

A SHORT HISTORY OF WOODHURST.

(Compiled by the Revd. G.E.Wood.)

The Village of Woodhurst - Wodehurst, Wodehurst in the 12th century is situated north of Huntingdon and St. Ives, and is reached by a road between the A141 and B1010. The parish covers an area of 1,823 acres; the soil is clay and it lies mostly above the 100ft contour.

It is a typical woodland ring settlement, and is probably the best example of a ring village in England, for it has been unaltered in shape since it was founded in thick woodland some 2,000 years ago. It was originally a track through the forest, widened at convenient points on both sides, thus forming an oblong space in which the village was built.

The track was then divided where it entered the village to run around the perimeter until it came to the exits, thus forming a ring around the houses and the small fields it enclosed. (The road on the North is now Church Street and on the South, South Street). At the extreme East and West ends were gates, and along the outer edges of the track, a stockade afforded protection against wild animals and other intruders. It is suggested that the village was originally inhabited by two small branches of the Iceni tribe, each of which farmed land within the stockade.

The village was one of the Hurst hamlets belonging to the Manor of Slepe, which was held by the Abbot of Ramsey, and subsequently given by him to the Priory of Slepe - now St. Ives. The village and Church are both recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, in the following terms:-

"Three of the Abbot's (of St. Benedict's, Ramsey), men, Everard,"
"Ingelramm, and Pleines have four hides(a) of this land. They "
"have 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ploughs(b). 5 villagers and 6 smallholders with 3"
"ploughs. They have the Church and the Priest. Value 45s "
"Eustace, (the Sheriff of Huntingdon) claims 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hides"

(a) A hide is about 120 acres.

(b) A plough represents as much land as could be ploughed by a team of eight oxen in the year(season).

Little can be traced of the early history of the village, but there appears to have been three Manors or farms of about one hide, or 120 acres, which seems to correspond to those held by the three tenants at the time of the Domesday Survey of 1086, these are :-

THE MANOR OF WIGAN.- Wiken, Wykyn(12th century), Wekyn(16th century), Wiggen(17th century). This was originally a hide of land given by the Abbot of Ramsey to the Priory of St. Ives, sometime after 1086; thereafter it was held by various tenants of the Priory until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1530. In 1544, the Manor was granted to Thomas and Elizabeth Audley of St. Ives, and subsequently to their sons and successors.

It is now identified as Wiggen Hill Farm which is occupied by Messrs R.F.Ranson. Although still part of Woodhurst parish, it is completely cut off from it by the runways of Wyton Airfield, and can only be reached from the Old Ramsey Road, St. Ives.

THE MANOR OF STOW IN WOODHURST. was granted by Abbot Reynald of Ramsey, who held office from 1114 to 1130, as a hide of land to Gilbert, the son of Guy de Stow. Guy the son of Gilbert de Stow held the land in 1134; he also held land in Stow, Cambridgeshire, hence the name Stow Manor in Woodhurst. Guy's son was Stephen de Stow who was holding the land at the end of the 12th century, and which continued to be held by members of the de Stow family until 1479.

There were various other tenants of the Abbot of Ramsey until the Dissolution of the Monasteries, when the Manor of Woodhurst was separated from the Manor of Stow. In 1611, the Manor of Woodhurst was granted by the Crown to George and Thomas Whitmore; it was held by the Manning family in 1631, and was conveyed then to Jonah James in 1641. Thomas James, of Buntingford, Hertfordshire is shown as Lord of the Manor in 1670; the Manor changed hands again in 1676 and again in 1701 when it was held by Robert and Alice Browne, and remained in their family until 1795. The Manor then passed to Sir Robert Burton in 1796; to John Carstairs of Stratford Green, Essex, whose daughter married Sir John Henry Pelly, Baronet, who died in 1864. He was succeeded by

his son, Sir Henry Carstairs Pelly, on whose death in 1877, the Manor passed to his two daughters Annie Evelyn, who married Captain Thomas Rivers-Bulkley, who was killed in France in the early days of 1914 war, and Constance Lillian who married David the Earl of Crawford, later the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres.

The Manor was purchased in 1919 by Mr. Spearing, a solicitor of Cambridge, and on his death, it passed to his two daughters, Mrs A.P.G. Dalton and Mrs B.M. Lock, who are shown in the Manorial Court Book of 1937 as joint Ladies of the Manor.

The Manor was sold again sometime in 1948, when it appears that a compensation agreement was entered into to redeem the liability to repair the chancel of Woodhurst Church. Confirmation of this agreement is awaited from Messrs Taylor, Vinter, Solicitors who are the successors of Messrs Spearing, Raynes and Co.

The Manor Farm as it is now called, came into the possession of Mr. and Mrs Michael Marr in 1957; Extensive restoration of the house was carried out, and at that time an old disused Brew House was discovered at the rear of the premises; this had obviously been used by previous tenants to brew beer for the various beer retailers of the village. Mr and Mrs Michael Marr are still the occupiers.

THE MANOR OF PECKS PLACE. had its origins in an hide of land which Simon, son of Adam Hawker held in demesne (freehold) in 1251. This land, worth 100s, was held by John Peck in 1412, and in 1477 was held by William Peck and his son John. The land passed to Henry Sherman in 1535; to John West in 1595, and was held by the "Gascoignes" in 1619. Since that date no reference can be found of "Pecks Place" in any history, so presumably the land was split up or its name changed.

PELL'S HOLE. while not strictly a Manor or a farm, this is shown in some documents as "Pelts Hole", which suggests a place where pelts or hides of animals were dressed.

On the other hand, in a history of the Armada, it is noted that a William Pell and three other men from the village of Woodhurst were called to defend against the Armada in 1588; William Pell being armed with a culverine (a small firearm). So perhaps Pell's Hole is named after his family.

In 1928 it is recorded that there was a public house at Pells Hole, the licensee being Richard Wootton; he is also recorded as the licensee in 1940.

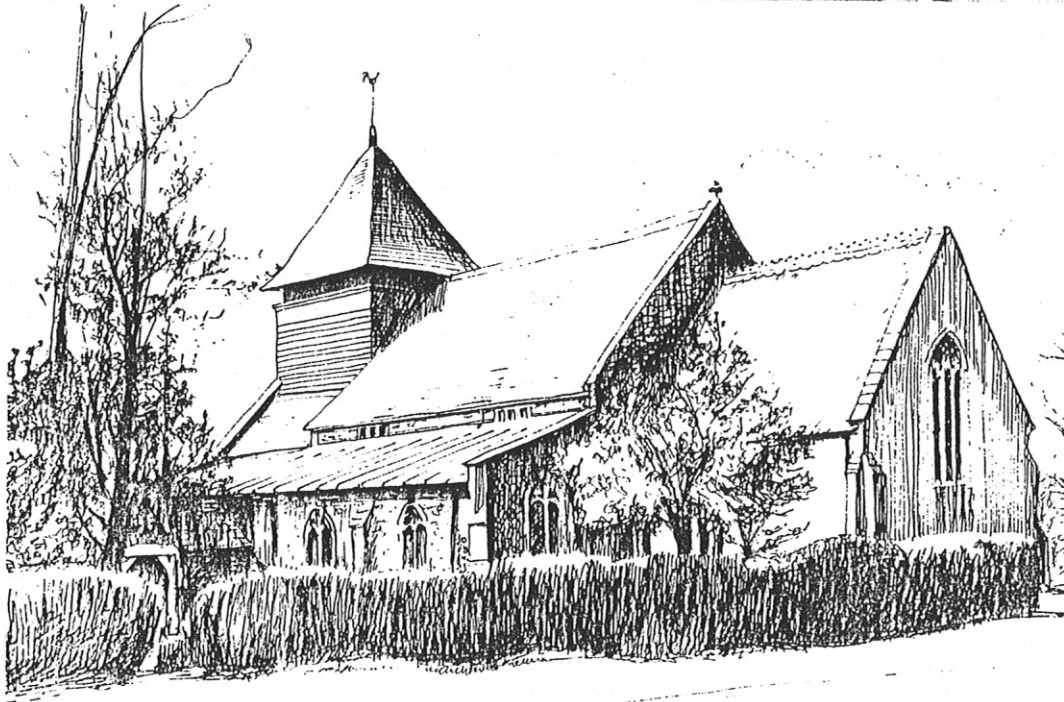
Like Wiggen Hill Farm, Pells Hole is also separated from Woodhurst parish by the runways of Wyton airfield, and can only be reached from the Old Ramsey Road, St. Ives.

The occupation of land becomes a little obscure when land which was part of Somersham heath was inclosed in 1796; some of this land became part of Rectory Farm, St. Ives Road. To give some indication of the difficulty and how names of farms have changed over the years, it is found that in 1928, farms in the parish were occupied as follows:-

Harradine House Farm.	Ebenezer Gurry.
Fullards Farm	Edward Gurry.
Bull's Farm	Herbert Kimpton.
Church Farm	Charles Rowell.
Natts Farm	George Ruff.
Manor Farm	Jim Ruff (bailiff to William Farey).

Messrs Farbon are now the occupiers of Fullards and Natts Farms, the latter is now known as "The Grange". Harradine House has been divorced from its land, which is now occupied by Messrs Huggins, and called Harradine Farm. Messrs Clarke occupy Bull's Farm, and Church Farm, later known as Redhouse Farm, has been demolished to make way for the new farmhouse of Bull's farm, while the Church farm land has been split up. Wiggen Hill Farm by virtue of its position has always been identifiable.

At the time of going to print, part of Bull's Farm is in process of being developed, and it seems likely that the old farmhouse of Bull's farm will either be demolished or redesigned as private dwellings.



ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
WOODHURST

Although the Church is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, the oldest parts of the Church are the Nave built late in the 12th century, and the South Arcade built in the mid 13th century. The Aisle was rebuilt late in the 14th century, and the timber Bell Turret in the early 17th century. The Chancel was rebuilt in 1864 by Sir John Henry Pelly (see Stow Manor), at a cost of £500. The South Porch is also 19th century, the Church being restored in 1871; it is in the process of further restoration at the present time.

The 19th century Chancel has a three light east window, two single lights in the north wall and one in the south, and there is a plain south door. The Chancel arch is 19th century, but some of the stones are ancient and it rests on reused 13th century corbels; the screen was included in the 1864 rebuilding and the painted rood above was added in 1879.

The Altar Table has turned legs and a shaped rail of the early 18th century.

The late 12th Century Nave has a north wall with an early 14th century two light window and a 12th century doorway; the wall has been extended, probably at the 1871 restoration to accommodate the clearstory which has two 19th century three light windows. The roof of the Nave is 19th century, but incorporates three ancient 15th century moulded tie beams; the shaped corbels which support the wall posts are also ancient.

Also in the Nave are four 16th century shaped bench ends and some of the seats are made up of early 17th century panelling; one bearing the date 1631; there is a possibility that these came from the old Manor House, when it was demolished in the 17th century.

On the floor of the Nave, near the rood screen, is a late 17th century memorial slab to William, the son of John Cox; and on the north wall there is a memorial to four young villagers who were killed in the 1914/18 war.

The South Arcade is mid 13th century of four bays with pointed arches on round columns; the eastern respond is a moulded corbel with mask top. The clearstory above has two 19th century three light windows. Externally this wall shows signs of being extended to form the clearstory.

The Timber Bell Cot is early 19th century and is carried partly on the west wall and partly on a timber post supporting a cross beam; the framing is covered with oak shingles and it has a low pyramidal roof. There is one bell inscribed "Hee that will be meri let him be meri in the Lord 1624"; the bell was made by W. Haulsey.

The Timber Bell Cot(contd)

There are pits for three bells, but two bells were removed in 1871, because they were cracked. At a meeting of the Church Council in May 1889, it was resolved to sell these two bells to Messrs Taylor of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry; these bells weighed 8cwt, and realised the sum of £25, which sum "was devoted to the repairs and warming of the Church".

The inscriptions of these two bells were (1) "W.Govve J.Christmas Churchwardens 1621" made by W.Haulsey and (2) "John Christmas William Bull C.Newman made me 1695".

The late 14th century South Aisle has two light east window, three two light windows and a doorway in the south wall, and a 19th century single light window in the west wall. In the sill of the east most window is a late 14th century piscina(a perforated stone basin for carrying away water used in rinsing the Chalice), with an octofoil basin. In between this window and the next is a plain locker in which the holy vessels used to be kept.

On the south wall is a brass tablet to the memory of Benjamin Feary who was killed in the South African war of 1899/02.

The Font has a 13th century octagonal bowl resting on a tapered stem which is either 19th century or an older stem reworked.

The Church Plate consists of a standing paten hallmarked 1763/4 the gift of Mrs Alice Browne (see Stow Manor), and a silver Chalice the gift of Ebenezer Gurry.

The Chest is late 16th century; it is of oak with the top in two divisions with four strap hinges and a slot for money. The upper part of the front is however modern.

The Bible is inscribed S.J.M.Price M.A. Vicar, E.E.Kilburn M.A.Curator Emmanuel Gurry Thomas Ding Churchwardens, and is dated 1898.

The Registers The first Baptismal, Marriage and Burials records date from 11th March 1680. Only the current registers are kept in the Church; the remainder are in the custody of the County Archivist in Huntingdon.

The Rood Lamp is situated before the Lady Chapel Altar, it may be the one which Nicholas Franceys had to find and furnish in 1278 as rent for his dwelling house and three acres of land; quite a rent in those days as tallow candles were very expensive!

Coffin Lid is at present used as a coping stone at the west end of the churchyard wall; it is a tapering slab with traces of a cross. There are also remains of other coffin lids on the church wall, but nothing to identify them.

The Patronal Festival is kept on the Feast of the Birthday of St. John the Baptist which is on the 24th June. Since the 1980's, the Patronal Festival has been held on the Sunday nearest to the 24th June, and the week following has been celebrated as Feast Week, sponsored by the Sports and Social Committee.

The Church has been a Chapel of Ease of St. Ives from the 13th century until 1968, when it was transferred to the parish of Broughton, still as a Chapel of Ease. Since 1981, however, it has been administered as a separate parish, and in 1986 was granted parish status. The legal process of incorporating the parishes of Bluntisham, Colne and Woodhurst into a United benefice is now well in hand, and an incumbent of the new benefice is likely to be appointed later in 1989.

THE HURSTINGSTONE HUNDRED. This was the Saxon unit of local government, and it is alleged that the Hundred met at the Hundred Stone or Abbots Chair, which was situated at the West end of the village about one and a quarter miles from the Church; the meeting place was subsequently moved to the Manor House at Broughton, the site of which is now a grassed over ruin at the end of Illings Lane.

The Abbots Chair so called, is of Barnack stone, would appear to have been the base of a medieval Cross, probably St. John's Cross, of which there is a mention in 1545, one side of which has either weathered away or been cut away so that the original square socket for the shaft has only three sides. The stone had been set up on one side and had the appearance of a rough seat with arms. This stone has now been removed to the Norris Museum in St. Ives for preservation and safe custody.

SCHOOLS (Contd)

Father Place was the first Curate to live in the village and he was followed by Father Lovell, the last Curate who left to become the incumbent of Lolworth, Cambridgeshire. While the house was vacant it was used as a parish room; and during the 1939/45 war it was used as the Home Guard guardroom. It then became a private dwelling.

There was also a School behind the Chapel which was rented by the Huntingdonshire County Council for the County School. In 1963 this was closed when the children were dispersed to schools in Warboys, Ramsey and St. Ives. Latterly, the building was used for village functions until the village hall was built in 1984.

CHAPELS. The Baptist Chapel was built by John Longland Ekins in 1840; a well constructed building to seat some 300. It had a good congregation for many years, but this gradually dwindled and the Chapel closed. In 1983, the Trustee decided to sell the building with planning consent to convert the Chapel to a private dwelling; it is now the home of Mr. and Mrs Graham Skinner.

The Bethesda Baptist Chapel was built in South Street in 1903 by William Childs of Alconbury, this survived until 1945; it is now part of the residence of Mr. and Mrs Smith.

PUBLIC HOUSES OR BEER RETAILERS.

There were, at one time, seven public houses or beer retailers in the village, these have been identified as follows:-

"The Three Horseshoes"	Now Horseshoe Cottage, Church Street. The Manorial Court used to meet in this establishment.
"The Travellers Rest"	Now St. John's House, Church Street. Mrs Saddington and her daughter Mrs Bozea were the last two licensees.
"The Cherry Tree"	Now Cherry Tree House, Church Street.
"The Half Moon & Stars"	Now Harradine House, Church Street.
"The Farmer's Boy"	Now Church View, Church Street.
"The Plough"	Now Penny Farthing Cottage, South Street.

The seventh public house was Pell's Hole; Richard Wootton being the last licensee.

Most of these establishments were not public houses as we know them today, but were rather operated by beer retailers, who had other means of employment. It is probable that the Brew House at the back of the Manor Farm provided the beer which was sold in these premises.

There was another public house at the crossroads of the St. Ives/Woodhurst roads in the house which is now used by Hensby's Composts as an office. It was known as "The Wheatsheaf" and this is the reason that the road to Bluntisham is known as "Wheatsheaf Road".

SHOPS. In 1885 the Post Office was in the house aptly named "The Murdens", occupied Mr. and Mrs Tif Stimson; the sub-postmaster at that time being John Murden. It is understood that he and his son Richard also carried on a business as a baker and confectioner. Delivery of mail was from Huntingdon and was made on foot at 8.30.am.; Collection from the village was at 5.00pm.

Nowadays the Post Office is on the opposite side of Church Street. This shop was occupied by a Mr. Reynolds who carried on a business as a Grocer and Cornchandler; when he retired the business was taken over by Messrs Sanso and Watson. Mr Watson is now the sub-postmaster.

The present derelict cottage within the curtilage of Mr. and Mrs Chris Cannon's property was, prior to 1912, a butcher's shop, a Mr. Annis being the proprietor. In 1912, Mr and Mrs Cannon, Chris's grandparents took over the property and Mrs Cannon carried on a business as a Greengrocer and confectioner.

There was a second butcher's shop in the village, this was in the Barn within the curtilage of Church View; the proprietor being a Mr. Griffin.

The Blacksmith had a forge in Colne House, now the home of Mrs Stimso Senior, it was carried on by a Mr. Mathews and in 1911 was taken over by Mr. Cade senior, whose son Bob eventually joined him in the business, which later was removed to the present premises where Bob Cade still continues with his business on a part time basis.

PUBLIC AMENITIES. The water supply to the village was at one time by three pumps, one in Church Street which is still maintained by the Parish Council; one by Horseshoe Cottage and one in South Street, the latter are now nonexistent. In 1938, the St. Ives R.D.C. brought a mains water supply to the village, which has now been taken over by the Cambridge Water Company. At the same time, 1938, kerbs and a metalled road was provided from Harradine House to Swan Weir.

There is as yet no main sewerage system in the village, although a scheme had been submitted by the St. Ives R.D.C. in 1974 to central government for approval; sadly this scheme was overtaken by the Local Government Act of 1974, which merged the small R.D.C.s into the Huntingdonshire District Council. With the continued pressure of housing needs it is hoped that main sewerage will be provided within the next decade.

POPULATION. This was 533 in 1851, but following two year's bad harvests and other disasters, the population dwindled to 200; today with modern "infilling" this has risen to 320, and is set to rise further with the development of Bull's farmstead.

In November 1834, a fire started in one of the farms in the centre of the village, and devastated almost half the cottages leaving twelve families homeless; they slept for at least one night in the Church. A contemporary account of the fire describes how people from around the district came to quell the blaze and noted that the villagers/labourers "appeared indifferent to the result of the fire, in as much as some were intoxicated and some engaged in pugilistic contests"

HOUSING. Following the fire, several cottages were rebuilt in the 19th century style, but there are still a few 17th century cottages remaining which have been modernised. The Manor House, now Manor farm, stands at the North East corner of the village; it is a large brick house with tiled roofs built partly in the 17th century and partly in the 18th century. It contains an 18th century staircase with turned balausters moulded on panelled strings and moulded hand rails carried over square newels. In the north wing there is an original chamfered ceiling beam, though this has now been covered over with a modern ceiling. The house was extensively rebuilt and modernised in 1957 by the present owners Mr and Mrs Michael Marr.

To the north east of the present Manor farm, there is a moat, called Spinney Moat; this may represent the site of the original Manor House; it is possible that when this house was demolished, part of the panelling was taken to the Church to make the pews.

There is also an early 18th century brick house of seven bays, with a hipped roof and a modillion frieze, on the north side of South Street, which is now known as "Holditch Farmhouse", the home of Mr. and Mrs Peter Matthews

Abbots Close was built by St. Ives R.D.C. in 1935 with access only into Church Street; Moot Way was built in 1947, the top four houses being completed in 1952, while those facing on to Church Street were built a little later.

St. John's Close was developed by Messrs Fleming of Hilton in 1976, with access only on to Church Street. Further development is now planned on the site of Bull's farmstead and farmhouse. Other houses have been built in the 1970's on the perimeter of both Church and South Streets, Mill Tiles and Wheatsheaf House are built on the site of an old thatched barn, and it is interesting to note that the irons on the side of Horseshoe Cottage came originally from the thatched barn. These irons being used to pull burning thatch off barns and buildings.

The Huntingdonshire District Council have not given approval for any further development which would have access into South Street on the grounds that the road is narrow, in a poor state and with a difficult access. As the need for housing grows, and when main sewerage arrives, it is possible that South Street will have to be upgraded and development allowed.

SCHOOLS. A National School was established in Church Street in 1843, in the house now known as "The Limes", the residence of Mr. and Mrs Collins. It was financed by Sir. John Pelly, the Lord of the Manor; it had 30 pupils and the teachers were the Vicar and the Curate. The School was, however closed in the late 1920's, when it was taken over as the Curate's house; at that time a first floor was inserted to provide extra rooms, and the plaque recording the founding of the school was removed from the gable end to make room for a window; this stone plaque is now held in the Church.

VILLAGE HALL. was erected in 1983 at the back of the Chapel building, the building being partly financed by fund raising and partly by a grant from the Local authority. It is now well used by the organisations in the village and is administered by a Village Hall Committee.

CLAYPITS FIELD. this is administered by the Parish Council. The origins of its acquisition are obscure, but in ancient times the villagers had the privilege of digging out clay from the field to repair the walls of their houses. With the general use of bricks for building, the need for this privilege diminished, and the Parish Council resolved to let the land year by year, the rent going to the benefit of the poor of the village; it is now shared between the pensioners of the village.

NOTE: Having compiled this short history, I am conscious of the fact that history is never static, and that the contemporary history contained above is very sketchy. I would be grateful for any contributions to complete or correct this short history.

