Cerne Historical Society

MAGAZINE

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Cerne Historical Society

Gordon Bishop - Chair

Welcome to the winter 2024/25 issue of the Cerne Historical Society's Magazine. The photo on the cover of this issue is of a medieval gold ring found locally in 2004. The ring was purchased by Dorset Museum with the aid of a donation by Shirley Francis, a much loved and greatly missed resident of Cerne Abbas and member of the Society, who lived here from 1969 until her death in July last year at the age of 91. Mike Clark's article about the ring can be found at **page 3**.

This is the first issue of the magazine since the Winter 2023/24 issue was published in January 2024. A Summer issue was not published last year as the very successful "Guide Book for the 2024 Dig" was published in its place. This issue contains at **page 5,** a fascinating report by Dr Hugh Willmott on what discoveries and finds were made during last year's dig. It also contains a further article by Mike Clark about local 'Old Stone Crosses', seven articles on various other topics by some of our regular contributors and the letters column, all of which I am sure you will enjoy and find of great interest.

I am very grateful to everyone who has contributed to this issue, and in particular to Andrew Popkin our Design, Graphics and Publishing editor. As with all previous issues of the magazine and the Dig Guide, it is Andrew who with consummate skill and patience has turned the material created by the contributors into a highly attractive and inspiring work of art. We hope to publish a Summer issue in June this year shortly before the 2025 Dig which Dr Willmott has recently announced will take place from the 12th July to the 3rd August.

Finally I would like to draw your attention to an anniversary which will occur shortly after this issue is published. On the 11th February 2025 it will be 800 years since Henry III sealed a charter at Westminster which came to be known as the 1225 Magna Carta. Those of you who were members of the Cerne Historical Society in April 2016 and attended a talk by the distinguished medieval historian Professor David Carpenter, entitled 'The copy of the 1225 Magna Carta in the Cartulary of Cerne Abbey', will be aware of it. For those of you who are not, Professor Carpenter has kindly permitted us to use some of the material about Magna Carta that he published then to write a short article on the subject in this magazine. It is at **page 10.**

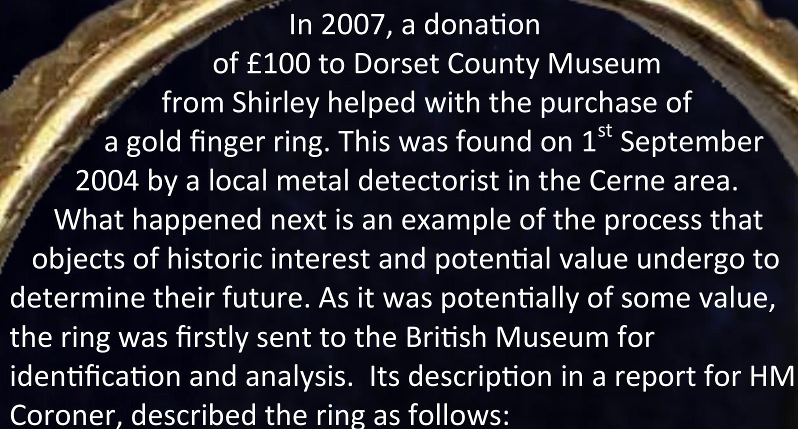
I am delighted to say that Professor Carpenter has agreed to give a talk to the Society on Thursday the 27th March 2025 entitled 'Henry III. How can we know the personality of a medieval king?' I do hope most of our members will be able to attend. It will be a most interesting evening.

Gordon Bishop – Chair of the Cerne Historical Society

Gordon may easily be contacted by using the form on the website cerneabbashistory.org/contact-us

Mike Clark — Shirley Francis & the Gold Finger Ring

Many of you will have known Shirley Francis, a well-known and popular Cerne resident and an enthusiastic member of the Historical Society, probably from its beginning in 1988 until she passed away last July. Following her death, some correspondence came to light describing how, some years previously, Shirley had made a financial donation towards ensuring that a locally found historical item could remain in Dorset.



In 2007, a donation of £100 to Dorset County Museum from Shirley helped with the purchase of a gold finger ring. This was found on 1st September 2004 by a local metal detectorist in the Cerne area. What happened next is an example of the process that objects of historic interest and potential value undergo to determine their future. As it was potentially of some value, the ring was firstly sent to the British Museum for identification and analysis. Its description in a report for HM Coroner, described the ring as follows:

A medieval gold finger ring. The hoop is engraved with a black letter inscription, alternating with sprigs of foliage and a lozenge design, against a hatched ground. The inscription is difficult to decipher, but may read 'e'est + en bone [?] foy' (it is in good faith'). The hoop is of D-shaped section, the internal band slightly damaged. The ring may have been a marriage ring or love token and probably dates to the 15th century. The diameter is 21mm.

The report concluded by saying that the ring qualified as Treasure under the stipulations of the Treasure Act 1996 in terms both of age and precious metal content and should go forward to inquest. A letter to Shirley in August 2007 from Peter Woodward, who was Museum Curator at the time, after thanking her for the donation, described what happened next:

Shirley Francis & the Gold Finger Ring

Dorset Museum & Art Gallery

Your donation, in the first instance will be placed in our treasure fund to await the moment when the paperwork is completed by the Treasure Valuation Committee on this Treasure case, at which point I will be able to apply to national grant giving bodies for matching grants to the purchase from the Crown at the agreed valuation of £750. The necessary paperwork and agreements sometimes take a little while and the grant applications also, so I hope you can be patient! I fear that success may not be achieved until later this year….. In the record of many medieval Treasures over the last ten years it is apparent that finger rings are frequently found in isolated positions close to boundaries, manorial, parish and topographic. ***This suggests a degree of intention.***

© Jane Tearle

As with most historical finds, there is a story behind the ring which, tantalisingly, will always remain unknown but Shirley's generosity helped to ensure that it stays in Dorset.

The ring is now in the possession of the Dorset Museum to whom the Historical Society is indebted for allowing us access to take the accompanying excellent close-up photographs by Robin Mills, which reveal the ring's intricate design and superb craftsmanship.

Summer 2024 saw the second season of excavations in Beauvoir field by the University of Sheffield. Once again, students and volunteers from the UK and abroad were joined by local residents, who helped out with the digging, washing of finds, and marshalling of visitors. We were also very grateful to all those members of the village who offered washing and laundry facilities, they made the whole experience much more bearable! This year, we wanted to continue their investigation of the area where the monastic church and cloister are known to be located, as well as a new area further up the field where the ground-penetrating radar suggested other unidentified buildings lay.

Fig 1 Trench C © Sheffield University 2024

The first area we looked at was towards the monastic church's west end, close to the graveyard entrance into the field. A trench measuring 8x10m was initially opened, but it was subsequently extended by 2m to the west and 2m to the south. **Figure 1.**

Like the excavations the year before, the trench included portions of the cloister, its southwest corner and walkway and a small portion of the southern end of the west range. These areas were heavily robbed of stone, but the foundation cuts for the original walls were still clearly discernible, allowing these details to be added to our emerging plan for the monastic complex. The interior of the west range was only partially explored due to the limited area within the trench, but this was sufficient to reveal a series of 6-8 overlaid mortar floors. On top of the very last of these, lay a considerable quantity of painted and coloured window glass. **Figure 2.** This presumably related to the initial post-Dissolution robbing of the abbey when windows were removed from the complex. The recyclable window leads were stripped, and the unwanted glass was discarded on the floor.

Fig 2 Window glass © Sheffield University 2024

This trench's southern portion lay over the monastic church. It was immediately apparent that this had been subjected to far more extensive and damaging robbing in the 19th century than we had seen the previous year. Instead of just narrow robber trenches chasing and removing surviving wall stone, thus leaving floors and surfaces largely intact, a huge pit had been dug into archaeology, destroying much of what was originally there. The reason for this is uncertain, but this may have been due to the presence of a higher concentration of desirable stone in this location. Interestingly, what we observed in the trench might relate to an incident recorded in the 1870 edition of Hutchins when it was noted, "*About 20 years ago* (i.e. c.1850) *in digging for stone in this field near the hedge* (the graveyard boundary that preceded the current stone wall) *the remains of what was supposed to be a sepulchral chapel or shrine were discovered…this monument appeared to have stood between two pillars at the west end of the church*". While it is tempting to connect this historical account with the archaeology we found, the robbing had removed all structural evidence, and we shall never be entirely sure if they relate to the same area.

Fig 3 Chalk blocks © *Sheffield University 2024*

Fortunately, the robbing in the eastern portion of the trench was less thorough and destructive. Here, portions of the original church floor level survived, and while most of the tiles had been removed, some patches remained but were highly fragmented, probably because they had been crushed by falling masonry before they could be removed. Almost all the architectural elements, floor tiles and window glass recovered from this portion of the church dated to the 13th and 14th centuries. This corresponds with our findings from the previous year's trenches over the centre and east end of the church, confirming a complete reconstruction of the building around c.1250. Excitingly, we got our first evidence for an earlier structure in this area. Below the 13th-centry floor level were wall remains of a completely different construction. **Figure 3.** Built from unmortared, roughly squared and poorly aligned chalk blocks, these starkly contrasted with the later work. Unfortunately, the 19th-century robber pit had also removed any remains of earlier walling in the western portion of the trench, so interpreting what survived is challenging. However, those we could record appeared to form a squared corner, possibly from an external facing feature such as a small corner tower. Dating is also difficult, as in the absence of tooled mouldings or architecturally distinctive elements, the walls are relatively undiagnostic. They must predate the 13th-century rebuilding, so could be Norman in origin. However, the absence of even the smallest fragments of Romanesque stonework, which ordinarily might be expected to have been incorporated into the rubble cores of the later 13th-century walls had an earlier church been demolished, suggests otherwise. Instead, our working hypothesis is that the Saxon church survived largely intact through the post-Conquest period (albeit probably with minor modifications) until it was finally demolished and rebuilt in the 13th century.

There were relatively few finds beyond architectural stone, floor tile, window glass and some surprisingly large pieces of roof lead in this trench, but two are of note. The first is the bottom end of a heavily weathered Purbeck marble grave cover with the remains of an incised cross base and shaft. **Figure 4.**

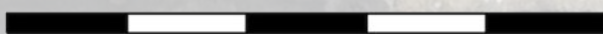
Fig 4 Marble grave cover

© Sheffield University 2024

The second are two joining fragments of a bronze letter 'M' in Lombardic script, originally set into a grave slab as part of a decorative inscription running around its edge. **Figure 5.** Neither of these finds was in their original location and had been displaced by robbing, probably shortly after the Dissolution. However, they speak to the important role the monastic church played as a place of interment, although no surviving burials were encountered within the confines of our trench.

Fig 5 Bronze letter

© Sheffield University 2024



cm

The second area of investigation was located further up the field on its eastern side, where the radar survey had indicated there was a cluster of buildings of uncertain function. We placed a trench measuring 15x7m over here, which we subsequently extended a further 4m to the east. **Figure 5.**
In this area, the depth of demolition rubble proved to be shallower than in the trenches over the church. In the north part of the trench, the central room of the range of the building was entirely uncovered. Although the exact function of the building is still uncertain, excavation suggested it originally had a vaulted undercroft, and fragments of a decorative chimney top recovered indicated it was residential and of a higher status.

We also got further hints of this with some other finds. One of the most interesting was an iron 'flesh hook', a kitchen tool used to scoop chunks of stewed meat out of a large cauldron and indicating that cooking and entertaining were taking place here.

Fig 5

© Sheffield University 2024

***Fig** Flesh hook (two views)*

© Sheffield University 2024

In the building's final phase of use in the early 16th century, an industrial hearth had been inserted into its floor, and there was extensive evidence of the melting and casting of lead.

In particular, several unsuccessful castings of window leads were recovered, where the molten metal had failed to fill the mould and were therefore discarded. **Figure 6.** On the building's floor were also many offcuts from large sheets of window glass, which were cut up to create individual panes of glass. This leads us to make a few tentative conclusions. The building started life as a higher-status one, possibly even an earlier abbot's lodge. However, by the beginning of the 16th century, it was used as a makeshift workshop to produce new windows. We are still uncertain whether this was right at the end of the abbey's life or in the immediate post-Dissolution period. Still, further analysis of the other recovered finds will help us answer this question.

When excavating the west wall of this building, we could just see the remains of a fireplace on the other side outside the limit of our trench. To investigate this, a very small extension was made that showed us that there was indeed another room to the west, although at this stage, little more can be concluded about its function.

***Fig 6** Lead window "cames"*

© Sheffield University 2024

To the south of the building, occupying the remainder of the trench, was a hard-packed yard surface. At its highest level, there were fragments of both 16th-century and medieval pottery, probably arising from the post-dissolution clearance of the buildings. However, also within this yard were dumps of ash and domestic waste from the raking out of fireplaces and a large deposit of oyster shells, typical of medieval kitchen waste. Excavating the compact yard surfaces was arduous work, but once these layers were removed, a series of deeper features, possibly pits, were visible. Unfortunately, there was no time to investigate these fully. Still, pottery on the tops of some of these can be confidently dated to the late 10th or early 11th centuries, earlier than most of the archaeology we have encountered across the site to date.

Yet again, we have learnt much from just four weeks of work. Although excavations over the church were disappointing due to the very heavy later disturbance, we still have evidence for an earlier phase of the church, and further analysis that is currently ongoing will add more to our interpretation soon. In particular, the study of soil samples we collected, which is nearing completion, will provide further information on activities taking place across the site and give us charcoal samples that we can radiocarbon date.

In the area to the north, we now have much more information about some of the activities taking place away from the cloister and have had a tantalising glimpse of some earlier archaeology. The University of Sheffield plans to return for a third season of excavations this summer between the 12th of July and the 3rd of August. One of the main tasks will be to complete the excavation of the unfinished trench to see what evidence emerges of the site's earlier history.

© Hugh Willmott: © Sheffield University 2024

Gordon Bishop

The Cerne Abbey Magna Carta

***The passages in italics below have been taken by kind permission of the distinguished medieval historian Professor David Carpenter from his Preface to the Penguin Classic 'Magna Carta', of which he wrote the Commentary in 2015. A recent article by Professor Carpenter about the 1225 Magna Carta appears in the February 2025 issue of the BBC History Magazine*.**

The 11th February 2025 will be the 800th anniversary of the sealing by Henry III at Westminster of the 1225 Magna Carta, often known as the Cerne Abbey Magna Carta because of the copy that was made of it by scribes at the Abbey shortly after it was sealed. That copy became part of the Cerne Cartulary and was bound up in a 9th century liturgical volume known as The Book of Cerne, now preserved in the Cambridge University Library.

There were two main differences between the Cerne Abbey copy of the 1225 Magna Carta and copies made elsewhere. Firstly, the Cerne copy joined together into a single charter Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest which had been issued in 1217 to make it easier for lords and freemen to exploit their own woods free from restrictive forest law. Secondly the date of the 1225 Charter and the names of the 65 witnesses including Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, 11 bishops, 20 Abbots including "the Abbot of Cerne' and many barons and knights, were written out in 'uniquely magnificent fashion'.

The terms of the 1225 charter were in essence the same as those sealed by Henry's father, King John, at Runnymede on the 15th June 1215, a document then known as the Charter of Runnymede. The name Magna Carta was first used after 1217 to distinguish the Great Charter from the smaller Charter of the Forest.

'The Charter of Runnymede, which consisted of 63 chapters (all written in Latin), was originally drafted by Stephen Langton to make peace between King John and a group of rebel barons who wanted to impose a series of restrictions upon the king. It sought to prevent the king from exploiting his power and placed limits on royal authority by establishing law as a power in itself.

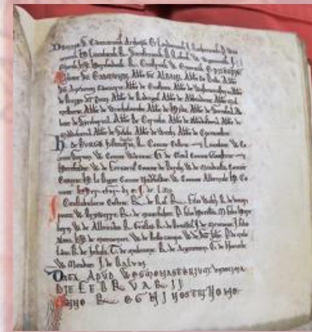
In particular it promised the protection of Church rights, protection for the barons from tyrannical imprisonment, a limit on the king's ability to raise money in an arbitrary fashion and an end to his selling, denying and delaying justice. The promises were to be implemented through a council of 25 barons.

Neither the king nor the barons stood by their promises. Within a few weeks John had asked the Pope to quash the Charter and civil war broke out. Had King John not died in October 1216 little more would have been heard of Magna Carta. However, those ruling on behalf of his son, the 9 year old Henry III, immediately issued a new version of the Charter. A year later, having won the war and to consolidate the peace they did so again. Finally in 1225 Henry, in return for a grant of taxation, sealed what became the definitive version.

"The Charter has indeed become one of the most famous documents in world constitutional history, regarded as a fundamental protection against arbitrary and tyrannical rule. In some ways, this illustrious history is as undeserved as it was unintended. Magna Carta, as originally conceived, certainly did not offer equal protection to all the king's subjects. It was, in many ways, a selfish document in which the baronial elite looked after its own interests. While, moreover, the Charter is usually regarded as firing its salvoes at the king, it was also (a major theme of this book) firing at sections of society. It discriminated against unfree peasants, who formed the largest section of the population. It also discriminated against women. It revealed tensions between barons and their knightly tenants. The towns, like the knights, got far less from the Charter than they might have hoped. Magna Carta shows the king's subjects in conflict with one another as well as in conflict with the king.

"Yet Magna Carta did assert a fundamental principle. That principle was the rule of law. Henceforth, the king was to be bound by law, the law the Charter made. He was thus restricted in a whole series of ways, for the charter had no fewer than sixty-three chapters. Most significant of all were chapter 39 and 40. In chapter 40, the king was not to sell, deny or delay justice. Under chapter 39, no free man was to be imprisoned or dispossessed save 'by the lawful judgement of his peers' or 'by the law of the land'. These two chapters are still on the statute book of the United Kingdom. To be sure, in 1215 it was only the 'free man' who benefited from chapter 39. It offered nothing, therefore, to the unfree peasant. The chapter still reads 'free man' today.

"In course of time, however, the chapter became more socially inclusive. Legislation in 1354 defined 'free man' as a 'man of whatever state and condition he may be'. The legislation also made clear that treatment according to the law of the land meant treatment according to due legal process. Other legislation interpreted 'lawful judgement' by peers as meaning trial by peers (that is social equals), and so trial by jury. While, moreover, chapter 39 read 'no free man', 'man' here, from the start in 2015' could be understood as meaning human being and thus as applying to both sexes.

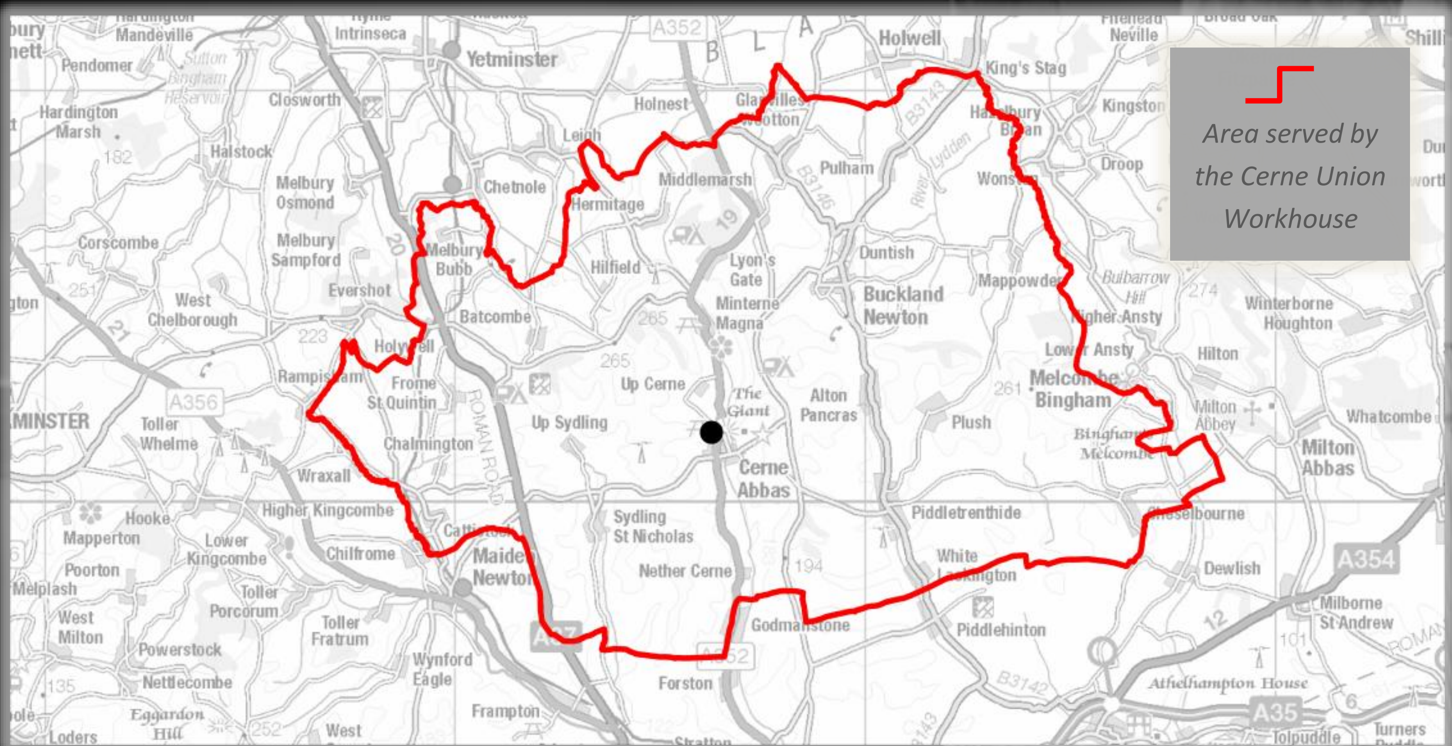


The 1225 copy of the Magna Carta in the Cartulary

"In terms of the principles it asserted, therefore, the Charter was rightly called in aid by the Parliamentary opposition to Charles I, and by the founding fathers of the United States of America. In the 20th century it was appealed to by both Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. It still features and political debates in Britain today. A Guardian newspaper leader in 2005 protesting about the proposed ninety-day detention period in terrorist cases, was headed 'Protecting Magna Carta."

Coronation of Henry III

Den Denness | **Scandal at the Cerne Union Workhouse**



The Cerne Abbas Union Workhouse (now the Casterbridge Manor care home) was opened in 1837 and was designed to house up to 130 paupers of both sexes. The inmates could be drawn from any of the twenty parishes that had been amalgamated by government edict to form the Cerne poor law 'union'. This local poor relief enterprise was managed by an elected board of twenty-one 'Guardians', one from each of the Union's constituent parishes plus an additional one from Cerne Abbas, the largest settlement in the Union. The Board of Guardians were themselves answerable to the three London-based Poor Law Commissioners who had oversight of the entire national network of Poor Law Unions.

A limited number of staff were employed at each workhouse to ensure that the everyday functions of these institutions were carried out. Typically, these would include a 'Master' who took overall responsibility for the workhouse, supported by a 'Matron' – often the Master's wife – who looked after the female inmates and took control of most of the inmates' domestic arrangements. To aid the Master and Matron, a resident 'Nurse', 'Porter' and 'Schoolteacher' were often also employed.

An indication of the type of person sought for these roles is provided in the advertisements published when vacancies arose. The workhouse master, for example, must be a member of the Church of England, he should be 'an able-bodied man, his age not exceeding 50 years, he should be a good accomptant [accountant]', and must be able to supply 'testimonials of good character and ability'. Any prospective Porter 'must be able to write with a good hand', and the ideal Nurse should be 'a respectable woman, between 30 and 50 years of age'.

That was the expectation. However, events which occurred at the Cerne Abbas Workhouse during the early Summer of 1846 suggest that the choice of postholders made by the local Board of Guardians fell far short of these standards.

By March 1846, the forty-five-year-old Robert Wilson had been the Master of the Cerne workhouse for six years. He and his wife Elizabeth – who served as the Matron at the workhouse – had been selected after a rigorous interview conducted by the Board of Guardians. The Workhouse nurse had been a more recent appointment, Mary Ann Hix taking up the role in 1842 while aged just twenty-two – younger than the required age as stated in the job advertisement. The Porter was a Dorset man named Moses Bedloe, originally from Poole and the same age as Robert Wilson.

a disturbing report

In May of that year, the Cerne Board of Guardians received a disturbing report that Robert Wilson had assaulted Moses Bedloe. They, in turn, contacted the Poor Law Commissioners in London to ask them to investigate the matter. The Commissioners responded by, first, granting Wilson a week's leave of absence and, second, dispatching Assistant Commissioner John Graves to Cerne to investigate the matter.

Graves visited the Workhouse on 17 June and interviewed Bedloe first. In the Porter's version of events, on the morning of Friday 8 May Mrs Wilson had asked him to venture into Cerne to bring back a pint of beer. He followed her instructions but, instead of handing the beer directly to the Matron, he passed it over to Vallis the 'Turnpike Man' who had said that he would take it to her instead. So, Bedloe returned, empty handed, to the workhouse.

On entering the building, he was accosted by Master Wilson who demanded to know where Bedloe had been. He responded that he had 'been for a walk', a reply that, for some reason, made Wilson suspicious. The Master then proceeded to search Bedloe's pockets. When the Porter protested at this treatment, Wilson attacked him. First, he hit him with a broom then, after tripping him up, he continued his assault on the prostrate porter with a two-pronged attack with the broom and the handle of a paintbrush. The beating left Bedloe with a black eye, a cut head, and gashes to his elbows and knees. In addition, the tails of his coat were ripped, and his hat was 'broken'. The injuries were still apparent when Bedloe was summoned to see the Guardians seven days later. The Porter did admit to striking Wilson, but only in self-defence.

he was not fit to run the workhouse

Wilson's account was slightly different. He said that he had known Bedloe to have previously brought 'illicit' objects into the workhouse, which is why he checked the Porter's pockets. Wilson claimed that during the search, Bedloe verbally abused him, calling him a 'rascal', a 'rogue', and said he was not fit to run the workhouse. Irate at this treatment, Wilson ordered Bedloe to sweep the yard, an instruction that was refused. Incensed, Wilson attacked him with the broom. Although he said that Bedloe's coat was ripped 'accidentally', he did not deny tripping the Porter or hitting him while he was on the floor.

Having effectively admitted the assault, Wilson knew that he was facing a serious predicament. In a desperate attempt to ingratiate himself to the Poor Law Commissioners who were to act as judge and jury in this affair, he wrote them a petition pleading his case. He drew attention to the fact that this was the first complaint that had been made against him in six years of service, and that the local Guardians had previously acknowledged his good work. He mentioned the cleanliness of his workhouse, the discipline among its inmates, and the reduction in its costs that he had overseen. Lastly, he pleaded that he had a wife and two children to support and that he was sorry for the assault, which he said had been committed in 'a moment of irritation'.

He need not have bothered. The Commissioners had already heard enough from Graves' report to conclude that Wilson was unfit to hold the office of Master and were actively progressing his removal from his post.

"events took a scandalous twist."

However, before word could reach Cerne of Wilson's imminent dismissal, events took a scandalous twist. On the night of 4 July, one of the inmates of the Cerne Workhouse, Jane Christopher, was idly gazing out of an upstairs window into the courtyard below. Unexpectedly, she noticed Mary Ann Hix, the Nurse, loitering in the darkness. Shortly after, the Master emerged from the building and joined Hix outside. Victorian delicacy may have served to constrain some of the details included in Christopher's testimony, but she did describe the respective positions adopted by the Master and the Nurse as 'with she in front, and he behind her'. Christopher banged on the window and shouted to the pair that she had witnessed 'the upshot of what's going on'.

Christopher and another inmate, Jane Frampton, then rushed straight to Mrs Wilson to tell her what they had seen. Clearly furious, the Matron confronted her husband with his infidelities when he came in, flustered, from the courtyard. 'It's a damned lie' the Master insisted, but no one was convinced. He then grew violent and set about both his wife and inmate Frampton, causing both injury and upset to both. Seemingly with nothing left to lose, the Master and the Nurse absconded from the Cerne Workhouse that very evening, Wilson committing the Victorian sins of abandoning both his family and his duty. No one knew where the two had eloped to.

These events served to confirm the decision made by the Poor Law Commissioners to dispense with Wilson's services. On 9 July all three added their signatures to the formal dismissal of Wilson and urged the Cerne Guardians to find a replacement Master as soon as possible.

It is not clear what happened to Robert Wilson after his departure from Cerne Abbas. His name is sufficiently common to render him indiscernible from the many other Robert Wilson's that appear in the genealogical records. However, we do have a clue as to what may have happened to Mary Ann Hix. Included within the returns for the 1851 Census for Cerne Abbas is one 'Mary Ann Hicks', described as a 'washerwoman' who was by then a pauper living at the Cerne Abbas Workhouse. It may be that, within five years of eloping with the Workhouse Master, the erstwhile nurse returned as an inmate to the institution in which she had previously found employment.

Graham Clark, who lives in New Zealand, is the researcher and guardian of the history of the Clark family. The Clark family featured strongly in the history of Cerne Abbas from the mid/late 18th C until the turn of the 19th/20th C. Graham is a regular visitor to the village as he continues his researches. Last year, just a few days before he returned to New Zealand from a visit to UK, he purchased a painting by Joseph Benwell Clark. Graham has kindly sent the Society a photograph of the painting.

Graham says that when he discovered this painting on a website it had been correctly attributed to Joseph Benwell Clark, but gave the scene as being in Weston-super-Mare. Graham immediately recognised it as a view of what was then called East Street, looking west, with the rear of the Market House and 1 Abbey Street easily identifiable. It was painted in 1933, but the scene seems to reflect memories of Joseph's earlier life as the ladies in the painting are dressed in late Victorian clothes. Joseph has clearly exercised considerable artistic licence in the scene, as a comparison with the photo below will show. The church is more prominent in his painting and the tower is shown much taller than in reality. The fronts of the houses do not correlate to today and Long Street, from where the painting was drawn, never had the distinct curve on the left as shown. The biggest change is that the gate and yard on the right is now occupied by No 33 Long Street and obscures most of the church as Joseph might have seen it in 1933. No 33 was built with the Abbey Court development in the 1970s and the culvert shown is now underground.

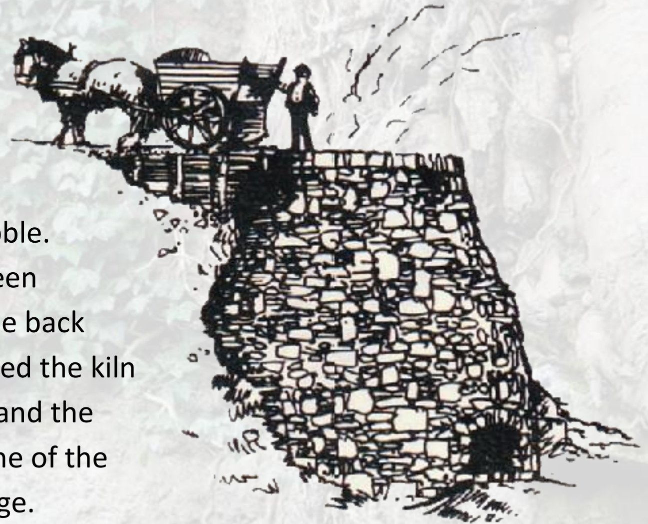
However, as there are no surviving photographs or other images of this historic part of Cerne, we must be grateful to Joseph Benwell Clark for his painting and to Graham for finding it.

Joseph Benwell Clark was born in 1857 in Cerne Abbas, trained at the Slade School of Fine Art in London and became a distinguished English painter, exhibiting at the Royal Academy. In retirement he lived at Barnwell's in Abbey Street and its striking front door was to his design. He died in 1938 and is buried in the Cerne burial ground. (Beware! There was an earlier Joseph Clark, also born in Cerne Abbas, who became a well-known painter in the 19th C.)

Robin Mills

Lime Production in Cerne Abbas: ...another vanished industry

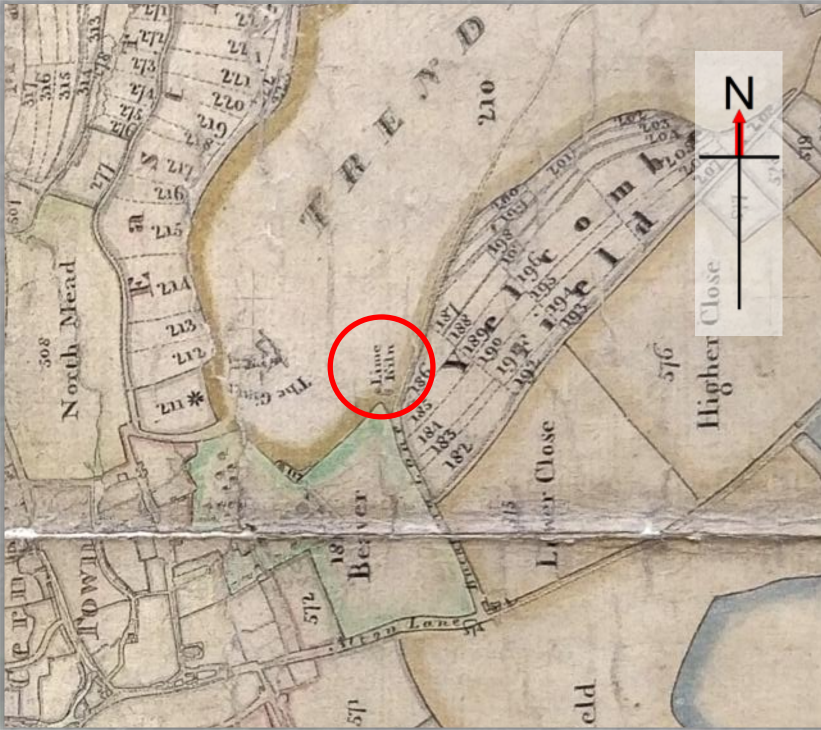
At the top of a steep bank beside the Priest's Walk, near the junction of the paths which lead eastwards under the trees and up the hill, or southwards towards the lower margin of Yelcombe Bottom and Alton Lane, is all that remains of a lime kiln. Amongst the leafiness of summer, it's hard to spot; there's a tree growing out of the remaining wall, which will before long be demolished by its roots. There are broken bricks and stones under the leaf litter; a large metal band which once would have reinforced the structure, still attached to the tie rods which anchor it, lies amongst the rubble. On close inspection some of the remaining stones have clearly been subject to high temperatures. What we can see is the inside of the back wall of a bottle-shaped kiln which would very likely have resembled the kiln in the sketch, the fire being fed from the top with fuel and chalk and the burned lime raked out from the bottom. This kiln is marked on one of the earliest maps we have of the area, dated 1768. See map next page.



Rubble from the old Kiln

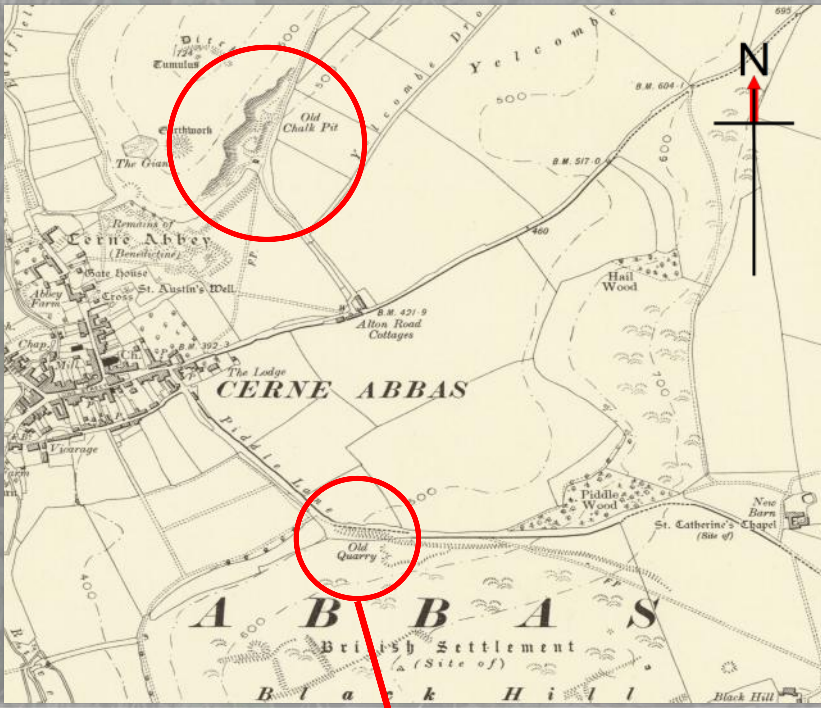
Iron hoop with tie rods

Fire damaged stone in the Kiln



A section of ***Pryce's map from 1768***

On the 1903 OS map, there is a mark possibly representing the kiln, but only a chalk pit is recorded.



More obvious to even the casual observer taking a walk, or perhaps labouring their way up a steep path around the village, are craters, pits and deep ditches, which can only have been dug into the hillsides by human hand rather than by natural process. Some are in plain sight, for example the large scrub-filled pit on Black Hill, close to the stile giving access to the hill from Piddle Lane, shown as a quarry on the 1903 map. Today, one can pace the dimensions of this crater at approximately 80m by 30m, and about 10m deep at the back wall. A vixen reared 2 cubs there during the summer of 2023.

A section of ***the O.S map from 1903***

Black Hill chalk pit

A deep gully, possibly the result of many years' cart traffic, leads from the quarry south-eastwards up the slope to a smaller pit at the top, dense with bramble and thorn and honeycombed with badger setts. And around the southern base of Giant Hill are more pits and craters, almost hidden in the trees, dug into the steep slope of the hill. A large pit can be seen to the rear of the remains of the kiln.

The answer to the first question, what were they for, is simple. To extract the chalk which lies under our feet nearly everywhere around the village, and in some cases building stone. The second question, why, needs a bit more exploration.

Chalk is mostly too soft for building structures, but broken into lumps, then heated to 900°C, it is known as lime, or quicklime, and can be used for many purposes. Alkaline in nature, it can be applied to farmland to correct soil acidity, and it would be a safe assumption that the majority of chalk and limestone dug out of Dorset hillsides would have been for this purpose. Lime is occasionally beneficial even on some of the thin, flinty soils on the tops of the hills near here, because the naturally occurring raw chalk can be insoluble. Soil acidity, or low pH, is more common on heathland, as in East Dorset, and on the clays of Blackmore Vale, and because of the large amounts needed to neutralise the soil, ("20 hogsheads of four bushels each, per acre, is esteemed a good dressing", according to John Claridge, 1793), one can begin to understand the reason for the size of the earthworks, especially if lime was exported to nearby areas where soils were more acidic. The practice of liming farmland has been widespread in Dorset since the 18thC and continues to this day. In general, today's farmers would use crushed chalk rather than quicklime for reasons of cost; in earlier times crushing chalk finely enough was impractical.

The other main use of lime is as a building material. The heating of chalk or limestone (called calcination) was carried out for agricultural use but was also an essential part of the process of making lime mortar. Originally introduced by the Romans – a limekiln was identified in the excavations at Colliton Park, Dorchester in 1938 – it didn't become widespread until medieval times when general construction of buildings, including castles, abbeys and cathedrals, used stone.

Reference to lime burning was made in building accounts at Corfe Castle in the 13th and 14th C. Lime was, and in renovations of older buildings still is, the ingredient which, combined with other materials, bonded the stones together, made render and plaster for walls, filled gaps, and created a solid base for tiled floors. It was an essential component of all construction from the medieval to when Portland cement was invented in the early 19thC by Joseph Aspdin from Leeds (known as Portland cement from its resemblance to Portland stone). The last two years' archaeological excavations of Cerne Abbey have highlighted many aspects of the Abbey's construction; the large quantities of lime involved would have been produced on site given that the raw material, chalk, is ubiquitous hereabouts.

At this point, a brief chemistry lesson might be helpful.

Calcium carbonate (chalk or limestone) + heat → calcium oxide (quicklime) + carbon dioxide.

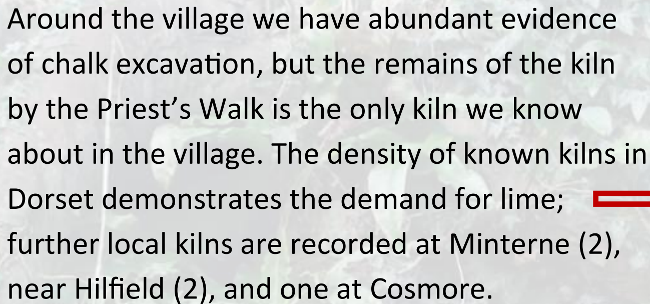
This process is called "calcination".

Broken into fist-sized lumps, the chalk needed to be heated to at least 900°C for calcination to take place. In very early days that was simply carried out in a pit, the chalk and timber laid in alternate layers then burnt. This was inefficient and contained ash impurities, and stone-built kilns were constructed. Stone- or brick-built lime kilns were of two basic types: 'flare kilns', also known as 'intermittent' or 'periodic' kilns were commonly used from Roman to medieval times, and 'perpetual', 'running' or 'draw' kilns, came later. As their name suggests, 'flare kilns' were loaded with a single charge of limestone and burning had to stop for this to be removed before it could be re-loaded for the next firing. 'Draw' kilns were loaded with alternate layers of fuel and stone, kept burning continuously while further supplies of raw material and fuel were fed in at the top and the lime was drawn off at the bottom. Both types had the same basic structure, consisting of a thick-walled stone chamber with a hearth at the base, and it's likely what little we can see beside Priests Path was the latter type. Coal was sometimes the preferred fuel to timber when it became widely available.

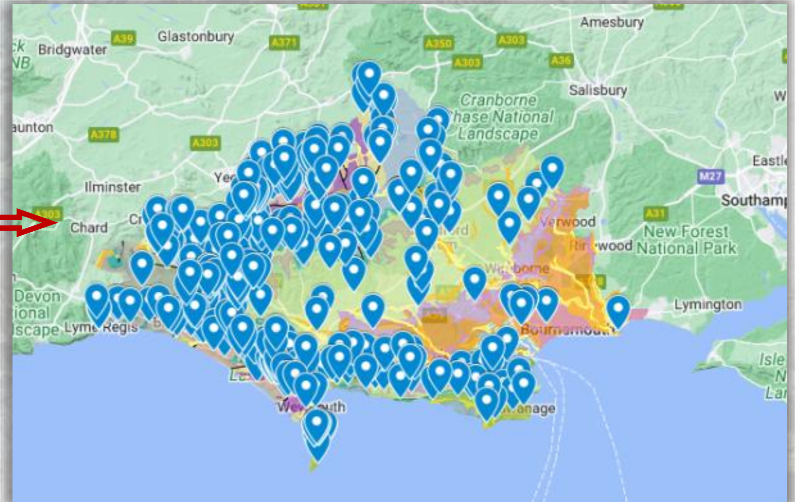
For the second phase of lime mortar production, we need a bit more chemistry (and this is the fun bit!)

Calcium oxide (quicklime) + water → Slaked lime + *heat*.

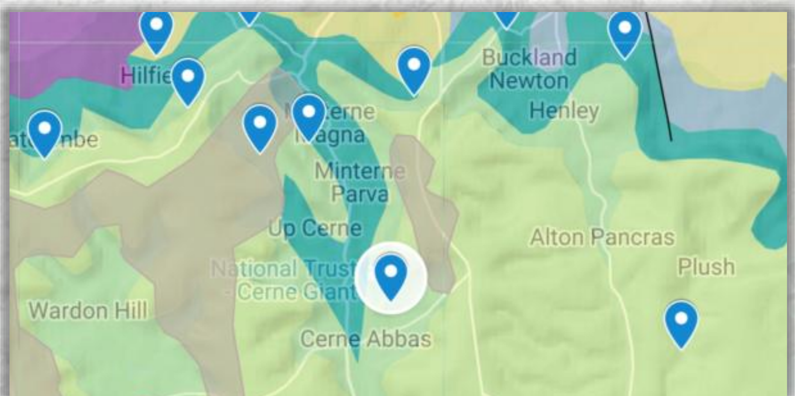
Quicklime, brought from the lime kiln, would have been put in a clay-lined pit close to the construction site, and water added, a process called slaking. This would cause it to froth, bubble and fizz impressively, possibly drawing an audience, and considerable heat would be generated by the reaction. After which, the result is a putty-like substance, slaked lime, which can be used when bedding stones together, pointing stone walls, sealing gaps, and plastering walls. Slaked (or hydrated) lime then begins to slowly harden by reacting with atmospheric carbon dioxide and reverting to calcium carbonate, a process which can take months to take full effect.



Around the village we have abundant evidence of chalk excavation, but the remains of the kiln by the Priest's Walk is the only kiln we know about in the village. The density of known kilns in Dorset demonstrates the demand for lime; further local kilns are recorded at Minterne (2), near Hilfield (2), and one at Cosmore.



In Cerne, we can find information about the families involved in the industry. Both the 1841 and 1851 censuses record a John Curme, of Alton Lane, as a lime burner. This seems to have been a longstanding family business. John Curme (Snr) was born in 1780, and was listed as employing 4 men. A younger John Curme (Jnr), probably a son, born in Cerne in1818, was listed as a lime burner in 1851. He had a brother, Thomas, also listed as a lime burner.

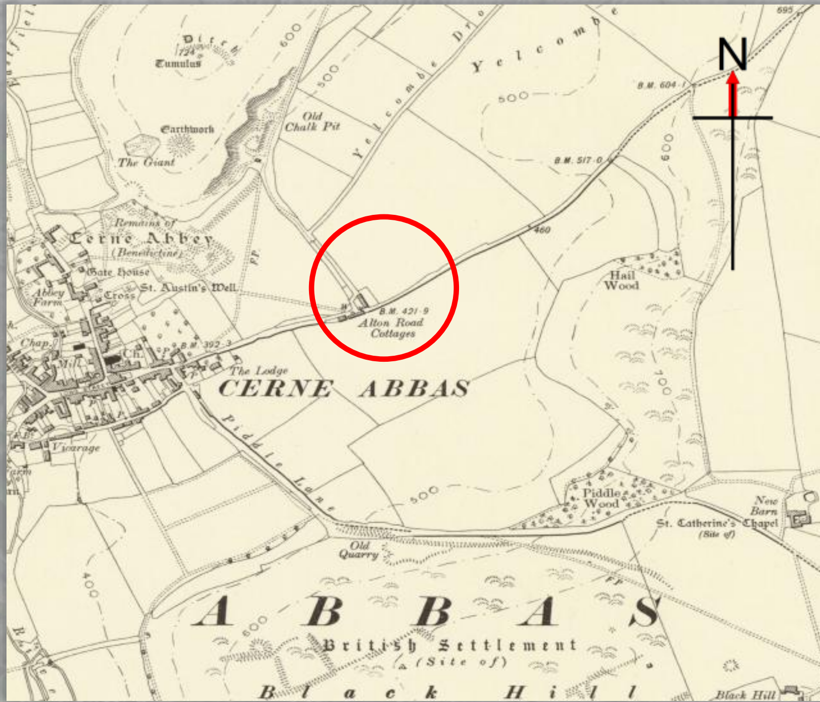


CERNE ABBAS.—PETTY SESSIONS.—WEDNESDAY.—Present: J. E. Bridge, Esq., and the Rev C. W. Bingham. There were only a few cases for hearing. DRUNKENNESS.—George Davis of Piddletrenthide, was summoned for drunkenness, and being convicted, was fined 5s and 2s 6d costs.——Robert Spicer, of Hermitage, also pleaded guilty to a similar charge, and was convicted in a like penalty. —— FAMILY JARS.—Jane Curme (widow), and John James Curme her son, both of Cerne, were summoned by Superintendent Brown for committing a breach of the peace, on the 6th instant. From the evidence adduced, it appeared, however, that the mother struck the son with a whip and was alone to blame, and as the police had been called in on several occasions, to quell disturbances in the family, the Bench required Mrs Curme to enter into her own recognizance in £10, to keep the peace for 6 calendar months, and to pay 11s 6d costs. Emmanuel Baker, of Batcombe,

Bridport News 24 June 1866, p8

John Curme Jnr had a troubled early life, recorded as having served 2 months hard labour in 1837 for "trespass" on the Digby estate, and stealing hurdles, perhaps as kindling for his kiln. But he was later listed for jury service in 1862, so he seems to have regained respectability. After his death in 1863, leaving a bankrupt widow, Jane, the family seems to have had a stormy time. Both Jane and her son John were summoned to appear before the magistrates in 1866 for committing a breach of the peace. It transpired that Jane had attacked her son with a horsewhip and was deemed to be solely to blame. As the police had been called on several previous occasions, Jane was fined £10 with 11s/6d costs and required to keep the peace for 6 months.

John Curme's son was also called John. Born in 1841, he also lived in Alton Lane, and worked as a lime burner. But by 1891 he and his sons had all moved to Wigan, Lancashire, working as coal miners. He died in 1900, aged 59.



There was also an Edwin Paulley, listed on the 1891 census as a lime burner. Born at Minterne, he was the son of a woodman, but was also working as a woodman in 1881. He'd become a lime burner during the following 10 years, and lived at Alton Lane, but by 1901 his wife Bessie was recorded as a widow.

Alton Lane cottages, situated by the entrance to today's cricket ground, are where the Curme family lived, as well as Edwin Paulley. They were conveniently placed, being fairly close to the kiln on Priests Walk, and a short enough distance if chalk was being dug on Black Hill in their day. On a 1950's OS map a cottage can be seen on the south side of the road, but when that was demolished, all traces of Alton Lane cottages were gone.

Lime burning, like so much labour of the day, was not without its hazards. Lime is caustic and will cause burns on exposed skin, and fatalities were recorded from inhalation of toxic gases; there were also horrific cases of labourers, sometimes children, falling into burning kilns. A tragic incident recorded in Dorset, at Langton Herring in 1832, was the deaths of 4 boys who had climbed into an empty kiln and were suffocated by the gases therein.

This was dangerous and arduous work. But it was also highly skilled; many years' experience was needed to achieve an efficient burn, when the correct temperature, 900°C, was reached but not exceeded. Like a blacksmith, a good lime burner knew when that temperature had been reached by the colour of the heated material, a peachy-coloured glow. In theatres and music halls, pre-electric stage lighting, invented by Thomas Drummond in 1816, was provided by a hot flame fed by hydrogen and oxygen directed at a cylinder of quicklime, giving a distinct, peachy-coloured incandescence. It sounds highly dangerous, but its atmospheric, theatrical glow was what allowed actors and performers to enjoy their time "in the limelight".

(With thanks to Den Denness, George Mortimer, and John Charman for help with research)

We are fortunate in retaining the Minutes of the Hall Committees for the two Cerne Abbey Village Halls from 1936 to the present day. This second article covers the period from 1938 to the end of the 20th century by which time it was accepted that a new Village Hall was necessary. The minutes for the war years in particular are a fascinating record of the village at that time, but also with the sadness of lives lost in that conflict.

The first AGM for the new Village Hall was held on 18th January 1938, chaired by Lord Digby as Life President. It got off to an unfortunate start with all assembling for 7pm, but Lord Digby and the Management Committee arriving for 7.30pm. The Hon Sec, Colonel Bald, apologised for the confusion. Someone, perhaps the Secretary himself, has appended the following witty observation in the minutes (believed to be from 'Handley Cross or Mr Jorrocks's Hunt' by Robert Surtees in 1854):

'A good Sec is a werry useful sort of hanimal, but a bad 'un's only worth 'anging'.

Fig 1

The minutes for 1939 increasingly herald the coming war. In July the question was whether, in the case of war, the Village Hall should be handed over as a communal kitchen for evacuated children if necessary. It was agreed that *'if circumstances demanded it we must let them have it, but that we should have little option as the Government would take it over'*.

At the first meeting of the Management Committee immediately after the declaration of war on 3rd September 1939, Colonel Bald announced his resignation as Chairman, as '*he had been called up for the duration of the war'*. Colonel Bald, who owned Barton Lodge, was in the Royal Engineers and had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order in the early months of the First World War. The meeting '*thanked Colonel Bald for all he had done in erecting the Hall and since and expressing regret at his resignation'*. Having elected a new Chairman, the Revd Whittock of the Congregational Chapel, the meeting went on to discuss the provision of the 'Black Out' arrangements.

Little was the Committee to know how closely the war was to affect them. The Royal British Legion representative on the Committee was Christopher Downton. He was to enlist into the Infantry and, seriously wounded in Italy in 1945, was invalided back to Minterne House which had been turned into a hospital for the duration. He died later at home in Chescombe on 8th June 1945 and is buried in the Cerne Abbas Burial Ground. Only a month earlier his brother, Walter, had been reported as killed in action in Burma. He is buried in the Maynamati War Cemetery in Bangladesh. If the surname is familiar, it is because they would have been great uncles to Peter Downton, whom we all know, had they survived.

(If you want to know more about the casualties from the Cerne Valley in WW1, WW2 and the Falklands Conflict, the details are on the CHS website.)

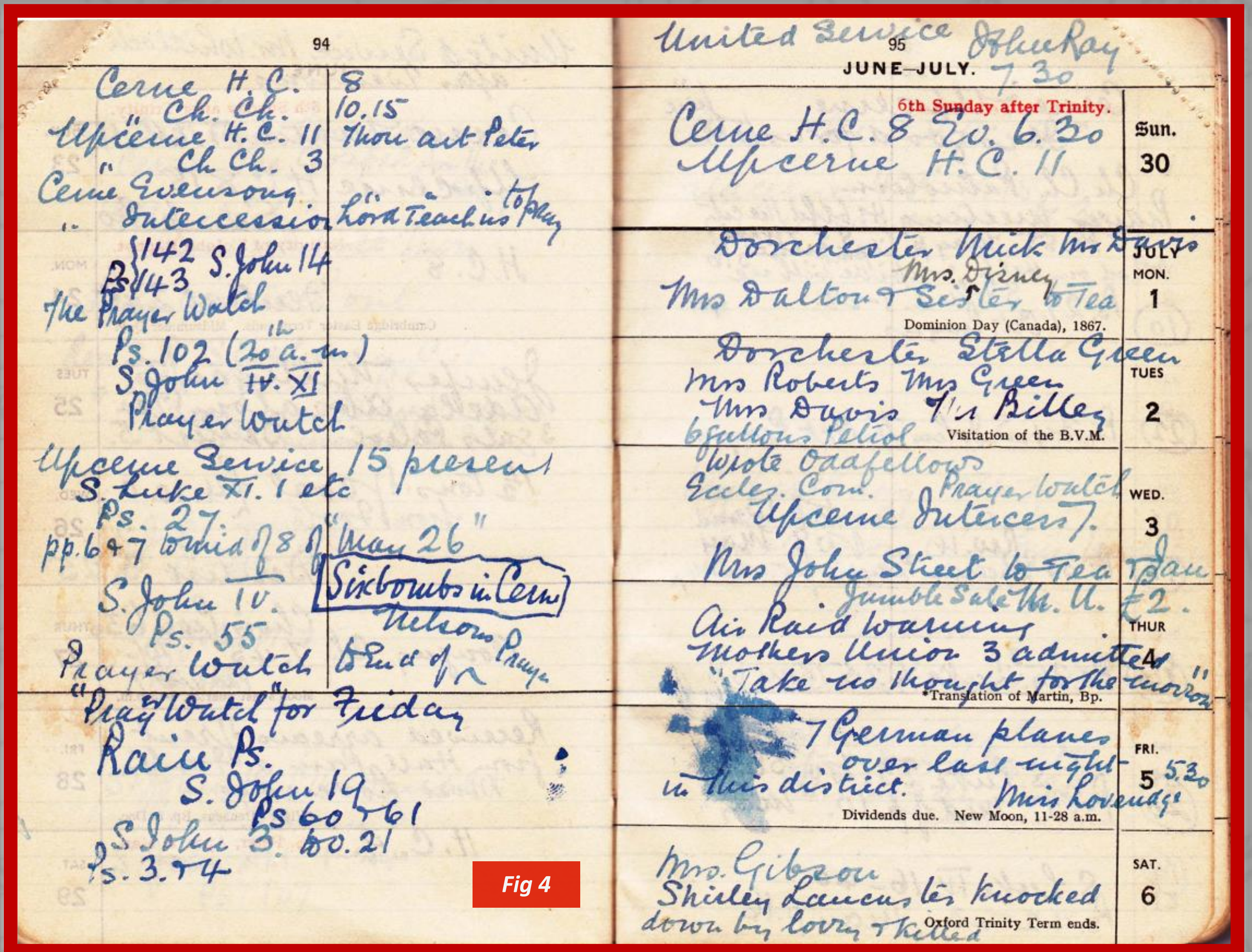
By 1941 the Hall was in regular use at least twice a week by the Home Guard. **Figure 2** Happily, the Government was paying for this.

Fig 2

The Hall was also being used by the Air Raid Precautions (ARP), the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) **Figure 3** and First Aid. These organisations were allowed to use the Hall for free. As regards the 'Black Out' arrangements in the Hall, it was agreed that these should be lifted when the Hall was not in use '*to be able to see Fire bombs'*. Mrs Hough (First Aid) suggested that the women should help keeping watch all night. However, this was opposed by a Mr Morgan who ran the ARP, as *'he didn't want the women till all the men were helping as there many who could but didn't'*. It was resolved to '*request the Parish Council to organise a Fire Watching Service in this village'*.

Fig 3

The diaries of the Revd John Ray (held by the Society), the incumbent of St Mary's at the time, contain constant references to the over-flying of German aircraft. **Figure 4.**



94

Cerne H.C. 8
Ch. Ch. 10.15
Upcerne H.C. 11 Thou art Peter
Ch. Ch. 3
Cerne Evensong
Intercession Lord teach us to pray
142 S. John 14
143
The Prayer Watch
Ps. 102 (20th a.m.)
S. John IV. XI
Prayer Watch
Upcerne Service 15 present
S. Luke XI. 1 etc
Ps. 27
May 26
Six bombs in Cerne
S. John IV.
Ps. 55
Prayer Watch
"Pray Watch for Friday"
Rain Ps.
S. John 19
Ps 60 & 61
S. John 3. to. 21
Ps. 3 & 4

United Service 7.30
95
JUNE—JULY.
6th Sunday after Trinity.
Sun. 30
Cerne H.C. 8 Ev. 6.30
Upcerne H.C. 11
JULY MON. 1
Mrs Dalton & Sister to Tea
Dominion Day (Canada), 1867.
TUES 2
Dorchester Stella Green
Mrs Roberts Mrs Green
Visitation of the B.V.M.
Wrote Oddfellows
Prayer Watch
Upcerne Intercess.
WED. 3
Mrs John Street to Tea
Jumble Sale M.U. £2.
THUR 4
Air Raid warning
Mothers Union 3 admitted
"Take no thought for the morrow"
Translation of Martin, Bp.
FRI. 5 5.30
7 German planes over last night in this district.
Dividends due. New Moon, 11-28 a.m.
SAT. 6
Mrs. Gibson
Shirley Lancaster knocked down by lorry & killed
Oxford Trinity Term ends.

Fig 4

Memories of the splendid 'Dad's Army' TV series come flooding back!

The rest of the War years were taken up with the usual minutiae of managing the Hall. Events such as 'Warship Week', 'Salute the Soldier', and 'Wings for Victory' were held, organised by the National War Savings Committee. There were also numerous social occasions to relieve the gloom, although the Home Guard diary for 27th September 1940, when the Revd Ray was reporting intense enemy aircraft activity overhead, records the *'inadequacy of the blackout of the village hall during a whist drive'*. Such classic British sang-froid; perhaps why we won the war!

The post-war years were relatively uneventful by comparison. At a meeting in August 1946 Lady Digby reported that she had met the Senior Trustee of Major Colville's estate. This was to purchase the piece of land between the Hall and Wills Lane being used as a car park. At the AGM on 29th January 1948 it was reported that a purchase offer of £25 had been made, but the Trustees' solicitors required the costs of both sides in the purchase

It was agreed that the solicitors be informed that the Hall was still willing to purchase the land, but not to pay all costs, the total calculated at about £50. The solicitors responded by saying that it would not be worth acting on this basis and they would not proceed. At the AGM on 31st January 1949, it was decided to let the matter drop. However, it was not to go away and would return in 1995 when ownership of the whole village hall site became vital in the context of its sale to fund the new village hall.

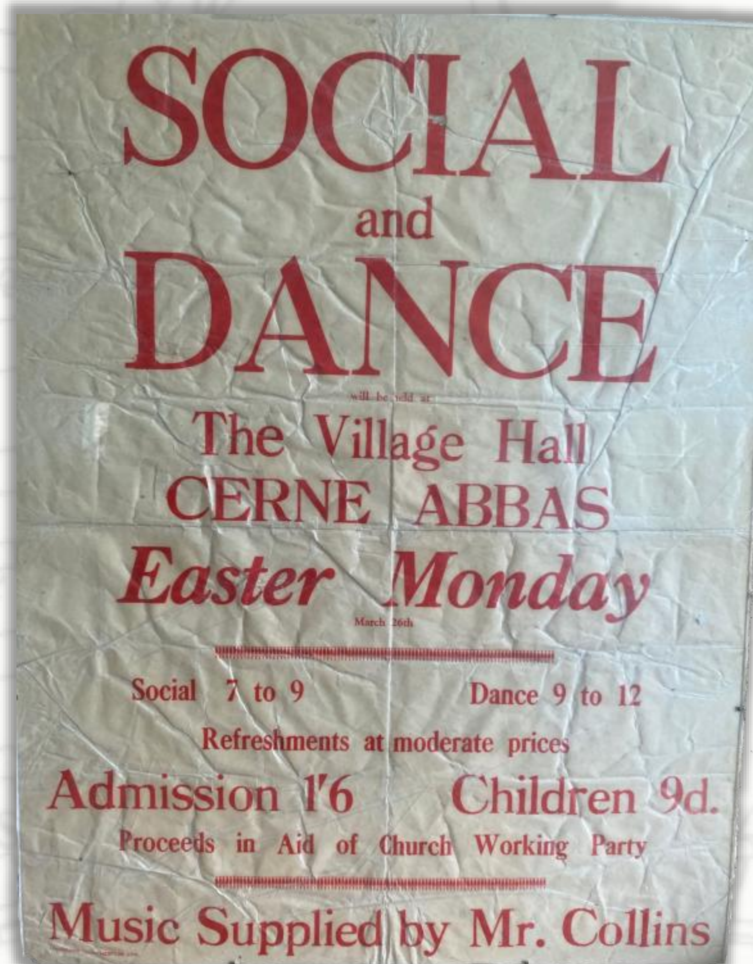


Fig 5

One recurring theme in the early post-war years was the inadequate heating for the Hall. The minutes of a meeting in 1953 recorded '*complaints from a few organisations and that the village was feeling very strongly about the heating of the Hall*'. Eventually, coal stoves and chimneys were fitted at each end of the Hall. The coal stoves were lit by the caretaker in advance of meetings if requested - and charged for. Supplementary electrical heaters were also fitted on the stage and in the Hall, to be paid for through coin meters. Additionally, an electrical lamp in a tin box was fitted inside the piano to ward against the damp! It was only in 1968 that oil-fired central heating was fitted at a cost of £563 13s. Use of it was set at 3/- an hour. Other charges were also made. In addition to the basic letting charge of 3/- an hour to groups and parties at 25/- for the Hall, charges were made for the use of tables at 1/- each and chairs at 1/- per dozen. Use of kitchen crockery was charged at 1/- a dozen for cups and saucers and 1/- per dozen for plates; and so it went on. How this was all accounted for remains a mystery, relying as it must have been on the honesty of the users of the Hall.

One constant throughout these years was the active role of Lord Digby as Life President of the Committee of Management and that of Pamela, Lady Digby as Chairman. Lord Digby died in early 1964 and at the AGM on 6 March 1964 '*everyone present stood in silent homage to the late President of the Village Hall, the Rt Hon The Lord Digby*'. At the following meeting, Lady Digby was unanimously elected as 'President for Life' in succession. She died in 1978.

A feature of the finances for the Hall in the post-war years was the income from lettings being supplemented by continuous fund raising. There were Autumn or Halloween Fairs, Jumble Sales, Whist Drives, Bingo evenings, Coffee Mornings, visiting concert parties, and so on. **Figure 5.** The 'Young Farmers' were active supporters, led at one stage by a certain ever-youthful Fred Horsington. Plays put on by the Cerne Players, led by a Miss Congram, were also profitable.

The Hall as erected in 1937 was only ever conceived as a 'semi-permanent' building. The implications of that decision increasingly came to the fore with the fabric of the Hall beginning to show signs of wear. At a meeting in January 1953, it was noted that the exterior wood was deteriorating rapidly. The wood was duly painted with creosote by a team of helpers in 1954. The subject came up again in May 1958 and it was painted this time with a black bituminous paint. It was also recorded that the window frames had been renewed. Maintaining the Hall was becoming increasingly 'make do and mend', but it staggered on for some three decades yet despite the odds. However, the inevitable could not be delayed for ever.

1988 was the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Hall and it was proposed that it be marked with an extension to the Hall. However, it was recognised that there was little available space for this. The committee also had a report that '*our architect gives it* (the Hall) *5 to 10 years and the last 5 will start incurring extensive and expensive repairs. The roof may last longer than the walls. It is not far distant when it will become more economic to pull it down and start again'*. It was also becoming clear that, even with an extension, the Hall was becoming incapable of meeting the evolving demands on its use. The village population was expanding and their demands more sophisticated. For example, the Cerne Historical Society had been formed in 1989 and was thriving. The Hall was used in 1996 for a programme by BBC West called 'The Giant on Trial', sponsored by the Society. **Figure 6.** This film can be viewed on the CHS website.

Fig 6

The event was successful, but also demonstrated the Hall's obvious limitations.

However, even before this event, in December 1995, the minutes recorded an unanimous statement by the Hall Committee that a new Hall had to be built.

The next and final article will relate the struggle, against much adversity, to build the present Hall and its successful opening in May 2006.

Old Stone Crosses

In the June 2020 edition of the magazine, George Mortimer described, with accompanying photographs, the medieval stone cross which is in Cerne's burial ground. This will be familiar to most people as it is just to the right of the path as you walk through the burial ground from Abbey Street. The inscription beneath the cross describes it as a 15th century hamstone preaching cross. It is possible that this was originally sited elsewhere but when and why it may have been moved is unknown.

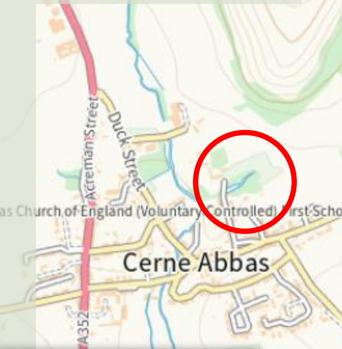
This is just one of many crosses throughout Dorset. The most complete original account of each individual cross can be found in Alfred Pope's book from 1906 'The Old Stone Crosses of Dorset' in which he identified over 60 crosses and monuments from different ages.

What was the purpose of these crosses? Standing crosses, usually of stone were mostly erected in the medieval period – mid 10th to mid 16th centuries.

The following account is from Historic England:

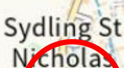
Standing crosses served a variety of functions. In churchyards they served as stations for outdoor processions, particularly in the observance of Palm Sunday. Elsewhere, standing crosses were used within settlements as places for preaching, public proclamations and penance as well as defining rights of sanctuary. They were also employed to mark boundaries between parishes, property or settlements. A few were erected to commemorate battles. Some crosses were linked to particular saints whose support and protection their presence would have helped to invoke. Crosses in market places may have helped to validate transactions.

Crosses may have numbered over 12,000 in England but their survival since the Reformation has been variable being much affected by local conditions, attitudes and religious sentiment. Many crossheads were destroyed by iconoclasts in the 16th and 17th centuries. Less than 2,000 medieval standing crosses, with or without heads, are now thought to exist.



There are crosses found locally, in varying states of preservation, which will be familiar to many of you. These are all Grade II listed as scheduled monuments and details of individual crosses can be found on Historic England's website.

In Sydling St. Nicholas, the cross is on the High Street, opposite the village hall. It now consists of an octagonal stone plinth with a similarly shaped tapering shaft. The village stocks used to stand nearby.



If your car journey takes you to Maiden Newton via the Sydling Road and across the A37, you approach the junction with the A356 where you will find the remains of a 15th century Market Cross, now consisting of a square base and the lower part of a roughly square stem, standing about 5ft high. On the west face are the weathered remains of figures. As the accompanying plaque indicates, this was moved to its current location in 1998, but it does not say where from. In the nearby churchyard lies the base of a cross dating from around 1400 which a church guide leaflet says was moved to its present position by a former rector, but from where and when is not mentioned.

Nearer to Cerne, but relatively unknown because of its more isolated position is the wayside cross at Minterne Parva, found by taking the track off the A352 and into the hamlet. This also dates from the 15th century. An octagonal base and 3ft of a shaft remain.

More curious, but not a cross and only a few yards away is a circular building which is probably a late 18th or early 19th century granary which may be a re-build of an earlier structure. It is described as very large for a farm granary in this location.

It would make an interesting project, using Alfred Pope's book, to visit all the crosses he describes to see how they have fared in the 120 years since his book was published.

Den Denness Cerne Abbas in 1921 – A Moribund Village

An earlier article, published in the Summer 2023 edition of the *Cerne Historical Society Magazine,* looked at Cerne Abbas in its 1850s heyday. At that time the village was at its post-Dissolution economic and social peak. The recently published returns made for the national Census of 1921 offer a contrasting view of the village in the early years of the twentieth century. During the seventy years which preceded the first post-First World War Census, Cerne Abbas had experienced a steep and destabilising decline which left the village a pale shadow of its former glory.

Decay and decline had been evident in Cerne for several years prior to 1921. Visiting the village in 1906, **Sir Frederick Treves** (surgeon, left) reported that, on entering the village it was evident that:

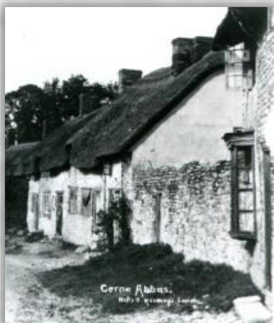
"Some trouble has fallen upon the Abbey town. It is silent and well-nigh deserted. Sad to say, Cerne Abbas is dying. Grass is growing in the streets, many houses have long been deserted, many have their windows boarded up, or are falling into listless ruin. Here are empty barns, gates falling off their hinges and doorways grown up with weeds. There are quaint old shops with bow windows, but the windows are empty of everything but a faded red curtain, while over the door in very dim paint, are traces of a name. One feels compelled to walk very quietly through the echoing streets and to talk in whispers for fear that the sleep of Cerne should be broken."

A little over ten years later, the writer **Frederick Harvey Darton** (below), a man who was incredibly fond of Cerne, reported that he had:

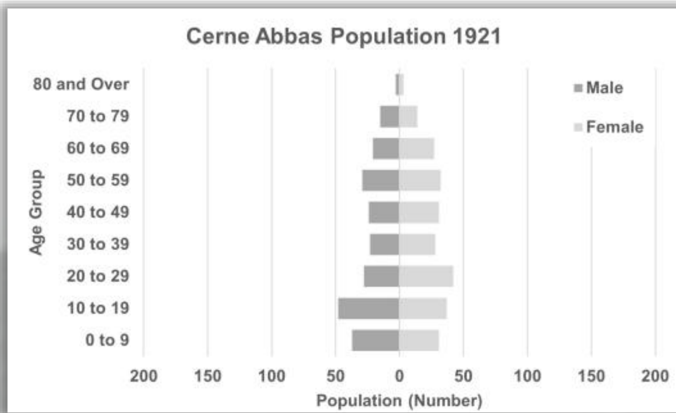
"Been into some of the cottages [of the village]. There were holes in almost every ceiling; most of the walls were perishing; slugs of the Giant's kin were in many rooms – they were exhibited with a kind of pride. The Abbey Farm was shut and deserted…the wide street is always empty, save when charabancs vomit incongruous crowds…I doubt if a man could get drunk in the inns: they are too desolate."

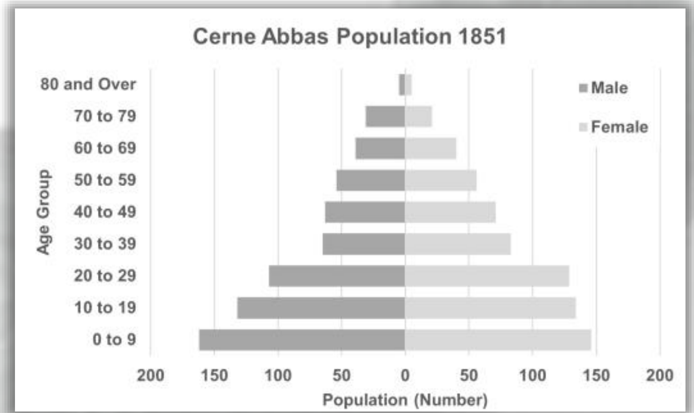
This was a far cry from the bustling, vibrant and youthful Cerne Abbas of the 1850s.

For a whole village was changing hands. I had been into some of the cottages a few days before. There were holes in almost every ceiling: most of the walls were perishing: slugs of the Giant's kin were in many rooms—they were exhibited with a kind of pride. The Abbey Farm was shut and deserted:* the lovely orchard behind it many feet deep in grass and nettles, the little fabric of beauty in the old



Acreman St *crumbling buildings*





The most obvious sign of Cerne Abbas' decline can be seen in the changing demographics of the village. In 1921, the population of Cerne stood at 480, almost a third of the size it had been seventy years previously. The average Cerne resident was also older. In 1851, 50% of villagers were aged 23 or younger but, by 1921, the equivalent median age was 33.

There were several causes behind this population implosion. The increasing mechanisation of agriculture throughout the nineteenth century resulted in fewer jobs being required in farming and an accompanying depression in rural wages. Fewer opportunities for work and increasing poverty encouraged a depopulation of rural areas as former agricultural workers migrated to England's growing towns and cities in search of easier, better paid and more secure employment. Improvements in the local transport infrastructure – starting with the opening of the turnpike roads in 1820s, the growing popularity of cycling from the 1880s, and the emergence of motorised transport at the turn of the century – also meant that people were less tied to the village and many services could be centralised in larger settlements, often at the expense of rural employment. Cerne Abbas was particularly disadvantaged by the decision to reroute the railway, which was originally proposed to pass through the village, further to the west, contributing to its decline as a commercial centre.

The Folly in the 1920s. *At the time, this road formed part of the main route for traffic passing through the village*

The reduction in agricultural employment is illustrated by the occupations recorded in the returns for the two Censuses. In 1851, 194 villagers (27% of the working population) claimed employment in farming. However, by 1921, that number had fallen to 59 (18%). These were primarily recorded either as 'agricultural labourer' or as working specifically in dairy work.

The churn of people living in Cerne is also reflected in the continuance and change in the surnames of the village's residents. It is tempting to imagine that a few well-established families had stayed in the village for generations, but the evidence from the Censuses reveals a different picture. For example, in the 1850s there were a number of 'Biles' (twenty-eight in total) living in Cerne, alongside twenty 'Greens', eighteen 'Gillinghams', and fourteen 'Paddocks'. By 1921 their numbers had reduced to eight, three, three and two respectively. Conversely, the number of 'Foxs' rose from seven to thirty, and there were eleven 'Belts' where previously there had been none. Many formerly well-known Victorian Cerne families, such as the 'Clarks' and the 'Derrimans', had all but vanished from Cerne by 1921.

Despite its decline, Cerne did retain some of its former industries. In the early 1920s it was still possible to find **thatchers, millers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons and shoemakers** living and working in the village. Commercial activity also continued.

A view of Duck St in the 1920s. *The presence of a greater number of shops on the village's main streets, despite its fallen population, indicates that Cerne still met the needs of communities from miles around*'.

The returns for the 1921 Census include references to local butchers, grocers, an ironmonger and a tobacconist operating as businesses in Cerne. A few professional people are also represented, with two clergymen (Anglican and Congregational), a physician (Dr Dalton), and a handful of local government officials forming the educated elite of Cerne.

The village's pubs did not fare quite so well. Whereas in 1851 Cerne residents had a choice of eight licenced premises at which to slake their thirst, their options had narrowed to just five by 1921. The reduction in the number of pubs was driven, in large part, by the pressure exerted by the local teetotal vicar, the Rev. Gundry, on the local Licensing Committee in the 1890s. Noting the declining population, Gundry argued that Cerne no longer required so many pubs, and successfully oversaw the revocation of the liquor licences held by both the Antelope Inn and the Glove Inn. When the Prince of Wales in Duck Street was destroyed by fire in 1913, the clergyman again lobbied to prevent it being rebuilt and reopened. Of the five pubs that existed in 1921, three are still opening their doors to the public – it's remarkable that Cerne has only lost two of its pubs (the Union Arms in the 1930s and the Elephant and Castle in the mid-1970s) during the past hundred years.

Cerne in the 1920s appears also to have been slightly more 'cosmopolitan' than it had been.

The 1851 Census records that 91% of villagers had been born in Dorset, while in 1921 that proportion had dropped to 80%.

In the 1850s, approximately half of Cerne's population had been born in the village. The comparable figure for 1921 lay somewhere between 25-50% (this uncertainty is the result of many villagers simply recording their birthplace as 'Dorset').

It might be reasonable to expect that the sale of the village in 1919 would have had a substantial impact on the social landscape of Cerne Abbas. But closer study reveals that the sale had only a limited effect on the village. A comparison of information contained in the Electoral Registers published before and immediately after the sale confirms that approximately 80% of residents remained living in the same properties after the auction as they had before it. Any upheaval caused by the wholesale change of property ownership appears to have been limited.

In 1921, half of Cerne's population lived in its two most populous streets. Acreman Street provided homes to 113 people, most of whom were engaged in manual and agricultural jobs. By way of contrast, Long Street, which housed a similar number of people, was home to several skilled artisans and business owners. Most of Cerne's shops were to be found along the village's main thoroughfare. Of Cerne's remaining streets, only Vicarage Street (now Back Lane), Abbey Street, the Folly, and Bridge Street (now Duck Street) had resident populations of more than twenty people. The Cerne Union Workhouse, which had been built to house a pauper population of 130, had just twenty inmates in 1921, including Percy and Emily Holwell, the Master and Matron of the Institution.

The most popular names for males in 1921 were William, Charles and George, much as they had been in 1851. There was, however, a notable decline in the number of people in the village named John. The most prevalent names for females in the years after the First World War remained Elizabeth, Alice, Annie and Mary, although Jane appears to have lost its popularity during the preceding seventy years.

Some of the more unusual names held by villagers in 1921 included one Octavius, an Esau, a Selina and a Dulcinea.

Cerne society continued to languish throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Unfortunately, the 1931 Census records were destroyed by a fire in the 1940s, and the Census was not conducted in 1941 due to the War. Consequently, the 1921 Census provides the best insight into the extent to which the village had degraded since the height of its early Victorian successes. When the 1951 Census is published (sometime after 2051) it will portray Cerne as a community on the rise again, its resurgence powered by improvements in the road network and the widespread ownership of motorised vehicles. Within forty years of 1921, the village's population had recovered to reach a little under 850 people, a figure not too different from that of today. And the sense of terminal decline which hung over Cerne between the Wars is now just a distant memory.

Long St in 1962.

With thanks to John Chalker

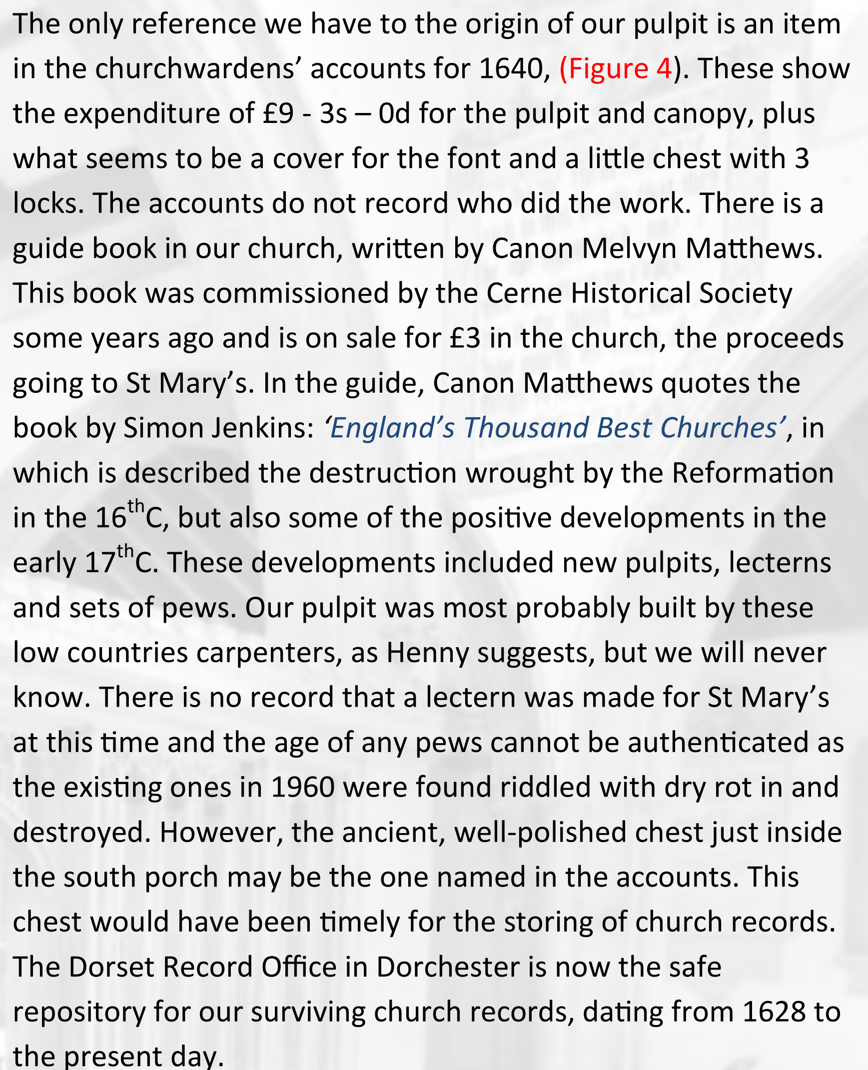
George Mortimer

St Mary's Church, Cerne Abbas

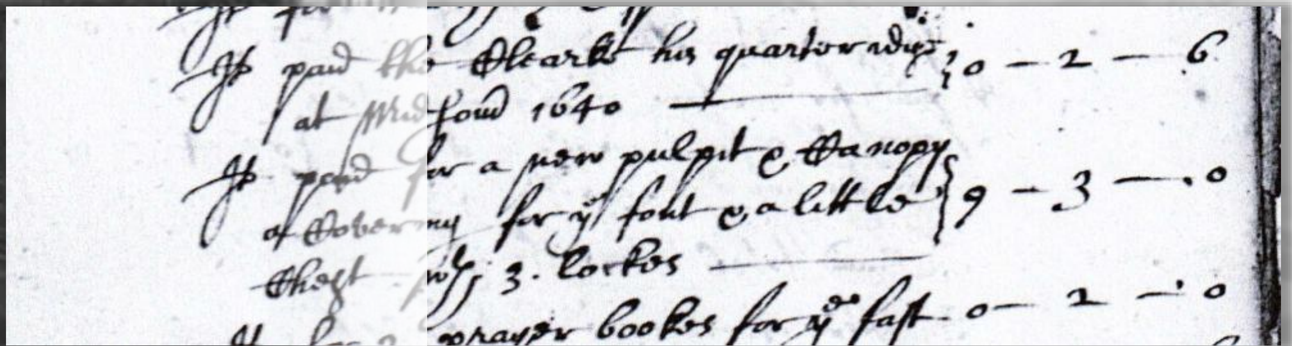
The pulpit & other Church furniture. pt 1

A recent visitor to St Mary's Church from the village of Lenham in Kent posed some interesting questions about the history of the pulpit in the church. The visitor was Henny Shotter, the Secretary of the Lenham Heritage Society in Kent, who noticed that our pulpit was in style and shape, if not in size and carved detail, identical to the pulpit in their church of St. Mary's in Lenham. Our pulpit (below) is dated '1640' on its back screen.

Lenham's pulpit displays the date of 1622, but this is a later addition and not original to the pulpit. The pulpit may have been gifted to their church in 1622, but this is not certain. Otherwise, the similarities were such for Henny to raise the thought that this design was perhaps common for the time and based on a generic pattern book for pulpits produced by journeymen carpenters. Further, Henny wondered if the carpenters who built these pulpits come from abroad, perhaps Holland. Intrigued by these questions, a little research was initiated.



The only reference we have to the origin of our pulpit is an item in the churchwardens' accounts for 1640, (Figure 4). These show the expenditure of £9 - 3s – 0d for the pulpit and canopy, plus what seems to be a cover for the font and a little chest with 3 locks. The accounts do not record who did the work. There is a guide book in our church, written by Canon Melvyn Matthews. This book was commissioned by the Cerne Historical Society some years ago and is on sale for £3 in the church, the proceeds going to St Mary's. In the guide, Canon Matthews quotes the book by Simon Jenkins: *'England's Thousand Best Churches'*, in which is described the destruction wrought by the Reformation in the 16th C, but also some of the positive developments in the early 17th C. These developments included new pulpits, lecterns and sets of pews. Our pulpit was most probably built by these low countries carpenters, as Henny suggests, but we will never know. There is no record that a lectern was made for St Mary's at this time and the age of any pews cannot be authenticated as the existing ones in 1960 were found riddled with dry rot in and destroyed. However, the ancient, well-polished chest just inside the south porch may be the one named in the accounts. This chest would have been timely for the storing of church records. The Dorset Record Office in Dorchester is now the safe repository for our surviving church records, dating from 1628 to the present day.



It paid the Clarke his quarteridge at Midsomer 1640 } 0 – 2 – 6
It paid for a new pulpit & canopy & [illegible] for ye font & a little chest wth 3 locks } 9 – 3 – 0
[illegible] prayer books for ye fast 0 – 2 – 0

A final thought: the beautiful carving detail on the pulpits must have had a meaning when executed. Would anyone care to enlighten?

Our thanks must go to **Henny Shotter** for initiating this interesting research which we trust has been of mutual benefit to both Historical Societies.

Photo A K Popkin

Letters

Edited by George Mortimer

Andrew Whittle writes:

I have been reading the article by Mike Clark in the recent CHS magazine. I notice that the seat by Jackman's Cross is attributed to Grassby. This is not so, as I made it for Christopher Pope around the millennium. Anyhow, I thought that I would write and ask you to pass on the correct attribution to Mike.

Andrew Whittle
Letter Carver and Designer
Bridport

Mike Clark has responded:

Dear Andrew

Thank you for drawing my attention to the error in my article on Jackman's Cross in the winter edition of the Cerne Historical Society magazine. I tried to check the accuracy of my source but obviously this was incorrect. My apologies. We will publish a correction in the next edition of the magazine.

Kind regards

Mike

Michael Parroy *writes:*

Thank you so much for the talk last night. Very good content and delivery and educational. Really enjoyed it.

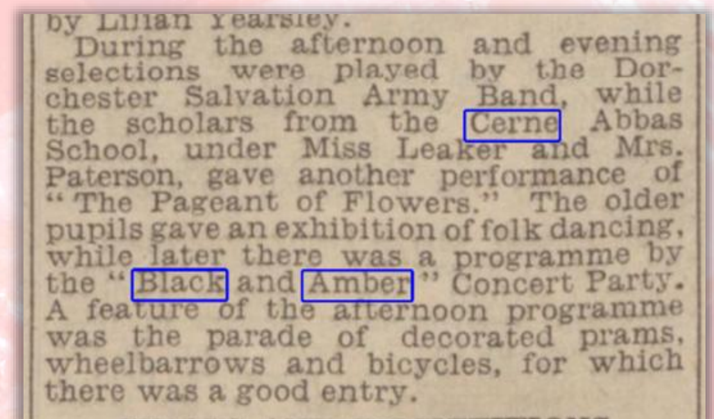
Best wishes

Reply by the Editor

Michael lives in Wincanton and is a member of the Society. He refers to the talk given by Chris Copson on 28 November on the subject of '**Prehistoric and Roman Food and Farming'.** Other Society members will agree entirely with Michael about Chris's talk and Chris thanks Michael for letting us know personally.

Ian Denness writes:

In the article about the early Village Hall, there was a reference to a Mrs House of the 'Black and Ambers'. It was thought that it was possibly an amateur dramatic group. I thought that you might be interested in this extract taken from the ***Western Gazette*** *of 7 August 1936.*



by Lilian Yearsley.
During the afternoon and evening selections were played by the Dorchester Salvation Army Band, while the scholars from the Cerne Abbas School, under Miss Leaker and Mrs. Paterson, gave another performance of "The Pageant of Flowers." The older pupils gave an exhibition of folk dancing, while later there was a programme by the "Black and Amber" Concert Party. A feature of the afternoon programme was the parade of decorated prams, wheelbarrows and bicycles, for which there was a good entry.

From this it appears the 'Black and Ambers' were a local band of musicians and entertainers.

Reply by the Editor

The Cerne Historical Society thanks Den for his continuing invaluable research into so many aspects of our local history.

Letters

Jane Still writes:

The signing of the Magna Carta with King John at Runnymede on 15th June 1215 included 25 Barons as Surety for the enforcement of the conditions contained in the document. They brought with them as 'witnesses' Bishops or Abbots. In the case of one of the Barons, Geoffrey de Mandeville, 2nd Earl of Essex and 4th Earl of Gloucester, he brought as his witness the Abbot of Cerne. There were 15 abbots in Dorset, two of which were of Sherborne Abbey and Cerne Abbey, so it was quite a thing to be invited as a witness to this seminal document in our nation's history. I wonder why Cerne (or whoever the abbot was then) was so important in 1215.

Reply by the Editor

The Society is grateful to Jane for finding this connection of Cerne Abbey with a document that has echoed down the ages both nationally and internationally. For example, it influenced the early settlers in New England and the United States Constitution. Dr Hugh Willmott of Sheffield University has confirmed that Cerne Abbey was one of the wealthiest monastic houses in the South West of England which probably explains why its Abbot was chosen as a witness. We know that the Abbot at the time was called 'Dionysus'. In ancient Greek religion and myth, Dionysus is the god of wine-making, making orchards, vegetation, fertility, festivity, insanity, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, and theatre. Busy chap! We do not know what became of Abbot Dionysus, but Geoffrey de Mandeville was killed in a tournament in February the following year.

The Letters Page Editor will be pleased to hear from you on any subject that will increase a mutual understanding of our shared history.

gcmortimer@btinternet.com **or put a note through the door at 3 Abbey Court, if you prefer.**

We reserve the right to publish if no objection is expressed in your email or letter.

This magazine may be viewed online at cerneabbashistory.org

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