

PART THREE

The Past Around the Parish

Many of the landmarks around Silchester have their own tales to tell about the impact of the past upon the parish.

In this section we have deliberately focused on post-Roman features. Our Roman heritage is of course an important part of the parish's fabric, but we cannot improve upon other excellent publications which are available.

Moving from roughly the oldest to the youngest, we start this section by looking at Flex Ditch, followed by the Impstone. We have placed Silchester Common next as this area was first exploited during the Roman era. Then we come to our 12th century parish church of St Mary the Virgin, although readers requiring fuller information will enjoy the many details contained in the church guidebook.

Thereafter we reach more modern buildings and include the War Memorial, dating from 1922. In this section we also felt it appropriate to honour those servicemen from Silchester who fell in both world wars by giving their biographical details. We have photographs of all those who died in the First World War but, unfortunately, no photographs of those who died in the Second. For this reason the biographies of the Second World War servicemen are slightly more detailed. All names are listed in the order in which they appear on the War Memorial.

Finally, we touch on some utilities and an industrial building. These might not be the most attractive parts of our parish, but they are nevertheless features of everyday life which we felt should not be excluded.



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Locations map

- 1 Flex Ditch
- 2 The Imp Stone
- 3 Silchester Common
- 4 St Mary the Virgin Church
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- 6 The Calleva Arms
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- 11 Silchester Village Hall
- 12 The Pavilion and Playing Field
- 13 The Water Tower
- 14 Silchester Sewage Treatment Works
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3.1 Flex Ditch

Flex Ditch is a scheduled ancient monument located at the foot of the slope leading down from Silchester village centre on the road towards Little London. It sits at the side of a sharp right-hand bend and appears as a depression holding standing water, covered with vegetation including several trees. The ditch is a well-known feature of the parish.

It is also something of a mystery.

Describing Flex Ditch, the Historic England website states the following:

The monument includes a ditch of probable Iron Age date c.1km south west of the Roman town of Calleva, on the outskirts of the modern village of Silchester. The ditch crosses the

highest part of a spur, extending between a dry valley to the south west and the valley of a tributary of the Silchester Brook to the north east. The ditch, which is up to 25m wide and has a maximum depth of c.6m, was probably intended to restrict access from the south to the ridge of higher ground to the north. On lower ground to the south and west of Flex Ditch are several other linear earthworks extending north eastwards towards Calleva, which is at the eastern end of the ridge. The Roman road between Calleva and Sorviodunum (Old Sarum) passed close to or cut across the south side of the ditch at its north eastern end. This end of the ditch has been more recently disturbed by the construction of the road between Little London and Silchester and is now boggy and partly water-filled. The south

western end of the ditch was remodelled and a bank at its northern side was levelled during the construction of houses, paths, garages and parking areas around the site. Excluded from the scheduling are the footpaths, lamp- and signposts, but the ground beneath them is included.

The dimensions quoted appear inaccurate. At its widest point Flex Ditch is about 40m. No length is given above and a depth of 6m appears unlikely. As an average two-storey house is just under 5m tall, it seems improbable that Flex Ditch should have a depth greater than the height of a house.

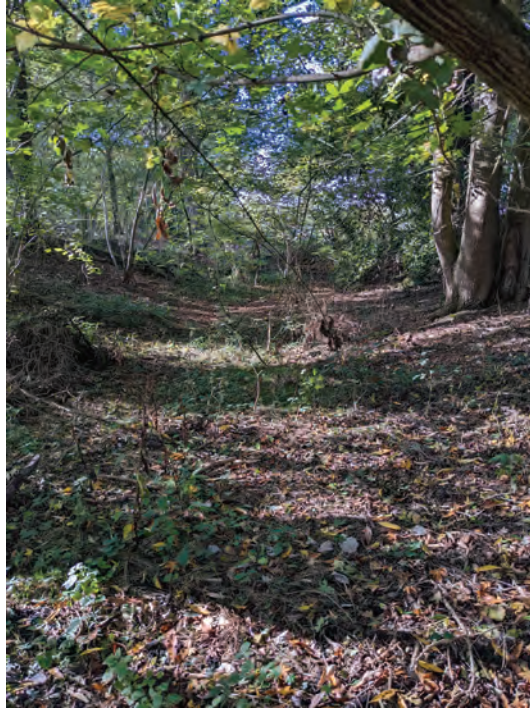
As a result of Historic England's apparently authoritative description, it is commonly assumed that the ditch is part of an Iron Age fortification. However, this is puzzling as the principal Iron Age earthworks lie 1km away. It seems odd that a substantial ditch should have been carved out of the earth at an isolated spot apparently bearing no association with the main settlement.

In *The History of Silchester Parish* Florence Davidson, writing of Flex Ditch, states:

The bottom of the pond rests on the Roman road that runs through this part of the Pamber Forest. The bed of the pond was examined some years ago and was found to be the bed of a Roman road and is the one that eventually runs into Salisbury. (sic)

This is quite impossible. Professor Michael Fulford has observed that a Roman road would lie just beneath the ploughsoil, not at depth. Furthermore, although Flex Ditch lies near the route south-west to Dorchester (Durnovaria) via Old Sarum (Sorviodunum), modern technology has shown that it was not part of that road. Furthermore the Environment Agency's Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey makes it clear that the Roman road runs just to the south of Flex Ditch, though it may have clipped the east end of the ditch (if the ditch is earlier than the road).

Indeed the map in 2.19 accurately depicts the line of the road.



Left: Flex Ditch

Below: Flex Ditch Pond



This Roman road became known as the Portway. If Flex Ditch were ever drained it would certainly not disclose the remains of this ancient highway. We have been unable to locate any independent record of the examination of the bed of the pond which, as Florence Davidson was writing in about 1910, must be assumed to have occurred in the second half of the 19th century. We can only conclude that this was one instance when she accepted an unreliable story.

Another theory is that Flex Ditch, rather than being part of the Portway was a quarry from which material for building the road was obtained.

By contrast, in *An Introduction to Field Archaeology as illustrated by Hampshire* (London, 1915), JP Williams-Freeman suggests that Flex Ditch appears to be a modern digging for soil.

Professor Fulford is more cautious about imputing either an ancient or man-made origin to the depression. He speculates that Flex Ditch might simply be a natural feature of the landscape.

Neither is there a definitive explanation for the name. Florence Davidson states the following:

The word Flex comes from a pond or stream that does not rise from a spring, but comes and goes according to the wetness of the season. The pond and stream is one of the Flex, grows and runs quite dry in very dry weather or a long draught. (sic)

This may have been a fanciful notion or, more likely, an explanation based on local belief.

By contrast, in *Silchester: The Roman town of Calleva*, in a footnote on Flex Ditch, George C Boon offers the simple explanation that it was probably so named because flax was steeped there.

Possibly we shall never know the exact origins of this interesting feature which, like its name, will continue to remain a mystery.

3.2 The Impstone

The Impstone, set into the grass verge on the north side of the road between Silchester and Pamber Heath opposite Impstone Road, marks the north-western boundary of the parish.

Its name and origin have been the subject of academic theories, speculation and local mythology.

According to George C Boon in *Silchester: The Roman Town of Calleva*, in 1280 the stone was called *Hyenstone or Hyrneston* and marked the northernmost point of Pamber Forest.

He suggests that the stone was a Roman milestone. However, it is unlikely to have been placed in its present position by the Romans as it is not adjacent to one of the main routes out of Silchester. The more likely explanation is that it was removed from its original location prior to 1280 and, in an early example of recycling, appropriated as the boundary marker.

In her book *Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain*, Charlotte Higgins suggests that the word 'Imp' might be a contraction of 'Imperator', the Latin for emperor. This inscription has been found on certain Roman coins discovered in Calleva and it might simply be the case that our forefathers regarded the unusual landmark as the Emperor's stone.



The Impstone

On later maps the Impstone is denoted as the *Nymph Stone*. In the 1924 volume *The Book of Silchester* the author suggests that this name was given on the occasion of the visit of Queen Elizabeth I in 1601. She was received in this corner of Silchester Common where the boundaries of two counties (Hampshire and Berkshire) meet. The name *nymph* could have been a flattering tribute to the then ageing Queen. He also speculates that the stone may have been erected on that occasion, although this seems unlikely as it was apparently in place many centuries before.

It is also interesting to note a cartographer's mistake. On the 1961 edition of the Ordnance Survey map Sheet SU66, the stone is erroneously shown some 750 yards west of its true location. This is a strange aberration as it is correctly positioned on other Ordnance Survey maps both older and more recent.

By far the most attractive, if fanciful, explanation of the Impstone is that the original name of Hyenstone derives from *Onion's Stone* and that a local giant named *Onion* hurled it from the Roman site 3.2 km (2 miles) away, which is how it arrived at its present spot.

It is hardly surprising that our ancient forebears might have imagined the Roman walls to have been the work of a race of giants, as such a substantial construction must have appeared wondrous to them and beyond the efforts of ordinary people. The name *Onion*, applied to one of these mythical giants, comes from a misreading of lettering on numerous Roman coins, minted in the reign of Emperor Constantine, and discovered in the locality. Indeed, such coins were termed *Onion's Pennies* and one part of the Roman site, where a brook trickles through the wall, was for many years known locally as *Onion's Hole*.

Local mythology also suggests that a giant's finger marks are visible in the Impstone. Closer inspection reveals that three depressions are actually part of a benchmark. There is no explanation for a deeper circular hole apparently drilled into the stone.

3.3 Silchester Common over the Years

Silchester Common has existed as heathland since pre-Roman times. Very early in its history it was exploited for the extraction of gravel lying just below its surface. The numerous depressions on the Common, often filled with water and either temporary or permanent ponds, are the direct result of this activity. Gravel was a useful material employed in construction both within the Roman town and more widely. As Calleva Atrebatum was developed, streets were laid down in a grid pattern. Additionally, five radial roads were built, linking Calleva with other Roman settlements in southern England. Over the years all of this activity demanded a huge supply of gravel, as did the building of the town walls in the late 3rd century AD.

The wooded areas, together with the more extensive Pamber Forest, are the only remnants of the former Royal Hunting Forest of Windsor which, in medieval times, extended into northeast Hampshire, creating a vast wooded area between the Thames Valley and the New Forest.

The royal forests were forbidden territory to the villagers of Silchester, although the temptation to enter and trap game or gather wood was sometimes irresistible. Indeed,

Cottages on the
Common





Top: Silchester
Common the Moors

Bottom: Heather on the
Common

poverty may well have made this a necessity. In her research, conducted in the early 20th century, Florence Davidson discovered that in 1346 two residents of Silchester were imprisoned in Winchester Castle for trespassing in the forest. One was named John Couper; the other was no less a person than the Rector of the day, Peter of Goncaux.

By way of contrast, Common Land carried ancient rights of access. These rights were not granted by a Lord of the Manor but were accepted as having existed since time immemorial. Most Commons consist of uncultivated

land of poor soil and were known as Manorial Waste. They were left unenclosed although occasionally some families did encroach upon them, setting up smallholdings.

Contrary to popular belief, Common Land always had an owner, most frequently, but not necessarily, the Lord of the Manor. Until the end of the 20th century Silchester Common remained unenclosed and, like the majority of Commons elsewhere, in the ownership of the Lord of the Manor.

Silchester Common was the setting for a royal visit on 5 September 1601. On her progress through England, just 18 months before her death on 24 March 1603, Queen Elizabeth I was received here by Francis Palmes, the Sheriff of Hampshire and other gentlemen of the county. State papers described the visit thus:

She stood on the Shires bound, on Silchester Heath, with the flower of Hampshire gentry before her. Her Majesty sayd she was never so honourably received into any shire, for as Hampshire is a county pleasant of soile and full of delights for princes of this land who often made their progress thither, so it is well inhabited by ancient gentlemen civilly educated and who live in great amity together.

After the reception Frances Palmes escorted the Queen to Basingstoke where she knighted him. (See 3.2)

It was to be 400 years before Silchester received another Royal visitor. Appropriately, this occurred during the reign of the second Queen Elizabeth. On this occasion it was the monarch's daughter, rather than the monarch herself, who arrived. (See 4.19)

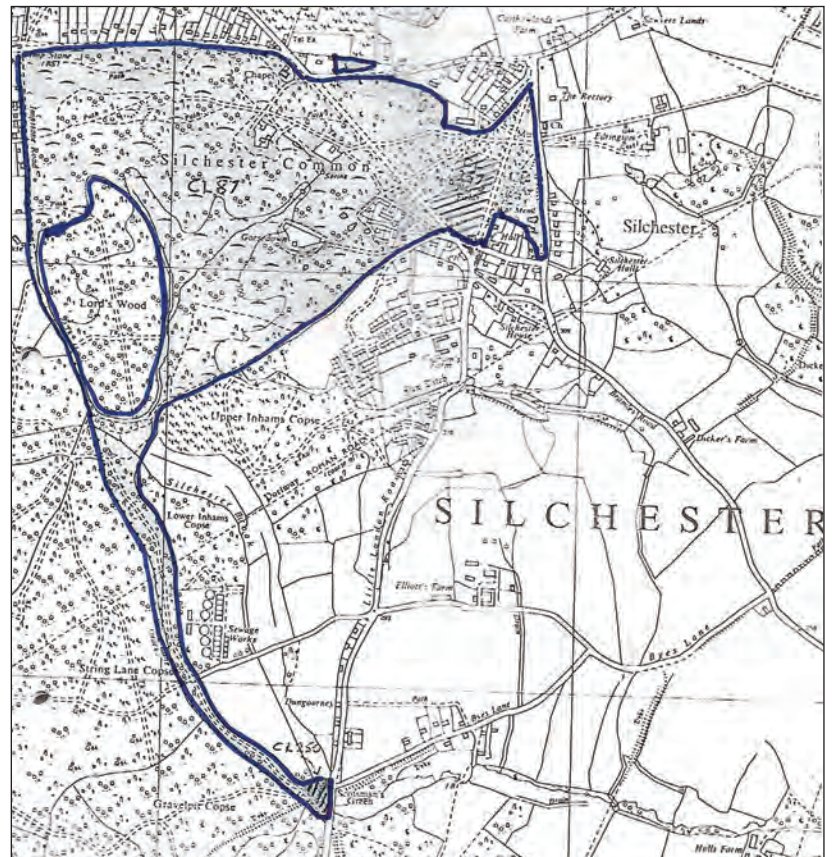
In 1653 Silchester Common was recorded as being 205 acres, but at the time of tithe commutation in 1841 there was an area of only 175 acres.

In 1828 the first Duke of Wellington, became Lord of the Manor of Silchester and, via a Parliamentary trust, owner of extensive land within the parish, including the Common. At that time, a number of villagers lived in

Subsequently Lily Heath decided to dispose of 900 acres of land, formerly held by the Wellington Estate, as it was no longer required for development. Silchester Common was included in this parcel of land which was offered for sale by auction in Basingstoke Town Hall on 4 October 1977. The successful bidder was John Cook of Reading whose father, Sidney Thomas Cook, had been the founder of Ideal Casements (Reading) Ltd, which had

Silchester Parish Council marked the transfer by holding a reception. During this there was a brief ceremony in which John Cook broke a twig from an oak tree growing on the Common and presented it to the council chairman, Lady Atkinson. This simple action continued a tradition dating back to feudal times. In those days, when literacy was limited,

Plan of Silchester
Common gifted to
Silchester Parish
Council. The
Lordswood area is
privately owned



it was a regular practice to mark the transfer of land by handing over a physical representation such as a small quantity of soil or a twig from a tree growing on the property.

To help control the growth of gorse, in 1995 the greater part of the Common was fenced and New Forest ponies were brought in to graze. In 2001 they were removed and replaced with a small herd of 17 more voracious Dexter cattle. However, despite these hearty bovine appetites the gorse remains prolific and problematic. From time to time contractors are employed when certain areas require more extensive clearance or birch trees need to be cut back. Their efforts are supplemented by weekend working parties of local volunteers.

Historically, persons living within the area defined as a Common have held clearly defined Commoner's Rights. Following the passing of the Commons Registration Act 1965, 29 properties around Silchester Common registered the rights of their owners. These are:

<i>Animals ferae naturae</i>	the right to take wild animals;
<i>Common in the soil</i>	the right to extract gravel;
<i>Estovers</i>	the right to collect fallen wood;
<i>Pannage</i>	the right to permit pigs to feed in wooded areas;
<i>Pasturage</i>	the right to graze cattle;
<i>Piscary</i>	the right to fish;
<i>Turbary</i>	the right to dig peat.

We are fortunate to have been given a photograph of one Commoner, Mrs Smith, who in the 1920s regularly exercised her right of Pasturage. Perhaps nowadays Estovers is the only Commoner's Right of any relevance.

Under the Commons Act 1899 and byelaws made under section 15 of the Open Spaces Act 1906, Silchester Common will remain in perpetuity a *public open space*. It is subject to byelaws made by BDC on 22 April 1970. These can be viewed on the parish noticeboard near the Calleva Arms or the B&DBC website at <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/council-byelaws>.

Mrs Smith
a Commoner outside
the school



3.4 St Mary the Virgin Church

It is immediately noticeable that the church of St Mary the Virgin Silchester stands in an unusual position being situated within the Roman walls of Calleva Atrebatum. Indeed, the eastern wall forms part of the church boundary. The building dates back to the 12th century with brick and stone from the Roman walls incorporated within its structure. It is a Grade I listed building.

The yew tree outside the north porch is estimated to be about 400 years old and probably replaced an earlier yew tree. It was dated by the famous botanist David Bellamy OBE, President of The Yew Tree Campaign, in April 2001.

In pagan times the yew tree held associations with death and the journey of the soul to the

underworld. It was therefore often planted near temples. This tradition may have been carried over to Christian times. However, there was a more practical reason for planting yew trees in churchyards. As their seeds, needles and bark carry poison, their presence discouraged people from permitting cattle to graze in consecrated ground.

Archaeological investigations have established that the church is situated in an enclosure with lengthy religious associations. Nineteenth century excavations identified two Romano-Celtic temples in this area, significantly predating its later use as a site for Christian worship. Twenty-first century archaeology undertaken by Professor Fulford's team from the University of Reading employed Ground Penetrating Radar, undreamt of by their 19th century predecessors. This has led to the discovery of traces of a third temple in the churchyard and the adjacent Old Manor House.

The nave of St Mary the Virgin church is the oldest part of the structure. When constructed it probably terminated in an apse as in nearby Padworth church dating from 1130. There also remains a fragment of the original 12th century font.

In the early 13th century, the north aisle was built or remodelled, probably to accommodate a growing population. At the same time the south aisle was constructed and the present northern doorway inserted. The chancel was then extended eastwards so that the church attained its present ground plan apart from the porches, bell turret and the 21st century extension.

It is unusual for churches to be entered from the north. The likely explanation in Silchester is the presence of an adjacent building. As the church faces the residence which stood on the site of the existing Old Manor House, the north doorway would have given convenient access for the Lord of the Manor and other local inhabitants.

The interior of the church holds several features of historic interest.

Near the organ there is a list of Rectors of Silchester. It is noticeable that during the year 1349 there were no less than six Rectors. The Black Death spared no one, not even clergymen, although as the Rectors were not necessarily resident in the parish it cannot be assumed that they died in Silchester.

In the south aisle a recumbent effigy is considered to be that of Eleanor Baynard, a member of the Bluet family who were Lords of the Manor until 1430. This monument dates from about 1375.

Extensive traces of the original wall paintings dating from the mid-13th century can be seen in the chancel. These were discovered during restoration work in 1872 under the Rectorship of W S Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes. Further restoration took place in

420 year old Yew Tree





West side c. late 19th century



13th Century wall paintings



Left: East Window 2022

1972 and 1998. Originally the church would have been heavily decorated before being whitewashed during the puritan era of the mid-17th century.

The chancel screen is a particularly fine feature. It dates from the early 16th century and incorporates both the Tudor rose and the pomegranate, the latter being the emblem of Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife. The screen was removed in the Reformation and appears to have been forgotten for three hundred years until, in the mid-19th century, it was discovered in a local barn. Although at the time John Coles was Rector of Silchester, it is likely that the screen's recovery and reinstallation in the church was overseen by Rev HW Sheppard who was curate from 1843 to 1851.

Four substantial posts at the west of the church were installed in the 18th century to carry the weight of the bells housed above. There are now five bells but today they are supported by an iron frame resting on girders above the nave. Prior to 1744 there were only two bells but Rector Paris (1719 to 1742) left £80 [*approx.* £20,000] for three new bells to be cast. These bells were renewed in 2021.

Additionally, from the 18th century onwards St Mary the Virgin church has been embellished by monuments commissioned by some of its wealthy parishioners. On the north wall are memorials to the unfortunate fifth Viscount Ikerrin and Rector Paris. (See 4.13) The perpendicular chancel east window was installed in memory of Henry Newnham Davis who died in 1873. (See 4.2) The chancel also holds plaques in memory of 20th century village residents including Lt Col JBP Karslake. (See 2.21)

Also of interest is the large church organ presented by Rector Langshaw in about 1898. This had previously belonged to St Pauls Church, Tottenham and actually originates from about 1770.

The church continues to be an important part of the Silchester community. A more recent 21st century memorial is the Carpe Diem

window on the west wall. This commemorates two young parishioners who tragically lost their lives in separate accidents.

In March 2008 a new vestry on the southern side of the building was completed and dedicated by Bishop Trevor Willmott. The construction project was complex, requiring compliance with numerous regulations due to the church's Grade I listing as an historic building. When the foundations were prepared not only were the footings of a Roman building revealed, but also a very old skeleton was uncovered. This was carefully removed and in due course given a new Christian burial. The vestry walls and roof were skilfully designed to blend with the existing structure so that the modern extension is totally in keeping with the 12th century fabric of the church.

Over nearly 1,000 years St Mary the Virgin church has witnessed changes both in its structure and religious worship. Prior to the English Reformation, services would have been conducted in Latin according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. Although Henry VIII (ruled 1509 to 1547) broke with Rome, significant changes in worship did not take place until the reign of his successor, his son King Edward VI (1547 to 1553). Roman Catholicism was reintroduced by Queen Mary (1553 to 1558) but thereafter under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558 to 1603) attendance in the Church of England became compulsory where Latin was no longer the liturgical language.

Accordingly, an event which took place in March 1988 was truly historic. For the first time in 450 years, St Mary the Virgin church was made available to the Roman Catholic community for the celebration of the Roman Catholic mass. In a more ecumenical world, in the late 1990s, the church was also made available for a Greek Orthodox baptism.

These recent events demonstrate that the church continues to adapt and to be of great importance to the daily life of the local community.

Those requiring fuller information are

encouraged to obtain a copy of the current church guidebook. This in turn has an interesting history. The first guidebook was compiled by Rector Adams in the 1920s. It was then updated in the 1960s by LF Rushbrook Williams, an eminent historian who lived in Silchester and specialised in eastern studies. It is evident that he drew on the researches of Florence Davidson. (See 1.4)

In 1989 a new guide was written by George C Boon, the author of *Silchester: The Roman Town of Calleva*. In addition to his interest in antiquity he also extensively researched the history of the church, generously offering to present some of his findings in a new booklet. The Boon guide has been reprinted several times with updates by local residents Robina Rand and Michael Cole.

A dedicated band of volunteers ensures that St Mary the Virgin church remains open to visitors every day. With its extensive history, fully detailed in the helpful guide, it plays a most important part in *The Silchester Story*.



Carpe Diem window

3.5 Silchester Methodist Church

Silchester Methodist church stands on the northern side of Silchester Common near the junction of Pamber Road, Kings Road and Soke Road. The original church, known as Silchester Primitive Methodist Chapel, was built in 1839 following a huge increase in the numbers of local people attending Methodist gatherings.

Over the 150 years prior to 1839 there had been a steady drift away from the established Church of England in many areas of the country. During the mid-17th century, Puritanism became well established within the English church. Rector Whistler of Silchester (1629 to 1630) is known to have been of this persuasion.

Following the restoration of the monarchy and the accession of Charles II in 1660, there was a return to a less radical form of religion. Indeed, The Act of Uniformity (1662) gave authority for any minister refusing to conform to the Book of Common Prayer to be dismissed from the Church of England. Some 2,500 clergymen departed in what became known as the Great Ejection.

Likewise, many worshippers preferred Puritanism and left the established church. As they did not conform to the Book of Common Prayer, they became known as non-conformists. Locally, just 2 miles away from Silchester, The Old Meeting House in Malthouse Lane, Tadley (now the United Reformed Church)



was established in 1662. It seems likely that dissenters from Silchester worshipped there and that, following association with these neighbours, they too acquired the confidence to remain outside the Church of England.

Towards the end of the 18th century there was an evangelical revival, led in particular by John and Charles Wesley. They adopted what was termed a methodical approach to religion, leading to the term Methodist. After John Wesley's death in 1791 the Methodist movement split from the established church.

The revival gained enormous popularity in northern Hampshire and Berkshire. A thriving Methodist community developed, centred on Shefford, a few miles northwest of Newbury. From here preachers came to different localities, often holding meetings in the open air.

By 1835 Shefford was the hub of a Methodist circuit (equivalent to an Anglican parish). The circuit boasted a membership of 2,480 people and employed 23 travelling preachers. It also appointed 67 approved local preachers.

From the early 19th century, missionaries

Above right: Silchester Methodist Church

Right: Silchester Methodist Chapel 1839





Methodist Church
and Manse c. Mid-
20th century

from Shefford were sent to Silchester, holding meetings either in houses or in temporary constructions on Silchester Common. Florence Davidson describes a *temporary shelter made of thatched hurdles and branches of trees* which was apparently first erected by members of the Old Meeting House, Tadley.

The first open air meeting took place in 1807. Such was its success that these gatherings continued annually for nearly three decades. Then in 1834 the first formal Primitive Methodist meeting took place in a private house. Three years later Silchester Methodist Society was formed.

Methodism very quickly took root within Silchester, the community becoming large enough to finance the purchase of land and construction of its own chapel. Silchester Primitive Methodist Chapel was completed in 1839 at roughly the same time the public house, then known as The Crown, was built. There is a theory that one strong factor influencing Rev John Coles (Rector of Silchester 1812 to 1865) to provide land for The Crown was his desire to marginalise the Methodists, forcing them to find a location well away from the centre of the village.

In the event, the site of a disused windmill was purchased at a cost of £120 [*approx. £10,000*]. The land transfer document listed the names of nine trustees. Those from the immediate area included Aaron Tull of

Silchester (shoemaker) and Benjamin Noyes of Little London (coppice dealer). Some of the masonry from the windmill was used during construction although, as the exterior of the building was finished with a mortar rendering, no traces of that material are visible.

The original chapel continued to serve the Methodist community throughout the 19th century. Congregations remained sizeable. On the day of the 1851 census a total of 123 adults and 40 children are recorded as attending the morning service, while at the evening service there were 174 adults.

In 1864 a small manse was built alongside the chapel to become the home of the Superintendent Minister. This was in anticipation of a pending reorganisation when, in 1866, Silchester became a Methodist circuit in its own right. Over the years there were further circuit reorganisations and consolidations, with Silchester becoming part of the Reading circuit in 1982.

By the 1920s it was becoming clear that the fabric of Silchester Chapel was deteriorating. The roof was in poor repair and the ceiling was dangerous. This prompted the building of a new church, more suitable for worship in the 20th century. Thus in 1927 the present attractive brick church was constructed, its western wall backing on to the 1839 building which became the church hall.

3.6 The Calleva Arms

The Calleva Arms sits in what is now the centre of the village of Silchester. It has an interesting and mildly controversial history.

The building of the public house, originally called The Crown, began in about 1837 on land provided by Rector Coles. By this period much of Silchester was in the ownership of the Wellington Parliamentary Trust and it is possible that the plot made available was actually glebe land, held by the church and not personally by the Rector.

Although he was frequently absent from the parish, Rector John Coles, who arrived in 1812, became the occupant of the Rectory (now The Old House). The adjacent property to the south was a farm, whose farmhouse stood on the site of what was to become Silchester Hall. Next to this agricultural residence was a building, known as the Malthouse, used for brewing. Early in his incumbency Rector Coles purchased the entire farm, becoming landlord.

He discovered that the only ale available in the village was brewed in the Malthouse. To his intense irritation he also discovered that villagers were in the habit of walking through the Rectory grounds to reach these premises. Once there, they occupied a bench at a long table while consuming the local concoction purchased from the brewer, the tenant farmer, Mr Tiley. Thoroughly disconcerted, Rector Coles commissioned the building of The Crown, closed down the Malthouse and installed Mr Tiley as landlord of the new public house.

The census data for 1841 shows Stephen Goddard, aged 55, as The Crown Inn publican. Ten years later the 1851 Census reveals that the publican was Stephen Goddard's son-in-law, John Charlton, aged 26. He lived on the premises with his wife and two-year-old daughter. In total there were eight people resident at The Crown, including two other members of the Goddard family who were described as maltsters and brewers.



The Crown in the
19th century

The provision of land by Rector Coles could be seen as an act of philanthropy, providing the village with a far more pleasant venue for social drinking. However, it is more likely that it was an act of self-interest: an expedient means of keeping tipsy villagers at arm's length.

There may have been a more devious motivating factor. By the early 18th century the main focus of the village had moved away from the Pound area to its present location on the north-east fringe of Silchester Common. Knowing that the growing band of Methodists wished to construct a chapel in the new village centre, possibly Rector Coles moved quickly to thwart them. His disdain would have been amply demonstrated by the erection of an establishment considered malign by the more temperate Methodists.

Visitors to the Calleva Arms will have noticed that in the grassy area to the front there is a large, roughly rectangular stone. There are various theories as to its provenance. One is that it may have been a 'preaching stone' used as an extempore open-air pulpit by non-conformist evangelists; another that it was a relic of the nearby demolished windmill. (See 3.5) Whatever its origin, it is likely that it was used as a mounting block by travellers taking refreshment at the inn.



The Crown and Green
early 1900s



The Calleva Stone



The Crown 1946



Calleva Arms 2022

Florence Davidson, writing in 1910, recorded that the village stocks and whipping post used to stand just opposite the public house. However, James Thomson in the *Book of Silchester*, published in 1924, records them as having stood in the triangle of grass opposite Dial Cottage. (See 4.9)

Although since its original construction modern extensions have been added, the public house retains an exterior appearance very similar to that which it possessed throughout the 19th century. Perhaps the greatest change is the name, as over the winter of 1977/1978 The Crown became The Calleva Arms. With its late 20th century identity, it remains a popular village amenity.

3.7 Silchester School

Prior to the 19th century there was no educational establishment in Silchester.

After his appointment as Rector in 1812, Rev Coles set up a Dame school in a cottage near Flex Ditch. This gave rudimentary tuition in the 'Three Rs' – reading, writing and

arithmetic – to those children whose parents could afford the small fee.

In 1841, thirteen years after he became Lord of the Manor, the Duke of Wellington made arrangements for the creation of a village school. A building was constructed at a site on the north-western edge of Silchester Common, eventually opening in 1844 when 129 children enrolled.

Although in nearly 180 years the school has grown both in pupil numbers and physical size, the original building can still be seen quite clearly. It has a distinct double gable frontage and tall, imposing chimneys.

The original school charter stated that the Duke of Wellington gave the lease of land:

For the purpose of a school for the education of children and adults with children, only of the labouring, manufacturing and other poorer classes in the parish of Silchester, and as a residence of the teacher or teachers.

The first principal was Mr J Plummer. He became a well-known figure in the village and took an interest in the Roman site. Possibly because of this, he became acquainted with a

younger man, George Nelson Godwin, also a keen amateur historian.

Godwin was born in Winchester in 1846, brought up and educated there. He then attended the London College of Divinity, taking holy orders in 1870. Thereafter he served as curate in various parishes until appointed as Chaplain of the Forces in 1877.

When not otherwise engaged in their professions, Plummer and Godwin collaborated to write a book drawing attention to the Silchester Roman site at a time when significant discoveries were being made. *Silchester or the Pompeii of Hampshire: how to get there and what to see* appeared in 1879. This was the only published work by J Plummer. Godwin, on the other hand, published several works over his lifetime including *Civil War in Hampshire 1642 to 1645* and *the Story of Basing House*.

Long after Plummer's days, Silchester School continued to provide traditional primary education. During the Second World War pupil numbers increased dramatically. Many children were evacuated to Silchester from Portsmouth as that city was a prime target for German bombers. Additionally, The Old House was temporarily used as an orphanage. To cater for the extra pupils, several classes were held in the Village Hall.

Bizarrely, by the time of the 1944 Education Act, the exact ownership of the school had become unclear. The seventh Duke of Wellington, who had succeeded to the title in 1943 and was perhaps unsure of the full extent of his property, wrote to the Rector of Silchester, Rev PV Bruckin, enquiring as to whether or not the school belonged to him.

The answer was by no means clear cut. Rev Bruckin replied as follows:

In view of the major alterations to the building which will be required under the terms of the new education act, the managers [i.e. the school governors] are anxious to put the matter on a firm basis and ask whether your Grace would be willing, if you still consider



the estate has no claim on the school, to enter into a legal agreement with the Managers.

Victorian schoolchildren

It is not difficult to appreciate that improvements were required. In particular Michael Knight's memoir describes some very rudimentary toilet facilities. (See 2.23)

The Wellington Estate manager responded:

The Duke does not consider the school is an asset to the estate, and is likely to be a liability... will you advise what form the agreement with the school managers should take?

Silchester School
2023



Thus in 1944, connections with the Wellington Estate were severed. Within the new educational system Silchester School became a Church of England primary school, a status it has retained into the 21st century.

Expansion continued after 1944. New classrooms and facilities were created as the population of Silchester increased, especially in the last 30 years of the 20th century following the building of the nearby modern housing estates. The school maintains its excellent reputation, providing high quality education to local children in an enviable location adjacent to the Common and village playing fields.

3.8 Silchester War Memorial

Silchester War Memorial is located on the eastern side of Little London Road, occupying a small patch of Common facing onto the village playing fields. The memorial is a rough granite column mounted upon a large square base. On its face, inlaid with lead lettering, are the names of those men of the village who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars.

Following the end of the First World War, communities throughout the country resolved that they would not forget those servicemen from their localities who had sacrificed their lives during the conflict. In the vast majority of towns and villages funds were raised to construct appropriate memorials.

The Silchester Memorial is striking in its handsome simplicity. Its natural stone blends perfectly with the background of native vegetation, while the small area of cleared Common in which it stands provides a calm environment for contemplation and the annual Armistice Day commemoration.

Once the decision had been taken in 1919 that a Silchester Memorial should be erected, various fundraising events took place, many of them organised by the Women's Institute. A flower show raised £39.6.10 [approx. £1,900]. The Mothers' Union raised £24.00 [approx. £1,150] from afternoon teas.

There are no records of who created the memorial. It appears likely that the organizing committee simply chose the design from one of the many catalogues available at the time. Originally the memorial held only the names of those who had died in 1914–1918, although that of Arthur Pearce was added later. Following the end of the Second World War the names of those who had died in that conflict were added.

In 2005 the War Memorials Trust provided funds for the memorial to be refurbished and preserved.

The unveiling of Silchester War Memorial took place on Sunday, 19th June 1922. The *Basingstoke Gazette* for 24 June 1922 records that:

The Rector, Rev EC Hetherington, amidst an impressive silence, commenced with the words, 'At the call of King and Country these our brothers, Reuben Knight, George Hunt, Walter Aldridge, Robert Neville and Francis Stacey gave up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let us see to it that their names are not forgotten.'

The report continues:



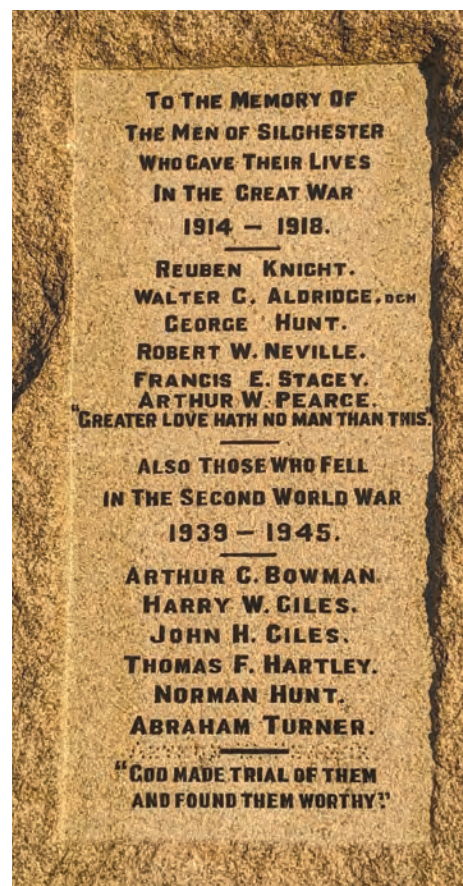


War Memorial
Inauguration 1922

After a prayer had been offered, Lieut. General Mayne in a few well-chosen words (prior to unveiling the memorial) spoke of the honour he felt in being asked to take part on such an occasion and said that the stone which had been erected would always keep in remembrance those who had given their lives for King and country in the Great War. The Silchester band then led the singing of the hymn 'Fight the good fight'.

After the dedication the lesson was read by the Rev J Walker (Primitive Methodist). The hymn 'Oh God our help in ages past' was then sung and the 'Last Post' was sounded following which a most impressive two minutes silence was observed. Many beautiful floral tributes were placed around the stone.

Since 1922 an annual service has taken place at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday. Although over a century has passed since the ending of the First World War and over three quarters of a century since the ending of the Second, the parish has indeed ensured that the names of the fallen are not forgotten.



In Memoriam

3.9 Fallen First World War Servicemen

*Reuben Knight 1899–1916
(died aged 17)*



Reuben was born in 1899 in **1 Clematis Cottages, School Lane, Silchester** to Henry and Leah Knight, joining his sisters Leah (Minnie) and Elsie. His mother having died in 1903, his father then remarried to Eva. Reuben's step-brother Henry was born later that year.

Although only sixteen and underage, Reuben managed to enlist with the West Surrey Regiment in March 1915. He was part of the 5th battalion which consisted of reserves and those under training. On 1 September 1916 he and twenty-three colleagues were transferred into the 6th battalion of the London Regiment (City of London Rifles) and travelled out to France. With his new regiment, he took part in the capture of Highwood on 15 September 1916, the last major tree-covered area to be taken by the British during the Somme offensive. Just a month later on 8th October he was killed in battle near L'Abbaye d'Eaucourt, also on the Somme.

Buried in France, Reuben Knight's name is recorded on the Thiepval memorial.

*Walter G Aldridge DCM
1885–1917 (died aged 22)*



Walter was born in 1885 to Walter and Sarah Aldridge who lived in **Northview Cottages, Kings Road, Silchester**. He was the eldest of seven children, having two sisters, May and Kathleen, and four brothers, Bob, Archie, Arthur and Sid. Walter was employed in the family sawmill business as a steam Sawyer.

Walter joined the Hampshire Regiment in December 1914, just over four months after war was declared. He was sent first to India and then, in April 1917, to Egypt. Here his regiment was heavily engaged in combat as over seven months the troops battled their way through Gaza, eventually reaching Jerusalem. Walter was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for *Conspicuous Gallantry* but on 19 November he was killed in a battle near Junction Station, a location on the railway line leading to Jerusalem which was attacked by Turkish forces.

Walter Aldridge is commemorated on the memorial in the Jerusalem War Cemetery.

*George Hunt 1883–1916
(died aged 33)*



George was born in 1883 to Thomas (a domestic gardener) and Caroline Hunt. They lived in **School Lane, Silchester** in the cottage next door to that of Reuben Knight's family. George was the oldest of five children including Edith, Rose, Walter and Amy.

In 1901 George was living and working as a gardener at the Vicarage in Mortimer West End but had returned to Silchester by 1911. He married Fanny Saunders in early 1916 then joined the Duke of Edinburgh's (Wiltshire Regiment) 6th battalion, sailing to France in July.

On 20 November George was in the front-line trenches near Thiepval when his regiment was subjected to heavy artillery bombardment. He was one of the many soldiers killed in this attack.

George Hunt's name is recorded on the Thiepval memorial.

Robert W Neville 1881–1918
(died aged 37)



In 1881 Robert was born in Bergholt, East Suffolk to Harry and Eliza Neville. He moved to Stratfield Saye after the death of his father in 1898 to live with his sister Annie and her husband (a grocer and butcher).

In 1911 Robert was living in Baughurst and working as a butcher, later becoming a Canteen Manager at Bulford army camp in Wiltshire. He joined the Army Reserve in 1915. In September 1916 he married Maude Street in St Mary the Virgin church, Silchester, taking up residence in **Gorselands (now Keeper's Cottage)** on Silchester Common. However, within one month of his marriage, as a reservist he was called up to join the Coldstream Guards in October 1916. He was sent to France in May 1917, a month before his son, Ralph, was born.

Robert was wounded in August 1918 and taken to the 5th Northern General Hospital in Leicester where he died of his wounds on 23 October.

Robert Neville is buried at the Leicester (Welford Road) Cemetery.

Francis E Stacey 1892–1918
(died aged 26)



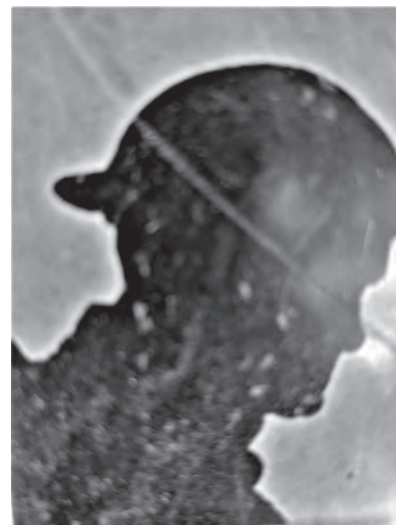
Francis was born to Ebb and Mary Stacey in 1892 in **Brook Lane, Silchester** (now known as **Byes Lane**) where he was one of seven siblings. Following Mary's death in 1903, four of the children stayed with Ebb, while the others moved to live with Mary's parents, near **Rosebank** in Kings Road.

In 1911 Francis was a gamekeeper in Kent but in 1913 he emigrated to Canada. Having volunteered for service in the Royal Canadian Dragoons, in 1915 he was sent to France.

On 21 March 1918 the Germans launched a major offensive near St Quentin. The Dragoons were at the forefront of resistance to this attack, helping to hold the Allies' line and launching cavalry charges. During the battle Francis was captured and held as a prisoner of war. However, on 5th June he died of heart failure while a patient in a German Military Hospital.

Francis Stacey is buried in Hautmont Cemetery near Maubeuge, France.

Arthur W Pearce 1886–1914
(died aged 28)



Arthur was born in Baughurst in 1886 to Charles and Elisabeth Pearce, the third of a family of seven children. By 1901 the family had moved to **Chitty Farm, Wall Lane** where Charles was a shepherd.

Arthur served in the Royal Berkshire Regiment 1904–1907 then became a reservist. He married Rose Belcher in 1908, their daughter Beatrice being born the following year. During this period Arthur, Rose and Beatrice lived near **The Pound** where Arthur worked as a carter.

At the outbreak of war Arthur was promptly recalled to the army and almost immediately despatched on active service, sailing to France in August 1914. Arthur's unit was sent to Ypres, Belgium on 20 October to join the defence against a heavy onslaught by the German Army. The Allied line was breached and during heavy fighting Arthur was killed on 13 November.

The name of Arthur Pearce is recorded on the Menin Gate in Ypres.

3.10 Fallen Second World War Servicemen

Arthur C Bowman 1923–1943 (died aged 20)

Arthur Claude Bowman was born on 3 July 1923 to Arthur, a bricklayer, and Jessie Bowman, in Tadley. By 1939 the family were living in **Northleigh**, a cottage next to what was **Lovegrove Garage** on **Silchester Common**.

Arthur joined the Royal Navy as an Ordinary Seaman, aged 18, on 22 October 1941 and was initially stationed at HMS *Collingwood*, a shore-based camp in Fareham. He spent 1942 with the Naval Air Service 760 Squadron during which he became an Acting Able Seaman.

On 23 March 1943 Arthur was assigned to HMS *Chanticleer*, deployed on convoy duties. In November they set off from Freetown, Sierra Leone as an escort for Convoy SL139 heading for Liverpool via Gibraltar.

On 15 November, 250 miles north-east of the island of San Miguel in the Azores, the convoy was attacked by a German wolf pack of eight U-Boats. HMS *Chanticleer* was hit by an acoustic torpedo and severely damaged.

Twenty-nine out of a total crew of 129 were killed. Arthur was declared *missing presumed dead*.

Arthur Bowman is remembered on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

Harry W Giles 1910–1941 (died aged 31)

Henry William Giles, known as Harry, was born to Thomas and Julia Giles on 17 October 1910. They lived in **The Cottage, Kings Road, Silchester** which had been the home of Thomas Giles since his childhood. The 1911 census shows that Thomas's widowed mother and Julia's younger brother also lived there.

Thomas had been a steam sawyer but was now working as a labourer in a wood yard, probably Valentine's Wood (now Easter Park) at the end of Soke Road.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Thomas and his son Harry, now 29, were still living in The Cottage. By now Harry was a builder's labourer.

He enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1940 and

was based at HMS Victory in Portsmouth.

Harry was in Portsmouth on the night of 17 April 1941 when a heavy bombing raid was carried out by the German Luftwaffe. Six people were killed and sixty wounded.

One of the more severely wounded was Harry who died of his injuries the following day, 18 April 1941, in the Royal Naval Hospital Haslar, Gosport.

Harry Giles is buried in St Saviour's churchyard in Mortimer West End.

John H Giles 1900–1943 (died aged 43)

John Henry Giles was born in 1900 at Little Heath, Mortimer West End to George and Elizabeth Giles, joining William, Amy, Louisa and Millicent. The family then lived at **2 Chitty Farm Cottages, Wall Lane** where George was working as an agricultural labourer. George died, aged only 39, just after John was born. In the 1911 census Elizabeth and the five children were described as surviving on *Parish Relief*.

There is no record of John marrying. In WW2 he served with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps who were responsible for the supply of weapons, armoured vehicles, ammunition, military equipment and clothing.

He was with the Eighth Army in North Africa and was part of the Tunisia campaign under General (later Field Marshall) Montgomery.

John was killed on the first day of the battle of Enfidaville on 19 April 1943, the Eighth Army's last significant battle in the North African campaign.

John Giles is buried at the Sfax War Cemetery in Tunisia.

Thomas F Hartley 1912–1942 (died aged 30)

Thomas Fitzhardinge Hartley was born on 24 October 1912 to Thomas and Cicely Hartley in Hastings, Sussex. Thomas had an older sister, Sylvia. Another sister, Alice, was born in 1915. TF Hartley's father, also named Thomas, purchased **Silchester House** in 1929.

After attending Harrow School and graduating from university, Thomas joined the Royal Artillery as a Second Lieutenant in

February 1933. He was promoted to Lieutenant in 1936 and to Captain in 1941. Subsequently he was promoted to the rank of Major.

Thomas was seconded to the 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery. This regiment was deployed against the advancing Japanese forces who swept southwards through Malaya in 1941. Unable to resist the Japanese offensive, the regiment fell back to Singapore.

After the fall of Singapore Thomas was reported missing and it was believed that he was a prisoner of war. However, somehow he had managed to evade capture and escaped to New Delhi in India.

He contracted typhoid and died in New Delhi on 4 September 1942.

Thomas Fitzhardinge Hartley is buried in Delhi War Cemetery. He is remembered on Silchester War Memorial and also on the memorial in Bassenthwaite, Cumbria, the home of the Hartley family prior to their move to Silchester.

Norman Hunt 1917–1943
(died aged 26)

Norman Hunt was born in Silchester on 15 April 1917 to Arthur and Ellen Hunt. Arthur Hunt worked as a hay binder and later a thatcher. Arthur's father and grandfather had also followed these trades and all three of them had been born in the parish, making Norman the fourth of a long line of Silchester residents.

In 1939 the family, including Norman's two younger sisters, were living in **Flex Ditch Cottage, Little London Road**. Norman's occupation was a lorry driver.

Joining the army, he entered the Royal Army Service Corps as a driver. As part of the 18th Infantry Division, he was deployed to Singapore. There he took part in the Battle of Singapore against the Japanese and was taken prisoner along with 80,000 British, Australian and Indian troops.

Norman was initially held in a series of POW camps on the Changi peninsula. He was then included in a group of 7,000 soldiers shipped to Thailand. They were subjected to a 200 mile forced march, during which many soldiers literally fell by the wayside.

Norman survived this ordeal and was forced to work on the Burma railway, which became known as Death Railway because of the appalling conditions experienced by the POWs and the high mortality rate amongst the Allied soldiers. The building of the railway became the subject of the 1957 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

Norman Hunt died on 23 August 1943, probably of cholera aggravated by malnutrition, malaria and beri-beri. He is buried in the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery in Thailand.

Abraham Turner 1899–1943
(died aged 44)

Abraham was born on 22 June 1899 in Hurst, Berkshire, to Alfred and Ellen Turner. He was the youngest of four brothers but also had three half-brothers and three half-sisters. His father Alfred, a general labourer, died in 1911. Abraham lost one of his half-brothers, James (not a resident of Silchester) in 1915 when he died in a First World War engagement in France.

In 1917, during the First World War, Abraham enlisted in the Royal Navy as a stoker. He served on HMS *Endurance* and remained with the Navy following the end of hostilities working on many other ships over the following 22 years and rising to the rank of Chief Stoker.

In 1920 Abraham married Alice Fairs, a housemaid. In 1924 they had a daughter, Beryl. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 Alice and Beryl were living in **Oak Tree Cottage, Silchester Common**, adjacent to Heathercote House.

Abraham was due to leave the Navy with a pension but stayed on after war was declared and was posted to Singapore. He was taken prisoner when Singapore fell to the Japanese in February 1942.

Abraham was one of 950 prisoners shipped off to serve as slave labour. He arrived at Hakodate Main POW camp in June 1943 where, a few months later, on 28 December 1943, he died of kidney failure. His body was cremated.

Abraham Turner is commemorated in the British Commonwealth War Cemetery in Yokohama.

3.11 Silchester Village Hall

Silchester Village Hall is situated on Little London Road, adjacent to Whistler's Lane and opposite the playing fields. It is an important building in village life and suitably occupies a site at the present centre of the village.

Prior to the construction of the hall the only publicly available village amenity was the wooden building known as the Reading Room situated just outside the parish in the grounds of Impstone Cottage on Soke Road. Its location is clearly marked on early 20th century maps.

Following the construction of the Village Hall, the Reading Room was moved to a site in Bramley Road near the new Rectory. As it was a comparatively light building it was raised off the ground and dragged by a team of village men along the roads to its new position. It remains on this site today where it is known as the Mission Church. The building has been used for worship when repairs have been conducted on St Mary the Virgin church and continues to provide premises for various other Church of England activities.

Once the decision had been taken to build a Village Hall, a committee was formed in the mid-1920s to oversee the project.

An important contribution was made by Charles Bramley-Firth who in 1923 had moved into the former Rectory, changing its name to the Old House. He negotiated the purchase of a plot of land from Henry John Whistler (the son of Henry Whistler), which he then transferred as a gift to the newly-formed committee to become the site of the new amenity.

A fundraising subcommittee was created, chaired by Colonel Parkinson who lived in Glebe Cottage (now known as Woodrow), located very close to the recently acquired plot. Local organisations, including the Women's Institute, the Cricket and Football Clubs and the Silchester Silver Temperance Band, all played their part in amassing a building fund. Additionally, a village fete generated the enormous sum of £513.13s.11d. [*approx. £33,000*].

The architect commissioned to design the hall was Mr Norman Evill. He was already very familiar with the village having designed



Silchester Temperance
Silver Band 1921

an extension to Silchester House for the Newnham-Davis family and also two new dwellings, New Timber and The Grange. The appearance of the hall has similarities to these houses, reflecting the Arts and Crafts influence.

The building contract was awarded to the local firm, John Wigley & Son of Silchester, located in a yard adjacent to the nearby forge.

Building commenced towards the end of 1925, occupying a large number of men for a year. The total cost of construction came to £1,767.3s.6d. [approx. £115,000], although this did not include running water or toilets. Water was provided from a well in the grounds and electricity from a generating plant in a shed behind. Cooking and all-important tea-making had to be done over a solid fuel stove.

The grand opening of the hall took place in January 1927 with a revue called *Hullo Silchester!* The report in the Hampshire and Berkshire Gazette recorded that it was: *...a brilliant revue... a quite gorgeous affair... while the animated singing and graceful movements of the chorus were extremely pleasing...* Numerous performances were put on due to the great popularity of the production.

Another development occurred in 1928 when a Village Hall library was set up with the help of the Carnegie Library and Hampshire County Council. The library, which offered free membership, opened for the lending and return of books each Friday evening. It ran continuously until 1965 when it was disbanded.

A Working Men's Club also made use of the new premises. They met in the back rooms but used the main hall for billiards, setting up their table on a rug to protect the wooden dance floor.

The arrangement proving rather unsatisfactory, in 1934 the Club raised £188.10s [approx. £14,000] to build an extension adjacent to the main hall. This was the origin of the Club Room still so called today.

The popularity of the new hall is a reflection of how different society was in the middle years of the 20th century. There was no television



Silchester Village Hall
prior to early 21st
century extension

and no easy access to neighbouring towns and to other places of entertainment. The Village Hall enabled the local populace to socialise and enjoy diversions from their daily employment.

The building continued virtually unchanged until 2014 by which time there was a clear need for improvements. A new committee arranged for the construction of an extension together with a general overall refurbishment. Modern toilets were installed, including a facility with disabled access. A more spacious kitchen was created containing work surfaces, hob, ovens and dishwasher.

The work was financed in part by the sale of a plot of land held by the Village Hall trustees and known as the bowling green. This raised about one third of the funds. Another third came by way of grants from local authorities and other organisations. The final amount consisted of donations from various trusts including the Englefield Trust and the

Village Hall
November 2022



Calleva Foundation as well as gifts from private individuals.

The total cost of the extension and refurbishments came to £300,000, a stark contrast with the original building cost.

Subsequently the hall roof was replaced at a cost of £70,000. Of this £25,000 was provided by Basingstoke and Deane Local Infrastructure Fund, £25,000 by Hampshire County Council Community Buildings Fund and £20,000 by Veolia Trust.

Although its use may have altered since 1927, the Village Hall plays an important part in the everyday life of Silchester. It is used for meetings by several local organisations and for stage productions by the local amateur theatrical group, The Silchester Players.

3.12 The Pavilion and Playing Fields

Silchester playing fields are an extensive open area opposite the Calleva Arms and the Village Hall. With their adjacent pavilion and children's play area, they present a large, attractive amenity close to the village's main concentration of dwellings.

Technically the playing fields form part of Silchester Common and, although they have a somewhat timeless appearance, are a comparatively recent creation.

Until the early years of the 20th century Silchester Common remained largely gorse-covered over its entire area. A customer of the public house then known as The Crown, in the year 1900 would have looked out across a landscape similar to that of the present-day Common south of Pamber Road.

Silchester Football Club, founded in 1907, needed a home ground. Accordingly, a patch of gorse opposite The Crown was cleared to create a pitch. A similar facility was not required for the more well-established cricket club who played on a nearby meadow.

No further clearance was undertaken during the first half of the 20th century, the football pitch remaining hemmed in by gorse. Neither

were there any changing facilities for football team members.

During the course of the Second World War, Silchester Cricket Club (CC) lost the use of its meadow which was commandeered by the War Agricultural Committee for the cultivation of corn. In 1947, two years after the end of hostilities, Mr AJ Goddard took the initiative to reintroduce cricket to the village by creating a pitch opposite The Crown. He borrowed a 15-ton steamroller to create a flat area within the football pitch and also borrowed coconut matting from Newbury Cricket Club to create a suitable wicket. In the absence of a pavilion, cricket teas were prepared in the Village Hall.

Silchester CC had previously used a small cream coloured pavilion on their old ground. It was decided to move this to the playing field area. Paul Pratt of Whistler's Lane (the son of the Silchester CC captain in the early 1950s, Alf Pratt) recalls that in about 1951 the pavilion was transported across the playing field to be placed above the newly created cricket pitch. This became the first building on the pavilion site.

The remainder of the playing fields area simply lay in its natural state until the end of the 1950s. Then in the early 1960s an opportunity came to improve the cricket facilities by preparing a permanent pitch. In 1961, financial assistance was sought from a Duke of Edinburgh post war sports ground fund, set up to help communities re-establish sporting facilities which had been lost during World War II. Additionally, a prominent club supporter, Commander Ivens of Soke Road, donated £300 [*approx. £5,000*] on the condition, which was fulfilled, that this would be matched from elsewhere.

The necessary funding having been raised, extensive gorse clearance was undertaken to create the cricket pitches which now lie in the northern part of the playing fields.

An opportunity to improve pavilion facilities came in 1963. The local coal merchant, Mr 'Sooty' Freestone, who lived in Culham's



Silchester Pavilion

Farmhouse, had acquired four disused army Nissen huts. These were situated at Little Park Farm in Stratfield Mortimer, having been used to accommodate German and Italian prisoners of war in a detention centre known as POW Camp 88. Mr Freestone, perhaps living up to his reputation as a wheeler-dealer, made an offer to the cricket club. His proposition was that if the club dismantled and transported the four huts, they could keep one of them. The club members accepted these terms, the fourth hut duly becoming the first proper pavilion. The work of reassembly was completed on Boxing Day 1963, just as the first of a notoriously hard winter's snows were falling.

In 1979/1980 the pavilion was substantially upgraded. At its core the army Nissen hut was retained but subsumed into a more extensive purpose-built wooden structure. The *Silchester Parish Magazine* records that in September 1979 this cost £7,392 [approx. £32,000].

When opened, the pavilion was formally named the Sidney Cook Pavilion. This was in recognition of the transfer of the Common to Silchester by Sidney's son, John Cook, whose gift was made in memory of his father.

Following a rebuilding grant of £360,000 received from the Sports Legacy Fund, further

improvements took place in 2013. Separate Home and Away changing rooms with toilets and showers were created together with space for referees and umpires.

In this way, over half a century, there has been an evolution from a small cream coloured shed used for cricket teas, to a substantial pavilion equipped with all necessary facilities, supporting all local sports and also the wider community.

Silchester Playground



3.13 The Water Tower

Although the Water Tower is situated just over the parish boundary, in Mortimer West End, it is a familiar landmark to Silchester residents. Indeed, according to Michael Knight's memoirs, in less safety conscious days it frequently provided an unofficial, if hazardous, play area for village children. (See 2.23) The tower is now enclosed by more robust fencing, preventing any unauthorised access.

The tower was constructed for the Mid Wessex Water Company just before the Second World War, providing a good head of water for the village. Its heavy, cast iron tank has the remarkably large capacity of nearly 225,000 gallons.

The dimensions of the tank are 60 ft by 48 ft with a depth of 12 ft 6 ins. There is a 4 inch thick concrete slab set into its base.

The supporting structure is constructed of rolled steel sections and has a height of 63 ft.

New roofs were provided to cover the water in 1956 and again in 1976.

Subsequently the water tank went out of service and is no longer used for the supply to



The Water Tower

the parish. At the time of preparation of this book no long-term plans for the future of the tower had been announced.

3.14 Silchester Sewage Treatment Works

Silchester Sewage Treatment Works is situated south of Upper Inhams Copse which borders Silchester Common. Largely hidden by mature trees, it lies in the shallow valley through which Silchester Brook meanders. It is accessed from the narrow-metalled lane which runs off Little London Road and past Culham Mill. Villagers unaccustomed to walking through this area could very possibly be unaware of the existence of the facility.

Construction of the Sewage Treatment Works began in 1951. As this was in an era when there were few residential buildings available in the village, the Water Board built four dwellings at Flex Ditch to house their workers. Known for a time as Water Board Cottages, they were later sold off to private purchasers.

It had been necessary to build the Works not because of any expansion within Silchester but as a result of the creation of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at nearby Aldermaston. Not only was AWE growing into a vast complex but also Tadley was rapidly increasing in size to house its large workforce.

The Water Board needed a site which met several criteria:

- proximity to the areas of expansion;
- situation at the foot of the gradient to minimise pumping;
- lying on undeveloped land;
- close to a watercourse into which treated effluent could be discharged.

Fortunately, the chosen site was also discreetly hidden, being situated well away from the main centres of population both in Silchester and Pamber Heath.

By the end of the 1950s the Sewage Treatment facility consisted of holding tanks linked

to 4 biological filters. During the 1970s the site was upgraded with the addition of two further filters thereby increasing capacity at the time Silchester village was expanding. A much larger upgrade was undertaken in the 1990s by which time the works were in the ownership of Thames Water. This upgrade, costing £4 million, became effective in 1992.

The sewage treated comes solely from the direct catchment area which includes not only Silchester but also Pamber Heath, Tadley, AWE and Baughurst.

When the sewage enters the site, it firstly is allowed to stand in settlement beds. Solid material sinks to become sludge. This is then removed by tankers for further treatment in Reading or Basingstoke. Tankers are also used to deliver chemicals or to remove effluent if process tanks need to be emptied and cleaned. These vehicles reach the site from the lane running off Little London Road and generally cause little disturbance. No effluent for treatment is 'imported'.

It is not generally known but Silchester Sewage Treatment Works benefits from the installation of some equipment unique to this facility. After sewage has passed through settlement beds, the remaining liquid enters what is termed a *Thames Flood Filter Plant*. This is essentially an aeration unit, consisting of 10 cells that contain media held in suspension by injection of air. This mixture develops a slime-like coating called bio-film. Once formed, the bio-film is host to micro-organisms which break down the remaining nutrients within the liquid sewage. It effectively transforms it into treated water which can be returned to the Silchester Brook watercourse without causing any environmental impact.

No one would claim that Silchester Sewage Treatment Works is the most attractive of local landmarks. However, its function is essential to modern living and we can consider ourselves fortunate to be the beneficiaries of a unique treatment technique. Besides having little environmental impact the facility, tucked away almost unnoticed, also has little visual impact.



Silchester Sewage
Treatment Works

3.15 Culham Mill

Silchester is largely a rural, residential parish, but it has one industrial site. Culham Mill, can be found tucked away down a turning off Little London Road. The premises are located on the narrow lane which leads down into a hollow and over a brook to terminate at the Sewage Treatment Works.

This lane originated as a track constructed to facilitate the haulage of felled timber from Pamber Forest. Prior to removal to a sawmill, the wood was stored on a plot of land adjacent to Brooklyne Cottage.

In 1969 the plot of land, previously owned by BDC, was conveyed to Mr. and Mrs. Freestone. The transfer was by way of compensation for the Freestones' agreement to vacate Culham's Farmhouse which they occupied as tenants. The Council had purchased that property, together with its associated land, for the purposes of development.

On part of their newly acquired plot the Freestones built the house Rampiers. It took its name from Rampier Copse, one of the distinctive ancient earthworks to the west of the Roman wall. In this area Mr Freestone, apparently regarded locally as a loveable rogue, organised a shooting syndicate.

Mr Freestone extended his holding of property by purchasing an area of boggy, vacant land below Brooklyne Cottage. To improve his new acquisition, making it stable and capable of supporting a building, he imported rubble. He then obtained planning permission to construct a grain store which he named Culham Mill.

The lower section of the new building

Culham Mill



consisted of concrete panels while the upper walls were corrugated metal sheets, designed to hold grain and permit air circulation. However, the building was never used for its intended purpose and stood empty until the Freestones sold it in the mid-1970s.

There were numerous applications for a change of use of Culham Mill. Among those rejected were requests for it to become a vehicle inspection establishment, a storage facility, a scrap metal operation and a general purpose warehouse. Eventually a company specialising in animal health products took possession of the premises but stayed for less than three years.

The next occupant was a company, Tramar Ltd. Its business was the recycling of out-of-date foodstuffs. Having been required to vacate a site in Wokingham, the company was given permission by the local authority (by now B&DBC) to carry out their operations on this Silchester site. Unfortunately, this brought an influx of heavy lorry traffic carrying goods to and from the premises, creating noise and disturbance. Furthermore, the process of recycling generated clouds of unpleasant, sickly smelling dust.

In response to local outrage, B&DBC held a Public Enquiry. The company was adjudged to have seriously breached planning regulation and was subsequently served with an enforcement notice to cease operations.

Following Tramar's departure, in 1995 B&DBC permitted Corporate Engineering Ltd to occupy Culham Mill, having been satisfied that there would be no detriment to the local environment. The company has had a continuous presence on this Silchester site since then. It manufactures a range of high-quality Glass Reinforced Plastic covers for agricultural, industrial and commercial use.

