

Village History

Development - Looking at the Manor during the 19th century it is fairly obvious that the Norris Berties were not in the top echelons of the landed gentry and most of the middle of that century was characterised by an empty Manor House undergoing modernisation. I think they were not able, financially to spend money on property for their tenants and there probably wasn't a great call for new buildings anyway. Many of the children in the Victorian age village families moved away from the village because agriculture was not employing quite the number of people as it had done in the 18th century. Mechanisation was beginning to improve agriculture and reduce the number of men required in the workforce. Many of the men and women moved away to either Birmingham, West London or places like Australia and Canada and of course the women found work in service all over the country.

The major growth in the village comes in two forms – the addition of over 40 bungalows in the 1960s – what a change that must have been – and the smaller developments of 3 or more houses in groups – Knowle Lane in two phases, Church Close, Blacksmiths Close, Shepherds Close, Village Farm Court, Oxford Court, Ladygrass etc. and individual development of small pieces of land for dwellings (e.g. along the road between the Ben and Hazel Cottage), conversion of redundant buildings (school, chapel etc.) to the most recent 'bunker' in North Lane.

We do now have quite a range of buildings – some quite traditional, others could be described as 'one off' along with the old buildings whose footprint can be seen on the 1800 map and which are now well into the 20th if not 21st century.

What is significant is that the character of the village, being a collection of fairly modest dwellings grouped along one side of the main road and along

4 side roads, 3 of which are dead ends but are connected by village footpaths across the 'back' of the village, has been maintained through the 20th century development.

Maps - Apart from some very early maps of the county which just show Weston as a dot or a house (often smaller than the space taken up with the name!) the earliest map of the village showing details of buildings is the map which was found in a trunk or cupboard about 1965/70 and was reproduced to sell in aid of the Village Hall building fund in 1972/3 The original is in the County records office but we do have some copies left of the facsimile produced. It was used in Weston Matters.

Apart from the various issues of OS maps the next important thing we have are the maps drawn up at the time of the sale of the village. The sale catalogue worked with two maps – one of the whole parish, showing fields, woodlands etc. and one showing the centre of the village and detailing properties in their different sale lots. We (that is the village archive) has both a transcript of the lot details and a copy of the maps, albeit not in very wonderful condition.

By comparing the 1800 map with that of 1918 you can see that there was very little change during the 19th century. In fact when Jubilee Cottage and the School House were built in 1887 it was reported in the local paper that these two buildings represented the only new properties built in the village 'within living memory' Given that this phrase usually represents about 60-80 years and also that the 1800 map so closely resembles that of 1918 you can see that the village definitely didn't grow during the Victorian era.

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Oak Tree - the tradition with our tree is that it will continue to flourish as long as at least one child is born in the village each year. I have always hoped this 'in the village' includes the John Radcliffe! At one time I thought the tree was about 250 years old and looked at the church records to find that there had been at least one baptism each year until about 200 years ago – can't remember the exact dates but I was pleased at the time! However, we now know that the tree is much older – about 400 years old so my work with the church records doesn't help much. However, it is a tradition which seems to be handed on to each new generation – I was told about it not long after coming to the village in the early 1970s by someone whose family had lived here since the early 18th century. I got the feeling if you were interested in the village you were told the tale...

In the 19th century there is a newspaper report of a farmer giving a harvest home supper to his workers 'under the boughs of the spreading oak tree' on his land. I don't think this is the tree by the pond, but can't identify where this old tree was. There is also a reference in the 19th century to the 'knarled (sic) oak' at Weston – is this the pond tree, would it have been called 'knarled' when it was a mere 250 year old? I just don't know. Nowadays it is recognised by the local authority as being of importance and they periodically check it to keep it safe and healthy.

The Green - The name Weston refers to the position of the village in the west of the parish, which we are. 'Hard up against the Bletchingdon boundary' as one lady described us. The 'on the Green', I think, derives from the fact that we were once a village strung out along a very large green – much larger than that at Bletchingdon or Kirtlington where the green is surrounded by houses.

Looking at the sale catalogue map there are several fields named 'The Green' or 'Part of The Green' and these start at the north end of the village, just to the north of the junction of North land and continue down to the south – almost to The Chequers. They have a common eastern boundary which may imply the route of the original road through the village. When enclosure came to Weston (no need to have an act of parliament because the owners of Weston Manor owned the entire parish, they were just enclosing their own land) these fields became the separate pieces of land they are today, but all retained the name the Green. Thus now the land is owned by several different people, although the hedge lines have so far been more or less maintained.