

Ashendon - An article written in 1982

Ashendon, which includes the tiny hamlets of Upper and Lower Pollicott is an unpretentious, friendly village which has changed relatively little in living memory. Built high on a ridge, it has magnificent views across the Vale of Aylesbury. Whether it is approached from Westcott, Wotton Underwood or Winchendon, the distant prospect of the houses grouped together on hillside enchants. This enchantment even survives a closer inspection, as the stone and brick cottages, some even thatched, convey the impression of an age long settlement. It can boast of no "big house" or well-known personality, but it is a complete village with its Church, shop and public house and with the seven original farms still being worked, one of which has been farmed by the same family for at least 350 years. There was a school from 1906 – 1950 and the building is now used as the village hall. There is a good mix of old and new inhabitants, the newer ones generally integrating well and taking part in village activities, and there are still a few old village families left. Most people enjoy living in Ashendon hence there is very little population movement, except where necessary due to employment.

The young people are content to reside in their birthplace as long as they can commute reasonably to work, indeed in several cases local girls have married and settled in Ashendon with their husbands. At a time of personal loss or tragedy, as has been often proved, everyone is a good neighbour. It is a happy community in which to dwell.

The only industry in the village is agriculture. Until just before the First World War, all employment was on farms, but then the first farm worker broke away from that way of life to work on the railway which created quite a stir. Up till about 1930, the Wotton estate which comprised Wotton Underwood and Ashendon was owned by the Duke of Buckingham, and at that time there was only one privately owned house in Ashendon. The parish of Ashendon was sold to the Crown and the parish of Wotton Underwood was sold to Mr Michael

Beaumont which included Hill Farm in Ashendon. This was subsequently bought by the farmer and in 1979 the Crown sold all their land and houses in Ashendon and the four tenant farmers of Crown land bought their farms. Between them there are now only four workers so employment is mostly outside the village. Fifty years ago there were 8 – 10 men working on each farm. In the early part of the century a roadman was asked where a gentleman of the name of George lived. He replied “There b’aint no gentlemen in Ashendon, they all be farmers”.

In 1925, travelling was improved when a bridge was built over Pollicott ford, previously it was impassable on many occasions and horses and carts got stuck – some people thought it would be a bad thing for Ashendon.

John Boughton’s Anecdotes

The Boughton family has farmed at Ashendon Farm since the early 17th century, so I feel I have deep roots in the village. I had to help on the farm from a very early age, when farming was very hard work physically, and left school at 15 when I was given 1/6d a week working for my father. This was just before the Second World War. In those days farmer’s sons were expected to work almost unpaid on the farm and rarely had a chance of alternative employment. When the war came they were not allowed to join the Forces, but had to stay on the farm and increase production of cereals etc. as the country had to be self- supporting. The farmers and farm workers joined the Homeguard instead.

Before the war, farmers had several farm workers, most of whom were very loyal to their employers. “Old Mate” was a very popular character who worked on Ashendon Farm and used to brew beer in large quantities. He once gave me a lecture on the dangers of drinking water which resulted in my love of beer drinking from an early age. I remember my father once lost his tobacco box and

offered 1/- reward for its return. "Old Mate" found it but gave it to me so I could collect the reward. I once broke a lot of eggs which he took the blame for, so I wouldn't be punished.

Second World War

It is almost unbelievable that there was a three day battle with the British Army defending the hill and the Canadian Army mustering their tanks and artillery for attack from Wotton Underwood. The Canadians finally overcame the British and took the hill with their tanks. Ashendon Farm had been requisitioned for this exercise, and used for officers headquarters and the farm buildings were used for the soldiers. After the battle, Ashendon was a complete shambles. Hedges were flattened and cattle and sheep got lost and thoroughly mixed up. It took many weeks for the farmers to make good the damage and get back to normal, but this was wartime.

There are many amusing homeguard stories to be told. The army were stationed in Wotton Underwood so they were often going through Ashendon. On one occasion, a local man was on his way home from the pub in an inebriated state. When he reached the homeguard patrol he passed out and lay down on the grass verge. Some minutes later an army staff car appeared and the patrol stopped the car and asked for his identity papers. The officer felt himself superior and argued, to which the homeguard answered "Suit yourself, but you see that man on the grass verge, well he refused to show his identity card". At that the officer showed his card and moved on.

More Anecdotes – Audrey Ayris

The Wind & the Irate Thatcher

On an autumn day at Upper Pollicott Farm, the newly built haystacks were lined up like soldiers awaiting their warm winter covering of thatch. The ladder was in place and the old thatcher garbed in leather apron and knee-pads was ascending with armfuls of rick-pegs and lengths of straw very neatly bundled together. For the first hour or so the old man, a master of his craft, toiled steadily on. At this point the clouds gathered and a wind began to rise. The old thatcher struggled on, each gust of wind taking some of his straw in its wake. At last (not being the most patient at the best of times) his face as red as a turkey cock, he hauled the remainder of the straw heavenwards, commenting “Here wind take the B----- lot and be done with it”.

Narrated to me by my brother, the old man’s boy assistant.

Lambs- Tail Cutting Day

It had been a very busy day at Pollicott Farm. All hands had been hard at work catching the chubby frisky lambs and relieving them (very painfully) of their tails. It had always been a ritual on this day to have pancakes for supper, and these were being looked forward to with relish, when horror of horrors, the farmers wife got out her large iron frying pan only to find it had a small hole in it. However, on this of all days the pan was needed. Her husband, a dodderly old chap almost knocking ninety, hobbled up to my father’s door, frying pan in hand. “Oh Law “, he said “Do you think you could mend my frying pan Bill, we need it for the pancakes tonight”. “Yes” said my farther, “I will mend your pan for you right now, on one condition, “THAT I HAVE A PANCAKE’. An hour or so later a knock came on our cottage door, and there he stood, with a plate of the lightest pancakes imaginable, complete with lemon trimmings. (I would add that his wife was a first class cook).

Ashendon Feast

Sadly, this annual get together is now a distant memory of the past, (remembered by the inhabitants of Ashendon, in the late 70-80 age group).

Apparently, this was a great day to look forward to, for young and old alike, the children were up bright and early, many of them going to the top of Lynch Hill to catch a first glimpse of the Fair people on their way to the village. A roundabout was soon erected in the "Hanger" and swinging boats in "The Square", coconut shies ran parallel with the garden hedge of "Cherry Cottage", and an old lady frying an inexhaustible supply of sausages was also part of the scene. Salt beef and ham were eaten in the evening at Ashendon Farm.

All this came to an end at the start of the Great War in 1914, but it was revived later in a different form, when there were sports and a cricket match during the day and the Feast was held in The Hut in the public house grounds. Funds ran out in 1935 and the annual Ashendon Feast came to an end.

The event was always held on the first Tuesday in May, and folk used to say the weather would never "warm up" until after the Feast.

Village Achievements

This year the village bought the Playing Fields from the Crown Commissioners after extensive fund raising for three years. The sum of £4,000 was raised by generous donations and events such as sponsored walks, a supper and a mini fete.

In 1981 and 1982, Ashendon won the best kept village competition and were presented with the Gurney Cup by the Lord Lieutenant at a

small ceremony on the green. This cup is presented annually to the best kept village with a population of under 500.

Occasional fetes, an annual bazaar and other events have been held to raise money for the Church Restoration Fund enabling major repair work to be done.

In. 1981, the football club won the Sheffield Jackman Cup and also the Division 1 of the Aylesbury District League.

Also in 1981, the W.I. obtained 1st Prize in the County Co-operative Craft Exhibit at the Bucks County Show at Hartwell House.