

More from Eric Harmsworth c1987 (date not verified)

I remember Rectory Meadow is on the site of the field owned by the Rectors and was the favourite site for all fetes, the Rectory itself was a large old house in spacious grounds. Doveleat is named after the house of the same name which stood on its site. Grafton Orchard was built on the orchard attached to the Old Grafton House.

Other odd names eg Rannall Drive and Estover Way recall old field names and rights of common.

Church Bells

The Bells – The then Tower Captain Eric Harmsworth

There are six in the ring with the heaviest now 10 ½ cwt. (Until 1865 there were 5 bells only but the heaviest was 14/15 cwt. In 1865 this was taken out and recast into two smaller bells by George Mears of Whitechapel. Unfortunately it was not a good job so they were recast again fifteen years ago. One of the Ringers in Chinnor became an apprentice and then a founder at the same foundry recently.

The present bells weigh

10 ½ cwt: 8 cwt: 7 cwt: 6 ½ cwt: 6 cwt: 5 cwt: The four first were all cast by the Knight family of Reading in 1651, 1635, 1663, 1620 respectively. Almost certainly the largest, if not all, were cast beside the Church Tower. A pit would have been dug lined with cowdung and horse hair and the melted metal poured in. The 6 ½ cwt bell is a 'virgin' bell – usually to tune bells, the founder has to hammer lumps off the rim. The 6 ¼ bell is still true to the note of C and the rim is completely smooth.

Eric showed the meeting a framed address dated 1920, to John Seymour who had been a Ringer for over fifty years. It is signed by the Rector Churchwardens and the six ringers.

Footpaths

Many still continue, unaltered although now often almost unused. Previously many were an essential part of transport. There were few cars and buses, so most people walked certainly as far as Thame, Princes Risborough, Wycombe, and Watlington. Roads were often the long way round, footpaths more direct. (It would be interesting to tie in marriage horizons to the footpath network). Eric's mother was born in Bledlow, walked from there to Wallingford and back in a day all by footpaths.

Where footpaths have a useful function, they should be preserved otherwise, Eric agreed with Mr Rose they should be suppressed.

Transport

Buses ran from Stokenchurch to Thame via Chinnor every day except Monday and Thursday. Trains ran everyday although they could be delayed eg by derailments which due to the low standard of trackbed were frequent. If the train derailed near

Watlington, it could take a long time to get the 'key' back to Princes Risborough for use by the rescuers. Derailments were common.

The Railway itself was originally intended to link up with GWR at Wallingford road to Princes Risborough but the middle part was never built and the line from Princes Risborough got only as far as the station misnamed Watlington but in fact near Shirburn Castle – The Earl of Macclesfield was a major shareholder! The line was laid virtually without any earthworks and with a minimum of bridges. Outside Princes Risborough the station is a bend of nearly 90 degrees which is almost unique in England.

Opened in 1872 the W&PPR was absorbed into the GWR in 1884, that railway having provided all the stock from the beginning. The line is probably in a better state now than it has ever been.

Until the Halts were built in 1910, there were only three stations (Chinnor, Aston Rowant and Watlington), with Chinnor the only one without a goods yard (an index of their respective importance in past days).

Warwork

During the War, the old British School was used as a small 'shadow' factory making metal plugs, staffed by 2 shifts largely by women and managed by Belling and Lee (well known for its cookers now) who also had a larger factory at Princes Risborough. The Goodearl factory at Princes Risborough was taken over by the Miles Co making frames for the Magister.

Incomers

The War brought in foreigners such as the Poles who had resettlement homes on the Upper Icknield Way until well after the War. There were also Prisoners of War both Italian and German who came to work on the farms and decided to stay on.

After a lively series of questions Keith Lane thanked Eric most warmly for his talk.