquest the Church was rebuilt in stone—it was a simple structure and probably had no tower. A small portion of this, just below the present tower, still remains. The Chronicles of Evesham Abbey tell us that Abbot John of Brokehampton between the years 1282 and 1316 made additions to the Church at Offenham.

In the 15th century this small Norman church or chapel was rebuilt and enlarged and the present tower added.

By the middle of the 19th century it had become very dilapidated and in need of repair. This old church consisted of tower, nave and chancel with a porch on the north side.

The Revd. R. Lawson, who was presented to the living of Offenham in the spring of 1848, recorded the following impression of it:—

"The exterior had a look of neglect and advancing decay and on the south side were two rough modern buttresses of blue stone; and in the roof on the same side had been inserted two dormer windows of the same character as those in the neighbouring cottages. On the gable of the nave stood an open gabled Sanctus bell turret, capped by a finial which had not belonged to it, and had probably come from a pinnacle of the tower. A similar finial surmounted the chancel gable, and two or three others were lying in a niche in the porch. The perpendicular tower was in pretty good repair. On the west side a low, narrow, square-headed door had been inserted in order to admit the ringers without passing through the church.

"Inside, the nave was filled with a variety of seatings: here and there were some roughly hewn oak benches with plain backs and square ends.

"The reading desk was entered by two or three high steps and led by a few more to the pulpit, close to which, and attached to the south wall, was a rusty iron frame for holding the hour glass, by which the preachers of former days are said to have regulated the length of their sermons. A western gallery, supported by two iron pillars, was reached by a flight of stairs from the tower and was occupied by the male and female members of the choir. The instrumental music, so far as I remember, was a flute, clarionet and base viol. The perpendicular font stood in the centre of the nave between the north door and the recess in the south wall.

"The churchyard had been of considerable extent early in the century but was claimed by some layman as his freehold, and was purchased from him by Canon Digby, who then undertook to decide that only a certain portion of it had been consecrated ground, and enclosed a strip on the north side to enlarge the Parsonage garden. Three other strips on the south, east and west sides were also shut off with rough paling, and left only an inner square of scanty dimensions for burial ground. These four strips, together with an adjoining close and orchard, he left by his will to be purchased for the incumbent as glebe for £300, and the purchase was made from funds belonging to the benefice.

"The churchyard was badly kept and rank growth of nettles stood high against the walls of the church. On the south was a raised flat tombstone of the 17th century which was in memory of Thomas Hazelwood, Esq. (eldest son of Sir Thomas Hazelwood) who died 10th January 1732. Doctor Nash in his history of Worcestershire says that the Hazelwoods succeeded the descendants of Sir Philip Hoby, to whom Offenham was granted at the dissolution. Near this memorial were four upright tombstones, side by side, form-

ing a solid wall of obstruction, sacred to the memories of various members of a local family, and one of them bore this desponding utterance, which almost seems to imply the prevision of an impending purgatory for the perpetrator of three false concords in four lines:—

‘My quivering lips hang feebly down,
My pulse are faint and few;
Then slowly, with a dismal groan,
I bids this world adieu.’

“On the north side, near the chancel, there was a stone inscribed with a quatrain, which, if commonplace, took hold of my fancy and memory on account of its simplicity and the smoothness of its flow:—

‘Here lies asleep a child so sweet,
To keep you fresh in mind
That die you must, and turn to dust,
And leave this world behind’.”

I have quoted very fully from Canon Lawson’s reminiscences, because they are the only existing record of the interior of the old church before it was pulled down in 1861, and students of the history of Offenham Parish will for ever be indebted to him for making these notes. There are a few sketches and photographs available of the exterior of the old church.

The question of rebuilding the church was first brought up at a vestry meeting on 10th April, 1855, by the Revd. Canon Lawson, whose notes I have quoted from above. Plans were submitted by a Mr. Preedy, who was a native of the village and an architect of considerable skill. Numerous meetings were held and attended by the principal parishioners. Four tenders were received and the lowest, that of Mr. James Griffiths, of Eldersfield, was accepted. His tender for the nave, aisle, porch and vestry was £1,046 10s., and for the chancel £324.

As the work of rebuilding proceeded numerous additions were thought of, including the wall and gate to the main street and various additions within the church. The nave, aisle, porch and vestry were paid for by local residents and by grants from various charitable bodies and persons. The cost of rebuilding the chancel was shared by the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, Oxford, as to one half, and as to the other half by Capt. Digby, their lessee of the greater part of the land in the village.

While the church was being rebuilt the services were held in the barn just opposite the church gates—some of the fittings of the old church were transferred to this barn temporarily. Some of the colouring on the walls near where the temporary altar stood can still be seen. At a parish meeting on the 10th September 1861 a vote of thanks was passed to Mr. Tomes for the accommodation afforded by him to the parishioners in lending this barn for so many months as a temporary place of worship.

The church was rebuilt in the decorated style and consists of chancel, a nave of four bays, north aisle and south porch. The east window is stained and there are memorial windows to the Revd. R. Lawson and to Lieut.-Colonel R. Preedy. In the tower is another stained window which was the gift of the same Revd. Lawson. The pulpit is of carved Derbyshire marble supported on a cluster of six polished piers.

There were a dozen or more memorials in the old church but only one small one of these was transferred to the new church and can be seen in the vestry. I have been unable to trace what happened to these old memorials—they seem to have just disappeared like many of the ancient tombstones.

The Buggin Memorial

This can be found near the pathway below the east window of the church. This has a most interesting epitaph to the memory of Anthony and Elizabeth Buggin and some of their children. They were married in 1628—she being the daughter of Robert Martin of Evesham, and lived in wedlock for fifty-three years.

The Church Plate

Apart from a fine Elizabethan chalice which is kept in the Vicarage, the church plate is fairly modern and consists of a chalice (c.1750) and a silver flagon and paten (c.1849).

The Clock

This, too, is fairly modern and was erected by public subscription in 1887 at a cost of £80. The works are said to be those which had previously been in the Town Hall clock, Evesham.

The Bells

The first peal was believed to consist of five bells cast by the Bagleys, a family of bellfounders of Chacombe, Northants. A member of this family (Matthew) left Chacombe and started a foundry at Merstow Green, Evesham, in 1686.

Details of the present peal are as follows: Treble and Second were cast by Taylor & Sons, Loughborough, in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Third bears the date 1732, the Fourth and Fifth are dated 1701 and were cast by Wm. Clark, of Evesham. The tenor bell is by J. Rudhall and is dated 1830.

The Vicarage

In 1802, according to the records of Christ Church, Oxford, the Vicarage consisted of three rooms on the ground floor and two on the first—"all with sashes." There were also garrets, a kitchen, a brewhouse, cellar, coal house and stable. In 1849 considerable additions were made to the Vicarage at an estimated cost of £422 11s. 8d., the builder being Solomon Hunt.

The Church Registers

With the kind permission of the Revd. A. T. Bartlett, the present Vicar, I have been able to make a careful examination of the church registers, and was delighted to find them in such a good state of preservation and so well cared for. A note on the metal container for the old registers indicates that the 16th century paper and parchment volumes were rebound and repaired at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, some years ago.

The earliest register is of paper, watermarked a flagon, bound in a cover of flexible parchment. The heading runs:—

“Hereafter followe the names of suche p’sonnes that have been christened within the parishe of Offenham since the IXth day of Novembre for the XXXth yere of the reigne of our Sovereigne Lord King Henrye the viiith, at which tyme his Graces injunctions were directed unto us. A’o D’m 1538.”

The parchment copy of the above, made compulsory in the time of Elizabeth I, also exists and contains all entries between 1538 and 1720. The third ancient register is, like the first, of paper and includes the burials and baptisms for the years 1724 to 1812 and marriages to 1753. The fourth volume contains marriages only from 1754 to 1777 and the fifth volume the remaining marriages to 1812. These are followed by the modern and current registers.

Although the registers are in exceptionally fine condition there are few items in them worthy of special comment, but one is struck by the recurrence of such well-known Offenham names as Aldington (from 1572), Spragge (from 1576), Warner (from 1582), Harrys (1580), Gibbes (1594), and Moore (1625).

There is a note opposite an entry for the year 1650 in the register of baptisms which should, perhaps, be mentioned. It reads “formerlie forgotten by reason of ye warres.” One can conclude from this that the then vicar had his registers well hidden to avoid possible destruction by Cromwell’s men.

The following curious entry appears in the burials for 1771 and can be assigned to early experiments to prevent the spread of the dreaded smallpox:—

“In the year 1771, one hundred persons were inoculated in this Parish for the smallpox, out of which only six died marked XX on the opposite page. Twelve people had the disorder in the natural way, out of which number six died marked thus X on the other side. — R. Burgis.”

Offenham’s Connection with Christ Church, Oxford

The Cathedral Church of Christ in Oxford was founded by King Henry VIII in 1546, and, following the dissolution of the Abbey at Evesham, received from the Crown tithes of corn, sheaf grain, wool and lamb and the presentation to the living of Offenham. As far as I have been able to ascertain, no land was given beyond the site of a barn—presumably the tithe barn.

Contrary to common belief, I find that it was not until 1868 that the college bought land in Offenham. In that year 188 a. 15 r. and 12 p. was bought for £13,770, and some small additional purchases have taken place since.

The following quotations from the College's "Book of Evidences," c.1674, may be of interest. Speaking of the livings of Hampton, the Littletons, Badsey, Aldington, Wickhamford and Offenham it quotes: "All the said Parishes are an exempt Jurisdiction, lately belonging to the Abbey of Evesham where the Bishop and A.deacon of Worc: have Nothing to do: Onely the Bp may visite there every third year; which the Bp hath had but of late years since the disoluccon of the sd Abbey." It is also recorded that at that time there were 13 ploughs in the parish and "100 housling people."

The rectory was leased to Sir Phillip Hobby on 31 Jan 36 Hen. viii for 60 years, and a reversionary lease for a further 50 years was granted on 17 Aug. 10 Eliz. to Elizabeth Hobby, sole executrix of Sir Thomas who was himself executor of Sir Phillip, and to Posthumous Hobby. The estate then passed to the royalist Earl of Worcester and was sequestered at the end of the Civil War, but restored to the Earl in 1660. The Marquis of Worcester, as he was then, sold his lease to a certain Canning, who had held it during the interregnum. Descendants of this Canning still reside in Offenham. Adam Piggot bought it from Canning some time before 1672, in which year Richard Canning brought a Chancery suit against him for possession.

Since the estate of Christ Church in Offenham was in the form of tithes, these frequently had to be surveyed and the changing value of the estate is quite remarkable.

In 1679 the tithes were valued at £46. In 1772 they appear to have been worth £140; in 1798 £176. By 1815 they had risen to £307 2s. 6d., but had fallen by 1826 to £245 14s. In 1839 they were up to £300 5s., and in 1841 were finally commuted for £330.

The College records for 1772 show the following cultivations with commodities titheable to the rectors:—

Enclosed arable	...	498a.	1r.	13p.
Enclosed pasture	...	123a.	1r.	2p.

In 1798 another surveyor noted that Offenham was entirely enclosed, and was cropped half with corn and half with grass, seeds, turnips and fallow. The parish then contained 1,000 acres, of which 250 were tithe free.

In 1826, the totals in cultivation were:—

Wheat	...	...	163a.	0r.	0p.
Barley	...	...	112a.	0r.	0p.
Oats	...	...	1a.	2r.	0p.
Beans	...	...	21a.	1r.	0p.
Peas	...	...	18a.	0r.	0p.
Rye	...	...	1a.	0r.	0p.

In 1839 the acreage of the parish was 1,176a. 15r. 23p., of which 789a. 1r. 39p. was arable, and 199a. 0r. and 36 p. meadow and pasture. After the commutation, of course, valuations became unnecessary and were discontinued.

CHAPTER V

Places of Special Interest in Offenham

The Maypole

THE Maypole at the bottom of the main street of Offenham is regarded by all Offenham folk with considerable pride.

This is well justified, as I believe there are now only five of these permanent village Maypoles still standing in England. The origin of the Maypole is obscure but is believed by many to have some connection with the ancient worship of fertility. They are known to have existed in Medieval times and it is known that in the middle 17th century many maypoles were destroyed by the Puritans, possibly on account of their heathen origin but more likely because the village maypole was often the scene of much fun and games on the Sabbath.

The present pole at Offenham was erected about 100 years ago to replace the older one which was blown down in a gale, and is 55 feet high. The cost of maintaining the Maypole has always been borne by the village "Wake" Committee, who regularly lower the Maypole for repainting and reguilding the weathercock.

The late Mr. G. M. Stratton in 1908 wrote, in his reminiscences of 50 years earlier: "The pole was garlanded each year with may and flowers around which the village lads and lasses made merry upon the first of May."

Just opposite the Maypole on the west of the village street will be found two cottages in the true Cotswold style. These were formerly one house which was an inn and bore the sign "The Maypole Inn." No doubt its close proximity to the Maypole did much, at times, to enliven the dancers, who were known to continue into the early hours.

Many of the older inhabitants recall the days when fiddle, bassoon and viol were played on the green which used to surround the Maypole. This green gradually diminished and I think the last bit of grass was removed about 1938 to make it easier for motor buses to turn. Before leaving the Maypole I cannot resist mentioning the Birmingham lady who, coming to Offenham for the first time, was much taken aback in finding that the Maypole was not the village grocery.

Faulk Mill

This is located on the Badsey brook about 500 yards along the road leading from The Laurels in the direction of Evesham. Unfortunately there is little left of this ancient Mill, there remaining only a few mill stones. Faulk Mill is mentioned in some of the very early Abbey documents and was probably the "Folk Mill" where the people took their corn to be ground.

In a document of 1591, which has been transcribed by the late Mr. E. A. B. Barnard, M.A., F.S.A., it appears as "ffowlke mylne." It is a great pity that this fine old link with the past was allowed to decay, but I have been fortunate in acquiring a photograph of it taken in 1870 and which I shall hope to reproduce here.

Dead Man's Ait

This ait (or island) will be seen opposite and a little to the north of the Bridge Inn and Ferry. Many skeletons of men and horses and pieces of armour are said to have been dug up there and appear to be grim relics of those who, apparently without success, tried to escape after the Battle of Evesham in 1265. It is in the parish of Norton and Lenchwick.

The Village Pound

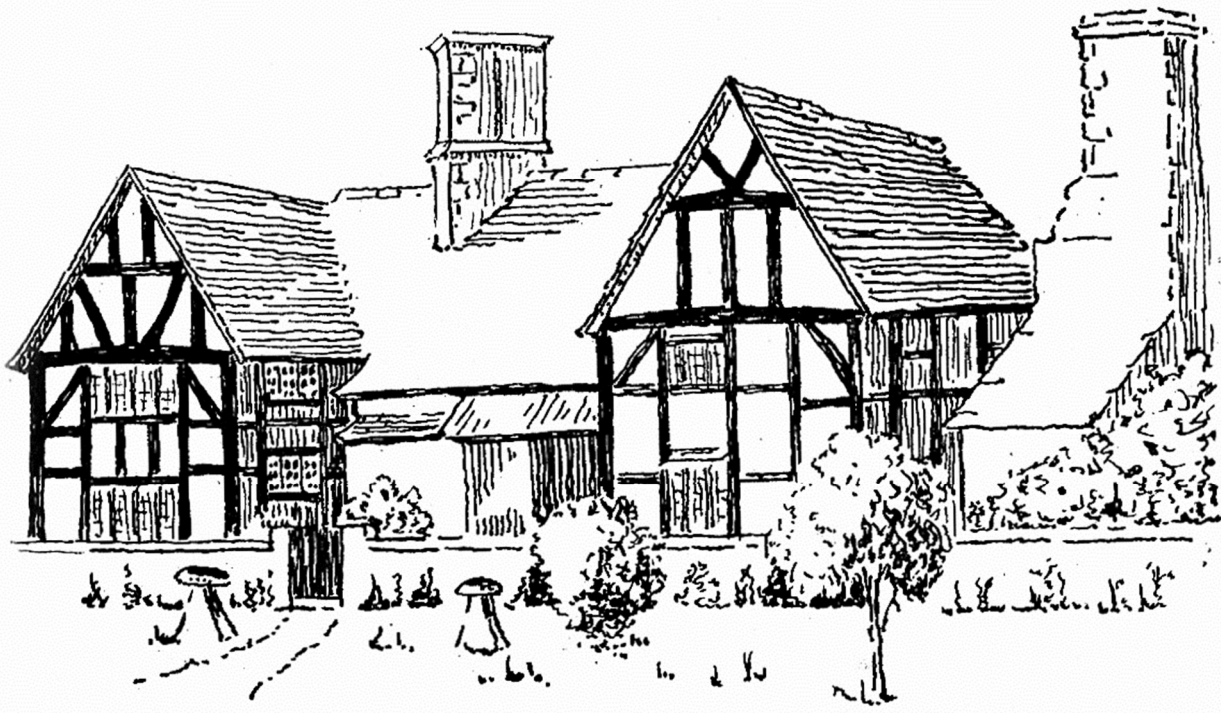
This will be found near the building known as the Reading Room and immediately behind the house known as "Ivydene." Here stray animals were put until they were claimed and a fine paid to the pinder. This gentleman also carried out the duties of "Dog Whipper" on Sundays, it being his business to keep the dogs brought into the church by the worshippers quiet during services.

The Old Manor

This early Tudor, half-timbered house, was rebuilt by Abbot Clement Lichfield on the site of the residence of the former Abbots of Evesham. John Leland, the famous Tudor traveller and antiquarian, in his "Itinerary" compiled between 1534 and 1543 wrote, after making reference to the building by Abbot Clement of the Bell Tower at Evesham, "This Abbot builded his Mannour at Uffenham." The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings confirm that the timber framing marks are of this period. It is also recorded that he built a costly barn and dovecot. This half-timbered dovecot collapsed about 25 years ago and at about the same time the barn, which was of exceptional beauty, was purchased by the late Sir Philip Stott and re-erected at his Stanton Court property, where it still stands bearing a plaque recording its removal from Offenham.

The Abbot's house at Offenham was first consecrated in 1358 by the Venerable Father Richard, Archbishop of Nazarus, and the following extract from the Harlean Manuscripts (3763 fol. 115) is of interest. It reads as follows:—

"Memorandum. That on the 9th of the kalends of October 1358, the venerable father Richard, Archbishop of Nazarus, consecrated the upper altar in the Manor House at Offenham to the honour of St. Mary the glorious Virgin, St. John the Apostle, St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Michael the Archangel, St. John Baptist, St. Anne, St. Margaret and St. Martha.



The Manor House
An artist's impression of the restored Manor House



The Manor House prior to its restoration

“The aforesaid Father, consecrated also on the 8th of the Kalends of October the lower Altar which is under the Abbots Chamber in the same Manor House to the honour of the Saints, Martin, Benedict, Christopher, George, Leonard, Mary Magdalene, Katherine, Apolonia and Winefrid.”

The east wall of the houseplace contains the cross on which a representation of the Holy Figure once hung. Above this room is the bedchamber in which Abbot Clement is believed to have died in October 1546. The house contains a number of stout old wooden bolts and some very interesting ecclesiastical carving.

Offenham Court

This stands on the site of the ancient Court House of the Manor of Offenham and formed part of the Abbey possessions. The present house is built largely from materials of the former house. It was here that the Manorial Courts and general administrative work of the Manor was carried out. The administration of the court was in the hands of a steward, who was usually one of the Evesham lawyers.

The Court House was at one time the home of members of the Hazelwood family, who were Lords of the Manor of Bengeworth, and whose arms can still be seen beautifully represented over the principal fireplace.

The Priory

This charming late seventeenth century residence lies immediately north of the Maypole—additions were made to it at the rear and in an inferior taste to the front of the residence. This house is built on former Abbey property and possibly replaced an earlier house which was the house occupied by the Priors of Evesham Abbey.

The Bridge Inn

I have previously mentioned that the bridge over the Avon was probably destroyed in the latter part of the seventeenth century and I think it would be a fair guess that there was an inn near the spot well before that time. It would not have been called the Bridge Inn, I think, if there had been no bridge there. There is definite evidence that an inn stood on the site of the present Bridge Inn in 1768. Soon after the battle of Waterloo, there was a very popular tendency to rename streets, buildings and places after Waterloo. It seems, from the title deeds of the present Bridge Inn, details of which have been kindly supplied to me by the Brewery Company, that the inn was renamed The Waterloo Tavern. This continued to be the name of the inn for at least 50 years, but eventually the old name was reverted to. It is now known to almost everyone in the village as “The Boat.”

Although the village has an off-licence and a licensed British Legion Club, the Bridge Inn remains the only inn in the village, the Fish & Anchor Inn being, of course, in the Parish of North and Middle Littleton.

The village has many interesting houses but space will not permit of my giving detailed descriptions. I feel I should, however, refer to that beautiful late sixteenth century house in the main street now used as a shop and off-licence with its carved bargeboards and well preserved timbers. The house opposite, known as "The Hollies," is believed to have been at one time the Vicarage. The village street, which comes to an end at the maypole, is very wide and is remarkable for its picturesque thatched cottages, seven of which are under one huge thatch.

The Schools

The oldest school in Offenham I have been able to trace was at the thatched cottage on the west of the main street and now known as Greystones. This was succeeded by the small parochial school at the apex of the two lanes leading down to the Bridge Inn.

As the population of the village increased, and education became compulsory, this tiny school became inadequate and the Parish erected a new Church School with a master's residence in 1873. A further school was erected by the County Council in 1905 in rear of the Church School.

The Abbot's Wine Press

This huge stone wine press can be seen in buildings below the thatched cottages in Court Lane and is still practically intact.

Conclusion

As I close this my short History of the Parish of Offenham, written during the Coronation Year of our most Gracious Queen Elizabeth II, I find the people of the village busily preparing their Coronation arrangements. Some say they would like to return to the "good old days," but as I survey the present-day scene I feel sure it is the case that the people of Offenham enjoy a greater prosperity than ever before. Once again the ordinary people have a stake in the land and, provided they cultivate their holdings in a reasonable manner, they cannot be disturbed by any landlord or authority. This is indeed a very happy state of affairs and one which I sincerely hope will long continue.

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