



## CHALGRAVE

### A Deserted Village

A sizeable village was first recorded as *Cealhgraefen* (Chalk Pit) in 925AD but Chalgrave is one of about 500 villages which probably ceased to exist after the Black Death of 1348-50 during which two priests died in quick succession.

The site of the deserted village south-east of the parish church was marked by field undulations that are recorded in aerial photographs. Sadly, the field archaeology was destroyed in the 1960s by bulldozing and ploughing. The village name now exists as a parish of two hamlets – Tebworth and Wingrave, together with Chalgrave Manor Farm, a golf course and the isolated but regularly used All Saints parish church. Historic links that have not yet been destroyed are the ridge-and-furrow field patterns at Tebworth (Chalgrave's former East Fields) at SP 995273, Mediaeval fish ponds at TL 017273 near Manor Farm that would have served the original manor house and a 1.5 mile length of green lane, now a public byway, on the southern edge of the parish which is part of ancient track known variously as the Salt Way or the Theed Way. Its line continues for 25 miles, west as a tarmac road and footpath to Watling Street at Hockliffe and east as byways, bridleways and footpaths along the northern edge of Luton to join the prehistoric Icknield Way as it winds uphill between Warden and Galley Hills towards Lilley, where it probably once had other strategic connections.

### All Saints Parish Church

This is an interesting building located at TL 008274 on Lord's Hill within a grove of horse chestnut trees. It is approached through a field that is said to have been the scene of a great battle between the Britons and the Saxons. Frederick Davis writing in 1855 records that the Britons were vanquished and retreated in the direction of Chalton. He also mentions bones and weapons discovered by farm workers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1937, P G Bond described an earthwork at the centre of the field that appeared to be the remains of a fortification.

Much of the church dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century when it probably replaced an earlier wooden Saxon building. The passing of time has not been kind to the building: a tower blew down during a severe storm in 1889 but it was never rebuilt; the site has been sinking for several centuries and is now lower than the surrounding land. The church interior contains some

important mediaeval wall paintings that were discovered during the 1930s hidden under layers of whitewash.

### A Mediaeval Knight

The church also has a 14<sup>th</sup> century memorial in the form of a recumbent knight in full armour to Sir Nigel Loring, Lord of Chalgrave manor and hero of the Hundred Years War who started his career in 1335 fighting for Edward the Black Prince. In 1340, his small English fleet engaged a superior French force in Sluys harbour, attaching on a favourable wind and tide with the sun in the face of the enemy. His archers inflicted immense slaughter and Loring captured the entire French fleet. He later fought at the Battles of Crecy in 1346 and Poitiers in 1356 and was knighted by Edward III as a founder member of the Order of the Garter. Loring's manor house stood on a prominent mound that disappeared with other field earthworks but his exploits became the subject of two 'ripping yarns' written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

### A Novelist's Sojourn

A tombstone in the churchyard recording the death of Enoch Bennett provides a link to the period, between 1900 – 1903, when his 33-year old son, Arnold, took a short lease on nearby Trinity Hall Farm at Hockliffe (SP 988254). It was a time of transition for Bennett between leaving his origins in the Potteries district of Staffordshire and the beginnings of a successful writing career. Having won acclaim for his first novel *A Man from the North*, he felt the need to live closer to the metropolitan centre of England. With a good rail link to London at Dunstable, then just two miles away, Bennett decided that the house at Hockliffe was a suitable place to bring his sister and elderly parents to live. Apart from the loss of his father in January 1902 (characterised as Clayhanger in his later novel), it was a happy period when he developed interests in local life, history and geology. He wrote enthusiastically in his letters of the adjacent Watling Street's historical associations and the extensive views from his study across the Chiltern landscape to the south. He also carried out some substantial improvements to the house at his own expense, despite his short tenure. During this time he completed his second major novel *Anna of the Five Towns*, wrote some of the stories that appeared in *Tales of the Five Towns*, and *Fame and Fiction*. He also wrote in its entirety his only detective fiction *Teresa of Watling Street* which, although not one of his best works, is set in this district with descriptions of local places including a then sleepy and almost traffic-free Dunstable.

### Unjust Desserts

Dr William Dodd, Vicar of All Saints from 1772 (and Rector also of Hockliffe and Wing), achieved fame of a different kind. An extravagantly dressed dandy accustomed to living high on the hog, he appointed lowly-paid curates to tend his parishes while he resided in London. He built a chapel in Pimlico catering for a wealthier clientele, for he was an able and popular preacher, author and Doctor of Divinity. As friend and protégé of the Earl of Chesterfield, he

was appointed as Royal Chaplain. Sadly though, he had no ability with money. After becoming heavily in debt, he obtained £4,200.00 (a colossal sum in those days) from a stockbroker by forging the signature of Chesterfield to a bond. Quickly exposed, he offered to return the money and, with the help of friends, did manage to repay £3,900.00. Nevertheless he was sent to Newgate Prison to await trial. The verdict was guilty and because then the charge of forgery was considered a form of treason, the penalty was death by hanging.

Some 23,000 people considered this excessive and petitioned for a reprieve. They included John Wesley and Dr Samuel Johnson who visited him in jail and spoke eloquently on his behalf. But to no avail. Dodd was taken to Tyburn where in 1777 he was hanged alongside a 15-year-old boy who had stolen a few silver coins. At that time, hanging was an inefficient method of dispatching. The corpses of victims were frequently sold for dissection and it was not uncommon for victims to revive on the anatomist's slab! Indeed, it was not unknown for deals to be arranged between the executioner and the surgeon. Dodd chose John Hunter, the leading man of his time who pioneered the advancement of medical science with experiments that included organ transplants, preservation by freezing, artificial insemination and vaccination. But Dodd's secret plan for the hangman to cut him down quickly for revival was thwarted by enormous crowds who hemmed in the site of the execution. Hunter's efforts with bellows to pump air into his lungs were to no avail.

Many convicted murderers, burglars and robbers had death sentences commuted to transportation or imprisonment, but the death sentence for forgery remained in place until 1832 when the maximum penalty was reduced to life imprisonment.

*Tony Northwood, Icknield Way News Spring 2009*

*His references were:*

*Bennett A., "Teresa of Watling Street" 1989 Book Castle Edition introduction by Simon Houfe*

*Bond P G, "Rambles around Luton" 1937*

*Davis F, "History of Luton and its Hamlets" 1855*

*Moore W, "The Knife Man" 2005 – a biography of John Hunter*