

## **HADDENHAM WYCHERT WAY**

### **Notes by Peter Gulland on places of interest seen en route**

#### **The railway**

The railway on right was opened in 1906 as part of the shortening of the GWR's London – Birmingham – Chester route. Haddenham's original station (in Station Road, of course) was closed in 1963 under the Beeching "axe" when the number of passengers boarding trains here averaged 31 a day. A new station was opened in Thame Road in 1987 and, today, over 70 passengers board a single train in the rush hour.

#### **Notley Mill**

After you have crossed the River Thame the water course on your right was a millstream. The low embankment which holds the water in (above the level of the Thame) was built by hand over 1000 years ago and is probably the oldest man-made structure in Long Crendon parish. The embankment leads to a bridge over the two mill races at the site of Notley Mill. The first of several mills here was on the site before 1086, and the last one stopped work just before the First World War.

#### **Notley Abbey**

As you follow a fenced path uphill you can see most of the above-ground remains of Notley Abbey. Founded as an Augustinian monastery in about 1162, it had become one of the wealthiest monasteries in the area by the time that it was suppressed by Henry VIII in 1538. The building nearest to the footpath (now a private house, but available for functions) was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as the abbot's lodgings; behind it were the cloisters. The great abbey church (largely demolished in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) was uphill behind the surviving buildings, and would have towered over them.

#### **Dovecote**

As you leave the abbey behind, the pyramid-roofed building on the hill on your right is a dovecote which was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries using stone from the ruins of the abbey church. The inside of its walls are honeycombed with nesting boxes.

#### **Lenton's Pond**

As you descend the hill the pond behind the fence on right was created by Notley Abbey to supply water to the water meadows on the flat land behind the pond, and to the abbey's fish tanks (out of sight). Largely out of use since the surrender of the monastery these features have silted up and are best seen now in aerial photos. The pond was created by excavation at the uphill end beneath the spring which feeds it, and by building an enclosing dyke around its lower end to hold the water in.

#### **Chearsley**

St. Nicholas's church dates mostly from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and has a floor made largely of pre-Victorian bricks and tiles. The modern pews and pulpit were made in the Haddenham workshop of the late Ivor Newton, and the windows beside the pulpit were reglazed, incorporating fragments of medieval glass, by Michael Farrar-Bell, also of Haddenham. The unusually low chancel arch cuts through what looks like Saxon stonework,

but is actually a fragment of medieval wall painting which was on the wall before the chancel was rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

In the field to the south-east of the churchyard are the grassy and dry remains of a rectangular moat (once filled with water, probably from the spring which feeds the pond outside the churchyard). The moat was probably dug in the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century around a high-status house as an embellishment, not as a defensive work. You can see the site over the hedge at the back of the church car park.

### **Ridge and furrow between Chearsley and Cuddington**

As you begin to climb off the flat floor of the Thame Valley you obliquely cross the rolling waves of ridge and furrow which are a good example of the fossilized results of medieval ploughing. Each ridge would have been one allotment in the open fields of medieval Cuddington, and most farmers would have held several ridges scattered across the parish. The well-preserved state of these ridges suggests that they have been under pasture continuously since Cuddington's arable open fields ceased to operate in about 1707. Most of the hedges around here are likely to date from that time, when they would have been planted to break up the old, largely hedgeless and treeless, open fields.

### **Gibraltar**

This hamlet seems to have acquired its unusual name rather hesitantly. Britain acquired the Rock at the entrance to the Mediterranean in 1713 but the first detailed map of Bucks. was still calling this hamlet Littleworth in the 1760s. The first edition of the Ordnance Survey map, published in 1813, called it Gibraltar, but another map of the county, in 1824, called it Trafalgar, and as late as the 1860s some locals were still calling it Littleworth. The last time that this Gibraltar was seriously in the news was in 2003 when its well-known pub, the "Bottle and Glass", was gutted by fire; its subsequent rebuilding is a credit to all concerned.

### **Westlington**

Westlington was earlier known as West Dinton and some of the houses around its attractive green are a reminder that Haddenham may be the principal "witchert village" but several other villages in the area have a noticeable number of houses built of "white earth".

At the east end of the green the Belgian restaurant "La Chouette" occupies the building which was the village pub "The White Horse" until 1989.

### **Dinton**

Before reaching the Dinton – Ford road you get a good view on your left towards Dinton Hall. The core of this impressive family home was built around 1500 and it was extended in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, but extensive alterations in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have somewhat obscured its complex history. The recent, painstaking, refurbishment of the house has replaced the worn, uniformly coloured roof tiles with a completely new set in two colours to recreate the eye-catching zig-zag pattern which had been a feature of the original house. Perhaps the most famous owner of the Hall was Simon Mayne (1612 – 1661) who, as a prominent Parliamentarian during the English Civil War, was one of the select few who signed King Charles I's death warrant. After the restoration of the monarchy he was tried

and sentenced to death for his treason but, although reprieved by Charles II, died of natural causes in the Tower of London.

### **Ford**

The name of “The Dinton Hermit” pub, on your left in the village, commemorates John Biggs, a secretary of Simon Mayne of Dinton Hall (see above). After Mayne’s death in 1661, Biggs became depressed and took to a hermit’s way of life, living for 36 years in a shed at Dinton and existing on charity. He died with the secret which was rumoured to have caused his withdrawal from normal life – that he had been the masked executioner of the king at Whitehall in January 1643.

About 130 yards from the crossroads along Chapel Lane, just before the road bends, you will pass the former Ford Baptist Chapel and schoolroom, now converted to a house. In spite of the “erected 1710” plaque on its gable end it is now believed that the present building was more likely to have been built in 1818 on the site of the 1710 chapel, with virtually nothing from the previous building incorporated in the present structure. It looks rather large for the population of Ford, but it initially served a much wider area, although not including Haddenham, which had rebuilt its own Baptist chapel in 1810.

### **Kemp’s Farm Rural Units**

About  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the crossroads you turn right off Chapel Lane behind the prominent line of cupressus trees. These are screening a small industrial estate whose buildings started life as a mushroom farm, to which workers were brought in by minibus in the days before widespread car ownership. Mushroom production ended in the 1980s and the buildings have been adapted for further use by a variety of small businesses.

### **Kingsey**

St. Nicholas church dates from 1892, when the previous church on the site was demolished. It is one of a cluster of buildings in this small village which were built in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Wykehams (of Tythrop House); notice the Wykeham initials (HW and PJDW) on the gables of several houses near the church. The principal group of earlier buildings in the village are the four widely-spaced late Georgian farmhouses on the south side of the main Thame – Princes Risborough road.

As you leave Kingsey and cross the field towards Haddenham, Tythrop House appears, initially briefly on your left, and later behind you. This mansion was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and remodelled to its present form late in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was the home of the Wykeham family from 1800 to 1928 and then stood empty until used to accommodate Basque children who were refugees from the Spanish civil war in 1938, and then Jewish children from Nazi Germany, before being requisitioned by the army during the 1939-45 war. The scale of repairs needed after all this led to a plan to demolish the house in the 1950s but, after several changes of owner, it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. J. Cotton in 1963. They then spent several years in renovating it to the high standard in which you see it today.

### **Pond Close**

The pond on the right in the last field before the railway embankment is believed to have originated as a quarry for the stone used to build Haddenham’s church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

It was later deepened into a fishpond by building the low embankment across its nearest end so that water level is usually above field level there. It was finally shortened in 1906 when the railway embankment was built though its northern end.

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<sup>i</sup> There are various accepted spellings of Wychert. The author of these notes has a preference for Witchert and this spelling is supported by Pevsner.