

Shrawley

through the

AGES



The original book 'The Parish of Shrawley' was written and produced in 1982 by Robert Walker C.B.E who lived at The Knapp, Shrawley. A small quantity were printed and sold mainly to the people of Shrawley and other parties interested in local history.

What I have endeavoured to do is to update the book here and there as well as include much more material which was not possible with the original publication due the costs involved in printing.

With the advent of home computers and the internet it has enabled me to expand the book considerably and I hope this will give a greater insight to the history of Shrawley and the people of the village.

John Mills

ja.mills@ukonline.co.uk

web.mac.com/johnamills

Acknowledgements

I would to thank the many people who over the last thirty odd years have relayed stories, lent or given me pictures and documents to copy and firstly produce my photographic album. This has enabled me to include many more pictures in this updated version of Robert Walker's book.

Some of the illustrations are taken from newspaper cuttings given to me, and where possible I have sought permission to use them.

"Lost local ferries" is an extract from Severn Ferries and Fords by HW Gwilliam (permission is still being sought.)

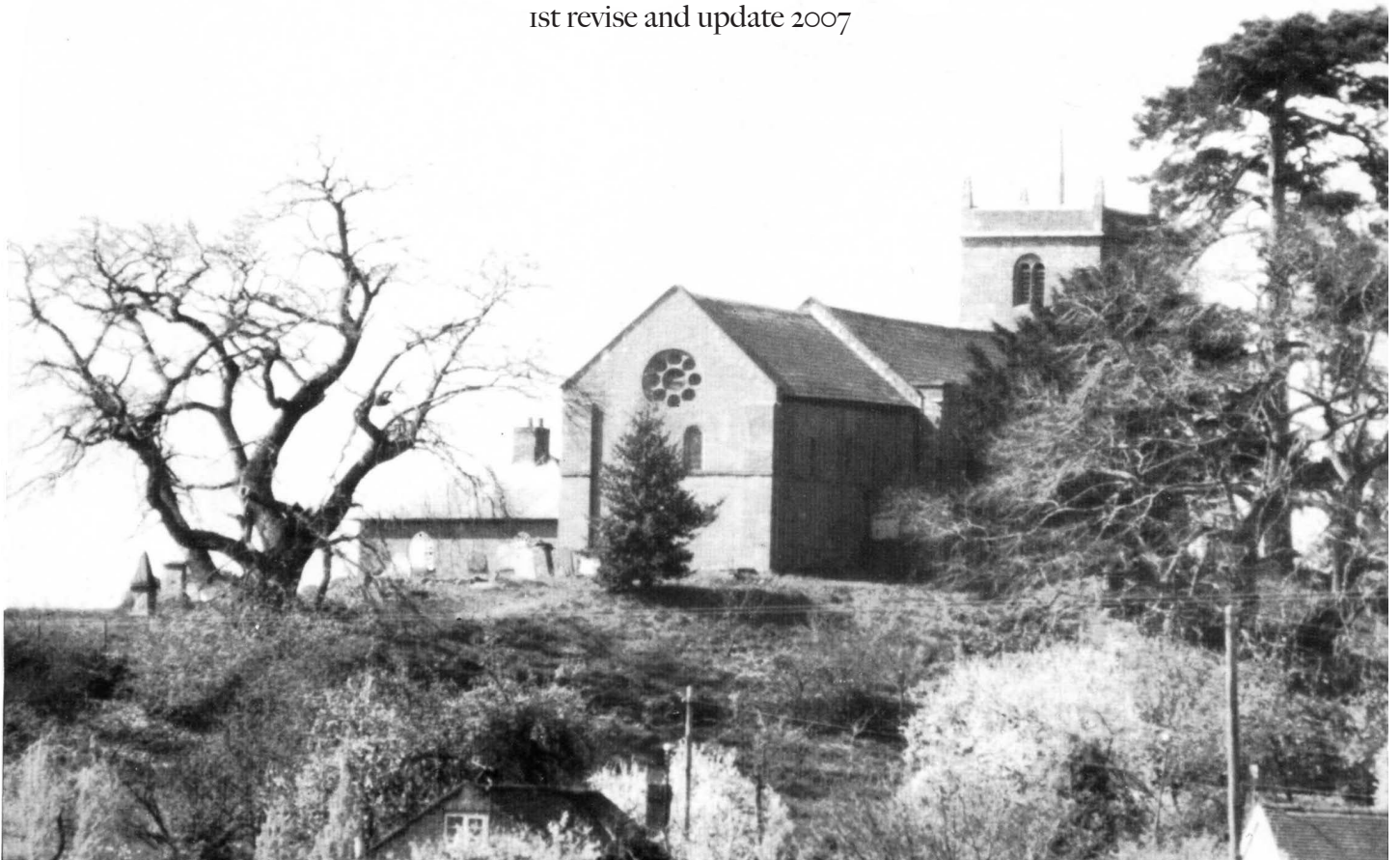
The 3 pictures of the flood damage on P44 are reproduced with permission of the Worcester Evening News.

the Parish of Shrawley

to celebrate the Ninth
Centenary of St Mary's Church
July 1982

Compiled and edited by
Robert O. Walker C.B.E.

1st revise and update 2007



THE PARISH OF SHRAWLEY

The Parish of Shrawley lies in the County of Hereford and Worcester 8 miles from Worcester, 4 from Stourport and 6 from Bewdley. The area of 1940 acres is bounded on the East by the Severn, on the North by the Dick Brook, on the South by Shrawley Brook and to the West by the Parish of Witley. Some 450 acres is woodland mostly in Shrawley Wood, 40 acres is water and the remainder mixed agricultural land. The terrain is undulating and the soil a stiff loam on a base of clay or marl with outcrops of red sandstone which run through the parish. Here and there are beds of gravel and bands of clay suitable for brick making.

Since the original book was written the village store and post office has closed.

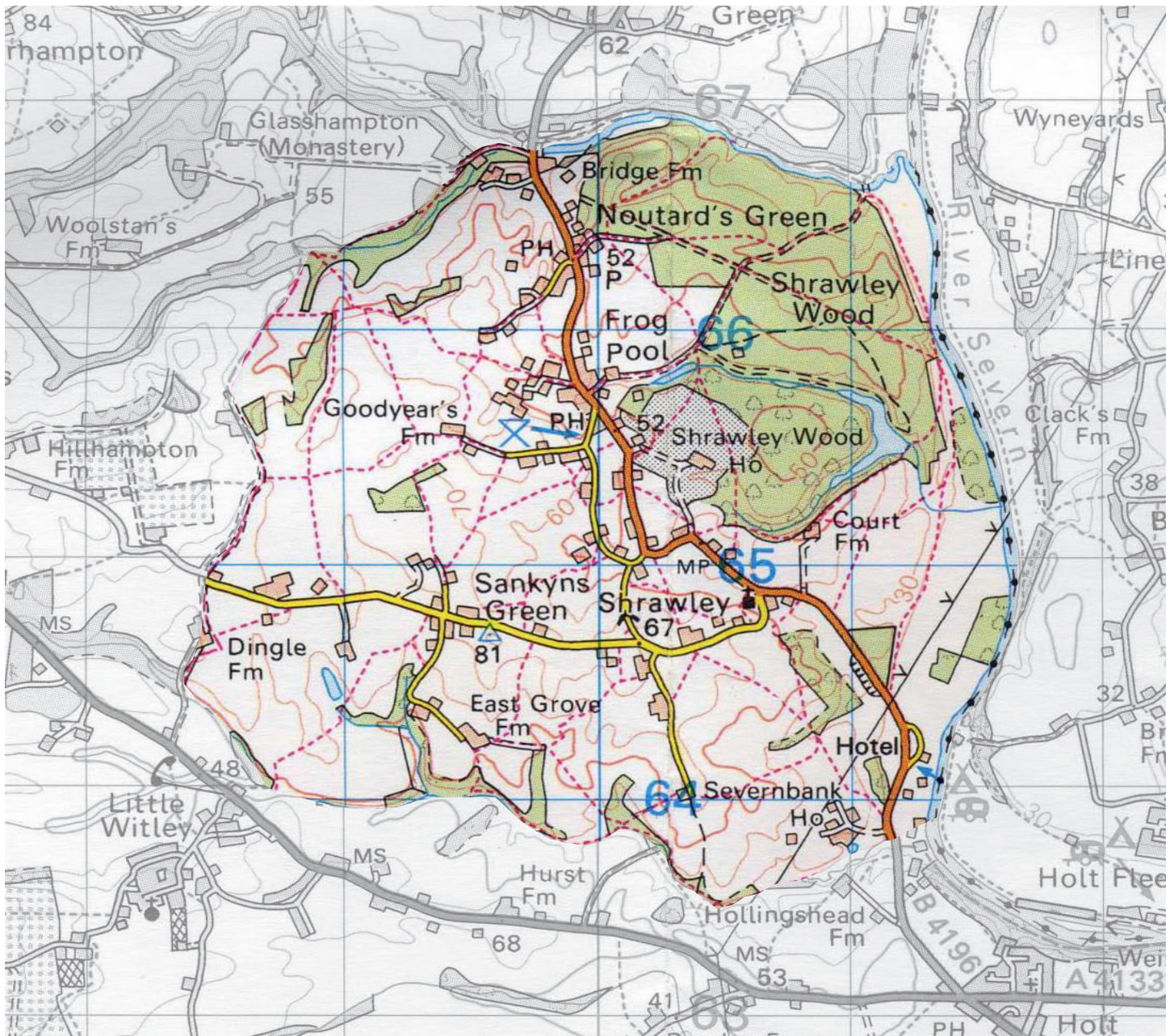
The bulk of the population of 348 persons (1981 census) is spread out along the 4171 yards of the B.4196 with concentration of population at Noutards Green, Frog Pool and Sankyns Green. It is not surprising therefore that visitors find themselves directed by reference to the three old established Inns, Lenchford to the West, New Inn to the East and Rose & Crown at Frog Pool.

Shrawley Wood has been listed by the Nature Conservancy Council as a site of special scientific interest to Naturalists.

The church is of Norman origin set on a hill overlooking the west end of the Parish and on the road

leading to the Hundred House. The incumbent Rector is now responsible also for ministering to the needs of the neighbouring parishes of Little Witley, Great Witley, Astley and Abberley.

The Post Office and only Village Store in the 1980's was at Noutards Green. Although like so many other rural communities the village is less self reliant and self contained than it was a few decades ago, there is much to interest visitors and a variety of activities still serve to foster a sense of belonging amongst the local inhabitants which we hope will be reflected in the celebrations of the ninth centenary of the Parish Church of St. Mary.



The Early History

Robert O. Walker

The early evidence of a settlement in what is now the Parish of Shrawley was centered near a ford across the Severn, between it and the Woods. It remained in constant use until bridges were built at Stourport and Holt and until the use of river vessels of a deeper draft demanded the construction of weirs and locks or the dredging and deepening of the shallows associated with rocky outcrops such as those at ShrawleyWeyre. It probably ceased to be useful about the middle of the nineteenth century. Associated with it and on higher ground was a “castle” or fortification obviously designed to protect the ford from marauders whether they were local bandits or invading Britons, Saxons, Danes or Normans. The tracks leading to and from the crossing place, later known as Redstone Ford, are generally regarded as having been important elements in the routes from North Wales, through the Abberley Gap to London via Hartlebury or Droitwich and, in the case of the latter, part of a “Saltway”.

The heavily wooded countryside included the Hundred of Doddingtree, which embraced the manors of Abberley, Astley and Glasshampton as well as that of Shrawley. The overlordship of the Hundred of Doddingtree was granted to a Ralph Todeini, a relative of the Duke of Normandy, in the year 1066 by William the Conqueror as a reward for his services as Standard bearer during the Norman Conquest. He and other members of the family owned large areas of land throughout the county as recorded in the Domesday Book. His sister owned the Manor of Elmley Lovett and Hadzor near Droitwich. After the Battle of Hastings, Ralph built the Priory near Astley Church and the well there still functions today. He also built castles at Abberley and Glasshampton.

Towards the end of this 11th century the first stage of the Parish church was built on a commanding site at the west end of the parish and with the appointment of a priest with responsibility for “the care of souls” in the surrounding district began the first real evidence of the Parish of Shrawley. The Lord of the Manor’s right of appointment of a clergyman to the parish - a survival of the control exercised by Feudal Lords over churches-meant that the boundaries of manor and parish were commonly and conveniently co-extensive. There is no firm evidence of the site of a Manor House but it would seem likely that its first equivalent was situated on the “Court Hills” by the ford.

The parish of Shrawley is not mentioned in the Domesday Book and the first official record of its existence is in the Evesham Chartulary or Register assigned to the latter half of the 12th century.

Through Ralph Todeini the manor of Shrawley fell by marriage to the Beauchamps associated with the manor of Holt and subsequently again by marriage to the Earl of Warwick, the King Maker, who died discredited by the King, and so the Manor of Shrawley passed to the crown. During the reign of Henry VIII some fifty years later the Manor of Shrawley was granted to one Mr. Sheldon of Spetchley.

At the time of the Civil Wars 1642 - 1651 the Manor was



divided, William Chylde an ardent Royalist possessing the woods and John Adams the remainder. At this time there may well have been two hamlets, one by the river and one by Frog Pool. Tradition has it that Chylde defended the ford and castle against Cromwell and that Cromwell subsequently occupied the site and doubtless the church, for the billeting of his troops. Around the same time Andrew Yarranton was active with his forge by the Dick Brook, and, being a sympathiser with the Parliamentarians, may well have rendered service to Cromwell with the repair or fabrication of his instruments of war. It would seem that the "Court Hills" which was the site of the fortification by the ford changed its name about now to "Olivers Mound".

During the years 1928-30 excavations on Olivers Mound were undertaken by S. W. Masterman at that time resident at Bartlands.

"A square tower 27 feet each way, an oblong chamber overlooking the river the base of an octagonal tower and some portions of wall were uncovered. Archaeological findings included 14th century green glaze, a handle of a bone implement which may have been used for pin making and a bronze coin also dated 14th century. Part of a sandstone capital ornamented with a pollard pattern similar to that on the font in St. Mary's church dated 13th century was also found.

Against the base of the octagonal tower was found some iron slag indicating iron workings subsequent to its abandonment as a fortified dwelling and tradition has it that the ruins were used to make armaments during the Great Civil War".

The only other armed conflict referred to in the neighbourhood is that of a Battle in 1405 on Woodbury Hill in sight of Shrawley. This involved the last invasion of this country by foreign troops when the Welsh Chieftain, Owen Glyndower, supported by Mortimer and Percy, brought in 5000 Frenchmen via Milford Haven on a march on Worcester. His advance was blocked by the forces of Henry IV positioned on the Abberley Hills and after the deaths of some 500 men, the invaders retreated back to Wales.

By the year 1681 the Chylde family had acquired the whole of the Manor and sold it to Alan Cliffe who later in 1700 sold it to Thomas Vernon of Hanbury to begin a long and continuing association of that family with the Parish.

In the year 1701 Glasshampton Manor, one of the stately homes of England, was erected together with landscaped parkland in place of Todeni's castle, but in Victorian times it was burnt to the ground leaving only a walled garden and an impressive range of stables which were converted, starting in 1918, by Father William into the Anglican community of St. Franciscan friars that it is today.

Near to Dick Brook and behind the monastery stands an interesting relic of the times in which Glasshampton Manor was built. It is one of the few remaining ice-houses and consists of a tunnel into the bank leading to a bricked chamber about 20 feet deep. In the days before refrigerators were invented, the owners of stately homes filled these ice-houses with blocks of ice in the winter in order to preserve meat during the heat of summer.

The comparative calm of the Middle Ages was rudely changed in the late eighteenth century by the advent of the Industrial Revolution which was accompanied by a consequential change in farming methods. The small relatively independent peasant farmer was unable to

compete with the capital investment required for the enclosures, the more intensive use of machines, fertilisers and the better strains of cereals and grasses and livestock which were being introduced. Many found themselves absorbed into larger estates and made redundant without compensation. Traditional rural crafts such as spinning, weaving, milling and brewing moved to the towns. Some individuals were attracted to the newly expanding industrial centres and the more independent chose to emigrate to the "new worlds" opening up overseas. The necessary capital came mostly from the newly rich industrialists in the towns and the harmonious, if inefficient, relationships of the old English Society were upset by a division between town and country, with further polarisation of the rich and poor and depression of the villages.

The nineteenth century was one of industrial development, awakening interest in social problems and in the absence of war for the greater part, one of returning stability and prosperity. Many of the changes which occurred are familiar, not peculiar to this parish and need not be repeated here but the recollections and reminiscences of some of the older parishioners, who have spent a life time in the area and which are contained in a later article will shed some light upon the conditions and customs which prevailed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They provide material for an absorbing insight into the way of life at that time.

R.O.W.

Within Living Memory

“We walk every day among witnesses of History who probably never talk about it””

In conversation with those who have spent a lifetime in a parish, it is possible to build up a picture of life in Shrawley during the early part of the 20th century.

Two world wars contributed greatly to the changes which occurred but prior to 1940 it would seem that the transition was gradual. After the second world war the speed of change was accelerated as a result of even more rapid advances in applied science and technology, difficult to embrace and profound in its impact upon the fabric of a rural society. Farming methods changed, domestic service was no longer available or acceptable as an occupation for girls, and improvements in roads, the rapid increase in privately owned cars and public transport opened up new opportunities in the towns for the younger generation. City dwellers who during the war period had regarded the villages as convenient evacuation centres were able to revisit the countryside under different circumstances and some chose to take advantage of the availability of vacant cottages to modernise, restore or in some instances replace them as dwellings suitable for the commuter, displacing families who for centuries perhaps had known no other home.

This is a familiar national pattern, accepted perhaps reluctantly but with good grace by the older generation, who saw an era of self

sufficiency in a closely knit community, enjoying a degree of tranquility, replaced by one, perhaps less peaceful, which will require time to consolidate and to acquire a fresh identity.

This narrative therefore - while of necessity referring occasionally to post-war developments - will concentrate rather upon those recollections of the pre-war periods in the hope that it can convey some impression of the quality of life in this rural community which may be in danger of being forgotten in this more affluent age.

Statistics

Any rural community around the turn of the century depended largely upon landowners for their employment, upon farming which required back up services from blacksmiths, wheelwrights, carpenters and coopers, and upon local gentry who while also farming to a greater or lesser extent, were pleased and able to employ additional staff to maintain the gardens and to serve in the house.

A further not inconsiderable group was the self employed shop-keeper and tradesmen who “serviced” the community by providing for most of the everyday requirements. Littleberry’s Directory & Gazetteer of 1879 gives the population of Shrawley in 1871 as 519, with 119 inhabited houses and 134 families or separate occupiers and a Post Office with daily deliveries from Stourport.

There were then 2 blacksmiths,



Above
The OLD Post Office

Below
The Smithy

2 wheelwrights, 2 carpenters, a cooper and haulier, an excavating contractor, a coal merchant and two carriers travelling to Worcester on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Of shops there were 2 butchers, 4 general provision stores, a shoemaker, tailor, draper and a market gardener and to provide for the refreshment of local inhabitants and travellers, three Inns - The New Inn, the Rose & Crown, and one at the Lenchford Wharf known then as the Vernon Arms.

By 1901 the population had fallen to 414, in 1921 to 384 and by 1931 had risen again to 414. The 1981 census identifies 348 persons. This declining population is readily understood but what is more significant of the social changes taking place is the steady decline in tradesmen and shopkeepers.

*In **1904**: one blacksmith, one carpenter and wheelwright, one coal merchant, one grocer and draper, one baker and grocer, one general store and one dressmaker, as well as the Post Office and, mentioned for the first time, a Police Station then Rose Cottage now Shrawley House.

*In **1928**: one blacksmith, one carpenter, one wheelwright, a grocer, a newsagent and mail now coming from Worcester

*In **1940**: one carpenter, a Post Office and shop, a newsagent, one other general store.

*In **1980**: one Post Office and General Store.

During the transition the part played by the travelling tradesman with his horse and van and later motor

**From Kelly’s Directories*



van, was not insignificant in accelerating the demise of the local shopkeeper and craftsman. From time to time charitable bequests have been made for the benefit of parishioners in need. As with many such old established charities their usefulness was limited by restrictions placed upon their designated application. In 1977 four such charities, two donated by Thomas Vernon and others by Jane Bourne and Rev. Edward Burlton were consolidated with the consent of the Charity Commissioners into a substantial capital sum and can now be used for purposes more in keeping with present day needs.

The Vernon Family

During the past 300 years the destinies of the Parish have been inextricably bound up with the fortunes of the Vernon family, the major landowners but non-resident. Sir Harry and his eldest son, Bowater George, are those who are best remembered today. Both were popular and considerate squires. Sir Harry and his wife Lady Georgina were especially well loved and had three children, Bowater George, who succeeded as Sir George in 1920, Herbert, a batchelor who died in service in the South African War and Auda Laetitia, who married late in life and died in 1957.

Bowater George married Doris, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Allan - at that time tenants of the Wood



House - in 1905- but their union was childless and ended unhappily in separation. Ruth Powick daughter of Edward Powick the manager of Shrawley estate who was at that time Sir George's secretary, was adopted by him and in 1938 given



Shrawley Wood House

the name Vernon by Deed Poll. On his death in 1940 she inherited the major portion of the estate and returned to live at the Wood House until her death in 1980 -Mrs. Allan, moving to live at Hanbury with Lady Doris.

It is thus Sir George, the last male heir, who is best remembered in the early part of this century. He was recalled from "ranching" in South America in 1902 to assist his father in the management of the Vernon estates and in 1906 was given the Shrawley estate by his father. It is now recognised that he had a special regard and affection for Shrawley and especially its historic woodland and his programme of woodland management earned him a considerable reputation among contemporary experts, although the changes introduced in Shrawley Wood were criticised by some of the local population at the time.

A considerable part of the property was sold in 1919* largely to sitting tenants, but the Wood House, the woods and several farms and cottages were retained. It is of interest to note the prices paid at that time for some of the farm properties.

*Bonefields: 40 acres: £1450.

*Caldicotts: 10 acres: £850.

*Goodyears: 49 acres: £1590.

*Nicholls: 11 acres: £800.

Other small properties also changed hands.

*Horn Cottage: £290. *Wood Cottage (the Post Office, closed 2005): £230.

*Harbord Cottage: £260.

*Fir Tree Cottage: £175.

Much of Sir George's love for the wood was nurtured when as a youth, he spent many hours with

college friends from Oxford using the Summer House as a base for sporting and other activities, and would account for his frequent visits in later life.

Sir George was active in the Tithes War of the early 1930's and the resultant conflict with the church authorities accounted for his expressed wish to be buried privately, not in consecrated ground but by the Summer Cottage, the scene of many happy memories. The grave was lined with honeysuckle, picked from the wood, a fitting tribute to one who had always enjoyed the unique nature of the surrounding flora and fauna.

Shrawley Wood House

The Wood House, without doubt the most prestigious house in the parish, was built in the early eighteenth century, on the site of a previous house, by the Vernon family for the use by one of its number but was only occupied for a short time. For the most part it has been the home of tenants who have enjoyed the associated parklands and gaming rights in the adjoining woods.

During the 20th century it was first occupied by Mr. & Mrs. Allan, 1903-1940, from the older Victorian school of wealthy tenants. Mr. Allan died in 1919 but Mrs. Allan stayed on and it is she who is best remembered for her patronage.

Among the several benefactions attributed to them were the addition of an extension to the school in 1911, the building of the old Parish Room (now demolished) as a Working Men's Club in 1913 and its extension in 1924, the building

* see separate sale details booklet

Sir George Vernon at a childrens party at Hanbury Hall

of the sandstone wall around the church yard and the provision of the first local district nurse. The woods were opened for two weeks each summer for the collection of "winter fuel" by parishioners but axes, saws and wheelbarrows were barred for obvious reasons! They were generous to the poor and sick and their kindness to the children took many forms including parties on special occasions, outings for choirboys who each also received a suitably inscribed book and all young couples on marriage received a gift of £1. All of this, of course, was in addition to the care of the park and woodland and house which provided employment for five servants and four outdoor employees who maintained the garden, grounds, woodland paths and riding tracks, in immaculate order. An important occasion in the social calendar of the county was the "Blue Bell Party", when many guests were invited to admire the

profusion of wild hyacinths in the woods and were subsequently entertained to afternoon tea. Other "comfortable gentlemen's residences" of that era still exist at Bartlands, Court Farm, Dodoak, East Grove, Hazelhurst, Severn Bank and Wood Farm and doubtless each made their own contribution to the personalities of the parish. Miss Ruth Vemon returned to Shrawley to live in the Wood House from 1940 till her death in 1980 and was survived by her husband Mr. Fredrick Horton whom she married in 1946. Many have cause to be grateful to them for the special interest they have taken in the welfare of the parish and its parishioners. The lovely parkland in particular has been the scene of many festive gatherings and the Fete, organized to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, has now become an important annual event but not always held in the Wood House park..

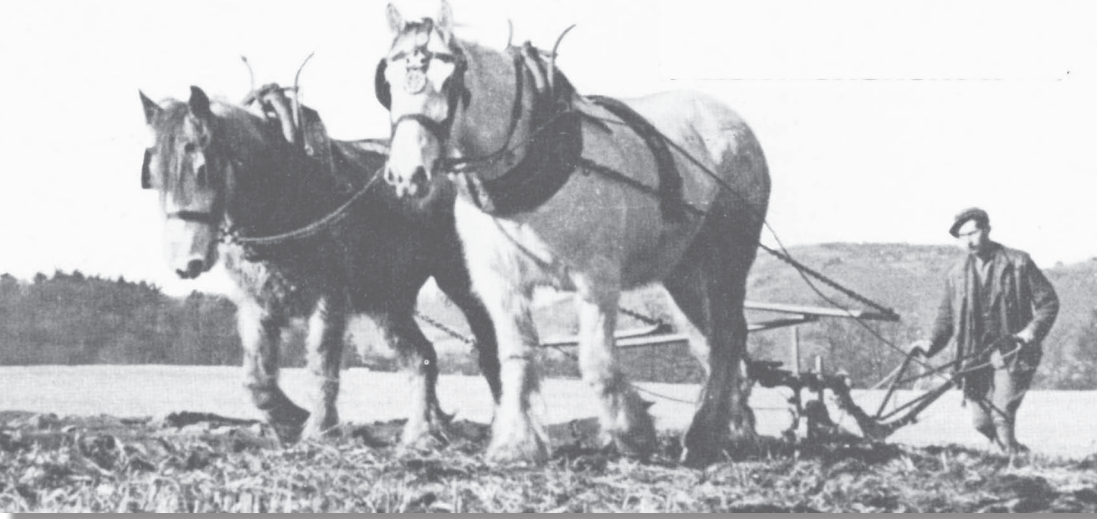


Above - Mr and Mrs R Horton, insert Ruth Horton in a school play.
Below - Witley Court

Witley Court

Witley Court in its heyday provided much opportunity for gainful employment by Shrawley parishioners and many of the paths and tracks still appearing on today's maps bear witness to the routes taken by those of the many employees walking to work. The Court, greatly enlarged by the Foley family from the original manor and their home for just under 200 years, was purchased in 1838 by the trustees of William 11th Baron Ward later to become Earl of Dudley. In the ensuing years the Court maintained a connection with royalty, was further enlarged and rendered palatial at a cost of £250,000 and became an important centre of social activity, employing something in the order of 200 people in the house and on the estate, which included the farms of East Grove, Hazelhurst and Dod Oak in the Parish of Shrawley. It was sold after the tragic death of Rachel Countess of Dudley in 1920, lost much of its importance and was finally destroyed by fire in 1937. Happily the adjoining church, first consecrated in 1735 and completed in 1756, was saved and remains today as the finest baroque style interior of any church in England. It is now used as the Parish Church of Great Witley and in 1994 had major maintenance and restoration work including the regilding of the dome in 2005/6.





within 40-50 yards of woodland were grazed bare by rabbits and where three thousand or more of these pests were trapped in one year. The wiring in of many crops was essential if reasonable yields were to be obtained. There was little understanding of the need for liming or fertilising other than the compulsory returning of manure and unused hay or straw to the land as humus, rather than see it sold off the farm. Weed control

Agriculture

Any rural community at any time must be aware of the situation facing agriculture. What is difficult to appreciate today is the magnitude of change which has taken place and the Parish of Shrawley, will, of course, only vary in details from the county or national pattern. It would be difficult also for the author of a short essay such as this to convey anything other than a broad picture of the situation as it appears to have been in the early part of the century and he must leave the reader to superimpose his or her own observations on the situation as of today and to make comparisons. With this in mind let us start with a few statistics. In 1912 there were 22,000 horses employed in farming in Worcestershire and in 1920 50 full time farmworkers living in the parish of Shrawley-plus 10 full time gardeners. The average wage at the time was sixteen shillings with two shillings in extras and estimated allowances in kind. Farms were comparatively small in acreage 60 acres probably representing a large holding - many others struggling to make a living from 5 or 10 acres and the occupiers prepared to hire themselves out to neighbours on a permanent or casual basis, relying on the family to keep the homestead going in their absence. Few owned their own land, most being tenants of the Shrawley or Witley Court estates, the principal landowners in the parish. Rents were low but productivity was poor and much of the land infested with weeds and overrun by rabbits. It is difficult to visualise the picture on one farm where one could walk over permanent pasture jumping from one ant mound or tussock to another, where crops

Above

Ploughing a straight Furrow

Right

Loading the hay

Below

Loading hay on a smaller holding

Bottom

Loading bark in Shrawley wood for the Worcester tannery



was only possible by hand-hoeing of root crops and the yearly laying down of part of the land to fallow - this land being ploughed after June 1st to avoid any late frost which might break up the clods, thus leaving the maximum surface of soil exposed to the elements and birds. Wheat was the usual crop to follow and further rotation of crops was regularly practised. Hedging and ditching were the tasks for winter with suitable



stretches of hedge being “laid” but only after the landlord had been informed and given the opportunity to mark any oak, ash or elm saplings he might wish to retain. All farms, large and small, carried at least one house cow, a pig and farmyard fowls. Many of the wives would eke out the housekeeping by selling surplus dairy products, eggs or even bacon, locally or in the market at Kidderminster. Although mechanical devices were available for some farming procedures, many tasks could only be carried out using hand implements and the farm worker took considerable pride, not only in his horsemanship, but in his skill with scythe and sickle, hedging hook or draw hoe, sheep shears or sowing fiddle. The process of harvesting was often long drawn out and very dependent upon the weather for good quality hay or corn. Reapers and binders were available but all fields had to be “opened out” by hand to receive them. “Laid” corn and, in fact, many entire fields were still cut, sheaved and stooked by hand. In such cases a team of men would enter a field and, weather permitting, stay there until the task was complete, sleeping the nights under specially long stooks erected for the purpose. Root crops of mangolds, swedes and potatoes were lifted by hand. It is easy therefore to understand the satisfaction derived from a full stackyard, the pride taken in thatching and the sense of security when root crops were securely ‘clamped’ and protected from the elements. The arrival of the threshing box from Hammonds of Astley or Colbach of Witley was a day to be remembered when neighbours would join together to help, when the cider would flow more liberally than ever, and comparisons in quality and yields of crops made. Harvest Homes and Festivals were real occasions for thanksgiving. Progress however was being made. Sugar beet was becoming an established and profitable root crop with the opening of a processing factory at Kidderminster in 1925. In the same year weather forecasts and special programmes for farmers were introduced on the radio. Agricultural research and education in special colleges was now more widely available with the result that improved strains of grasses, cereals and livestock were constantly being introduced. Advice was more readily available on the use of fertilisers. Electricity was reaching

the rural areas. Two world wars accelerated the development and use of power driven implements, and permanent pasture was broken up to meet the need for more production of essential foods. At the same time shortages of male labour and increasing mechanisation resulted in a progressive run down of manpower and the replacement of the traditional farm labourer, highly expert in his own skills, with the more scientific and technically trained operator. Farming was becoming increasingly intensive, the few hop yards - one at Hazelhurst - had disappeared and the many orchards with their apples, plums, damsons and cherries and underlying pasture were ploughed. Low lying land by the river was drained and the associated osier and withy beds turned over to more productive use. The breakup of the Shrawley Estate in 1919 and the Witley Court Estate shortly after enabled many tenants to purchase their own land and others to extend their acreages.

It seems a far cry from those early days to the present situation where nearly 1200 acres of the 1450 acres of land available for farming is worked by six farmers with eight workers and the remainder probably under-used by remaining old established families or newcomers to the parish. Short term leys have largely replaced permanent pasture and yields of all kinds, unheard of even 30 years ago, are now common-place, largely due to improved farm management, the availability of chemicals for weed and disease control and the enormous increase in mechanisation of farming procedures. Even the rabbits have largely disappeared!! Doubtless the environmentalists and conservationists will deplore some of these changes but most farmers are aware of their responsibilities. Some may even regret the demise of some aspects of a bygone age, one in which there was at least time “to stand and stare”.

Cider

It was the general rule for many years that farm workers carried a small wooden cask - 1/2 to 1 gallon in capacity - which was filled with cider; or less commonly, perry, before setting out to work. It is apparent therefore that in the appropriate season cider or perry making was an essential occupation for anyone with a crop of cider



Above
Cider making at
Wood Farm

apples or suitable pears. For small quantities home-made hand grinders and presses were sufficient but for larger quantities a mill, preferably power driven, and a large screw press were essential. One such was based at “The Knowle” and this would “travel” if transport could be provided and another static unit remained operational at Crown Cottages until recently for those with smaller requirements.

Fruit was ground in the grinder or mill and collected in a tub from which it was spread on coconut matting suitably folded to prevent spillage. One such unit was referred to as a “Hair” and when ten or twelve of these were placed on top of each other in the press, this constituted a “Cheese” upon which the top platform of the press was placed. As the press was screwed down the liquid extract was collected in a fermenting barrel and allowed to “work”, a process usually taking about three weeks. Water was added according to the quantity of the fruit and alcoholic content required. It was usual to

Background
Threshing
Machine

Below
The Knowle

HOME OF THE MOBILE CIDER PRESS



wait a further three weeks before sampling the result-if one had the patience - and in a good year sufficient cider or perry would be available with only occasional need to import from other producers in the county or in Herefordshire.

Various adjectives were applied to the end products according to taste but the title "prepared by the twelve apostles" was said to be reserved for that, so diluted, that it was alleged to have included only one tub of apple juice to eleven measures of water!! On the other hand if rum or brandy casks were available for storage, especially when straight from the wine cellars, a cider of exceptional quality could result only suitable for consumption at home or with special guests!

An interesting indication of the popularity of cider in the county among farm workers is given by the fact that in 1865, 10,000 gallons and 130 hogsheads were "listed" at two farms in Astley and Shrawley. The daily ration of cider for the agricultural worker gradually died out in the early part of the 20th century but not before there was conflict between farmers and workers over the practice of some employers of making deductions in wages for drink supplied or alternatively of giving men 4 pence and boys 2 pence per day in lieu.

Local Industry and Transport

The advent of the canal in Stourport in 1771 and the Railway in 1862 did much to improve communication between the larger centres of population but many rural industries remained untouched, supplying local needs and using available raw material. Thus in Shrawley blacksmiths, carpenters, wheelwrights and coopers remained while brickmaking, basketry, pottery and candlemaking were still practised. With clay, eminently suitable for making bricks or land drains, readily available in meadows by the Severn, it was inevitable that an industry should develop and the sites of several kilns can be identified on the Tythe Plan and Award Map of 1839.

These were still in use in the late 19th century and children, when not at school, were regularly employed to "tread" the clay beds. The end products were a rich rosy red colour and apart from those required for local needs, were



Transport through the years



transported by trow or barge on the river Severn to developing centres of population such as Worcester and the Black Country. When production ceased, the buildings along with those by the Old Weyre, which had become refuges for poachers and other vagrants, were razed to the ground and evidence of their existence no longer exists. The woods provided occupation for many foresters. Apart from the usual requirements of the carpenter, some wood catered for special needs. Lime wood was in demand for handles for enamel pans and as witton for chip baskets for the soft fruit producers around Evesham. Wither from the willows was in demand for basketry and oak bark for the tanneries in Worcester. The alder provided soles for clogs and each year clogmakers would camp in the woods and ply their craft "on site", using the waste

wood and chippings for their fires. Many acres of timber were thus sold but perhaps the most lasting monument to the woods of Shrawley rests in the benches of the present House of Parliament at Westminster, made from some of the magnificent, centuries old oak trees for which they were famous, to replace those lost by fire during World War II.

The advent of macadamised roads was a gradual process as far as rural communities were concerned. Dirt tracks were first reinforced with "road metal". Suitable stone brought by barge to the Wharf at Lenchford, was deposited at strategic points along the route and then reduced to a suitable size by the roadman with his "knapping" hammer, a specific tonnage being required each day. These chippings, spread and bonded lightly with soil and water, were rolled in with the

steam driven road roller. Such surfaces took time to settle and were noisy, so much so, that straw would be used to cover the surface near the houses of the sick or other places where quiet was important. Horse-drawn buses or carriers with wagonettes capable of carrying merchandise, as well as a few passengers, plied between the main towns using local hostleries as staging posts. By the end of the day the journey could become exciting if the drivers were inclined to over-indulge!

Rubber tyres and motor coaches were quickly introduced after World War I and two bus companies competed for custom in this area. "Owen's" of Abberley which ran twice weekly from there via Holt to Worcester and "Moore's" of Witley, also twice weekly, which called at Sankyns Green and the Rose & Crown before proceeding to Worcester or Kidderminster. The open topped double deckers were popular but even the single decker carried the occasional adventurous passenger on the roof along with the luggage and livestock!

Owen's eventually took over Moores and both were later absorbed into the Midland Red Bus Company. Roads and transport improved rapidly between the wars to accommodate the motor propelled vehicles which had replaced horse drawn carts and wagons. The farmer had given up his stylish pony and trap for the speedier motor car. Motor bus services opened up otherwise isolated villages and the rural dweller, especially the younger generation, was able to reach wider opportunities for further education and move if so desired, into neighbouring towns where other trades and professions offered better rewards.

Education

In the early part of this century large families were common and the Church Endowed School built in 1860 and extended in 1894 and 1911, was required to cater for up to 90 children with a headmaster and two other teachers. It catered not only for the education of children but also provided facilities for social functions, The Parish Room, built in 1913 as a Working Men's Club, was not generally available for other functions until considerably later.

Two names of headmasters stand out, Mr. Teasel and Mr. Thomas, both strict disciplinarians but just in their dispensation of punish-



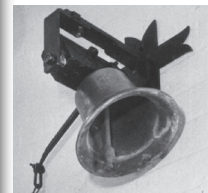
Front Row- 3rd from right Den Jones, 2nd row 2nd from right sister Margaret Jones, back row 5th from right Tom Jones all from Sankyns Green farm.



Above Shrawley School pupils about 1930 Back Row Left to Right Rose Downs, Florrie Bowers, John Cooper, Joyce Spragg, Joan Watkins, Margaret Shepherd, Kathy Cope, Phyllis Harris, Doris Compton, Dorothy Bradley, Mary Walker. Middle Row Joe Hinett, Fred Harris, David Green, George Harris, Denis Crane, Ken Powick, Stan Davies, Bill Walker, John Oakey, Ron Harris. Front Row Irene Spragg, Violet Bradley, Millie Jones, Betty Bolstridge, Winnie Calder, Mavis Walker, Freda Carden.



A school drama acted out under the eye of Mr Thomas



The old School Bell



A protest by the pupils in 1975 to try and avert closure but the school finally closed in 1977

ments for misbehaviour. Between them they served for nearly fifty years. Mr. Teasel played the organ in church and held a Sunday school in the school prior to morning service, after which the children would walk in crocodile formation to church, all but the choir boys being accommodated in the gallery. Later the Sunday school met in the afternoon in the Parish Room. Mr. Thomas, a church warden, was ably supported by his wife, and children normally stayed at school till aged 14. A few scholars left at age 11 if successful in the "Scholarship Exam", and would then qualify for entry to Worcester or Kidderminster Grammar Schools. It should be remembered that education did not become compulsory till the Education Act 1870 after which time education reached the majority of children, although for a time country children were still expected to help in the many and varied seasonal tasks concerned with a farming community. Before the advent of the Church endowed school in 1860, privately run Dame's Schools provided primary education for those who could afford the small fees involved. One of these was at Church Cottage pupils going on from there to other fee paying schools probably as boarders. Both masters played an important roll in the life of the Parish being included, with the occupants of the Wood House and the Rector, as worthy of a curtsy from the girls or a touch of the forelock or cap by the boys, a custom which died out after World War II. Occasional school holidays were approved to enable children to assist in the fields with the harvesting of peas, hops and potatoes, or for the boys to act as beaters when important game shoots took place. Ash Wednesday and Ascension Day were generally regarded as half-day holidays. With the advent of "wireless" children aged 7 and over were walked on Empire Day to the Wood House to listen to the King's Speech and be regaled with plum cake, Empire Day was also associated with the "oak apple" as was Ash Wednesday with the "ash" and children would take samples of each to school or risk a pinch from their friends if found defaulting! Before traffic monopolised the roads, playtime could be spent on the road or adjacent green and



Mr Teasel



Mr Thomas



School Mistress
early 1900s



Mrs Dunn
Last Headmistress

Right
School photo 1976

Below
School Reunion
2002

many a child at the proper season would be able to skip, bowl a hoop or whip a top along the roads to and from school. Popular children's games which seemed to come around the same time each year were marbles, tip cat, tig, leap-frog and conkers with hop scotch and various ring games considered more appropriate but not exclusively for the "young ladies". The area round a fir tree in the meadow adjacent to the school was worn as smooth as concrete by countless feet playing "Bobby Bingo", "Drop Line", "Mary is Weeping", "Jenny Jones", "Nuts in May" and "Roman Soldiers".

Bronze medals suitably inscribed and greatly prized were awarded for "unbroken school attendance" and all choir boys received, each year, a book from Mrs. Allan of Wood House. School concerts and school plays were annual events and for many years a Christmas Party was provided for the children at the Wood House and later in the Parish Room. The Christmas Tree decorated with lighted candles excited the children but presented a major fire risk which was controlled, if necessary, with wet sponges

mounted on bamboo canes. Until 1940 a joint summer party for the children of Shrawley and Hanbury was arranged by the Vernons, the venue alternating between the two parishes, one year being held in Hanbury Hall and the next at Shrawley as a picnic with games in the woods.

The declining birthrate associated with the departure of some of the younger generation after the second World War and in 1948 children over 11 years of age had to attend Stourport Secondary School led to a gradual run-down of the school population from 90 in 1900 to 60 in 1940 and to 32 in 1977, when much against the wishes of the local population and to the detriment of the cultural life of the parish, it was closed. Children are now "bussed" to Witley where their education continues but at a cost, more noticeable perhaps to parents and future generations, of that sense of belonging to an important institution in the life of a village. Plans are now well advanced for the conversion of the school buildings into a new Village Hall to replace that which has served the parish well for nearly seventy years.



The Club Walk or Wake

A highlight of the Social Calendar enjoyed by everyone was the “Club Walk” or “Wake” arranged annually by “The Foresters” on the second “Tuesday of July. This “Ancient Order of Foresters” - a friendly society with the object of providing sickness and other social benefits - formed a branch in Shrawley in 1880 which still functions today although its medical benefits have been taken over by the National Health Service. Members of “the Club” dressed in

Special Club Cakes were baked in Worcester and sold for half penny each. Other travelling fairs occasionally visited the village but none could compare with “The Club” although the “greasy pole” mounted annually on the green opposite the Rose & Crown brings back memories for some. Dancing on the green at Hayes Comer to music, provided by the blind musicians, Abel and Bob Spragg, was also popular and doubtless the adjacent Pound with stocks added something to the mood of the revellers.



Tradition has it that in years gone by a Wake was also held at the Weyre Inn by the old ford on the fifth of November when this was an important part of the village.

The Foresters, gathering for the Club Walk or Wake

their regalia, assembled at the New Inn for early refreshment to march through the village. which was decorated for the occasion with flowers, headed by a Brass Band either from Stourport or on some occasions by local musicians. The outward journey terminated with a service at the church and refreshment at Church Farm before returning to the New Inn where they would be joined by the entire village population to enjoy the “fun of the fair” on the meadow beyond the New Inn where council houses now stand.

