

A short history  
of our village

# CHEARSLEY



Dennis Lane

*With Best Wishes  
Dennis*

# ***Chearsley***

**A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR VILLAGE**

**DENNIS LANE**

All profits from the sale of this booklet will be shared between the Church of St. Nicholas and the Village Hall.

First Published 1977

© Dennis Lane 1977

Printed by The Anchor Press  
Church Road, Tiptree, Essex.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	Chearsley from the beginning	pp 5
CHAPTER 2	The Church of St. Nicholas	pp 9
CHAPTER 3	Historical Chearsley	pp 12
CHAPTER 4	A Walk about old Chearsley	pp 31

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am grateful to those who have loaned the old prints of the village which are included in this booklet which help to give us a visual glimpse of the past. I also wish to thank Miss Daisy Tomes (our oldest inhabitant) and others who have supplied me with local colour and reminiscences. My thanks also to Mrs. Braley for typing the manuscript and to others for their help in many ways which has made publication possible.

D.L

## CHAPTER 1

### CHEARSLEY FROM THE BEGINNING

The village of Chearsley is situated 7 miles S.W. of Aylesbury and 4 miles N.E. of Thame, and is built mainly on the southern slopes of a small hill approximately 410 feet above sea level. It is surrounded to the North by Chilton, Ashendon and Nether Winchenden; to the East by Nether Winchenden and Cuddington; to the South by Cuddington and Haddenham, and to the West by Long Crendon and Chilton. The River Thame flows from East to West having risen in the Cheddington area and joining the Thames at Dorchester.

The name of Chearsley has progressed through the centuries

CERDICESLEAH	527
COERED	845
CERDESLAI	1086
CERLESLAI	11th Century
CHERDESLE	1204
CHARDESLYE	1296
CHARDESLE VALANCE	1359
CHARDISLEE MOLYNS	15th Century
CHARESLY	1526
CHERDESLEY	) 17th —
CHERSLEY	) 19th Century

The similarity between the two names of the 11th Century may have been caused by a different interpretation of the same word. Very few people could write at all in those times, and history was generally transmitted by word of mouth and then written down by a scribe. The voice of maybe two persons would perhaps interpret the same word by different sounds and even may have spoken in a different dialect, thereby confusing the scribe.

Lea or Lai, or Ley, means a clearing or an open space in a forest, or land cleared of forest.

It has been supposed the Cerdeseleah mentioned in the Saxon Chronicle (where Cerdic and Cynric defeated the Britons) refers to Chearsley. It is remarked that the memory of Cerdic, who subdued this part of the country, and included it in Mercia, is partly confined in Chersey where "in a sharpe and bloody battle he was victor over the Britaines".

Chearsley was originally a Chapelry to Crendon and was included by Walter Gifford, Earl of Buckingham and the Countess Ermengard in their endowment of Nutley (Notley) Abbey. It was given for the sustenance of the monks and is mentioned in a confirmation charter of King John. In the reign of Henry III the Abbot of Nutley held one vingate of land here of the fee of Richard le Knight under the honour of Wallingford. In the taxation of Pope Nicholas IV (about 1291) the hold in rents and services by bondsmen in Chearsley was eleven shillings per annum.

The parish has varied in size from between 917 and 1100 acres over the centuries, but at the time of the Enclosure, 917 acres were in fact enclosed. The Lord of the Manor at that time, Sir Clement Cottrell Dormer accepted an allotment in lieu of his wasted glebe and the ancient custom of keeping a boar and a bull was abolished. The Lords of the Manor retained rights in Chearsley as late as 1739. During the period 1254-1595 they held free warren, return of writs, goods and chattels, felons and fugitives and other privileges.

Sir Charles Cottrell Dormer (1745) also held Long Crendon Manor and left Chearsley Manor to his son in 1805, who "dealt" with the village until his death in 1822. It then passed to a Captain Wyndham, who was still Lord in 1864. In 1865 the property passed to Mr. Richard Roadnight who was at that time principal landowner of the parish. After his death his executors held Manor Farm.

We now have copies of a facsimile of the Domesday Book (1086), which relate to this parish.



In Cerdeslai ten' Ricard' de melone. i. hōd 7 dim.  
 Tra. ē. i. car. 7 ibi. ē. cū uno uillo 7 i. bord'. Sbi. ii. serui.  
 p'ci. i. car. Val' 7 ualut' sep' xx ii. sol'. hanc q'ā  
 tenuit Alden bō heraldi. 7 uendē potuit.

The translation of this is:

In Cerdeslai Richard holds of Melonis 1½ Ledes. There is land for 1 plough and this is there for 1 villein and 1 bordar. There are 2 serfs and meadows (sufficient) for 1 plough (team). It is and was worth and after (Valuit Semper) 22 shillings. This land, Alden, as man of Earl Harrold held and could sell.

In Cerdeslai ten' Ernulf 7 Goisfrid' de Watgro  
 viii. hōd 7 dim. Tra. ē. vi. car. In dñio. iii. car. 7 vi.  
 uilli cū. ii. bord' hñt. ii. car. Sbi. iii. serui. p'ci. vi. car.  
 Val' 7 ualut'. vi. lib. T. k. l. vii. lib. hoc m' tenuer. vi.  
 reigñ. 7 uendē potuer' cu uoluer'.

The translation of this is:

In Cerdeslai, Ernulf and Geoffrey hold on Walter 8½ hides (1 hide is 60–100 acres). There is land for 6 ploughs. On the demesne are 4 ploughs and 6 villeins with 2 bordars, have 2 ploughs. There are 4 serfs and meadow (sufficient) for 6 plough teams. It is and was worth £6. This manor 6 thegns (superior Lords) held and could sell to whom they wished.

It may sound unusual but a fishery existed in the River Thame for about 1¾ miles and produced an abundance of eels, pike, roach, dace and gudgeon. In 1254–5 Hugh-de-Crecy claimed a common fishery in the waters of Chearsley against John-de-Columbors; the latter giving up his claims, receiving in return from Hugh, certain fishing rights. Apparently in 1356–59 the Prior of Rochester, holding the Manor of Haddenham, complained that the free-fishing in the Thame was greatly interfered with by five weirs which Sir John-de Molyns had raised. The sherrif having made a survey caused the weirs to be thrown down.

In 1363 Sir William-de-Molyns brought a suit for trespass in his fishery against the Abbot of Nutley (Notley). Free fishery was held by subsequent lords until 1627 or later.

Flooding of the water meadows is nothing new, as a description of the area during the 17th century shows:

"It appears that the meadows lying near the river and other brooks, being frequently 'flotten and utterley spoiled', and being exceedingly fruitful, mellow and tender, were so overstocked with cattle that many rotted. The Manor lay in open fields and was a 'champion place', with a very fertile and fruitful soil which was oftentimes hurtful and very casual for sheep, but excellent for other animals, although there was no convenient cow-pasture, save among the corn and grain, which by reason thereof is much spoiled".

A windmill is stated to have been in existence in 1255 and a deed of 1822 mentions 2 windmills and 2 watermills.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS

The Church of St. Nicholas the oldest building in the village consists of a chancel measuring internally 20'6" x 14', North vestry, nave 44'6" x 18'6", West tower 12' x 11' and South porch; the last being built of brick whilst the other parts are of stone rubble roofed with tiles.

The nave dates from about 1300, the tower from the early part of the 15th Century and the chancel, which was probably erected at the same time as the nave, was rebuilt about 1480, when it seems to have been widened towards the North. The porch and vestry are modern.

The chancel is lighted from the South by two late 15th Century windows of two lights under square heads and on the North are two similar windows but the westernmost has been blocked in. The East window is modern.

A pointed doorway with moulded jambs in the North wall and a similar one in the South wall, both probably dating from the end of the 13th Century, have been reset in the walls. The chancel arch, which is of the same period, has also been rebuilt and now centres neither with the chancel nor the nave.

In the South wall is a piscina with a sexfoil bowl. The timber roof dates from the late 15th Century but has been restored.

The North and South doorways of the nave which have pointed heads and moulded jambs and a lancet window in each of the North and South walls, are all probably original. In each side wall there are also a modern window and a 15th Century window of three lights under a square head, while at the south-east is a two-light window of about 1600, near the square head of which, a head corbel has been re-set in the wall. The North doorway has been partly blocked and the upper part glazed.

The pointed tower arch on the West appears to have been rebuilt about 1480.

The nave has a fine timber roof with curved braces and foliated struts, which probably date from the late 14th Century; it appears to have been somewhat altered about 1500 and has been repaired more recently. The original pitch can be traced on the tower wall.

The tower is of two stages with a stair turret at the south-east, rising above the embattled parapet. The West window of two cinquefoiled lights with tracery in a pointed head, is original and retains in its head some fragments of painted glass. In each wall of the bell chamber is a window of similar character, also original.

In the chancel is a brass with the inscription, "Her lyth John Frankeleyn and Margarete hys wyff which ordained ( ) Stowe to the chyrch and divine service to be doone every day in the (YE)R A<sup>o</sup> MCCCCLXII on whose soules God have mercy. Amen".

Above the inscriptions are their figures and below are groups of three sons and four daughters. (There is also a Frankeleyn brass in Crendon church and this family perhaps formed Notley Abbey before the monks came.)

The font has an early 13th Century circular bowl with a cable mould round the rim and a band of foliated ornament. It stands upon a late octagonal stem and moulded base.

In the church yard is the octagonal base and part of the stem of a medieval churchyard cross.

There is a ring of three bells in the tower, the first inscribed, "SANCTE, PAULE, ORA. PRO. NOBIS W.H", is of about 1500 by William Hazylwood of Reading. The second is by Thomas Lester of London 1741 and the third by Henry Knight 1616. There is also a sanctus but with no inscription.

The communion plate consists of a silver cup of 1569 with a cover, a modern silver paten and a modern plated flagon.

The register begins in 1570. The first curate mentioned is Michael Brightwell (1483).

The remains of the frescoe over the partially blocked doorway by the font (showing St. Christopher carrying the child Jesus) are 14th Century. Elsewhere are early 17th Century borders and on the North wall the arms of George II (1727-60). These were all discovered accidentally during redecorations in 1935.

In the Charity returns made in the reign of Edward VI it states that the annual rent of 12d. for a rood of land in Chearsley was for the maintenance of a lamp in the church. This land lying to the west of the parish was granted to John Howe and John Broxholme in 1549.

It seems that around this time churches generally were poorly endowed and several, which had been completely appropriated by religious houses, had no vicarage ordained and were left without any regular endowment especially those churches which had once belonged to Notley Abbey (six up to 1652, at least).

John of Chearsley was Abbott of Nutley in 1379 (died 1389).

Chearsley Church is one of only two in the country where you go *down* to the chancel and not *up*. Church land in the parish amounts to approximately five acres, which is let for allotment and agricultural purposes.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORICAL CHEARSLEY

Here we will describe items of general interest ranging through the past 1000 years.

Remains of a moat exist in the field below the Church but I can find no evidence to support the theory that this general area was once the centre of life in early days and that the life hereabout was wiped out by the "Black Death", as reported in paragraph 23 of the conservation plan of the village. Although water was of great importance to the early communities, I think that due to the number of oxen that were kept exclusively for ploughing, (one team was 10 or 12 oxen) and as recorded in the "Domesday Book", 'enough meadow for 7 teams existed', a fair acreage would be required for their keep alone — and this together with land for the oxen to plough would leave very little land for a settlement. Added to this, flooding was also a problem even in early days, so I would suggest that the community lived higher up the slope, where in fact the older part of the village is to be found today.

Therefore the remains of the moat are more likely to have been to protect the Church, as a ford existed just to the left of the river footbridge and who knows how many villains may have wanted to cross!

Toward the end of Chapter 2 is a reference to a piece of land rented out for the purpose of maintaining a lamp in the Church. This piece of land is very likely to be the small field described now. If one walks down to the footbridge over the River Thame, one can see a row of trees and bushes to the immediate right and this was the boundary of a very small field, approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an acre, which was rented at the turn of the century by a Mr. Gregory and I can see no other reason for such a small field to exist where the general pattern is for quite large fields.

Field names are quite common in all village history and these have been used for centuries. I know quite a number by name but undoubtedly not as many as some older inhabitants



may know. However, on going through various records, I came across one in particular, named in the 17th Century; the extract is as follows:

"Messuage (dwelling house with lands attached) with four and a half yardlands of arable meadow and pasture called COLUMBORS in occupation of Thomas Herne the Younger (1664) 7 acres of meadow called NORTH BERTAM meadow (1678) and schedule of lands in BERRY, MIDDLE and MOOR fields."

The name of the field in question is MOOR field and this is still the name of the field directly below the large arable field farmed by Mr. Gibson towards the river.

A few other field names are mentioned in 1825, some of which are very quaint. Dennis Meadow, Dennis Furze, Washermans Hill, Ramel-han Mead, Sandy Furlong, Allicum Piece, Sperris Lants, Furzy Meadow, Chitterling Piece, Wash Brook and Turks Hill. The first two mentioned are by the railway bridge on the Chilton Road, left hand side somewhere opposite the farm buildings. This bridge is named "Dennis Bridge".

Given below are extracts from various books,

1. In 1598 Chearsley was assessed to the provision money of Queen Elizabeth I household at £1. 6. 10. per annum.

2. Chearsley appears to have been a poor parish as records show that "expenses", "parish relief" to the poor were as follows:

1776	£49. 0. 6.
1783	£24. 8. 0.
1813	£464. 0. 0.
1815	£50. 0. 0.
1822	£235. 17. 0.
1824	£248. 0. 0.

The years 1813-1822-1824 seem to have been "bad" years for the parish and suggest extreme hardship for the villagers.

3. Charles Warton bequeathed certain lands in Chearsley towards repairs of the Church. In 1825 this benefaction was of the value of £10. per annum.

4. CHERSLEY. "Thys inventorye indented made (23 July 1552) of all the goodes pertaynyng to the Chirche and parysshe of Cherseleye betwene (the same commissioneries by virtue of the same commission) Nicholas Byht and Thomas Fuller all



which goodes (etc. as above). .j.crosse .j. payre of vestimentes  
One Chalys of Syllver, three great belles .j.Sanctus Bell.j.ault  
clothes of lynyn, candellstyckes of brasse, .j.payer of sencers  
one towell.

M<sup>d</sup> that theye do owe for casting the mydle bell – xx.  
Item iJ copies of sylke, a new syrples clothe a hand bell

(Two marks)

5. Rates levied on the parish:

1833                £5. 3. 0.

1833                £3. 8. 8.

1833                £6. 17. 4.

1833                £1. 14. 4. for Marlow Bridge

1834                £5. 3. 0.

1834                £3. 8. 8. for Marlow Bridge

It appears that, as today, rates were used for everything,  
including Marlow Bridge!

Some interesting facts have come to light whilst browsing  
through different records, not least that it is fairly certain that  
a gallows once stood where the tracks from Crendon, Chilton,  
Cuddington and Winchendon meet, and a number of skeletons  
have been found over the years in that area. A sobering  
thought that the Lords of the Manor held such great power in  
12th–16th Centuries.

Very few archeological finds have been made in the village  
but a Master Simon Kelly who once lived at Farthing Cottage,  
Watts Green, did his share in the early 1960's. He made the  
following four findings of sherds (broken pottery).

13th Century sherds were collected from footing trenches  
for a bungalow in Church Lane.

13th–14th Century sherds found on the surface of a  
building site in School Lane.

13th–14th Century sherds found when alterations were  
made to Regency Cottage, Watts Green.

13th–18th Century sherds found during road widening in  
School Lane.

I have had the opportunity to study a farm sale catalogue  
and was amazed at the “going rate” for agricultural land (the  
very best) at that time (1825). The land in question was of  
approximately 750 acres in four main farms, in other words,  
virtually the whole of the parish farmland.

1. Manor Farm, 204 acres let at £350 per annum and included many buildings plus a cottage.
2. Middle Farm, 235 acres let for £350 per annum including barns, etc., and two cottages.
3. North or Tithe Farm, 210 acres let at £250 per annum together with general farm buildings.
4. Lower Farm, 65 acres let at £120 per annum with rickyard, stabling, etc. This farm appears to be what is now known as Lower Green Farm if one reads the field names. West Meadow and The Moors in particular, as these names are still in use today.
5. Three small areas of land known as Turnip Close, Pickle Close and Pound Close were stated to be near the "Bell" public house. Turnip Close was village allotments prior to the building of the house of Mr. K. Wright and possibly included Pickle Close and Pound Close.

What a different rent would be asked today?

The population had increased by only very small numbers until the 1930's, and I have found that the increase in population during the century 1709–1810 was by only 47 persons – from 170 to 217. The records show that in 1821 the village consisted of 58 houses, 64 families and a total population of 256. To think that today we have approximately 120 children under the age of 16 alone, only shows the increase.

The area surrounding the village has always been good fox-hunting country and the following extract was recorded in the middle of the last century. "A piece of woodland belonging to Mr. James Dodwell is noted as being the best fox cover in the Bicester Hunt to which gentlemen from all parts come to hunt". This was undoubtedly "The Furze", which was a wood of great trees and dense undergrowth situated in the valley between Winchendon Road, (where a track leads to the Chilton Road) and Policott, an outlying area of Ashenden. The steep slope down the fields to this wood was a warren of rabbits, foxes and badgers, covering a large area. Alas the magnificent trees were felled (chestnut, elm and oak) and the wood replanted, but will never again contain such wonderful trees. The late Duke of Windsor hunted over this area on a number of occasions.

The village still contains a few 17th Century houses and

perhaps with the aid of a compass you can decide for yourselves if you live in one. The reports made on the buildings were taken from the Royal Commission of 1912 on the Monuments of Buckinghamshire.

1. The Church of St. Nicholas.
2. Homestead moat to S.E. of Church.
3. *House* 100 yds. N.E. of the Church is of two storeys built of brick and timber in the 17th Century but much altered. The roofs are tiled. The original plan was rectangular but it has been enlarged. On the first floor is a wide fireplace with a flat head decorated with an arabesque design.
4. *Cottage* now two tenements about 250 yds. N.W. of the Church is of one storey and an attic built in the 17th Century. The walls are partly of timber and brick, partly covered with plaster. The roof is thatched. The plan is "L" shaped, some of the ceilings have old beams and in one room is a large open fireplace.
5. *House*. West of (3) is of two storeys built in the 17th Century, timber framed with brick filling, partly in herring-bone pattern. The roof is tiled. The building originally extended further towards the west and a bricked-in fireplace is visible externally in the west wall. One old chimney stack remains. Under it is a large open fireplace and the rooms on the ground floor have chamfered beams in the ceiling.
6. *The Bell Inn*. 400 yds. N.W. of the Church is of two storeys built in the 17th Century. The walls are covered with plaster, the roof is thatched. The plan is "L" shaped and at the west end is an old chimney stack. Inside the house is an open fireplace and some of the ceilings have chamfered beams.
7. *House* opposite (5) is of two storeys built of timber and brick in the 17th Century. The roof is tiled. The plan originally rectangular, facing south, is now "L" shaped, an extension having been added to the back.  
originally rectangular, facing south, is now "L" shaped, an extension having been added to the back.
8. *Cherry Orchard*. About 230 yds. N.W. of the Church is an early 17th Century house of two storeys. The plan is "L" shaped with the main wing projecting towards the west and the short wing towards the north. The walls of the main wing have been refaced with red and blue bricks. The short wing is





THE CHURCH OF ST. NICHOLAS



CHEARSLEY GREEN      BEFORE 1940



CHEARSLEY POST OFFICE      BEFORE 1940





"THE BOOT" WHEN PART WAS A SWEET SHOP



THE WHITE HORSE INN



LACE MAKERS AT END OF LAMMAS PATH  
ABOUT 1890



CHEARSLEY'S FIRST GIRL GUIDES



THE LAST SHEAF



THE VILLAGE PUMP



MANOR FARM



WATTS GREEN



"THE OLD HOUSE"



OLD COTTAGES ONCE OPPOSITE ENTRANCE  
TO FURZE FARM





CHEARSLEY CRICKET TEAM EARLY 1930s

timber framed with brick filling and has a small projecting window. The roof is tiled. Inside the house one room has a large moulded beam in the ceiling. Other ceilings have chamfered beams and there is a large open fireplace, partly blocked.

9--10 *Cottages*. Two on opposite sides of the road about 250 yds. N.W. of the Church are each of two storeys, the upper storey partly in the roof. They were probably built in the 17th Century and are timber framed with brick filling. The roofs are thatched. The cottage on the west side of the road (The Rosaries) has stone foundations and is partly covered with plaster. Some of the windows are old. The plan of the other cottage was originally rectangular but modern additions have made it "L" shaped. Both cottages have old chimney stacks and large open fireplaces, partly blocked.

11. *Cottage*. 500 yds. N.W. of the Church is of two storeys built late in the 17th Century of timber and brick. The walls partly covered with plaster and modern rough-cast. The roofs are thatched.

12--13. *Cottages*. Two 100 yds. S.E. of (11) are of two storeys, built in the 17th Century. The walls are covered with plaster and modern rough-cast. The roofs are thatched.

14. *Cottage*. Opposite the school was built in the 17th Century. It is of two storeys; the upper storey partly in the roof. The walls are on stone foundation and covered with plaster. A little timber framing shows in one gable. The roof is thatched. The central chimney stack is of old thin bricks.

15. *Cottage*. S.E. of (14) on the opposite side of the road is of two storeys built in the 17th Century. The walls are timber framed with brick filling, set partly in basket fashion. The roof is covered with slate.

16. *Cottage* about 200 ft. S.E. of (15) is an early 17th Century building of two storeys, the upper storey partly in the roof. The walls are timber framed with brick filling and partly covered with plaster. The roof is thatched. One of the chimney stacks is old, and under it is a wide open fireplace.

I will leave you to work out where these buildings are, or were. I can place six standing and two which I know have gone!!

A fair number of older houses are made of witchert (clay and straw) with walls up to two feet thick — so no cavity walls to insulate!

I think that the remainder of the village we will analyse and comment upon during the “walk around” we will have in Chapter 4.

### **The Village Hall**

The idea of a Village Hall was first discussed publicly at a meeting held in the school on 25th November 1944. It was soon realised that it was going to be a long haul before the money needed to finance this venture could be raised and it was not until 22nd December 1951 that the hall was finally opened. It took seven years to raise the necessary cash and all kinds of fund-raising activities were carried out with this one aim in mind — “The Village Hall”. A great deal of hard work was put in by the various committee members and our thanks are due to all who participated in this venture. Initially the hall was used almost nightly for whist drives, square and country dancing, youth nights and ballroom dancing. A coach was laid on to collect dancers from Long Crendon and Chilton on country dancing nights. However after the first twelve months the committee changed and the hall went into a decline. Now in 1977 it at last appears that the village, as a whole, is once more showing interest in communal activities and the building will be used for the benefit and enjoyment of the whole village community — the purpose for which it was originally intended.

### **The School**

In 1864 a night school was in existence but it was not until 1879 that the school was built. Prior to this, in 1876 a School Board of Governors was formed and the first teacher, Mrs. Laura Ray, was in command until 1903, when she retired. The school was enlarged later and was meant to accommodate 70 pupils. The average attendance was between 34 and 54 pupils. The 1000th pupil was enrolled on 14th October 1971.



## Harts Charity

This charity is available to the school leavers of the parish and was endowed by a Mr. John Hart. In his Will of 15th May 1665 he devised a rent charge of £2 per annum issuing out of the Manor and premises of Eassingdon, Oxfordshire. By a scheme of the Charity Commissioners of 14th April 1905, the annuity of £2, less land tax and the annual dividends amounting to £2. 8. 4., are made available to boys and girls to defray the cost of an outfit for an apprentice. The Charity is dispensed every third year, providing there are any suitable applicants for the grant. The amount of the grant is governed by the number of applicants and the money available. The Charity is administered by a Committee of four persons. In a report to the Charity Commissioners in April 1840 it was stated that the payments to the Charity were paid very irregularly. The last receipt was in May 1831, when a sum of £8. 5. 2., after tax, for five years' arrears, was received. The last boy was "bound out" about 17 years previously (1814). During the period which intervened between 1820-1827 a sum of £14. 6. 0. was received in respect of this donation and was improperly paid by the then Churchwarden to the schoolmaster of the Sunday School, in payment of his salary as schoolmaster. No accounts are kept of this Charity but one of the Churchwardens has undertaken to keep them in future.

A Baptist Chapel was built in 1854 in the Winchendon Road but is now a private dwelling. In 1909 a Church Room was built in the Vicarage grounds at the south west end and, until the village hall was built, this was the centre for village activities. A youth club existed there and it contained a full-size billiard table. The room was used for Whist Drives and Beetle Drives and many pounds were raised to help the Village Hall Fund. Boiling water, for the inevitable cups of tea, had to be carried from nearby houses. It was eventually dismantled and its materials used in the erection of a block of garages.

Bucks Lace was made in Chearsley by approximately 20 ladies from the mid 1800's until just prior to the 1914-18 war. This was a painstaking labour and died out due to the poor financial reward and the fact that young girls could earn more by going "into service". The price paid for lace was 3s. 6d. for 1 yard by 2 inches wide. The mother of Miss D. Tomes, (our oldest inhabitant) made lace, together with two

other ladies from Long Crendon for Princess Beatrice's wedding dress, at a price of 9s. 6d. a yard by 4 inches wide. Mrs. Tomes, in fact, made three yards for Princess Beatrice. The purchase of materials, pins, bobbins and cotton, meant walking to Long Crendon, as that was the nearest place where they could be obtained.

One lady made shirts for the Roadnight brothers for 6d. each!

In 1847, a carrier passed through the village on Wednesday and Saturday for Brill and Aylesbury. This journey invariably took 2 hours in each direction. When buses became available, we became much more sophisticated and had a service of one bus each way between Long Crendon and Aylesbury on market days (Wednesdays and Saturdays). This was operated by a Mr. White of Long Crendon.

In 1864 letters arrived in the village by foot messenger via Waddesdon at about 11.30 a.m. and mail was despatched from the village at 12 noon.

Milk could be obtained at a number of places between 1880–1940. From the "Old Post Office", the house now occupied by Mr. Holloway, the bungalow now occupied by Mr. F. W. Young (before conversion) and from Mr. Godfrey, who lived in the "Old House". It was also delivered by Mr. W. O. Blake of Winchendon, who "walked" the village with a yoke and pails.

The building of the railway in the 19th Century was quite an event and a few Chearsley men found casual labour at the time. However, in the main, the workers lived in huts "on the job", and one site was by the Thame/Aylesbury road where the railway goes under the bridge, and another was sited along the Long Crendon road to the right of the railway bridge. Families were resident at these sites and moved on as the railway proceeded. An outbreak of smallpox was reported and confirmed at the site near the Thame/Aylesbury road – the victim being a child. Many men slept rough and a favourite site was the cow shed, which used to stand in the field to the left of the Church tower. They "bedded down" in the manger. After work the men used to visit the Bell Inn and the White Horse and were reasonably well behaved.

A butcher lived in the village around 1900 at Rose Cottage, School Lane; namely a Mr. Boddington, who killed his own



beasts for meat. He was succeeded by Mr. Eli Claydon, who later moved to Longwick and carried on his trade, visiting the village by pony and cart.

A story exists that when the "White Horse" public house was burned down, the Lady of the Manor at that time objected to having to pass a pub on the way to Church, and that when the re-building was completed, it was not used as a public house, although one room was fitted with seats around the walls. So it appears that even then pressure was "brought to bear" in certain places!

A farm labourer's wage around the turn of the century was 14s. 0d. per week, with an extra shilling for milking the cows on Sunday. Tobacco was 2½d an ounce and beer was 1d and 2d a pint. You took your own bottle for 3d worth of gin!

Maypole dancing was performed at Cheersley Hill House between 1900 and 1910 by Girl Guides from Cheersley and the surrounding villages. This was followed by tea and games and then a march to Church. As many as 200 girls were present. In the old print of Girl Guides of the Cheersley Group, surely many must have come from other villages. We certainly could not muster anything like that number now.

The main source of employment until buses and cars became available were the farms and the work on the railway — keeping the permanent way in good shape. For girls — "service".

### The Tradesmen of 1853

S. Badrick	Beer Retailer
Martha Cooling	Farmer
Beattie Williams	Victualler (White Horse)
Edward Geddon	Farmer
James Gregory	Carrier to High Wycombe, Thame, and Oxford.
John Gregory	Shop-keeper
Thomas Guy	Farmer
James Williams	Victualler (Bell Inn)
Mary & Susan Maberley	Dressmakers and Day School
William Maberley	Shoemaker
William Mew	Blacksmith
Thomas Plaston	Shopkeeper
J. Roadnight	Farmer

K. Shrimpton  
R. Walker  
John Smith  
John Wood

Farmer  
Farmer  
Beer Retailer  
Shoemaker and Beer Retailer

A couple of anecdotes would not be amiss.

When bicycles became available, the local roadsweeper, who until then had used the droppings from horses and cattle to keep his garden in good heart, said that, "a bike was a damned bad thing for gardeners"!

A lady who resided in one of the three cottages known as the "Rosaries" kept her cat tied to her plum tree to scare the birds from having the fruit.

## CHAPTER 4

### A WALK ABOUT OLD CHEARSLEY

I think we should take a walk around the village and look and talk about old houses and anything else of special interest we see. We will use the "Bell Inn" as the centre for our excursions and return there for each subsequent walk.

We will start off by walking past the "Old Post Office" on our right and note that this was once a general shop as well. The room used as the shop was very tiny and goods were hung on nails around the walls and everything looked in utter confusion — but everything was "to hand" in time!

Immediately on our left is "Sunrise", which once was in fact three cottages. The house has excellent flagstone floors and is now a fine residence.

Continuing further along we come to a single cottage on the right and proceeding around the bend in the road, two more are seen on the left. All are built of stone and witchert and rendered. On the right is Manor Farm House, an imposing brick structure and partly covered by a beautiful Virginia Creeper; a dazzling display of colour in Autumn.

On the opposite side of the road is the entrance to Orchard Close, which was once a stud farm, owned by William Coles in 1877 and by Henry Coles in 1887. The house and land at that time was known as "Center Farm". Miss Tomes' uncle worked for Mr. Coles as a stud groom. We proceed further down the lane and roughly opposite numbers 3 and 4 Council Houses, on the right hand side of the road once stood a farm worker's cottage, together with a dovecote. The house became known as the "Pigeon House". The last occupant was a Mr. Young. Both cottage and dovecote were allowed to fall into disrepair and were demolished and so lost for good.

Carrying on down the hill we now come to an item of interest on opposite sides of the road; namely the "White House" and the piped spring and pond known as "Stockwell". We will deal with the last 100 years or so of the house first. In records of 1847 the property was known as the "White



"Lion" Inn and the owner a Mrs. Beattie Williams who was also in residence. However, between 1847 and 1853 it appears that the name changed to the "White Horse", still under the same management. The old building was thatched and was burned down in the early 1900s and rebuilt in its present, outside form, as seen today. A bakehouse is also on the property and this was used by Mr. Thomas Smith for baking bread. (He was the grandfather of Mr. M. Edmonds.) The spring opposite had, for a great number of years, been the drinking water supply for many people including the Cox family, Mr. and Mrs. T. Cox and Mr. E. Cox, and for their parents before them. It made an excellent cup of tea and has done them no harm. However, the pump which was used to draw water from the well (from which the piped outlet comes) was dismantled and I feel that some effort should be made to have this replaced. The spring has rarely been known to fail, even during the drought of 1976.

Continuing down to the lower end of the lane we pass again the Church on our right hand side and opposite the Church gate (beautifully carved by the late Mr. Kind) is the entrance to the home of Mr. and Mrs. K. Brown. This is an imposing residence with excellent views of the river and surrounding farmland. The house was once moated, according to the records, part of which still remains and now forms ornamental fishponds. The oldest part of the house is a stack of chimneys at the west end. From a massive stone base, about 25 ft. high, rise two red brick chimney shafts, which are moulded at the top. Above the stonework are two curious niches under one trifolied canopy. Records state the house as being known as "Chearsley Green", another source says the "Moat House".

Mr. Brown's father, Mr. S. Brown, established the poultry farm in 1911 and which is still in existence.

We now return to the "Bell Inn" for another walk and this time we will go down Shupps Lane again towards the lower end of the village. On the left after the low pink wall of the "Bell Inn" ends, once stood three cottages. These were allowed to fall into disrepair and demolished during the last war. A few yards away had stood a detached cottage, which suffered the same fate. We take the right fork at the junction (the left fork leads to Watts Green) and pass "Hill View" on the right, which was once two houses, with a slate roof. A



little further down the lane on our right stand a pair of new houses. On this site once stood a *very old* witchert and timbered cottage with a thatched roof and in the garden, two large walnut trees. About 50 yds further down, a turning to the left leads us into Watts Green. There is a cluster of six houses here which used to be the most charming area of the village. "Lynton Cottage" is a 'preserved' building due to its age, but is perhaps no older than other buildings in the village such as "The Boot" or "Farthing Cottage". However, the outstanding feature of "Lynton Cottage" has now been obliterated (herring-bone brickwork of Brill bricks), by the rendering of the panels between the timber frames.

Opposite is "The Boot" the name of which is assumed to have connections with North Marston a village eight miles away. The records tell us that during the early 14th Century, the Rector of North Marston, a Master John Shorne (who had previously been Rector of Monks Risborough), invited the devil to Church. The devil accepted the challenge and was imprisoned in one of the Rector's hunting boots and for this act, the Rector became a saint. The Rector also blessed a healing well in the Churchyard and his acts became known far and wide. In fact the shrine at North Marston became the third most important in the country. The other two were Beckett's tomb at Canterbury and the "Shrine of Our Lady" at Walsingham in Norfolk.

We know that "The Boot" was a jug and bottle ale house in the early 19th Century and prior to this could well have been an Inn for liquid refreshment and rest for pilgrims to North Marston. There were a number of inns called the "Boot" in the area which are believed to have been also used by pilgrims. These were at Dinton (no longer in existence as an inn), Quainton, Soulbury, Swanbourne, Winslow and Olney. Coming to later times, the "Boot" was occupied by a boot and shoe repairer (Jack Woods) and in my time, a sweet shop. Indeed I have spent many a halfpenny pocket money there.

Michaelmas Cottage has nostalgic memories for me. I knew it in my younger days as a "two up and two down", with tiny rooms, a large open fireplace with oven and inglenook. As my family home my grandmother and my mother and father lived there and I was born there. Later my wife and I

came back and here my daughter was born. This was also at one time another sweet shop and owned by a Betsie Smith.

The next two cottages mentioned, "Farthing Cottage" and "Regency Cottage", were originally three cottages. "Farthing Cottage" is another very old timbered and thatched dwelling with windows set in the roof, the infilling between the timbered walls being brick and wattle and daub. There is reputed to be a "poltergeist" in this cottage and the owner, from before the last war until 1958, was so disturbed, that she enlisted the help of a priest to have him "laid". After this "he" became much less of a nuisance and only moved articles around — not throwing them, as he had done previously.

Mrs. Lee and her daughter, the occupiers before Mr. and Mrs. Smith well remember occasions when the cellar door, very thick and old and fitted with a good hand made lock, would occasionally open itself with a slight creak every six weeks or so. Car keys would disappear from their accustomed place, only to be found there again the next morning. The kitchen window would be mysteriously opened at night several days running, even though it had been barred and bolted, until Old George as they called him became bored with that ploy and turned his attention to another trick.

Mrs. Barbara Green of Regency Cottage remembers when her six year old godson came to visit them and by mistake wandered into Farthing Cottage finding the door open. He knew nothing about Old George, but quickly realised he was in the wrong cottage and ran next door to tell his family that a white haired old man in a white suit was sitting at a table counting money. The only time apparently that George has actually been seen. Mrs. Green can remember other instances of George's activities such as a neatly stacked pile of books being found a few minutes later jumbled and untidy, the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs when she knew the cottage was empty. All very eerie, but luckily Old George's activities, though frightening, were fairly harmless.

Still at Watts Green, "Regency Cottage" adjoins "Farthing Cottage" and is a much later building of fine brickwork. "Walnut Orchard" is a large house built of brick and stone and the stone portion facing Dark Lane is very old, with the date inscribed on the brick part of the wall. The stone part is older



still. It was once the home of our local carrier, Mr. Lee, who succeeded Thomas Hanson.

We will now return to the "Bell Inn" and proceed towards the site of the village pond. Adjoining this site is the "Old Farm House", a very solid building with tiled roof and brick walls.

The village pond was used as a watering place for the shire horses which were owned by the Roadnight brothers of Manor Farm and also for cattle being driven between market and local farms. It was kept filled by drainage water from the roads but eventually was filled in and levelled out. Sliding on the ice across the frozen pond was a favourite winter sport and much enjoyed at least 100 years ago and in all probability long before then.

The large barns of the farmyard, next door, were always filled with corn and hay and the arrival of the threshing machine was the signal for all the village boys to make an attack on the hordes of mice and rats living there which were disturbed. Straw and "caveings" (husks or corn and weed seeds which were discarded) were all stored away for further use and not burned, as is the practice today. I well remember Saturday mornings, as I used to help with "mangold cutting", "chaff cutting", and breaking up the cow cake, which came in slabs about 3 ft. long by 1 ft. wide and 1 inch thick. The week's supply was cut for the shires and cattle for fattening. This was done under the supervision of Mr. Frank Walker.

Before we proceed down School Lane, we will take a look at the house which until a few years ago was known as the "Plough Inn". From the 1800's, the property had been in the hands of the "Dancer" family and throughout the old reference books, it was not until 1939 that the property was referred to as "The Plough". Prior to this, the occupier was referred to as "a retailer of beer, wheelwright and carpenter". Inside the low wall skirting the Aylesbury Road, once stood a large water trough, used by cattle and horses making their various journeys.

Just across the road is the old village Smithy, now a private dwelling, but for many years the "Hillesden" family were the owners. This was always a favourite place for small boys and if you behaved, you were allowed to pump the bellows. The smell of burning hoof and myriads of sparks as the shoes were

made, had a magnetic attraction to young boys and men alike; and possibly gave the men an added thirst, as the "Plough" was opposite! The beautiful chestnut tree nearby made the classical village setting.

We will now walk a little further down the lane and come to the entrance of "Old Plough Close". In the area of the entrance and standing back off the original lane, stood three cottages but these fell into decay and were demolished. Opposite and set back from the road is "Furze Farm House", very old and built mainly of stone. A laundry and dairy were part of this building when the Bernard family lived in Cheersley Hill House. The house appears to have been built in two different periods. The top end is, I would suggest, late 17th or early 18th Century and contains much old timber, some of which appears to have been from ships. Two distinct types of stone have been used in the construction, one being softer than the other, and apparently originated in the area of Pitstone and called "clunch" stone. The rear of the house is made of timber with brick infilling, some herring-bone, and possibly "Brill" bricks. The chimney at the top end has fine brickwork and an ornamental cap. The other chimney is quite massive, being approximately five feet square at the top. A large cellar under the property has a flagstone floor. The hallway is also "Flagged". An old faggot oven exists in one room with a "proving" oven underneath. A beam over a fireplace has a little engraving, including the initials "I.B." The driveway is where a large timber and thatched barn stood until it was burned down and access was by footpath between that barn and the farm buildings of Grove Farm, which continued on along the front of the house and across the paddock, which is now "Bernard Close". A "kissing gate" existed at the end of the "Furze Farm" boundary.

When the house was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Franks, it was thought to be a four-bedroomed house, but when a survey was made, the "lay-out" of the exterior did not "tie-up" with the inside rooms. On investigation, another bedroom, fourteen ft. by twelve ft. was found, apparently it had "just not been needed"!

Let us now consider the lane from this point down to as far as the "Old House". Looking at the scene today, one can hardly imagine what it once looked like for unfortunately the



lane was completely destroyed by the development of Bernard Close and by road widening. It was the best example of a sunken lane that we had, and I will try to show you the scene. On the right, the lane surface was bounded by a bank which was 6 or 7 ft above the lane level. Bernard Close was a small paddock with a large walnut tree in the corner next to Mrs. Tillier's boundary. On the left hand side of the lane a raised footpath (3 to 4 ft. high) ran the entire length, and above this, the bank continued up another couple of feet to the level of the field which is now Old Plough Close. The lane was flanked on the left by huge elm trees at the top end and a large ash tree at the lower end.

We must make sure that the remaining sunken lanes in Chearsley do not suffer a similar fate.

We now arrive at the "Old House"; very aptly named and built of stone and with old timber beams. This was once the home of Mr. G. Godfrey, the village carpenter, a man much respected for his skills. His sons took up building work or carpentry and Mr. Eli Godfrey still maintains the family tradition. I remember the old workshop well; knee deep in wood shavings and a perpetual smell of planed wood and glue. A shoe maker, a certain Bill Lester, carried on his trade at the lower end of the house. A cottage once stood at the rear of the main house.

We will now keep to the left hand side of the school and we see a row of five cottages on the left. The top and bottom ones both thatched and all very old. A footpath known as Lammas Path goes off to the left to join up with the Aylesbury road and a few yards along this is Lammas Cottage. This was originally three cottages, one of which, at the far end, was used as a Baptist Chapel and used until the Winchendon Road chapel was built. The entrance was by two steps from Lammas Path.

Opposite Lammas Path is another *very* old house, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Hinton, partly timbered with brick infilling. At right angles to this house were two more cottages built of witchert and stone but which were allowed to become derelict and were eventually demolished.

Rose Cottage opposite, was the home of two village butchers in succession (now we do not have even one) and in 1920 a general store was opened there by Mrs. Janet Slatter.

The shop closed during the mid 1960s. A greengrocery business was also carried out from the premises and goods were carried to all the surrounding villages by van.

We continue right to the bottom of Lower Green Lane and on the right is "Elder Tree Cottage". The original plan was of two cottages occupied by sisters. The timbers of the original cottages are extremely old but additions have been blended well into the original. The public hangman resided here for a while around 1900, having moved from Haddenham.

Standing at the gate which brings the lane to an abrupt halt, one must visualise three cottages standing on the immediate left. The pear tree which stands rather forlornly in the field, is the only clue which tells us that in fact these cottages existed. Apparently the tree was the same size 80 years ago and bore excellent fruit. This makes the tree very old, especially for a fruit tree and it should be preserved.

A further fifty yards or so down the field was another cottage, also of witchert and a thatched roof. This was the home of the Vicar before the present Vicarage was built. Alas, this dwelling suffered the fate of so many more and was bulldozed in the early 1960's.

Over to the right of the field stands "Lower Green Farm House". This house is largely timbered and perhaps the oldest in the village as it is described in one source of information as 15th to 16th Century with massive chimneybreasts being built of stone and "H" shaped.

We must now return to the school and we see a portion of grass verge stretching from the entrance of Mrs. Tillier's home to where it tapers off into the roadway, roughly opposite the end of the school playground wall. This was at one time a deep gully, perhaps 8-10 ft. deep at its top end. This was used as a saw-pit and during the 1800s was a place where men used to saw up timber. The area outside the school has always been known as "Saw-pit"

Proceeding down Dark Lane we come to two small cottages, one on either side of the road, "Vine Cottage" and "Hicks Cottage", both quite picturesque and old; "Vine Cottage" being faced with flint and small stones, an unusual material for this area.

We continue further down the lane and come on the left to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wallis. On this site once stood three

cottages, one being the smallest house in the village and called, "The Mansion", (not very aptly named as it was only one up and one down). Opposite "The Mansion" were two other cottages, the west end of which faced the road. One was known as the "Pig and Whistle", another ale house. Both of these cottages were very old and were demolished. On the opposite side of the road stands the "Rosaries", one of the few cottages mentioned by name earlier in the description of "old village dwellings".

We now reach the bottom of "Dark Lane" and see the new development of Elm Brook Close, which was originally a paddock and contained a deep pond with an outlet to the S.E. side of the development. This was a place where watercress was readily available.

This was indeed a very "dark lane", enclosed by huge elm trees at the lower end and along "Farmyard", (the path which is on the left as we turn the corner and leads to Church Lane). The elms standing now along the footpath are a sad reminder of the ravages of Dutch Elm disease. They are only saplings compared with the size of the trees I well remember.

The lane now continues up hill to join up with Watts Green. The triangle of land bordered by Farmyard footpath, Shupps Lane and Dark Lane was once a fruit orchard containing about twenty massive walnut trees, together with large apple and pear trees and belonged to the Poultry Farm. Chickens and pigs were kept there and, during the walnut season, a large number of grey squirrels carried the nuts away and buried them for use in the winter.

We have made a comprehensive walk of our old village and I hope that we have learned a little of the village as it was in the past. All of us must ensure that the character of the old village is not spoiled any more and we should preserve the few sunken lanes we have left. Any more destruction of these lanes must be most vigorously opposed as they are virtually unknown to any area outside the West Country as an integral part of a Village.



What is the future of Chearsley? We have in this year of 1977 celebrated the Queen's Silver Jubilee and all the many exciting events leading up to and during Jubilee week itself seem to have drawn all sections of the village together in a wonderful way. Let us hope that the communal functions and the ensuing spirit of good will will continue and that the present and future generations of Chearsley inhabitants will remember with pride their past heritage.



