

# ***“The Ancient and Noble Seat”***

## ***The History of the Villages of Overthorpe and Warkworth in Northamptonshire***

***by Shona Rutherford-Edge***

***“Our forefathers in this village were no doubt as busy and bustling, and as important as ourselves: yet have their homes and transactions been forgotten from century to century, and have sunk into oblivion.”***

***Gilbert White, 1789***

Gilbert White was of course writing not about Overthorpe or Warkworth, but about the village in which he lived in 1789. However, I felt it was pertinent, because sure enough, when I agreed to edit a book about our villages, and then ended up writing it, none of us had any idea just how much history there was to be found here. We originally intended this “booklet” to be rather smaller, and not to take so long to produce, but just as White writes, I kept finding transactions that had sunk into oblivion ... almost. I dedicate it to the present inhabitants of both villages, and hope they find something of interest within it.

*With grateful thanks to everyone who contributed documents, photographs, time or money towards this project. Documents are listed in the bibliography and pictures are credited in their captions but for time and money the committee and I can only offer our sincere thanks.*

*The title of the book is a reference to a quotation from Anthony à Wood, writing about Warkworth Castle in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, of which there is more written later.*

“...to the antient and noble seat of Werkworth, then lately belonging to the Chetwodes ... The mannour house is a stately house...”

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*Introduction*

**THE UNDERSIGNED RATEPAYERS**

*“We, the Undersigned Ratepayers and householders in the Hamlet of Overthorpe and the Parish of Warkworth, humbly petition that Overthorpe should still remain in the Parish of Warkworth”*

Petition addressed to Northamptonshire County Council in April 1897

## CUTTING UP THE PARISH

Prior to 1889, (before which date the border between the two counties was marked by the boundary-stone on Banbury Bridge), Warkworth Parish extended into what is now Oxfordshire and north into what has been part of Middleton Cheney Parish until this year. It thus included the hamlets of Huscote, Nethercote, Grimsbury and Overthorpe. The whole area covered 2096 acres of land, bounded on the southwest by the river Cherwell and on the southeast by a subsidiary flowing tributary, whilst its northern borders reached as far as Kings Sutton, Middleton Cheney and Chacombe. The soil is almost entirely lower and middle lias clay apart from patches of marlstone rock, as any resident with a garden will tell you!

Both the bureaucracy and the geography of Local Government were changed considerably by two parliamentary acts in the reign of Queen Victoria, although the new civil parishes did not affect the ecclesiastical parishes, or at least not initially. It was the earlier act of 1888 that led to the cutting off of Grimsbury, Nethercote and Huscote from Warkworth and their subsequent absorption into new parishes in Oxfordshire. The 1888 act also led to parts of Marston St. Lawrence parish being re-designated to Middleton Cheney (that area of Middleton including the Police House, and on towards the A422 by-pass). Then in 1894 Middleton Cheney received Overthorpe as well, which caused a great deal of controversy at the time. But the government nonetheless got what it wanted and the new, smaller parish of Warkworth was issued with its new Minute Book. The first page opens,

### ***Parish of Warkworth: Local Government Act 1894***

*Notice is hereby given that the First Parish Meeting for the above named Parish will be held on Tuesday the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1894, at six o'clock in the evening at Mr. John Adkins' House, Warkworth. The business to be transacted at the Meeting will be:-*

*To Elect a chairman of the Parish Meeting*

*To conduct such other business as may be necessary to bring the above-mentioned Act into operation.*

*Dated this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of November, 1894.*

*Signed Edwin Mawle*

*William Saunders, overseers.*

The following year, business included arranging a 2-shilling payment to Mr. Adkins each evening that his room was to be used for Parish Meetings and that Mr. Coultard should be advanced £3 to purchase an iron safe. Also, the Reverend Blencowe should be written to, asking him to hand over the Parish Award so that there would be something with which the new safe could be filled!

Overthorpe's local government had been a very odd case for hundreds of years. Warkworth parish as a whole was divided into three townships or "tithings" each paying their tithes to different parishes. *Warkworth Tithing* consisted of 960 acres and paid tithes to St. Mary's Church at Warkworth, while *Middleton Tithing* (consisting mostly of Overthorpe) had 950 acres and paid tithes to All Saints Church in Middleton Cheney. The third was *Banbury Tithing*, consisting of the other three hamlets, which paid tithes to St. Mary's Church in Banbury. All three tithings paid highway rates to Warkworth. The hamlet of Overthorpe was therefore

included in the poor rate of both Middleton Cheney and Warkworth, paid highway tax to one, was on the school board rate of the other, was entitled to certain charities, but not others, and was all in all very complicated.

Overthorpe remained in its peculiar position after the act of 1888 (being part of Warkworth, but paying certain taxes to Middleton Cheney) for several more years until the second Local Government Act began to come into force around 1895. Then *both* Middleton Cheney and Warkworth claimed Overthorpe as their own, both putting forward eighteenth century documentation to support their respective cases. The hamlet of Overthorpe was to be added to the rapidly expanding parish of Middleton Cheney. For the first year after the proposed change not much notice was paid to it because the inhabitants of Overthorpe continued to worship at St. Mary's Church and to receive the Warkworth charities. However, the following year came around when all the inhabitants had to pay their rates, twice, and then the political confusion that still surrounded Overthorpe became evident.

A report from the Rural District Council dated February of 1896 explained that Overthorpe was "in the Parish of Middleton Cheney for sanitary purposes and in the Parish of Warkworth for highway purposes". So long as you didn't do anything unsanitary on the roads you were all right! The rateable value of Overthorpe in that year was £1,238, and neither Middleton Cheney, nor Warkworth wanted to lose Overthorpe and have to increase her own rates to compensate. The auditor asked that the County Council hold an inquiry as soon as may be, to sort out this anomaly "with a view to the hamlet of Overthorpe being comprised for all purposes in ONE of the two respective parishes"!

The parish jurisdiction was consequently changed as of April 1897, but not until after Mr. Edwin Mawle had proposed that it would be more desirable if Overthorpe should be included with Warkworth Parish "as formerly ... for all purposes". He maintained that as it was still ecclesiastically joined and was still in the same highway area, it was logical to remain so. Indeed Mr. Mawle was not alone in his desire that Overthorpe should remain within Warkworth. A formal petition of thirty-six names including every householder in Overthorpe, was presented to Northamptonshire County Council; it read:

*Gentlemen*

*We, the undersigned Ratepayers and Householders in the Hamlet of Overthorpe and the Parish of Warkworth, humbly petition that Overthorpe should still remain in the Parish of Warkworth for all purposes including Civil, Ecclesiastical, Charity and other purposes.*

*We are, Gentlemen, Your Obedient Servants.*

*Edwin Mawle, Warkworth  
Wm M. Jones, Warkworth  
John Jones, Overthorpe  
Walter Tucker, Overthorpe  
Heath, Overthorpe  
Crowe, Overthorpe  
Joseph Wilkinson, Overthorpe  
T. R. Gorrum, Overthorpe*

*Ann Clarke, Overthorpe  
Emily Coy, Overthorpe  
H. Sirett, Overthorpe  
Rd Griffin, Spital Farm  
W. Stowe, Warkworth  
Thos. Mawle, Warkworth  
John Adkins, Warkworth  
Arthur Tisdale, Overthorpe*

*Thos. Mauder, Overthorpe*  
*J.W. Dumbleton, Overthorpe*  
*J. French, Overthorpe*  
*E. Mold, (X) Overthorpe*  
*A. Cannings, Overthorpe*  
*John Waters, Overthorpe*  
*Thos. Bromley, Overthorpe*  
*Wm Adkins, Overthorpe*  
*G. Pinfold, Overthorpe*  
*J. Pargeter, Overthorpe*

*Caleb Tew, Overthorpe*  
*Joseph Mold, Overthorpe*  
*Joseph Viccars, Warkworth*  
*Thos. Mold, Overthorpe*  
*John Bennett Luddelt, Ratepayer*  
*David Davies, Ratepayer*  
*W.J. Wakelin, Banbury*  
*Ernest A. Tustian, Warkworth*  
*J. Wall, Overthorpe*  
*R. Spencer, Overthorpe*

Both Mr. Dumbleton and Mr. Bromley signed that petition, and houses in Overthorpe retain their surnames to this day. Several of the other names in this petition will appear again later on in this volume, with stories to tell.

The first inquiry was held in the Magistrates room of the Police Station in Middleton Cheney at noon on Tuesday May 26<sup>th</sup> 1896, and was attended by many local people including a representative of the Blacklock family from Overthorpe Hall. The correspondent for the *Banbury Advertiser* described the meeting in almost novelistic detail. It is so easy to picture the crowded Magistrates room on that hot, May afternoon, crowded to the brim with Victorian gentlemen in frock-coats, carrying their tall, stove-pipe hats, and the farmers in their tweeds, and all of them with ridiculously unbelievable beards as was the fashion in the 1890s. The change of the rates was disputed and Mr. Cartwright of Middleton retorted, "It does not affect them at all."

Mr. Fisher agreed with him, "Not at all."

Mr. Cartwright added that the six-and-thirty petitioners did not state the terms of their objection to the proposed change. The chairman turned to Mr. Osbourne, District Councillor for Warkworth and asked,

"Perhaps you can tell us their grounds?"

The journalist continued:

Mr. Osbourne said they wished to be in Warkworth for several reasons. The poor rate had been collected by Middleton Cheney, and they wished to collect their own poor rate.

The Chairman: We want your reasons for doing so.

Mr. Osbourne: We consider it would be better for ... Overthorpe, and that if Overthorpe went into the parish of Middleton Cheney the people would lose the charities which belong to Warkworth.

The Chairman: Are the charities extensive?

Mr. W. Jones put in an extract from a will showing that £500 was left for investment, for the benefit of the poor, and brought in about £14 a year from consols.

The Chairman: Is there any other reason?

Mr. Osbourne said the residents thought if Overthorpe were part of Warkworth for all purposes it would simplify matters a great deal. They ... could collect their own poor rate ... and in other ways simplify matters. ...

Mr. Blacklock said as Churchwarden for Warkworth he would like to ask whether by the proposed change Overthorpe people would lose the benefit of the charity previously referred to. ...

The Chairman read the extract from the will, under which £500 was left in trust to the vicar of Warkworth, to be invested, and the income distributed at Christmas in bread, coals &c., among the poor of the parish. Mr. Knightly said it seemed to him that Overthorpe people had the charity under

the present system, and if the hamlet ceased to form part of Warkworth they would not get the benefit of the charity.

Mr. W. Jones said he had been one of the trustees of the charity for six or seven years, and the income had always been distributed in the ecclesiastical parish of Warkworth, which included Overthorpe. ...

Mr. Mawle said he went round with the petition in favour of Overthorpe being in Warkworth parish, and could testify that everyone signed it, and that no one signed it but those who had a right so to do.

The Chairman: Is it your opinion that Warkworth should be retained in Overthorpe? *{I expect this was a slip of the tongue. Ed.}*

Mr. Mawle: Certainly. We have given up a slice in Grimsbury, and we don't wish to give up this other.

The whole meeting lasted only about half an hour, the rest of it being about Warkworth's right to retain the stone pit field, used for extracting the stones which were used to pave the roads in Victorian times. They also discussed Middleton Cheney school board, and the fact that Middleton residents objected to paying school-tax for Overthorpe children if Overthorpe itself was not to pay. The Warkworth-Overthorpe group claimed that this was immaterial as only about three or four Overthorpe children ever attended Middleton school in any given year, and they could just as easily attend Grimsbury. In fact some already did.

Mr. Knightly more or less ruled in favour of Warkworth that day, but that was not the end of the tale, because Middleton Cheney's parishioners then made a complaint to the effect that their case had not been properly heard, so a second meeting was called in early December.

Again the question of the school board came up. There were around 160 or 170 children attending Middleton Cheney School at the time, of whom as many as twelve had come from Overthorpe.

Mr. Wilkinson, from the committee of inquiry asked, "How many now?" and Mr. Tomkins from the school answered, "Nine."

A voice from the assembled company retorted, "Three!"

So Mr. Wilkinson looked about the room with exasperation and asked, "Only three now?" as if to say, *Come along Gentlemen; it must be one or the other!*

Mr. Tomkins however had the figures in front of him and confirmed that it was nine children.

"Perhaps he included Warkworth," suggested Mr. Blacklock.

"I don't know about that," put in Mr. Tomkins, but Mr. Knightly agreed,

"Perhaps he does".

It is hardly surprising that Middleton Cheney did not want to lose Overthorpe's contribution to the school board rate; it seems statistics at the meeting showed that Overthorpe was paying 25 per cent of it. Mathematics is not my strength, but do you make 9 out of 170 children equal 25 per cent?

Howsoever, the second inquiry then got rather more personal, with Mr. Cartwright accusing Overthorpe residents of being too "genteel" to want their children to receive a Middleton Cheney education, people on both sides calling each other "fools", and "Order!" having to be cried often. There were accusations of selfishness and of one parish trying to rob the other. Things became heated again over the question of burial-grounds and the cutting up of parishes in recent years.



The Rev. Blencowe pointed out that when Marston had lost part of what was now Middleton, they had lost £1,000.

“But was not a considerably *larger* value added?” asked Mr. Treadwell.

“I don’t remember about any value being *added*” rejoined Blencowe.

“I believe you will find that there was.”

“Yes; about £3,000”, agreed Mr. Anker. You can just imagine the frustration in Mr. Knightly’s voice as he said,

“I don’t think it matters – whether £3,000 or £50,000.”

He was forced to sum up by saying that the committee would do their best to arrive at a fair decision; he did not suppose that they would please everybody.

You never can.

### IN THE BEGINNING

Or to be more accurate, in 1086, which is thought to be the year in which William I ordered the Domesday Book to be written, inventorying the entirety of his newly conquered kingdom. It is popularly thought that the Domesday Book was a list of villages and that to find your village name in this list indicates its antiquity. In fact, although it was an exhaustive survey, it nonetheless contained several omissions; all of London for one! Furthermore, villages as we understand them (with a church, various tradesmen, a green, a mill etc.) do not seem to have come into existence properly until around the twelfth century. There has been a great deal of archeological work done around Brixworth in this county, because of its excellent Anglo-Saxon church, but instead of a single village it appears that no less than thirty nameless settlements are dotted around that centre.

In Domesday a landowner’s “minor” estates are often lumped in with their main one. It was actually a list of land-ownership for taxation purposes; not a list of villages. That is why the questions asked are all financial: how many hides? (a *hide* is around 120 acres of arable land). How many ploughs were available to work it, and how many labourers to use them? Fishponds and watermills were also listed as these made a difference to the financial value, and finally, the entire estate was valued as a whole. Neither Overthorpe nor Warkworth are mentioned, but this does not mean that there were not settlements here, rather that they must have been hidden within the property of one of the magnates. Middleton Cheney and Kings Sutton were both held for the King by Hugh de Grandmesnil, so perhaps the land in between them was also his. However it is even more likely, given the geographical arrangement of the parish right next to Banbury, that Warkworth Parish as a whole was held by the feudal lord of Banbury town, who was the Bishop of Lincoln.

*The Northamptonshire Archeological Survey* states that “numerous coins of the early emperors” are recorded from the parish, but that these may well have been discovered mostly in the Grimsbury area of the parish, which once contained a Roman road. After the Roman Empire abandoned Britain in the fourth century, this area of the lower-midlands was part of the Kingdom of Mercia, which was inhabited largely by Angles rather than the Saxons; the latter were mostly based in the south. The Mercians were defeated in battle by the Danes in 873 and from then until

the Norman Conquest; this region was right on the border of the Danelaw, because although Alfred the Great managed to re-capture a large part of *Engleland*, he never really regained control of this bit. During much of the Anglo-Saxon period, this area would have seen a great deal of warfare, as the strong kingdom of Wessex pushed up from the south to encompass most of Oxfordshire and the Danelaw pushed west from Northamptonshire, both attacking this tip of the kingdom of Mercia. It is no wonder that the name of Banbury is derived from the Old English word for violence and bloodshed!

The ancient kingdoms were beginning to divide and re-arrange their borders during the Anglo-Saxon period, and the “Shires” were forming. *Shire* is Saxon for “share”, and each had a *Shire-Reeve* (Sheriff) to administer justice. Each shire was then sub-divided into *Hundreds*. It is not certain where the name came from, but it could mean each area of land containing 100 hides, or perhaps 100 families, again for taxation purposes. As hundreds are all different sizes when viewed on a map, the latter seems likely. Overthorpe and Warkworth are situated in Kings Sutton Hundred, which is one of the largest in Northamptonshire, so might well have been quite sparsely populated; certainly it contained no large towns. After the Norman Conquest, William gave control of the shires to his Norman noblemen, who were called Counts, and from them we arrive at the word “counties”.

### THE ORIGINS OF PLACE NAMES

The names of the various hamlets in the parish each date back to at least the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Overthorpe almost certainly derives from the Old Danish word “thorpe” (*yorp*), meaning either “a hill”, which nobody can deny that this village sits upon, or “a secondary settlement”. It is mentioned as *Trop juxta Bannebyr* in a 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscript and is clearly called *Overthorp* in the Assize Rolls for 1330. Warkworth probably describes quite simply the “worth” of a chap called Wark, or rather an Anglo-Saxon name from which that derives. *Worth* can mean “a clearing or enclosure”, so it could easily have been “Wark’s Enclosure”. However, a 13<sup>th</sup> century document spells the parish name as *Wauerkeworth* and *wauerk* is Old English for “spider”. But personally I find “Spider’s Clearing” less likely, although you will often find it described thus in local history books.

The other hamlets in the parish were of course, Grimsbury, Huscote and Nethercote. *Grimsburie* (the *burgh*, or “stronghold”, of a fellow named Grim) was listed as such in the Northamptonshire volume of the Domesday Book, while *Nerthercote* appears in the Assize Rolls of 1202 and can be found described as *by Bannebury* in 1392. *Hussecote* is mentioned in 1497 but is likely to be earlier, although I can’t find an earlier reference. The latter two hamlets derive their names from *cote*, so we have “the cottages of Hussa or Hussy and the other cottages that are near them but further south”.

Incidentally, the name “Banbury” comes from the Saxon words *Bana* and *burgh*, meaning “manslaughter stronghold”! This is not really surprising, because the town is right in the middle of the country and from the Roman Legionaries right up to New Model Army, there have been people slaughtering each other around these parts for centuries!

*Chapter 1*

**LORDS OF THE LION**

*Lord of the Manor of Warkworth, cousin  
and heir of Sir John de Lyons.*

Sir John Chetewode, Sealed with the De Lyons arms 1399.

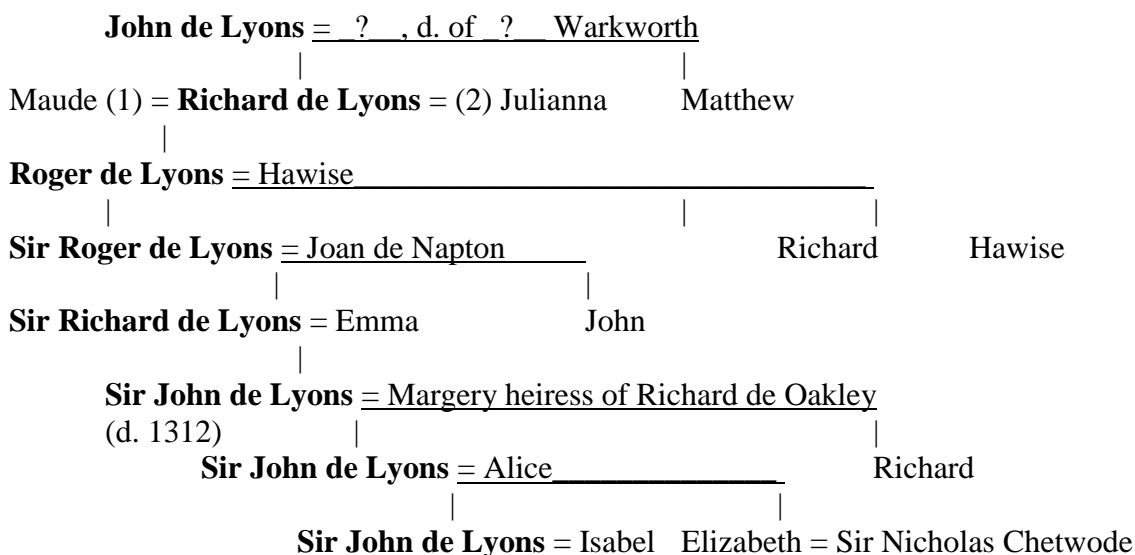
## LORDS OF THE LION

The beginning of the story of both Overthorpe and Warkworth dates back to before any of the houses had been built in either village. In fact there was no church here yet. When the medieval manor house was built we cannot say, but it presumably stood on the same site as its successor, which was built in 1595 after the old one had been demolished. The site lies immediately to the south-east of the church, but there is nothing to be seen of it now. Both villages were made up largely of tied cottages throughout the middle ages, at first owing feudal service to the Lords of Warkworth Manor. The tiny, one room cottages, each with a central fire and no chimney have long ago fallen down and been replaced, but when the last Lord of the Manor, the Earl of Newburgh was landlord in the 1800s, his tenants lived both in Overthorpe and Warkworth. The villages were like two arms adjoining a central body; if the church formed its heart, the castle formed its head. There is no telling exactly what the manor house looked like. It may have been a castle, but if it were, it would almost certainly have had a *motte*, or mound, rather like the one that survives (minus its keep) at Deddington. The raised ground near the church is too little to have been designed for a castle, so a manor house is more likely. It would have had storage on the ground floor, while the family rooms would have been upstairs.

It is rather difficult to tell Manorial History without the whole passage sounding like something out of the Old Testament with each fellow begetting someone else, but here goes. Baker tells us that the early Lords of Warkworth adopted the place-name as their surname, and were installed here until they ran out of male issue, when a daughter (her name is unknown, hence the question marks in the family tree) married John de Lyons.

## THE KNIGHTS OF DE LYON

Their son “Richard de Leone” gave two virgates of land in “*in Wafurcurt*” to his brother Matthew as well as a palfrey and a hawk. In the same document, he gave his wife Maude a gold ring. Richard’s son Roger laid by one third of his lands in “*Wavercurt*” to his father’s widow Julianna as a dower (i.e. widow’s pension) in 1203.



(d. 1385)

| (d. 1369)

**Sir John Chetwode**  
(bur. Warkworth 1412)

By 1303, the De Lyons were well established at Warkworth when Sir John and his wife Margery legally arranged to settle two parts of the manor upon themselves for their lifetimes as well as the remainder to their sons John and Richard.

Jon and Margery's son, another Sir John was summoned to court in 1329 to show and prove by what right he held the manor of Warkworth and he cited the above document of 1303. However, at that court, he was forced to confess that neither he nor his ancestors had a pillory for offenders against the assize of bread and that offenders against the assize of beer in his manor were not punished with the tumbrel until the third offence. Promising to address these faults, the manor was restored to him through law for the price of half a mark (3s 4d). During the fourteenth century the feudal system (of use of the land in return for feudal service) was giving way to a system of work for wages and land for rent. However the manorial court still had power over the villagers. The Reeve, who was like the Lord of the Manor's on-site foreman, would often bring cases such as one villager appropriating another one's pig, and the Lord would sit in judgement and sentence offenders. The crimes of assizes of bread and beer are quality-control laws, such as "loaves too small" or "ale too watery". Both the punishments are about public humiliation. The pillory is like the stocks, but taller so the offender stands. *Punishment by the tumbrel* had two meanings during the fourteenth century; either it could be wheeling the criminal through the street on a cart, to be abused by his fellow villagers, or alternatively, it could also mean a ducking stool.

It was this Sir John de Lyons who in 1332 founded a chantry here in Warkworth for two secular priests to be supplied by the Priory at Chacombe. This is likely to account for the gift that he granted in 1345 consisting of some of the rents from land in Grimsbury and Nethercote to Chacombe Priory, linking the several villages in Warkworth parish even as early as the fourteenth century. It was around this time that the first version of St. Mary's Church was built, and it is this Sir John whose effigy lies in an arched apse there. Monuments commemorating the de Lyons family and the church are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

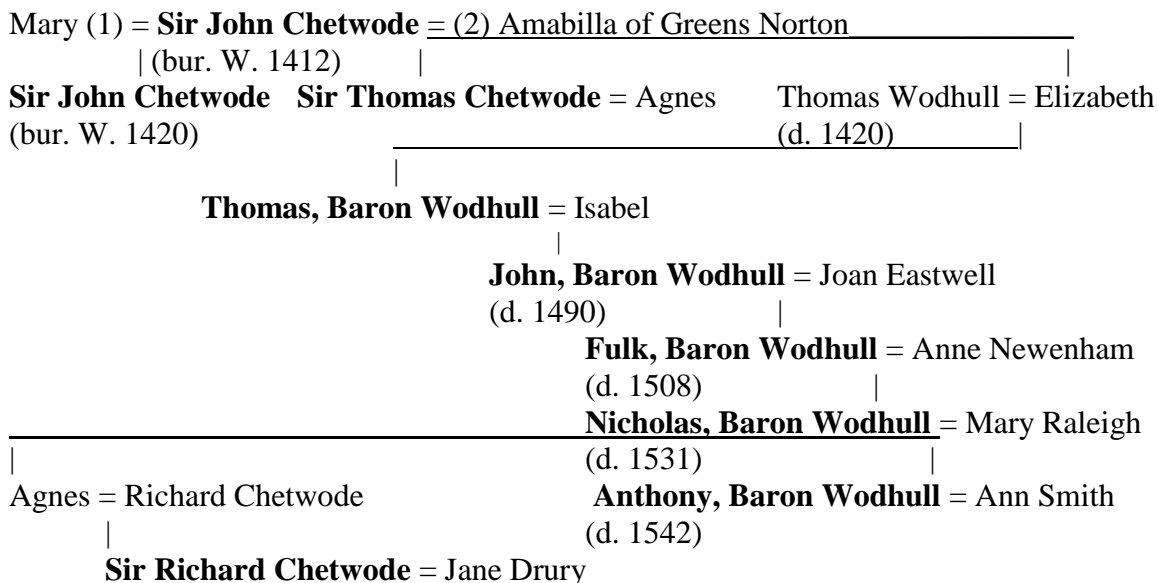
His son, a 3<sup>rd</sup> Sir John, who boasts the largest effigy in the church, married Isabel (sometimes called Margery or Margaret), daughter of Sir William and Isabella St. John of Plumpton in 1370, and she brought with her land in Middleton Cheney which came from her mother's inheritance. When Sir John died in 1385 without any children, the manor passed to his nephew, Sir John Chetwode.

### **THE ARMS OF CHETWODE AND WODHULL**

The Chetwode family, hailing originally from the town of Chetwood in Buckinghamshire, had probably been in the Midlands since before the thirteenth century; the Warwickshire lists of knights from the *Eyre* and *Curia Regis Rolls* for the years 1200-1232, number two generations of Robert de Chetwodes. Another Robert de Chetwode applied for respite of knighthood in 1256, which means that he asked to be allowed not to be a knight because it was too much trouble and

expense for him. Surprisingly such legal action was not uncommon during the Middle Ages. Less surprisingly, the government wouldn't let him off so he continued to be taxed accordingly.

The first Sir John Chetwode of Warkworth died in 1412, and his estate was left to his heir another John, who died without children not many years later. The second son, Sir Thomas, then inherited. His mother Amabilia's brass can be found in the church. In a deed of 1440, he settled all his estates onto his heirs male, or the male children of his daughters, or finally to his own sister, Elizabeth. As it turned out, he was not lucky with male heirs, so after Elizabeth's death, her son, Thomas Wodhull, styled Baron Wodhull, inherited the manor of Warkworth.



Nicholas Wodhull died in May, leaving the estate to his fourteen-year-old heir Anthony, but he in turn died without issue. He also left a donation to the church that can be read in the next chapter. So the estate then passed to Anthony's sister Agnes who had married Richard Chetwode, so that upon her death in 1585, the Chetwode family, in the form of Agnes's son Sir Richard was once again lords of the Manor of Warkworth.

Sir Richard Chetwode proceeded straight away to knock down the medieval manor house and build something modern and stylish in its place. The new Elizabethan manor house was local stone, but smoothly cut. It formed three sides of a square, was decorated with classically influenced columns and was, as Jane Austen said of Rosings, "by no means lacking in windows".

The Charter of James I making Banbury a Mayoral Town was granted in 1606, and amongst a long description explaining the consequent re-arrangement of local government, it lists as one of thirteen Justices of the Peace, *Sir Richard Chittwood*.

The Chetwode family name is, of course, commemorated in the street and small estate of houses at the southern tip of Overthorpe, built during the 1950s, originally as council houses, but they have now been privately owned for decades.

*Chapter 2*

**THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY**

*My bodie to be buried in the chappel of oure  
lady in Warkworth.*

Nicholas Wodhull, weak in body but of sound mind:  
nine and twentieth day of March Anno Dni 1541

## THE ARCHITECTURE AND FURNISHINGS

The parish church of St. Mary in the ecclesiastical parish of Warkworth is clearly the oldest building in these two villages, dating as it does from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, strictly speaking it is not really in either of them, but stands alone in the fields, straddling the two villages with only tiny lanes and footpaths. The outside structure is made of the local building stone, whilst smoother, paler limestone forms most of the interior such as columns and carvings. Much of the building has been heavily restored so although it dates from the so-called “decorated period” (in other words around the fourteenth century); it is in many places a Victorian interpretation of Gothic.

Nikolaus Pevsner in the Northamptonshire volume of his famous survey *The Buildings of England*, published in 1961, has less than half a page to write about St. Mary’s, and at first he does not seem very impressed.

Much restored and rebuilt in 1840-41 and 1869 by *Driver*, eg. The top parts of the tower, the chancel, and the S aisle windows, the S transept E window, the arcades of three bays with octagonal piers, capitals decorated with heads in the cardinal directions, and double-chamfered arches.

However, he warms to the monuments and describes the tomb-chest of “a knight of c. 1350 (Sir John de Lyons?)” as “unusually splendid” and illustrates it amongst the prints in the centre of the book. Pevsner goes on to write:

In addition a number of BRASSES, and first the headless and legless demi-figure of Sir John Chetwode + 1412 with praying hands (2 ft 3 in. figure, S transept). Then Lady Chetwode + 1430 (3 ft. 8 in., S aisle), John Chetwode + 1420 (3 ft 1 in., N aisle), Margaret Brounyng + 1420 (2ft 11 in., S transept), William Ludsthorp + 1454 (2ft 9in., S transept). Finally, yet another MONUMENT worth looking at is that to William Holman +1740, signed by R. Mottley and purely architectural. ... FONT. Circular, with cusped arches, probably C14. - BENCH ENDS. Mostly with tracery, but one with the Annunciation and one with a group of Donors and the inscription Ora pro nobis. - PLATE. Cup, 1570.

Whellan listed the restoration work about which Pevsner is so sniffy in his late-Victorian survey in the very matter of fact, statistical fashion that he uses, not unlike Pevsner’s own. He tells us that the upper story of the tower and the wall of the north aisle were rebuilt in 1841 and the church thoroughly restored in 1869. The whole was re-roofed, the chancel re-built and a new vestry and south porch erected. Some of the little faces all over the roof are fourteenth century although those around the capitals of the columns are Victorian copies. The medieval tiles patched in a hotchpotch around the largest effigy are also original.

The Victorian alterations were not to everybody’s taste however. Beesley, writing in 1841 describes them with disgust.

In this present year, this church has been subjected to repairs; and also to what some persons consider improvement. ... It has been fitted up with new deal painted seats, of which those in the nave are pews, or sleeping-boxes. To effect this change, the fine ancient open-carved seats have been removed ... All the backs, with their inscriptions and other beautiful carvings have been taken away, and the parts which escaped mutilation are now lying on the premises of a builder. The tiles also ... have been sold to adorn a summer house; and all the brasses of this church, excepting two, were thrown



away unheeded, and might have been purchased of the workmen for a pot of beer, until Mr. Danby, the builder, greatly to his credit, buried them for security beneath a large flagstone in the nave.

So what did the church look like before this “instance of vandalism” (as Beesley terms it)? We have few clues. Baker visited it to include it in his *History* published in 1822. He writes: “The interior is paved with plain square tiles, and was formerly floored with ornamental Norman tiles of which some detached ones are still remaining; as are the old horizontal benches carved at the ends and in front. ... The west window of the nave retains the arms of Lyons.” As the Lyons family had already died out by the early fifteenth century, this window must have contained fourteenth century stained glass; it would be good to know if the whole window was coloured, or merely a coat of arms in the middle of otherwise clear glass. He also tells us that most of the windows were “small and mean”. Perhaps these other windows had only plain glass in them, because all of the present stained glass is Victorian, in an “arts and crafts” pseudo-gothic style that is very attractive and in keeping with the architecture of the church as a whole. Every window incorporates some text, so it is very clear what each window depicts.

The windows on the three sides of the choir illustrate key scenes from the life of Christ. On the left as you face the altar, is The Epiphany, with three kings rather squashed into the smallest window in the choir. That is balanced on the right by the scene of Mary and Martha at the tomb with the angel saying, “He is not here”. In other words the significance of the gifts of Gold Frankincense and Myrrh given to the Christ-child in the left-hand window is revealed in the fulfillment of the prophecy in the right-hand window. The central window behind the altar includes three scenes: the Annunciation, the Crucifixion and *Nole me Tangere*.

In the transept next to the pulpit are two large windows. The south window, which gets most of the sun and therefore often looks glorious and dapples all the stonework within with pink and blue light, depicts the Ascension of Christ. The east window shows many scenes on two levels, including miracles on the lower level and above them the four charitable scenes from *whatsoever ye do unto the most mean ye do also unto me*. Under the south window is a charming and rather elaborate holy water niche, but it is incomplete and shows some signs of iconoclastic vandalism.

The windows in the north aisle illustrate (starting at the back of the church) the Parable of the Sower, Peter’s Doubt, the Healing of the Leper and the Raising of Jairus’ Daughter. These are doubtless the windows which were described by Baker as “small and mean”, because they are certainly the smallest and darkest, those on the south side being very lovely. It was the Horton family who donated all the present stained glass to the church during the 1860s.

The present pews are late Victorian replacements. Presumably the parishioners at that time didn’t fancy the “painted sleeping boxes” any more than Beesley did. However, it is worth stopping to take a close look at the pew ends because a few of the original carved ends were rescued and inserted into the reconstructed benches. Some rescued carved text has been incorporated into the choir seats too, being from the *Agnus Dei*. We have no precise date for them, but stylistically they date to the fifteenth century. There are several pew ends featuring examples of tracery, but my two favourite panels are the ones depicting figures, and both are to be found in the nave.

One is a delightful carving of the Annunciation, composed with a large potted palm in the centre to form two balanced niches in which Mary and the angel Gabriel stand. Mary crowned with a large halo and wearing fifteenth century costume, holds her hands in the *orans* position of prayer (hands open as though mildly astonished) that was typically used by medieval artists to depict the “*Be it done unto me according to thy word*” section of the Annunciation. However, it is Gabriel who I particularly like in this carving. Being an angel, the sculptor has covered him in feathers, in addition to his wings, so that to the cynical modern eye he rather resembles a man in a chicken-suit. Perhaps this was the sculptor’s imagination, or perhaps it might have been based on an angel costume he saw in a mystery play. I have seen carved angels in the church in Warwick that look just the same. The composition includes a ribbon for text, but none was ever carved. The other pew-end that I like shows three fifteenth century donors, two gentlemen and a lady, kneeling in prayer before an open prayer book on a low lectern. Around their heads, a ribbon of text in gothic abbreviated script, reads: “*Ave Maria; ora pro nobis*” which is of course two lines taken from the Hail Mary ~ Hail Mary; pray for us. It is very tempting to guess that some of the other carved panels that are now missing might have shown other sections of the noonday prayer, the *Angelis*, from which the two panels I have described both form a part. Just imagine that the fifteenth century benches with carving “at the ends and in front” were still in situ as late as Baker’s visit in 1822 and were not ripped out until 1840. And then some were put back in 1869. Is not the march of fashion a curious thing?

The most exciting thing about the carved pew ends however, is pure conjecture on my part, but if you look at the carved strip representing the tiled floor on which the three donors are kneeling, you will see three initials carved under the figures. These are *I, I, and A*. Could those letters stand for John, John and Amabilia, the Chetwodes who lived at Warkworth Manor in the first half of the fifteenth century and who may well have commissioned these carvings? Certainly no one of the Wodhull family who succeeded them have Christian names which fit the initials, but if this panel *does indeed* depict the first and second Sir John Chetwode, then it may well date to as early as 1420, the year of the second Sir John’s death. The donors need not have commissioned it themselves because prayers for relatives who were already dead were commonplace in the Roman Catholic Middle Ages. Perhaps Sir Thomas Chetwode commissioned the carvings to remember his parents and his older brother in purgatory, at some time after he himself succeeded to the title in 1420.

The tower is square and includes a square turret on one corner. There is no staircase and the tower is accessible only by a ladder. It is in the same architectural period as the rest of the church, and contains two bells. It was the Wodhull family that lived at Warkworth Castle throughout most of the Tudor period, and Nicholas Wodhull’s will survives, dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 1531. He left £10 towards re-building the spire. This will hints that Warkworth, like nearby Kings Sutton and Middleton Cheney (though obviously smaller) once had a spire on the top of its tower. However, I have not yet found enough evidence to determine when it fell down or if it was ever replaced. It may just have been a slip of the pen however; the clerk may have written *steeple* although he meant *tower*.

The *reredos*, as the carving behind the altar is termed, is a lovely piece of sculpture, and depicts the animal attributes of the four evangelists in very high relief. Matthew and the winged lion of Mark are on the left of the central crowned cross and IHS, and the bull and eagle of Luke and

John are to the right. The influence of the Florentine gothic sculptor Ghiberti is very evident, and this work reminds me of his Sacristy Door in Florence. At some time in its life it has broken into several parts, which have since been glued back into place. Beneath it are brightly coloured Victorian tiles influenced by William Morris. The choir as a whole is attractively floored with similar “arts and craft movement” ceramic tiles. The small organ is by *Bryceson Bros. & Ellis* of London.

The font is carved limestone with a lead liner and a flat oak lid, with rather beautiful twisted ironwork on the top to hold together the planks. The ironwork is in a Celtic style and is probably by the same craftsman who made the hinges of the church door. The wooden lid as a whole doubtless only dates back to the nineteenth century restoration work, but the font itself is thought to be fourteenth century.

The pulpit is Victorian, but carved in a gothic style and is reached from twisting stairs through a rather charming diagonal arch on the corner of the nave and the transept.

At the capital of every column, edging window-frames and under most of the buttresses, can be found charming medieval carved faces. Some are human and some half-human-half-animal, and when my children were small they loved to give each other the giggles trying to pull faces imitating each one. There is one that has a sheep’s head but a human face above the large effigy.

The artist Peter Tillemans visited Warkworth Church on the 3rd July 1719 and made fairly detailed sketches of the effigies and brasses there. He did not bother much about who any of them were however, being much more interested in the sculpture than the history, so his notes add nothing to our study, although the brasses were more complete in 1719 than they are now, which is helpful. We are very fortunate to have these monuments as intact as they are, because both the effigies and the brasses are early examples of their types.

## EFFIGIES

To begin with the oldest monuments, we must look near the foot of the wall that is directly opposite you as you walk through the church entrance. Hidden behind the rather showier effigy of their son, in shallow arched alcoves, lie Sir John de Lyons and his wife Margery (sometimes called Margaret; the names were interchangeable at the time). This is the Sir John who died in 1312, but as his wife survived him for at least ten more years, we must date them at any time between 1310 and 1330. Both figures rest their heads on cushions supported by angels and Margery has another at her feet, while her husband rests his feet on a rather cuddly little lion that is a friendlier version of the one upon their family badge. Margery wears a loosely flowing gown with a veil-and-wimple headdress, and Sir John is wearing a three-quarter-length mail hauberk with a fabric surcoat over it, a simple conical helmet, spurs and a cruciform sword. The helmet is an open bascinet and was one of the types worn by the Crusading European knights in the Holy Land during the 3rd Crusade.

Like most medieval sculpture, these effigies, and that of their son, would have been painted in bright and life-like colours and would have given the impression of wax-works lying in their alcoves rather than the monochrome effect that we see now. The walls of the church too, of course, may well have been painted with scenes from *Christ’s Passion*, or from *The Last*

*Judgement* with its gaping mouth of Hell and demons torturing the wicked souls. Both were very common scenes to find enacted on the walls of even the tiniest village churches before the Reformation whitewashed them away. (A good example of a church from not terribly far away with surviving wall paintings is to be found at Ashby St. Ledgers, where St. Leodegarius church has one of the most complete cycles of the Passion, which dates to about 1500. Pevsner writes that it is “too faded to be enjoyed” but I disagree because I enjoyed it very much!) Baker (1822) suggests that these effigies commemorate the founders of this aisle of the church, which, though only speculation, is a logical supposition as the dates tally.

Standing between the nave and the north aisle is a very tall monument carved in clunch and covered in coats-of-arms and small figures on the top of which lies another Sir John de Lyons. He is the son of the one we have just discussed, whose exact dates of birth or death are unknown, but who was certainly alive in 1346, the same year as the Battle of Crécy. This effigy, which we hardly ever notice as we stand next to it to drink coffee after services, is exceptionally fine. Baker was delighted by this effigy and wrote, “The mustachios of his manly countenance curl over his helmet”, and so they do. The sides are covered in high gothic tracery in fairly deep relief, forming eight arches on each of the long sides. Each one of these contains a little knight, a little lady or a shield bearing the devises of the families to whom the de Lyons were related through marriage. Hartshorn thought that one of the figures represented the 3<sup>rd</sup> (and last) Sir John de Lyons. Around the base is a decoration of quatrefoils. We must imagine this monument polychrome and gilded! It must have been gaudy but impressive, and would not have failed to remind the husbandmen and labourers of the parish precisely whom God had set above them to rule!

Sir John himself rests his head on a helmet, with a lion-crest upon the top, the whole being supported by a pair of angels. This is an example of a completely enclosed form of helmet, which in this case is decorated in the way it would be for a tournament. If you now find yourself imaging him charging down the lists to joust, you may as well bear in mind that at this early date, a mini-battle would be a more accurate image, because the tilting barrier was not instated until around 1420! His feet rest on another lion, and lion-heads decorate his armour in several places. His shield is now slightly broken, but the lion rampant carved upon it is entirely intact. Like his father, he wears mostly mail, with an open-faced bascinet. His surcoat is rarely shown elsewhere and is a style called a *cyclas*, which is slit at the side-seams; on his right you can see the cross-lacing. The rear panel of his surcoat is ankle-length, whilst the front panel is cut higher than the knee. He is covered all over in graffiti from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ~ think how many people “woz here” since 1350! Above Sir John’s feet is a beautiful, small statue of the Virgin, which is believed to date from a similar period. She stands under a canopy of gothic tracery.

The shields illustrated include those of the wife of the last Sir John de Lyons, married in 1370 and those of Sir Nicholas Chetwode, who died in 1369. Both were presumably sculpted after those dates. A very full description of all three effigies can be found in Hartshorn: *Recumbent Effigies*, 1876.

## MONUMENTAL BRASSES

The brasses (removed during the Victorian era) are back in place, but are now kept under panels of carpet, so you will have to know where to look for them. They depict **Sir John Chetwode**, his second wife **Amabilla**, his son **John** and daughter **Margery** by his first wife Mary, and **William Ludsthorpe**, who was the husband of his youngest daughter by Amabilla.

From the entrance, turn left, and fold off the panel of carpet next to the font. This lady is Amabilla, née Strange, who was the second wife of Sir John Chetwode. I thought Amabilla was a strange name indeed, until I found two more in this area including the heiress to Chacombe; it seems not to have been so uncommon in this region during the Middle Ages. She died in 1430 and is shown wearing a veil over the slightly horned headdress of the time. Her clothing consists of a mantle over a gown which like all upper-class dresses of the fifteenth century, is about 30cm too long for her and so drapes picturesquely upon the ground in heavy folds around her feet. Her lapdog that sits amongst the folds of her gown has a bell on his collar.

Her husband Sir John Chetwode used to be depicted in another brass, which was described by both Baker in 1822 and Bridges in 1791 as well as being present in 1961, when Pevsner described it. Sadly, this gentleman was no longer whole in Pevsner's time, having lost both his head and his legs, which disappoints armour historians because apparently the helmet was an early form, rarely seen in brasses as early as 1412 (the year of Sir John's death).

Peter Tillemans' drawing does not do much to fill us in on how it may have looked, because the sketch is so vague that it looks more like a man with toothache, who has simply bandaged up his chin! Apart from that, he wears full plate armour in a style typical of the first half of the fifteenth century, and what appear to be two swords, but are actually a sword and dagger. Baker can help us out with the helmet however, because although by the 1820s both legs had already been "wantonly removed", the head was still complete and we get the impression that it was not unlike that of his son, who is to be found elsewhere in the church.

Another knight may be uncovered if you turn right from the entrance and fold back the carpet under the elaborate marble columns of William Holman's monument in the south transept. This gentleman is Sir John's son-in-law, William Ludsthorp. He wears no helmet, but heraldic mantling billows around his head as well as a tournament helm with a dog-crest. His hair is cut in the very short pudding-bowl style of Henry V, and around his neck is a dagged mail collar. He too wears full plate armour in the deeply fluted style of the high gothic period, with extended pointed elbows and toes. There is what appears to be a lance-stop on the right side of his breastplate. He is armed with a sword and a handsome roundel dagger, and he stands on a hillock his feet resting on his greyhound.

There are two further brasses, of Sir John Chetwode and his sister Margaret Browning (son and daughter of the Sir John above). The knight lies under a panel of carpet between the effigies of the de Lyons family, in front of a table used for coffee. He is dressed in a very similar style to Tillemans drawing of his father's brass, except in small details of the armour (plainer gauntlets and fan-shaped *couters*, or elbow-pieces). His feet rest on a curly-maned lion and his sword pommel is of a typical fashion in use during the Hundred Year's War. Above his head are empty, shield shaped indentations, presumably for heraldic devises that have since been lost. His inscription is in medieval French rather than Latin and reads:

***Icy gist John Chetwode le fils de John Chetwode ch'r qui morist le v jour de junn l'an de grace MCCCCXX de qui alme tout puissant Dieu eit m'ci Amen.***

(Here lies John Chetwode the son of John Chetwode knight who died the fifth day of June in the Year of Grace 1420 on whose soul almighty God have mercy. Amen.)

His sister can be found lying covered in a panel of carpet underneath the pulpit. She wears a rather simple close-fitting wimple and veil, and a full-bodied gown, belted in at high-waist level, in a style less ostentatious than Amabilla. Her gown has loose, turned-back cuffs and a talbot sleeps amongst the folds of her heavy gown at her feet. Her inscription reads:

***Ici gist Marg'ie la file de Sir John Chetwode rh'r fem'e a John Brounyng esquier q'morust et gist a Melbury le secunde jour de May l'an de grace MCCCCXX. et cest Marg'ie morust le jour de Seinte Anne mesme l'an queur almes Dieu assoile.***

(Here lies Margaret the daughter of Sir John Chetwode wife to John Browning esquire who had died and was buried at Melbury the second day of May in the Year of Grace 1420. And Margaret died on St. Anne's Day the same year whose souls God save.)

In Bridges' *History* of 1791 there is even a further brass cited, which Baker writes had disappeared by the time of his visit. It was to Elizabeth Wodhull, the eldest daughter of Sir John and Amabilla, through whom the Wodhulls inherited Warkworth Castle. Unfortunately, her image is not described but the inscription read:

***Hic Jacet Domina Elizabetha Wodhull quondam uxor domini Thome Baron de Wodhull. Et filia et heres domini Johannis Chetwode et --- et heres Domini Johannis de Lyons que obiit vii de mensis Augusti Ao Dom. MCCCCLXXV cujus Anime propiccietur Deus. Amen.***

(Here lies Lady Elizabeth Wodhull who was wife of Sir Thomas Baron Wodhull. And daughter and heiress of Sir John Chetwode and --- and heiress of Sir John de Lyons, who died the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month of August Year of our Lord 1475 Life everlasting God. Amen.)

The clothing of ladies that date from the 1470s on other brasses I have seen often consists of figure-hugging gowns with a boat-neck and tight sleeves. On their heads they often wear a fez-shaped hat, with a transparent veil over it. Perhaps Elizabeth looked like that, but her clothing could have been behind the fashion.

## OTHER MONUMENTS

Near the brasses, in the south transept, the walls are covered with the monuments of the Holman and Eyre families, whose stories are related in chapter 4. The floor of the nave is paved with their marble tombstones. If you look at these monuments and compare them to one another, you can clearly see the rise and rise of the family fortune. Philip Holman, the first of the family to reside at Warkworth, has a rather modest stone; his coat of arms with its Holman arrowheads is carved in low relief and the Latin inscription recalls simply his name, age and date of death. However, as the family became important enough to marry into the house of Stafford and to increase their estates in Britain and abroad, the monuments become more expensive, more deeply carved, and much wordier! Of course this development is due equally to the changing

fashions in art, whereby, the relative simplicity of the mid-seventeenth century, gives way to the overblown rococo style a hundred years later. Then during the more simple, naturalistic era at the end of the eighteenth century, ostentation is replaced by the three plain oval tablets dedicated to Maria Onslow, née Eyre who died in 1800, Lady Mary Radclyffe, first wife of Francis Eyre, dated 1798 and finally, Francis Eyre's own tablet, erected by his widow Sarah.

By far the most elaborate monument (listed in Pevsner) is the architectural confection in two kinds of marble that takes up the whole west wall of the south transept. It dates to the height of mid-eighteenth century flamboyance and commemorates William Holman. The composition incorporates Corinthian columns and a Hellenistic broken pediment in which sits the Holman coat of arms. At least the helm, mantling and shield are there, but the heraldic devise itself is not, so perhaps it was formally painted onto the smooth surface left vacant for it and has since faded away, as the crest of Mary Radclyffe is now beginning to do. The carving also includes two flaming torches and four seraphs. The text was formerly gilded, and several traces of the gold remain.

On the wall next to the entrance is the memorial to the two sons of the Blacklocks. It takes the form of a carved marble plaque, topped with the crest of the family that depicts three black locks.

IN MEMORY OF GEORGE HERBERT BLACKLOCK DIED 14 JUNE 1920 AGE 42 ALSO OF  
ALGERNON HADEN BLACKLOCK 2<sup>ND</sup> LIEUT. ARG. & SUTHD. HIGHRS. WHO FELL IN  
ACTION AT LE MAISNIL EN WEPPE FRANCE 21 OCTOBER 1914 AGE 20. SONS OF  
JOSEPH HERBERT BLACKLOCK AND OF JULIA HIS WIFE SOMETIME OF OVERTHORPE.

The Blacklock family lived at Overthorpe Hall during the nineteenth century and are described in a later chapter. There are also Blacklocks named on the simple wooden memorial crosses under the pulpit which commemorate those slain in the Great War. Above the crosses, on an engraved brass plaque, is the list of the dead from Warkworth Parish: 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. A.H. Blacklock, Pte. F.B. Dallow, Pte. H.D. Loveday, Pte. F.G. Vince and Pte. J. Vince.

The Creed, Commandments and Lord's Prayer on either side above the door are painted onto sheets of metal in the Victorian "arts and crafts" style in the suitably Christian colours of red, blue and gold.

### **THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

Sir John de Lyons founded a Chantry here in 1332 for two secular priests to pray for the sick, the dead and other issues according to what they were requested to do. The nearby Priory of Chacombe provided the said priests, for whom De Lyons granted rents and profits from some of his Warkworth lands. In 1346, Edward III granted Chacombe Priory a license for the alienation of eight messuages of land which were the gift of Sir John de Lyons, as well as gifts of lands from two other gentlemen on the same license. Perhaps it was due to these extra profits that the Prior of Chacombe was able to loan the king £5 13s 4d towards his war in France in 1347. Nothing is heard again about the Chantry established by Sir John or its connection with Chacombe Priory until 1552.

Legend has it that before the present occupants came to live at *St Brides* in Overthorpe, “a white monk” haunted the house. For fear of not being able to sell the property, the previous occupant had the spectre formally exorcised by the Bishop of Peterborough, and I am assured that nobody has heard or seen him since. The house is one of the oldest in the street, stone built and retaining its thatched roof; a chimney is dated 1699, but it is very likely that parts of the interior are rather older. They are not medieval however, but perhaps this building replaced an earlier one on the same site. Word of mouth in this area has always claimed that there was a monastic hospital around here. The alleged monk could have been part of that complex. Apparently this accounts for the name of the building because St. Bride might have been the saint to whom the hospital was dedicated. St. Bride is the patron saint of poets, blacksmiths and healers and has always been much more popular in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland than in England, although there are about 20 churches in England dedicated to her. St. Bride (or Brigid of Kildare) is said to have helped the Virgin give birth to Jesus (a part of the story that seems to have been overlooked by St. Luke!). She is therefore the protectress of pregnant women and midwives, and due to her having tended Mary and Joseph’s cattle, she is also sometimes called “Christ’s Milkmaid”. Her saint’s day is the 1<sup>st</sup> February and is supposed to herald the very first signs of spring. I have not found documentary proof of a hospital at Overthorpe. There was certainly a medieval chantry here in addition to the church, and there was a hospital dedicated to St. Leonard in Grimsbury (a Leper hospital from which *Spital Farm* nearby derives its name). There is no reason to insist for certain that there was *not* some form of hospital connected with Warkworth Chantry; Warkworth was a subsidiary house of Chacombe and the monks at Chacombe were Austin friars who did wear habits of “sheep colour”, so that might indeed be the “white monk”.

Another possible solution for the house name could be that the building was named during the lifetime of the Roman Catholic Mission in the village. There were friars working at the mission with Fr. Hersant and several of their bodies, wearing habits, were re-interred at St. John’s Church in Banbury when the Chapel was demolished. They were Franciscans mind you, but a brown monk might look white if he is nothing but ectoplasm!

Chacombe Priory was one of the earliest to be dissolved by Henry VIII’s Act of Suppression, in 1536, because it could not even generate the minimum income requirement of £200 a year (only managing to scrape together an income of £85 13s 5d for the year in 1535). Their lands began to be parceled up for a quick sale to create money for the crown; the Prior was granted a pension of £14, but no mention is made of any compensation for the other brothers.

Not long afterwards, Nicholas, Baron Wodull of Warkworth Manor, died a Roman Catholic in spite of Henry VIII changing the state denomination. He asked in his will, that his “body be buried in the chapel of Our Lady in Warkworth” and directed his executors to provide a yearly salary of 8 marks, for twelve years following his death, to a priest to sing masses for the souls of himself and his parents (a mark is 14 shillings). He also left £20 to the vicar of Warkworth for forgotten tithes, £10 towards rebuilding the steeple, a gown of black satin to make into a cope and some of his wife’s clothing to be turned into vestments and other ornaments. I wonder what happened to the vestments that were made from those gowns; they certainly would not have been worn for very long, because they were bequeathed in 1542, only five years before the laws of Edward VI swept all custom and ceremony from the church in a rush of fervent iconoclasm.



It was during the reign of that young king that we again find a reference to those lands granted to Chacombe Priory centuries earlier. In an indenture of 1552, Thomas Reeve and George Cotton received a grant of “all the land in Warkworth and Overthorpe parcel of the late priory of Chalcombe”. They sold it on a few years later, to William Taylor, whose inventory made when he died “an old man” in 1595, is printed in full in the next chapter. His eldest son Richard was baptised in 1565, so it is likely that he was a young family man when he purchased the former priory lands that must form part of the eighteen ridges of crops in his inventory.

Little is known about the life of the church during the early seventeenth century. It seems quite likely that services remained fairly high, because of the influence of the families at the manor. During the English Civil War the castle was a Royalist garrison, and they too were probably traditionalists. After the war, in 1655, a parliamentary commission valued Warkworth Rectory at about £40 a year. Philip Holman was named in the same document as the patron of the living at that time and Rev. John Eyre, Vicar of Marston St. Lawrence and Parson of Warkworth received the profits from both. Mr. William Gilbert supplied the cure of Warkworth for which Eyre allowed him £25 a year.

When Whellan visited in the 1870s, shortly after the restoration work, the living was in the gift of John Alexander Blencowe Esq. and the incumbency of the Rev. Thomas Blencowe of Marston St. Lawrence. Monuments to the Blencowe family may be observed in the church at Marston.

About four years ago, when Miss Cissy Bennet still lived in the village and got about delivering the benefice magazine, she told me a little about her parents’ involvement with the church at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her father was churchwarden for many years, and her mother used to provide the ingredients for the sacrament. As well as purchasing the wine, she would bake fresh bread on Saturday evening, then early on the Sabbath she would cut it up into small, diced portions for the congregation. I asked her when wafers were introduced here, and she wasn’t sure, but said that it wasn’t until after the First World War.

## **CHARITIES**

These were briefly mentioned in the introduction. There were a number of charities in this parish, including the Taylor Doles and The Horton Charity. The word “dole” means charity ~ that which is doled out. Many large houses and farms used to have a Dole Cupboard near the back door, in which old clothes or left-over food was placed ready to give to beggars, rather like the dole cupboard that can be seen in the great hall at Sulgrave Manor. It is from this word that we get the phrase “on the dole”, meaning receiving unemployment benefit, because back in the 1920s and ‘30s, many of the people forced to take it still considered it as a shameful charity, an attitude that has since disappeared along with the phrase. Ask any child if they have ever heard the phrase “on the dole”; they hardly ever have.

The Taylor family, who were prevalent in both these villages from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until Victorian times, set aside some money to accrue interest so that each year bread (and later food generally) could be distributed to their struggling neighbours. It was normal for such charities to insist that the money is given as goods, because “the poor” were thought to be silly people who would not use cash wisely! This charity was the most ancient in the parish, but was wound up

early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the 1894 local government shifts, as well as the Taylor family leaving the area, had made it less relevant.

Miss Mary Ann Horton was a member of the very altruistic family who were lords of the manor at Middleton Cheney, where they lived, as well as of Warkworth and Overthorpe (although we no longer had a manor house to go with our title). The family donated the almshouses in Middleton and of course the Horton Hospital in Banbury. Mary Ann contributed money to the church restoration between 1863 and 1868, and in 1869 she left in her will £500 to be invested, the income of which was to be used towards helping the poor of the parish. Her will states:

I give to the Vicar and Churchwardens of the Parish the sum of £500 to invest the same with the Charity Commissioners of England and to receive and expend the income thereof in the purchase of bread, coals and Blankets and other necessaries to be distributed yearly at Christmas among such poor of the said Parish whether receiving Parochial relief or not and without reference to their religious beliefs as the Vicar and Churchwardens for the time being shall deem most deserving of relief, but no part of the said income shall be distributed in money.

The annual income amounted to £13 8s 6d; a not inconsiderable sum in old money and at one time twenty-four people benefited. In recent times however, the income has been translated into a mere £13.45, and in 1996, the Charity Commissioners decided that it was no longer practicable for them to deal with any charity below £1000, so the money was transferred to Barclays Bank, with a view to it gradually being allowed to close. Since that year four recipients have been given vouchers to be exchanged at a local food store, so they still receive goods rather than cash, according to the terms of Miss Horton's will. The year 2001 finally saw the closing of the charity after 131 years.

*Chapter 3*

**THE FIELD OF WARKWORTH**

*To William my son, my house ... and all the  
land I have in the feild of Warkworth.*

Will of William Frenche, carpenter, AD 1619

Although the *Northamptonshire Archaeological Survey* states that there are settlement remains along Warkworth's only street, it is impossible to tell for sure the size of the village at any date prior to 1791 because taxation returns always include the populations of the other hamlets within the old parish boundaries. However, in 1791, Bridges wrote that there were only five houses, which is not dissimilar to the number now, excepting the recent barn-conversions, so it is logical to assume that the village has been this size for a long while. Warkworth's relationship to the church remains unclear; the only surviving earthworks are behind *Manor Farm* and are apparently not extensive enough to be useful. However we are very lucky to have so many wills and inventories surviving from the Tudor and Stuart period; the surnames which they feature are so few as to suggest that Warkworth has probably never been any larger than it is now.

### THE ORDINARY INHABITANTS c.1500-1764

We can get quite a clear idea about the trades and industries that were carried on in our two villages between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries from these sources. The vast majority of the inhabitants were farmers; although some of the people owning land in Overthorpe and Warkworth were tradesmen, hardly any of them lived here, but seem to have earned an additional income from land-rents. There were several such tradesmen living in Grimsbury, which although part of Warkworth Parish, was of course much closer to town and therefore more suitable land for shops. Nearly everyone whose actual abode is listed as Overthorpe or Warkworth, however, is called a "husbandman" or a "labourer" or a "widow". The wills also tell us how financially secure these occupations left the villagers. John Magood of Overthorpe was worth £14 when he died in 1573 and four years later Thomas Butler of Warkworth, husbandman, died worth only £8. At that time a male servant would earn about £4 a year plus all his keep while a master tradesman such as a blacksmith might make £9 a year. Minor Gentlemen such as Lawrence Washington of Sulgrave Manor would have been making about £700 a year and we can assume that the Chetwodes' income was in a similar bracket, although the Holman family in the seventeenth century appears to have made rather more.

The will of William Taylor of Overthorpe, whose name cropped up in the previous chapter, is published by the *Banbury Historical Society*. The inventory that was taken upon his death in 1595 (coincidentally, the same year in which Warkworth Castle was built) is so interesting that I have chosen to reproduce it in full. A husbandman was a small farmer, sometimes subsidising his income with a trade in addition to farming; as we can see from the differences in the worth of Thomas Butler and William Taylor, there were wealthy husbandmen and starving husbandmen! Taylor was certainly not what the Tudors would have called a "gentleman" or even what used to be described as a "yeoman" (defined as someone owning land to an annual value of at least 40s), yet the very precise list of his goods and chattels drawn up by his executor and neighbours tells a fascinating story. Even the oak boards forming a ceiling over the hall are inventoried!

His house contained different wheels for the spinning of flax and wool, plenty of napery, and four beds, and for more delicate cookery than could sometimes be afforded by an open hearth, he owned a chafing-dish (a sort of earthenware charcoal brazier). *Gawbeirnes* is a phonetic spelling of "cob-irons" which were sort of hand-irons for use in the fireplace, while *hengens* are simply pot-hangers. *Keeveres* and *Cowles* are different shapes of wooden, coopered tub for use in brewing and dairy-work.

In land he owned eighteen and a half ridges of crops in the fields. Before the common fields of Warkworth were enclosed by Act of Parliament in 1764, we have to imagine the land around here without the patchwork effect created by the hedgerows. Prior to enclosure all the land around a village was divided into only two or three enormous fields, and then each field was subdivided into a large number of strips or ridges, each one separated from the others by a ditch or furrow. Each farmer or husbandman held a number of strips in different parts of the few fields, thus everyone had some strips on the good, rich soil, some on the indifferent soil, and probably a few bad strips too. Technically, each strip was 220 yards long and 5 and a half yards wide: one furlong by one rod. In effect though, they turn out to have been all sorts of sizes. Ridges were never entirely straight, because the ploughman always swung out to the left a bit towards the end in order to get his team around the right turn at the headland, where all the strips butt onto a long lump, so they all form backwards Ss.

Like most Tudor farmers, Larden did not concentrate solely on arable or livestock, but practised mixed-farming; the *three beaste* are cattle because in this part of the country we see no oxen used for farm work by this date, only horses. A store-pig is one almost fully-grown.

*The Inventory of William Tailor of Overthorpe, husbandman, "an old man" buried 14<sup>th</sup> May 1595, Inventory taken 11 July 1595 proved and exhibited 28<sup>th</sup> July 1595.*

*Inventory taken by Thomas Averell, Richard Frenche of Overthorpe and Edward Cowper of Banbury.*

In the Hawle: one old table upon too postes, one form, one bench, one cheare, one woollen wheele, one other litell form and a boarde, 6s 8d; One cupboard 5s; too little pare of gawbereines, a gridirne, hengers, a fyre shovel, to pare of potthookes, too little irne spites, a pare of old bellowes 6s 8d.

Brasse and Pewter: Too brasse pottes, too litell olde pottes, one other pott lyke a laver, too littell panes, one olde panne, one kettell, three olde candlesticks and a chaufing dishe, £1 13s 4d; 13 pewter dishes of all sortes and one olde fryinge panne 10s.

18 narrowe oken boards over the hawle, 6 ashen boardes and five planks 15s.

Lynen and napperies: 18 pare of hempton sheates £3; Foure hempton board clothes, eight napkins and three towels 10s.

In beddinge: One olde fether bedd, too olde matteresses, five olde bolsters with fethers 16s; One coverlet and too olde blankettes, 6s 8d; Sixe olde twillie clothes 5s; Three cowfers 6s; A peece of twille aboute sixe yards 2s.

Corne: Three strykes of malte 8s; One stryke of mastlen 3s; In mastlen one the grounds, foure ridges and a half £2 0s 3d; Tenne ridges of barlie £3 6s 8d; Foure ridges of peases £1 10s.

Irne ware: Too olde axes, a hatchet, to litell irne barres, too wedges, thre sheepickes, three reaping hookes and three sythes 11s;

Three litell olde lennen wheelles 1s 4d; Three sakes 3s; A powderinge troughe 2s 6d.

Foure olde bedstedes 4s; a ioyned cowfer 2s 6d; One rounde table, one foure feete 1s.

Cowperie ware: Fyve keevers and cowles, two olde vattes, one cherme, two mylk pannes and too pales 6s 8d; Sixe cheese boardes and one olde cowfer 3s; One brydeirne 6d; One olde malte millne 6s 8d; One goosepanne and a stell 8d; Olde here clothe 1s 6d; A wasshe barrell 6d.

Foure boardes of elme and astell 3s 2d; Plowe tymber 10s.

In the stable: a racke, one manger and other thinges 2s; One olde irne bounde carte with wheelles £1; One plowe and too harrowes 5s.

A hovell and overlayers 10s; Tymber and woodd £2.

Catell: Too mares £3 6s 8d; Three beaste £4; 17 sheep of all sortes, £6 6s 8d.

One carte rope, too pare of harnes and one ladder 5s.

His apparrell £1.

Implementes of howsholde stuffe and other thinges not before prayed 5s

Sum £39 1s 11d

Richarde Frenche also helped to compile the inventory of “John Bull of Grimsburie” (still part of our parish at that time) who died in 1600, leaving debts to Frenche himself as well as to “Richard Smarte of Overthrop”. When John Jackson, a surgeon of Banbury died in 1609, he owed one “William Cherry of Overthrop in ye county of Northampton, £2”. Richarde must have been a relation of William Frenche, a carpenter of Grimsbury, who in 1619 left to his son, another William:

my house that I now dwell in, and all the land I have in the feeld of Warkworth and Grimsbury, that is tenn arable lands and foure lese of greensward; and for lack of heir to Jone Kirnocke (his daughter) and for lack of heir to Peter French of Overthorp.

This confirms what we already knew from the 1764 act, that strip farming was still in place here, in spite of the Tudor impression that enclosure was occurring all over throughout the century. Incidentally, Whellan lists the inhabitants of Overthorpe in 1879 and they included one John French, a shoemaker, and a J. French signed the 1894 Overthorpe petition.

Indeed as we can see from our corrugated fields, the open field system continued until very late in history all around Banburyshire. The parish of Warkworth however is of particular interest because it was such a complicated case. The parish was divided into three townships, “vills” or “tithings” each paying their tithes to different parishes. Warkworth Tithing consisted of 960 acres and paid tithes to St. Mary’s church at Warkworth, while Middleton Tithing (consisting mostly of Overthorpe) had 950 acres and paid tithes to Middleton Cheney. In addition, Banbury Tithing, the largest at 990 acres contained Nethercote, Grimsbury and Huscote and paid tithes to Banbury. All three tithings paid highway rates to Warkworth and incidentally, the Warkworth parsonage belonged to Marston St. Lawrence church! When we read all this information as laid out and explained in the 1764 Act of Enclosure, we finally realise why it was thought logical for Overthorpe to become part of the temporal parish of Middleton Cheney in 1894. Banbury Tithing all became appropriated to Banbury when the Oxfordshire border was moved in 1889, and of course much of it now lies under the M40 motorway!

John Speed’s map of this county, which was published in 1599, was accompanied by a commentary in which he stated that the “soil is champion, rich and fruitful” although in actuality much of it was not well suited to grain production. He also tells us of the sheep

loaden with their fleeces of wool ... of all creatures the most harmless, are now become so ravenous, that they begin to devour men, waste fields and depopulate houses, if not whole townships, as one hath merrily written.

A degree of such enclosure of land for grazing sheep was indeed occurring throughout the late middle-ages and the Tudor period, but not so much as the people thought at the time. Riots against Enclosure in Northamptonshire and elsewhere had led to the Crown commissioning several inquiries into the practice in 1517, 1545, 1566 and 1607. An uprising in Oxfordshire in 1597 claimed to be for “Relief for corne and putting downe of inclosures” stating that around the town of Banbury “verie manie have inclosed, in everie place somewhat”. Although the Crown Commissioners seem to have uncovered a small amount of fraud and coercion, for the most part

little or no action was taken because the commissioners found that most of the relevant land was poor in any case.

Interestingly Speed's map includes the parish of Warkworth twice, once situated between Banbury and Middleton Cheney (where one might expect to find it) and then again out beyond Marston St. Lawrence (here called *Merston*) pretty much where Greatworth ought to be.

Whereas ridges of arable lands (or rights to rent them) were passed down from father to son, meadowlands tended to be mowed according to a system of drawing lots, so that some years you would mow a good bit of meadow, and others you'd have to mow a tatty bit. This parish had some wonderful customs for the mowing of its meadows.

There is a modern house, more or less opposite the *Manor House*, called *Ashe Meadow*. When the present occupants of the *Manor House* first moved in, in 1976, all that land was somebody's private orchard, but if we stretch back another hundred years in time, the land somewhere nearby took the form of a large grassy field. That field was called *Ashe Meadow*, and there was a particular tradition for mowing it each haymaking season. I first came across the tradition when reading Richard Griffin's memoirs (a manuscript now in the care of the Warkworth Churchwardens), but have since found it described over and over by successive historians of the area. It had ceased to be practised by the time Griffin lived here in the 1920s, because he wrote that he had lived here much of his life and had never even heard of it until several years after he had left! Baker also makes reference to the custom but decisively writes, "several curious customs *were formally* observed here at the annual meadow mowing" (my italics). So it had even fallen away by 1822. Here is the earliest version, which I found in Bridges' *History* of 1791, and I think it is well worth repeating in full.

*Within the liberty of Warkworth is Ashe Meadow, divided amongst the neighbouring parishes, and famed for the following customs observed in the mowing of it.*

*The meadow is divided into fifteen portions, answering to fifteen lots, which are pieces of wood cut off from an arrow, and marked according to the landmarks of the field. To each lot are allowed eight mowers, amounting to one hundred and twenty in the whole.*

*On the Saturday seven-night after Midsummer-day, those portions are laid out by six persons, of whom, two are chosen from Warkworth, two from Overthorpe, one from Grimsbury and one from Nethercote. These are called field-men, and have an entertainment provided for them upon the day of laying out the meadow, at the appointment of the lord of the manor.*

*As soon as the meadow is measured, the man who provides the feast attended by the hayward of Warkworth, brings into the field three gallons of ale. After this the meadow is run as they term it, or trod to distinguish the lots; and when this is over, the hayward brings into the field a rump of beef, six penny loaves, and three gallons of ale, and is allowed a certain portion of hay in return, though not of equal value with his provision. This hayward and the master of the feast have the name of *Crocus-men*. In running the field, each man hath a boy allowed to assist him.*

*On Monday morning lots are drawn, consisting of some eight swathes and others of four. Of these the first and last carry the garlands. The first two lots are of four swathes, and whilst these are mowing the mowers go double; and as soon as these are finished the following orders are read aloud:*

*“Oyez Oyez Oyez, I charge you under God and in his Majesty’s name, that you keep the King’s peace in the Lord of the Manor’s behalf, according to the orders and customs of the meadow. No man, or men, shall go before the two garlands; if you do, you shall pay your penny or deliver your scythe at the first demand, and this so often as you shall transgress. No man, or men, shall mow above eight swathes over their lots, before they lay down their scythes and go to breakfast. No man, or men, shall mow any further than Monk’s-holm-brook, but leave their scythes there and go to dinner; according to the custom and manner of this manor. God Save the King!”*

*The dinner, provided by the lord of the manor’s tenant consists of three cheese-cakes, three cakes, and a new milk cheese. The cakes and cheese-cakes are of the size of a winnowing-sieve; and the person who brings them is to have three gallons of ale.*

*The master of the feast is paid in hay, and is farther allowed to turn all his cows into the meadow on Saturday morning till eleven o’clock; that by this means giving in more milk, the cakes may be made the bigger.*

*Other like customs are observed in the mowing of the other meadows in this parish.*

### **THE HOMES IN WHICH THEY LIVED**

Raymond Wood-Jones has found in his study of the architecture of the region that even the houses of the relatively poor were constructed out of the local brown-red marlstone, wood having always being fairly scarce in the area, while stone was plentiful. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell *exactly* which of our village houses were occupied by the people whose wills and baptismal registrations we read. This is partly because people at the time obviously knew the person writing the will and therefore knew which house he lived in. Sometimes people owning a house in town apart from the one in which they actually dwelt, would describe the other one as, for example, “my house in shepe street that is by the bakers”, but none of the Overthorpe or Warkworth wills are helpful in that way. Furthermore, houses in this region are difficult to date because the builders were so traditionalist, and continued in much the same style for about three-hundred years, being content with the materials and methods used by their fathers before them. We can, however, get a good general idea about the sort of houses in which they lived.

Many period travellers have commented about the extensive use of stone as a building material in this area even for the houses of the poor. The local honey/brown marlstone has been quarried since medieval times at Horton and Burton Dasset. Timber was actually in fairly short supply at this end of Northamptonshire, so timber-framed houses, filled with wattle-and-daub, so usual elsewhere in the country, were fairly uncommon here from the seventeenth century onwards. Raymond Wood-Jones has found in his study of the architecture of the region that even the houses of the relatively poor were constructed out of the local brown-red marlstone, wood having always being fairly scarce in the area, while stone was plentiful. There was some use of



timber-framing of course, as can be seen in Kings Sutton, and probably there were such buildings here too, but they have since been replaced.

The traditional local plan is of long houses with rectangular rooms, created by a series of bays. Thus, a poor labourer's cottage might have only one room, consisting of one or two bays, whilst the house of a tenant farmer might have both a hall and a service-room of some kind. A husbandman as comfortably-off as William Taylor would certainly have had a house large enough to have accommodated his four beds, so I imagine one rather along the lines of *Warkworth Farm*, a plan of which can be found in Wood-Jones' book. Another house based upon the same basic long house format, which features in the book, is *Hill Farm* in Overthorpe. Taylor's inventory also states that his home had outbuildings, a stable and a hovel in which he kept firewood and other odds and ends, and many of such buildings must have been present in our two villages, although they are not often listed.

*Bromley Cottage* in Overthorpe, before the Victorian windows or modern extension, was probably a seventeenth-century, one room house; the blocked-in period window can be seen from the public footpath.

The pitch of the roof of local houses is nearly always high, creating a tall upstairs story or easy attic space. The walls of the buildings slope out slightly to counter the effect of the tall, heavy roof, and bracers of timber can quite often be seen through the stone at the gables. There were two coverings for roofs during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: thatch or stone tiles such as cover the roof of Sulgrave Manor. The stone tiles were only used by householders who could afford them, thatch being cheaper, but the quarries at Collyweston and Stonesfield have been constantly in use from the middle ages until this day. Robert Plot, writing in *Natural History of Oxfordshire* (1676), describes how the tiles were prepared. They are

dug first in thick cakes about Michaelmastime, or before, to lye all the winter and receive the frosts, which make it cleave in the spring following into thinner plates, which otherwise it would not do so kindly.

For those of you unfamiliar with the ecclesiastical calendar, Michaelmas is the 29<sup>th</sup> September. Each tile is a rectangle, the sizes of which vary because small ones were used near the apex while large ones were hung lower down. They have a hole in the centre of one end, which hangs from a peg on the purlins of the roof. There *is* a house in Overthorpe called *Stonesfield House*, but ironically it is the *least* likely to have ever been roofed in this way, because it is absolutely modern!

Much more common was thatch. Some houses in Overthorpe retain thatched roofs, but none in Warkworth, which is not surprising as that village was decimated by fire in 1811. Sometimes wood to form a ridge-beam was either too scarce or too expensive, and in such cases the ordinary inhabitants of this area used turf, not all over the roof, but in place of a ridge, using it as a strong base to which to sew the thatch. Again this information comes from Plot (note the mud-walls of the very poor).

The uppermost turf is not infrequently used by Thatchers and laid on Mud-walls, and the top of houses, in place and manner of those we call ridge tiles; not that it is so good as thatching (though

some say it better resists the wind) but because in some places wood is so scarce, that they cannot get spraises to fasten on Thatch; or else the people so poor that they care not to buy them

The floors of the common people were of beaten earth, which our local clay lends itself to very well, or, as the family became a bit richer, of stone flags of irregularly-sized rectangles, laid straight on top of the former beaten earth.

Other houses that date from this period include *Castle Cottage* and the oldest parts of *The Manor House* in Overthorpe. *Warkworth Farm* is the only building this old in Warkworth. There used to be very ancient cottages in Grimsbury, some of which survive in Victorian photographs, but as that area expanded and industrialised throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were demolished along with the 16<sup>th</sup> century Grimsbury Manor, in favour of more fashionable establishments. The Grimsbury Manor on Henef Way was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Chapter 5*

**ROYALISTS AND RECUSANTS**

*Their horse came to Broughton, Warkworth  
and other places thereabouts.*

The Pro-Royalist newspaper, Mercurius Aurelius AD 1644

The Elizabethan historian William Camden wrote that Northamptonshire was in his day “passing well furnished with noblemens’ and gentlemens’ houses”, and many of them survive for us to visit to this day; another look at Speed’s 1599 map will show us Holdenby, Althorp, Kirby and Sulgrave. However one gentleman’s house that was quite well known in its day has vanished without a trace save for some uneven ground. *The Northamptonshire Archaeological Survey* tells us that until 1970 a terraced area was preserved in pasture and can be seen in aerial photographs taken in 1947, but the whole site is now arable. This was Warkworth Castle, the Elizabethan building bought by “a Scrivener of St. Paul’s in the City of London” in 1629.

### THE WEALTHY SCRIVENER AND THE WAR

Named Philip Holman, he bought Warkworth Manor and all the land and appurtenances thereto from Sir Richard Chetwode for the considerable sum of £14,000. It was during Philip’s lifetime that we believe the manor house reached its final architectural form, a castellated building (thus accounting for its being described as a castle though it was not in fact a fortified building) built of smooth-cut, brown stone, and forming three sides of a quadrangle. Eighteenth century illustrations of the house also show a semi-circular porch or entrance. The Holman family was not unimportant, and married into several of the great families of the day who shared their own loyalty to what Baker describes as “the faith of their ancestors”. Warkworth castle formed, during the seventeenth century, an island of Roman Catholicism in an ocean of Puritanism. Banburyshire was synonymous with severe Protestantism, as can be seen from the plays of the Jacobean era. Ben Johnson’s wonderful comedy, *Bartholomew Fair* mocks the well-known town of Banbury with *Zeal-of-the-Land Busy*, a character embodying the two attributes for which Banburymen were famous in Jacobean London: rampant Puritanism and an ability to make pastry cakes filled with dried fruit. It is not known for sure whether Philip Holman himself was a Catholic, because it is not declared anywhere; he may have already been a quiet, closet Catholic, or he may have been a “high” Anglican. We are only certain about the faith of his successors.

Philip Holman, sensible chap that he seems to have been, did not play a large part in the English Civil War, which is just as well because after the first phase the Royalist party, with which Holman, as a traditionalist, would pretty much have to side, lost. Many gentlemen on the losing side had their property sequestered by the government, but Holman hung on to Warkworth, and the house survived the war, unlike Banbury Castle.

This area, a gateway to three counties, saw a great deal of action during the middle of the seventeenth century, and there would often have been soldiers marching through our two villages; the road up from Banbury Bridge, through Grimsbury is a very ancient causeway. Very early in the war, after the Battle of Edgehill on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1642, King Charles I lost the minor advantage that he had gained over Sir Thomas Fairfax. By hanging about to capture Banbury Castle and Broughton Castle instead of making straight for London, he allowed Fairfax to get back to the capital before him, which all commentators judge to have been a vital mistake. Prince Rupert of the Rhine, one of the King’s chief officers, mentioned it briefly in his diary, in which he referred to himself in the third person:

*Oct 27*: Banbury was then taken, and ye Prince desir’d to have 3000 horse, musquetiers ... and with them he would march to Westmr who were then well dispos’d for ye K; and had intended to have

taken ye Parl house and knowing well he might of got thither before ye Ld of Essex. But some of ye Consell were agt it. ... And so that good Councill of ye Ps was rejected. On ye same day ye P took Ld Sayes house.

From that year onwards there would always have been soldiers about because Banbury Castle was a Royalist garrison, attempting to guard the path from London to the north, and Warkworth Castle too served to garrison a small force of Royalist cavalry throughout the war. August 1643 saw the Battle of Towcester, and two years after Edgehill, the centre of operations had returned to "Banburyshire".

On the afternoon of Saturday May 6<sup>th</sup> 1644 a skirmish took place at Middleton Cheney Towne Field, at which various reports suggest that there were possibly over 200 men killed ~ 46 were buried at Middleton Cheney "near the church". Others escaped "in small companies into by-lanes and hedges". The following month, the King's army was heading north towards Daventry, with a view to meeting up with Prince Rupert who was by that time in Yorkshire. However, Sir William Waller's Parliamentarian force, up from London, was marching neck and neck with them, and it was inevitable that the two forces would clash sooner or later, so the Royalist force turned around and came back to Banbury.

Both forces wanted to gain Crouch Hill to the south west of the town and Waller, who had less distance to travel, won the race, leaving the King's army to secure a position in the hills around Overthorpe and Grimsbury. King Charles himself spent the night prior to the Battle of Cropredy Bridge in "a yeoman's house in Grimsbury", which local tradition when Beesley wrote his history in 1841, believed to have been Grimsbury Manor, which has since been replaced with a later building.

The enlisted men made shift as best they could. Luckily for those who had only their cloak and a grassy bank, the weather was fairly good that June, as Thomas Ellis wrote, "our lodging having for severall nights been ... God's cold earth ... God in much mercy hath afforded us sweet temperate weather." There were also plenty of soldiers billeting themselves on local people all around the town and its villages. We may assume that in Overthorpe that June, things were similar to the situation complained of by the Parish Constable of Bishop's Itchington, where for two days and nights many stray soldiers had insisted on free quarter, claiming that "theire Captaine was sicke at Gloster". The Constable, being a proper man in his post, listed them all, as well as the unfortunate villagers who had to put up with them! There were ten lodged at Richard Hunt's, seven with Widow Avery, six at the Parsonage and one John Tomkins got the short straw, having to find space for twelve men and their horses. The list goes on to reach around a hundred men!

It was from Overthorpe then, that the King's Army marched down the hill at about eight o'clock on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> June 1644, through Grimsbury, and step for step with the Parliamentarians along opposite sides of the Cherwell River, until they came to the small but decisive bridge at Cropredy. To everyone's surprise, not least Waller's, the Royalist army was victorious that day, and consequently desertion was rife from the ranks of the losing side. The same thing is reported to have happened as did after the skirmish at Middleton Cheney, and many of Sir William Waller's Londoners ran away, wandering hungry and dispirited through local villages, making nuisances of themselves.

All these enormous armies, each consisting of tens of thousands of men, horses, artillery and baggage wagons, tramping hither and yon all over the parish of Warkworth cannot have given much pleasure to the local population. June and July were haymaking time, and heaven knows what was left of the arable crops to harvest come August. Richard Symonds described in his diary the King's victorious march away from our parish after Cropredy Bridge:

Munday morning, about four of the clock, his Majestie, with all his army, drums beating, colors flying and trumpets sounding, marched through Middleton Cheney, from thence to Farmigo, Aynoe on the hill ...

“And good riddance” was probably the thought of Master Taylor and Master French of *Overthorp neare Banburie*.

The pro-Royalist newspaper *Mercurius Aurelius* tells us that there were Parliamentary cavalry in the area on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1644 “on which day their horse came to Broughton, Warkworth and other places thereabouts”. The historian Sir William Dugdale confirms this report and writes that around late July “My Lord Fiennes (William Fiennes, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Saye and Sele) had arrived at Broughton Castle”, while Philip Holman was “at his own house at Warkworth on the other side of Banbury”. The following month, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, Warkworth itself saw action, which was witnessed by Sir Samuel Luke. He explains that a royalist cavalry sortie, part of the Earl of Northampton's regiment from Banbury Castle, drove a small parliamentary force to Warkworth, before being counter-attacked and losing an officer, one Captain Middleton. He died “by a carbine shot through the braine” as did his cornet “one Smith, a stout plunderer” who was fatally wounded, “whose bodyes Major Lydcott carryed the same night to his quarters at Warkworth for burial”. The true siege of Banbury, however, did not take place until three days later on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Banbury Castle was “relieved” on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1644.

There was another fatal skirmish in the parish in May of 1649, a few months after the execution of Charles I in January. 200 troopers with Leveller beliefs revolted in Banbury, under a Captain Thompson. New Model Army troops quickly put down the revolt, but the ringleaders escaped and chase was made. Government forces soon caught up with the rebels, where Thompson allegedly shot and killed Lieutenant Parry, one of the Parliamentary officers. The Parish Register of St. Mary's Church, Banbury where Parry was buried records that he was shot in *Ashe Mead*, which historians presume to have been Ashe Meadow in Warkworth.

Philip Holman and his wife Mary had three children, each baptised in London. George was born in 1630, Mary in 1631 and finally John in 1632. Philip died in 1669 and his monument in St. Mary's church, a large marble plaque on the floor near the lectern, and bearing the coat of arms of the Holman family, is inscribed:

*Hic jacet PHILIPPUS HOLMAN. Dominus de Warkworth  
qui obiit anno salutis 1669, aetatis suae 76.*

“Here lies Philip Holman, Lord of the Manor of Warkworth who died in the year of (salut) 1669, aged 76 years”.

## A MELANCHOLY AND BIGOTTED CONVERT

The eldest son, George, took himself off on an early form of The Grand Tour of the continent, which so often formed part of the education of the sons of the ruling class. When he came home he had been welcomed into the Roman Catholic Church. We are not certain at what point this conversion or confirmation took place, but it must have been before he was visited by the Oxford historian Anthony à Wood, who describes the occasion in his memoirs. Wood tells that he and his kinsman, John Lewes rambled:

To the antient and noble seat of Werkworth, then lately belonging to the Chetwodes; of whom it had then been bought by Philip Holman, of London, scrivener, who, dying in 1669, aged 76, was buried in the church there. ... wee found the eldest son and heir of the said Philip Holman, named George Holman, who was lately returned from his travels, had changed his religion for that of Rome, and seemed then to be a melancholy and bigotted convert. He was civil to us and caused the church dore to be opened, where wee found several antient monuments ... The mannour house is a stately house ... part of which, viz. the former part, was built by the Chetwoods, the rest by Philip Holman, before mention'd.

George Holman married Lady Anastasia Howard, daughter of William, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Stafford. Viscount Stafford, also an ardent Roman Catholic, moved his family abroad to Antwerp at the beginning of the English Civil Wars, but later they all came home. His goods were sequestered, but the House of Lords returned them to him in 1660 upon the Restoration of the Monarchy. George and Lady Anastasia lived away from Warkworth a great deal and were often abroad, during which times Holman's interests in this region were looked after by his brother John. John Holman was created a Baronet in 1663 and stood as MP for Banbury in 1661, 1679 and 1681.

At that time the chaplain of Warkworth Castle was Dr. John Gother. He had been brought up a strict Presbyterian, like most people in this region at that time, but was ordained a Catholic priest in 1682. His most famous published work was *A Papist Misrepresented and Represented* in which he attempted through logic and debate, to clear up some misunderstandings about Roman Catholic practice and loyalty to the crown. His housekeeper at Warkworth had a son in whom Dr. Gother recognised a talent for study, theology and spiritualism. He took this lad on as his own pupil and in the due course of time sent him to the English Catholic College at Douai. That boy became Bishop Richard Challoner, Vicar Apostolic of London and one of the leaders of the English Catholics during the first part of the eighteenth century. He was also the author of several theological books, the best known of which is *The Garden of the Soul*.

The Oates' Plot could have been a tricky time for George Holman, because a Commission to discover Catholicism listed him as one of the leading Papists in Northamptonshire. Titus Oates' desire to stamp out Catholicism in Britain seems to have actually been secondary to his desire to be the centre of attention! Oates was the son of a Baptist preacher who had been an army chaplain. He had already been expelled from Merchant Taylor's School, from a Naval Chaplaincy and from a Jesuit College, where he had naturally met many English Catholics; he had also previously been in prison for perjury. He first came to the attention of Charles II when he began spreading pamphlets that he had uncovered a plot involving Catholic noblemen. They were going to set fire to London, murder the King, replace him with his Roman Catholic brother the Duke of York, massacre the Protestants and let Irishmen run amuck throughout the realm. If you are going to make up stories, they may as well be big stories, and Oates' eighty-one-section

document gave names, dates and duties for each plotter. In spite of his conviction for blatantly lying before the Kings Council, the people believed him and wholesale anti-Catholic panic ensued, leading to the forfeiture of goods and imprisonment in the Tower of London for five Catholic Lords: Powys, Bellassis, Petre, Arundel and Stafford, who was George Holman's father-in-law.

Because Charles II had no legitimate children, he was trying to secure the succession for the Duke of York. He could not push his luck with a rabidly anti-papist Parliament, so he stood aside, though he found the entire bloodbath distasteful. "Let the blood lie on them that condemn them, for God knows I sign with tears in my eyes", the King is reputed to have said. The House of Commons eagerly passed the Exclusion Bill, to prevent James II from succeeding to the throne, but it was rejected by the Lords, and to placate the furious Commons, the aged Viscount Stafford had to be the pigeon. His lands were forfeit and he was beheaded in 1680. He died still protesting his innocence in the whole affair and was eventually beatified as a martyr by the Church of Rome in 1929.

In actual fact, although listed as a potential traitor to the crown, George Holman was almost certainly abroad at the time and thus escaped attention, and kept his lands. This period of insanity in what was otherwise an Age of Reason saw the establishment of several laws confining the boundaries of the lives of English Catholics. These laws would have been felt by the Holmans and any fellow Catholic servants or professionals who lived nearby and worked for the Castle. 1678 saw the passing of the Papists' Disabling Act which excluded Roman Catholics from taking part in government and which was not repealed until 1829. In 1699 a further anti-Catholic Act banned Catholic teachers and teaching priests and made them liable to life imprisonment. This law however was repealed in 1778, leading to mob violence in several towns.

In 1688, when King James II was deposed in favour of William of Orange, George Holman, although nearly sixty years old, took on a commission as a Colonel in a pro-Jacobite regiment. After His Majesty's ignominious flight, the Holmans chose to remain in England and Bishop Milner, in his *Life of Bishop Challoner*, writes that after a while George and his wife came to settle "at his own seat at Warkworth". There is no reason to assume that they were here as early as 1688 however, because they also had homes in Hampshire and London, but one may guess that at some point in the early 1690s they came home.

George and Lady Anastasia had nine children, of whom five survived to adulthood. William was born in 1688, Charles in 1692 and Mary was the eldest daughter but her date of birth is uncertain. There were two more girls: Anne was born in 1695 and finally Isabella in 1698/9.

George Holman died on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1698 at the age of 68 and was buried in Warkworth where a very wordy marble plaque, engraved in Latin, commemorates a gentleman who saw something of life. His younger son sadly lived only until the age of 25 years and was also buried in the local church in 1717. Lady Anastasia joined them two years later in 1719 aged 73.



Both daughters married into prominent Roman Catholic families. Anne Holman married her first cousin, William 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Stafford, and Mary married Thomas Eyre Esq. on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1709. Mary's dowry consisted of £6000, a very considerable sum in 1709.

The eldest boy William, like many Catholic boys from good families, was sent to school in Douai to receive the right sort of education. We have already learned that Catholic teachers were illegal in England at that time. He assumed the alias of William Holt (a security measure, again not unusual) and the Holman dynasty thought that all was well. Unfortunately he worried his family shortly afterwards by causing havoc and then apparently feared the consequences. A report from the college states that in September of

1704 "he ran away from the house about four in the morning for fear of a whipping, he being a little boy and only at the end of Grammar". (Actually William was sixteen in 1704 so he was not "a little boy", but nonetheless only a strip of a lad!) He managed to make his way to the Dominican Convent in Brussels to see his aunt, Sister Mary Delphine (born Lady Mary Stafford) and was not sent back to Douai. He was however, sent to Harcourt College in Paris, where he stayed until his education was complete.

When he got home from school, he seems to have lived principally at Warkworth. He married Maria Alexandrina Sophia Egon, but she died young and childless in 1726, and was buried at Warkworth. William married for a second time to Mary Wells, niece of the Count of Antrim. He made his will in 1739, leaving Warkworth to his widow for her lifetime, but upon her death, his estate was to be partitioned, part going to his sister Mary Eyre and part to his sister Anne, Countess Stafford. He also left £400 to the Missionary of the Order of St. Francis in England to be used "in whatever place it might be thought most expedient". Sure enough it was well used, for at Sheffield English near Holman's southern estates, Father Joseph Hickins O.S.F. was financially supported in his work by "Mr. Holman's legacy for the Missionary serving the poor in Hampshire".

### **THE EYRES OF HASSOP HALL**

William Holman died on October 11<sup>th</sup> 1740 at the age of 52 years and without issue. His widow Mary then married George Browne, but died in childbirth in 1744, and was buried at Warkworth when the inheritance of the estates of Warkworth and Middleton passed to Mary wife of Thomas Eyre, settling onto their second son, Francis Eyre Esq. in 1746.

A few years later in 1753, none other than Horace Walpole, the eighteenth century academic and politician, wrote a letter to his friend John Chute in which he describes a recent visit to Warkworth Castle. One assumes that the owner was still an absentee landlord at that time as nobody seems to have mentioned to Walpole that the Holmans no longer lived there.

I forgot to tell you of a sweet house which Mr. Montagu carried me to see, belonging to a Mr. Holman, a Catholic, called Warkworth. The situation is pretty, the front charming, composed of two round and two square towers. The court within is incomplete on one side, but above stairs is a vast gallery with four bow windows and twelve other large ones, all filled with the arms of the old peers of England, with all their quarterings entire.

Thomas Eyre's main estate was at Hassop, which is near Bakewell in Derbyshire, and although he and Mary tended to reside at their house at Eastwell in Leicestershire, he is always called "of Hassop" in documentation. The Eyre family had lived there since the fifteenth century and had clung staunchly to their faith throughout the reformation and the civil wars. In the early seventeenth century a new hall was built in the European Classical style, and that building still survives as a charming and beautifully kept hotel.

The couple had many children, but only five survived to adulthood: Rowland, Elizabeth, Margaret, Catherine and Francis. There was an age gap of about twenty years between the two sons, both of whom were educated abroad at Catholic schools and colleges. Rowland inherited the major estates, and Warkworth was settled onto the younger brother, Francis in 1746, at which time he would have been about fourteen years old. In the same will there were sums of money for Elizabeth and Catherine who were still unmarried, but not for Margaret, who was already a nun in Louvain. Thomas Eyre died in 1749. Catherine married in 1750, but died not long after and Elizabeth surprised everyone by marrying a Scottish Presbyterian gentleman called Francis Farquharson of Monaltrie in the 1760s, shortly after he had been released from a twenty year prison sentence for being on the wrong side at Culloden! On the other hand, it was not such a surprise because, although he was Protestant, he was also a Jacobite, a political cause supported with arms by both the Holman and Eyre families.

Francis Eyre married Lady Mary Radcliffe on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of February 1735 at St. George's Church in Hanover Square, London. Her relations were the Earls of Newburgh, and it was therefore through her that the Eyres began to use this title, although they never actually gained permission or right to do so. The couple had four children:

Mary, born in 1755, married Arthur Onslow in 1793, died in 1800 and is commemorated in St. Mary's church.

Francis, born in 1762, married Dorothy Gladwin in 1788, and inherited all the family estates in 1804.

James, born in 1765, married Terèse Joséphine de Chenicourt and lived in Europe until his death in 1817.

Charles, born in 1771, seems to have died unmarried in around 1819.

The famous Catholic writer, Alban Butler, served at Warkworth as priest from 1751-1758, and much of his opus, *The Lives of the Saints* was written here during those years. Butler was a Northamptonshire-man himself, having been born and largely brought up in Appletree, which is one of the townships of Aston-le-walls. Apart from minor editing and up-dating, the book remains the primary reference work on the subject.

Francis Eyre himself wrote many pro-Catholic pamphlets and essays while he lived at Warkworth, many in a friendly publishing war in which he indulged against the Rector of Middleton Cheney. One of them was delightfully titled: *A Short essay on the Christian religion, descriptive of the advantages which have accrued to society by the establishment of it, as contrasted with the manners and customs of mankind before that happy period. To Which are added, a few occasional remarks on philosophers in general, as also on some of the objections started against the Christian religion by the fashionable writers of the present age. The Whole*

*proposed as a preservative against the pernicious doctrines which have overwhelmed France with misery and desolation. By A sincere friend of mankind. 1795.*

Mary Radcliffe died in 1798 and Francis married his second wife, Sarah, in 1801. Sarah Eyre was still contributing donations to Overthorpe Chapel in 1834.

Francis Eyre Esq. died in London in 1804 aged 72 and was succeeded by his son, another Francis (from henceforth known as the Earl of Newburgh) who disposed of the whole estate (consisting of some 1073 acres) by public auction the following year. The auction advertisement read:

### AUCTION SALE

**Valuable** freehold Manor Estate, tythe free by Messrs. Winstanley & Son, at Garraway's this day 18<sup>th</sup> June, at 12 o'clock, in one lot. Warkworth Castle, with the Manor and Estate, situate in the County of Northampton on the verge of the northern part of Oxfordshire, 2 miles from Banbury, 22 miles from Oxford, 27 miles from Coventry, 20 miles from Northampton, 70 miles from London, consisting of a mansion house and offices, with the park and lands, plantations, fishponds, and matter in hand. Four capital farms, well-timbered, occupied by the most respectable tenants from year to year, capable of great improvement, and about 13 dwelling houses in the village of Overthorpe adjoining the Park. The Estate, which is in a ring fence, contains 1073 acres of land, a very small proportion of which is arable, the rest meadows and pasture, tythe free, bounded on one side by the River Cherwell, over which there is right of fishery. Possession may be had of the mansion and 100 acres of land immediately and of the remainder at Ladyday 1806.

Ladyday is the 25<sup>th</sup> March and had been New Year's Day until the calendar change of 1752. It was traditionally the day to pay rents and wages, so is a logical time for the former owner to wind up any outstanding rent collecting before giving up control of the rest of the land. The house and estate were sold to Thomas Bradford of Sussex for £53,000, but he made no attempt at the "great improvement" which the Estate Agent suggested, demolishing the house and in his turn selling to James Smith Esq. Smith parcelled the land into smaller lots for profitable re-sale. A Mr. Taylor bought much of the land nearby here and erected the date-stone from above the castle entrance (1595 and a coat of arms) in his garden where Baker saw it during his visit. Warkworth Castle was demolished in 1806, leaving no centre for the Roman Catholic mission in the Banbury area.

Documents from the time show that the Eyre family took out the stained glass and family portraits, removing them to Hassop Hall, but most of the internal fittings, oak-panelling and furniture were sold off.

One of the "four capital farms" was *Castle Farm* in Overthorpe, which was once lost and won back by gentlemen gaming at Pharaoh, the addictive and very easy gambling card game that was all the rage during the Regency era. I have never seen the document, but apparently there was an 18<sup>th</sup> century farm-ownership indenture, on which the winning and losing hands were scribbled in the margins!

### THE OVERTHORPE MISSION

In 1802 a French émigré priest named Pierre Julien Hersant settled in Banbury and spent much of his time in Warkworth over the next two or three years where he was closely associated with the Eyre family. A tiny man apparently, but with an enormous spirit and drive, he served the disparate Roman Catholic community in this area throughout the rest of his life. Local people called him “Mr. Harsant”.

Hersant kept a journal, which was like both a diary and a log-book and in it he describes his early movements in this region. He had been living in London, and it is likely that he met the Eyre family whilst there. Of course, apart from London, by this time the Eyres lived mostly at Hassop in Derbyshire and rarely visited Warkworth themselves. He writes with a Mr. Collins-like attention to detail:

Anno D.ni 1802, being Wednesday December 23<sup>rd</sup> I came from London to Warwort where I lived in the Castle until the beginning of Lent following, at which time I went to live in Banbury, Oxfordshire at Mrs. Munton’s, White Lion Street. Here I lived till the 26<sup>th</sup> March of the next following year, 1804, and on that Sunday, I came to live at Warkworth.

At that time the Castle chapel was serving as a base for the Catholic community. The oldest surviving registration of a Catholic baptism for this region is for Rebecca Griffin, baptised in 1783. The registers for the Roman Catholic community have been preserved and researched by the late Canon Wall of St. John’s Church in Banbury. As he explained in his book about that church published in 1938:

The Baptism Registers kept at Banbury begin with a collection of notes on scraps of paper, which I have got together and bound with a parchment cover. Apparently Fr. Hersent and others, called upon to baptise, perhaps quite a distance away, would jot down the record on a handy piece of paper. One baptism is recorded on a long and interesting grocer’s bill from Mr. Arris of Bodicote to Fr. Hersent in 1816.

Dr. Tandy began a proper register; the first entry is 28<sup>th</sup> July 1836, two years before St. John’s church was opened.

When Warkworth Castle was sold by public auction and then demolished in 1805-6 Fr. Hersent built a chapel in Overthorpe for the local Catholic population. Baker’s History says that it was erected in 1806, but he was writing around 1822, and may well have been misinformed. When Baker visited, the chapel was still standing and he describes it in the present tense and no detail whatsoever! Apparently, the chapel was 43 feet 3 inches long by 14 feet 3 inches wide and was paid for by the Earl of Newburgh, Francis Eyre. He also donated a “small house” and garden for the officiating priest. There is still a house in Overthorpe called *Chapel House*, but it is not small. Perhaps Baker’s idea of the bare minimum requirements for a house was different from mine! *Chapel House* is built in the perfect architectural style for the first decade of the nineteenth century, and the owners have documents stating that it was indeed Fr. Hersant’s home.

Certainly the priest’s house was not demolished when the chapel was, but was kept by the church for several years and rented out until it was eventually sold. Final support for this claim is that in many documents, the garden is described as including an orchard; could this be the orchard

which used to stand opposite the present *Manor House*, where the modern houses are now situated? Eyre also donated land for a small burial ground.

A date-stone on the front gable proclaims that a house opposite *Chapel House*, known as *Shillington*, was built in 1969. Underneath this modern house there is said to have been a burying ground. It is very likely to have been the graveyard for the former Roman Catholic Chapel. Certainly both builders and demolishers in this area have discovered bones. There used to be three small cottages on the land that is now the garden; it is unknown how old they were, but they were tiny, one room houses, built in the local stone, and a ghost of a fireplace can be seen against one of the garden walls.

Hersant's journal informs us that mass was being celebrated there from June of 1805, so work on its construction must have begun in the previous year; Francis Eyre must have been planning ahead, prior to disposing of his Warkworth property. The chapel was formally opened on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> October. The opening and Blessing were very well attended (Hersant lists those who were present on that day) and continued to thrive for the years following. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 1810 Bishop Milner visited to confirm 30 candidates and five years later "confirmed at Overthorpe the neophytes of that congregation and those of Aston-le-Walls; 43 persons".

However, by 1816 Francis Eyre, having donated the place, appeared to want to rid himself of the responsibility and expense of it, but Bishop Milner wrote back to him, wondering how the church was going to fund the chapel without Eyre's contribution:

I have reflected much on your Lordship's proposal of transforming £1500 with the house and chapel at Overthorpe to me and other clerical trustees with a promise of £25 per annum during your Lordship's life. Making £100 per annum for the priest, on condition of my acquitting your Lordship of all further expense and trouble concerning the place. I wish to do whatever is agreeable to your Lordship and for the benefit of Venerable old Warkworth, but when I consider that the priest will expect to receive the whole £100 per annum as he receives it at present; and indeed he cannot keep up the house and chapel, independently of the poor, for less, it appears to me that I should take upon myself the expenses of repair etc. which I have not the means of meeting.

This chapel was to serve them until the subsequent relaxation of the anti-Catholic laws in England in the early 1830s, as well as an increase in the local Catholic population around that time, led to a church being built in town. It is not certain when Fr. Hersent first thought that it was time to move the mission to Banbury town, but entries occur in his diary around 1810. Shortly thereafter, he had the opportunity to purchase land opposite his own house in South Bar when the grounds of the *Calthorpe Manor* estate were being sold off piecemeal. A large financial contribution came from John Kalabergo. Kalabergo was an Italian silversmith and watchmaker who came to settle in Banbury in about 1811 and bought a house in the marketplace. Before the land for the church was acquired, Fr. Hersent used to celebrate Mass in a "lecture room" in a private house. It is likely that Mr. Kalabergo's house was the one in question; apparently from 12<sup>th</sup> August 1828 onwards for ten years, Fr. Hersent "often celebrated mass on an oaken chest of drawers in a Catholic house in the marketplace". Kalabergo was a dedicated contributor to the Catholic community until his untimely death when he was murdered by his nephew. His story can be read in *John Kalabergo*, published by The Banbury Historical Society and on sale at Banbury Museum. The place where he was shot dead is still called Kalabergo Hill.

Francis Eyre died at Hassop on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1827. His son and heir Thomas Eyre wrote to Hersant and his bishop (Dr. Walsh, Milner having since died) apologising to them both for having kept them waiting so long about the fate of the chapel and subsequent living at Overthorpe. He had decided to give them the land, but no longer to pay the priest's salary. His letters also praised Hersant personally; Thomas Eyre explained that he had heard nothing but good about the priest and thought of him very highly. So although the deal was now informally settled it in fact took several years for the church to gain possession of the deeds and paperwork for the land and property. The congregation wrote to Dr. Walsh in 1833,

We are all desirous that your Lordship should procure the Writings of Overthorpe Chapel and house for fear that Lord Newburgh should either die or alter his mind.

Fr. Pierre Hersant himself died in 1833 and was buried at Overthorpe, although when his successors built the church of St. John on land purchased from the Calthorpe estate near South Bar in 1838, his remains and those of several of his flock were moved to the new churchyard. The chapel was pulled down in 1838, although the other property was retained and rented out. Several of the relics and plate from Overthorpe Chapel are now at St. John's. There is a brass marking his grave, which reads:

**In the Most Holy Name of Jesus, pray for the soul of the Rev. Peter Hersent, sometime Priest of the Holy Catholic Church at Overthorpe, who died the XXVII day of July in the Year of Our Lord MDCCCXXXIII.**

*Chapter 6*

**THE PORT WINE PEOPLE**

*...in Overthorpe ...a Messuage  
Cottage ... late in the occupation of the  
said Thomas Riley and then used as a  
schoolhouse ...*

Codicil to the Will of Thomas Maule, AD 1816.

## A MOST DESTRUCTIVE FIRE

Unfortunately anyone wishing to use the church registers for Warkworth for research has several problems to overcome. Firstly, prior to the nineteenth century they are intermingled with those of Marston St. Lawrence, although the good news is that they go back as far as 1653, so it is worth the effort. To make matters worse however, the Marston registers have been greatly damaged by fire, so there are many gaps. The Victorian registers for Warkworth have fortunately been lovingly transcribed and can be found in the local history department of Banbury Library and the originals are now housed at Wooton Hall Public Records Office in Northampton. The names, which appear over and over again, are only a few; Adkins, Gardner, Taylor, Elkington and Adams, and most families seem to have had a branch living in each of our two villages. Other familiar surnames appear in the newspaper article below, published at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

We have seen in a former chapter what sort of homes the villagers were living in at the end of the Georgian period, and that Warkworth definitely had five houses in 1791. Warkworth Castle was pulled down and demolished in 1806, and not many years later there was to be more destruction, although this time it was unintentional! The tragedy was reported in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 1811, and may partly explain why there are so few buildings now in Warkworth that date further back in history than the nineteenth century.

*On Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> inst. a most destructive Fire broke out at the Dwelling house of Mr. Robert Taylor of Warkworth near Banbury which burnt down the same also the Dwelling house of Mr. Osbourne with all extensive barns and outbuildings of Messrs Osbourne Maull and Drury. The Fire was carried by the Violence of the Wind to a Dwelling house some yards Distance which was consumed. The Cries of a valuable Mare in foal, Pigs etc. which were Burnt were truly Distressful. The Loss in corn, hay and goods was very great and Insured for a small Amount. Only one house could be Saved and that had taken fire. Four Engines attended but could Save a very small part of household Goods, Stock etc. Notwithstanding the Exertions of Banbury Inhabitants and the Engines from thence, the Wind was so high that in less than Two Hours the Village was nearly Burnt down. We are sorry to say Mr. Osbourne was Severely Burnt.*

The ancestors of the present occupants of *Castle Farm* and *Warkworth Farm* were already living in the latter house well before 1811. ... Adkins has written a very interesting, hand-typed book of the Adkins and Mawle families from the 1750s to the present. The Mr. Maule whose outbuildings were burnt was ... ETC. Get book off Thelma to fill a bit.

The occupants of *Dove House* in Warkworth have in their collection several indentures and wills concerning the property of *Dove House* and its barns, in Warkworth. The earliest one "made the sixth day of January in the forty-ninth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third" (1809) describes the sale of a plot of land in the possession of Thomas Bradford Gent of Sussex of the first part to Mr. John Osbourne Yeoman of Warkworth of the second part. This is the same Mr. Osbourne who was "severely burnt". The newspaper article also told us that one Mr.



Drury suffered some damage to his property; because of this indenture, we can say where these properties were. They are clearly described and a small map has been sketched in the left-hand margin of the second page. It concerns

... all that plot of land situate and being in the Parish of Warkworth aforesaid containing by Statute Measure twelve acres or thereabouts little more or less bounded on the north by lands now belonging to William Barret on the south by lands belonging to William Drury and on the east by the road leading from Warkworth aforesaid to Middleton Cheney and on the west by lands now belonging to Richard Mumford ... on which plot of land a Castle called Warkworth Castle which hath been ... demolished lately stood ...

Poor old Osbourne! He'd only bought the place two years before the fire "at the price or sum of £600 of Lawful English money to the said Thomas Bradford in hand well and truly paid". The indenture ends with the signatures and seals of both Osbourne (who spells his own name "Orsborne" perhaps revealing a local accent) and Thos = Bradford, as well as numerous witnesses. In addition, Osbourne nominated Philip Lumbert to continue as tenant to the property, for which Lumbert paid Bradford five shillings. The indenture promises that "Dove House Barn Buildings and Hereditaments hereinafter assured ... from henceforth remain routine and to the Use and Behoof of the said Philip Lumbert and his heirs". John Osbourne died in 1814, leaving the house to his widow Elizabeth for her lifetime and then to his daughter Martha Neale, to keep in trust for his grandsons William and John Neale. He left instructions that from the profits generated from the property £50 should be given to each of his three granddaughters, Martha, Elizabeth and Susannah. That is quite a gentlemanly sum to contribute towards an unmarried girl's dowry at the time; 1814 is exactly when Jane Austen's novels were being published, and her creation Elizabeth Bennet could only expect £1000 upon her marriage although she was a gentleman's daughter. The Osbournes and Neales must have lived quite comfortably.

Many of the names in the registers match up perfectly with who was living here when Whellan visited Overthorpe and Warkworth during the 1870s. He listed all the inhabitants of the village of Overthorpe. As we can see, the French family, which has been in the area since the Tudor period, is still in residence. The Elkingtons are also still here, but there is no longer a Taylor listed, for the first time since the sixteenth century. Hidden by ivy, under a holly tree opposite St. Mary's church door, is a white tomb housing the last of the Taylors. It is full of dead children and young people; after four hundred years of residence, it took the line only twenty years to disappear completely.

Charles Brickwell Esq. Overthorpe Lodge:	Yeoman.
Mrs. Anne Clarke	Schoolmistress
Thomas Coy	Wheelwright and Builder
Mrs. Caroline Elkington	-
John French	Shoemaker
* Thomas Gillet	Market Gardener
Mr. Thomas Kingerlee	-
Rev. John Merideth AKC	Curate
Mrs. Elizabeth Rodnight	-
* George Stanley	Dairyman

Edward Basley	Farmer and Cattle-drover
Thomas Hemmings	Farmer and Baker
John Jones	Farmer
* Thomas Mawle's executors	Tradesmen in Bloxham
* John Wady	Farmer
William Thomas Wakelin	Farmer
* Mrs. Mary Ann Jones	-

Those people marked with an asterisk were not residing in the village, but did own property here. Thomas Mawle no longer resided anywhere, having died in 1816, but he had been a farmer. As we can see, just as was the case centuries earlier, most people living here in Victorian times were farmers or landowners. The three women without occupations are presumably widows otherwise they would not be listed as heads of the household. As widows they technically do not work, although actually many widows had hidden incomes through rents or loaning money. The only other person without an occupation is Kinglerlee, who, it is worth noting is the only man listed as "Mr." from which we can infer his occupation to be the same as his rank: Gent. Some of the people listed by Whellan are buried in St. Mary's churchyard, such as Thomas Hemmings and his wife and John Jones, buried with his wife and his children. Wander around St. Mary's churchyard, and you will find nearly everybody who signed the petition not to join Middleton Cheney in 1897. There are many others too ~ the earliest gravestone outside the church that I can decipher is dated 1772. There are just as many, made from local brown stone, which have flaked away now beyond legibility; ironic memorials indeed.

The registers list many more burials than baptisms. Most touching to the twenty-first century reader, for whom child mortality is much more rare than it was in centuries past, is the fact that out of a total of fifty-seven burials, thirteen people died before the age of two years. Another little girl called Anne Gardner, whose abode is described as "Warkworth Grounds", died aged four. Tantalisingly, the registers merely list names, ages and abodes, so we can only conjecture the causes of death. We know that the Gardners were tenants of the Neale family in the 1850s and 1860s. They rented *Dove House* in Warkworth. In an indenture of sale dated 4<sup>th</sup> May 1865, John Neale's last living executor, Thomas Elkington, sold the share in question to Thomas Mawle of Warkworth for £600. The plot was described as "All that messuage late in the tenure or occupation of William Gardner and now of the said Thomas Mawle ... for the use of Daniel Parker Pillatt and his heirs during the natural life of the said Thomas Mawle". Where the Gardners lived after Pillatt took up the tenancy I know not.

In the census of 1871, the parish of Warkworth as a whole numbered 1905 souls, but only 42 of those people lived in Warkworth village itself. Warkworth consisted of 3 farmhouses and a cottage when Whellan surveyed it. Grimsbury on the other hand had 418 houses and several undergoing construction or extension. The latter half of the nineteenth century was a time of great expansion in Grimsbury, which had the advantage of being right on top of both the railway and the canal, the two forms of transport of which the Victorian men of trade and progress were so proud. Nethercote had 21 houses, Husscote only one farm, and annoyingly, he did not bother to number the houses in Overthorpe, having listed the inhabitants. We can however infer that if each inhabitant listed is a head of household then the list must roughly equal the number of houses; therefore there were approximately 17. Whellan did not make mention of the Wesleyan

Chapel in Overthorpe and as he was in all things very thorough, we can therefore assume that it had not been built.

He does however describe a Dame School, which had been founded in 1859. The schoolmistress was a Mrs. Ann Clarke, and the school was funded partly by the church, and partly through voluntary charitable donations. At the time that Whellan was writing it was not compulsory by law to attend school. We cannot be absolutely certain where the school was, but there are documents that can give us clues. The occupants of *The Cottage* in Overthorpe (a Georgian building, erected in local stone and following the regular dimensions so beloved of that era) are lucky enough to have a very full archive of deeds relating to their house, dating back as far as 1806. As we already know, the land from the Warkworth Castle estate was sold by auction in 1805 and Thomas Bradford bought most of it; *The Cottage* was part of that sale and at that time a Mr. Thomas Hawkes was renting. Bradford sold it to Richard Bignell (both men lived outside the county and were merely speculating property). Very soon after that in 1809, it was purchased by Thomas Riley, who certainly used the building as a school at some time during the years from 1809 –1816. We know this because when Thomas Maule (sic) of Milton, Adderbury published his will in 1816, he explained that he had just recently bought some property in Overthorpe:

And whereas since the making and publishing of my said will I have purchased of Thomas Riley of Overthorpe in the Parish of Warkworth in the County of Northampton Schoolmaster a certain Messuage or Tenement situate and being in Overthorpe aforesaid with the Outbuildings Yard Garden and appurtenances to the same adjoining and belonging also a Messuage Cottage ... late in the occupation of the said Thomas Riley and then used as a schoolhouse

“Hang on a minute”, says the reader, “you said that the school was founded in 1859!” It was indeed; that was the *second* school, but the pleasing thing is that it seems to have been in the same house as the first school about which we have just read



*The Cottage, Overthorpe c.1900.  
The roof of the Mission Room can  
be seen to the right of the house  
which has since been extended  
(Image: Simon Baylis)*

Thomas Maule (for so his name is spelt in the documents) bought the former schoolhouse just before he died, apparently in redemption of a mortgage which he had formerly advanced to Riley (teachers weren't paid properly in those days either!). He asked his executors to manage the property for his widow Sarah, the profits after running costs to go to her “for and during the term

of her natural Life for her own absolute use and benefit". However, "my Trustees or the survivors ... of them ... do and shall as soon as conveniently may be after the decease of my said Wife make Sale and absolutely dispose of my said devised Estate Heriditaments and Premises either together or in parcels by Public Sale ..." for the remaining benefactors. For several years the trustees of Maule's estate rented out the property to Mr. Aris, but whether it continued as a schoolhouse during this time is both unknown and doubtful.

In 1835, William East, the last living survivor of Maule's trustees, willed his responsibilities to Messers Margetts and Hitchcock of Deddington and they sold the estate by auction in 1847. Lot 2 (*The Cottage* and its garden) was bought by Jonah Clark, a carpenter, for £85, of which he paid an £8 deposit on the day of sale. We do not know when Jonah died, but his son William, also a carpenter, left the same house first to his widowed mother for her lifetime, and afterwards to his own widow, Eliza Clark. And who was William Clark's mother? Mrs. Ann Clark, surely the "Schoolmistress" of the Dame School whom Whellan cited in the 1870s! After Jonah died, with little money and William living in Grimsbury, she must have opened the school in 1859 to give herself a respectable occupation. I have not been able to ascertain when the school closed, but Miss Cissy Bennet has told me that she attended school in the early part of this century at Middleton Cheney village primary school, and had not heard of any other. We may assume that most of the children of our two villages attended school at Middleton Cheney, for there are several references to them in the Log Books there. For example the entry for 26<sup>th</sup> October 1900 reads: "Overthorpe children not admitted owing to scarlet fever." However there were also children who went down to Grimsbury to attend school, as Edwin Mawle told the commissioners in 1896 (see introduction).

Ann Clark died 19<sup>th</sup> February 1900 and was buried at Warkworth. The transfer of the property after her death opens up another intriguing line of enquiry. It explains that the property is:

Bounded by the Public Street in Overthorpe and on the Eastern side thereof formerly in the occupation of the said Ann Clark (except the building recently erected on part of the said garden and now used as a Mission Room which is the property of the Stewards of the Banbury Wesleyan Methodist Circuit).

This refers to a deal made between the widow Ann and John Hyde Percy Spencer Edwards, affording Ann some income from the lease of part of her garden to these respectable, Christian people, for the term of seven years. Sadly we cannot be sure which part of the garden the Mission Room was built upon, and as *The Cottage's* garden is certainly smaller than it was in times past, we may well never discover it. Presumably it only stood for the seven year term arranged and then disappeared again.

During the same period, we know that nearly all of the Lordship of the manor of Warkworth (the manorial right remained although the house was gone) was in pasture, less than one fifth being arable.

In 1866 the manor passed to the Horton family (who founded the Horton Hospital in Banbury and various bequests in Middleton Cheney) of whom the representative when Whellan visited was John H. Horton Esq.. The other principle proprietors of the land in the area were a Mrs. Forbes, John Hitchcock Esq., Charles John Bricknell Esq. of Overthorpe Lodge and Mr. James Jones. The Enclosure Act of 1764 had obviously done its work.

The Census returns for “The Whole of the Parish of Warkworth and Hamlet of Grimbury with Nethercote and Houses called Overthorpe and Overthorpe Lodge, Houses at Huscote and Spital Farm” for 1851 list Charles Bricknell, one of few heads of household whose address is stated. He was 64 years old in April of 1851, a widower, and lived with his 34 year old unmarried daughter, a bailiff, a groom, a housemaid and a cook. In Overthorpe Lodge Cottage, Mr. Bricknell’s tenants were the Hodges family: Thomas Hodges was a 43-year-old carter/labourer, his wife Harriet was a dairywoman, and they had three children living at home. Emma (15) and Tabitha (9) were both lace-makers and Timothy (13) was a labourer like his father. The Bricknell estate appears on a map in the Public Records Office in Northampton and shows the northernmost dwelling in the village, surrounded by land that stretches up into Middleton Cheney. Highfield now stands on the site.

You remember Whellan listed a John Jones, farmer? Mr. John Jones (not to be confused with James) owned *Warkworth Hall* in 1851, farming 180 acres and employing three labourers. He was 45 years old and his wife Sarah was twelve years his junior. They had three children under five, a governess named Selina Sirett, who was 17, a house-servant called Elizabeth Barret who was 19 and they kept a full-time shepherd, 21-year-old Edward Blencowe.

Thomas Mawle’s farm is not named, but it consisted of 130 acres and employed three labourers. He and his wife Ann were still a young couple in 1851, with five children: Edwin (8) (the same Edwin who spoke at the parish meeting which opened this book), Sarah (7), Elizabeth (5) Thomas (2) and a new baby Ann who had been born the month before. They kept 19-year-old Elizabeth Bullet as a servant.

One of the wealthiest occupants of the parish was Robert Field who owned the mill in Grimsbury. He and his wife, Phoebe, were both 40 years old and their mill employed eleven men. They had five children, ranging in age from 15 to 3 and none of them worked; on the contrary, a governess was kept, one Anna Johnson, still on the shelf at 27. There was also a cook, a housemaid and a nursemaid and Robert’s older brother Benjamin lodged with them and helped with the business.

Other Census returns for the Grimsbury section of the parish show some of the trades that went on there. John Orsborn (a different one ~ the other died in 1814 ) was a cabinet-maker, James French was a plush-weaver, William Batchelor was a cordwainer and William and Henry Neal managed to make a living as Hay Binders and Hay Trussers. Also, as the nineteenth century wore on, more and more inhabitants of Grimsbury worked for the railway in one capacity or another.

James Jones lived at the *Middleton Lodge Farm*, and he held a fete on behalf of the Liberal Party there in 1888, at which Middleton Cheney Brass Band entertained his guests. The band was but newly formed because this was their first gig. Leonard Jerrams (a lifelong resident of Middleton Cheney) remembered gleaning in James Jones’ fields with his mother and several of his large family of siblings in the 1900s.

This was a time of considerable distress in the whole of the district. Children were deliberately kept home from school as a consequence of what was called a “run”. Fields cleared of corn were opened

for gleanings. This was more commonly known as “leazing”. The farmer usually left one shuck in the middle of a field; when this was taken out women and children would pick up the loose corn. Whole days were spent on this job and by concentrated and diligent work a fairly large amount was gathered. The very young children had a pouch tied around them in which they collected the corn. I can remember doing this with older members of my family, accompanied by our mother. Some of the fields that we ... leazed were on the Lodge Farm, Astrop Road. Mr. James Jones, who was in occupation on the farm was very considerate and did not rake the fields to the extent that he could have done. ... Mr. Jones gave up the Lodge Farm in 1921.

The Warkworth Parish Minute Books includes an entry dated March 21<sup>st</sup> 1898, concerning a road with still worries the inhabitants of Overthorpe to this day. At that time it was felt that the County Surveyor ought to be putting more stones in the road, and the “metal parts” on the sides were overgrown with grass. It reads:

In the opinion of this meeting the awarded Bridale Road leading from Banbury to the Bowling Green Inn ... is still in a very unsatisfactory condition and dangerous to those riding along the road and is at times impassable owing to the mud and deep ruts. As nothing was done in reply to the petition sent to the Council the meeting respectfully wish again to draw the attention of the council to the matter.

No, and we didn't get our pavement either, did we?

Cissie Bennet was born in May Cottage at the beginning of the last Century, and lived there all her life. Her baptism is recorded on March 19<sup>th</sup> 1905. When Cissie Bennet was a girl around the time of the First World War, she was in service for the Griffin family who lived at *The Grange*.

However, the First World War began a change in country life that, like the young men remembered on the wall of the *Village Room* in Overthorpe, would never return. Bit about the war, the monument and memorials in the church. Dorothy's Father's memories of digging up *The Knob* for vegetables.

**THIS TABLET IS ERECTED AS A MEMORIAL OF VICTORY AND OF PEACE SIGNED BY THE GERMANS ON JUNE 28<sup>TH</sup> 1919 AT VERSAILLES ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE GREAT WAR WHICH LASTED FROM AUGUST 4<sup>TH</sup> 1914 TO NOVEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup> 1918 AND AS A TRIBUTE TO THOSE FROM THE VILLAGES OF OVERTHORPE AND WARKWORTH WHO BORE A PART THEREIN.**

Richard Griffin lived in Overthorpe in the 1920s. He writes:

My first recollection was of workmen digging up the village streets and laying pipes for sewerage. There had been an outbreak of diphtheria and two children had died ... The village pump was the only water supply and Mr. Carter in a drought summer used to hog all the water for his tomato greenhouses. There was a church room with a three-quarter sized billiard table, a dartboard and a cracked piano. The room was open and heated twice a week.

In the First World War an ammunition factory was built on Mr. Stroud's farm near the Bowling Green Pub. I can remember the workers (mostly women) from Middleton Cheney walking home through Overthorpe with their hands all yellow from the chemicals used in explosives. When the war ended

the ammunition factory was used to bring the shells home from France in order to empty them of explosive material. The shells arrived in wooden boxes and first the boxes were burnt but a Mr. Chilton who was a seller of firewood, said he would cart the boxes away for free. Chilton had a field and he amassed about 20,000 boxes. People said he was mad but in three years he had chopped them all up and sold them.

After the war in 1918 the farm was sold, but as it was a mass of concrete and bricks it was useless for agriculture but Mr. Stroud bought it back for a mere pittance; fortune smiled on him, for in 1925 the Midland Marts was built and the contractors wanted 500 tons of hardcore for the base of pens and buildings ~ where else could they get it from of course but Mr. Stroud's old ammunition factory site.

There was indeed a shell-filling factory opened at the foot of Overthorpe Hill in 1916.

William Wheeler also remembers the factory girls walking down the hill and home again. He writes that they were known as the "canaries" due to the yellow colour that the chemicals turned their skin. After the war, there was serious unemployment in the area, and the men used to assemble at Drop Stile Field (now the site of The Moors Drive, Middleton) in order to walk down into Banbury in great gangs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to sign on the dole.

A pen-and-ink drawing with watercolour touches shows what is now the dining room of *Sycamores*, and is in the possession of the present occupant. It depicts one wall of the room early in the twentieth century, with rag rugs near the hearth, muddy-coloured green wallpaper and a large wicker chair. The Banbury iron range shown here is still in place today and is occasionally lit by the owners. It is a rare survival, sadly; there was a much smaller one surviving in *Bromley Cottage*, but it was taken away before the present occupants bought the house, and we would love to replace it with another!

### **BLACKLOCKS ON BLACKLOCK HILL**

William Wheeler, a resident of Middleton Cheney ever since his birth in 1909, remembered Overthorpe Hall in his memoirs. The Blacklock family were very influential and both the hill where Overthorpe Hall now stands and The Blacklock Arms in Grimsbury are named after them. Wheeler remembers the head of the family in his day being Mr. James Blacklock, a Banbury magistrate. His son, Captain Ronald Blacklock went to sea in 1906 and became a pioneer submariner. During the First World War he fought in association with the Imperial Russian Navy and sank many ships including the *Moltke*, for which he was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir. He met Nicolas II on several occasions, and after the war, the Tsar sent him a cigarette case by Fabergé, which arrived after the news of the family's assignation by the Bolsheviks in 1917. In the Second World War he was appointed Director of Welfare Services and was awarded the CBE in 1944.

The other sons of James Blacklock ...

When the Blacklocks left, the house was bought by the Gilby family. As Richard Griffin recalled, the Gilby's family business was the production of Gilby Port Wine, which is still made.

...

Wheeler remembers in particular Geoffrey Gilby who was a noted writer and racing correspondent; there is a race at Newbury that is still named after him. On one occasion, he and some other members of his family attended at concert at the Middleton Cheney Reading Room above the Co-op in order to deliver a monologue to raise money for the Conservative Association.

We know who our postman was in the early part of the twentieth century, because he is remembered by Jerrams. Apparently “Charlie Jeffs the postman” used to “express disgust when he had to walk across the fields from Lodge Farm to Warkworth. ... ‘Fancy having to walk all this way with a snotty postcard’”. He retired in 1925 and was given a cheque for £10.

The name *Bromley* is said to derive from the family who lived here at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when this house apparently served as a village shop. Sadly, the house was completely gutted before the present occupiers (David and I) bought it so it is difficult to determine its original form. Certainly it retains a seventeenth century window, filled in early in its working life with local stone, which therefore dates the front part of the building, but the windows onto the road are certainly Victorian or later. It used to contain a Banbury iron range in the tiny kitchen (which the previous owner threw away) and the cellar under the present dining room served the office of a stockroom for the shop.

For most of the twentieth century the Clements family owned it. Local folklore tells us that it was one of the Clements’ little boys who planted a small Christmas tree in the garden before the Second World War; the very tall pine tree which dominates the garden and the public footpath is reputed to be the same one.

Stories from Margaret Brooks eg. The 2 nurses who looked after Mr. Greystone at Manor. *The Manor House* still has a listed bell system which rings in the kitchen, showing that service is required in the Morning Room or in the numbered bedrooms, although there have been no servants there for decades now.

Other houses built during the twentieth century are ... in Overthorpe and ... in Warkworth. (Except for Chetwode ‘cos discussed elsewhere)

### **COLD WAR IN A COUNTRY PARISH**

The seemingly insignificant hamlet of Nethercote does have one claim to international fame. It was here, conveniently mid-way between Oxford and Birmingham, yet safely off the beaten track, that a communist spy ring would exchange secrets to send to the USSR.

Ruth Werner was born into a Jewish, middle-class, academic family in Berlin in 1907. She was the daughter of the prominent economist, Dr. René Kuczynski and at that time she was called Ursula. Having lived through the humiliation and defeat of the First World War, Ursula, like many other young idealists, held Nationalism and Capitalism responsible for Germany’s chaotic unemployment and inflation. She joined the Communist Youth League of Germany in 1924, and was soon a full member of the Communist Party. In the 1930s she was working as a Soviet



agent in war-torn China with Richard Sorge and Rolf Hamburger. With her British Communist husband, Ursula arrived in Britain in 1940 where she lived in Oxford as Ursula Brewer, a Jewish refugee. Her brother, Dr. Jürgen Kuczynski had already been spying here for some time, and had introduced Dr. Klaus Fuchs to Soviet Intelligence. Fuchs was developing the early stages of the atomic bomb at Birmingham University, and he would meet Ursula at *The Red House* in Nethercote, an easy walk from Banbury Station in Grimsbury for each of them. Fuchs apparently believed that both sides in what was later to become the Cold War should have Atomic technology in order that a fair balance of knowledge would promote Peace. In her autobiography published in 1977, Ruth always justified her work as being against Nazi-fascism. Throughout 1942 they would meet and she would send details by wireless. She returned to Germany in 1950, where she lived in East Berlin as Ruth Werner, and died in 2000.

*The Red House* (was it chosen on purpose as a Communist joke?) is now called *The White Cottage*. Local word of mouth tells us that Ursula and Klaus would sit on a green council bench, just along from *The Red House*, outside *The Willows*. The bench was situated on a rather bad bend in the road and was always being crashed into by cars, so in time the council took it down and Kenneth Carrdus bought it and it stood in the garden of Overthorpe Hall for many years.

Another incident involving a bomb (although this time not atomic, thank goodness) was related by Ann Weise, née McCloghry, in a letter sent from America where she now lives. Her father was one of the head teachers at the school at Overthorpe Hall during the 1950s, and her mother (known as Mrs. Mac) lived there too in a domestic capacity.

One of the boys claimed to have found a “rocket” in the woods to the right of the old cricket pavilion on the sportsfield (I believe the property belongs to the boys school now). He carried it down to show to my mother, who felt it looked familiar, and suddenly realised that it was a bomb. She immediately carried it down to the woods to the left of the cedar tree and wedged it in the branches of a tree. She called the Bomb Disposal Team about it, but they could not come until the next day.

My father returned home to find none of the boys around and all of the windows open. My mother had sent all of the boys to bed at 6pm, as they kept trying to sneak down and see the bomb for themselves. My mother had a sleepless night, as it occurred to her that the vibrations of the traffic could set it off.

The next morning a lorry with Bomb Disposal Unit written in huge letters drove up the driveway. They managed to dismantle the bomb which had explosive in it, but luckily did not have a fuse. Apparently the woods had been used as an ammunition dump in the Second World War and this had been left over.

*Conclusion*

# **TOWARDS TOMORROW**

## THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

There are no longer any general shops in either Warkworth or Overthorpe, the nearest general stores, Post Offices and garages being in Grimsbury and Middleton Cheney. There has recently been a great deal of alteration and renovation done to many of the houses in the area, and several barn conversions over the past few years. The former Overthorpe Village Room is currently being made into a habitable dwelling, having been sold by the church council last year. The ancient village is now skirted by a number of modern houses, and with the building of the M40 motorway and the improvement of rail services, an increasing number of residents commute long distances to work, even to London (unthinkable a century ago).

As Overthorpe village has expanded beyond the 30-mile per hour road-signs, they are soon to be moved further towards the village boundaries, to include all the houses currently beyond them! The road through Overthorpe has been “access only” since 1991, but is sometimes used by through traffic nonetheless, because from the villages it provides a “rat-run” to the railway station and shops. The church remains inaccessible by a proper road, although there is a stony track that goes most of the way, though car tyres can still get bogged down in the field to which the track leads.

In Warkworth there are now several businesses undertaking such varied services as upholstery, parcel shipping and the buying and selling of reclaimed building materials; few now are directly involved in farming and the rural trades and crafts, as the village inhabitants once were.

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