

# DISCOVERING OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

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gramme "Living in the Past" gives a good idea of what life was like in one of these settlements. The weaving of cloth for clothing was a major industry. Iron Age people cut the White Horse at Uffington in the chalk, probably as an emblem of the Atrebatas tribe.

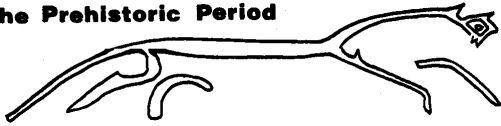
Iron became even cheaper and more plentiful than bronze, its ores were common and within reach of every man. So a wide variety of tools was devised and by the end of this period and during the Roman Empire, the tools of the carpenters and farmers were remarkably similar to those in use to this very day in Drayton.

Eirwen Jones

April 1978

## Part 1 THE PREHISTORIC PERIOD

### the Prehistoric Period



The first inhabitants of the area that we now call Drayton were the nomadic hunters of the Stone Age who arrived in the Thames valley about 250,000 years ago. They took shelter where they could, worked skins for clothing and used flaked stone and bone tools.

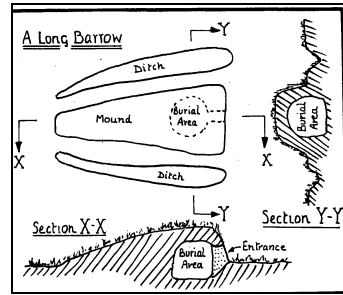
In about 3,000 BC, the Neolithic period, the first farmers arrived from the continent of Europe and settled here. They introduced the basis of our civilisation which has developed without interruption ever since. With their polished axes of stone, they cut down the thick forests which abounded in the Thames Valley and began to farm and raise stock, a truly revolutionary development! Instead of being savage food-gathering hunters ranging over a wide area, these farmers settled down in one fixed place. They still used skins for clothes but they also made textiles. Farming enabled them to have more material possessions because their surplus crops could be exchanged for tools equipment and ornaments that could now be made by specialists. They must also have co-operated with their neighbours because their numbers were increasing with the increasing food supplies and they were living ever closer together instead of meeting occasionally for tribal gatherings. Urban life is a direct outcome of these early trends and here we have the beginnings of the rich community life we know in our village of Drayton today.

One of the links we have with the farming people of this period was the discovery of a Neolithic Long Barrow in Sutton Wick Field. These 'barrows', or mounds of earth, were 100 to 300 ft. long, from 30 to 100 ft. wide and were used for collective burial of the dead, usually about 6 to 8 in number. They were wider and higher at the interment end, being 4 to 12ft, as in this sketch, and would be the burial place for a tribal family

The next development in our story was the arrival again from the Continent, of the Beaker people, about 2,500BC. These tall vigorous people introduced the use of copper and bronze for tools and weapons and for food vessels. They developed a rich trade in these objects as far afield as Greece and the Baltic. They made textiles also and wore leather and cloth.

The standard tomb of the Bronze Age man was the Round 'Barrow' used for a single burial. The Ashmolean Museum records that one of these was found in a field at Drayton. A skeleton accompanied by a pale brown urn, a bronze ring and some brooches was unearthed earlier in this century. Single burials were often contracted that is the body was flexed in the position of sleep (or possibly the pre-natal state), and accompanied by food and drink in pots, by weapons tools and ornaments for the life to come. The tools would be broken either to release the spirit or to prevent the living using the property of the dead! Cremation as well as inhumation was practised.

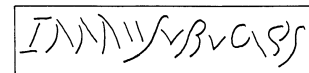
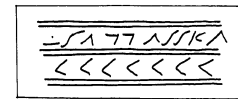
Finally, in 550 BC we come to the beginning of the Iron Age, when our ancestors accepted f use of the new metal, iron, for their tools and weapons. There are traces of Iron Age settlements at Little Wittenham. The farms of these Iron Age people were small, consisting of only a few acres with roundhouses, timber-framed and thatched, surrounded by a ditch and palisade. Farmyards contained pits for the storage of grain and corn was dried on racks. The present BBC pro-



## Part 2 ROMAN TO 1066 PERIOD

In AD 43, Britain became part of the Roman Empire and remained so for nearly 400 years. A very high social and material Roman standard of living was imposed and evidence that this prosperity spread to the Drayton area was discovered when the remains of a Roman villa\*\*\* were excavated on Mr. Fidler's farm, near Dropshort, in 1962. Roman bricks and parts of two tessellated floors were found. [\*\*\* Modern update: - put 'Dropshort near Abingdon' into Google].

This region was one of the main pottery-making areas in Roman Britain. Local woods around Oxford provided fuel for the kilns at Headington and local villa owners provided the capital. The potters produced luxury tableware and mixing-bowls which were sold throughout southern Britain, transported on packhorses or by barges down the Thames, to places such as Dorchester, an important Roman town. Pots have been found bearing the names Vassulus, a mid-second century potter, and Tamesibugus (dweller by the Thames), a late-third century potter, scratched or stamped on the pots, thus



As the Romans withdrew their influence from Britain, the Saxons came as mercenaries and pirates at first, but later settled here in the 5th century and developed their own Germanic culture and social system. Britain became a land of villages. Each village community owned and worked the arable land, the open meadow and pastures and finally the forest and meadowlands. They introduced the three-field system of farming, with the land divided into strips for easy ploughing with the communal plough, and the rotation of crops.

The site of one such village was discovered on the Sutton Courtenay road at the Milton Turn, where excavations by Mr. E. T. Leeds from 1921 to 27 found a Saxon village overlying a Bronze Age settlement. Most of the site has now been destroyed by gravel workings. Each Saxon chief would build his great Hall first of all and then surround it with huts for his followers, bowers for the womenfolk, out-houses and working sheds. Often there was a 'moot', or meeting place and then the whole would be enclosed in a wooden palisade for protection. More than 30 huts, squarish with rounded corners, were found on the site. Each was sunk two feet into the ground, and they would have had thatched roofs above low wattle and daub walls. These were probably Industrial huts for weaving and

baking. The Anglo-Saxons were expert weavers on looms and used beautiful colours. They also made fine pots, by hand, but later using a wheel. Examples of these pots have been found at Sutton Courtenay and in the Abingdon area.

King Alfred, the greatest of Saxon kings, was born at Wantage in the year 848A.D. In spite of his valiant efforts against the invading Danes, he had to withdraw south and west of a line from the Tees to the Thames and Drayton was part of this Kingdom of West Saxons (Wessex) and derived its name 'Draigtune' from the Saxons. The Anglo-Saxon dictionary gives 'Draegel' as the word for a drag-net and 'Tune' as a village or town. But Margaret Gelling, in her book 'Place Names of Berkshire' suggests that, as there was marshy ground to the north-east of Drayton then the more appropriate translation could be 'the place where sledges were used'

King Alfred must have passed through Drayton many times in the course of his expeditions over his kingdom, and an interesting relic of the times is Alfred's Jewel. He probably lost it whilst fleeing from the Danes. Found in Somerset in 1693, it is now on permanent display at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. It is beautifully made in coloured enamel under rock crystal in a gold setting inscribed AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN (Alfred had me made).

The first written mention of Drayton is to be found in the Abingdon Chronicle of the year 958 AD. It refers to the granting of land by charter. King Eadred of the late-Saxon period granted 10 hides of land in Draigtune to a thane (nobleman) in 955 AD. A hide was said to be about 120 acres, but this figure could vary considerably and so we have only a rough idea of the size of Drayton at the close of the Saxon period.

Eirwen Jones

May 1978, p10.

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### Part 3. NORMAN and MEDIAEVAL TIMES

- Draegtune, Draigtun -- 10th Century
- Draltuns, Draeton ---- 10th & 11th Century
- Draitun ----- 11th to 13th Century
- Drettun ----- 12th Century
- Drayton ----- 13th to 20th Century

It has been said that the Norman Conquest "altered the face of England in a way unequalled until the coming of canals and railways". Saxon buildings had been mainly wooden, and few of them stood up above the trees. The Normans changed all this and made their mark on the landscape of our neighbourhood as on the rest of the country. Norman mottes or mounds lifted their castles high above the ground. One of these mottes can still be seen from New Road in Oxford as part of the prison grounds. Huge stone castles and fine churches sprang up all over the country, like the Benedictine Abbey at Abingdon. Rebuilt by the Normans in the 12th century, part of the south wall of Drayton Church, too, is of 13th century origin and its tub font is typically Norman, round and solid. There is a Norman Hall at Sutton Courtenay, a Norman doorway at St. Nicholas Church Abingdon and one of the finest Norman churches in the country is at Iffley, south-east of Oxford.

The Saxon idea that the land belonged to the people was replaced by the Norman insistence that England belonged to the King, who promptly parcelled it out to the barons, demanding a service of them in return. They, in turn, demanded a service of their lesser vassals, and they of the humbler villeins, cottagers and serfs. This rigid feudal structure was enforced with the aid of detailed information collected from each village, including Drayton, and recorded in Domesday Book. The counties were divided into Hundreds. Drayton belonged to the Hundred of Sudtone or Sutton Courtenay, later renamed Ock Hundred. The Hundreds were then divided into Manors; Domesday Book records that Earl Hugh held a manor at Draitone assessed at 2 hides, with land for 5 ploughs. We know, too that Drayton possessed a water-mill from the year 1000 and the Abingdon Chronicle records that Henwardsmill at Draitune was given to the Abbey at Abingdon.

What mental picture of life in Drayton village emerges as we move forward into mediaeval times? We see a cluster of farmhouses and cottages grouped around the church and manor (no longer standing). As brick was very rare in England from the departure of the Romans to the 15th century, the homes were made of logs and planks of wood or of uprights and beams supporting rubble and clay. The floors were of trodden earth and the roofs thatched. Many of the villagers kept sheep and sold the wool for profit. They had meat, cheese, eggs and fruit such as apples and cherries. Their small plots of land provided them with vegetables, such as peas, beans and 'worts', (cabbage-like plants). There were no potatoes as yet! Everyone kept bees for honey, and some owned a cow or a pig. The farmers used Oxen for ploughing, poor lean beasts at best. Timber from the wasteland was used to build their houses, for making fires for cooking, to make carts and ploughs, tools, furniture.

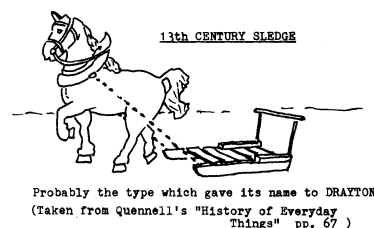
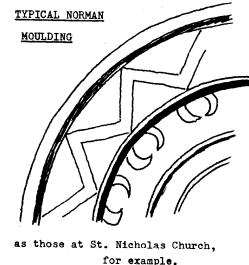
Cultivation of the Drayton soil was mostly by the open-field method, a village community working huge unenclosed fields on the principle of strip allotments. There were no hedges anywhere. In relation to each other, the peasant cultivators were a self-governing community but in relation to the Lord of the Manor they were serfs. They were compelled to grind their corn at his mill and they owed him fixed workdays of field-service on his destine (domain). It was not until the late 14th and 15th centuries that Lords of the Manor began to commute field-service for cash 'rent'.

In addition to these commitments, Drayton villagers had to pay tithes (one tenth part of the harvest yield, among other things) to the Abbott of Abingdon for the Manor was part of the Abbey holding. As the monks of Abingdon had by late mediaeval times fallen into some disrepute because of their easy and luxurious living, the villagers of Drayton were aggressively reluctant to pay up. There is an interesting record in the Abingdon Abbey Accounts concerning this. The Abbot visited Drayton Wyke with his harvest wagon to collect his tithes (which could be stored in the Abbey Tithe Barn, now Northcourt Church). As he walked along the fields pointing out every tenth sheaf for his servants to lift on to the Abbey cart, the villagers of Drayton angrily resisted. Some Oxford students and certain Abingdon men, present at these proceedings, defended the Abbot from the angry Draytonians. In the accounts there is a record of the payments made to these men for their protection. The unpopularity of the monks, only too evident from this incident, made it easy for Henry VIII to dissolve the monasteries later, in the 16th century. The Abbot of Abingdon accepted the dissolution and was dismissed with an annual pension of £200 and the manor house at Cumnor.

How did the Draytonians of the 15th century amuse themselves in their leisure time? The nave of Drayton church was the village hall for all community events and Miracle Plays were staged in the churchyard. Draughts, chess and playing cards helped the men pass the winter evenings whilst the ladies did embroidery or sewing. Country dancing, shooting at the butts ball games, cock-fighting, hawking, snaring and fishing were some of the more popular summer pastimes; whilst visits to Abingdon for Market Day and the annual St. Mary's Fair were events to be anticipated with the greatest pleasure.

Eirwen Jones

June 1978



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## Part 4 DRAYTON ABLAZE!

Hark: through the Groves a dreadful Cry,  
It echo's o'er the plains,  
The precious sacks of Corn and Hay,  
Fell victims to the flames.

Sad shrieks and cries from cot to cot,  
Each weeping Infant trace,  
And mark the horrid frightful looks,  
Upon each aged face.

The village with confusion fill'd  
Whilst multitudes draw near,  
The rapid flames at noontide day,  
Did strike each heart with fear,

The sufferers' names I cannot describe,  
Save only just a few,  
But all alike ye generous hearts,  
I recommend to you.

To everyone that can bestow,  
Even the smallest mite,  
To each poor sufferer lend a hand,  
I humbly now invite.

Av..y\_Ty...ls might loss,  
Thomas, and Robert too,  
Likewise the loss I recommend,  
Of worthy Thomas D.W.

John H..de, an aged honest man,  
Which long time has been blind;  
You that are with compassion fill'd  
Pray bear him in your mind.

John Cheer, and William Cheer also,  
Sustained a heavy Loss,  
And many poor distressed souls,  
Endured the fiery cross.

John H...t, John Wy...t shared a part,  
Destruction by the flames,  
John Ly...d too, these are few,  
Of these great sufferers names.

There was two worthy good Divines  
Submitted there and slav'd,  
Through fire and water, mud, and dirt  
Fain would the village saved.

The freighted Warblers left the spray,  
And took their winged flight,  
Whilst mortals were obliged to stay,  
To see the mournful sight.

Go see the village drop a tear,  
Drayton in Berkshire's fall,  
Is an object of your Charity,  
I recommend to all.

The Great Fire that swept through the High Street of Drayton in the reign of George III began in a house next to the Wheatsheaf on Sunday 16th April 1780. Upward of 30 houses went up in flames. So catastrophic was it for the village that a wide appeal was launched, and books were opened to receive subscriptions at London, at Oxford and at Abingdon. The appeal was worded thus:

"The loss by this fire has fallen chiefly on industrious farmers and labourers, many of whom have lost their all. Only a few hundred pounds, in value, of the Property was insured.

"The neighbouring gentlemen... have formed themselves into a committee for the purpose of collecting relief for the sufferers and distributing the public bounty. And in order to make a distinction between those who are totally ruined and others who are partly or wholly enabled to support their loss, it is intended to divide the sufferers into classes and to relieve them agreeably to their respective merits".

In order to help the appeal along, a local poet of the time, one Samuel Harding composed the above verses for distribution:

The appeal realised the sum of £3,066. (This was a considerable sum when the wage of an agricultural labourer, was about 6 shillings a week). Of this £2,614 was distributed, and after payment of expenses, a balance of £344 remained. This was used to buy ground at the lower end of the High Street and to build thereon 5 almshouses, and to establish a trust fund for their upkeep.

Some of the names on the Committee's 'Statement of the losses of several individuals' are well known family names in the village today.

The greatest losses, running into many hundreds in each case for property and equipment, were suffered by the farmers. Farmer Thomas Dew's losses amounted to £954 and other farmers with surnames Tyrrell, Cheer and Hunt also lost many hundreds each. The Reverend Wright lost his property worth £507 and with it went all the old registers of Drayton, sadly. William Nevill, wheelwright, also figures in the list of sufferers to the sum of £282, so he must have been a man of substance in the village society of the day. Names like Allwright, Cook, Lyford, Buckle, Kimber, Clarke, Badcock, Beckensale, Winter, Pointer, Belcher, King, Hyde and Wyatt also appear in the list, which runs to 73 names.

A group of 5 names, including Widow Beckley and Elizabeth Lay, were living in houses belonging to a village charity.

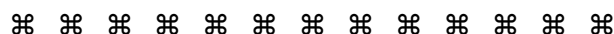
Why did the fire spread so quickly? The houses lining the High Street probably dated from the Middle Ages and would have been made mainly of lath and plaster, with wooden beams and thatched roofs. Picturesque they may have been, but when the fire came racing along, fanned by a lively wind, these flimsy buildings went up like tinder. The flames easily leapt the narrow road, and only when they encountered brick or stone could they be halted. Both the Church and The Grange, standing well back, escaped.

Then again, fire-fighting facilities of the village were totally inadequate to deal with such a conflagration. The only water sources available were from the wells of the houses, from the village pond near Mr Bomford's yard and from the ditch which ran the length of the High Street on the side nearest The Grange. Fire-fighting equipment, kept in the Church, consisted of buckets, ropes, ladders and firehooks (used to pull down the burning thatch).

Little wonder then that the villagers fought a losing battle from the start: The furious clanging of the bells on that fateful Sunday in 1780 prefaced a scene of such utter devastation that the like of it has never been seen before or since in our peaceful village. The one consoling fact that emerges is that there is no record of any lives having been lost.

Eirwen Jones

July 78



## Part 5 OLD HOUSES OF DRAYTON

by Eirwen Jones, with sketches by Bill Fuller

The first census shows that the population of Drayton was only 484 even as late as the year 1801. Yet a peep at the history of the old houses of Drayton reveals that the village, for all its diminutive size was almost entirely self-supporting and independent for centuries before that.

Of first importance were the farms, the lifeblood of the village. The oldest, the Manor, was mentioned in Domesday Book, and even earlier in the Abingdon Chronicle, as being the foundation of this rural community. Today's Manor keeps up the tradition of farming, whilst the old house bears witness to its position of importance over the centuries. It has a timber-framed Elizabethan portion containing a fine Tudor fireplace with the Tudor-Rose cut into the stonework above. The Eastern block was added about 1700 and the Queen Anne doorway, with its Corinthian side pillars in the 18th century.

We know that the land here was divided into West and East Drayton at the end of the 11th century. It is possible that Gilbourne's Farm was the site of the East Manor, whilst the old best Manor remained where it was originally. The central section of this old house dates back to 1580, whilst the front and back portions with the staircase are seventeenth and eighteenth century additions.

Another lovely old house, originally belonging to the farming community is Lime Close along Henley's Lane. This partly Elizabethan building is a reminder of an early kind of villa e tenure. Unlike 'open-field' farming, 'closes' (enclosures) were reserved for individual cultivation by their owners. These one-acre holdings lined the High Street before the fire of 1780 destroyed them. The Grange was another fine house built originally for the enclosed land of the

farmer in the mid-17th century. The extra-wide floorboards in the upper storeys - the width of the tree with the knotted wood untreated - help to date the old house. Sutton Wick Farm is late Georgian with Victorian additions, whilst Sutton Wick House is now converted into flats. It has a date stone 1712.

Connected with the farms were the cottages of the workers. There are several old ones dotted about the village, but the most interesting is Mrs. Taylor's thatched cottage near Elm Close. This is a fine example of an early cruck cottage dating back to 1385. It has six pairs of crucks (curved timbers from ground to roof) which make it unique, as there are usually no more than two pairs. Eight oxen standing side by side gave the width of the bay between two pairs of crucks. Carbon dating of the old soot-encrusted thatch has enabled the restorers to copy the original roof.

Farm carts require wheels, so the wheelwright, combining his skills with that of carpenter, was essential to the independent existence of the village. William Nevill, wheelwright, claiming £282 for losses in the great fire of 1780, was undoubtedly a man of great wealth and standing in Drayton. After the fire, the wheelwright transferred his business to Walnut Cottage lower down the High Street, the property of Mrs. Darter until recently. The old 16th century cottage was the family dwelling house with the workshop in the yard alongside. Fragments of old tools and wheels were found buried in the garden, and a carpenter's saw-pit remained there until fairly recent times. Stout Berkshire wagons, famed throughout Southern England, would undoubtedly have been made there to a high standard of craftsmanship.

Over the way at Forge Cottage, the blacksmith plied his trade under the shade of the spreading walnut tree.

Busy workers must eat, so what better to accompany good home-grown produce than a hot crusty loaf fresh from the ovens of Bradfield's cottage in Gravel Lane. This old bakery was built in 1742 and the ovens were only recently removed during modernisation. Another old house that became a bakery was Winter's Corner. This was originally a two-up, two-down cottage built of wattle and daub about 1730. The chimney had 5 flues, each with rungs to enable the little sweep boys to clamber up and down as Tom did in "The Water-Babies". Early in the 19th century extensions were made to the dwelling house and a bakery and flour store added. This was an important village shop supplying bread to the Oxford Colleges in the early 20th century.

Forming an essential link between the farmer and the baker was the miller. New Cut Mill (Bug's Mill) on the Ock, once part of Sutton Wick, had 2 pairs of millstones. It is now a dwelling house.

It carries a date-stone of 1757, which probably refers to the rebuilt section after a fire there in the previous year. The date of the oldest part is unknown, but the present owner has found a Charles I silver shilling and Georgian coins in the grounds. Even more interesting was the discovery of a 12th century steel yard-weight there recently during improvements. This suggests that New Cut Mill dates from Norman times and is therefore almost as old as the oldest mill in England, Abbey Mill in Abingdon.

The larger Drayton Mill, on the Ginge, which had its heyday in Victorian times, had four pairs of millstones and a 'fine wheel with dished spokes'. The Bradfields worked this, with Milton Mill, well into the present century.

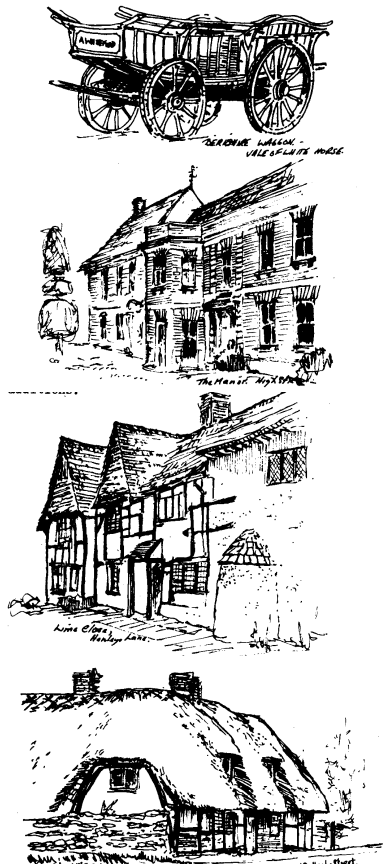
Carting heavy loads was thirsty work for man and beast, so where better to refresh oneself than at The Wheateheaf (an old beer-house before the 19th century) or at the Red Lion (pre-1830) where the old horse trough remained until comparatively recent times. Walnut Cottage, the home of the wheelwright, was originally built as an inn, also, in the 16th century, for the cellar walls had curved, barrel-holding alcoves built into the structure. So it seems that Drayton never lacked suitable liquid refreshment. Likely as not, after a drink, the horse and cart would be driven to and fro through the village pond to clean wheels and hoofs before continuing the journey.

Even in the matter of building, the village was capable of complete independence by providing its own material and skills. After the fire of 1780 had destroyed most of the old houses in the High Street, the villagers set about the task of rebuilding, and the material used was Drayton Brick. Kimmeridge clay was dug out of the pits in the Whitehorns Way area. This was mixed with sand and water, and the

bricks were then shaped and dried in the open, and fired in the kiln (at Kiln Road, near Lockway). The bricks were mostly dull red in colour but grey and blue-black ones were also made, and these were used to vary the patterns on the facades of the houses. Most of the houses in the High Street were built at this time, and of Drayton Brick. These include the Almshouses, the farm cottages, Mr. Hall's farmhouse (used to re-house the Vicar after the fire) and also The Old Pound, to the right of which was the walled enclosure for the impounding of stray cattle.

These old houses of Drayton provide ample evidence of the self-sufficiency of the village before the advent of public transport. 'When we add to the list of skills already named, the boot and shoe makers, the dressmakers, the glaziers and tile-makers, the pig farmers and bacon curers, etc, we realise that in spite of its rural isolation, Drayton lacked few of the essential amenities of life in those bygone days.

August 1978



Eirwen Jones

August 1978



## Part 6 ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

Abingdon was the chief commercial centre for North Berkshire: it was to the market and fairs there that Drayton folk flocked over the centuries. The old St. Mary's Fair of the Middle Ages gave way to a two-day Michaelmas Fair, when hiring agreements between masters and men were entered into for the coming 12 months. A small Runaway Fair a week later enabled unhappy employees to change their contracts if they wished. Hiring Fairs continued right up until the beginning of the 20th century.

Carters and wagoners wore whipcord round their hats; thatchers wore a wisp of straw, shepherds carried crooks and the milkmaid a stool. Thus the job required was obvious to the hirer at a glance. When the bargain had been struck, the workers received a "fasten penny" or "earnest" money, usually a shilling. The serious work being done, they then went off to enjoy themselves. All the fun of the fair was there: gypsies and showmen, quack doctors, men with dancing bears and entertainers of all kinds. The noise was deafening, what with the music of the hurdy-gurdies, the bawling of the stallholders and the

excited shrieks of the villagers making the most of the long awaited treat.

The Michaelmas Fair was only one of the seven annual fairs maintained by Abingdon. The Bull Fair (Lombard Street Fair) was held in May, and traded in horses, cove, sheep, bulls and also cheeses. There was Ock Street Fair in September, St. James Fair in August, and so on. Closely connected with the Fairs were the village carriers who plied their trade between Abingdon and Drayton as other villages, fetching and carrying at the convenience of the buyers.

Then there were the special fairs like the Horse Fair at Harwell and the Great Sheep Fair at East Ilsley in August, which attracted villagers from Drayton and elsewhere. Great flocks of sheep with tinkling bells converged on the downlands, making it a vast sea of wool under the ever-watchful eyes of the shepherds and their dogs. The life of the shepherd was a busy one and we are told that when he died, he took with him in his coffin a lock of wool and sometimes his crook "so that the Almighty would understand why he had never had time to attend church on Sundays".

In addition to all these events, there were the annual feast days held in the villages on the festival of the Saint to whom the Parish Church was dedicated. A successful attempt to revive Drayton Feast on St. Peter's Day was made in recent years.

If these revelries did not suffice, there was always the scouring of the White Horse at Uffington. This took place at intervals of several years, the last being in 1857. This was really the spring cleaning of the Horse, to which the venturesome young bloods of Drayton would undoubtedly have flocked. Men from nearby farms swept and cleaned the Horse with besoms and shovels, restoring its whiteness, whilst others trimmed the edges and the ditches, cutting into the chalk. When they had finished, the workers downed a large can of beer sent up by the squire and sang a song, beginning,

"The owld White Hares wants zettin to rights  
And the Squire her promised good cheer  
Zo we'll gee un a scrape to kip un in zhape  
And a'll last for many a year".

The scouring was followed by 'The Pastime', a programme of sports and merrymaking. Show booths and stalls of all kinds were set up and there was much eating and drinking and singing. Contests of all sorts took place, often with smocks for prizes. There was fighting and wrestling, carthorse racing and pig chasing. Thomas Hughes presents the pigs' point of view in these lines -

"Pegs baint made no race to win  
Be zhart o' wind and tight o' skin  
Dwont ee hunt 'em, but instead  
At backswyrd break each other's yead  
Cheezes down the manger rowl  
Or try and clim the greasy powl  
Pegs in stubble, yeard and styce  
May you never be zard {served} like I  
Nor druv wi greasy ears and tail  
By men and bwoys drough White Harse Vale"

From these accounts it is obvious that Berkshire folk never missed the opportunity for any fun and games to be had. "Work hard, play hard" was their motto.

Eirwen Jones

September 1978



## Part 7 MORE PASTIMES & SPORTS

As a sport for farmers and squires, fox hunting developed in the Vale throughout the 18th and 19th centuries; and the Old Berkshire Hunt is one of the oldest in England. Horse racing also took place at this time, firstly at Culham Heath and later at Abingdon Common on the Marcham Road, where it was well established by the beginning of the 19th century.

Yet for all the good-natured fun, there was a cruel side to life in the past centuries. The stocks and the pillory, public whippings and even public hangings were accepted spectacles by Drayton people, as by others. Old inhabitants of our village still remember the stocks that used to stand near Sutton Wick House. Galley Fields, the old name for the fields at the bottom of the High Street, near the Milton Road turning, was probably the site of a gallows.

Sentences for petty crime were very harsh. At the Midsummer Assizes, held at Abingdon in 1820, sentence of death was passed on one James Bayliss, age 25, for stealing 2 gowns and 2 shawls. The same fate befell Samuel Blackball, age 17, and Robert Leech, age 57, for stealing sheep and beehives. Executions were often carried out in public, and the corpse was left hanging as an awful warning to others. A man could be hanged for stealing a sheep as late as 1830, and public executions persisted until 1868.

The same harshness was reflected in the sporting interests. To our shame, Berkshire was one of the last counties to abandon Bull Baiting. In the 17th century it was illegal for a butcher to slaughter a bull that had not first been baited. Baiting was thought to improve the quality of the meat. We have it on record that a Newbury butcher was fined in court for breaking this law in 1661.

Berkshire's favourite day for the Bait was Good Friday, and every sizeable village in Berkshire had its green where this cruel sport was practised. It is revolting to think of the possibility of Drayton Green being sullied by this pastime. The Bait always attracted crowds from miles around. Spectators hung from bedroom windows and climbed to vantage points such as chimney pots, treetops and anywhere that a safe footing could be found. There was much shouting and arguing, and the women folk joined in the general confusion.

The bull, secured by a rope attached to his horns, was led to the green by sturdy men. He was then fixed to a ring in the ground by a chain, and a ferocious bull-dog was let loose to attack and 'pin' the nose of the bull, at the same time being wary to avoid the deadly horns poised to rip him apart. When the bull, finally exhausted by a succession of dogs, was dragged away, he was taken to the slaughterhouse. At Christmas time, it was the practice in the towns to distribute the meat among the poor.

Bulldogs, the oldest known British breed of dog, were much cherished by their owners. They wore silver collars to show off their medals for past victories. In 1835 bull baiting was forbidden by law, but Wantage had the unenviable distinction of being the last town to comply with this law.

Cockfighting was the most popular sport of all in Berkshire, and all classes staked their money. Shrove Tuesday was the favourite day for the big matches, called 'mains' (from the French "a la main").

These were held at Oxford, at Wantage and at Abingdon; and villagers from Drayton and elsewhere flocked to see them. The heels of the birds were often armed with steel spurs. Matches between birds belonging to farmers and gentlemen of different counties took place frequently. Both the Crown Inn at Faringdon and the New Inn (now The Queens), Abingdon, had well known pits. The remains of a village cockpit can still be seen at Long Wittenham behind the village school there, with a path leading from the churchyard straight to the cockpit for after-church sport.

It is a relief to turn aside from these barbaric practices and to end on a happier note. Mummers and Morris Dancing were a form of entertainment which was part and parcel of Tudor and Stuart times and continued right through to the 18th century. Indeed the Morris Dancers of Ock Street still keep up the tradition, and delight us with their prowess from time to time.

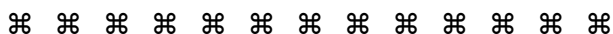
Mummers of Drayton had their own particular version of the Christmas play and the Abingdon Morris Dancers used to tour the villages on Mayday taking with them their own Maypole, which had a

pair of ox-horns on top. Drayton children danced around the maypole and sang happy songs, garlanded with spring flowers. Here is one of the Drayton songs:

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a happy day  
I come to show my garland Upon the First of May.  
Fail, all hail, the merry month of May  
The spring is coming in The cuckoo's voice is heard  
Come out into the fields To hear my favourite bird.  
Cuckoo, cuckoo, he warbles in the tree  
Cuckoo, cuckoo, how sweet his voice to me".

Eirwen Jones

November 1978



## Part 8 COACHING DAYS

During the 17th century it was a common sight for the People of Drayton to see trains of pack horses picking their way over the rough tracks that criss-crossed our village. Strapped to their sides were panniers laden with hardware goods, pottery or coal. This form of transport was used because wheel traffic was liable to be bogged down and broken in the deep ruts and potholes of the roads. The ruts were sometimes four or five feet deep. Pepys in his diary complained of being lost in 1688, on one of these roads leading out of Newbury. The Pack Horse Inn at Steventon is a link with this period of our history.

Local government was responsible for the upkeep of the roads, but they remained in an appalling state until the Turnpike companies took over. In the early 18th century these were granted Parliamentary powers to erect gates and toll bars to make the actual users of the roads pay for their upkeep. The roads derived their name from the swinging bar with its spikes, preventing people and traffic passing until the toll was paid. The mail, clergymen, soldiers, farm implements and dung carts went through free. A strange assortment.

Turnpike Trustees improved the roads of Drayton as elsewhere, out of all recognition, finally reaching the perfection of the Macadam Roads. Although most of the tollgates have been swept away, many of the old tollhouses remain as dwelling houses, like the one at Culham. The A34 passing through Drayton was once part of a Turnpike Road and is still referred to as such by some of the older inhabitants. Mr. Frank Buckell maintains that the rounded corner-wall of his house at the beginning of Steventon Road was part of the old tollhouse that once stood there.

With improvements in the roads, the isolation of villages and small towns like Drayton and Abingdon ceased. By the mid-18th century the stagecoach, drawn by 2 or 4 horses, was operating on our roads. A red-coated guard with his blunderbuss accompanied the coach from stage to stage to fend off highwaymen for these 'gentlemen of the

road' were by no means the gallant frock-coated figures of romantic fiction. They were rough louts wielding nasty weapons. In 1784 gentlemen farmers and others formed an association in the neighbourhood of Abingdon to repress highway robbery of the coaches.

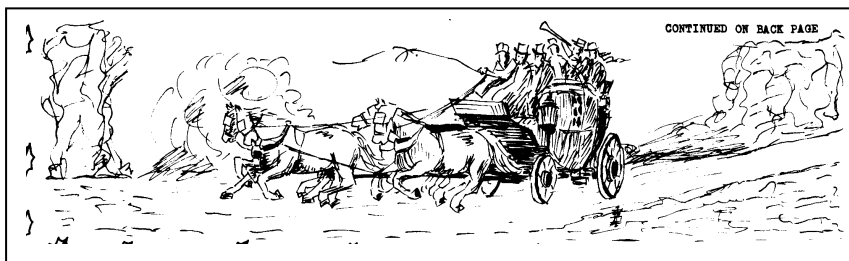
By 1825 Abingdon was linked to London and neighbouring towns by separate coach services usually carrying 4 people inside and from 5 to 11 outside. Coaches with names like The Defiance, The True Briton, and The Dart could be boarded at Abingdon, the chief picking-up places being The Lamb (now disappeared) in The Square, and New Inn (now The Queens) in Market Place. Only 4 or 5 of the old Coaching Inns of Abingdon now remain. They are The Crown and Thistle, The Kings Head And Bell, The George And Dragon, The Horse And Jockey, and possibly The Air Balloon.

The Oxford to Southampton coach, after making its customary halt at The Lamb in The Square at Abingdon, left at 9.00 am on weekdays to proceed through Drayton on the turnpike road to Ilsley and the South. Two milestones, one at each end of the village remain to remind us of this period of our history. One can imagine the interest when the coach passed through Drayton Village. As men paused at their tasks in the fields to steal a glimpse, women and children shouted greetings from doorways, and the proud coachman flicked his whip in acknowledgement.

The elegant Mail Coaches soon outstripped stagecoaches in speed and efficiency. These were first introduced in 1784, their object being to take over the work of the post-boys and to deliver the Royal Mail to all parts of Britain strictly on time. They also carried passengers along with the mail. Their speed was considered astonishing. They ran at an average 8 miles an hour, with bursts of 11 or 12 miles. A German visitor to England complained, "You can only get a piecemeal view of the country from the windows on account of the tremendous speed you have no object long in view".

The Mail Coaches were uniformly decorated with simple elegance. They were painted black and maroon with scarlet wheels. The insignia of the four orders of chivalry (Garter, Bath, Thistle and St Patrick) appeared on the panels flanking the windows and the Royal Arms were on the door. By contrast the gaudily painted stagecoaches,

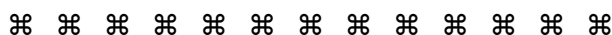
yellow, green and blue, seemed vulgar. Also the mail Coaches bore no names, but mere discreetly anonymous. They had great prestige on the roads. At a blast from the coach-horn, the tollgates flew open wide, and all other traffic gave way to them. The mail coach passing through



Abingdon was the Stroudwater Mail. This was listed in the London Directory for 1815 as an auxiliary mail. The 1836 Timesheet shows that it left London at 6.00 pm and was due at The Crown And Thistle at 2.27 am. Here the horses were changed in the cobbled courtyard before continuing the journey through the night to Stroud where the Mail was due to arrive at 7.47 am. The charge for carrying a letter to Abingdon was 8 pence a single sheet, based on the mileage from London (56 miles). The route was turnpike on which tolls were levied, but the Mail Coach passed free. All along this route milestones can be found, two being in the vicinity of Abingdon. The first is opposite the causeway into Abingdon, near Culham, and the second at Shippon, near the Airfield. It is likely that the early postmasters of Abingdon were the local innkeepers, until the Post Office was established in Market Square, where the Tourist Office now operates. Letters for Drayton completed the final stage of their journey by letter carrier or by messenger. Drayton's first Post Office was at Walnut Cottage in the High Street, the home of the wheelwright. The post-box was built into the wall of the house. The rapid development of the railway in the mid-19th century brought an end to the short-lived coaching era. The Pickwickian scene faded away, and the highways were left deserted, awaiting the coming of the motorcar.

Eirwen Jones.

December 1978



## Part 9 THE WILTS AND BERKS CANAL

In September 1810, the Wiltshire & Berkshire Canal was opened for navigation, and St. Helen's Wharf at Abingdon, gay with bunting, was the scene of great jubilation. There was music and merrymaking for the visitors from Drayton and neighbouring villages. They crowded the banks of the Thames to cheer the decorated narrow barges through the last lock of the canal into the Thames.

The canal ran across the vale coming from Bath through Grove (where there was a wharf) to East Hanney and thence to Drayton. From our village it continued its way to Abingdon, crossing what is now the A34 near the present Caldicot Road. The older inhabitants of Drayton remember a humpbacked bridge over the canal there. From there it continued to St. Helen's Wharf.

The canal was 52 miles long with 42 locks. It had a depth of 4ft 6in and a surface width of 27 ft. Each barge, 70ft long and 7ft broad, could carry about 25 tons of cargo. The canal was the only regular means of transport in the Western part of the Vale at the beginning of the 19th century. It supplied Drayton, as other local places, with cheap coal from the Somerset coalfields. In 1837, when the canal was at its peak, 10,669 tons of coal were unloaded at the Abingdon wharf. Also flour, malt and corn were transported, as timber and pottery and even bricks and tiles from village kilns like those at Drayton.

In the 1830s a quick passenger service was also introduced between Abingdon, Bath and Bristol, with further connections to London and Birmingham.

Thomas Hughes in his book "Tom Brown's Schooldays" describes the canal scene thus: -

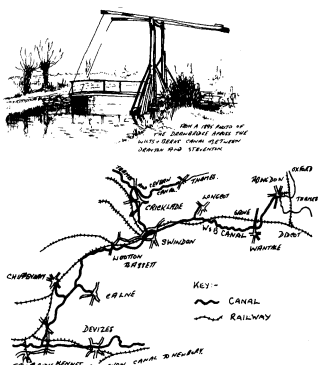
"There was the canal, which supplied the countryside with coal and up and down which continually went the long barges, with the big black men lounging by the side of the horses along the towing path the women in bright-coloured handkerchiefs standing in the sterns, steering. Standing, I say, but you could never see whether they were standing or sitting, all but their heads and shoulders being out of sight in the cosy little cabins which occupied some 8ft of the stern".

Gaily-decorated pails, jugs and kitchen utensils added another touch of colour to the barges.

The canal system was sometimes referred to, grandly, as 'Inland Navigation'. Hence the labourers building the canals came to be called 'navvies'. These navvies and the boatmen, coming as they did from more riotous places, sometimes had a disturbing effect on the quiet communities of Berkshire. Wantage, for instance, came to be known as Black Wantage on account of the rowdy scenes at the cock fighting and bear-baiting along the Wharf Terrace there.

Canal transport also had an effect on local architecture. Bricks from kilns such as those at Drayton came to be used more and more to repair old wattle and daub cottages along the canal route, or for 'quoins' (external angles of buildings, or cornerstones) and window jambs in houses built of local chalk or ragstone. At the same time, Bath stone and Welsh slates were brought in from the West by the canal and these began to appear in local buildings.

The canal system was highly successful, being speedy and cheap, but the canal era faded away when the fast railways came to the Vale of the White Horse in 1840. This was when the Great Western Railway between London and Bristol opened. After 50 years of service, the canal ceased to be used in 1906, and was finally abandoned in 1914. Today, only faint traces remain of what was once a busy thoroughfare.



Eirwen Jones (Sketches by Bill Fuller)



## Part 10 THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

Until the late 19th century most of the children of Drayton received no schooling, for the State did not concern itself with their education. Its provision was left to private individuals or to charitable institutions. A few children probably attended the Grammar School at Abingdon or went to a Boarding School; but for most, education was centred in the practical activities of the home, the village and the countryside around.

By the late 17th and 18th centuries, attempts were made to provide private education. The Dame School, conducted in a cottage room by an elderly woman, became a feature of most villages. It is likely that one of our old cottages was used for this purpose. It would have been little more than a baby-minding establishment, with young children gathered around the Dame for such homely teaching as she could muster. The 2 or 3 pence a week charged by her supplemented her small incomes and those children who attended long enough acquired, albeit painfully, a modest skill in reading.

Another type of private school, one 'for young ladies' was conducted at "Lime Close". James Woodeforde, the diarist, who visited Drayton in the late 18th century, makes reference to it in his writings. It was still operating a century later, for the 1871 census lists 9 boarders being present at this 'Ladies Seminary'. A hoard of rusty thimbles and scissors, found beneath the floorboards there during recent alterations, conjures up a picture of little girls laboriously stitching letters and verses into their treasured samplers.

In the late 18th century the plight of most of the children became a national disgrace. Widespread poverty, caused by the Industrial Revolution and the accelerated Enclosure Movement, forced many parents to send their children out to work. Whilst town children took jobs in factories and mines, village children found farm-work such as crow-scaring, or they could become "climbing boys" for the village sweep.

Public outcry prompted many laws limiting the employment of these young children, but it was the Church, to its lasting credit, which pioneered the movement for educating them. Sunday Schools sought to give the children some instruction in reading and writing along with religious teaching. Then the National Society of the Church began establishing schools in villages. It was this society which founded the Primary School at Drayton in 1842, in the churchyard of St. Peter's Church, begging parents to send their children along.

Most of the teaching in these first elementary schools was devoted to the 3 Rs (Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic) with Scripture and Needlework for girls in addition. Because many people were fearful that education-for-all would lead to a lowering of moral standards, much of the teaching had a religious bias. Infants learning to read sang lustily to the tune 'Adeste Fideles' (O Come, all ye faithful) thus: -

- A is for Angel - who praises the Lord;
- B is for Bible - God's most holy word;
- C is for Church - where the righteous resort;
- D is for Devil - who wishes our hurt.

"D is for Devil" was sung thrice, and one can imagine the gusto given to this line by the tiny tots.

For the older children, line upon line of painstakingly copied handwriting hammered home the maxim

- Cleanliness is next to Godliness
- Cleanliness is next to Godliness
- Cleanliness is next to Godliness.

And when it came to the arithmetic lesson, young scholars were wont to chant

- "Two bottles one gallon,
- Two gallons one peck fair.
- Four pecks one bushel, heap or brim.
- Eight bushels one quarter are.
- If, when you sell, you give
- Good measure shaken down
- Through motive good, you will receive
- An everlasting crown."

Children attending the Church Lane School at Drayton must have received an educational diet very similar to this.

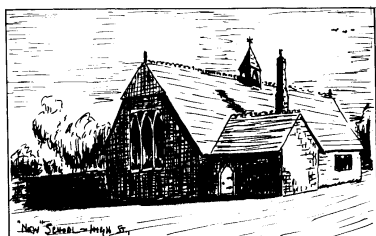
By the important education acts of 1870 and 1880 attendance at school was made compulsory for children up to 14 years of age, or 11-years of age for the very bright pupil. (Free education followed in 1891). The increased number of children on roll at Drayton School resulting from these measures (from 90 pupils in 1855 to 136 in 1875) necessitated a move to a new building in the High Street in 1875. This was half financed by the State and half by voluntary contributions raised by the National Society.

The 'new School' in the High Street, now a dwelling house was a typical Victorian village school building. It had one large room divided by a partition, with high windows to ensure that the attention of the children should not be distracted. Heating and sanitation left much to be desired, and what would be considered gross overcrowding today was acceptable to the Victorians.

But not even the excitement of moving to a new building could redeem the "Payments by Results" system which had been operating in the schools since 1862. Under this system, every scholar who attended regularly and passed an annual examination would earn from the government a grant of 8 shillings for the school. If a scholar failed to pass the examination, the amount of 2 shillings and 8 pence was forfeited for each subject of the 3 Rs in which he failed. The examination was conducted by one of Her Majesty's visiting Inspectors.

In order to get their pupils up to the required standards, teachers were compelled to enforce harsh discipline, and the children came to associate school with dull mechanical grind. When there were trees to climb, nuts to be gathered and fish in the streams, it was difficult to harness the attention of a country lad to tedious lessons in a cramped classroom. Even newer subjects like History and Geography consisted mainly of learning long lists of facts; and the more popular object lesson was marred by the long descriptive words that had to be memorised.

Tempting carrots in the shape of books, pennies and medals were offered as an inducement to good attendance, but to little avail. Truancy was rife and although it had become a criminal offence since the introduction of compulsory education, yet these extracts from the old Log Book of Drayton School show that it continued to be a serious problem. School was a place to be avoided whenever possible. "May 1st 1895 - Only 62 here. All the others going round the village garlanding. September 8th 1895 - 55 scholars present. Many children still helping in the field, the harvest not being over".



Eirwen Jones

March 1979

positions are still marked on some maps. The machinery in Drayton Mill is intact and Upper Mill, in Sutton Courtenay, is kept in first class order and its waterwheel is occasionally started. Throughout this century, village mills were used for such purposes as grinding cattle food, chaff cutting and even sawing wood. Steam power extended the life of some mills but, one by one, they ceased to operate and in the early 1960's the stones at Drayton Mill stopped too, the last working mill on the Ginge.

However, the brook continues to serve in other ways. It provides watering places for cattle; it is still used for fishing, though only on its tributary, the Lockinge, where trout have been introduced. In earlier times, trout could be caught along the whole length of the brook and eels were caught below Drayton Mill. Crayfish too were in sufficient supply to provide a commodity for local markets.

Its use as a drainage channel, with consequent clearing of banks and dredging may account for the disappearance of fish spawning grounds and the wilder marginal habitats that otters may have used for resting places, if not for breeding. Certainly, the decline of fish stocks has discouraged the otters that have been seen in the watercress beds at the rising of the brook, within living memory. These beds stretch for about a quarter-mile and represent the last of an industry that flourished in the early part of this century.

The clear waters of the Ginge, at its source, were used as mineral waters in the Nineteenth century. Visitors resided at a large house, now gone, that stood near Ginge Farm and they made their way through a willow grove to bathe in a spring nearby. This is recorded in Eleanor Hayden's book of West Hendred 'Travels Round Our village'.

The brook now has a potential new supply from boreholes that have been sunk at Gore Hill, Hodcote and Knollend Down, from which a pipe leads down to the Ginge. In times of drought, water can be pumped into the Ginge and so carried down to the Thames. This arrangement was barely finished for the drought of 1976 and was not put into use although in that year and for the first time in living memory, the springs at the source of the Ginge and at Betroth, the source of the Lockinge Brook dried up,

There have been several changes to the course of the Ginge over the centuries, the most drastic recent change being the re-routing of its final stages in 1941 to avoid flooding. Fortunately, the old channel, now a backwater of the Thames, still remains and very beautiful it looks. Within Sutton Courtenay Manor grounds, there is also an interesting old backwater, linking the Old Ginge with the Thames, which was probably cut to provide wharfing arrangements in earlier times.

There is a tendency for the brook to force a passage down Moor Ditch an outlet on the edge of Milton Manor grounds that runs down to join the Thames near Long Wittenham. The vulnerable bend has been heavily reinforced and a piped outlet installed to allow water to escape into Moor Ditch, a very old drainage channel referred to in a Saxon Charter as 'ealdan diel'. Such an outlet was also called a 'law hole' and Mr. Ron Bradfield, the last owner of Drayton Mill can recall his father using the term of an outlet at Milton Mill. The present outlet that exists in the mill pond there, allows water to flow into the various pools of Milton Manor and it is still incumbent upon the owner of Milton Mill House to preserve a head of water in the mill pond so that the Manor ponds may be replenished. Such ponds were used for fish keeping, originally.

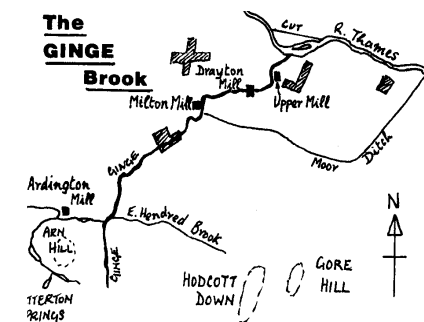
A small, but interesting change took place in the 1930s when a number of looped meanders were severed to increase the flow of water on the stretch just before the brook turns east to move towards Drayton Mill. This had the effect of leaving bits of Drayton parish on the 'wrong' side of the brook since the parish boundary continues to follow the old meanders of the brook.

The brook has two tributaries. One is Goddards Brook, a winterbourne rising southwest of Arn Hill and joining the Ginge brook near Ardington Mill. The other is East Hendred Brook that starts a little way to the north of AERE, near the Hungerford green road, and runs east to west to join the Ginge just above East Hendred Mill.

The Ginge Brook is a modest stream; narrow and silent for much of its length but it has been a busy brook in its time and has a quiet charm that makes it worth seeking out.

Frank C. Poller, Milton

May 1978



## Part 11 THE GINGE BROOK

For part of its 11-mile journey the GINGE BROOK forms the parish boundary between Drayton and Milton although the boundary leaves the brook for a while to run along the leat that by-passes Drayton mill.

Short though it is, the Ginge has been a lifeline for the villages through which it meanders. In this century, it has turned the waterwheels in a number of mills that have now gone though their