

A SHORT HISTORY OF WHITCHURCH, BUCKS

by Maurice Foulger

Our village of Whitchurch abounds with historic associations; the castle of the De Bolebecs has long since disappeared, but the site Castle Hill (or Moat Hill) still remains, with the spring "Fair Alice", Lords Garden to the East and the Parks to the South and West of the mound. There is evidence that Romans resided in the area, for a coin minted in the reign of Tacitus Marcus Claudius, Emperor of Rome AD275, was discovered in Whitchurch in 1891. A Saxon church was built about the year 1000 and had a circular tower; as this was the only church in the district built of stone, it is supposed that is how White Church or Whitchurch Parish got its name.

The Normans under William the Conqueror did a survey of the whole country in 1100, recorded in the Domesday Book, and the reference to Whitchurch Parish can be seen on the Parish Notice Board.

Bolebec Castle was built about this time - a model of what the castle could have looked like can be seen in the Methodist Hall. The castle itself was destroyed by Cromwell's army in 1657 after the Civil War; many of the stones were recycled to build nearby cottages, and some were used to do repair work on the Parish Church.

During the Civil War, Whitchurch at one time was on the dividing line between the King's army and Cromwell's army. In 1645, King Charles marched from Wing to Oxford and could have passed through Whitchurch; it is possible that horses of the Parliamentary army were stabled in the Parish Church about that time.

In 1771 when the Enclosure Act was passed, all of the many "strips" of land, half acre each, that were individually owned were enclosed to make three divisions; Dunmill was land to the South of the village and reaching Hardwick, Upper Field being land to the North West out to Oving and East to the road to Winslow, other land to the East to Aston Abbots being Bushmead Field. A map of Whitchurch prior to the Enclosure Act can be seen in the County Records Office in Aylesbury; on this map are marked houses in the High Street opposite the Methodist Church - these were known as Rotten Row, and were demolished in 1786 to widen the road. Wesleyan Methodism was introduced to the village about this time and services were held in a cottage in Castle Lane.

The population of Whitchurch in the early 1800's was 646 living in 97 houses. In 1811 an association called "The Whitchurch Association" was formed for the protection of people and property in this and neighbouring parishes not less than 5 miles from the "Cock Inn", Whitchurch. About 5 years later, a regular stagecoach came through Whitchurch three times a week, Holborn Bridge at 8 a.m. and a wagon at 4 p.m. twice a week for Snowhill.

Boring for coal near to Dunn Mill started in 1826, but the scheme was abandoned through lack of money, and at about the same time, land between Castle Mound and Market Hill was lowered to link up with Weir Lane and the stones were used to repair Bushmead Road.

John Westcar of Creslow fell from his horse and died in Creslow Great Ground (365 acres); there is a tablet in the Parish Church to his memory, and he left £500 to be invested for the benefit of the poor.

At the coronation of Queen Victoria, the whole country observed a holiday. In Whitchurch, meat was distributed to the poor of the parish and sports took place on land opposite the "Cock Inn" (Winster Paddocks).

About this time, silk manufacture started in houses in the village; looms were set up by Messrs Moscop and Nixon and the industry continued until the early 1900's - mulberry trees at St Osyth on Market Hill and the Vicarage garden could have helped to supply food for the silkworms.

In 1844 the present Methodist Chapel was built, and in 1845 the Vicarage was built by the Vicar Rev A Turner. Village population then was 930. On 1st January, the first Day School was established in the village, mainly by the efforts of Richard Darley. The room below the Methodist Church was the first classroom, but three years later land in White Horse Lane was given by Mrs Rhodes for the building of a Day School. This land was formerly the upper farmyard of Bolebec Castle Farm.

Some alterations were made at this time to the interior of the Parish Church; some pews that were removed had projected out into the chancel so far that bridal processions had to proceed in single file from the nave to the altar. A

few years later a stained glass window was placed in the Parish Church to the memory of Mr and Mrs John Tattam, who left money to provide coal for the poor of the village.

By 1864, the vicar Rev A Turner had for the past four years collected money to build a National Day School, about £1,400, with which he bought land and built a school (now the Legion Hall). In 1885 a Telegraph Office was opened at the Whitchurch Post Office.

At the Jubilee celebrations of the reign of Queen Victoria in 1887, the Church bells were rung at 6 a.m., sports took place in Vicarage Close, with a free tea for all people in the Parish, and the following day, there was a bonfire on Castle Mound. As a memento, a minute hand was placed on the face of the Church clock. The Jubilee Lodge of the Oddfellows was formed at this time.

In 1889, the foundation stone of the Primitive Methodist Chapel was laid, and Mr Joseph Holloway gave his two lectures on "History of Whitchurch" in the Wesleyan Day School. The population at this time was 709.

On 2nd August 1893, the first omnibus service from Whitchurch to Aylesbury started to run twice daily to make connections with the Metropolitan Railway service.

Since 1245, when Whitchurch was granted an Annual Feast to be associated with St John the Evangelist, the patron saint of the Parish Church, a fair and stalls had been set up in the High Street. This ancient custom ceased in 1894 and was not revived until 1979 by general support of the villagers after a very successful village celebration of Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee. This resulted in the formation of the Whitchurch & Creslow Community Association, which is now 17 years of age. The first Parish Council in Whitchurch was elected in 1894; there were 16 parishioners keen to serve, but only 7 could be elected.

The first motor car came through the village just 100 years ago in 1896 - it was with a visiting circus. The next year, the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria was celebrated with a church service conducted by the Vicar, Rev G Tate Medd; a peal from the church bells and music by the village band contributed too, and there was a free tea for all residents. A stone cross was placed on the entrance to the Parish Church, a lime tree planted outside "The Firs", and three permanent seats were erected in the village. Population at this time was 619 with 151 inhabited houses.

At the cessation of the South Africa War in 1902, the seven soldiers from the village were presented with watches and chains. The village had a visit by the new King Edward VII when the Staghounds met at Beechmoor in 1905 - at that time the King was staying at Mentmore Towers. In the following autumn, Army manoeuvres took place in and around Whitchurch and a public telephone call office was opened at the Post Office in 1906. With the formation of a Nursing Association, a nurse was employed to work in the villages of Whitchurch, Oving and Pitchcott. The Rev Hugh Wood MA was installed as Vicar in 1908.

By 1910, it was found necessary to erect notices in the High Street to warn motorists of dangerous corners, especially at the Oving Road and High Street junction. This was carried out by the new Parish Council. At their first meeting, a new Councillor, Mr W Young recommended that "every effort should be made to obtain a recreation ground for the village". (87 years of trying has not obtained one yet.)

The coronation of King George V and Queen Mary called for more celebrations, with tea and sports for all, and each child had a souvenir medal. A new clock costing £60 was purchased to place in the church tower.

A Scout Troop of 2 patrols was formed in the village in 1912.

"The Chronicles of Whitchurch" produced by Mr George Wilson was on sale to help raise money for the Parish Church Restoration Fund (much of the information in this report comes from this book - thank you, Mr Wilson). The Aylesbury Rural District Council was considering two sites in the village for sewerage sites; two years later the Parish Council had estimates that would put 2s.6d. on the rates.

War with Germany was declared in 1914, and the villagers met to consider how they could help to supply comforts and garments for the Forces. This village organisation worked all through the war and 8,579 articles were produced and sent to the members of the Forces. The year after the Armistice, there was a reception at the Vicarage for all who served in the Forces. A war memorial commemorating the 15 gallant men who gave their lives in the War was unveiled in the Parish Church in 1921.

The Aylesbury Motor Bus Company started services between Whitchurch and Aylesbury in 1920, to run on

Wednesdays and Saturdays, with two journeys each day.

Whitchurch started a football team in 1921 and in 1924 a new cricket ground was prepared in the field (now Ashgrove Gardens) owned by Mr G Wheeler - there had been a team as early as 1904.

Dr MacFarlane, who had been the local doctor serving 12 other parishes, retired in 1925 after 30 years service.

There were more traffic problems in 1927 when the Parish Council requested alterations at the Oving Road/Winslow Road junction. (In 1996 a roundabout was constructed, almost 70 years later.) The Whitchurch Folk Dance Group came third in a Dance Festival at High Wycombe. On 13th June that year, the Queen passed through the village and at 11.30 the children stood to wave as she passed by to visit Stowe. Later in the year, the new Methodist Hall kitchen and Sunday School were dedicated.

The Whitchurch and District branch of the British Legion was formed in 1929. Later that year the Aylesbury Borough Council decided to create an electricity supply to the villages, Whitchurch being one of them. In October that year, the Wesleyan Day School was taken over by the Bucks Education Committee, and was now a Council school.

In 1931, further alterations were made to the road junction at Oving Road and Winslow Road. From 1932 onwards, postmen cycled from Aylesbury to deliver and collect mail.

With great unemployment in 1933, the Parish Council met to consider how they might help. Major Abrahams offered to finance work to improve the road drainage in the village and carry out work on his estate at "The Firs". Population at this time was 570.

Unemployment was bad throughout the country, and a collection of clothing, etc, was made in the village by the Wesley Guild and parcels sent to the Sunderland Mission for distribution.

In 1934, Public Health were concerned about the lack of water in the wells serving the council houses. A water diviner was employed to find a supply of water - he was successful.

In August, the Women's Institute put on a historical pageant "Isobel of Bolebec", written by Mr Cecil Wall and based on life on the Bolebec estate. At last this year the sewage scheme was almost complete, with only the link-up to the houses to be done.

Silver Jubilee celebrations included the carrying of a message to the King by teams of Girl Guides. The message arrived in Whitchurch at 1.35 p.m. for the girls to take to Wing by 2.30 p.m.

In July 1935, the Rural District Council proposed a scheme to supply water to all villages, 25 parishes altogether. Later in the year, the fear of an outbreak of war made the County form an Air Raid Precaution County Committee.

King George V died on 20th January 1936 and a memorial service took place in the Parish Church. Over 150 people attended, and the Vicar Rev Hugh Wood preached on the text "All the people took notice for he pleased them" - he associated these words with the life of the king. Coronation celebrations took place on 14th May 1937, and one of the features of our village celebration was the competition for the best decorated house. The firework display took place a week later because of inclement weather.

In 1938 the number of children in the village school was at an all time low - only 44. There was a possibility that one teacher would have to leave.

A wrought iron gate was made by the local blacksmith, Mr Arthur White, to be placed at the entrance from the High Street of "Hemp Plat", the short cut to the Parish Church, to commemorate the Coronation.

Air Raid Precautions decreed that fit men over 30 years of age were required as wardens, firemen, first aiders and rescue men. Civilian respirators were delivered at ARP Headquarters in Aylesbury for local Air Raid Wardens to distribute in the villages and demonstrate how to use them. On 2nd September 1939 the first evacuees arrived in Whitchurch from Ealing, London.

On 3rd September 1939 war was declared on Germany. During the war years, Whitchurch raised £33,960 for the War Effort.

