

EDITORIAL

Since our last issue the Society has been active in many different fields around the village! On a delightfully warm and sunny evening, Sunday 2nd July, we had a most enjoyable 'Cocktail Party' in the Spanish Garden of the Bury. Thirty members attended from 6.00 to 8.00p.m., many in the costume of a 1930s party, to sip sparkling wine, eat canapes, and to play croquet and boules. It was a good start to the summer season. Our thanks once more to Sir Patrick and Lady Lena Browne.

On Monday June 10th about 25 members were given a most thorough and amusing tour of the conservation areas of Wandlebury-on the summit of the Gog Magog Hills to the south of Cambridge- by the Warden, Bill Clarke. Many of you will know of his work in this area, preparing footpaths, felling and planting trees, protecting rare species of plants, animals and insects, and preserving meadow flowers native to this region. The site is owned by the Cambridgeshire Preservation Society and is open to the public at all times. Why not take your summer walk or picnic there?

The Smithy on the Green is now well restored and readers will find an article by David Easthope about its restoration in this Journal. David was responsible for the oversight of the work and the Society has a watching brief on behalf of the Parish Council. The working bellows were recently given an overhaul by Arthur Rowe and Bill Wittering and treated with leather oil preservative. The Smithy is always open on Daffodil Weekend and can be opened for village residents and other *bona fide* visitors at other times. The Juniors of the School had a lesson there a few weeks ago. The keys are held by the Society and by the Parish Clerk.

An event outside our published programme was held on July 13 in the form of a One-day School on 'Medieval Houses of the Thriplow Area'. The course was organised by the Board of Continuing Education, Madingley Hall, of the University of Cambridge, and given by Dr. Leigh Alston, one of their Tutors. An account of the Day's activities appears in this Journal. There were 32 participants, twice as many as we had anticipated, as recruitment took place outside the village by the Board : it created some problems in the afternoon for the visits. The Society would like to place on record its most grateful thanks to Hugh Byrne, Graham and Janet Wynne, and George Deller for allowing us to inspect their timbered properties. We discovered that the oldest secular structure in the village and dating from at least the mid-fourteenth century is the barn at Rectory Farm. The Society will press the authorities to give this ancient building a *listing* in the catalogue of Historic Buildings of Thriplow.

Please note a change of date to the advertised programme of events : the annual Musical Soiree at the Bury will now take place on Saturday, November 9th. Our apologies for this change but the musicians were not all available at the earlier advertised date. Our next event is John Sutton's talk in October-"The Witch-Finder General". He is an excellent speaker-don't miss him!

Peter Speak and Shirley Wittering : Joint Editors.

PROFILE - WILLIAM SKIPPER

I was born in Foxton on February 23rd 1916. I was brought up by my grandparents as my father was killed in the war and my mother remarried and moved away. My grandfather, also William Skipper, was coachman at Foxton House He drove a coach and four and at one time I had all his livery, boots and whips in a big wooden box. When motor cars came in Dudley Welch (later Welch's coaches) became the chauffeur at Foxton House and my grandfather who could not drive became the gardener.

I went to school at Foxton and sang in the choir of both Foxton and Thriplow churches. I left school at 14 and started work at Foxton House, milking 7 cows and feeding a herd of pigs but a job came up at the East Anglian Cement Co. at Shepreth driving an engine and six trucks between the pit beside the A 10 and the works, and later I drove a lorry for them.

I started coming to Thriplow when I was fifteen, courting, and in 1939 I married Phyllis Gambie, the daughter of Bert Gambie. I was called up and did my training in Blandford in Dorset. Our first daughter, Susan, was born during the war, she now lives in Tasmania. I travelled all over the continent ending up in Germany. I was lucky, I did not get wounded. In 1946 Mrs Vinter who was a District Councillor got my wife a council house, and our second daughter, Jane, was born. She now lives in St Ives; my son lives in Newton, and we have grandchildren and two great-grandsons.

I had been trained as a blacksmith in the army, and in 1946 I was about to go to Letchworth on a training course when I met Mr (later Lord) Walston and he offered me a job as chauffeur to his wife Catherine. She had a yellow Rolls Royce and I used to drive her to London where they had a flat in the Albany. But my wife wasn't very happy about me being away so much, so I took to driving lorries for the farm. I drove pure bred Arab horses to shows in London and we went to between 15-20 Jersey Shows around the counties. I drove an articulated cattle float taking mares and stallions to be bred from, and sometimes I carted sugar beet which the farm had been growing since 1946. In those days Thriplow Farms was full of people and animals. We had 30 mares and 3 stallions; 3 Jersey herds, a herd of Black Angus cattle and a herd of White pigs at Duxford Grange, and 3 Dairy Farms, one at the Dairy House, Newton, one in Thriplow and one at Duxford. We also had chickens at Bacon's. The farrier came to the farm to shoe the horses, the smithy on the green wasn't used much then. I drove right up to when I retired at the age of 65.

I built this house myself where we live now. There was nothing in Fowlmere Road after Saracen's but orchards of greengage trees. I grubbed up the trees and my wife dug the footings while I was working. I remember putting on the ridge tiles one Christmas Day!

I remember the village when I was a child - it's still a very pretty village but it was much wetter in those days. There was a pond on the Green and ditches were always needing to be dug out. The fair used to come for two or three days over St George's feast and there were three pubs in the village: the Fox in Church Street which was burnt down in 1920, the Green

Man which during the war was run by Kath Pettit's parents, Mr and Mrs Buckerfield and the Red Lion where the Village Hall is now - it was one long room with the bar at the far end. There used to be a Doctor's surgery in Hodge Sheldrick's house in Church Street, where Peter and Sarah Freedman now live. When Mrs Hodge Sheldrick got too frail, she moved out and Dr Treweek stopped coming. Eric Pettit bought the house and enlarged it.

My grandfather taught me carpentry and I have made wooden wheelbarrows and other things to sell at Daffodil Weekend for many, many years. If I could have my working life over again I wouldn't change a thing. I've had the most enjoyable working life that anybody could have.

Shirley Wittering



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William Skipper

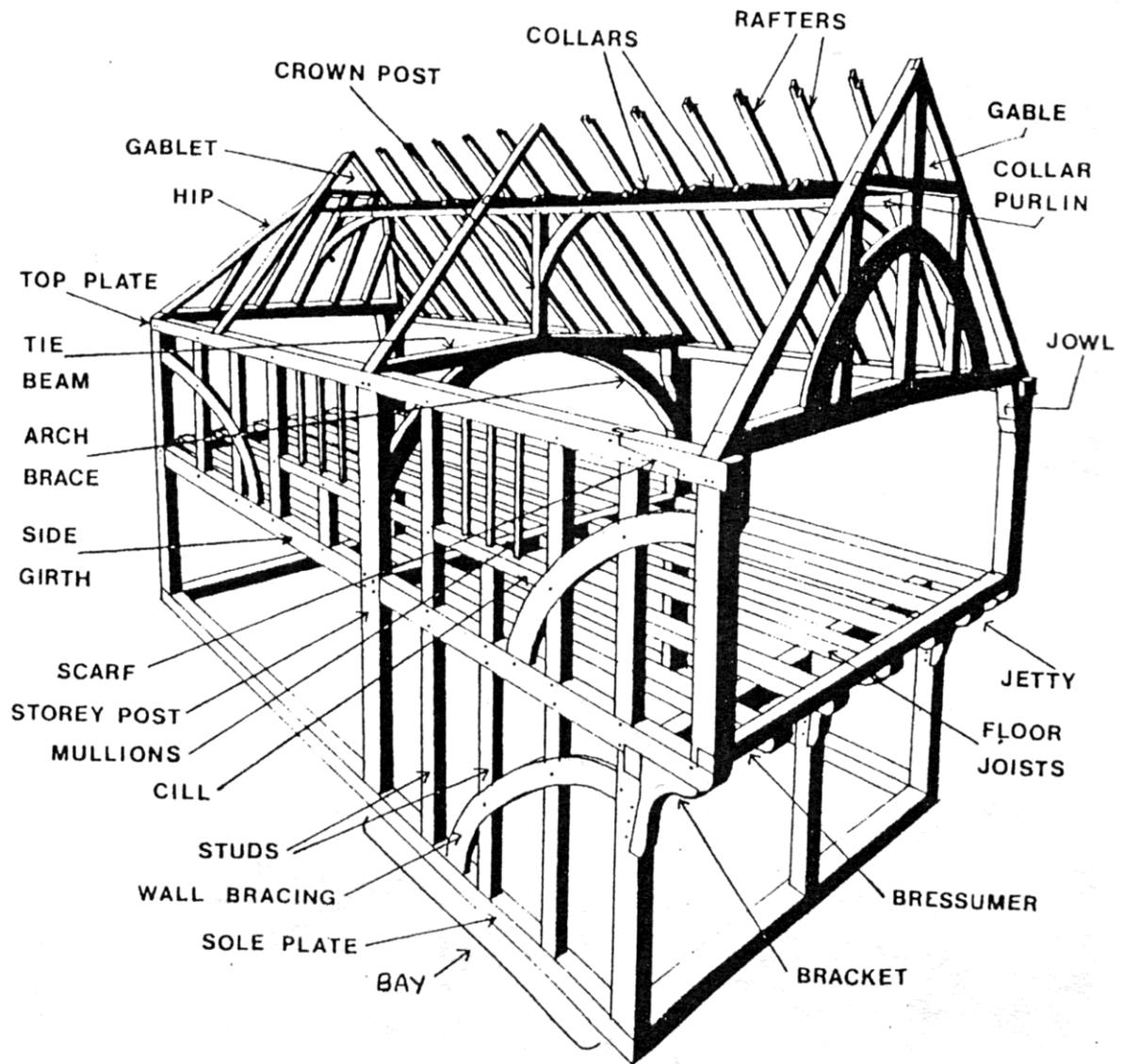
MEDIEVAL TIMBER- FRAMED HOUSES

On Saturday July 13 the Society was host to a One Day School organised by the Board of Continuing Education, Madingley Hall, of the University of Cambridge. This was an experiment by the Board to test the popularity of such courses in the villages of Cambridgeshire. The Society informed its members and 15 showed interest ; unknown to ourselves other similar organisations in villages around were informed and when the day came we found that 32 participants had been recruited. The tutor was Leigh Alston from Bures in Suffolk, an expert in the construction and history of timber-framed buildings. The programme for the day consisted of illustrated lectures in the village hall during the morning and visits in the afternoon to Bassetts in Lower Street, and to Gowards and the Barn at Rectory Farm in Middle Street.

We learned that the typical house of the 14th and 15th centuries was the open hall house consisting of a Hall leading into a Parlour, with two Service rooms separated from the Hall by a Cross Passage with doors at each end. The Hall was the only heated space in the building and the most important room. Here the family and its retainers would take their communal meals with the head of the household seated at a raised table at one end and the others in rank below. A central hearth on the floor heated the Hall and the smoke rose to escape through unglazed windows rising from the floor to the level of the eaves, and through the roof itself. A feature of all houses of this period is the smoke-blackened crown post, purlins, and rafters: without this soot the building is unlikely to be earlier than the end of the 16th century when the building of chimney stacks became more common. This innovation represented a change of fashion rather than a technological revolution: it was the need for greater privacy and less communal activity that was responsible for the later insertion of chimneys. The Parlour was the bedroom with the Solar above it used possibly as a secondary bedroom and for storage. On the other side of the cross-passage there would have been two rooms a buttery and a pantry, one for wet and one for dry goods, with chambers above. Leigh Alston was able to demonstrate for us these characteristics in both Bassetts and Gowards.

By 1650 this house pattern was beginning to disappear; it had survived by 'cultural inertia' for about 1000 years. Thereafter chimneys were added, the cross passage was re-organised, bedrooms were made upstairs, servants had separate entrances and upper stories were often jettied. But sufficient surviving elements of the medieval house can be recognised by the expert to date the property within a decade or two. Diagnostic signs are the design of the joints and the carpentry of the cross-sections of the timbers, the distribution of the wooden pegs and the positions of the present and former door frames. The wooden structure was usually prefabricated and prepared by the carpenter in advance away from the site. It took no more than two or three days to erect the basic framework but about six months to complete the whole house.

TERMINOLOGY OF THE TIMBER-FRAMED HOUSE



(By courtesy Of Dr. Leigh Alston)

The lecturer explained how many of our preconceived notions about medieval houses were simply wrong: for instance, all timbers were likely to be locally grown and not derived as *ship's timbers* from coastal locations; most timber was used *green* although imported "estrich" boards were brought from the Baltic via King's Lynn. Oak woodland was managed by coppicing on a 7-year cycle with selectd trees left as 'standards'. Small poles were cut for

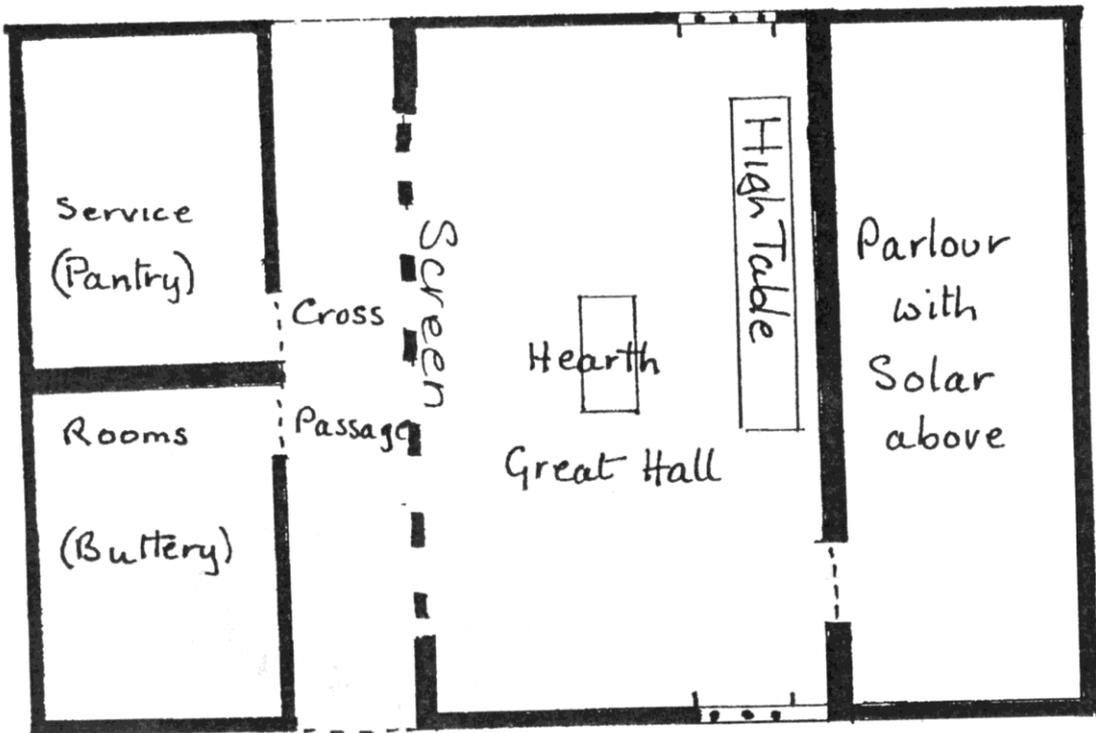
'wattle and daub' infilled with mud and straw (but not dung which was much too valuable as fertiliser). Although joints were 'pegged' nails were also used but often hidden from view. Like axes and saws nails were used from Roman times, but the shipwright's adze was never employed by the carpenter. The origin of 'half-timbered' comes from splitting the oak tree in half and not from the house style of timber and plaster. In East Anglia by the mid-seventeenth century many of the houses were plastered over with 'pargetted' decoration and dates added at this time (cf. Anno Domini in Church Street). Eventually windows were glazed between the narrow diamond-shaped mullions (see small window overlooking Church Street at Bacon's).

By this timber detection work Leigh Alston was able to indicate that Bassett's dated at least to about 1520 and Gowards to the latter part of the same century or to 1620, as doubt arises because some of the timbers appear to have been used from an older house. But the oldest structure to be seen was the barn in Rectory Farm, Middle Street. Although the thatched roof was replaced by corrugated iron some 50 years ago the medieval beams, rafters, with rough-hewn arched braces give a date possibly as early as about 1330 for the entire structure. The barn is very large with seven bays and probably used by the whole village at that time.

Thus clever detective work by the architectural historian can supplement and complement the documentation of the archivist in telling the story of Thriplow. From the Record Office in Cambridge we have mention of one John Bassett of Chishill who in 1444 sold part of his land in Thriplow to John Thurlow, and in the 1760s there are several references to members of the Goward family living and dying in Thriplow. When in 1284 the church in Thriplow was appropriated by the Bishop of Ely to the scholars of Peterhouse the payment of tithes from the great barn in Middle Street may well have been far greater than we had imagined. In 1333 thirty two men were named as having caused a riot and '*having burned ten carts of the Bishop of Ely's loaded with wheat, malt and other victuals for his household, taken away 30 horses worth £80 which were in the said carts, carried away his goods and assaulted his servants*'. So much equipment and food would have needed a large barn indeed to store them in before transporting them to the Bishop at Ely. This riot took place only fifteen years before the Black Death in 1348, a time of high population, land hunger, bad harvests and resulting famine; no wonder the people of Thriplow objected to the Bishop taking so much of their food away for his own use.

Peter Speak.

Recommended Reading : *Discovering Timber-Framed Buildings*, Richard Harris, Shire Publications Ltd., 3rd. Ed : 1978.



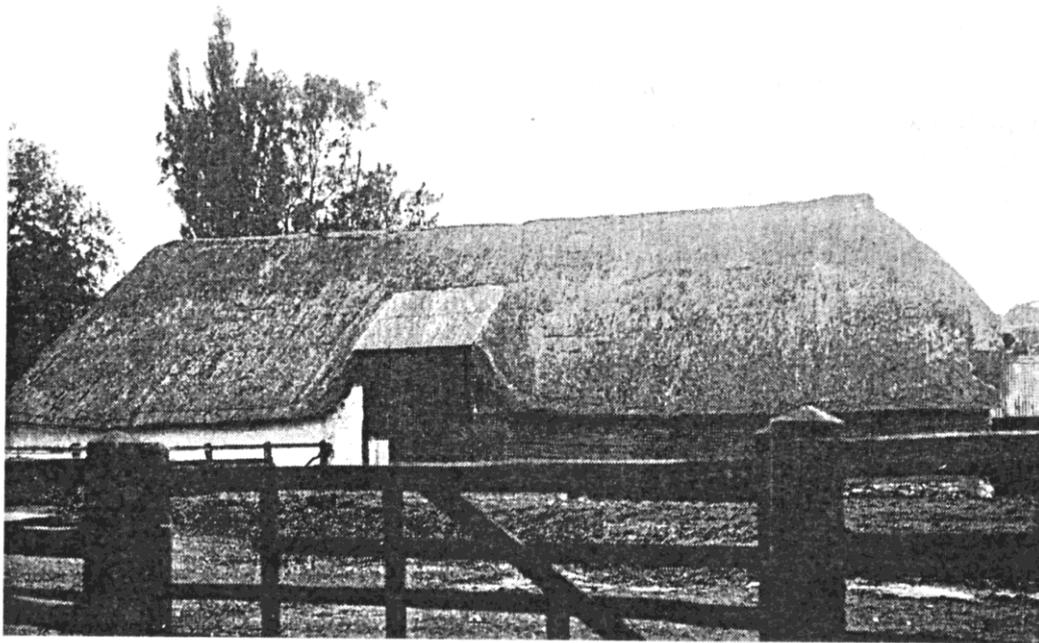
Plan of Medieval Hall House



Bassets in Lower Street 1920s



Gowards in Middle Street 1910



Rectory Barn in Middle Street 1920s

OLD FEN ENGINE

Years ago I played my part,
At keeping land and sea apart,
By steam I checked the flowing strain
Of waters deep by dyke and drain.

Squeezed the orange of its juice,
Sent it down through cut and sluice,
Never mind the rising tide,
By steam my service I'd provide.

Flying piston, crank and shaft,
Made my bearings jump and laugh,
These the days that I recall,
When my power was all in all.

Speeding fly wheel, quite a breeze,
Made my governor bob and tease,
Working then I did my part,
At keeping land and sea apart.

Fertile land of bulb and root,
Don't let the waters overshoot!
Push them back through ditch and drain,
Send them back to sea again!

Fertile land of bulb and beet,
Though my boilers never sleep,
Skilful Dutchmen made a plan,
To drain and dry this hearty land.

Tall gray smokestack, granite, neat,
Stands beside two old black teeth,
Those the doors to chancel greet,
All those drawn by my heart's beat.

Squeeze the orange till it's dry,
Let the pips both squeak and fly,
This, the great big oily sponge,
Dry the sludge and flake the grunge!

It always seems so strange to me,
That both by man's and nature's art,
That water which made steam in me,
Made the water floods depart.

In silence now, I stand alone,
Waiting all the time,
For some bright engineer to spark,
My heart, as in its prime.

Graham K.A.Walker 1995

THRILOW SMITHY

The Smithy, which is a Grade II listed building, had recently been refurbished. With the aid of an Historic Buildings grant from South Cambridgeshire District Council the Parish Council employed George Sheldrick and his son Douglas to carry out the work.

The present building, which was heavily refurbished in the 1930s, is not an old building, probably being built in the middle of the last century. It is likely, however, that it stands on the site of a previous smithy. Mr Vinter records that there has been a smithy in that location for about 400 years.

The present Smithy is built of clunch (chalk blocks), with gault brick dressings, dentil *, eaves, cornice and stack, under a pantiled roof. The timber framed annex is covered in weatherboard with the roof also finished with clay pantiles. The floor in both buildings is concrete. The principal problem that had to be tackled was the erosion of the exterior clunch facing due to frost action. Originally the clunch blocks were laid in a mortar of lime and sand, and in subsequent repairs the lime mortar had been raked out and replaced with cement mortar. Lime mortar is very soft and is compatible with the clunch. However, cement mortar is very hard and totally incompatible.

What is so bad about cement mortar? Oddly enough it is its strength that is its failing. Cement mortar does not simply dry, but rather sets by complex chemical reaction. The result of a 1 to 3 mix of sand and cement can be about 20 times the strength of traditional lime mortar. This makes it much more brittle so it is liable to crack and is also less permeable. In addition the chemical set produces salts. Water that finds its way into the wall cannot dry out through the mortar and instead it is concentrated along with the salts in solution in the adjacent clunch. The clunch, not the mortar, is eroded.

By contrast, traditional lime mortars are based on the simple fact that limestone can be transformed by the process of burning, slaking and mixing with sand into a highly workable long life mortar. This reacting with the carbon dioxide in the air, simply dries back into limestone again. This limestone is basically the same material as the clunch that it surrounds and evaporation of any damp in the walls is evenly spread between mortar and clunch. Many clunch buildings survive quite happily with the chalk face exposed. However, these are generally smooth faced like Harry Short's house next to the 'Queen's Head' at Newton. The Smithy is made of rough hewn blocks which become badly eroded much more easily than the smooth faced clunch, leaving ledges and cracks into which the rainwater can penetrate. It was therefore decided that, having repaired the walls using replacement clunch blocks obtained from Barrington Cement Works, and lime mortar, they should be lime washed. There are old photographs of the Smithy showing that at one time it was lime washed or, perhaps, even rendered.

The lime wash itself is derived from the same basic material as the lime mortar and also the clunch blocks, and therefore is totally compatible with the clunch and mortar. It enables the

rainwater to be shed more easily from the face of the building and allows any dampness in the walls to evaporate evenly because of its vapour permeability.

A colony of Masonry bees have lived quite happily in the walls of the Smithy for many years. Although in the raking out, repointing and lime washing the bee holes were all filled, they reappeared again in less than a fortnight after the restoration work was completed.

Internally, render was flaking off the walls and all that was loose has been removed and the walls re-rendered using lime putty, sharp sand and horsehair in the traditional manner. This was again finished with a lime wash. During the 1930s refurbishment a lot of new concrete was introduced internally at the tops of the walls, where the walls had, no doubt, crumbled. This concrete, because it is on the inside of the building and does not get wet, is not causing the problems that the cement mortar externally was causing and has therefore been left undisturbed.



George Sheldrick mending the Smithy.

The roof to the building was replaced in the 1930s with modern timbers which are in quite a sound condition. The pantiles which had previously been torched (the gaps between the edges filled with lime mortar to prevent driving rain and snow entering the building), again were in good condition although parts of the ridges needed rebedding. The torching, which had largely fallen out, was not replaced as it was considered that the excellent ventilation that these gaps between the tiles allowed the building was far more beneficial than the ill effect of the occasional penetration of the roof by driving rain and snow.

Many other minor works were carried out including the replacement of some rotten weather boarding and painting of the weather boarding, doors and windows. The opportunity was taken to remove the drawing pins from the doors and shutters which had previously held notices, although in my time in the village, which is more than 25 years now, I cannot recall seeing notices being put on these doors and shutters. The hundreds of drawing pins that were removed give testament to the previous use of the building as a notice board.

The object of refurbishment was to maintain the fabric of what is a delightful little building in the middle of our village green. Apart from the even white colouring of the limewash the appearance of the Smithy has not changed. It is believed, however, that decay both in timber and clunch has been arrested and provided that this maintenance is continued in future years, the life of the building can be said to be extended indefinitely into the future.

David Easthope.

Dentil = bricks set diagonally into the wall under the eaves to project in a decorative manner.



LADY'S BEDSTRAW - *Gallium verum*



Lady's Bedstraw is one of the 'strewing herbs' that were used in medieval times to put on the floor to mop up mud and mess and to give a sweet smell to the house. It was also used to stuff mattresses and is said to be one of the herbs in the manger at Bethlehem. When dried it smells of new mown hay. It belongs to the Madder family and as such gives a red dye from its roots, though it would take a lot to give much dye as it is a rather weedy plant. It grows abundantly in roadside verges, between 10-40 inches high with clusters of small yellow flowers in each stalk.

Its generic name comes from the Greek *gala* - 'milk' from its unusual ability to curdle milk. In the sixteenth century it was used as a cheese rennet and is still used in Tuscany to give a sweeter taste to goat's cheese.

Culpepper recommended it as a cure for nose bleeds and internal bleeding. An infusion of the leaves is said to be a laxative and it was also a popular remedy for gall stones and hysteria. According to Gerard, a medieval herbalist, an ointment made from the herb was 'soothing to the weary traveler'.

A close relative of Lady's Bedstraw is Cleavers or Goose Grass *Galium aparine*, that bane of every gardener's life; it is some consolation to know that it too, gives a red dye if enough of it is used! It is also an old country remedy to induce sleep and if used as a lotion is said to reduce freckles and sunburn.

S.A.W.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE THRILOW SOCIETY

Although it was not obvious at the time, the beginnings of the Society were sown by the Great Gale of October 1987. At that time, Thriplow had a small but very interesting museum housed in the big barn at the back of Bacon's Manor in Church Street. The founder and curator was the late 'Mossy' Arbon who lived in Bacon's and worked for the owner, Oliver Walston. Mossy would open the museum every Daffodil Weekend and tell the visitors about all the exhibits he had collected over the years.

The gale force wind blowing on the night of 15th October is said to have lifted the roof of the barn and let it down six inches from where it was. The gale had however done more damage than was at first apparent for the top of the clay-bat walls were now open to the rain and the walls began to cave outwards as can be seen today. Oliver Walston felt that it was no longer safe for the public to enter the barn and for the Daffodil Weekends of 1988 and 1989 they were only allowed to stand at the door and peer in. He however was still concerned about safety and decided to clear the barn all together. A notice was placed on the door of the Post Office inviting people who had loaned objects to the museum to reclaim them; the rest were sold.

The Parish Council were worried by the sudden loss of the museum and at their meeting on May 8th 1989 adopted a suggestion I put forward that a Committee be set up to do whatever they could to save the remaining exhibits of the museum and consider what could be done for the future. The Committee I proposed consisted of Dr Ken Joysey whose long experience of museums would be of immense value, Geoffrey Axe who had already shown a considerable interest in the local history of Thriplow, Arthur Rowe who had retired from farming in the Fens and from a career at The Welding Institute and whose knowledge of old farm implements was to prove invaluable in the years to come, David Easthope with his connections with the Parish and District Councils and in the world of architecture, myself with a interest in local history, formerly a member of the Council of the East Herts Archaeological Society and a Parish Councillor, and Richard Webber who had specialised in Historical Geography for his M.A. degree at Cambridge, as secretary.

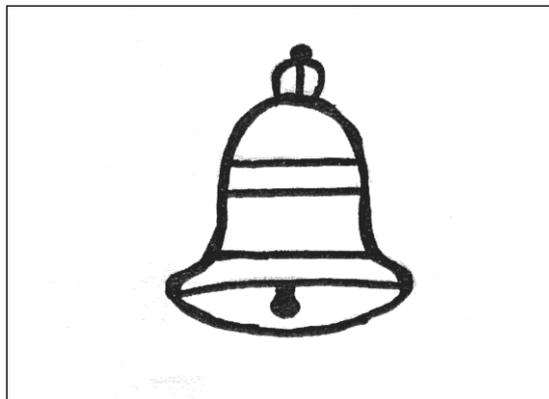
We met three times over the next three years. We explored many ways of re-creating the museum but so few items had been salvaged and there were no suitable premises available in the village. We sought the views of Peter Speak, a geographer with considerable interest in the village and secretary of the Meadow's Committee for 25 years. He suggested a wider approach

- 'Why not form a Society?'. This Society would not only collect artifacts etc, but would hold regular meetings, run outings and publish a Journal.

So an open meeting was held in the Village Hall on April 27th. 1992 with an inaugural talk by Peter Speak on 'Two Million Years of Thriplow History', and the Society came into being. The Committee consisted of Peter Speak as Chairman, the five 'founder' members plus Arthur Wragg (Treasurer) and Shirley Wittering as Secretary. Richard, because of business pressures had to resign early on from the Secretaryship and was replaced by Shirley who had just stepped down from being President of Thriplow W.I. and had been a founder member of The Frensham & Dockenfield Local History Group as well as a member of the East Herts Archaeological Society. When Arthur Wragg left the village in 1993 Cliff Parker took his place as treasurer and in turn handed the job over to Betty Parker in 1995. And that is how things remain to this day with the addition of Janet Melesi, Richard Taylor and James Quinlan to the Committee. Lady Lena Browne has been our stalwart President since the inception of the Society. Four years on and 12 issues of the Journal later, we have a membership of over 70 families - probably about half the population of the village.

Long may the Society reign!

Bill Wittering



This drawing of a bell was scratched on the lead of the church spire by Joseph Eayres of St Neots who made the five bells for the church in 1743.

GLEANINGS:

ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP;

Richard Webber and Tony Airey have been excavating some interesting molehills in Bacon's meadow! Various pieces of pottery have turned up, some dating from Romano-British times, some medieval but so far, nothing of any size. Various animal bones including oyster shells indications of human habitation over a very long period were also dug up. Richard and Tony hope to try another dig in a different part of the field soon.

MAP GROUP:

Is anyone interested in plotting the old field strips onto a modern map? We have several 'Terriers' (listings of strip ownership) for various dates, the earliest so far dated 1649. These lists give valuable information of the sequence of property ownership and maybe the clue to the location of certain houses (of which we know the name but not the whereabouts). They are also a very valuable source of old field and house names, giving, perhaps, a clue to their original use and ownership.

I would be very happy to organise an evening during the winter for a few people to get together to see if we can crack some of the puzzles.

Shirley Wittering.

THANKS are due to several people from the Thriplow Society:

To Miss Jean Dobson, whose ancestors (the Perrings) came from the village, for a beautifully reproduced copy of the Inclosure Award of 1841.

To Mrs Doris Bligh for giving the Society a framed copy of the Enclosure Map.

To *CPB Twyford* of Church Street for three splendend notices, one for the plough outside their premises, one for the Village Hall Garden and one to mark the site of the old Red Lion pub where the Village Hall now stands.

Thank you all very much.