

A Short History of Shinfield

P. J. JEFFERIES

F I E L D E A S T

Acres
2441.086
(includ^g 187.236 de^l partition)



St. Mary's Church, Shilfield, about 1909

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The scenery of Shinfield is very English, with the charm of gently undulating country. The walker going from one scattered group of buildings to another is constantly happening upon a fresh view of gently curved and sloping fields bordered by great oaks, or by the rich green of the Loddon water-meadows. The bare bones beneath this garment are size and contour. The parish covers about 4126 acres¹ and its boundaries are the Loddon to the south and east, Reading to the north, Grazeley near the railway line to the west and Spencers Wood to the south². Formerly the ecclesiastical parish included Swallowfield, Grazeley and Spencers Wood but they formed separate parishes from 1847, 1854 and 1913 respectively³. What provides the views, and also the incentive for the first people to settle here, is the central ridge of high ground, mainly clay, sloping east to the Loddon and west towards the Kennet. The clay soil is fertile and, incidentally, good for oak trees and its gravel patches are well drained for living on. In former times the Loddon provided water for drinking for man and beast, fish and the power for a mill.

Yet there are few traces of men living here in Roman times or earlier—a flint pick, a bronze age urn, spear and knife, a Roman amphora and some coins⁴. Shinfield was not on a Roman road nor very near the Roman town of Silchester⁵. The earliest settlement was in Anglo-Saxon times and the little we know is in Domesday Book. This is what it says:

The King holds Selingefelle in demesne. Sexi held it in alod of King Edward. (It was) then assessed at 5 hides; now (it is assessed) at nothing. There is land for 6 ploughs. On the demesne there is 1; and (there are) 8 villeins and 5 bordars with 7 ploughs. There are 2 serfs and a mill rendering (de) 5 shillings and 150 eels and 5 fisheries rendering (de) 550 eels and 16 acres of meadow and woodland to render (de) 90 swine. It was (formerly) worth 7 pounds; now 8 pounds⁶.

We know nothing more of Sexi; like many another Saxon he lost his lands at the Conquest in 1066.

From 1066 to 1560 the history of Shinfield is obscure because for most of that time the manor was held as an appendage of Swallowfield, in which its lords took more interest. After the Conquest William the Conqueror almost certainly granted it to an important Norman companion, William Fitz Osbern, lord of Breteuil, Seneschal of Normandy and Earl of Hereford⁷; but his son, Earl Roger, forfeited it by rebellion in 1074⁸ and by the time of Domesday Book, as we have seen, the King held it himself. It had until then been separate from Swallowfield, though held by the same men⁹, and a comparison of the Domesday accounts shows that, though both manors had about the same amount of land under cultivation, Shinfield was more valuable in having fisheries and a mill yielding eels—which represented a cash income—and more woodland pannage for pigs. But no matter what earlier lords thought, the fact that the mother church was founded at Shinfield (as we shall see) indicates that the first Norman lords of the manor preferred the central Shinfield area, no doubt for practical reasons, and there is evidence of some sort of early village settlement near the church¹⁰.

However this was changed. By 1166 the manor of Shinfield, together with Swallowfield, had been granted to William de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick, who in turn granted it to the St John family of Stanton St John in Oxfordshire¹¹. They held it of him and his descendants until 1353 and it is with the St Johns that we are concerned.

This family settled in Swallowfield, enclosed a park¹² and built a manor house providing some comfort¹³, for, being favoured at court¹⁴, they entertained royalty and others¹⁵ who were no doubt attracted by the hunting to be had in the park and in Windsor Forest in which Swallowfield lay¹⁶. They valued Shinfield primarily as a farming proposition and for its fisheries and mill and it is very likely that a bailiff or younger St John ran its demesne farm and collected rents. In 1256 an occupier of Swallowfield found it difficult to get to the mother church at Shinfield because of robbers from the forest¹⁷ and the winter floods of the Loddon, so it seems unlikely that daily contact for farm supervision would be easy if the bailiff lived outside Shinfield. But where was this demesne farm, where was the heart of medieval Shinfield, what sort of people lived there and what were their lives? To find this we must look at the church and the manor, both of which were for obvious reasons on high well-drained ground and the area round the church was, as we have said, probably the original heart of the village.

St Mary's Church, Shinfield was founded by William Fitz Osbern, that first Norman lord of the manor already mentioned, and it included the chapelry of Swallowfield. He gave the advowson to the Abbey of Lire in Normandy but, as in many alien priories, their affairs in England were administered locally by a cell of the Abbey—in the case of Berkshire properties, by Saint Mary's Priory, Carisbrooke in the Isle of Wight¹⁸. Again in typical fashion the priest who was appointed was an absentee rector: he drew the income from the parish, paid an agreed sum to the Abbey and a small pension to the man appointed to act as vicar¹⁹. The advowson of the church was granted in 1269 by the Abbey of Lire to John, Bishop of Hereford, and remains with the Dean and Chapter of Hereford to this day. The earliest known name of a minister at Shinfield is for c 1170–99 when Wigod, a priest, was holding the benefice and paying a pension of 20/- *p.a.* to Gilbert, the chaplain of Roger, Bishop of Worcester, to act as vicar²⁰. At this time Gilbert was involved in a dispute with Roger de St John, the lord of the manor, about some land and houses given to extend the cemetery at Shinfield²¹. The King settled the matter and Roger had to acknowledge the rights of the Abbey of Lire, upon which he had evidently been trying to encroach²². We may assume that a church was built during the lifetime of the founder or his son—say between 1066 when William Fitz Osbern came to England and 1074 when Earl Roger forfeited his lands—but the earliest feature in the church now is the north doorway dated to the late twelfth century²³ and it may be that Roger de St John had rebuilt or improved the church. Sometime before 1179 Gilbert died and was succeeded by Master Stephen Remsem²⁴.

As Gilbert was the chaplain of a bishop he may have been well educated, for his time, but most of the vicars of Shinfield during the Middle Ages were not.

Twenty shillings a year was a very low stipend indeed and perpetual vicars (which another incumbent, John Andrew, was said to be in 1334²⁵) were among the lowliest—usually of peasant stock, ignorant and ill educated and mainly concerned with celebrating the mass and administering the sacraments but not with preaching or teaching the people. It is possible that, in consequence, the people of Shinfield would be even more ignorant than others of the time about religion and the bible and could join in only part of the mass. Nevertheless the church was important in their lives because of its symbolism which they understood with their eyes and ears—dignity was in its size, bigger by far than any other building except perhaps the manor house, and beauty lay in its fourteenth century tracery which we see now in the north windows, its grand fourteenth century King Post roof in the nave, its pictures and chalices and the sound of its bells across the fields. The church was earthy in their lives too—they had meetings and celebrations inside and the churchyard was used both for the burial of the dead and for dancing on May Day: and the very ignorance and poverty of the vicar put him close to his flock.

The lives of the villagers of Shinfield were all bound to the soil and in the common fortunes of open field farming where each man had scattered strips and all must co-operate in deciding the rotation of crops and sharing the oxen to draw the ploughs. Until the middle of the fourteenth century, though some were free men, paid rent and had a little independence, most were bound not only to the land but to the lord of the manor to work his land. This was the demesne farm, i.e. the part farmed by the lord himself as distinct from the lands he let, which took its name from the family and was known as St John's manor²⁶. It lay in the north east of the parish near where the seventeenth century manor house stood until *c* 1802, i.e. to the east of the present road from Shinfield to Reading and opposite the former RAF station: there is still a copse near Cutbush Lane called St John's copse²⁷ and Lords meadow between Old Field Farm and Arborfield Bridge was a name still used in 1836²⁸.

A manor was an administrative unit and did not necessarily have a manor house but it is very likely that some dwelling stood on the same site as the seventeenth century one. The moats near the present vicarage indicate that a medieval house stood there and there were houses near the church in the twelfth century²⁹. Many farm labourers lived on the manor farm and worked for a wage, others had a cottage and garden. Yet others had a cottage and strips in the open field in return for which they owed the lord part-time labour in his fields every week and at harvest and haymaking. All owed certain other payments such as eggs at Easter, money when the lord's eldest son was knighted, their best beast when they died. They were bound to attend the manor court to discuss village matters, settle disputes and have their misdemeanours judged. It was a hard life, with most of the profit milked off by the lord of the manor (though possibly no worse than in later times, as we shall see) and lack of personal freedom must have irked many: yet there were certain compensations—security in their land, allowances made in hard times and the lord would not oppress them too much lest they gave inefficient and reluctant work on the

demesne. Much depended on whether the lord of the manor was humane or rapacious.

Although we do not know how the St Johns treated their tenants we know a little of them as people. They were a knightly family. Their members included a crusader, John, who was with Richard I at the siege of Acre³⁰, and another John who, as a soldier, had charge of the young Edward of Caernarvon and fought in the campaigns of Edward I and Edward II in Wales and at Bannockburn and was created the First Baron St John of Lageham, being summoned to parliament by writ in 1299³¹. These had less to do with Shinfield than with Swallowfield and their manors in Oxfordshire and Surrey. But Shinfield does come into the picture in the story of two thirteenth century St Johns, Roger, a rebel adherent of Simon de Montfort, and his mother Emma, long-lived, domineering and a loyal servant of the crown.

In 1229 John de St John died leaving a widow Emma and a little boy named Roger of eight or nine years old. As Roger was too young to take charge of his lands the king sold the custody of Roger and the lands to Geoffrey le Despenser³². The very next year Geoffrey married the widow Emma³³ and got an even firmer grip on the estates. Roger came of age in 1242–43³⁴ but Emma and Geoffrey kept hold of the estates long after this³⁵, and when John le Despenser, Roger's step-brother, came of age in 1256³⁶ Emma, now a widow, let him have Swallowfield³⁷ and went off to live in Porchester Castle with a relative³⁸. Emma was a great favourite at the King's court and she was put in charge of the royal children, especially the little deaf and dumb Princess Katherine whom she brought to stay at Swallowfield. The little girl died when she was five³⁹ but Emma must have looked after her well because the King continued for years to give her many gifts including deer, a brooch and a girdle⁴⁰. This favour may be the reason why she was allowed to go on depriving Roger of his estates long after he had grown up. She was a redoubtable woman as after Geoffrey died she had charge of his lands in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire as well as the manors in Berkshire and Oxfordshire⁴¹.

Poor Roger meanwhile had to shift for himself. In 1248 he was granted by Alice De Dammartin a manor at Lageham in Surrey⁴² which he fortified⁴³ and this was his main manor as he was called "de Lageham" at his death⁴⁴. By 1254 (after his step-father died) he had also got possession of Berton in Oxfordshire and of Shinfield, though these were by now less valuable manors than those his mother kept. He must have lived at Shinfield part of his time as he was granted free warren there in 1254 when he came back from fighting in Gascony⁴⁵. He served in the army several times, in Gascony in 1253 and against Llewellyn in Wales in 1260 and 1263, and he went to court⁴⁶. This was the time when Simon de Montfort and the barons were struggling against the king to get some reforms and their plans included some for improving the position of knights of middling status like Roger. Roger must have joined the barons because of his mother's unfair treatment of him and the fact that the king had not intervened on his behalf. He was a prominent supporter of Simon de Montfort from 1258 and, for example, he was one of the visitors sent by the Council to religious

houses where the banished Poitevins had deposited their plunder⁴⁷; he was one of the "sealers" appointed to check the use of the Privy Seal⁴⁸, and he was summoned to de Montfort's parliament in 1264⁴⁹. He was killed at Evesham in 1265⁵⁰ fighting against the king and his estates were forfeited, most of which he had never had for himself because of his domineering mother and her new family. His ghost must have had a sour smile when his estates were immediately granted to Roger de Leybourne⁵¹, a turn-coat, now a royal supporter, but they were evidently restored to the St Johns under the Dictum of Kenilworth as Roger's son John, who was the first Baron St John of Lageham, had them at his death in 1316⁵².

In 1353 the widow of a later Roger de St John sold the rights in the manor to the crown⁵³ and from then until 1560 Swallowfield was used a great deal by the royal family and it was the dower of the successive wives of Henry VIII⁵⁴. The people of Shinfield, which was still attached to Swallowfield, must often have seen the royal parties hunting or riding the horses bred at this royal stud farm⁵⁵ and on occasion must have been asked for twenty of the best capons for a dinner at the manor.

The change of owner marked a new era more or less coinciding with the Black Death. This killed up to one third or even a half of the population of England (including John de St John, the lord of the manor⁵⁶) and its constant recurrence during the next 100 years kept the population down and made labour scarce. Under the St Johns farming of the demesne, as described, had been profitable especially in the thirteenth century when two other small and unimportant manors emerged in Hartley, one held by Sir Richard le Dummer and another by Amys de Pellitot and Matthew de Burghfield⁵⁷. But shortage of labour made letting more profitable and very likely a good deal of Shinfield was let to small independent farmers and the old system of payment by work, although dying slowly, had finally vanished by 1568⁵⁸. One of the earliest available land deeds for Shinfield dated 1338 bears the name of Robert Bullock, a free man⁵⁹, whose relatives were the lords of Arborfield⁶⁰.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the rise of many such independent yeoman and gentry families and Shinfield has some typical examples of what was happening all over England, for the land market was very fluid because of the inflation of the sixteenth century and the vast amount of land released on the market by Henry VIII's confiscation of monastic property. One such yeoman family which rose by gradually accumulating small parcels of land were the Woodcocks⁶¹. By 1540 their land formed the compact holding of Moor Place⁶² and by 1678 they were able to buy Beaumys Manor in Swallowfield⁶³. Their name still survives in Woodcock Lane leading to Diddenham Farm. Shinfield manor itself now became separated from Swallowfield once and for all and this shows a typical success story. It begins with Christopher Litcott. He was one of the gentleman pensioners of the king⁶⁴, trainbearer to Queen Anne⁶⁵ and acted as agent for the king in selling confiscated church properties⁶⁶. As a reward for service Henry VIII first granted him a lease of Swallowfield manor house and fulling-mill in 1542⁶⁷ and then in 1553 Edward VI granted him the

manor in fee⁶⁸; and though he was not granted Shinfield he had some sort of rights in the manor⁶⁹.

When Christopher Litcott died in 1554 his wife Katherine was left with four children, the eldest of whom, John the heir, was only thirteen⁷⁰. When he grew up John first mortgaged⁷¹ and then sold Swallowfield⁷²; he may have found farming unprofitable because he had no father to train him in management of an estate as he grew up. Though there was much profit to be made at this time in a well managed estate, in the enormous inflation of the sixteenth century (prices multiplied $5\frac{1}{2}$ times between 1500 and 1600) men also went under due to over-investment or being saddled with too many tenants at low fixed rents. Incidentally the man who bought Swallowfield was Samuel Backhouse, a rich London merchant who, like many of his kind, invested his fortune in land and so infiltrated into the country gentry; he was sheriff of Berkshire on two occasions⁷³.

The widow Katherine who had custody of the manor and children soon married again and her new husband, Edward Martyn⁷⁴, is an example of the rise to the gentry class. Edward Martyn came of a modest family who in 1566 were settled in Wokingham and claiming to be gentry—though one member was a grocer⁷⁵. He was in royal service and probably came of a line of such men—in 1438 John Martyn, a groom usher of the Chamber, had been granted custody of part of Swallowfield manor⁷⁶. Edward was apparently appointed bailiff of Shinfield manor in 1553 and came to live there at the age of 28⁷⁷. What could be more natural than that a young man capable of managing an estate, and no doubt in constant contact with the widow at Swallowfield, should marry the lady? In 1560 the Shinfield manor was granted by the Queen to Edward for his own benefit⁷⁸, most probably on the occasion of the marriage to Katherine. Katherine was probably also known and favoured at court as her first husband had been. Edward was also made surveyor of the royal manors of Berkshire in 1594⁷⁹. The Litcotts were a friendly family and Shinfield manor was shared with Katherine's son Leonard Litcott and his wife Frances⁸⁰; there was probably an understanding about Leonard's rights when Edward Martyn first came to Shinfield. Katherine bore Edward no children and was dead by 1568 and Leonard and Frances also apparently had no heirs, luckily for Edward⁸¹. But Edward married again and his wife Mary⁸² bore him one child, Anne. Though he had no son Edward did at last have an heir in this daughter who made a good marriage to William Wollascott, the son of a neighbouring lord of the manor of Tidmarsh⁸³. So Edward Martyn, the one time bailiff, may really be said to have "arrived" as a member of the smaller gentry when in 1596 he built the Martyn Chapel in Shinfield church to hold pews for his family. His son-in-law took over his office of surveyor⁸⁴ and also eventually his estates⁸⁵, adding to them in his own turn⁸⁶, and they remained in the Wollascott family until about 1786⁸⁷.

Prosperous people like these—farmers and gentry all over England—were putting their money into new buildings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and Shinfield has many examples most of which still exist; Hartley Court

of c 1599⁸⁸, Church Farm House of 1604⁸⁹, the sixteenth century rectory now the National Institute for Research in Dairying, Badgers Farm and Goodrest of the early seventeenth century⁹⁰ and Shinfield Grange of 1655⁹¹ and of course in the church the Martyn Chapel of 1596, the rebuilt tower of c 1664, and a wooden gallery of probably the late seventeenth century⁹².

Prosperity expressed in new buildings is the happy side of the picture but the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also times of political and religious turmoil when even small villages like Shinfield were deeply affected. In 1552 Calvinism, which frowned on church ornaments, was being used as an excuse by some patrons and parishioners to help themselves to church plate and King Edward VI ordered inventories to be taken. At this time St Mary's Church had three silver and gilt chalices, two pyxes, and four corporas cases in cloth of gold and red velvet and altar cloths and vestments in damask and embroidery. All these vanished the next year in the royal confiscations⁹³.

The Protectorate of Cromwell also roused strong feelings. William Cosins, the vicar of Shinfield, was ejected for saying that "the land was wholly governed by the sword" and parliament had destroyed the common law⁹⁴. The vicarage was vacant for three years⁹⁵ and when Cosins returned in 1660, after the restoration of the monarchy, he still made trouble by having an anabaptist, William Stanley, a cordwainer of Reading, to preach and even marry people⁹⁶. When the Bishop of Salisbury ordered Stanley out he declared "he would stand by the people of Shinfield if they would stand by him" and to prove his intentions marched to Shinfield with sixty stout men of Reading to protect him⁹⁷!

After such disturbances Shinfield, as part of the nation, gladly settled down again and this is symbolised for us by the inscription on a new bell cast in 1664 "Honour the King"⁹⁸—Charles II, only restored to the throne in 1660. The same year, because the old steeple was collapsing, the present brick tower was built⁹⁹ probably of bricks from Katesgrove Kilns¹⁰⁰. Either the brickwork or the construction was poor for it was constantly being repaired right into this century¹⁰¹. In the early eighteenth century the church also replaced the lost communion cup, bought new pews and a basin for the font, a grand pulpit and two bells named after churchwardens Daniel and David Headland and Thomas Hollier, and generally improved the building¹⁰².

This was a time of relative ease, farming flourished and most people had enough to eat. The poor were the responsibility of their native parish ever since the Poor Law Acts of Elizabeth, but there were also the charitable bequests* of such people as Nicholas Russell, Elizabeth Speke and William Wollascott¹⁰³, and the helping hand of patronage—as two local boys found. The great adventure began for Thomas Medins and William Davis in 1704—off to the Guinea coast to trade in slaves and gold. They were orphans of Shinfield and the parish had apprenticed them to the Royal African Company which carried on the notorious triangle trade with Africa and the West Indies. If these boys survived

* See Appendix 5

the perils of the sailing ships, the West African climate and the native wars they may have made a modest fortune as factors. Such opportunities were rare. For most parish orphans "apprenticeship" meant being sent to live and work on a local farm as labourer or servant—as happened to Thomas's brother Samuel and his two sisters Elizabeth and Anne¹⁰⁴—but Thomas must have made a good impression on someone important in Shinfield—perhaps Sir Owen Buckingham, MP, of Moor Place who was a rich London merchant and financier and the owner of a Reading sailcloth factory¹⁰⁵.

Two years later another merchant Richard Piggat, a cutler of Westminster, and a local boy who made good, came back to his native Shinfield and used his wealth to build and endow a school for twenty poor boys. They were to be educated up to twelve years of age, given new clothes and shoes every year, and apprenticed to various trades*. He had no children of his own but a great affection for his servant and his sister and his nephew, and his first young schoolmaster Samuel Higgs, all of whom he provided for in his will. The faithful Samuel Higgs remained as schoolmaster for 38 years, long after Piggat died¹⁰⁶, and this school was the direct ancestor of the present primary school.

But education and change were for the few. Most people stayed in Shinfield all their lives and a poor family with no land had little chance to pull out of poverty. The Appletons were lame dogs from 1700 to 1774—an orphan Robert apprenticed to a broadweaver of Reading¹⁰⁷, Henry and Anne his wife sent back from Aldermaston because they were destitute¹⁰⁸, little Peter boarded out with a farmer for 1/- a week and Thomas given money and a shirt. And above all the hilarious widow Appleton who went round collecting from every charity in the village—the parish paid her rates and gave her money¹⁰⁹, Wollascott's charity (founded in 1628) paid her "wascoat money"¹¹⁰ and her tenancy of a cottage at £2 *p.a.* cost the owners £16 in five years for repairs¹¹¹!

In the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the scale of poverty became enormous especially in south east England, where wages were low, prices rising and the whole business accentuated by the effects of the Napoleonic wars and the agricultural depression which followed. The worst years were 1782–84, 1795, 1800 and 1808–13. The "Old Poor Law" was criticised in the nineteenth century as being wasteful and encouraging idleness. This was largely because of the almost universal custom, started by the justices at Speenhamland in Berkshire in 1795, of paying a bread-scale allowance of money to people who earned less than a living wage. It had both good and bad points but the overall policy was laid down by law and by the local justices of the peace—the gentry such as Dr Mitford—and the Overseers of the Poor, who had to deal with poverty at grass-roots level, had a daunting task. Farmers were criticised because the allowances enabled them to get away with paying low wages but it was substantial farming families like Headland, Pither, Creace, Howell and Body who turned out unflinchingly to meetings when the rest of the parish was apathetic, who made the decisions and who paid a good deal of the poor rate

* See Appendices 1 & 2

and who had to learn the art of administration pragmatically¹¹². Moreover they had on the whole a more humane and sensible approach than many parishes. In 1829 John Walter, editor of *The Times* and a Berkshire MP, criticised the lord of the manor of Swallowfield because he influenced the Select Vestry to make harsh rules about assistance to the poor¹¹³.

Moreover the Shinfield Overseers had some constructive ideas. For example in 1774 they granted £5 to John Wheatley for iron and coals to set himself up as a blacksmith and gave him work steeling pickaxes and repairing shoes¹¹⁴, and his descendant was still carrying on the business in 1834¹¹⁵. Another scheme started in 1700 was to provide land or parish cottages (a sort of council-house scheme) where families could have room to grow vegetables and keep pigs and geese¹¹⁶. By 1836 there were fifteen of these, nearly all built on the edge of commons as at Shinfield Green, Lambeth Hill, Spencers Wood and Great Lea¹¹⁷. Some were little more than shacks and in 1806 the lord of the manor insisted on them being moved as they offended him¹¹⁸.

Even with a parish cottage life was hard—there was only one tenant who did not ask for help of some sort from the parish between 1802 and 1832¹¹⁹. The Cusdens were parish tenants who fell into trouble in the 1790s and were helped in many ways by the parish—widows given money, boys' shoes repaired, orphans apprenticed¹²⁰—but their worst time came during the Napoleonic wars. They were receiving regular weekly payments but one day in 1812 the menfolk found an escape. Thomas, John and Richard all went on exercises with the local militia and during the fortnight, tempted by the £2.2.0 bounty and desperate to get away from grinding poverty, enlisted in the army proper. Their wives and children were left to be kept by the parish, and their old parents ended their days in the workhouse¹²¹.

The workhouse at Shinfield had been in the church house until 1768 but it was then found to be “an encouragement to profligacy, filthiness, debauchery and immorality to the great scandall and publick and abominable nuisance” of all the neighbours and people going to church. So it was pulled down and a new workhouse built at Great Lea Common. The rising cost of living can be seen from the cost of maintenance of each inmate which was 1/9 a week in 1788, 3/6 in 1800, 4/- in 1808 and 6/- in 1826¹²². It is doubtful whether the goings on in the new workhouse were any better. Unless insane, criminal or old, orphaned or very sick, people preferred to stay at home and get “outdoor relief”. “Outdoor relief” covered the whole range of human needs and the personal relationship between the Overseers* and the poor shines across two centuries in lists like “mutton for Mrs Palmer, 44 weeks”, “nurse for Mrs Palmer”, “coffin for Mrs Palmer”, “midwife for Mrs Bailey”, “Palmas Boya Fowlwether Cote 9/6”, “a truss of straw to lay upon”, shoes, smock frocks, coals, “coffin for child found at Gravelly Bridge”¹²³.

Like many others the Shinfield Overseers tried to economise by setting the poor to work on roads or gravel pits, giving soup instead of money, buying meat wholesale and reselling it, and sending the poor to work for farmers in rotation¹²⁴.

*See Appendix 4

But the cost was enormous and unfairly distributed. Many Berkshire men debated these questions in the *Reading Mercury*¹²⁵ but of course they were national problems and an Act of Parliament of 1834 set out to solve them. The New Poor Law offered the "workhouse or nothing" to sort out the deserving from the undeserving poor. It achieved this economy by cutting down on outdoor relief but at a heavy cost in suffering and it made "the workhouse" a bogey spoken of with dread and shame even in living memory. The Shinfield workhouse was sold and the inmates sent to a big Union at Wokingham and the responsibility for the poor was taken from Shinfield men and handed over to a union of several villages, while Shinfield people simply paid poor rates¹²⁶.

Even for the solvent life was harsh in the nineteenth century—transportation could be the sentence for larceny, poaching laws were harsh, the octagon lock-up built in Shinfield in 1828 measured 7 feet across inside¹²⁷, homes were damp and food monotonous and poor. This grim side of life was excluded by Mary Russell Mitford who lived at Three Mile Cross from 1820 to 1850 and wrote *Our Village* and other essays. She saw it—her father was a J.P. and a partisan of village needs¹²⁸—but she wrote of her book *Our Village*, "if anything be ugly you strike it out"¹²⁹, and she paints a sentimental picture of life in a pretty, slow-moving, leafy village where petrol fumes were unknown. This too is an aspect of the truth and, in what it ignores at least, is in the tradition of those she admired—of Jane Austen and Charles Lamb.

Against this quiet background a surprise discovery about 1786 must have caused a stir in Shinfield. A builder repairing a chimney in the manor house discovered, behind a wall, a cartulary—a book in which were made copies of deeds concerning properties—relating to the great medieval Abbey of Reading. Gul Corderoy, Lord Fingal's steward, supposed that also "the bricklayer who is now living in Reading found no small sum of money, or something valuable, as shortly after that time he advanced much in the world"¹³⁰. How the cartulary was hidden at Shinfield is not known. As other and more important cartularies were not so hidden it is unlikely that the Abbot hid it from the commissioners in 1538. Perhaps it was stolen and then hidden in panic. Fingal's Cartulary, as the book was called, was nearly lost again by being dumped in Lord Fingal's house at Woolhampton (now Douai) with other manuscripts and books until discovered by sharp-eyed Dr Virtue in 1882 and handed over to the British Museum¹³¹.

The church choir of 1827 must have given enjoyment to many*. There was singing of metrical psalms accompanied by a band of local farmers playing clarinet, bassoon, cello, fiddle and flutes and "Robert Hatton given a Christmas box for keeping the boys silent in the gallery". The same band probably played at village weddings and parties. It was disbanded in 1830 when a barrel organ took over¹³². During this time the parish clerk was a man named Critcher. He had been schoolmaster for a time¹³³, was dismissed and served as parish clerk from 1804 to 1839. He had £5 *p.a.* salary as clerk and a good many per-

* See also Appendix 7

quisites for his other jobs—washing surplices, scouring plate, cutting nettles in the churchyard, filling in the militia return for the constable, and on one occasion he surveyed an estate with disastrous results. Parish clerks, having the post for life, were often hard to get rid of and Critcher was a tenacious one. In 1834 it was agreed that he should sit in the churchwarden's pew but give up Sunday duties in church—and by 1839 he was blamed for “the discreditable manner in which the graves . . . have been dug and want of cleanliness in the church” and persuaded to retire on a pension of 4/- a week (i.e. £10. 8. 0 *p.a.*)¹³⁴.

Another village character known to all was the master of Piggat's School. The first, the devoted Samuel Higgs, we have mentioned but his successors were less devoted and in the early nineteenth century several were dismissed such as he who “disguised himself with liquor so as to neglect the children”. Another, James Draper, dismissed in 1807, was accused of ungovernable temper, impertinence and spending too much on decorating the schoolhouse¹³⁵, and got his name in the paper. He was ejected from the schoolhouse, attacked an old man with a chisel and was sent to Reading gaol for three months¹³⁶. From there he wrote three pages of foolscap to the Shinfield school trustees comparing their treatment of him to the plot against Naboth and refuting their accusations with “if you can prove this I will undertake to stay in prison for life”. The letters of a schoolmaster a century later make a great contrast: of a complaint about free boots “some of the parents think the boys can kick footballs or stones along the road for about four months with impunity” and, of the scripture exam “Mr Ditchfield was rather stiff in the scripture exam. I think if the children could satisfy all his requirements they would be able to take a degree at Oxford”. Here is the ring of competence and common sense marking the great changes which took place in a century, notably a new building of 1861 and the status of Public Elementary School in 1872. Still many pleasant traditions remained—the Founders Day ceremony and the distribution of clothes and shoes¹³⁷.

The church has also changed a good deal both in the religious revival of the nineteenth century and in the restoration of its building by Sir George Gilbert Scott in 1855; an incidental result of this was the destruction of the wooden gallery¹³⁸—which may have had wood-worm—and the unfortunate loss of several brasses of the seventeenth century¹³⁹. In material matters above all the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw great changes as the modern village emerged* and as gradually agriculture improved and poverty decreased. In 1847 village trades only catered for the simplest needs—blacksmith, butcher, bootmaker and so on¹⁴⁰, but by 1915 there were indications of more gracious living—a dairyman, photographer, confectioner and draper¹⁴¹. Part of this was due to the increased population which grew from 869 in 1801 to 1,608 in 1901¹⁴² (and was 5,187 in 1961¹⁴³). Much of this new population went to make Spencers Wood which had been farm land in 1872¹⁴⁴ and by 1913 had houses, a church, recreation ground and school¹⁴⁵. This had grown round an old common like many of the earlier settlements of Shinfield, for example Shinfield Green, School Green and Lambwood Hill¹⁴⁶. Although these commons have gradually been

*See Appendix 6

enclosed¹⁴⁷ and built on they lasted longer in Shinfield than in many villages and helped to set its pattern of scattered settlements. This pattern was set by about 1750¹⁴⁸ and from then until the later nineteenth century Three Mile Cross had the biggest concentration of houses and shops¹⁴⁹, doubtless because it was on the main road to Basingstoke and Southampton and was on a well-drained spread of gravel¹⁵⁰.

These scattered settlements have not prevented Shinfield from acting as a community. With all the sweeping changes of the twentieth century certain basic properties of a village, found in Shinfield's past, still survive, phoenix-like, as in the church and the school we have already mentioned. In 1969 Shinfield United Charities provided for the parish grocery vouchers, coal, an apprenticeship grant, a chiropody service and referred to the sale of parish cottages¹⁵¹—a list remarkably like those of the 1770s, though happily shorter. Although the paternalistic lord of the manor has long vanished, Shinfield has kept its agricultural character and this may be largely due to the National Institute for Research in Dairying which, as the biggest landholder¹⁵² and committed to farming in a parish so near Reading, acts as a barrier to urban sprawl. And that other component of the village, the rich and entertaining character, had certainly survived until the 1920s in the person of Tapping, the gardener at the National Institute for Research in Dairying with his mower pulled by a pony¹⁵³. And he must surely have his present counterparts in Shinfield, for history is not only past but is being made now.

SOURCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Manuscript Sources

Berkshire Record Office.

The main groups of documents used were:

1. Parish Records

which are further subdivided:

Churchwardens Accounts

Faculty to Restore and Repew Shinfield Church

Churchwardens Bills, vouchers and miscellaneous 1823-56

Vestry Books 1768-1845

Constables Bills

warrants, precepts, etc.

Parish Accounts

Papers relating to Settlement and Removals

Apprenticeship Indentures

Bastardy Depositions

Overseers of the Poor: Bills and miscellaneous

Registers of Births, Marriages and Burials

List of Paupers and Wokingham Union Accounts, after 1834

Sale of Parish Cottages 1836

Records of Piggats Charity School

Records of charity of Mary Spier and William Wollascott

Miscellaneous: wills, maps, correspondences, etc.

2. Land Deeds

3. Enclosure Agreements

Enclosure Agreements

4. Maps:

1678 glebe map

1759—manor

1760—Diddenham

1834 Tithe Apportionment Map and Award 1836

British Museum.

Cartulary of Carisbrooke (Egerton 3667) transcripts supplied by

Dr B. R. Kemp

Reading Public Library Local Collection.

Manuscript Papers of M. E. Williams

Printed Calendars and Texts

Calendar of Patent Rolls

Calendar of Close Rolls

Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem

Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous

Book of Fees

Rotuli Hundredorum (Record Commission)

Calendar of State Papers, Domestic

Calendar of Charter Rolls

Red Book of the Exchequer (Rolls Series)

Pipe Rolls (pub. Pipe Roll Society)

Abbreviations

B.R.O.

D/P 110

5/1-3

6/1

7/1-2

8/1

9/1-5

10/1

12/1-7

13/1-5

14/1-42

15/1-4

18/1-2

18/3

19/3-6

19/5

25/1-9

25/12-13

28/4

D/EBb/T

D/EBb

Q/

T/M 27

T/M 19/1-2

D/EBy P14

D/P 110 27A-C

Cart. Caris.

BYN/D

C.P.R.

C.C.R.

Cal. I.P.M.

Cal. Inq. Misc.

B.F.

Rot. Hund.

C.S.P.D.

Cal. Chart. R.

Red Bk

Rot. Pip.

Abbreviations

Other Manuscript Sources in the Public Record Office referred to in the text:

Patent Rolls	Pat.
Recovery Rolls	Recov. R
Common Pleas	Com. Pleas
Chancery inquisitions post mortem	Chan. I.P.M.
Lists and Provisions	L & P
Feet of Fines Berkshire	F.F.B.
Memoranda Rolls	Mem. Roll

Other Printed Sources

Victoria County History of Berkshire	V.C.H. Berks
Victoria County History of Oxfordshire	V.C.H. Oxon
Victoria County History of Surrey	V.C.H. Surrey
Berkshire Archaeological Journal	B.A.J.
Surrey Archaeological Collections	
Reading Mercury	R.M.
Reading Chronicle	
English Historical Review	E.H.R.
G.E.C. Peerage	G.E.C.
Dictionary of National Biography	D.N.B.
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M. R. Mitford: Our Village (London 1848)	
M. R. Mitford: Village Tales	
A. G. Matthews: Calamy Revised	
A. G. Matthews: Walker Revised	
ed. W. Money: (1882) Parish Church Goods in Berkshire 1555	
Constance, Lady Russell: Swallowfield and its Owners (1901)	S & O

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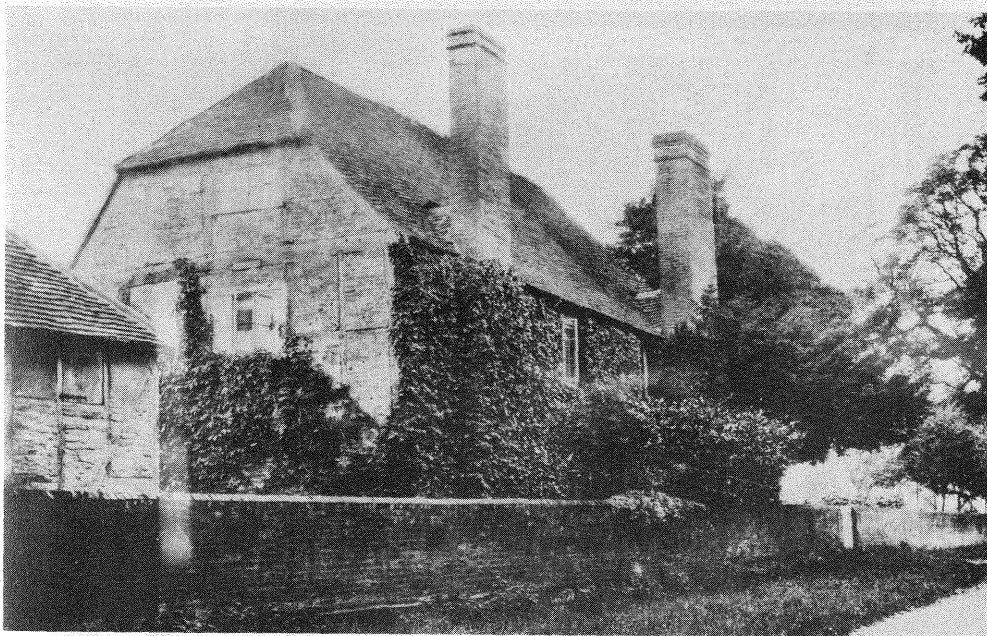
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Greenwoods County Map, 1824 (Reading Reference Library LMV)	
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J. Rocque: A Topographical Survey of the County of Berkshire, 1761 Ordnance Survey 6" Edition of 1877 Sheets 37 and 29	Rocque O.S.



Two views of the Shinfield Road; the pond at the corner of Brookers Hill and Lane End Farm, about 1909



The Schools, the Green and 'The Bell & Bottle' very early this century



Shinfield Grange (top) and Church Farm House (bottom), from a sale catalogue of 1903 (see inside of back cover)



Duckett's Barn (pulled down 1949-50) on the site of the old Shinfield Manor—Shinfield Green—from a painting by Harold J. Yates, Associate of Reading University and Lecturer in drawing and painting, 1921-43

Shinfield Fire Engine, 1913 with (left to right) seated—George Smith (Sr.), William Lailey, Arthur Holder and Richard Williams standing—Robert Curtiss, Harry Holder and William Higgs

Printed Maps (continued)

Abbreviations

Ordnance Survey 6" Edition of 1913 Sheets 37 and 29
Ordnance Survey 6" Provisional Edition Sheets 76 and 66 NW
Ordnance Survey Roman Britain, Third Edition

O.S.
O.S.
O.S.

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BYN/D
BYN/D

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24. Cart. Caris. fo 27r, v.
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26. Ibid. T16.
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31. D.N.B.
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33. C.P.R. 1225-32 p. 486.
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36. S & O p. 15 quotes MS Cott Claud 12.
37. T. Rymer: Foedera loc cit.
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43. C.P.R. 1258-66 p. 199.
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73. V.C.H. Berks p. 269.
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75. Heralds Visitation Berks 1566; Harleian Society Vol. 1, p. 43-4.
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APPENDIX I

R U L E S

TO BE OBSERVED BY

THE PARENTS OF THE CHILDREN

BELONGING TO

Shinfield Charity School.

I.

The Children must be sent to School, quite clean, with their hair cut short and combed, at a Quarter before Nine in the Morning, to remain till Twelve; and at a Quarter before Two in the Afternoon, to remain till Five in Summer, and till Four in Winter.

II.

The Children must be at the School every Sunday Morning at a Quarter before Nine, when Divine Service is in the Morning; they shall meet again at Half-past Two, and be dismissed at Five in the Summer and Four in the Winter; when Divine Service is in the Afternoon, they shall be dismissed at Half-past Eleven in the Morning and meet again at Two.

III.

The Children's Clothes will be kept at the School, and they will take them home with them every Friday Evening, and must bring them again to School on Monday Morning, their Shoes being first cleaned; and their Clothes brushed and neatly folded up; for which purpose they will be provided with a bag.

IV.

Parents who shall feel themselves aggrieved by any punishment the Master shall inflict on their Children, shall not be at liberty to offer any insult to him, but shall make their complaint to the Trustees at the next Quarterly Meeting, at which they will have notice to attend, when every real grievance will be redressed.

V.

No Child shall be absent a day but in case of illness, and of which the Parents shall give notice to the Master immediately, that he may call on the Child and ascertain the truth of such report.

VI.

The Holidays will be One Week at Christmas, Two Weeks at Bean-setting, Two Days at Easter, Two Days at Whitsuntide, Two Weeks at Hay Harvest, and a Month at Corn Harvest.

VII.

If Parents refuse to comply strictly with the foregoing Rules, their Children shall be expelled the School at the next Quarterly Meeting of the Trustees, and shall also leave their last suit of Clothes to their Successors.

The Parents of the Children are requested to hear them say the Prayers which they are taught at the School.

Confirmed and agreed to at a Meeting of the Trustees, held at the School House, on Tuesday, the 16th Day of November, 1830.

The Right Rev. the BISHOP of SALISBURY,
The Rev. MATTHEW FEILDE, Vicar, } SUPERVISORS.

RICHARD BODY, Esq.
Mr. J. ELISHA,
Mr. J. PITHER,
Mr. W. SMITH. } TRUSTEES.

The Account of Humphrey Black Treasurers 1736

Paid to M ^r . Wayte for the 20. Poor Childrens Cloths	£ 8 5 4
Paid to Edwards. Forchmore for 20 Pair of shoes for them	2 2 0
Paid y ^e . 4 Duberters Land tax for the School Farm at Binfield	2 9 0
Paid to Samuel Higgs his four quarterly Payments	15 0 0
Paid for the School firing	5 0 0
Bound Thomas Wigg to Rob ^t . Lawless Shoemaker on y ^e . 24 th Day of September 1736. to serve seven Years. Paid with him five pounds	5 0 0
Bound Elizabeth Alder to M ^r . Elizabeth Williat of the Parish of St. Giles in Reading Mantua maker to serve three Years. Bound her on the 9 th Day of December 1736. Paid with her five pounds	5 0 0
Paid to the Reve ^d . M ^r . Charles Eyles for a Sermon Preached on y ^e . 30 th Day of May	5 0 0
Paid y ^e . Clerk for his Attendance	0 5 0
Paid the Expences of this Day	0 50 0
Paid for y ^e . Carriage of y ^e . Childrens Cloths	0 5 0
To: £	40 = 4 = 4

APPENDIX 3—CONTRASTING BILLS

Mr. Kemble Overseer of Shinfield Parish

1834

May 3	fine Hat for Sexton	16—0
„	Gold binding & band	12—0
„	Lace	1—0
	Paid Jan 17 1835	<hr/>
	J. Chamberlin.	£1—9—0

The Trustees of
Shinfield Charity
School

1846

29 May	To 20 Stout Mixt Cloth Jackets and Trousers lined & Metal Buttons	
	20 Cloth Caps with Tufts	17—0—0
	20 Pairs Worsted Stockings	
	40 Bibbs <u>for Twenty Boys</u>	
	in Shinfield School	
	@ 17/- each Suit	

Mr Kemble Overseer of Stunfield Parish

Bought of J. Chamberlin & Son,

WATER PROOF HAT MANUFACTURERS,

No. 10, Minster Street, Reading.

1834

May 3 - fine Hat for Supt. - 16-0
 " - Gold binding band - 12-0
 " - Large for face - 1-0
 Paid for 17/1835 £ 1-9-0

J. Chamberlin.

126

The Trustees of
 Stunfield Charity
 School

READING.

Bought of HERBERT LEWIS,

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL

Woollen Draper and Man's Mercer.

FUNERALS
 FURNISHED.

PELISSE CLOTHS, FLANNELS, BAIZES, TABLE COVERS,
 IRISH LINENS, &c.

GLOVES,
 BRACES, &c

1846
 29 May

To 20 = Head Med Cloth Jackets and
 Trunks lined w/ Metal Buttons
 20 = Cloth Caps w/ the Suits
 20 = Brass Wristed Strappings
 40 = Bells for Inventory Days
 on Stunfield School
 17/- cash Paid

17-0-0

E. M. W.

APPENDIX 4—EXTRACTS FROM THE ACCOUNTS OF THE OVERSEERS
OF THE POOR
WINTER 1818-19

1818

Dec 1	Pd at the meeting at Church	0 : 7 : 0½
6	Pd John Plomer bread money 3 weeks arned 18 shillings it comes to Ten shillings and sixpence more	0 : 10 : 6
8	Pd the Expence with Jonathan Cusden and warents	1 : 5 : 0
12	Mearing Wife for her Daughter	1 : 0 : 0
15	Pd at the meeting at the Church House	0 : 10 : 6
26	mering Wife for her Daughter	0 : 10 : 0
	Mary Panket 1 Month	0 : 10 : 0
	Pd. for Examen Danel Carter	0 : 5 : 0
31	Mearing Wife for her Daughter	0 : 10 : 0

1819

January 2	Mathey Crips	0 : 1 : 0
3	Pd at the meeting at the Churchhouse	0 : 7 : 6
8	Pd for guine Round the parish weaing waites and midgering the Cupes	1 : 7 : 8
9	Higgs Wife one week	10 : 0
	Widow Fulker one week	6 : 0
	Pd for 3 Basters orders for Richard Culch and James	0 : 14 : 6

Paid at the Meeting
 at Church 0:7:0
 6 Pd John Honey bread
 money & wicks come
 16 Shillings it come
 to Ten Shillings and
 6 pence more 0:10:6
 8 Pd the Expence with
 Jonathan Cusden 1:5:0
 12 Measing Wife for
 her Daughter 1:0:0
 15 Pd at the meeting
 at the Church House 10:0:0
 26 Measing Wife for
 her Daughter 0:10:0
 Mary Jambet 1 Month 10:0:0
 Pd for Examine
 Daniel Carter 0:5:0
 31 Measing Wife for
 her Daughter 0:10:0
 1819 Measing Wife for
 her Daughter 0:1:0
 Pd at the meeting
 at the Church House 7:6
 8 Pd for guine bound
 the parish measing
 waxes and micingling
 the Expre 1:7:6
 9 Sligga 9th one week 0:10:0
 Wido Sulkerone 0:6:0
 Pd for 3 Pastors orders
 for Richard Enteli
 and Lucas 0:14:0

APPENDIX 5—SHINFIELD CHARITIES, WITH DATES OF FOUNDATION

1611. Nicholas Russell left 20 shillings for the poor.
1614. Reynold Butler of Burghfield left 6s. 8d. for the poor on Good Friday.
1626. Elizabeth Speke left money for the poor.
- c.1628. William Woollascott lefts 35s. for the poor, 20s. for the maintenance of footbridges and 7s. 6d. as payment to the vicar and churchwardens.
1646. John Reynold left 20s. for the poor.
1697. Mrs Mary Spier left a house and land in Diddenham to provide money to teach ten poor children to read the Bible, say the catechism etc.
1706. Richard Piggat founded the charity school, spending £917. 5. 0 on its establishment and endowment.
1724. Richard Piggat's school conveyed to trustees.
1729. Richard Piggat's will proved—additional money left for the poor of Shinfield and other places.
- Date unknown—probably early 1700's. "wascoat money" i.e. 8s. *p.a.* payable from the inn at Three Mile Cross, to provide waistcoats for two poor widows.
1837. Richard Body left £100 to maintain his monument in the church, the surplus to be spent on blankets for the old and industrious poor.
1859. Rev. William Fielde, by will, left money for school building, a school clock, celebration buns for scholars etc.
- Date unknown—"time whereof the memory of man was not to the contrary":
Church House held by the churchwardens for 8d. *p.a.* paid to the lord of the manor to provide money for the repair of the church and the surplus to the poor.
- Allotments for the poor and the Recreation Ground permitted on the common land of the manor.

APPENDIX 6—SHINFIELD IN 1903 (FROM KELLYS' DIRECTORY OF BERKSHIRE)

SHINFIELD is a village and parish, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles south from Reading, in the Southern division of the county, partly in the hundred of Theale and partly in the hundred of Charlton, union of Wokingham, petty sessional division and county court district of Reading, rural deanery of Reading, arch-deaconry of Berks and diocese of Oxford. The river Loddon flows on the south-east. The church of St. Mary is an ancient edifice of flint and brick, in the Early English style, consisting of chancel, nave, south aisle, north porch and low embattled western tower containing 6 bells: in the church are several monuments: the seats are of oak and the pulpit of carved oak: the east window is stained: the church was completely restored in 1857, at a cost of £1,600: there are 400 sittings. The register dates from the year 1649. The living is a vicarage, net income £100, with 26 acres of glebe, and residence, in the gift of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford, and held since 1900 by the Rev. Reginald Joseph Wilmot Ware B.A. of St. Peter's College, Cambridge. There is a Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Three Mile Cross, and at Spencer's Wood a Congregational chapel. The charities amount to about £8 yearly and are for clothing and coal. The trustees of the late Alexander Cobham Cobham esq. of Shinfield Grange (d. 1902), who are lords of the manor, and James Herbert Benyon esq. L.L. of Englefield, are the principal landowners. The soil is gravel and clay; subsoil, gravel. The chief crops are wheat, oats and barley. The entire area is 4,292 acres of land and 21 of water; rateable value, £7,415; the population in 1901, inclusive of Hartley Dummer Liberty, in Grazeley ecclesiastical parish, was 1,587.

The population attached to the parish church in 1901 was 1,015.

SHINFIELD.

PRIVATE RESIDENTS.

Cane George, Hyde end
Cobham Captain Alexander William J.P.
Shinfield grange
Deacon Simeon, Hyde end
De Vallentin James, Hyde end
Euan-Smith Col. Sir Charles Bean bart.
K.C.B., C.S.I., D.C.L. Manor house
Fifield Albert, Essendene
Goodall James, East Rop
Hargreaves Robert, The Grove
Lucas Charles, Lyndhurst
Manning John Henry, Chestnuts
Mayne John Dawson, Goodrest
Middleton Robert, Spencers Wood
Millett Charles Frederick, The Crofts
Oakley Miss, Vallimore
Portsmouth Miss, Merton villa
Portsmouth Miss, Warbrook, Spencers Wood
Prior Arthur, Warrigate
Saunders William George, School green
Thompson Mrs. Shinfield lodge
Tosland William, Hill side
Ware Rev. Reginald Joseph Wilmot B.A.
Camb. (vicar), Vicarage
Wilkins Mrs. Sussex lodge

COMMERCIAL.

Bailey William Isaac, blacksmith
Barrett George, farmer, Hyde end
Beard Henry, woodman, School green
Beckingham Albert, market gardener
Beesley William, grocer, Spencers Wood
Bradfield Frank, beer retr. Spencers Wood
Bridgwater George, coal dealer
Chase William, Black Boy F.H.
Cuthbert Walter, boot ma. Spencers Wd
Double Chas. blacksmith, Spencers Wood
Embery Ernest Charles, beer retailer &
shopkeeper, School green
Goddard Chas. Jn. farmer, Church end
Goddard Henry, assistant overseer
Grover William, carpenter, Spencers Wood
Hamblin Joseph, beer ret. Spencers Wood
Hawkins Wm. farmer, Spencers Wood
Hendy Adolphus, clerk
Johnson Richard, farm bailiff to A. W.
Cobham esq. Church Lane farm
Keene Oakley Rufus, farmer, Wyverley fm
Lucas Geo. D. farmer, Iane End farm
Luckwell Joseph, dairyman, Grovelands
Middleton Robert, grocer, Spencers Wood
Neighbour John, beer retailer
Pither Thomas, butcher, Spencers Wood

Three Mile Cross is a hamlet $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of the village. By Local Government Board Order 23,869, dated March 24, 1889, that part of Shinfield in Reading municipal borough was added to St. Giles'. Reading, civil parish. Parish Clerk, William Attawell.

Post Office, School Green.—William T. Attawell, sub-postmaster. Letters arrive from Reading at 8.10 a.m. & 1.15 p.m.; dispatched at 1.15 & 6.10 p.m.; 'sundays, arrive at 8.10 a.m.; dispatched at 11.55 a.m.' Postal orders are issued here, but not paid. Earley is the nearest money order & telegraph office, 2 miles distant

Post & M. O. O., S. B. & A. & I. O., Three Mile Cross.—Mrs. A. Bailey, sub-postmistress. Letters arrive from Reading at 5.15 & 11.40 a.m.; dispatched at 2.55 & 7.30 p.m.; sundays, arrive at 5.15 a.m.; dispatched at 7 p.m. Swallowfield is the nearest telegraph office, 3 miles distant

Wall Letter Box, Hyde End.—Letters collected at 6.40 p.m.; Sunday, 5.30 p.m.

Wall Letter Box, Manor House.—Letters cleared 8.15 a.m. & 5.30 p.m.; Sunday, 11.30 a.m.

Elementary School, School Green, built in 1707, enlarged in 1860 by public subscription, & again enlarged in 1892 at a cost of £600, for 300 children; average attendance, 110; it is endowed with £100 yearly, left by Mr. William Piggott, a citizen of London, for 13 boys & 13 girls, who have new suits of clothing on the 30th May annually: there is a house for the master, who receives £120 a year; Arthur Thomas Pooley, master; Mrs. Mary Pooley, infants' mistress

Purnell James, Magpie & Parrot F.H.
Rogers James, gamekeeper to A. C.
Cobham esq.
Snell William, Red Lion F.H.
Stevens Walter, farmer, Parrott farm
Stiff John, beer retailer, School green
Webb Albert, saddler
Wheeler Edwin, builder, Spencers Wood
Wicks David, carpenter, School green

THREE MILE CROSS.

COMMERCIAL.

Bailey A. (Mrs.), saddler, Post office
Bromley Joseph George, baker & overseer
Elliott George, beer retailer
Ford A. blacksmith
Halfacre David, beer retailer
Hamblin Albert Edward, grocer
Jennings Francis, George & Dragon F.H.
Jennings Thomas Rye, market gardener
Mitford Hall (Henry Charles Eggle-
ton, caretaker)
Randall Mary (Mrs.), laundress
Tame Henry, wheelwright
Ward John, Swan F.H.
Wyeth Walter, baker

SHINFIELD'S CHURCH BAND 1827-30

In the spring of 1827 the minister and churchwardens started a subscription list to get funds for the purchase of a musical instrument and books for the use of the singers "whose attendance at church will be more regular if they are supplied with what they need". Donations of £1. 1. 0. and £2. 2. 0. were collected (quite handsome sums, and mainly from the bigger landowners of the village) and the total was £15. 15. 0. The parish then formally established a choir "to promote psalm singing in Shinfield Church", and they bought books and two new instruments—a clarionet for £2. 12. 6. and a bassoon for £6. 6. 0.

These bands (also referred to loosely as choirs) were very common in village churches from about 1750 to about 1850 and were typically composed of some of these: fiddle, 'cello, bass, clarionet, bassoon, serpent, flute, and flageolet (rather like a recorder), and the clarionet was the most popular. They played the metrical versions of psalms as an accompaniment to the only sung part of the service, i.e. at the beginning, at the place where the rubric directs an anthem to be sung, and just before the sermon, to give the minister a chance to slip into the vestry and change his surplice for a gown. There were standard books containing the words of metrical psalms: *A New Version of Metrical Psalms* written in 1696 by the poet laureate, Dr Nahum Tate, assisted by Dr Nicholas Brady and an older one by Sternhold Hopkins; these were used until the advent of hymns in the mid-nineteenth century, Hymns Ancient and Modern making their debut in 1861. The books bought by Shinfield were by Tollhurst, Clarke, Walker, and Burgess and probably contained tunes. Tunes and metrical psalms were written independently, and often tunes were only kept in manuscript. Occasionally the works of great composers were adapted e.g. "The Heavens are telling" from Haydn's Creation was condensed with rather horrifying results.

There had been a choir before 1827—probably formed in 1800, when James Duckett was paid for fifteen months "learning the singers". In the succeeding ten years or so bass viols and psalm books were bought but by 1827 enthusiasm had probably waned and the church had "an old bassoon, out of condition", a clarionet and the members' own instruments—perhaps fiddles and flutes and a 'cello. It is not difficult to imagine the situation where those who owned instruments probably tended to dominate even if they were not very good players, and no doubt wanted their own way about choosing tunes; one of the rules made for the new choir was that William Smith, a farmer of Hartley Farm and a churchwarden, was to act as referee over the choice of tunes.

Church choirs often seem to have been conceited and, at times, a nuisance. There is a record of a choir at Hayes, Middlesex, who, about 1750, ordered the carpenter to pull down part of the belfry—without the consent of the minister and churchwardens—and, on a later occasion as part of the same running feud, when the clerk gave out the 100th Psalm the singers immediately opposed him and sang the 15th.

In Shinfield Church there then existed a wooden gallery supported by carved wooden pillars. This was probably erected, like many others, in the seventeenth century to provide room for a bigger congregation to listen to preaching but the Shinfield choir must have sat there; beginning in 1827 Robert Hatton, one of the choir, was given a Christmas Box "for keeping the boys silent in the gallery". If we are to believe Thomas Hardy the choir's position here contributed to their feelings of superiority. I quote:

"The gallery, too, looked down upon and knew the habits of the nave to its remotest peculiarity, and had an extensive stock of exclusive information about it; whilst the nave knew nothing of the gallery folk, beyond their loud minims and notes. Such topics as that the clerk was always chewing tobacco except at the moment of crying amen; that he had a dusthole in his pew; that during the sermon certain young daughters of the village had left off caring to read anything so mild as the marriage service for some years, and now regularly studied the one which chronologically followed; that a pair of lovers touched fingers through a knot-hole between their pews in the manner ordained by their great exemplars, Pyramus and Thisbe; that Mrs Ledlow, the farmer's wife, counted her money and reckoned her week's marketing expenses during the first lesson—all news to those below—were stale subjects here."

Although the novel from which I have quoted shows a time when these bands were dying out (it was published in 1872) it recreates delightfully the flavour of these rustic groups. Like Hardy's characters in *Under the Greenwood Tree* the Shinfield choir would have met in the house of a member to practise and would, no doubt, have played for other occasions in the village too—Christmas or harvest gatherings, weddings or dances. Singing and playing were thirsty work and surely there was beer or cider as part of the meeting. This, no doubt, is the explanation of an item of £2. 9. 0. entered as "expenses for several meetings to arrange the choir".

The rules laid down that the choir were not to be paid, though this was overcome a few months after the founding by a donation of £5 out of the church rate to encourage them. Another rule was that the choir was to practise "as often as their avocations permit"—a reminder to us of the demands of the agricultural life which all shared in Shinfield, the late hours worked at haying and harvest, the farmer kept at home on account of a calving.

Most of the choir were the middling sort of farmers, with one or two labourers. Their names were:

Frederick Bailey (master of the Charity school)

Charles Goddard

Geo Bailey

John Norris

William Goddard

William Smith

John Cove jun.

— Elisha

Robert Hatton

Their leaders were Frederick and Geo. Bailey and they were to call on the assistance of Piggat's Charity School choir, also trained by Mr Bailey, when they needed them. Perhaps these were the boys who had at times to be silenced by Robert Hatton.

Thomas Hardy's novel has another parallel to the situation in Shinfield. Penny, a member of the choir, relates:

“ ‘Joseph’, I said says I, ‘depend upon it, if so be you have them tooting clar’nets you’ll spoil the whole set-out. Clar’nets were not made for the service of the Lard; you can see it by looking at ’em.’ I said. And what came of it? Why, souls, within two years o’ the time I spoke the parson set up a barrel-organ on his own account within two years o’ the time I spoke, and the older choir went to nothing.”

And so it was, alas, in Shinfield. In October 1830 the Vestry Minutes declare that there will be no objection to a barrel-organ provided that the cost does not exceed £5 *p.a.*—a matter which George Hulme is prepared to guarantee. He was the young curate obviously pushing the innovation—the tone of the minutes suggest that not everyone was so eager. The organ was erected and the choir given some money for their past services and the option to buy the instruments—and so “the old choir went to nothing”.

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Particulars of 'The Shinfield Estate' from a sale catalogue of 1903



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Greenwich School

Norman Cottage

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