

Working Life Occupations

Background

Chinnor is unusual in that it does not have a Lord of the Manor although a house in the High Street is called the Manor House, the title having fallen into disuse in 1917. Chinnor could be referred to as an open parish, that is, a parish which did not support a resident squire. This had resulted in one of the distinctive features of the parish in that most of the residents were freeholders of their property and land. Traditionally, the English farmer rented his land rather than owned it.

This move to enfranchisement had originated when Richard Dormer, d. 1689, was Lord of Chinnor and under his rule all tenants were said to be able to buy their freeholds if they so wished. This move to enfranchisement was more generally common during the 1920s when estate lands were sold to pay death duties on sons and heirs killed in the war, so this was an early development for Chinnor. An 1888 map of Chinnor in the parish office, clearly shows all the individual dwellings and indicates that they all had surrounding land for personal cultivation in addition to the allotments.

A typical village would have a number of commercial establishments such as: a smithy, butcher's yard, saddle and harness maker, and carpenter and coffin maker.¹ Although Chinnor was primarily a farming community, there were from the end of the nineteenth century a number of businesses opened to add to the existing crafts and home industries and these provided a certain amount of non-agricultural employment, predominantly chair-turning and lace-making.

These businesses variously included a brass foundry, a jam factory, established in 1920, and builders and contractors, whose wages may have been higher than on the farms. The 1881 census of Chinnor indicated that, although the single largest employment for men was agriculture (80), in fact more men were employed in commerce (158), with the second largest single occupation for men was workers and dealers in house furniture and decorations (56). Women predominated as workers and dealers in textile fabrics (55) and or domestic or office workers (24). Seven men and two women were listed as professional. In addition, 14 men were listed as being without specified occupations, as were 93 women. Seven men and 102 women were listed as occupation unknown.

The census and *Kelly's Directories* (1903-1939) provide a picture of the evolving, declining, and changing occupations within the village. 1903 for example, indicated 68 commercial enterprises including the Reading Room and Working Men's Club. In addition, there were seven chair-turners (chair-turning was the key industry in Chinnor, providing chairs for the furniture factories in High Wycombe) listed as well as three bakers, five grocers and two butchers, one saddle store, one harness maker, two blacksmiths (brothers who did not speak to each other), one mason and a bricklayer. There was one hardware and tobacconist shop.

Some occupations were combined. For example, carrier and grocer; none more so than Mr. Sairey, who is listed as a general builder, contractor, decorator, undertaker and sanitary engineer. By 1907, the number of chair turners had increased to ten, many from the same family and the post office was also trading as a grocer and many of the retailers had additional crafts. In 1911, there were 14 chair turners and the post office also traded as a stationer. Other occupations listed included: a police officer, a stationmaster and an insurance agent. By 1915 there were 14 turners and in addition to his other occupations, Mr. Sairey was now an insurance agent. Chinnor boasted a high-class hand laundry (flannels a speciality), and a watch and clock maker who, according to Mrs Howlett's testimony, never gave the clocks back.

In 1920, the total commercial outlets numbered 71, with 11 chair turners and Chinnor had gained a motor garage. 1928 and 1931 records, a chemist and six turners. However, by 1939 there is only one chair turner listed. In 1908, Chinnor Cement and Lime Company was founded within an established quarry on the Chiltern escarpment. In 1975 it employed 160 men, it closed in 1989 and is now a housing estate although some areas have been preserved as being of outstanding scientific interest. Jimmy Eustace in his interview in 1988 recalls that the men working at the quarry would dig up a fair number of fossils, some of them quite large, and that Mr. Benton gave a lecture on fossils in the Reading Room.² A display of Chinnor's history staged in the village in 1967 included, as its oldest exhibit, a shark's tooth from the quarry dated 120 million years old, and a woolly mammoth's tusk dated as 60 million years old. According to the Domesday Book the population of Chinnor in 1086 was 26 villagers, 2 small holders and 4 slaves.
