

## PART TWO

# Silchester through the Centuries

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This section gives a rapid chronological account running from the geological background, which has had an important influence on the parish, through two millennia to the 21st century.

Interspersed with the narrative are explanations which complement the historical details. We also mention the Richard Hyde Charity and the local sports clubs all of which are part of the fabric of village life. Additionally, we devote some space to a few individuals of importance to the parish.

Finally, we include a condensed version of Michael Knight's memoir of life in pre-war Silchester.

### 2.1 Geological Background

To go right back to the origins of our landscape, the corner of northern Hampshire in which the parish of Silchester lies was once an insignificant stretch of seabed.

About 100 million years ago there existed a vast ocean, stretching from present-day Ireland to the Caspian Sea. The salty water teemed with life, supporting many different species of marine creature from huge predators to tiny crustaceans. Over the slow passage of millennia, the bones and shells from countless generations of these pre-historic amphibians accumulated on the ocean floor. Under enormous pressure they compacted, eventually creating the chalk beds which were to appear in later ages as a notable geological feature of Hampshire.

The constant action of water with its eddies and whirlpools, created depressions in the newly formed soft, chalky rock. These hollows were filled with sandy, sedimentary material

which also became compacted. As a result of even greater pressure from the weight of further deposits, these substances became extremely hard. The compressed pockets slowly metamorphosed into the flints which are a notable feature of present-day chalk landscapes.

About 65 million years ago various other sediments gradually accumulated over the strata of chalk. Layers of clay, gravel and sand built up.

While inexorably, millimetre by millimetre, this accumulation was taking place, the earth was cooling and, under immense tectonic pressure, continents were slowly moving. As part of this process, the land which was to become Britain had been remorselessly pushed from its position on the Equator to its present location in northern Europe. At the same time, constant subterranean pressures were gradually forcing the ground to lift and rise out of the ocean. As a result, about 50 million years ago, the area of the London Basin took its shape as

did the Weald, The Chilterns and other upland areas, including our corner of north Hampshire.

The chalk deposits, after millions of years of slow formation, were at least 200m (650ft) beneath the ocean. Over the passage of time they were thrust upwards to the present altitude of about 90m (300ft).

Eventually in south-east England the higher ground surrounded a huge river estuary (the forerunner of the present Thames). This estuary gradually became filled with further sediments washed down by the flowing river water and deposited in the vast basin over later millennia.

During these aeons of time all elevated areas of land were subject to continual erosion by the action of wind and rain. Additionally, over millions of years there were at least five Ice Ages in Britain, the last ending about 12,000 years ago. During these periods the area which would become the Thames Valley was thrust southward by the action of glaciers, which advanced as far as what is now the South Midlands.

Because of the relentless attrition of these natural forces, many of the accumulated alluvial deposits from earlier millennia were worn away. A more resistant spur of gravel remained, protruding between the rivers Kennet to the north and Loddon to the east. The present-day parish of Silchester is situated on this stony outcrop.

These ancient geological developments are hugely relevant to the history of Silchester. The first human settlement occurred on the north-easternmost portion of the gravel spur, doubtless because it was the ideal location for a fortified settlement. Further west, gravel deposits provided an environment ideal for the generation of heathland.

But the story of Silchester is not solely influenced by natural forces. It is also the story of the human endeavour both of our ancient ancestors and more immediate forebears who inhabited a landscape shaped and sculpted over countless millennia.

## 2.2 The Iron Age 800 BC – AD 43

Until approximately 6,500 BC Britain was connected to the greater European land mass. An area of what is now the south-easternmost part of England was joined to what is now northern France and the Low Countries. Dogger Bank, a shallow sandbank the North Sea is a submerged remnant of this lost landscape.

In these prehistoric times people were hunter gatherers. Following herds of animals, they gradually migrated north westwards. Their progress was unimpeded by the sea, giving them access to the area of land which was to become isolated and stand alone as the British Isles. Indeed, archaeological discoveries have found evidence of human existence in our country dating back 40,000 years.

Rampier Copse  
earthwork



Evidence of human activity becomes stronger as we move forward in time. Flint artefacts discovered in Silchester indicate that hunting took place in the ancient locality from 6,500 BC onwards. Further west, in our adjoining county of Wiltshire, Stonehenge was actively used between 3,100 and 1,600 BC.

The first permanent occupation of land eventually forming part of Silchester parish took place in about 800 BC. Excavations at Church Lane Farm in the 1980s revealed the remains of an early Iron Age settlement dating from around that time.

The people who lived here were members of a tribe known as the Atrebates. They were not unique to this area. Other members of the Atrebates also lived in what is now northern France (then part of ancient Gaul), their main settlements located in and around the present-day town of Arras. As there is evidence of links between the British Atrebates and the Gallic Atrebates, it is possible that the predecessors of local inhabitants were immigrants from across the Channel.

In the period 20–10 BC a much larger settlement, sufficiently substantial to be termed a town, was established. It was known as Calleva and located in what is now the historic site on Wall Lane, owned by Hampshire County Council and in the care of English Heritage.

Calleva is an ancient Celtic name translating as *woodland place*. This implies that originally the surroundings were lightly settled and extensively wooded. Other relics of ancient woodland are Bramley Frith and Pamber Forest, both just outside the parish boundary.

The Atrebates faced challenges from rival tribes. To the north of the Thames the Catuvellauni were the dominant power. To the east, territory was held by the Iceni who, famously led by Boudicca, offered considerable resistance to the Romans in the years following their arrival in AD 43.

The most notable and visible Iron Age remains in Silchester are stretches of the impressive ramparts and ditches which sur-

rounded the town of Calleva. The substantial stone walls are from a later era, archaeological investigations having established that the Romans simply took over and occupied the Iron Age town. Indeed, the line of the Roman wall falls partly within the pre-existing Iron Age defensive boundary.

Visitors have an early glimpse of a section of the Iron Age defences at the edge of the car park near the entrance to the English Heritage site. The banks rise above the footpath towards the main site while the ditch runs in front, being particularly noticeable in wet weather when it retains water. The most impressive earthwork, rising to a height of some 4.9m (16ft), lies in Rampier Copse, to the south-west of the Roman town, although in summer it is partially obscured by trees and other woody vegetation.

Excavations led by Professor Michael Fulford of University of Reading since 1974 have helped to establish that the Iron Age civilisation was not as backward as portrayed by Roman historians. Discoveries of pottery, jewellery and food remains demonstrate that merchants conducted an extensive and sophisticated trade with continental Europe. Furthermore, the numerous discoveries of Iron Age coins on the Calleva site indicate that the economy was sufficiently advanced to require a system of currency. Coins minted in the reign of Eppilus, immediately before the arrival of the Romans, carry the words REX CALLE. As 'Rex' is the Latin for King (of Calleva), it can be deduced that Eppilus and his court were both highly literate and numerate.

It appears that Eppilus was ousted from power by his brother Verica. However, intriguingly, coinage relating to Verica is mainly found in the Chichester area. This in turn suggests that Verica was driven out of Calleva sometime before AD 43.

To complete the picture, coinage produced by Cunobelin of the Catuvellauni has been discovered in Calleva. This suggests that he (and after his death his son, Caractacus) was ruler of the settlement immediately prior to



the Roman invasion. There is evidence that Verica pleaded with the Emperor Claudius to send his forces to remove Cunobelin. Thus, it seems possible that the arrival of the Romans may have been by way of invitation rather than invasion.

The Silchester excavations have revealed that our Iron Age predecessors created a thriving community. They enjoyed a varied diet, eating beef, lamb, and pork. They imported wine, olive oil and other foodstuffs from the Mediterranean. Besides the minting of coins, metal was worked not only to manufacture utilitarian goods but also to create delicate items such as brooches, used both to decorate and to fasten garments. Exports included grain, cattle, gold, silver and iron.

All the evidence suggests that Iron Age Calleva was prosperous. It is highly likely that it became an important import/export hub through which passed a wide variety of goods. As such it rapidly developed into one of the most significant towns in pre-Roman Britain.

### 2.3 The Roman Era

Following the arrival of Roman legions in AD 43, Calleva became the centre responsible for the administration of a county-sized area comprising parts of modern Hampshire, Surrey, Wiltshire and pre-1974 Berkshire.

There is no evidence of a wholesale destruction of the Iron Age town. It appears that initially Roman troops occupied existing buildings before moving on, as archaeological investigation has uncovered no formal military buildings such as barrack blocks. From the outset the Romans evidently appreciated the suitability of Calleva as a fortified settlement. As a thriving town existed in a favourable location, there was no need to start afresh. Suitability did not preclude development. In the late first century the town underwent Roman adaptation. Streets running south to north and west to east were laid down in a grid pattern, thereby replacing both the Iron Age town plan and structures.



Roman Wall South Gate





Joyce (1819–1878), Rector of Stratfield Saye from 1855 until his death. Subsequently, over two decades between 1890 and 1909, a major project financed by the Society of Antiquaries of London uncovered the entire site, revealing the remains of all the stone or brick-built edifices within the town. The Victorian technique was to identify the walls of the Roman buildings and uncover the remains of the structures within them. Later excavations, adopting more modern techniques, have removed material layer by layer across defined areas, revealing the underlying Iron Age and early Roman town and uncovering associated objects and environmental evidence previously unseen.

One of the legacies of the late 19th / early 20th century excavations is the comprehensive street plan of Roman Calleva, completed once all masonry remains had been uncovered. This Edwardian grid pattern map, familiar from its use in numerous guides, appears to depict the entire town, but of course it is a representation of the layout only at the very end of the Roman era in the fourth and early fifth centuries. Undoubtedly, over the period of 400 years

in which the Romans were present, the town evolved. There was inevitably a process of decay, renewal, redesign and reconstruction. It has been established, for example, that in the third century the amphitheatre was refurbished. The earlier terracing was removed to permit the installation of more comfortable seating.

The capacity of the amphitheatre might offer some indication of the size of Calleva's population during the Roman era. Initially, it may have held up to 3,640 people if there was seating and as many as 7,250 if there was terracing, although following refurbishment it is estimated that this number falls to around 3,000. As it can be assumed that the majority of spectators were local residents, we can conjecture that the town's total population was at least twice the capacity of the amphitheatre.

The Romans termed the town Calleva Atrebatum, denoting its importance as an administrative centre in the heart of the territory originally occupied by the Atrebates. At its centre was a forum, a rectangular area flanked on one side by a basilica. This was a



The Amphitheatre

very large colonnaded hall providing a public meeting place. Here, functions such as the dispensation of justice and the collection of taxes were carried out. This civic centre also acted as a marketplace. Elsewhere there is evidence of the manufacture of metal goods, pottery and garments. In other areas there were temples, public baths and private residences.

Discoveries from various excavations show that Calleva enjoyed a degree of opulence. Certain residences boasted intricate mosaic floors some of which, along with the finds from the early excavations, are now on display in Reading Museum. Many buildings were kept warm by means of a hypocaust, an early form of central heating. The floors of buildings were supported by a series of stacked tiles (*pilae*) to allow hot air to circulate between them, thereby heating the rooms above. The attached furnaces would have required a constant supply of dried, and perhaps costly, timber for fuel.

Some fairly sophisticated metal artefacts were discovered by Rev Joyce. On 9 October 1866, during excavations in the basilica, he unearthed what has come to be known as the Silchester Eagle. Although Joyce thought that the bronze eagle, just 15cm (6ins) tall, belonged to a Roman legion, it is now believed to have been part of a statue of Jupiter. The discovery (and Joyce's initial excited speculation) was the inspiration for the novel *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954) by Rosemary Sutcliffe.

Just over four years later, on 27 October 1870, Joyce made a further discovery during ongoing basilica excavations. This was the small object termed the Silchester Horse, thought initially to be a child's plaything, but now considered to have been a handle on a drinking vessel. Cast in bronze, it measures approximately 10x6cm (4x2ins) and is rather elongated in appearance but with distinct equine features on its head, reminiscent of the White Horse at Uffington in Oxfordshire. The Silchester Horse, having been adopted as a symbol by the modern village, is widely used as a logo. It features on Silchester School uniforms, within the Parish Magazine, above

the stage in the Village Hall and throughout this book.

The people of Calleva Atrebatum drew their water from numerous wells situated within the town. It is noticeable that there is only one other water source, a brook which nowadays rises near the centre of the Roman site. It is likely that in Roman times this stream fed the baths which, excavations have shown, were in its vicinity.

It is widely known that the Romans were great road builders, creating an extensive network of routes traversing the country in straight lines. Calleva was an important hub on this network with accommodation available for travellers in its *mansio* (inn). The roads radiating from the town were:

- a) east to London (Londinium), a route later known as The Devil's Highway and shown as such on Ordnance Survey maps;
- b) west to Bath (Aquae Sulis) and north-west to Cirencester (Corinium);
- c) south-west to Dorchester (Durnovaria), a route known as the Portway which ran near the Flex Ditch (See 3.1);
- d) south to Winchester (Venta Belgarum) and Chichester (Noviomagus);
- e) north to Dorchester-on-Thames (Latin name no longer known)

Each of these roads entered the town through one of the gates in the wall. The remains of two, the North and South Gates, are still clearly visible.

The Roman presence in Calleva lasted a total of nearly 400 prosperous years, with a population which, at one time, may have been as large as 6,000. Our forebears from this era engaged in trade, the manufacture of leather and metal goods and also civic administration. Their diet was varied including a variety of meats, game, freshwater and marine fish as well as locally grown fruit, pulses and cereals. Evidence has been found of the importation of significant quantities of olive oil, fruits and wine from continental Europe.

Against this background, it is salutary to remind ourselves that in the long history of our parish, the most extensive settlement, occupied for the greatest period of time, is now a pleasant series of grassy fields, lying quietly under the watch of the surrounding stone walls.

## 2.4 The post-Roman Era

It is likely that a combination of factors led to the desertion of Calleva, resulting in the disintegration of its buildings and leaving only the substantial Roman walls as evidence of its former importance. In turn, the walls were partly robbed of their stone over succeeding centuries.

Once they no longer faced Roman resistance, from the fifth century Saxon invaders were able to establish strongholds which developed into permanent settlements. In this part of the country they occupied extensive areas of the Thames Valley. For a time the most important town was Dorchester-on-Thames which in AD 635 became the seat of a bishop and, for about 30 years, effectively the capital of the emerging Wessex, until Winchester became predominant around AD 660.

By the late fourth century the administration of the Roman Empire was falling into disarray. There were both internal divisions and external dangers. Throughout Europe different tribes were making inroads into Roman territory. Faced with existential threats, in AD 410 the Emperor Honorius issued a command requiring the towns of Britain to look to their own defence and his legions to return to Italy. This marked the final exercise of Roman authority. Already by that time the usurper Emperor Constantine III had removed the remaining Roman forces from Britain.

Although there was no longer a military presence in Britain, such was the size and importance of Calleva Atrebatum that civil life would not have ceased abruptly. However, in the early decades of the fifth century the

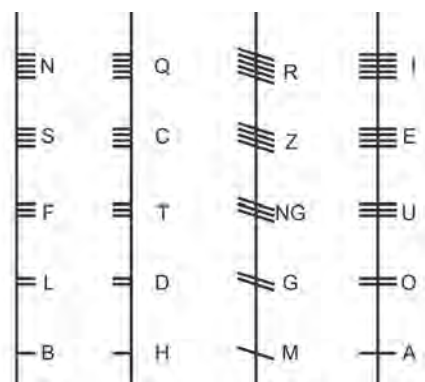
municipality experienced a steep decline. It appears to have ceased to carry out civic functions by AD 450 and to have been abandoned entirely between AD 550 and 650.

There is no definitive reason why such a substantial town simply fell into ruin, gradually crumbled and became buried. All the major towns of Roman Britain suffered the same fate. Quite simply, following the collapse of Roman administration one of their main *raisons d'être* had disappeared.

Possibly in Calleva there was a problem over water supply. Excavations have shown that the town possessed numerous wells and also numerous latrines. Accordingly, it is quite likely that, over four centuries, extensive contamination of ground water by sewage had occurred.

Apart from the abandonment of the town, there is scant knowledge of what might have occurred in the fifth to eleventh centuries. One tantalising glimpse was offered by the discovery of an Ogham Stone during excavations in 1893. This stone is actually a reused dwarf Roman column inscribed in the Ogham script which was developed in southern Ireland in about AD 400. Associated with a small property in the north-west of the town, the stone appears to indicate that there was an Irish community present in the twilight years of Calleva.

As is well known, the invasion led by William of Normandy occurred in 1066. Rapidly, after the defeat of King Harold, vast swathes of the newly conquered kingdom were in effect leased to various noblemen in return for feudal service. Often these grants were subdivided, rather like the lease of a large house being subdivided to



The principle characters of the Ogham alphabet



create individual apartments. At the highest level this placed an obligation upon the overlord to provide to the king the services of a knight for a period of 40 days per year.

Requiring a comprehensive inventory of his new realm, in 1085 King William dispatched commissioners to every county to ascertain and record details of population, livestock and buildings. The resulting document, known as The Domesday Book, was created in 1086.

The Domesday Book records Silchester as *Silcestre*, the name used by the Saxons. The suffix *chester* usually denotes a Roman fortification or settlement and is found within the names of many of our cities (e.g. Winchester) with a Roman heritage. The *Sil* is derived from a Saxon word *sealh* meaning a sallow tree, a type of willow. Literally it is *sallow tree chester*. As indeed to the present day willow trees grow in the vicinity of Silchester Brook, we can thank our Saxon predecessors for a suitably descriptive parish name.

Also from the Domesday Book we learn that, prior to the Norman Conquest, in *Silcestre* a certain Alestan held a manor, with King Edward the Confessor as his overlord. Another manor was held by someone named Cheping, with Harold Godwinson as his overlord. Following the conquest, Alestan's manor was transferred to the ownership of William d'Eu and Cheping's to Ralph de Mortimer. In turn, Ralph de Mortimer appointed a tenant named Ralph Bluet.

The manor held by William d'Eu consisted of five hides, while that held by Mortimer consisted of three. A hide was a patch of land considered sufficient to support one family. In practice it could vary in size between 40 and 240 acres (16 and 97h).

The larger manor formed what is now the parish of Mortimer West End. The smaller became Silchester parish and was located around the Manor House adjacent to the church. There was a total population of between 50 and 60 people.

Over the centuries there have been various Lords of the Manor of Silchester as detailed in 2.7.

## 2.5 Confusion over Calleva

Although Calleva Atrebatum is now universally acknowledged as the Roman name for Silchester, this acceptance has occurred comparatively recently. Indeed, for much of the last millennium very different names were applied to the Roman site. This is why antique maps predating the early 20th century bear no reference to Calleva.

The Roman name, Celtic in origin and occurring simply as Calleva on Iron Age coins, means Woody Place (Calleva) of the Atrebates Tribe (Atrebatum). Our knowledge of this appellation comes from various records created during the Roman occupation of Britain. However, as a result of misunderstanding, speculation and an 18th century forgery, other names were applied to our pre-Saxon parish.

An important reference point for antiquarians was a ninth century manuscript entitled *Historium Brittonum* written by a Welsh monk named Nennius. Little is known about Nennius who apparently was a member of a monastic order somewhere in Powys, mid-Wales. It is unlikely that his work was original, probably being based on other ancient written sources which no longer exist. Scholars regard the *Historium Brittonum* as a mixture of fact, legend and conjecture. Crucially, Nennius listed 22 ancient cities of Britain, among them Caer Segont (meaning stronghold of the Segonti tribe).

Three centuries later, the mediaeval writer Henry of Huntingdon (c.1080–1160) identified Caer Segont as Silchester. Nennius having recorded that the burial of Constantius, father of Constantine the Great (AD 272–327, the first Christian Emperor of Rome) took place at Caer Segont, Henry of Huntingdon created the mythical association of Constantine with Silchester. His near contemporary and fellow writer, Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100–c.1155) extrapolated this association to one with King Arthur.

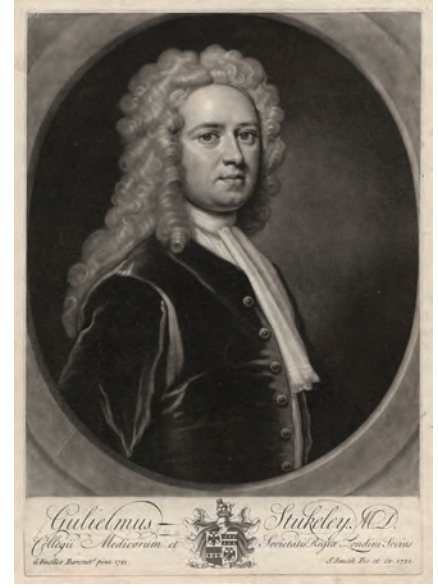
The acceptance of Caer Segont as Silchester became widespread. In a work of 1366 entitled *The Eulogium Historium* the following appears.



*Caer Segont, situated not far from Redinge, now called Silcestre, and almost completely destroyed.*



*Silchester in Hampshire: The Vindonum of the Romans, and the Caer Segont of the Ancient Britons. (See 3.1)*



*From left:  
Geoffrey of Monmouth  
William Camden  
William Stukeley*

The great early historian William Camden (1551–1623) associated Caer Segont with Vindomum as that was known as the capital occupied by the Segonti tribe. Some years later another famous antiquarian, William Stukeley (1687–1765), formed the opinion that Calleva was located at Farnham, labelling Silchester as Vindoma.

Now a cunning forgery muddled the waters. In 1747 a certain Charles Bertram alleged that a volume which had come into his possession was a hitherto unknown work by Richard of Cirencester (c.1335–1401). In fact, it was a well-crafted fake. The book positively identified Silchester as Vindomis, apparently confirming the theories of more respectable scholars. Charles Bertram's forgery was eventually exposed in 1869, over a hundred years after it was created.

Sam Chandler of Basingstoke writing about Silchester Roman site in the early 19th century, continued the use of what we now know to be mistaken nomenclature. His slim volume first published in 1821 and reprinted several times over succeeding years, bears the grandiose title: *The History and Antiquities of*

Vindoma or Vindomis became the accepted name until well into the 19th century. It was only when inscriptions with the name Calleva were found in excavations in Silchester in 1907 that it was finally established beyond doubt that this was not the location of Vindomis. At last maps began to give the Roman site its correct name of Calleva Atrebatum.

It had taken over a thousand years to demonstrate that what had been recorded by Nennius was hopelessly incorrect. We should not be too hard on him. After all he was a scribe in a monastic community in a remote area with access only to other unreliable texts. However, it is now generally accepted that the Caer Segont of Nennius was actually Caernarvon (the Roman Segontium) in North Wales.

## 2.6 1066 to the 16th Century

At the time of the Norman Conquest Silchester would have been a typical rural settlement with a small local population engaged solely in agriculture. There may have been a substantial dwelling for the Lord of the Manor, possibly on the site of the current Old Manor House

adjacent to the parish church of St Mary the Virgin. There would have been smaller, simpler dwellings nearby for his tenants. In return for giving labour service such tenants would have been permitted to keep some livestock and to cultivate communal land using crop rotation in the three-field system.

The impact of a change of regime would have been noticeable. The Anglo-Saxon nobility would have been thrust aside and Normans would have taken their place. Over the succeeding decades the distinction between Saxons and Normans faded, the two merging to become unified as the English.

What would have set Silchester apart from other similar rural settlements would have been the imposing Roman walls. It is likely that their origin at that time was unknown as by the time of the Conquest the Roman occupation was 600 years in the past. The local populace may well have had their own fanciful theories about the builders of the walls, but undoubtedly, they would have been grateful for a readily accessible source of building material.

The earliest known building post 1066 is the church of St Mary the Virgin. It is highly likely that it was located on the site of previous religious buildings, as there is evidence of Roman temples in this area. The fabric of the church shows that its builders certainly took material from the Roman walls.

The origins of the church go back to the late 12th or early 13th century. The Bluet family obtained ownership of both manors recorded in the Domesday Book in 1167, possibly marking the occasion with the foundation of a church. Alternatively, construction of the church may have been an act of atonement by a member of the Bluet family or an attempt to demonstrate wealth and status, perhaps to impress the monarch.

Archaeological evidence indicates that, at this time, the small settlement of Silchester consisted of a few buildings in the vicinity of the church. It is likely that these were located in what are now large fields to the east of the Roman site and next to the Roman walls as far as the South Gate. In the 13th century the population would have been tiny, hardly warranting its own church. This consideration gives rise to yet another theory that the Bluet family may have founded the church to enhance their status and to reinforce feudal ties. It is likely that it took some time for the building to be completed and to become the accepted parish church as the first Rector, John of Knovill, was not appointed until 1294.

Excavations in the Roman amphitheatre have indicated that during the twelfth century it held a building in the shape of a hall which was probably the manor house at that time. Secreted within the banks of the arena, it may well have been a fortified edifice. There is a suggestion that it was possibly the Castellum de Silva (small castle in the wood) captured by King Stephen in 1147 during the civil war against Matilda.

In 1204, a later Ralph Bluet (a descendent of the Ralph Bluet mentioned in the Domesday Book) was granted a licence to enclose an area of land to the south-east of the former Roman town as a deer park. In exchange he gave a palfrey – a highly valued horse suitable for long distance riding. Parts of the earthwork surrounding the deer park known as the Park Pale (from the palings used to enclose it) can still be traced today.

It is believed that the Parker, who was

The Moat



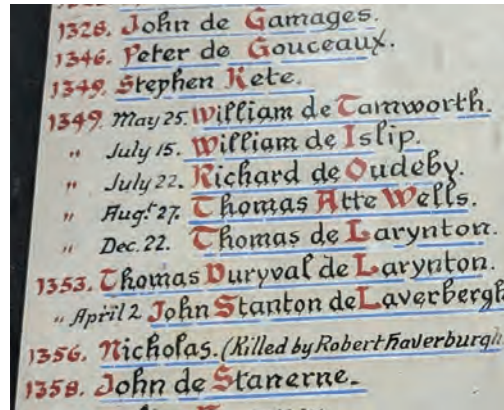


custodian of this enclosed area, lived a little further east in a fortified building protected by a moat. Traces of a 13th century moat can be seen adjacent to the road by the bend at Clapper's Farm, near the easternmost parish boundary. As the Parker was an important manorial official, this residence would have been impressive, appropriate to his standing in the small community.

The granting of the enclosure licence to Ralph Bluet perhaps indicates that he was held in royal favour with ready access to the monarch. At the beginning of the thirteenth century this was King John who reigned from 1199 to 1216. As the nearby Pamber Forest was one of King John's favourite hunting grounds he must have been familiar with Silchester. It is known that he paused in the parish en route to Winchester in May 1215, just a month before the signing of the Magna Carta at Runnymede in June of that year.

The Silchester Trail map indicates that on the site of what is now Rye House in Wall Lane the monks from Reading Abbey built a hospice or convalescent home, although no trace of this remains. There is also an assertion that material from the Roman walls was used in the construction of Reading Abbey. However, this is disputed and may well be a local myth rather than a proven occurrence. Construction of the Abbey started in about 1121 and continued for 200 years. In 1539 the community was dissolved, the abbot executed and the monks scattered. As the present Rye House dates from the 17th century any remnants of a hospice were probably already indistinct and doubtless obliterated during the construction process.

It is unlikely that Silchester escaped the Black Death which swept through the country in 1349. There were no fewer than six Rectors who held office in quick succession during this period, each following a predecessor who had succumbed to disease, although some may never have set foot in the parish. It is probably as a result of this pandemic that the small settlement near the church vanished, leaving no identifiable village.



Extract from the list of Rectors

The oldest existing building in the area near the church of St Mary the Virgin is The Mount, situated on the north-eastern side of the Roman amphitheatre (i.e. just outside the Silchester parish boundary and therefore within Mortimer West End parish). This property is listed in the Hampshire County Council publication *Hampshire Houses 1250–1700* where it is indicated that its crucks (large naturally curved timbers supporting the frame) were felled in approximately 1405.

We can envisage what the small settlement of Silchester must have looked like at the beginning of the 15th century. By now the church of St Mary the Virgin was well established. There would have been an important residence probably on the site of what is now called The Old Manor House. Just a stone's throw away, The Mount would also have held

The Mount



a prominent position. Poorer labourers would have lived in their more rudimentary dwellings in this same general area.

It is likely that over the centuries there was no Lord of the Manor resident in the locality. (See 2.7) This is perhaps why, without a strong guiding influence, the parish continued to develop in an ad hoc manner.

A mile from the church, the oldest part of Silchester House in Holly Lane dates to the early 1600s and is believed to have been constructed on the site of a Tudor farmhouse. This was a substantial property which, it is speculated, may also have been occupied as a manor house. If that is the case then possibly we can date the shift of the village centre to the late Tudor/Stuart era. It is noticeable that from this time onwards expansion gradually took place over land further to the west of the Roman town, extending to the adjoining heathland, now recognisable as Silchester Common.

## 2.7 Lords of The Manor

The title Lord of the Manor dates back to Anglo-Saxon times. It belonged to the person, generally a nobleman, to whom rights over an area of land, termed The Manor, had been granted by the king.

After 1066 William, Duke of Normandy (William the Conqueror) imposed his own appointees into this existing feudal system, displacing the Saxon nobility. Their land

holdings were simply transferred to favoured Norman compatriots.

The immediate recipient of land directly granted by the sovereign was known as the overlord. By the time of the Domesday Book of 1086 William d'Eu was overlord of two local manors, which eventually became the parishes of Mortimer West End and Silchester. However, the actual occupant of the land in 1086 was his tenant, Ralph Bluet – and it was the occupant who carried the title of Lord of the Manor.

William d'Eu himself was a prominent nobleman who held over 70 manors. He rebelled against King William II of England and was cruelly punished. His lands having been confiscated, for a considerable period thereafter the overlordship of Silchester was held jointly by the Earl of Norfolk and the Earl of Pembroke.

Despite changes in the overlordship, members of the Bluet family, at least two of whom were named Ralph, were Lords of the Manor of Silchester for over 200 years. However, it was unlikely that they lived in our parish as they possessed more extensive holdings of land in Lackham, Wiltshire.

Eventually in 1316, John Bluet died without sons. One of his daughters, Margaret, married Sir William de Cusaunce; the second, Eleanor, married Edmund Baynard. It is Eleanor's effigy which is thought to be on the tomb in the south aisle of St Mary the Virgin church.

Following these marriages, the Lordship of the Manor was divided into two halves. Nevertheless, it remained in the ownership of later generations of the Baynard family until the mid-16th century.

Thereafter the following changes took place:

- 1589 Robert Baynard conveyed the Manor to Sir Thomas Gardiner a citizen and grocer of London. (No details are recorded of any sale consideration.)
- 1594 The Manor was sold to William Dunche of Little Wittenham.
- 1667 Sir Thomas Draper Bt. of Sunninghill Park purchased the Manor.
- 1703 Sir Thomas Draper died without a



Lady Eleanor Baynard



son. His executors sold the Manor to Viscount Blessington from whom it passed to his grandson who was created Earl of Blessington.

- 1769 The Earl of Blessington died without children. The Manor was bequeathed to Charles Dunbar.
- 1778 Charles Dunbar died without children. Under his will the Manor was split between two beneficiaries: Viscount de Vesci and the Earl of Longford.
- 1828 Lords Vesci and Longford sold the Manor to the first Duke of Wellington.
- 1973 The Wellington Estate sold its Silchester land to a property holding company. The archaic title Lord of the Manor disappeared from use.

One practical benefit of being Lord of the Manor was that the position brought with it the Advowson – the right to nominate the rector of the parish. In that way Lords of the Manor could ensure that they had their own placemen in this office central to parish life.

## 2.8 The 16th to 19th Centuries

At the beginning of the 16th century Silchester remained a modest, scattered settlement, with a few dwellings near the church and others scattered around the parish. Agriculture was the principal occupation.

St Mary the Virgin church remained an important focus for the small community. Early in Henry VIII's reign (1509–1547) it received the remarkable gift of a chancel screen to divide the altar from the nave. The screen was subsequently removed, but then found stored in a barn nearby and reinstalled in the mid-19th century.

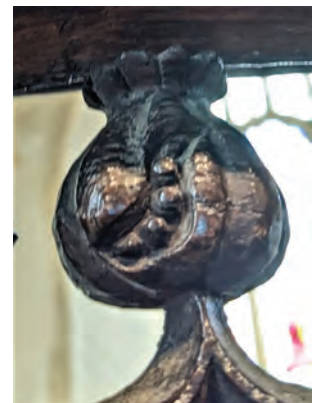
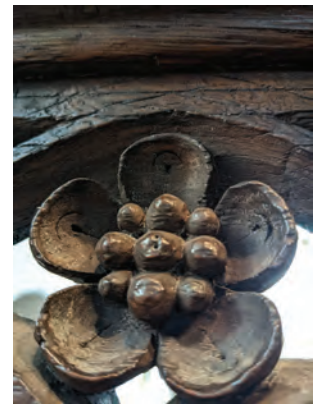
The screen contains numerous carvings, among which are both the Tudor rose of Henry VIII and the pomegranate symbol of Catherine of Aragon. It is therefore likely that it was constructed and installed before Henry's marriage with Catherine was annulled in 1533. It is assumed that this exceptionally fine piece

*Left:* Chancel Screen

*Right:*

*Top:* Henry VIII Rose

*Bottom:* Pomegranate – symbol of Catherine of Aragon





of work was the final gift of the Baynard family before they ceased to be Lords of the Manor. The symbolism within the screen would have been a clear indication to an illiterate populace that they were ruled by a Tudor monarch married to a queen from Spain. The donor presumably felt that the congregation was of sufficient size to warrant the installation of something so significant.

In 1589 the Lordship of the Manor passed to Sir Thomas Gardner of Sunninghill, who held it for only five years. In all probability, like his predecessors, he was not resident in the parish. The Old Manor House next to the church (now a private residence) dates from the late 16th or early 17th century but there is no firm evidence that it was the residence of Sir Thomas or occupied by a Lord of the Manor.

Similarly, although there was an unbroken line of rectors over several centuries, the presence in the parish of many was often sporadic, their duties being frequently delegated to curates.

By the end of the 16th century, the English Reformation was well-established and the country had experienced over a hundred years of Tudor rule. The last Tudor monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, honoured Silchester with a visit on 5 September 1601. She was received on Silchester Common. (See 3.2)

In 1594 the title of Lord of the Manor passed from Sir Thomas Gardner to a member of the Dunche family of Little Wittenham, in South Oxfordshire. In 1630 Edmund Dunche appointed Thomas Whistler as Rector. As Edmund Dunche was a first cousin and strong supporter of Oliver Cromwell, it is reasonable to infer that the Rector held the puritan views of his patron. Accordingly, it is probable that the removal of the chancel screen from St Mary the Virgin church took place at the instigation of Rector Whistler (1629–30). Stained glass from some of the windows may also have been removed. Fortunately, the chancel screen was rediscovered in the 19th century and reinstalled, but any stained glass was most likely destroyed.

Through the Rector, or his curate, Silchester parishioners would have been acquainted with wider political developments. Seismic changes were occurring throughout the land. The English Civil War (1642–51) had a profound impact, bringing conflict to many localities and removing regal authority with the execution of Charles I in 1649.

Some major hostilities occurred fairly close to Silchester. There were two battles of Newbury in September 1643 and October 1644 respectively, the fighting taking place at Speen, just outside the town. In her *History of Silchester Parish*, Florence Davidson quotes an unattributed report that prior to the second battle Commonwealth troops (i.e. the Parliamentarians or ‘Roundheads’) mustered near Silchester. Following this battle, as the opposing forces dispersed, there were skirmishes in Aldermaston and a brief, bloody fight in Red Lane. However, there is no record of any fighting within Silchester.

A greater impact would have been made in 1645 by the siege of Basing House, only 8 miles away, and its subsequent destruction by the Parliamentary army. There is a suggestion in the March 2000 reprint of the guide to St Mary the Virgin church that Oliver Cromwell himself might have stayed with his cousin Edmund Dunche en route to the final confrontation at Basing. While it is tempting to believe this, it is probable that Edmund Dunche was an absentee Lord of the Manor and there is no direct evidence that Cromwell either passed through or stayed in Silchester.

It is virtually certain that the parish would have been required to provide food and accommodation for Parliamentary soldiers. Communities which resisted would have suffered retribution, but Silchester avoided such a fate, possibly because the Lord of the Manor’s affiliations were to the winning side.

However, the political structure established by the victorious Parliamentarians was short-lived. Following the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, a power vacuum led to the restoration of the monarchy. This occurred in 1660 when

King Charles II was invited back to England from exile.

It was shortly after the restoration that the Richard Hyde Trust was created on 22 April 1671. (See 2.10) Under the terms of this benefactor's endowment, income from a house and a small area of land at Flex Ditch was to be distributed to 12 of the poorest parishioners.

The location of the property generating this income is an indication that the parish had developed in northerly and westerly directions. Flex Ditch is a full mile away from the earlier settlement in the vicinity of St Mary the Virgin church. Clearly by 1671 the land in question not only held a cottage but was also let for cultivation.

It can also be assumed that numbers living within the parish had increased. There were at least a dozen parishioners poor enough to be eligible for the Richard Hyde twice yearly charitable distribution and presumably many more not quite so destitute but surviving on modest agricultural incomes.

It is also interesting to observe that Flex Ditch, whose origins remain a mystery (See 3.1), was as significant a parish landmark in the 17th century as it is in the 21st.

A further indication of the size of the parish comes from the Compton Census of 1676. (See 2.12) This showed that the following numbers of people aged over 16 lived within the parish of Silchester:

Conformists	212
Papists	0
Non-conformists	1

It is not clear what exactly it was intended to include under the heading Non-conformists. The single number seems slightly odd, possibly indicating that the census-taker wished to minimise the extent of dissent within the parish. Nevertheless, the numbers are a further indication of Silchester's growth.

Such growth has to be seen in a national context. It is estimated that, overall, the population of England grew 250% between 1400 and 1700. If we estimate a total popu-

lation of Silchester in the year 1700 as 220 this would indicate that three centuries earlier, in the year 1400, there had been approximately 88 people living in the parish. This statistic helps us understand why, with numbers increasing, there was a gradual transition from a small, relatively compact community located near the parish church, to a larger more scattered community expanding westward.

It was not only Richard Hyde who desired to do something tangible for the poorer members of the population. Another record indicates that in 1700 a certain Samuel Wheat stipulated in his will that there should be a charge upon his estate of 30 shillings [*approx. £235*] a year *to be employed in buying coats for three poor people to be distributed on first November yearly.*

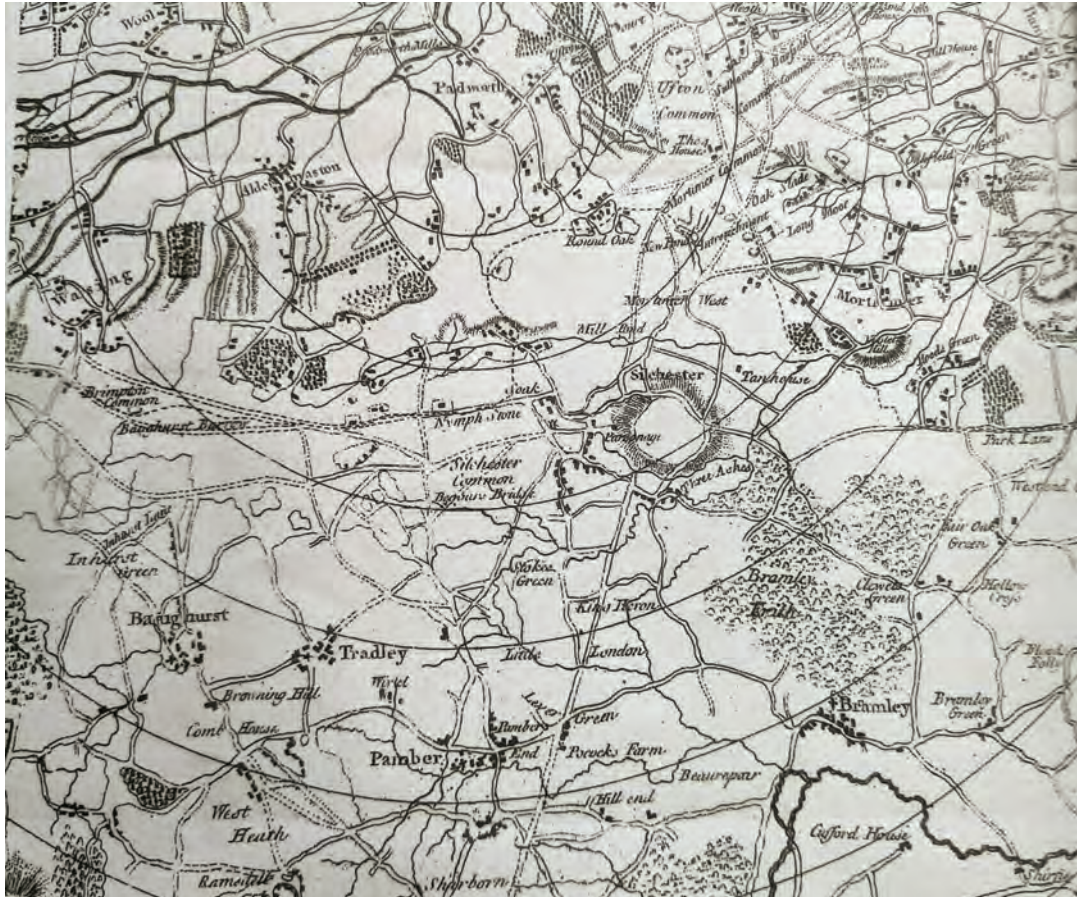
Perhaps the first substantial house on the edge of what was to become the modern village was the Rectory, constructed by Robert Bentham, Rector of Silchester from 1698 to 1719. The much-improved building, standing in private grounds, is now The Old House.

More modest dwellings were also constructed in the 18th century. What is now number 6 Whistler's Lane was built in 1760 and thereafter served as the village bakery. The lane was originally known as Nanny Goat Lane but appeared as Whistler's Road on the 1891 census. Its name was changed to Whistler's Lane in 1970 by resolution of the Parish Council in honour of the service to the community of Henry John Whistler (1871–1970) who had lived in Whistler's House. (See 2.20)

Henry Whistler's House







Right: Thomas Jeffreys map, Mid 1760s

Below: Willis maps showing Silchester Windmill – bottom right



The expanding parish was evidently not without petty misdemeanour. The churchwarden's accounts for 1719, when Richard Taylor was Rector, show payments of 18 shillings [*approx.* £150] for the erection of whipping post and stocks, apparently on the green at the junction of Little London Road and Holly Lane. (See 4.9)

During the mid-18th century the floor of the Roman amphitheatre was knee deep in standing water. It must have been unsightly with an unpleasant smell as it was used as a watering place for cattle. Also, at about this time the Roman Wall was partially demolished on its western side to create the Drove, giving direct access from the Rectory to St Mary the Virgin church.

As the 18th century developed, Silchester began to appear on various early maps. In the mid-1760s Thomas Jeffreys produced a map for Christopher Griffith of Padworth



Manor. This shows Padworth at its centre and, to the south, reaches as far as Silchester. The Roman site is indicated, although in an almost perfect circle rather than the distinctive lozenge shape. While the Impstone is shown, it is labelled as The Nymph Stone. (See 3.2) It is also noticeable that the map shows clusters of dwellings in the area west of the Roman town and adjoining the roads to Bramley and Little London. This is another clear indication that the parish was developing in this area, leaving the church somewhat isolated on its eastern side.

Another well-known map was produced by John Willis in 1768 covering the area ten miles around Newbury. The easternmost edge does not include the whole of Silchester but does include part of Silchester Common. On this a windmill is clearly indicated.

This windmill was on the site of what is now the Methodist church. There are records that the miller, a certain John Ward, refused in 1786 to pay the tax of 3d [*approx. £1.50*] to register the birth of his son, Hugh. He relented after two years when the baptism was inserted in the register. Sometime later the windmill became disused and the then owner, Joel Ward, possibly another son of John Ward, retired to live in a cottage nearby on the site of what is now the house, Macartneys. In the early 19th century the windmill and surrounding land was sold. The crumbling building was demolished and, in its place, a Methodist chapel was constructed using some of its stone.

It is also notable that during the 18th century, a period of advances in learning, various antiquarians became interested in the Roman site and referred to it in their writings. (See 2.11) However, it would be another 100 years before serious excavations commenced.

## 2.9 Thomas Dicker, Clockmaker

During the 18th century England led the world in clock making. Indeed the 40 years between 1720 and 1760 are known in horological circles as 'The Golden Age of Clock Making'.

The three most well-known names are probably:

Thomas Tompion (1639–1713) regarded as the 'Father of English Clockmaking';

John Harrison (1693–1776) inventor of the marine chronometer;

Thomas Mudge (1715–1794) inventor of 'lever escapement' in pocket watches.

Besides these luminaries, throughout the country in the Georgian era there were numerous craftsmen who specialised in making clocks. Indeed, in most towns there was either a clock maker or a clock seller. Although only a small village, Silchester produced a clock maker of considerable renown.

Our local horologist was Thomas Dicker, but unfortunately very little information is available about him. We do not know his date of birth nor where exactly in Silchester he lived. Florence Davidson in her manuscript describes him as belonging to an old Silchester family of farmers who owned Dicker's Farm in Bramley Road.

However, it is indisputable that from approximately 1736 to 1756 Thomas Dicker made clocks in Silchester. Occasionally his timepieces are offered for sale in specialist auctions. They are usually longcase (i.e. grandfather) clocks in handsome, highly polished oak or mahogany cases. Containing ornate brass work and impressive clockwork movements, they can be identified by the maker's name *Tho. Dicker* inscribed on the brass faceplate above the location *Silchester*.

These clocks, which today command prices of £3,000–£4,000, were probably intended for fine houses. It is likely that Thomas Dicker also made more modest clocks with plain cabinets and simpler movements. These may well have

furnished many Hampshire country cottages in the mid-to-late 18th century.

In about 1756 Thomas Dicker moved to Reading. Accordingly, his later longcase clocks bear the name of this town rather than that of the village of Silchester. We can only suppose that the removal was prompted by business success, giving Thomas Dicker more ready access to materials and a more affluent market.

Florence Davidson, not always reliable, has a less positive view on the removal. She concludes abruptly: *The Dickers as time went on fell into disrepute in the village and have now left the place.*

Thomas Dicker died in Reading in 1774. As brochures for specialist antique sales advertise longcase clocks made by Thomas Dicker (junior), we can assume that a son took over the business.

The Dicker talents were recognised locally during the mid-18th century. A member of the family (possibly Thomas Dicker himself) received a guinea [approx. £250] for making a horizontal brass sundial 4½ inches square which sat on the stump of a Roman column in St Mary the Virgin churchyard. It was inscribed with the words *Take heed / Time flies / Rome perished / so wilt thou / 1760*. Unfortunately, it was stolen in the 1950s.



Face of a Thomas Dicker longcase clock

It is also likely that Thomas Dicker made the remarkable sundial which used to stand in the grass triangle near Dial Cottage. (See 4.9)

In 2022 the owners of Culham Farmhouse acquired a longcase clock made by Thomas Dicker of Silchester. It seems entirely appropriate that this artefact having an important historical association with the village should return home after 250 years.

## 2.10 The Richard Hyde Charity

Attached to the wall of the north aisle of Saint Mary the Virgin church are two boards, both over 200 years old, giving information about the Richard Hyde Charity.

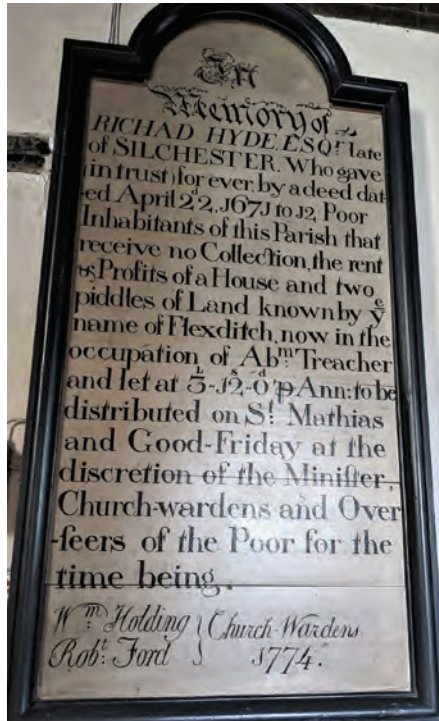
Under a trust created on 22 April 1671 the *rents and profits of a house in two piddles of land near Flex Ditch* were vested in trustees with a direction that the income therefrom be distributed to *12 poor inhabitants of this parish that receive no collection.*

There is no exact definition of a *piddle of land* but it can be taken to mean a small plot, no greater than 4 acres in extent. It is probably a corruption of the Middle English (approx. 1150–1500) word *pightle* meaning a small field or enclosure.

*Collection* refers to the poor rate. This was a measure with a long tradition, consolidated by the Poor Relief Act of 1601. Under the act a system of rating property was established, the proceeds from this levy being distributed to the poor. In effect the Richard Hyde trust apparently benefited those who were not quite as destitute as others receiving funds under statutory provisions.

The house near Flex Ditch was half-timbered and thatched. It continued to exist for nearly 300 years and was rented out until 1956. Its structure and general condition having deteriorated badly, at the end of the tenancy it was demolished. The land was sold to make way for the small development of Hydes Platt, its name suitably recognising the 17th century benefactor. The sale proceeds





having been invested, the Richard Hyde charitable trust continues to make grants out of its income. Following an application to the Charity Commissioners in 1968 a wider range of distributions is permissible as obviously the term *poor inhabitants of this parish that receive no collection* is now archaic.

Little is known about Richard Hyde. He was apparently a substantial landowner as there are records of other leases granted by him. The original trust deed setting up the Silchester charity is held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The two church noticeboards are interesting and enigmatic.

The earlier was installed in 1774, 103 years after the charitable endowment. This begs the question of why there was a delay. Possibly there had been an earlier, less substantial board which had deteriorated or, following the centenary of the charity, perhaps it was decided that Richard Hyde's munificence ought to be publicly proclaimed.

The second board is more intriguing.

Erected in 1815, adjacent to the earlier board, its wording is rather different. The 1774 board states that funds were to be

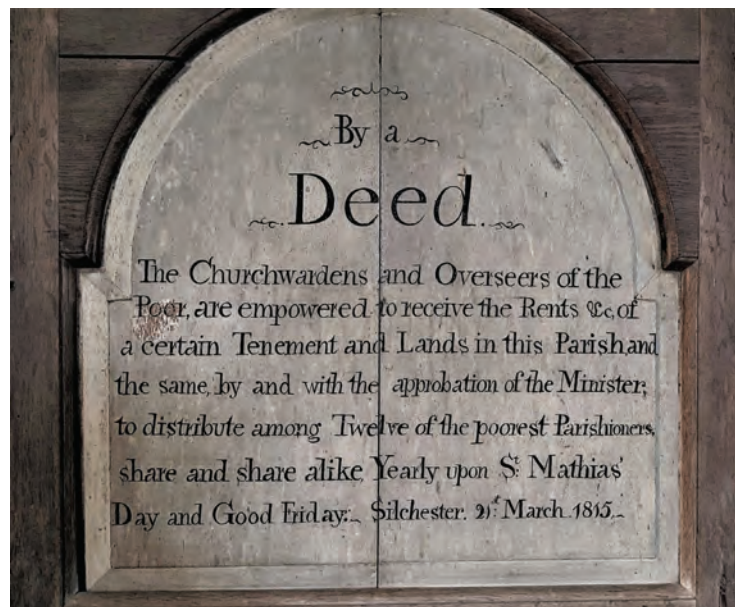
distributed *at the discretion of the Minister, churchwardens and overseers of the poor*. The 1815 board puts this responsibility onto the churchwardens and overseers of the poor but with the *approbation* of the Minister. In other words, the Rector or his curate were removed from the process of deciding who should receive an award, although he still had to approve the recommendations. The 1774 board is silent on the quantum of individual payments while the 1815 board says that *Twelve of the poorest Parishioners shall receive share and share alike*.

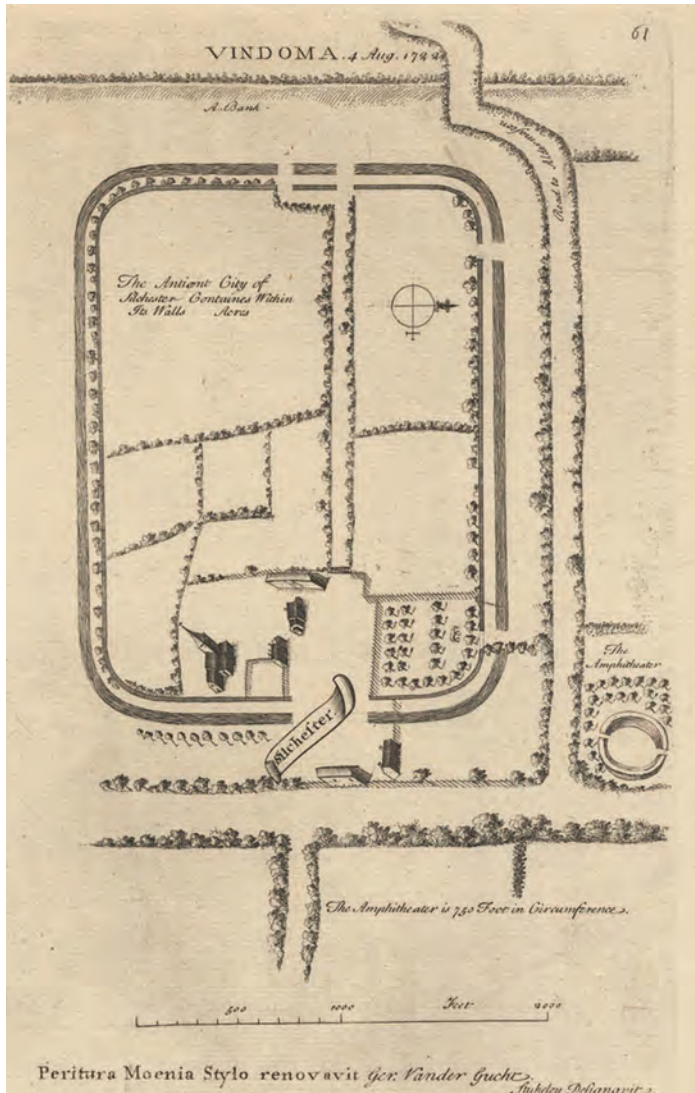
Possibly the trustees had taken the necessary legal steps to alter the basis of distribution, as was done in 1968. However, perhaps there is also a wider significance. Had there been a dispute between churchwardens and Rector both over the individuals who should be recipients and the amount each received? The 1815 board was erected three years after Rector Coles took up office. Perhaps the second board indicates that the churchwardens were asserting their authority and ensuring that the new Rector could not act as if the grants were solely at his discretion.

Interesting as these speculations might be, perhaps we might never know what stories the boards are trying to tell us.

*Above left: Richard Hyde Charity 1774*

*Below: Richard Hyde Charity 1815*





Stukeley plan of Silchester 1722

## 2.11 Antiquarians

The existence of ruins at famous sites such as Stonehenge and elsewhere had been common knowledge in Britain from time immemorial. Prior to the 16th century it is likely that the Silchester Roman site was known primarily as a source of easily accessible building material. However, despite extensive robbing, it was, and remains, the best-preserved Roman town wall in England. As explained, in early written works it was wrongly labelled *Caer Segont* and simply regarded as a curious ancient ruin. (See 2.5)

The earliest most reliable and recognisable description of Silchester comes from the famous antiquarian, John Leland who was commissioned by King Henry VIII to tour the country cataloguing books held by monasteries facing dissolution. Leland kept detailed records of his travels. He was very impressed by Silchester's walls, writing of his visit in about 1540 that *on that wall grow oaks of some 10 cart load the piece*. He also remarked upon, without understanding, the crop markings which we now know indicate the line of the Roman streets.

Some 40 years later Silchester enjoyed a visit from the respected early historian William Camden (1551–1623) who endowed the prestigious Camden Chair in Ancient History at Oxford University. Writing of his tour of the Roman site he stated:

*There is nothing remarkable now but the walls, for by the rubbish and ruins the earth is grown so high I could scarcely thrust myself through a passage they call Onion's Hole, though I stooped very low.* (See 3.2)

In 1595 another early historian and geographer, John Norden (154–1625), passed through the parish. Intriguingly, Florence Davidson records in *The History of Silchester Parish* that she travelled to the British Museum to examine his manuscript, written in his own copperplate script and then presented to Queen Elizabeth I. Florence Davidson



Stukeley print of Amphitheatre



observed that Norden called Silchester *Caer Sugunti*, perpetuating the common misunderstandings. He gave a description of the large oak trees on the walls and reported that it was supposed that the fertile farmland within the walls covered the streets of an ancient city. He wrote:

*Constantinious Sonne of Constantine the Great surrendered his soul at this place. Elsewhere he stated that Much Roman money has been uncovered to the ploughshare, which myself took up and saw sundrie pieces of copper great and small, some thick as a dollar and some small as a penny which the country people called 'Onyon's Penns'.*

Also in the 17th century, the famous antiquarian John Aubrey (1626–1697) (known for his biographical sketches *Brief Lives* and for giving his name to the Aubrey holes at Stonehenge) came to Silchester. As he was here in the summer of 1667, he too observed the emergence of the Roman grid street layout through the ripening corn.

Moving forward into the 18th century, Thomas Hearne visited in 1714. Having been born at White Waltham near Maidenhead, Hearne spent his life as a scholar in Oxford, publishing editions of many mediaeval chronicles. He wrote that the walls are *so intire that there is hardly any breach excepting where the four gates were.*

Ten years later William Stukeley (1687–1765) (famous for his work at Stonehenge and Avebury) observed favourably that Silchester's Roman remains were unencumbered by later settlement. He described the site as *a place that a lover of antiquity will visit with great delight.*

But perhaps the most remarkable research of the 18th century was that undertaken by John Stair (1708–1782). For most of his life John Stair lived in nearby Aldermaston where he was first a cobbler and then an innkeeper, becoming parish clerk in 1770. He had a keen interest in the Roman remains and in conjunction with John Wright, a professional surveyor, produced a map of the site in 1745.



John Aubrey

Entitled *A Plan of the Ancient City of Silchester in Hampshire Taken by John Wright Surveyor*, the map has accurate dimensions, clearly showing the lozenge shape of the site. It depicts the grid pattern streets, the central forum as well as the Norman church and a building labelled *Farmhouse* on the site of what is now the Old Manor House.

John Stair also carried out some rudimentary excavations. He uncovered a horde of silver coins from the spot in the middle of the Roman site where we now know the forum was located. For a time this was termed Silver Hill. Silchester villagers used to visit and surreptitiously dig by moonlight, selling coins they found to visitors to supplement their modest incomes.

## 2.12 The Compton Census

The first reasonably reliable indication of the size of Silchester's population came with the Compton Census of 1676. But what exactly was this?

Following the Restoration, King Charles II (reigned 1660–1685) attempted to extend religious liberty, particularly as he held Roman Catholic sympathies. Accordingly, he issued a Royal Declaration of Indulgence on 15 March 1672, temporarily lifting the penalties for not attending the Church of England.

One of the leading government figures,



Henry Compton  
Bishop of London

Lord Danby, was strongly pro-Anglican and resistant to the royal proposals. The King argued that strong pursuit of Anglicanism could serve to unite the disparate groups of non-conformists, creating a potentially troublesome bloc of dissenters. To counter this, Lord Danby devised a census, principally to demonstrate that the extent of nonconformity was strictly limited.

Following Lord Danby's initiative, the implementation of a census in every parish throughout dioceses within the province of Canterbury was authorised by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Gilbert Sheldon. However, as he was now elderly and too infirm personally to take any active part, he delegated the task to the Bishop of London, Henry Compton. Hence the exercise has become known as The Compton Census.

The Bishops throughout the Canterbury province were asked the following:

1. What number of persons, or at least families, are by common account and estimation inhabiting within each parish subject under them?
2. What number of Popish recusants, or such as are suspected of recusancy, are there among such inhabitants at present?

3. What number of other Dissenters are resident in such parishes, which either obstinately refuse, or wholly absent themselves from, the Communion of the Church of England at such time as by law they are required?

As the question regarding the total number of inhabitants was unclear, it appears to have been interpreted differently in different parishes. Some gave the number of families, some the number of persons over 16 (the standard practice of counting people in those days), and others the total population. Some simply gave the number of Anglicans as the total population.

Therefore, the figures cannot be considered accurate but do give an approximation of both the extent of nonconformity in much of late 17th century England and the size of the population in each of the participating parishes. We can therefore be reasonably confident that just over 200 adults were living in Silchester in 1676.

### 2.13 The 19th Century

During the 19th century the parish of Silchester developed into a community settled mainly in the area recognised as the centre of the modern village. New dwellings sprang up near the junction of the roads leading east to Bramley, south to Little London and west to Pamber Heath. The war with Napoleon, the coming of the railways and the increasing wealth of the nation all made their impact on the development of the parish in this era.

Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the Duke of Wellington (See 2.14) became the beneficiary of a Parliamentary trust which purchased the estate of Stratfield Saye in the parish adjoining Silchester to the east. Subsequently, in 1828, The Wellington Estate was expanded further by the acquisition of a considerable holding of land in Silchester, bringing with it the title of Lord of the Manor



which was now held by the Duke. (See 2.15)

In that year the Rector of Silchester was Rev John Coles, who held office from 1812 until his death in 1865. He seems to have enjoyed the favour of both the first Duke, who died in 1852, and his successor, his eldest son, Arthur Richard Wellesley. Rev Coles, although a frequent visitor, was not a resident of Silchester, living for much of the time in his London home. The day-to-day duties in the parish were delegated to a succession of curates. However, he was an influential character who played an important part in the development of the village. Notably, it was on his initiative that the first school in Silchester was established. This was situated in a cottage close to Flex Ditch where, for a time, the teacher was also the village postmistress.

As was evident from the Compton Census, the population of Silchester in 1676 was 213 or thereabouts. Official annual censuses commenced in 1801 although it was not until 1841 that they were conducted using modern methods. In that year for the first time the head of each household was given a form to complete on behalf of everyone living or staying in that household on census day. This gave a far more accurate result than any previous censuses.

The 1841 census shows that the population of Silchester had grown to 404 people, including children. However, it must be borne in mind that between 1650 and 1841 the population of England grew by 280%. Thus, the rise from 213 to 404 is not exceptional. The mid-17th century figure of 213 was not necessarily accurate but is unlikely to have been overstated. Thus, Silchester's population rise was somewhat lower than the average for the country, reflecting the general trend of birth rates increasing less dramatically than in more populous urban areas.

Changes were beginning to sweep through society from the earliest years of the century. Despite the Church of England's predominance, there had been a history of dissent in nearby Tadley from the middle of the 17th

century. Methodist gatherings took place throughout the earliest years of the 19th century until the Methodist chapel was built in 1839. (See 3.5)

An indication of the significance of the Methodist chapel to the life of the village is the size of the mid-19th century congregations. On the day of the 1851 census Silchester chapel attracted 123 worshippers (plus 40 children) in the afternoon and 174 in the evening. This is remarkable given that the total population of the parish that year was 392. It is possible that some of the congregation were visitors from elsewhere, but at a time when transport links were not extensive, it must be assumed that most were local.

Another important village building had been constructed in 1837. This was the public house then known as The Crown, now named The Calleva Arms. Although modernised and extended over its existence of nearly 200 years, as in the first half of the 19th century it remains an important centre of village life.

There are some intriguing theories concerning the building of the public house and the location of the Methodist chapel. (See 3.5 & 3.6)

Although ale was brewed at some local farms, prior to the building of the public house, the only other amenity within the village appears to have been the Old Stores on the corner of Whistler's Lane. This property dates from the 18th century. It ceased to function as a shop in the mid-20th century and is now a private residence.

Throughout the 19th century there was a spate of building. There were various reasons why this occurred. As the country became more prosperous farmers now possessed the wherewithal and ambition to live in much improved residences. An example is Culham's Farmhouse, constructed in its present form in 1847. At that time it was on the edge of the tiny village of Silchester, but would have made an impact on its surroundings with its impressive chimney stacks. The building still exists as a private residence now surrounded



Silchester at the end of the 19th century

by a mid-20th century housing estate. (See 4.12)

Additionally, a degree of prestige doubtless attached to Silchester following the 1828 acquisition of a large acreage of land by the Wellington Estate.

The Rectory already existed but in the early 1840s it was rivalled in size by Silchester House in Holly Lane. Although on the site of earlier buildings, this property was now substantially reconstructed. Some 25 years later Silchester Hall became the third prestigious dwelling, all of them situated within  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile of each other.

Another reason for growth in Silchester was the coming of the railway between Basingstoke and Reading. The Duke of Wellington had objected to the line running through his estate and accordingly the route chosen was to its west and thus closer to the parish of Silchester. When the line opened in 1848 there was only one intermediate station, at Mortimer. It was

nearly 50 years later, in 1895 that Bramley station was constructed.

There are various suggestions that at one time Silchester was served by a Halt – an unmanned platform with no facilities where trains could stop on request. However, there is no documentary or photographic proof of this. If it did exist, it is likely to have been next to Silchester Crossing. This is a spot on the railway line south of Brickledons Farm where it is crossed by a lane, although today the railway authorities prevent access by means of a locked gate.

It is interesting to note that Plummer, writing in 1879, makes no mention of a Halt. He describes travelling to the Calleva site from Basingstoke, passing over Silchester Crossing, alighting at Mortimer and then walking to the walls. From this we can conclude that no Halt was in existence at that date. Indeed 16 years later when Bramley station was opened in 1895 the timetable showed: *Bramley for Silchester 2 $\frac{3}{4}$*



*miles*. Additionally church records indicate the organ delivered in 1898 arrived via Mortimer station.

All of the evidence suggests that the existence of Silchester Halt is simply a local myth.

The coming of the railway prompted the opening of a public house just outside the parish border in Stratfield Mortimer. This was situated on the lane known as the Devil's Highway which runs eastward from the Calleva Roman site. An enterprising farmer whose premises were near the railway bridge 1¼ miles southwest of Mortimer station, saw an opportunity to sell refreshment to thirsty railway navvies. Accordingly, he opened an ale house as part of his farm, terming it The Silchester Arms. It remained in business long after the navvies had departed, changing its name to The Jackdaw. It finally closed in about 1950.

The village school was founded in 1841 as a result of the Duke of Wellington's patronage. The original building was constructed on its present site. The school replaced the earlier, more rudimentary, Flex Ditch establishment.

Also during the mid-19th century Silchester appears to have developed a village identity. Not only did it possess a public house, a church and Methodist chapel but also there was sufficient community spirit to establish a cricket club. Still thriving, its records date back to 1862.

The lands acquired by the Wellington Estate in 1828 included the Roman site, which then as now, was agricultural land. Five years later, in 1833, the first significant excavations took place when the baths of the inn were excavated. Later, in 1850, the site was mapped by Henry MacLauchlan with the line of the walls and earlier earthworks clearly shown together with relief hatching.

The first Duke died in 1852 to be succeeded by his son. Shortly after inheriting the title, the second Duke agreed to systematic excavations of the entire Roman town. He appointed Rev James Joyce, as chief excavator. Joyce, who had become Rector of Stratfield Saye in



1855, besides being a clergyman was also a keen antiquarian and an accomplished artist. He showed considerable skill and intelligence in his approach to the task of uncovering and recording the Roman town. He employed four labourers, undertaking continuous excavations from 1864 until his death in 1878.

Eagle discovered by  
Rev Joyce

We have Rev Joyce to thank for some remarkable discoveries. In 1864 he uncovered a beautiful ornate 2nd century mosaic floor which was removed and installed in the front hall at Stratfield Saye House.

This was followed by the discoveries of the Silchester Eagle in 1866 and the Silchester Horse in 1870. (See 2.3) Rosemary Sutcliffe's novel *The Eagle of the Ninth* inspired by the 1866 discovery, was written in 1954 and set partly in Calleva Atrebatum. In 2011 it



Silchester horse

was adapted into a film *The Eagle*, although having been shot in Hungary, the countryside depicted around the Roman town bears no resemblance to north Hampshire.

There is an extensive exhibition of artefacts from all the Calleva excavations on permanent display in Reading Museum.

Following the death of Rector Coles of Silchester in 1865, the Reverend and Honourable Wingfield Stratford Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes was appointed to the living. It was during his incumbency that the track now known as Edrington Lane was created. (See 4.13)

In 1861 the population of Silchester was at its highest when 481 residents were recorded in the census of that year. By 1901 this had dipped to just 390.

The census figures provide an intriguing illustration of the changes taking place within the community.

- In 1841 no less than 53 people reported their employment as being agricultural. This had declined to 17 in 1901.
- For every year from 1861 onwards there is at least one person described as a Railway Labourer.
- In 1871 one person was described as *Living on own means* but this had risen to 7 in both 1891 and 1901.
- Rev Joyce's archaeological enterprise proved a local source of employment as in 1881 three people were described as *Excavator Silchester ruins*.
- The 1891 census shows one person with the occupation of policeman. Possibly this was the traditional village bobby or merely another example of the move away from traditional agricultural employment.
- Prior to 1891, census returns give little indication of Domestic Service, but in that year 7 people were shown in that category. By 1901 there were 12 described as Gardener/Domestic.

Rector Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes was succeeded as Rector by Thomas Langshaw in 1880. From time immemorial a pound had existed in the area to the east of the parish where four roads meet – i.e. the roads towards Pamber Heath, Little London, Bramley and St Mary the Virgin church. The pound, used for confining stray cattle, horses and donkeys until reclaimed by their owners, was taken down by Rector Langshaw on his own initiative, reportedly causing much inconvenience to villagers. Doubtless it was this amenity which gave the names to the nearby Pound House and neighbouring cottages.

In the final years of the 19th century two decades of excavations brought more widespread scrutiny of Silchester Roman town. From 1890 to 1909 these were organised by the Society of Antiquaries of London who financed the enterprise by the creation of a Silchester Excavation Fund, supported from their own resources as well as by public subscription. Work on the site progressed in a structured and well organised manner until eventually the whole of the Roman town was uncovered. Although we now appreciate the limitations of these endeavours, they were of far greater significance than the pioneering efforts of Joyce and put Silchester and Calleva Atrebatum on the world map.

Numerous photographs of these excavations were taken and we also have an interesting description of activity from WH Hudson. (See 2.18) His *Afoot in England* (1909) contains a chapter entitled *A Gold Day at Silchester*, which includes the following:

*Looking through a gap in the wall I saw, close by, on the other side, a dozen men at work with pick and shovel throwing up huge piles of earth. They were uncovering a small portion of that ancient buried city and were finding the foundations and floors and hypocausts of Silchester's public baths; also some broken pottery and trifling ornaments of bronze and bone. The workmen in that bitter wind were decidedly better off than the gentlemen from*





The Jubilee Pot found during excavations by the Society of Antiquaries on the day of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, 20 June 1897

*Burlington House in charge of the excavations. These stood with coats buttoned up and hands thrust down deep in their pockets.*

Burlington House is the headquarters of the Society of Antiquaries. It is distinctly possible that one of the gentlemen observed by WH Hudson was J Challoner Smith. (See 4.16)

These excavations must also have had an impact on the local economy. All of the work was carried out manually with labourers being paid two shillings and sixpence (12½p) [approx. £12.75] per day with a small bonus for special finds. Their income was supplemented at weekends when they offered themselves as guides for the large number of curious visitors who flocked to the site. It is also possible that there was another local sideline in clandestinely selling small, excavated artefacts.

The labour force, exclusively male, was drawn from Silchester and other nearby villages. The men took the lengthy walk to the site, starting work at 6 a.m. every day.

This was an era when incomes were low. By

way of contrast, the minute book of Silchester Parish Council shows that in February 1896 distribution from the Richard Hyde charity was made in the sum of 7 shillings and 6 pence [approx. £40] to the ten poorest parishioners.

Two years after the excavations ended, *The Victoria County History*, published in 1911, made reference to the Richard Hyde charity. It stated that the parish possessed 4 acres of land as a result of the endowment which was let at £10 and 10 shillings per year. That income was augmented by annual dividends of just over £121 together with £3 interest on government stock. Accordingly, if the entire income were distributed, the 12 poorest people would have received about £10 each at the beginning of the 20th century [approx. £950].

A map of 1913 indicates four distinct areas of settlement in Silchester. There are a few houses in the vicinity of the school, another cluster on the eastern side of the Common, a third around the junction of the roads to Pamber Heath, Little London and Bramley and a few dwellings on the Bramley Road in the Three Ashes area. By the outbreak of the First

World War the general shape of the modern village (apart from the large housing estate) is clearly visible.

Over the course of the 19th century there had been a notable change in the character of the community. While it still remained predominantly agricultural, the parish had become home to several wealthy individuals with substantial dwellings. Also the interest in the Roman site brought both visitors and some limited employment opportunities. The nearby railway line offered comparatively easy access to London and the south coast. Nevertheless, there were extremes of wealth and poverty, the disbursements from the Richard Hyde charity remaining an important supplement for several needy inhabitants.

## 2.14 The First Duke of Wellington 1769–1852

Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington, was born on 1 May 1769 into an aristocratic Anglo-Irish family. He was the sixth of nine children.

Having decided to pursue a career in the army, he borrowed money to purchase a

commission and then enjoyed very successful campaigns in India between 1797 and 1804. Amassing significant prizes while fighting on the sub-continent, he returned to England a very wealthy man. He was made a Knight of the Bath in honour of his success in consolidating imperial rule, becoming Sir Arthur Wellesley.

In 1806 he married Catherine (Kitty) Pakenham who bore him two sons, Arthur and Charles. However, frequent absences and mutual incompatibility were not conducive to a happy marriage. The couple lived apart for much of the following 25 years until Kitty's death in 1831.

In 1808 Sir Arthur Wellesley was dispatched to the Iberian Peninsula to join the British army engaged against Napoleon. Following the death of Sir John Moore at the battle of Corunna in January 1809, Sir Arthur was appointed as head of the British forces in Portugal.

Within six months he masterminded a spectacularly successful victory at the Battle of Talavera on 27 July 1809. In recognition of this achievement, he was elevated to the peerage, becoming Viscount Wellington.

The title was chosen at short notice by Arthur's second brother, William. As his eldest brother, Richard, was already a member of the House of Lords as Marquess Wellesley, the family name was obviously inappropriate for a new ennoblement. The Anglo-Irish Wellesleys had long believed that the family originated from Somerset. After reviewing the names taken by other peers and having studied the Somerset county map in detail, William recommended Wellington as the titular name both because of the county in which the town was situated and because it sounded very similar to Wellesley. Arthur was delighted with the choice, although unfamiliar with the location. There is only one record of his visiting Wellington which he did while en route to Plymouth in 1819.

Several other military victories in Spain brought Arthur the further titles of Earl of



First Duke of  
Wellington



Wellington and Marquess of Wellington in 1812.

By now the fortunes of the French under Napoleon were fading, particularly following the disastrous retreat from Moscow in 1812. Several European countries including Britain, Prussia, Spain and Sweden formed an alliance against France, marching on Paris in the spring of 1814. Dissension within the French army, which feared a heavy defeat, forced Napoleon to abdicate as Emperor. Under the terms of the 1814 Treaty of Fontainebleau he was exiled to the island of Elba in the Mediterranean.

Following Napoleon's downfall, Arthur Wellesley, regarded as a great national hero, was elevated to the highest rank within the peerage. On 3 May 1814, he became Duke of Wellington in the County of Somerset. He also held the subsidiary title of Marquess Douro.

As is well known, Napoleon escaped from Elba in February 1815 and reassembled his forces. He faced a decisive battle at Waterloo in Belgium on 18 June 1815. At this encounter the Duke of Wellington was commander of the British and some Allied forces while General Blücher commanded the Prussian forces. After particularly ferocious fighting, the outcome was a victory for the Allies. The total number of casualties on all sides exceeded 50,000 men killed or wounded.

Over the following years numerous monuments were erected to commemorate the Duke of Wellington's victory at Waterloo, including a vast pillar on a hilltop outside the town of Wellington. Its design was inspired by an Egyptian obelisk, but in the shape of a bayonet used by English troops. At 53m (175ft) high it is the tallest three-sided obelisk in the world. More locally, the Duke of Wellington Commemorative Column was erected alongside the A33 at Stratfield Saye in 1863.

Following his final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, Napoleon was banished to the remote Atlantic Island of St Helena where he died on 5 May 1821. The victorious Duke of Wellington entered politics. He became a



Wellington Column  
Stratfield Saye

member of Lord Liverpool's government in December 1818 and subsequently served as Prime Minister from 22 January 1828 to 16 November 1830. He outlived Napoleon by 31 years, dying on 15 September 1852.

## 2.15 Wellington and Silchester

The nation's gratitude to the Duke of Wellington for his military success was manifested not only in titles. By various Acts of Parliament substantial sums of money were voted to him over the years 1812 to 1815.

Following the final defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, it was decided that the Duke of Wellington should receive an appropriate reward. There was precedent for this. Just over a century earlier, in 1704, the Duke of Marlborough had achieved a notable victory over the French at the Battle of Blenheim. His reward was a grant of Parliamentary funds enabling him to build a palatial country residence, appropriately named Blenheim Palace, at Woodstock, Oxfordshire. As the Duke of Wellington's achievement was of similar significance, in 1815 the British government made a grant of £200,000 [*approx. £14 million*] to fund the acquisition of an

equally magnificent country estate. As with previous amounts voted by Parliament, the monies were not paid directly to the Duke but were held by a Parliamentary Trust.

The Duke, fully occupied with national affairs, authorised his secretary and architect, Benjamin Wyatt, to identify a suitable estate. Various locations were visited until in 1817 Wyatt recommended that the Parliamentary Trustees purchase the house and extensive surrounding lands at Stratfield Saye.

Papers in the Wellington archives show that initially the demolition of Stratfield Saye House was planned. There are numerous architectural drawings of plans for its replacement with a grandiose palace, but reconstruction never took place, possibly because the enormous cost would have been prohibitive.

The Duke of Wellington never resided permanently at Stratfield Saye, preferring

to remain at his London residence, Apsley House. However, his wife Kitty, Duchess of Wellington, moved into the newly acquired country house and appears to have enjoyed living there until her death in 1831.

The Duke's estate was expanded in 1828 with the acquisition of the Manor of Silchester. In 1778 this had been inherited jointly by Viscount de Vesci and Tom Pakenham, 2nd Earl of Longford, an Irish peer, who was also Kitty's brother. Their property consisted of a large acreage of land within the parish of Silchester, which brought with it the title Lord of the Manor.

The 2nd Earl of Longford was one of 28 Irish Representative Peers chosen to sit in the House of Lords. He was awarded the subsidiary title of Baron Silchester in 1821, giving him and his descendants an automatic seat in the upper chamber.

Map of Wellington  
Estate 1857





Correspondence in the Wellington archives indicates that the Earl of Longford, presumably in need of funds, encouraged the Duke to arrange for the purchase of the Silchester lands. As these were situated in a block adjoining Stratfield Saye on its western edge, an already substantial estate would be vastly and seamlessly extended.

However, there was a snag. The Earl of Longford acknowledged that the title to the Silchester property although *sufficient for secure possession* might not be regarded as a *clear marketable title*. In other words, there could be difficulties if a subsequent sale was contemplated. The Earl of Longford considered the Duke an ideal purchaser because, having his country seat at Stratfield Saye, he would wish to acquire and retain the large adjacent area as part of his estate. Accordingly, having no inclination to sell, he would not be worried about the marketability of the title to the land.

It was this consideration, rather than the family connection, which appears to have prompted the Earl of Longford's approach to the Duke in 1824. As by then Kitty and the Duke were far from close, it cannot be assumed that the Duke felt any sort of obligation towards his brother-in-law.

Discussion by letter continued from autumn 1824 to autumn 1827. Any asset purchased by the Parliamentary Trustees was required to have a sale value. In view of what the Duke termed the *Defective Title to the Estate* he was cautious about proceeding. After protracted exchanges, by the end of 1827 all reservations appear to have been overcome and during the following year, the Earl of Longford, jointly with Viscount de Vesci, disposed of the Manor of Silchester.

The exact sequence of transactions is unclear but ultimately the Silchester acreages were legally held by the Parliamentary Trustees. Indeed, when the Wellington Estate in Silchester was expanded in 1946 by the addition of Silchester Hall and associated land, the purchase was undertaken by the Trustees.

THE THIRD SCHEDULE before referred to		
Date	Description of Document	Parties
23rd November 1953	CONVEYANCE	The Rt.Hon.Sir Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill. The Rt.Hon.Richard Austen Butler The Rt.Hon.William Shepherd Morrison. The Rt. Hon. Robert James (1) The Most Noble Gerald Seventh Duke of Wellington (2) Ritchie Gill and Emily Ethel Gill (3)
9th October 1957	CONVEYANCE.	Ritchie Gill and Emily Ethel Gill (1) Elisha Rogers (2)
15th October 1958	DEED OF RELEASE.	The Rt.Hon.William Shepherd Morrison The Rt.Hon.Harold Macmillan. The Rt.Hon. Derick Heathcoat Amory and The Hon.Robert James (1) The Most Noble Gerald Seventh Duke of Wellington (2) and Elisha Rogers (3)
22nd December 1958	CONVEYANCE.	Elisha Rogers (1) Harold Streeter and Jack Terry (2)
4th June 1959	CONVEYANCE.	Harold Streeter and Jack Terry (1) J.A.Manser & Son Ltd. (2)

As a result of the 1828 expansion of the Wellington Estate, for the following 144 years the legal ownership of much of Silchester remained technically in the hands of the Parliamentary Trustees. This increasingly outdated arrangement continued until the Wellington Estate Act of 1972 vested ownership in members of the Wellesley family.

While the Parliamentary Trust existed, its named trustees included the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Speaker of the House of Commons. Naturally, the actual individuals who held office as trustees altered frequently as of course, over time, there were numerous changes of politicians holding government positions.

Whenever property was sold or acquired by the Trust, the conveyance documents required the signatures of those who were trustees at the time of the transaction. Consequently, a number of Silchester residents possess title deeds whose chain of transactions bear illustrious political names from the past two centuries.

Famous names  
on a Wellington  
conveyance

**SHERFIELD v. SILCHESTER** – The return match between an eleven of the Sherfield, and an eleven of the Silchester cricket club was played at Sherfield, on Friday, Aug. 8th, when the Sherfield eleven won in a single innings with 23 runs to spare.

**SHERFIELD – First Innings**

Mr. C Butler, b W. Hamm .....	4
Mr. J. Matthews, b Kirby .....	0
Mr. C. Hunt, b W. Hamm .....	18
Mr. W. Wix, b W. Hamm .....	17
Mr. J. Tubb, b W. Hamm .....	6
Mr. G. Moss, B A. Hamm .....	0
P. Pigott, Esq., not out .....	10
Mr. E. Hamm, run out .....	2
Mr. D. Welch, run out .....	0
Mr. T Matthews, run out .....	5
Mr. L. Prior, b A. Hamm .....	9
Wides 13, byes 8, leg byes 3 .....	24

Total..... 95

**SILCHESTER**

<i>First Innings</i>		<i>Second Innings</i>	
Mr. Bedding, B Moss .....	10	b Moss .....	19
Mr. Broadhurst, b Tubb .....	1	b Moss .....	4
Mr. A. Hamm, c Pigott, b Moss .....	2	c Hunt, b Moss .....	5
-Kirby, Esq.,c E.Hamm,b Tubb .....	0	b Tubb.....	1
-Selby,Esq.,b Tubb .....	0	b Tubb.....	16
C. Wright, Esq., run out .....	0	b Moss.....	7
Mr. W. Hamm, run out.....	2	b Tubb.....	0
Mr. Ward, not out .....	2	b Tubb.....	0
Mr. Jeffery, b Tubb.....	0	not out .....	4
Mr. Cooper, c Pigott, Esq .....	4	run out.....	1
Mr. Goddard, b Moss.....	0	b Moss.....	0
Byes, &c .....	0	Byes, &c.....	0
Total.....	21	Total.....	51

**CRICKET – READING v. SILCHESTER** – This match was played at Silchester on Monday last, and terminated in favour of Reading by 36 runs. For Reading – Messrs Hobbs, Roupell and Hawkins; for Silchester – Messrs Wright, Bedding, and Rev. S. Slocock, batted well. The following is the score:

**READING**

<i>1st Innings</i>		<i>2nd Innings</i>	
J.W.Hobbs, C. A. Ham b F. Slo-		b Bedding .....	24
Cock .....	18	b Bedding .....	0
W.Slocombe, b F.Slocock .....	9	c A. Ham.....	8
H. Roupell, c Wright, b A. Ham .....	22	run out .....	29
H.Hawkins, c Cooper,b A.Ham .....	8	c Bedding .....	4
J.H. Hunter,b H. Kirby.....	4	b Bedding .....	1
A.B. Giles, b H. Kirby.....	0	not out .....	7
A.P. Mules, b A. Ham .....	1	c Chute .....	0
W.B. Monck, b H. Kirby.....	2	b F. Slocock .....	4
H. Hunter,b H. Kirby.....	0	F. Kirby.....	3
Welch, not out .....	0	b10,lb1,w2.....	13
b-3, lb-3, w-2.....	8		
	77		88

**SILCHESTER**

H.I. Hunter, b Roupell .....	8	c & b Roupell.....	5
R.Bedding, b Roupell .....	3	c Welch.....	21
D. Chute, c Roupell, J. H. Hunter ...	0	l b w .....	0
Rev. S. Slocock, l b w, b Roupell.....	9	c & b J. Hunter.....	10
F. Slocock, c Hawkins, b H. Hunter.	4	b J. H. Hunter.....	2
C. Wright, c and b J.H. Hunter .....	2	not out.....	24
A. Ham, c Hawkins, b Roupell.....	12	c Slocock.....	0
H.Kirby, b Roupell.....	0	c Giles.....	8
F. Kirby, b. J. H. Hunter.....	2	c Welch.....	3
W.Ham, not out .....	1	b J.H. Hunter .....	3
T.Cooper, b Roupell.....	0	c J.H. Hunter .....	0
b-7,l b - 1, w -2.....	10	l b 1, w 1.....	2
	51		78

## 2.16 Silchester Cricket Club

Silchester Cricket Club (CC) was founded in the mid-19th century. It possesses an interesting collection of records including cuttings from the local newspaper, the *Reading Mercury*, giving details of fixtures and scores. The earliest match which can be identified took place on 21 May 1842 when Silchester's opponents were Shinfield.

This reproduction of a press report from 1862 reflects the class distinctions of the time. Silchester fielded three *esquires* to Sherfield's one.

Among the players was A (Ambrose) Ham (misspelt as 'Hamm') who restored the chancel screen in St Mary the Virgin church.

A second cutting from 1863 shows that the team included a typical figure of the age: a 'cricketing parson'. Rev Slocock was both cricketer and curate. He was one of a succession of curates appointed by Rector Coles, covering his frequent absences from the parish.

Samuel Slocock was born in Newbury in 1833, the eldest of five children. When he was 18 in 1851, his parents moved to Chelsea. He attended Oxford University becoming a member of St John's College. The 1861 census shows him living in a cottage near Culham's Farm, Silchester.

It is noticeable that Samuel's youngest brother, Frederick (his junior by 11 years) also played cricket for Silchester in the match reported. Perhaps he was staying with Samuel and one wonders if the village indulged their curate by permitting his brother to play or whether they were short of a man and welcomed this player who, the scorecard shows, enjoyed some bowling success.

The cricket club lost the Slocock services in 1869. In that year Samuel became Vicar of Greenham near Newbury. He later became Rector of Kelvedon Hatch in Essex and finally Vicar of West Rounton, Yorkshire, where he died in 1901.

It is interesting to note that Rector Wykeham-Fiennes, who succeeded Rector



Coles in 1865, appears to have been a more permanent presence in the community. On Thursday, 18 July 1867 the cricket club played against Sulhampstead, including in their team both Rector Fiennes and his curate Samuel Slocock. The score sheet shows that the Curate was a far better cricketer than the Rector. The Sulhampstead team also featured a clergyman, Rev Collett.

These records indicate that in Silchester, as in neighbouring villages, both cricket club and church enjoyed strong links. During the 19th century and beyond, they became part of the fabric of local communities.

As it flourished, Silchester CC organised itself on a more formal basis. A *Reading Mercury* report in 1890 intimated that the club had been founded in 1887 by General Heythorne. However, it is clear that proper fixtures were taking place up to 30 years earlier.

By the closing years of the 19th century the club was both well-funded and well-supported as an organisation integral to village life.

Records from 1889 show that there were 27 members and that the treasurer held a total of £21.17s.10d [*approx. £3,000*]. The activities of the club even featured in the love letters between Arthur James Goddard (See 4.11) and his fiancée, Lottie. On 11 July 1897 he told her about a match between Silchester and Bramley, proudly writing that it was easily won by Silchester who scored 118 in their first innings to Bramley's 25. Batting again, Bramley could amass only 48 runs for 7 wickets.

Members of the Goddard family of Vine Cottage remained stalwart Silchester CC supporters well into the 20th century. They even featured in the local press. In one newspaper article Tom Goddard was described as a burly 28 year old who regularly made wagers with his father (AJ Goddard) about his batting performance. It was reported that he was invariably successful, these family bets generating a tidy profit.

A memoir entitled *Cricket at Silchester in the 1930's* was penned by Fred Oppe of



Cricket Club 1953



Believed to be the Silchester cricket team before the Pamber Heath Cricket Club began  
 Back row, left-right: Ken Boyd, Dodger Dor, Norman Hiscock, Ray Stacey, Chuck Smith, Arthur Nais!  
 Front row, left-right: Jim Hunt, Billie Potter, Les Hissey, Gerald Cottrell, Jack Boyd, Billie Upton

Cricket Team 1960s



Cricket Club 1971



Pamber Heath who played as a wicket keeper. He described this as an *absorbing occupation* as the ground, situated to the west of the gardens of New Timbers, was rough meadow normally occupied by forest ponies or store cattle. He describes the advantages gained by spin bowlers whose dexterous efforts were assisted by the *traces* left by the animals. On this idiosyncratic pitch it was unusual for scores by either side to pass a century.

Cricket teas, an important part of fixtures, were consumed in a small wooden cream coloured shed adjacent to the rudimentary pitch. Fred Oppe mentioned the incomparable Hampshire lardy cake *sweet and greasy, washed down by strong Indian tea*. He also commented on those who watched the games, writing: *The loyal spectators included regular attendance by Parson Adams in his white stock*. (Henry Theophilus Adams was Rector of Silchester from 1925 to 1943).

Press cuttings indicate that at some point during his rectorship Rev Adams was chairman of the cricket club. Also, in this period Mr Bramley-Firth of the Old House was secretary.

The next occupier of the Old House in the mid-1930s, following the death of Mr Bramley-Firth, also supported the cricket club, but as a player. This was Alec Waugh (1898–1981), novelist and brother to Evelyn Waugh. (See 4.13) There are several reports of Alec Waugh securing 5, 6 or 7 wicket hauls for Silchester as a result of his bowling.

Despite hostilities, some cricket was played at Silchester in the early years of the Second World War. A newspaper article from July 1940 reported that when a window of a cottage in Silchester was smashed the residents wondered why the siren had not warned them of an attack. The culprit was in fact a cricket ball. The report added that *they play strenuous cricket at Silchester*. However, the club's activities ceased when the ground behind New Timber was commandeered by the Hampshire War Agricultural Executive Committee and used for the cultivation of corn.

Such committees were created in each



New bats with willow from John Cook's Withy Farm

county during the Second World War with a membership consisting of leading local figures. Their purpose was to implement directives relating to productive use of land during this period of food shortage. The Hampshire Committee was particularly rigorous in its activities. Indeed, in July 1940 there was a notorious incident when a farmer at Itchen Stoke, near Winchester, refused to obey the committee's directions and opened fire on police when they were summoned. He was subsequently shot by armed officers after a short siege of his farmhouse and died of his wounds. The inquest returned a verdict of *justifiable homicide*.

Faced with this level of strict enforcement, Silchester CC had no choice but to surrender their pitch. There may have been a local imperative to comply as the Chairman of the Hampshire committee was Sir Charles Chute who lived at The Vyne, only some 4 miles away.

Cricket resumed in the late 1940s on a coconut matting wicket created on the football pitch. Then in the early 1960s the present cricket greens were created.

Thereafter Silchester CC continued to flourish, retaining a strong identity. Amongst the club's documents from this period is a letter written to the prominent military outfitters, Gieves of Bond St, by Jock Ivens on behalf of his father, Commander Ivens, concerning the design and purchase of a club flag. Another letter to Gieves engages them to manufacture and supply caps for the team.

For many years a regular feature of the

cricket season has been the annual friendly match, played in aid of a local charity, between The Calleva Arms and The Plough, Little London. Both local inns encourage participation: they each generously provide a barrel of beer for refreshment.

Membership of Silchester CC is not confined to Silchester residents. Indeed in 2022 the only member living in the village is one of its longest serving members, Life Vice President Marsden Jones. As with many local organisations, success is dependent on the efforts of particular individuals. For many years Paul Hearn has cared for the cricket ground, keeping the wickets in good order so that cricket continues to flourish in Silchester.

### 2.17 Silchester Football Club

Following the formation of the Basingstoke Football League in 1903, Silchester Football Club (FC) was formed in 1907.

At its inception the club adopted distinctive shirts in vertical black and white stripes, as

is clear from the photograph of the squad at that time. In 1937 purple was adopted as the team's colour to be followed later by a more contemporary strip in yellow and green, until there was a further change in 1992.

To create a suitable pitch in 1907, a patch of gorse opposite the public house (then known as The Crown) was cleared. Some rudimentary goalposts consisting of wooden uprights and a crossbar were erected, but there were no changing facilities.

Many local family names are recognisable in early team sheets. For example, the 1919 team included members of the Aldridge, Giles, Stacey, James and Hunt families.

In 1919, after the end of the First World War, Silchester FC, now known as Silchester United, became part of Basingstoke League Division II, remaining a member for many years. In the 1920/1921 season they won the trophy as league champions and repeated the feat in the 1922/1923 season.

There was a brief spell in 1933 to 1935 when Silchester withdrew from the league but re-entered in 1936 becoming runners up to



Silchester FC 1903



Wootton St. Lawrence. In the following season the team were more successful, coming top of a local circuit.

Fortunes sometimes dipped. In 1951 Silchester finished at the foot of Division II, having conceded 100 goals.

Ten years later, in the 1961/1962 season they became champions of the 'Lads League'. However, there was a degree of embarrassment in 1962 when the club was fined five shillings [*approx. £4*] by the Football Association for including a player in their side who was not a signed-up member of the team!

Toward the end of that decade, in the 1968/1969 season, Silchester FC won the Basingstoke B cup and were champions of Basingstoke League Division II. This led to promotion to Division I whose title they took in 1971/1972. However, fortunes faded and the team slipped back into Division II.

In 1992 a new strip was adopted in the blue colour favoured by the Conservative Party. Shirts bore the name of Andrew Hunter who was then MP for the Basingstoke constituency which, at that time, included Silchester within its boundaries. Until the arrival of the new kit Silchester FC were league leaders, but immediately they changed to their new colours they lost five consecutive matches and slipped back down the table! The apparent jinx of party



Silchester FC 1919

politics greatly amused the local press. It was not until the 2006/2007 season that once again Silchester FC were Division II champions.

In 2019 the centenary of the club was acknowledged by the Football Association with the award of a commemorative shield.

More recently the club has played in the Hampshire Premier League, the highest level of competition in its history. By 2022 its Chairman, Paul Evans had been a member for over 40 years and had tended the pitches on the village green as groundsman for over 20 years.

Silchester FC continues to play each week-end throughout the winter season and to be an important part of village life.

*Left:* Silchester FC 1992  
*Right:* FA plaque



## 2.18 A Trio of Talent

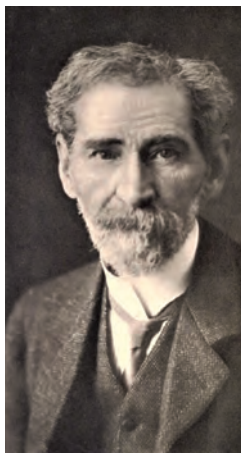


Richard Carte

*The Silchester Story* would be incomplete without a mention of three men, well-known in their day and age, who had strong connections with our parish.

**Richard Carte 1808–1891** was born in Silchester. From an early age he exhibited exceptional talent as a flautist. By the age of 16 he was regularly appearing in London concerts. He enjoyed a distinguished musical career eventually becoming a partner in a prominent flute making firm. Having been born Richard Cart, he added an 'e' to his name, possibly to make it sound more continental. Having eloped with Eliza Jones, a clergyman's daughter, he fathered six children. His second son Richard D'Oyly Carte became famous as the producer of Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

**James Crowdy 1847–1918** was a cricketer who made his first-class debut for Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in 1872. He played only one match for the MCC but then made



William Henry Hudson

sporadic appearances for Hampshire over the years 1875 to 1884. He was also an ordained Church of England priest who served as Rector of Sherfield-on-Loddon from 1890 to 1912. From 1904 to 1912 he was also rural Dean of Silchester. In that capacity he was effectively, in modern parlance, the line manager of the Rector of Silchester.

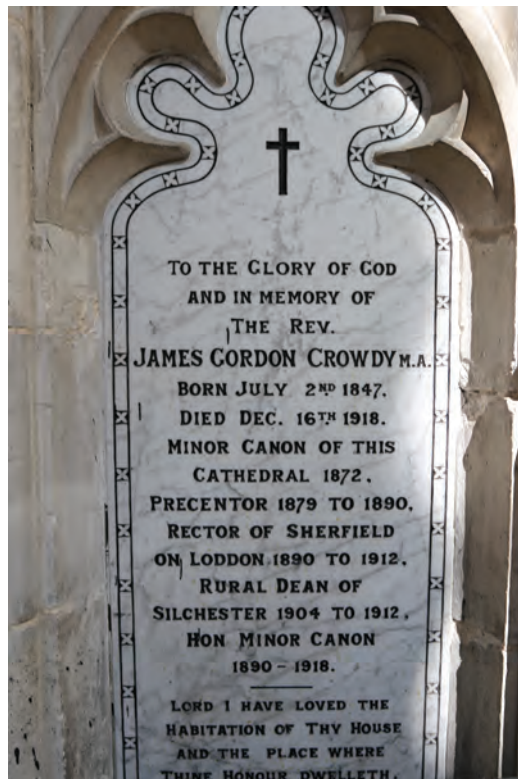
**William Henry Hudson 1841–1922** was a renowned author, naturalist and ornithologist. Having been born in Argentina he emigrated to England in 1874, supporting himself and his wife, a former singer named Emily Wingrave, through journalism and writing. He found fame in the early 20th century with two books about the English countryside, *Hampshire Days* (1903) and *Afoot in England* (1909). In the latter, Chapter 7 is entitled *Roman Calleva* and Chapter 8 *A Gold Day at Silchester*. William Hudson became very familiar with both the Roman site and the Common, having lodged for several months with James and Emma Lawes who occupied a cottage in Soke Road.

## 2.19 The 20th Century

Silchester continued to expand early in the 20th century, the main areas of settlement being near the school or the junction of the Pamber Heath, Bramley and Little London roads. By now a few large houses employed domestic staff while the other major area of employment remained agricultural. With improving living conditions families grew in size: in the 1911 census nearly 25% of the population of 400 were schoolchildren.

Silchester Cricket Club remained active and by 1907 there was sufficient interest within the community to form a Football Club.

At the turn of the century, there was a village shop at the Old Stores. A few other houses dotted around the village offered small front room retail operations. Among these was the house in what was then known as Nanny Goat Lane which in 1870 had become home



Memorial to James Gordon Crowdy in Winchester Cathedral



to Henry Whistler and remained occupied by him or his son for 100 years. (See 2.20)

Besides the Rectory, there were two substantial country residences which continued to be occupied by people of independent means. Silchester House was used by the Newnham Davis family as a summer residence (See 4.2) comparable in size to the nearby Silchester Hall (See 4.14), purchased by Commander HGW Thorold in 1895.

Until the early 1920s, the Rectory served its intended purpose as the residence for Silchester's clergymen. It was then sold in 1923 to become yet another sizeable country residence with Silchester Hall as its neighbour. A new, smaller Rectory was built in Bramley Road.

There was a spate of building in the early years of the 20th century. Several houses in the Arts and Crafts style date from this period, including Macartneys, Heathercote House, The Grange and New Timber, which later became the Romans Hotel and has now been converted into private dwellings. The Hollies owned by Lt Col JBP Karlake (See 2.21) was an idiosyncratic edifice at the entrance to the modern village.

In contrast to the small number of wealthy individuals in large houses, it is clear from the 1911 census that the majority of male residents of the parish were farmworkers. Six men from Silchester died in the First World War (1914–1918). Their occupations were sawyer, carter, gamekeeper, gardener and butcher: all typical of the activities in a rural village at the beginning of the 20th century.

Like other villages, Silchester erected a War Memorial in memory of the fallen servicemen of the parish. It was unveiled in a solemn ceremony on Sunday 19 June 1922.

The first owner of the old Rectory, following its sale in 1923, was Mr Charles Bramley-Firth who renamed the property The Old House. Amongst other improvements, he planted a large quantity of spring bulbs. (See 4.13)

Charles Bramley-Firth was also the prime mover behind the commissioning of the Village

Hall. He purchased a plot of land on the corner of Whistler's Lane from Henry John Whistler. The plot was then gifted to the newly formed Village Hall committee. After various fundraising activities, design and construction, the hall was opened in 1927.

Another notable feature of the village came into being following the purchase of Silchester House in 1930 by Mr Thomas Hartley. The new owner designed and built an elaborate mechanical clock which became a novelty, drawing sightseers to the village. Unfortunately, despite several restorations, although still visible, the clock is no longer working.

The Hartley family gave their name to the small Hartleys housing estate, although apparently Mrs Hartley was totally opposed to this modest expansion in the size of the village.

In 1935 The Old House was purchased by Alec Waugh, the brother of the novelist Evelyn Waugh. Alec became a very active member of Silchester cricket club in the late 1930s although he left the village to join the intelligence services on the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

We are fortunate to have a detailed description of life in Silchester between the wars in the form of a memoir recorded by Michael Knight who grew up in the village. (See 2.23)

From the memoir we learn that besides the village shop, there was a small business operated by the Knight family selling grocery and greengrocery. It was located in Calleva Cottage close to the school and functioned from 1933 until 1972. There was second small shop run by the Ellingham family in a house in Kings Road. In Soke Road (just outside the parish boundary) there was a small haberdashery shop and, at one period, a small bakery near the Methodist chapel. A village post office operated from Koolangatta, the first house in Kings Road. It closed in July 1990, following which services were transferred to Lovegrove Cottage on the edge of the Common off Pamber Road. However, it was not long before Silchester lost its post office entirely.

There was a limited amount of light industry. A member of the Whistler family owned a joinery workshop in what was to become Whistler's Lane. Mr Wigley owned a machine shop, his premises having previously been a blacksmith shop.

Silchester also possessed two garages. One, offering vehicle repairs and selling petrol, was on the site of what became Silchester Garage on Pamber Road. The other, owned by Sid Lovegrove, was located at the edge at of the Common at the area now known as Lovegrove Gardens.

For a time Silchester had its own undertaker business run by the Goddard family from their home, Vine Cottage (See 4.11) near the village pub.

Like all communities throughout Britain, Silchester felt the impact of the Second World War. Everyone would have been affected by rationing and the need to observe blackout protocols. Locally, there were some noticeable changes to day-to-day life. School numbers were swelled by evacuees from Portsmouth, the Old House became an orphanage, and the cricket field was lost, having been taken over for agricultural production.

As in other localities a War Book was compiled in Silchester. Among other items, this listed implements owned by villagers so that the authorities would be aware of what could be requisitioned if necessary.

Above right: Plane crash site

Below: Silchester War Book extract



There was a more dramatic impact on 3 October 1943 when an RAF plane crashed into woodland near the village. The accident report indicates that the aircraft was an Airspeed AS10 Oxford. It had flown from Andover where pilots from the British Dominions were trained to handle UK flying conditions. The official account states: *The crew was completing a supply mission when flying at a too low altitude, the twin engine aircraft hit tree tops and crashed in a wooded area. The aircraft was destroyed and all three crew members were injured.*

In preparation for the D-Day landings in 1944 a large number of American soldiers were accommodated in a temporary camp set up in Benyon's Enclosure, just outside the village. Additionally planes from the American Air Force were a frequent presence in the skies.

A second crash occurred in Silchester on the evening of 22 July 1944. A Liberator aircraft flying over the village appeared to develop a fault. Its crew bailed out by parachute and shortly afterwards the plane crashed on farmland within the Roman walls.

A policeman, with the entirely appropriate name of PC Perfect, hurried to the wreckage and was awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) for his gallantry at the scene.

At the end of the Second World War, Silchester, like other communities, organised events in the Village Hall to celebrate both

Section IV (cont)		Schedule of Implements							
No	Addresses	Picks	Spades	Shovels	Barrows	Ladders	Cross Bars	Axes	Bill
118	Miss Thatcher The Common Silchester	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—
119	Mr L. Manger The Common Silchester	—	2	—	—	1	—	1	—
120	Miss Under School House	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
121	Rev P. V. Bruckin The Rectory	—	1	1	1	1	1	1	—
122	Mr Thatcher Edrington Cottages	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
123	Mr J. Lamden Edrington Cottages	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
124	Mr P. Tipper Edrington Cottages	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
125	Edrington Gardens Capt H.G. Watson	1	2	—	3	2 1/2	1	1	—
126	Sawyer Lands	1	1	1	1	1 1/2	—	—	—



CASE 2209

Wilfred Perfect - 41 years      Police Constable  
Police - 20 years      Civil Occupation - Policeman

Rescue work at crashed aircraft at Silchester, Hants during the evening of 22nd June 1944.

Recommended by - Chief Constable, Hampshire  
No 6 (Southern) Regional Commissioner recommends - B.E.M., dated 22.9.44

Documents    (1)    Statement by T R Bonser      - Farmer  
                  (2)    "    "    A E Turner      - Farmer  
                  (3)    "    "    D Ford      - Timber Merchant

CASE CONSIDERED BY COMMITTEE      27/10/1944      RECOMMENDATION  
31 October 1944

TREASURY RECOMMENDATION      *Gated*      GAZETTED: 194 *Gow*

Copy of statement by T.R. Bonser  
About 9.20 pm On the 22nd June 1944, I was in company with Mr Turner, of The Cottage, Silchester, on Silchester Common, when we observed two men descending by parachute with an American Liberator circling and quickly descending to earth. The aircraft crashed and there was an immediate sheet of flame and large columns of black smoke.

Mr Turner and I went to the scene of the crash which was on my farm. We arrived, I should think, amongst the first at the scene. We were immediately followed by the American Air Force Fighting Unit who were doing their best to keep the public, who were then arriving, at a safe distance. P.C.Perfect had arrived on the scene by then.

Having regard to the nature of his task of keeping the public away, he is to be commended for his utter disregard for his own safety in continually moving amongst dangerous and burning wreckage in carrying out his duties, as there was ammunition continually exploding and it was there were unexploded bombs in in the wreckage.

I consider P.C.Perfect acted in a very courageous manner in carrying out his duties.  
(Signed) T.R.Bonser

Copy Of statement by A.E. Turner  
I have heard Mr Bonser's statement concerning P C Perfect's actions on the evening of 22nd June last at the scene of the crashed Liberator and corroborate it in every detail.

It appeared to me that P.C. Perfect was searching the wreckage for possible survivors, which I consider was a courageous thing to do in the circumstances.  
(Signed) A.E.Turner

Statement

Reconstruction of the  
BEM citation for PC  
Perfect

victory in Europe and subsequently the Far East, A *Welcome Home* fund raised £199.15s.0d [approx. £7,000] which was passed on to *His Majesty's returning servicemen* as they came back, in a gesture of thanks and appreciation from the people of the village.

Sadly, there was no homecoming for six men of Silchester who lost their lives and are now commemorated on the War Memorial. Their brief biographies reflect changing times. Three served in the Royal Navy, perhaps indicating

that, with greater mobility, it was now not unusual for villagers to have wider horizons.

The Festival of Britain took place in 1951, one hundred years after the Great Exhibition of 1851. Silchester's contribution was the construction of the small Calleva Museum housed in a modest wooden building on Edrington Lane (The Drove) at its junction with Bramley Road.

The museum contained a model of the Roman Town together with a few artefacts.



Silchester 1965

Due to difficulties of access, security and maintenance, it was closed at the end of 2005.

There was a modest expansion of the village in the 1950s when the local authority constructed houses in Hartleys and Hydes Platt. The latter suitably preserved the name of the 17th century charity as the new dwellings were built on its *piddle of land*.

A small number of individual building plots were also developed in this period but the transformation of the village into a community

of 1,000 people did not really begin until the 1970s. Various land disposals facilitated the construction of housing estates linked by the road named Dukes Ride, aptly reflecting the village's connection with the Duke of Wellington. (See 4.19)

By the end of the 20th century, from its beginnings as an Iron Age settlement, Silchester had grown into a modern village.

Significant traces of its history from over two millennia remain very visible today. Some features such as the Iron Age earthworks and the Roman Wall, have a striking impact. Others, such as the buildings of the 19th and 20th centuries, can be identified with the help of this book.

But a parish is not only buildings: it is first and foremost a collection of people. Fortunately, following the developments of the 1970s, the new has blended well with the old and today's residents appreciate and enjoy their rural environment. Volunteers help to maintain the Common, the cricket and



Calleva Museum





Centre of Silchester  
1960

football clubs still flourish, and the school, the Anglican and Methodist churches, the Village Hall and public house continue to be central to local life. As a result, present day Silchester is a thriving north Hampshire community and has become a popular village, offering easy access to pleasant countryside and also to the nearby towns of Basingstoke, Newbury and Reading.

## 2.20 The Whistler Family

In approximately 1870 Henry Whistler and his wife Emily, a couple in their 30s, arrived in Silchester. Henry was comparatively local, the son of a builder and decorator based at Sherborne St John. Emily was a grocer's daughter from Newbury.

Henry and his son were to make an important contribution to local life in Silchester. Meanwhile Henry's brother, John, took over their father's business. He in turn indirectly made a contribution to national life as he became grandfather to the famous artists Sir Laurence Whistler (1912–2000) and his elder brother Rex (1905–1944).

Henry and Emily moved into a house in what was then Nanny Goat Lane (now Whistler's Lane). This property had been built in about 1760 and for a time served as the village bakery, having a brick oven in an outhouse.

The front part of the house was used as a shopfront in which Henry operated a

greengrocery business. Emily offered services as a *dressmaker, costumier and milliner*.

As time went on Henry became a well-known figure in the village. He took on the roles of village postmaster and clerk to the parish council. He was also the local agent for the Hampshire Friendly Society. Such was his importance that his funeral merited a detailed report in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* when he died in 1907. Among the mourners was Mrs Mervyn Macartney, wife of the architect of Macartneys. (See 4.15)

Henry and Emily had a son who was named Henry John Whistler. He trained as a carpenter's apprentice then worked in Buckinghamshire before returning to Silchester. Once resident

Henry Whistler's  
House 2023





Whistler's Lane

again in the village, he took over the clerkship of the parish council from his ailing father. There is a record of Henry John's marriage aged 40 in Silchester on 13 April 1912, his occupation being shown as builder.

Henry John Whistler continued living in the house where he had been born which was then known as 6 The Lane, Silchester. He died there on 6 April 1970, less than three weeks before his 99th birthday.



Headstone of Henry and Henry John Whistler

Subsequently in the 1970s the name of the lane in which this property was situated was officially changed to Whistler's Lane with the approval of the parish council, in honour of the Whistler family's contribution to the village. House No. 6 was thereafter sold twice. It seems entirely appropriate that when it was offered for sale in 2001 it was referred to as *Whistler's House in Whistler's Lane*.

There is no known connection between the two Henry Whistlers and Thomas Whistler who was Rector of Silchester from 1629 to 1630. Neither is there a known connection with the American artist James McNeill Whistler. It is entirely coincidental that the latter should create an etching of another Silchester resident. (See 4.2)

## 2.21 Lt Colonel JBP Karslake, Amateur Archaeologist

John Burgess Preston Karslake (1868–1942) was an amateur archaeologist, although sadly his ambitions exceeded his aptitude. His most notable achievement was to identify a tile works in Little London dating from the time of the Emperor Nero.

Lt Col Karslake was born in St Pancras, London on 10 Feb 1868, the only son of a Reading solicitor. He was educated at Eton and Oxford and called to the bar in 1892. From 1895 he held a commission in the Berks Yeomanry reaching the rank of Lieutenant Colonel during the First World War.

He was very active in London politics being a member of London County Council from 1910 to 1931, representing the Municipal Reform Party, an offshoot of the Conservative Party. He also was a member of Paddington Borough Council serving as mayor in 1937/1938 and in 1940.

In the last decade of the 19th century, he purchased a house in Silchester. Known as The Hollies, it stood on the site of what is now Acre House at the junction of the Mortimer and Little London roads.



The Hollies was a remarkable construction. It was originally a farmhouse which Lt Col Karlake wished to extend upwards. However, an architect having advised that the foundations were deficient, Lt Col Karlake designed a number of upright pillars, appearing like stilts, to support a third storey. When construction was complete the house resembled an African game lodge raised above the surrounding terrain.

In *The Book of Silchester* (1924) James Thomson recorded: *The Hollies, the country residence of Col JP Karlake TD FSA, stands at the north-east corner of the common. A high-topped house, with a roofgarden, it is a prominent landmark.* Later, in a footnote on page 31 of *Silchester: The Roman Town of Calleva*, George C Boon noted that he had visited the house several times, presumably in the 1950s.

Thereafter the house burned down, its ruins were cleared and Acre House was constructed on the site. The nearby corner, with its distinctive pond, is still known as Karlake Corner.

During the year 1899 while in residence, Lt Col Karlake unearthed a large round object in the garden of The Hollies. It became a practice that whenever the Karlakes entertained guests, they would take turns tossing the object around as a trial of strength. On one occasion moss and soil fell away to reveal that the subject of playfulness was in fact a carved head, later identified as a representation of the Graeco-Egyptian deity Serapis.\*

Perhaps prompted by this discovery, Lt Col Karlake developed a keen interest in archaeology. When the Society of Antiquaries undertook excavation work in the main part of the Silchester Roman site in 1909, Lt Col Karlake carried out his own excavations on the outer earthwork in Rampier Copse, discovering a number of burials of cremated remains. Some years later, in 1925, he undertook further excavations in Little London which identified the tile works dating back to the era of Emperor Nero (AD 54–68). This discovery was verified by University of Reading excavations in 2017.



The Hollies

During his amateur archaeological career, Lt Col Karlake published several articles about his various finds. However, as they include various speculative suggestions, they are of limited historical value. The head of Serapis is now on display in Reading Museum while a tile excavated at Little London and bearing Nero's imprint is in the possession of the British Museum.

Lt Col Karlake died in 1942 and is commemorated by a plaque on the south wall of St Mary the Virgin church. Also in his honour the Calleva Museum (now closed) was established in 1951 as the village's contribution to the Festival of Britain.

## 2.22 Norman Evill, Architect

The architectural designs of Norman Evill (1873–1958) have made a distinctive impression on the village of Silchester. The Village Hall, facing the playing fields, has a distinctly Arts and Crafts appearance and remains perhaps the most visible testament to his work.

Norman Adolphus Evill, FRIBA, was the son of an architect from Gloucestershire. In 1899, when he was 26, Norman was apprenticed as a draughtsman in the Bloomsbury practice of the

\* Also known as Serapis and so labelled in the Reading Museum Collection

architect Edwin Lutyens who was to achieve renown for many outstanding architectural achievements. Notably it was Lutyens who was commissioned to design the Cenotaph after the First World War.

Lutyens had set up his practice in 1888 and by 1899 was already well-known and highly regarded. He had also commenced a long professional association with the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll.

Norman Evill remained with Lutyens for three years before setting up his own practice in the early 1900s. Initially he undertook restorations and re-buildings rather than entirely new works. For a time, he worked on an extension to Nymans Manor in West Sussex and also designed a row of cottages on the estate.

Some years before her death in 1909, Mrs Mary Newnham Davis commissioned Norman Evill to design an extension to Silchester House. It is possible that Mrs Newnham Davis heard of this architect through London society as she was resident at her home in Chelsea during the winter months. She may also have had connections within the architectural community as her late husband had been registered as a non-practising member of that profession.

New Village Hall  
1929



Presumably Mrs Newnham Davis was well satisfied with the improvements to Silchester House. Following their completion, she promptly commissioned Norman Evill to design two houses in the village for her sons. As a result, two dwellings in the Arts and Crafts style were built: New Timber and The Grange. (See 4.3 & 4.4)

It is interesting to note that Lutyens himself, the foremost proponent of the Arts and Crafts movement, was active nearby around the time Norman Evill was engaged on his Silchester commissions. In 1906 Lutyens designed an extension to Folly Farm in Sulhamstead, only 5 miles away. Following a change of owner, he designed a further extension in 1912 when the gardens were redesigned by Gertrude Jekyll.

Lutyens was very particular about the quality of materials he employed. One of his clients established the Daneshill Brick and Tile Company in Basingstoke in 1903. This made high quality bricks out of local clay. The brickworks office, designed by Lutyens, still stands, a small gem amongst the commercial buildings in Bilton Road, Basingstoke.

It is possible that Norman Evill retained a strong link with Edwin Lutyens, perhaps being closely influenced by him. It is known that the bricks used in the construction of The Grange came from the Daneshill brickworks and it is likely that they were also used in the construction of New Timber.

There are no other pre-First World War buildings in Silchester designed by Norman Evill. Subsequently he was approached again in the mid-1920s with the commission for Silchester Village Hall. We have no record of whether this work was put out to tender and why Norman Evill was selected, but his design for the hall reflects an architectural style which had become a notable feature of the village.

Silchester can be proud of its Arts and Crafts buildings in which it is possible to discern the influence of Edwin Lutyens himself. Norman Evill died in 1958, his architectural achievements in the village leaving a lasting and attractive legacy.



## 2.23 Michael Knight's memoir of Silchester in the 1930s & 40s

Michael Knight was the great-nephew of Reuben Knight, one of the servicemen who died in World War I, commemorated on Silchester War Memorial.

Michael, who lived in Silchester from 1933 to 1960, wrote a lengthy memoir entitled *Silchester Through the Ages* capturing many

details of village life. This document is held by Silchester Parish Council who kindly made it available to us. What follows is a summary of Michael's recollections. Readers will recognise many details mentioned elsewhere in this book but because this is a précis, in this section we have not made the usual cross references. We have, however, given some explanations, shown in parentheses.

Michael Knight's parents married in 1933 and set up a small grocery and green grocery shop in their cottage called Heathcote, which still exists on the edge of Silchester Common. The shop premises consisted of a wooden extension measuring only 3m x 3.3m. There was no mains water, no indoor toilet and no electricity. Water was drawn from a well.

The shop's takings were only in coins as purchases were small. People sometimes came in to buy just one cigarette because that was all they could afford until the next payday. In the 1930s a week's wage was about £2 for a craftsman and £1 for labourers. Michael remembered the day that his parents were astonished to receive a £5 note from one customer. It was very basic, plain white, printed on one side only.

Michael's grandparents lived in a cottage called Calleva in School Lane. This still exists, although much enlarged since the 1930s. In the cottage's front room his grandmother ran a small café selling teas and cakes. She also sold sweets, tobacco and, in the summer, home-made ice creams, although she never possessed a fridge. In the summer months she pro-



Knight's shop c1930

vided teas for garden parties and tennis tournaments at the houses of some of the local gentry, catering for as many as 40 people. Her catering prowess, operating out of only a small kitchen, was remarkable.

This enterprise was very much Mrs Knight's occupation. In contrast, Michael's grandfather was a thatcher and hurdle maker.

There were two other grocery shops in the village, one in Kings Road and

the other in what is now The Old Stores next to the Village Hall. There was also a haberdashery shop in Soke Road and a bakery at Chapel Corner. The Post Office was between Calleva Cottage and Karslake Corner.

In the 1930s two builders in Silchester owned joinery shops. Notably there was a thriving workshop belonging to Mr Whistler housed in what is now Whistler's Barn. Mr Whistler himself lived in what was No 6 Nanny Goat Lane but is now known as Whistler's House. Whistler's Lane was later named after him. The second workshop, belonging to a Mr Wigley, was situated opposite his house on the Common. It had previously been the premises of a blacksmith.

Michael went to Silchester School in which there were only three classes: infants, juniors and seniors. The children sat at wooden desks on benches big enough for two sitting side by side. The only toilets



Michael Knight's grandparents with horse & cart



Ellingham's Shop, Kings Road



School desk

consisted of a seat over a bucket. They were situated at the end of the playground (no doubt for a very good reason!).

There were two garages which sold petrol and repaired vehicles. Lovegrove Garage was situated on the Common where Lovegrove Gardens now stands. The other was on Pamber Road.

The Goddard family who lived at Vine Cottage near the public house ran an undertaker's business. The village's coal merchant was Charlie Butler who lived in Little London Road.

Michael Knight remembered the clock-maker, Mr Thomas Hartley. He recalled the installation of the clock at Silchester House with animated figures which struck the hours.

Besom making (i.e. the manufacture of brooms from birch twigs) was a local craft as was the making of sheep hurdles (i.e. portable fencing to pen sheep and lambs). Hurdles were fabricated from willow, known as withy in Hampshire.

(Withy Farm can be found on the outskirts of Silchester with a nearby plantation of willow trees, grown these days for cricket bat production.)

During World War II, after Michael's father was called up, his grandfather took over deliveries from the grocery shop, using his horse and cart.

In wartime, people were encouraged to grow their own vegetables. (What is now Hydes Platt was divided into allotments for this purpose.)

Silchester had its own Home Guard unit

set up on 14 May 1940. Michael remembers seeing them on parade outside the Village Hall.

There was an aerodrome in Tadley from which American soldiers flew Dakotas, towing gliders across to France. One of the American bombers crashed in a field very close to Silchester Church. A stray German plane, possibly with engine trouble, flew over Silchester one day just as the children were coming out of school. It fired indiscriminately, but the only casualty was one of the chimney pots on Calleva Cottage.

V1 rockets were also seen flying over Silchester in 1944. Fortunately none of them landed anywhere nearby.

The village was home to a large number of evacuated children. They were accommodated in some of the larger houses. In particular The Old House was used as an orphanage, with a number of staff employed to care for the children.

Food was rationed, as were many other items, especially petrol. There was a steam powered sawmill on the Green in Bramley. Frequently a steam lorry travelled through the village and was parked near the village green, to the delight of the children who loved to climb over it.

Towards the end of the war German and Italian prisoners were seen in Silchester. They were set to work digging trenches to accommodate the pipes which would carry a mains water supply to the village.



Making sheep hurdles

The work was physically demanding, all undertaken with pick and shovel on the unyielding gravelly ground. The prisoners were allowed time off at weekends when they sometimes made toys for the children out of odd pieces of wood and empty food tins.

The end of the war was marked by celebrations. Like other villages, Silchester held a huge party and displayed flags and bunting. But this was also a time of sadness for those who had lost sons or brothers in the fighting.

When Michael's father was demobbed he organised a party in the village for all the children with plenty to eat and drink, a magician and an entertainer. There was also music and singing for the adults.

Michael remembered playing on Inham's Hill where there was uneven ground due to the extraction of sand. (Presumably this is the area now known as the *monkey bumps*.)

Nearby a large wooden gantry, topped by fan blades, operated a water pump.

Another popular play area, although strictly out of bounds, was the village water tower. Children used to squeeze into its enclosure and climb up to the platform, dropping fir cones on unsuspecting passers-by. In the severe winter of 1947 the water tower froze, a pipe burst and the whole structure became covered in ice.

Silchester Common was not managed as it is today. The gorse was much lower and there were fewer trees. Fires burned on the Common as often as every three or four weeks. They were difficult to extinguish. It was not unknown for the fire engine to return to its station only to come back immediately to tackle another outbreak. Smouldering could start near the village green, the subsequent blaze spreading westwards as far as Impstone Road in Pamber Heath. Sometimes the fires would damage the hedges and gardens of the properties near the Common. Michael recalls that on more than one occasion thatched properties survived with lucky escapes.

