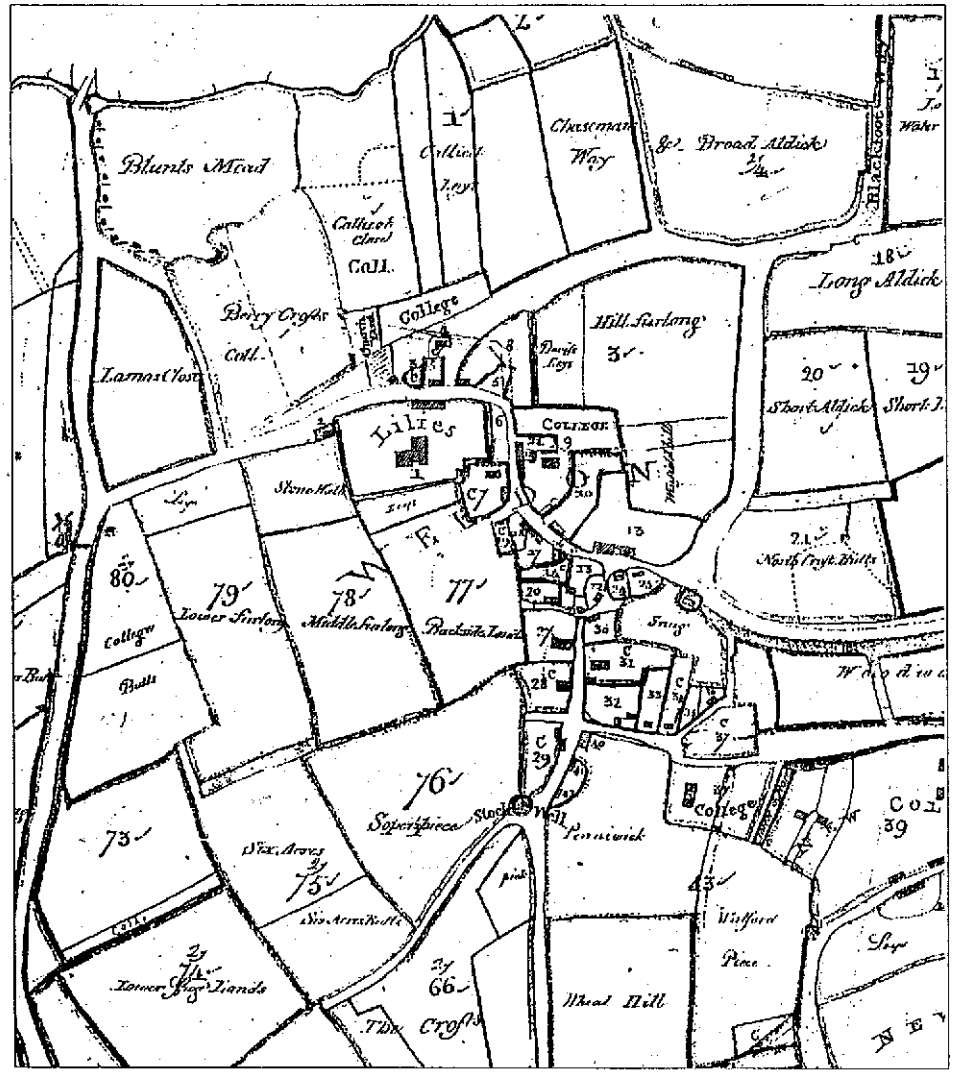
The Place Where We Were Born

E. Ralph Bates



An outline of the story of Weedon

The Place Where We Were Born

An outline of the story of

Weedon

near Aylesbury, Bucks.

by E. Ralph Bates

to J. T. S. Rolls

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Preface

'The Place Where We Were Born' was lent to me in the mid-1990s by Miss K. Joan Rolls. This is written in an exercise book in Ralph Bates' hand, sent with a covering letter to J.T.S. Rolls of Whitchurch at Christmas, 1968. At that date, Ralph was living in Bath, but still had friends and relations in the Aylesbury district.

The covering letter describes the book as "... an outline study and could be enlarged many times over". Ralph would have liked time to give more thought to the "phrasing and sentences", and he asked "that this hurried compilation shall not be copied". Some 30 years later, I hope he will forgive me for sharing "this hurried compilation" with others interested in Weedon and its history. His writings give a hint of the love of Weedon and of the effort and knowledge required to accumulate such a fascinating history of a small Buckinghamshire village.

Ralph hoped that "the result is reasonably comprehensible". It is - and I have tried to copy the text faithfully. Where I have doubts, I have commented in square brackets. The only modifications I have made are the deletion of some sub-headings from the margin of the book and a rationalisation of the 'Contents' section. Any reproduction errors in the main text are my fault.

Edmund Ralph Bates' mother was Ada 'Tottie' Rolls, sister of Joseph Tom Seamons Rolls and of Edmund Percy Rolls, father of Kathlene Joan Rolls. Ralph died in 1997, aged 100.

The Rolls family is first recorded in Weedon in 1791, when William Rolls was baptised at Hardwicke. This William was the great-grandfather of 'Tottie', 'Tom' and 'Ted'. The last Weedon Rolls, Maisie Sylvia Mary Rolls, left Weedon in 1998, having lived in the same cottage in Coodle Corner since her birth in 1906.

David Rolls

November, 2000

Introduction

'THE LAND OF BREAD AND BEEF'

Weedon. Far from the sea.

Few places in England are further from the sea than the hamlet of Weedon, three and a half miles to the north of Aylesbury, county town of Bucks. Others, more to the north, have a better claim to be called 'The Centre of England', but when their latitude is reached, the eastern coast-line has drawn nearer. Lord Nugent, Weedon's squire when Victoria came to the throne, described his mansion and estate as being "just midway between the three seas which form the boundaries of Southern England". He also declared that "our ancestors" called the hill on which the houses of the hamlet were built, "the heart of South Britain". The noble lord was a romantic, and the phrase may have been an invention of his own! In any case, the description is apt. Because of this remoteness from the sea, even in the twentieth century Weedon has had old inhabitants who had "never seen the sea".

Bucks.

Bread and Beef.

But in other ways, it is a favoured spot. Its situation on the northern edge of the Vale of Aylesbury guarantees a fertile soil. Bucks, with its corn-growing land south of the Chilterns and its rich pastures to the north, used to be called the 'Land of bread and beef'. The proximity of London guaranteed a ready market for its produce. Within living memory droves of cattle could be seen on their way to London town, to feed the ever-growing crowds of the metropolis. The wealth of the city was a boon to the country. Bucks was a privileged county.

The Fertile Vale.

Both north and south, however, were often out-matched by the abundance of the Vale of Aylesbury, which stretched across the centre of the county. Nearly 400 years ago the Elizabethan, Camden, wrote of the Vale, "The rich meadows feed an incredible number of sheep, whose soft and fine fleeces are sought after, even from Asia itself'. A few years later, Drayton described it as "a Vale that walloweth in her wealth". Not to be outdone, in

1660, Fuller said that the largest-bodied sheep in the land were bred in the Vale.

Weedon. Beans and Lamb.

Weedon shared the abundant fertility. Lord Nugent described it as being "on a small knoll ... which rises on a vale famous in all time for its fertility". In lyrical mood he writes of " the richness of the fields" in which "herds and flocks are content to thrive in silence"!

Actually it could be better described as "The home of beans and lamb" rather than "The land of bread and beef". In 1535, when Leland the antiquary was journeying from Quarrendon to Burston, just to the south of the hamlet, he noticed two features. One was the paucity of trees (the waste had been cleared completely), and the other was the quality of the beans which were growing. For many generations, New College at Oxford had a standing agreement for a supply of Weedon beans for use in its stables. As for sheep, as long ago as 1339 Weedon had honourable mention for its sheep and wool production. Out of 60 villages and hamlets, it came in the top three. Sheep from other places were sent to Weedon for pasture. Once, a hundred from Adderbury were nearly forgotten ...! A twentieth-century auctioneer has been known to say "Weedon sheep! Weedon sheep!" in an effort to boost the price.

"A quaint little hamlet", says a modern guide, referring to Weedon's thatched houses.. "One of the most fertile and valuable districts in England", wrote Leland. Both descriptions have truth in them.

Chapter I

IN THE BEGINNING

c. 600 A.D.

Two Questions. When? Where?

How long ago did 'Weedon' become a human settlement, with a continuous record ever since? Where did the first settlers "pitch camp"?

The two questions are not as ridiculous as on first hearing they may sound. The name 'Weedon' gives a clue to an answer to one, and the necessity of a good water supply, without risk of flooding, may be a pointer to an answer to the other. Many places have names which tell little of their origin. Hardwicke is in this class. It indicates a pastoral settlement, and no more. More often a local water supply can suggest a great deal. So with Weedon.

When?

The Pagan Shrine - a clue.

The name Weedon indicates that in the pre-Christian era pagan worship took place there. 'The Sacred Hill' was a centre for Anglo-Saxon religious rite, before Christianity was established among these invading tribes. Only a few places in mid-Bucks have names which confirm pre-Christian settlement. It was after the Battle of Wedavaiy Field* in 655 A.D. that Penda, King of Mercia and thus of the mid-Bucks area, accepted Christianity for himself and his peoples. This points to a date before 655 for continuous human settlement at Weedon. The date 600 A.D. for the beginning seems to be near the mark.

[*Is this Winwæd Heath? D.R.]

Earlier? The Romano-British.

Was there a Romano-British settlement before the Anglo-Saxons came? There may have been. Certainly there was at Quarrendon. Its ancient remains have been found there. No such discovery has been made at Weedon. On the theory that the majority of Saxon settlements were on the sites of earlier Romano-British clearings, the possibility remains open that it may have been so with Weedon. But many of them were unoccupied after the British fled before the Saxons. Thus it is safer to think that Weedon, with its

Saxon name, has had a continuous human story from about 600 A.D.. Nearly 1400 years!

Where?

Clue of the Four Springs.

Where was the first settlement? Records through the centuries have references to four sources of fresh water supply. One, called later by a religious name, like 'Holy Cross Spring', came to the surface in the present Snuggy, just below the stile leading into Turner's Field. Today it is a marshy patch which easily dries up. There is no indication that it has ever been a centre for dwellings. The second, coming to the surface near the gateway to 'The Old Allotments', used to feed a watercourse into the fields below. In Victorian times a pump was placed there. It seems to have 'run dry'. Again, on the cold northern slope, it is unlikely to have been the focus of primitive settlement. The third, long known as Hollatt's Well, surfaced on the slope below the Lilies. What happened to it in 1870, when the Cazenove estate was built up, is a mystery in 1968. This may have been the focal point of the original settlement. The Lilies site and immediately around, has very significant later associations with Weedon history. The fourth spring, in 'Stockwelle waye' (the spelling in the 14th century) was probably ideal. It flowed freely, emptied its overflow into a patch of marsh which was turned into a pond for animals with a minimum of labour, and the hillside sloped to the south. If the earliest settlement was pastoral, then the 'Stockaway' area was splendid. Thus the first settlement seems likely to have been either near the 'Lilies' or near 'Stockaway'. If it was a religious-patoral partnership, then the shrine may have been near the 'Lilies', and the pastoral support have been near at hand round about 'Stockaway'.

Then and Now.

That is as near as we are likely to get. But in two ways those far distant days left a legacy for the present. First, there is the fascinating and intriguing name, Weedon; and second, they made an initial contribution to the colossal task of clearing the primeval forest and waste. This task occupied many generations of men, and probably took towards a thousand years to complete. In the absence of modern tools and machinery it could only be done little by little. Indeed, some of Weedon's oldest closes, 'The Grove' behind the Homestead, and 'the Old Close' below 'Wheelwright Honours', almost give the impression of having been 'nibbled' out of the original woodland and scrub. The early settlers started the 'nibbling' process,

and every succeeding generation has had reason to say thank you to what has been done by all who have gone before. The amenities of the present are deeply entrenched in the past, at Weedon as in many other places.

Chapter II

THE GREAT SILENCE

650-1000 AD

Background.

The 350 years following Penda's acceptance of Christianity were a troubled period in the history of mid-Bucks. The area seemed fated to be a border-land between warring factions. First, when Wessex and Mercia fought for supremacy, Bucks was occupied sometimes by one side and sometimes by the other. Next, when Wessex had triumphed and rival kingdoms were united, the Danish invasions brought more war. Altogether, Bucks was over-run four times by the Danes. How the Saxon peoples in Weedon fared can never be known, for as far as can be ascertained, the actual name of the hamlet appears only once in the scanty records from the 650-1000 A.D. period.

One written reference.

That once merely shows us that men of property a thousand years ago were much as man today. They liked to bequeath it to others! In 944 A.D., Aethelgifu bequeathed land at Weedon to Leofacus. As we know nothing of either party, it is difficult to be thrilled with this information. Nevertheless, though the name does not appear in record, significant happenings belong to the 'Centuries of Silence', insofar as the present is a mosaic of the past, those happenings are related to 1968.

Parish Boundaries settled.

First, the parish boundaries were fixed some time before the year 1000, and 'Hardwicke-cum-Weedon' was established. For a thousand years they have remained unchanged. The arrangement raises questions. Why Hardwicke-cum-Weedon and not Weedon-cum-Hardwicke? Weedon covers a larger area. Hardwicke embraces some 1300 acres: Weedon 1700 acres. The answer seems to be that one landlord held nearly the whole of the 3000 acres, and probably his residence was at Hardwicke. The single ownership helps to explain why one parish only, and not two. Many parishes had only 1300 acres. But joint ownership, with the 'headquarters' at Hardwicke, determined the parish to be 'Hardw icke-cum-Weedon'.

Church site settled.

Second, the site of the church was settled. Again, a question is raised. "Why at Hardwicke and not Weedon?" A church on the site of the 'Lilies' would have been more central to the 3000 acres of the parish than the Hardwicke site, and again, Weedon was the larger part of the parish. Also, it was a common custom to hallow a pagan site by erecting a church where there had been a heathen altar. Once more, the residence of the lord of the manor usually determined the site of the church. It was his responsibility to provide the site, build the church and staff it. He built it where it was most convenient for himself and his household. Sometimes it was a mere annexe to his estate. Thus Hardwicke had the church, near the landlord's residence. Before the year 1000 A.D., it was likely to be a very humble structure and built of wood, though possibly more imposing than the nearby house. When that early timber structure was erected, we can never know.

Chapel at Weedon?

Meanwhile, for some part of its history, Weedon had not only a burial ground of its own, but a Chapel served from the Hardwicke Church. Most large hamlets, if divided from the village by an uncomfortable obstacle, such as a flooded brook in winter, had such an amenity. Weedon and Hardwicke were so divided, and except on horse-back might be cut off from each other when the 'roads' were merely tracks through mud and slush. But after the Black Death (1349 A.D.), when priests became less plentiful, many chapels could no longer be served. An ancient document tells how William-atte-Chapel (William at the Chapel) reported to the Hardwicke-Weedon manor Court that John Parson (John Edrith, the Parson in 1354), owed him money! The site of the 'old Churchyard' can still be identified near the top of Cook's Hill.

Though the 'Chapel site' (presumably near the 'Lilies') now serves other purposes, the Church site remains as it was more than a thousand years ago: a legacy fron 'The Great Silence'.

Ownership of Land. The lingering pattern.

Third, the pattern of land ownership, though changed in some ways, has an interesting link with today. Three people held land in Hardwicke and Weedon. Most of it belonged to the chief owner. A much smaller part of it belonged to a second owner. Finally, a very small part, linking up with Burston, was held by a third person. The second part ultimately became

merged with the first. This almost complete ownership of the parish was divided, almost equally, between New College and the Rothschild family a century ago. The small third portion is probably represented by the land known as 'Spencelot'.

Thus the 'Great Silence' still speaks!

Chapter III

The Eleventh Century

'CHURCH AND CONQUEST'

Background.

The eleventh century marks a great divide in English history. The year 1066, when Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings, was slain at the Battle of Hastings, and William, Duke of Normandy, the invading conqueror, became King of England, is the best known date in the story of our island home. From that victory came radical and permanent change. The Saxon landlords, almost without exception, lost their lands, and the Norman followers of William received them as reward for their services. The Saxon peasants, in general, became the servants of the new masters, and usually their bondsmen. Villein status, i.e. bondage, was the common fortune of the defeated Saxons. No village or hamlet escaped the attentions of the Conqueror, through his men. Weedon and Hardwicke shared the fate of all.

Church. The stone-built church.

But before the Conqueror came, there was a significant happening in the life of the parish. Early in the eleventh century, probably by 1020, the first stone-built church was erected on the site of the older wooden structure. Stone suitable for such a building was scarce. and had to be transported along rough and often rutted tracks. However, Hardwicke succeeded Whitchurch in having a white stone church. It was a plain building, no higher than the top of the arches to the south aisle today; its walls were stone faced and filled with rubble; its windows were small, with rounded arches and deep splays inside to spread the light; and altogether it must have lacked the dignity of the present church. But without doubt, parts of the north wall remain until now, and the small window over the doorway was there for the Conqueror to see (if he would!) when he passed by through the district. Once again, past and present join hands.

Conquest. The new 'Landlords'.

With the advent of William, the three landlords in the Hardwicke-Weedon parish all lost their lands. Whether they lost their lives, or only their lands, there is no means of knowing. Their successors were men who supported the Conqueror. But one of them, Almar by name, was a Saxon.

One wonders what service this 'Quisling ' rendered the foreign invader. In addition to his 200-300 acres in Hardwicke-Weedon, he also received land near Amersham. This became the family residence. Strangely, however, the surname adopted by the descendants of Almar was Weedon, and the name given to the Amersham estate was Weedon Hill. The de Weedon family held land in Weedon until 1440, when the last of them to farm in the hamlet died, leaving a daughter but no son.

Domesday Book.

Population. The Domesday Survey of 1086 gives other interesting information. Forty five men are reckoned as living within the parish. As they were likely to be enumerated because they were heads of households, the population of Hardwicke and Weedon is likely to have been less than 200, probably 160 to 180.

Classes. The 45 peasants were divided into three groups. Twenty-nine were villeins, seven were bordars and nine were serfs. The villeins had their own small holdings (possibly up to 30 acres); the bordars, often free men in Saxon times, were cottagers. The serfs were labourers without land or property, usually working for the lord of the manor. As the number of villeins, when compared to the national figure, shows a much higher proportion than usual, the picture for Hardwicke and Weedon is very favourable. A fortunate land!

Upheaval. The upheaval following the Conquest was considerable. When landlords were removed, and a successor took time to assert authority, cultivation suffered. Chaos asserted itself where order had been. In Weedon and Hardwicke the value of the manor soon slumped

Recovery. But by 1086 it had almost recovered, and under its new 'managers' was back (nearly) to the 1066 position.

The scene was set for consolidation on the Conqueror's pattern.

Chapter IV

The Twelfth Century

CONSOLIDATION

Background.

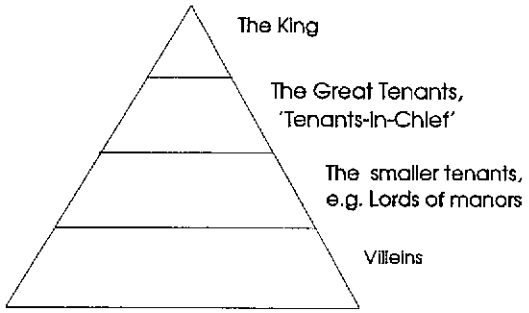
No one word can sum up all the various vicissitudes of a century. But despite a period of civil war; the growing power of the barons to challenge absolute authority; happenings which lowered the image of kingship, such as the murder of Thomas à Becket; and Richard Cœur de Lion's almost total disregard of the country of which he was King: despite all this, and much more, probably the hundred years 1100-1200 in English history can best be described by the word 'consolidation'. An ordering of life begun by the Conqueror was more deeply established, and the system of English justice moved steadily onwards. On the English manor, the Feudal System, as it has been called, was worked out, often with cold logic, and by 1200 the whole edifice was passing its strongest. Later it cracked, and then crumbled. But the 12th century saw it rise to its heights. As Weedon was clearly organised on its principles, it is worthwhile describing briefly what it involved.

The Feudal Manor.

Its foundation was the King's need of a military force. The problem was how to secure and maintain such a force. When money was scarce, and money was largely in land, the King's great asset was the land of the country. Norman William maintained that it all belonged to him. He then allocated it to his followers. They "held from him", and they held it on conditions of military service. A specified number of fully armed men (knights) had to be supplied for the King, and maintained with the households (esquires, servants etc) for the specified period of each year. The great land owner, a 'Baron', supplied his large quota of men by 'sub-letting' his land to a number of lesser 'lords', on condition that they supplied a stated number of equipped men towards the total number. Thus a man who held of a lord just one manor, say of 2000 acres, might have to provide one knight, with horse, armour, esquire (shield-bearer), other 'supporters' and maintain all for the stated period of the year. He 'held by a knight's fee'. No money rent was paid. Military service was demanded instead.

But how did the lord of a small manor secure the means to equip and maintain a knight, with all that was entailed in such maintenance? Even if

he himself fulfilled his obligation in person, it was costly. Again, the land was the answer to the problem. His manor was divided into two parts. One part was his personal land (the demesne), and other was held by men who lived on the manor, the villeins. There was little exchange of money. The villeins held their acres on conditions of service, not money. A stated amount of their time had to be given to the lord. They cultivated his land, served his needs and answered his call, according "to the customs of the manor", and in return, had their own lands to supply their own livelihood. It was a system where very little money changed hands. Thus the social order was a kind of pyramid, and the land was the basis, with the king's need of a military force always in mind.



Land - the foundation

To this 'Feudal System', outlined in general principle, was an important further factor. The villeins became bondsmen, tied to the manor and 'unfree' to leave it for elsewhere. They were sometimes called 'Blood natives'. A licence to leave was difficult to secure. They were an asset to the Lord. Their daughters could only marry with his permission. In theory, all they held was the lord's property. In practice, they had their stock on their land, but when they died, the lord took the best beast (a heriot) as a token that everything was really his, but they held by his grace! Various considerations made it less than serfdom, and there were very important privileges and safeguards. But it was bondage and the status had much of indignity. The villein's family was designated 'Sequela', which means 'brood'! Such was the position of the vast majority of Saxons under Norman rule in the 12th century.

Weedon Manor.

The Lord. Weedon conformed to the pattern. The family variously called Newmarche, de Novo Mercato, Neufmarché, according to the language used by the scribe, held the large manor on the basis of a Knight's fee.* Armies were small, and even the later technique of the long-bow was not then known, and the parish was considered to be worth one horseman, fully equipped, with his entourage.

Villeins. Next came the villeins. There does not appear to have been much land held free of all services. No contemporary account of these bondsmen exists, but when records begin at this level, it is obvious the villeins existed, with their irritating restrictions, but their privileges. At least, while they remained on the manor to which they belonged, and cultivated the land to which they were bound, they had security against utter destitution. They might even be better placed than a free man with less protection from the local manor court. They are described as 'Nativi domini de sanguine': 'Blood natives of the lord'.

Manor Court. The earliest records to be preserved until the present show the local manor court to be functioning normally. The lord or his representative presided. The lord's bailiff was a very important official. Every three weeks, the court might be called, and the tenants, though bondsmen, were bound to attend. All matters affecting the land, such as the death of a bondsman, were dealt with, and small offences, such as debts not repaid, unauthorised sale of ale, contravention of regulations re baking, were dealt with and fines imposed. The villein was thus in the hands of fellows as well as the lord, and had his measure of protection from tyranny.

Church and 'State'.

Of course the church came into the picture. The priest held the spiritual welfare of the bondsman in his power, and together with the long arm of the law of the land, and the ever present power of the lord of the manor, completed the strange combination of bondage and privilege which was the villein's lot. When a villein died 'holding' three beasts, the lord of the manor took the best and the church took its choice from the other two, If a villein died 'holding' only two animals, the church usually waived its 'right' to the second beast! This was Weedon in the 'Century of Consolidation', when Saxon bowed to the Norman rule.

*There was a tenant-in-chief, from whom the Newmarch family [sic]. Even up to 1800 the Lords Mordaunt claimed rights as tenants-in-chief.

Chapter V

The Thirteenth Century

CHANGING PATTERN

Cracks in the Feudal Edifice.

Scutage. The system imposed so positively was not to last for ever. Probably the first sign of cracks in the structure came from 'lesser tenants' who did not wish to honour their military obligations personally, or to secure a substitute. In some cases, the latter could be difficult, if not impossible. To meet this situation, the system of 'Scutage' was agreed. By it, the tenant made a money payment which relieved him of service. The money enabled the king to hire his own men. It was a scheme which also enabled the professional soldier to come to the fore, and in many ways suited both the King and the dissatisfied tenant. Before the year 1200 the Newmarch family were paying their scutage instead of performing service or finding their own substitutes.

Work for Wages. How far the bondsmen were becoming restive before 1300 we have no means of knowing. Possibly it is significant that a record of paid service on the manor has survived, suggesting that not all could be done by the free service of the villeins. In 1271 the sum of 4½d was paid for 264 yards of ditching. One wonders how many hours were spent in the task.

The Division of the Manor. "Two daughters, no son."

The most significant changes took place in or near 1236, when James Newmarch died. Because he had no son, but two daughters who were co-heiresses, the great manor was divided into two halves, and was never united again. Until 1919 the division was clearly seen. New College held the one half, with slight modifications, and the Rothschild family, similarly, the other half. Even today, the New College share of the parish bears silent witness to the fact that in 1236 James Newmarch died, leaving two daughters and no son! Big doors swing on small hinges. For Weedon, 1236 is the Great Divide.

Problems of such Division. Such a division posed acute problems. Some were still open to debate 400 years later. If there were two lords where there had been one, to whom did the bondsmen owe allegiance? If the land had to be divided, the open fields presented problems. The arable fields were

like enormous allotments, with hundreds of strips, headlands, etc., most of them with their own name. These had to be allocated. To whom did the fines from the village pound go? and who maintained the pound? Even in the 1660s, Warden Woodward debated such points. These are hints of the problems which had to be discussed and hammered out. Probably 1236 to 1286 was not an easy half-century for manorial officials in Weedon.

No record in 'Rolls of the Hundreds'.

Unfortunately a record which might have provided interesting information for the 1270s is a blank for Hardwicke and Weedon. The Rolls of the Hundreds supply much interesting information for many people and places (e.g. Seamans at Great Brickhill), but because the tenant-in-chief for Hardwicke and Weedon was a member of the Royal family, and his lands were separately investigated under 'The Honour of Wallingford', no record has survived.

Three Points of Interest.

Three points of interest, though not of deep significance, have survived.

A Rector named. In 1223, Walter Russell became Rector of the parish. There is good reason to believe he was related, by marriage, to the Newmarch family, who were patrons of the living. His is the first name of an incumbent to have been preserved in the annals of the parish. Also, he held the living for 70 years. When children could be presented to a living, one wonders what his age was in 1223.

Watermill at Hardwicke. The second point of interest is that Hardwicke had a watermill. Weedon had two windmills and a horsemill later; but Hardwicke seems to have made use of the brook. A likely site would be near the ford.

The Murder of the Forester. The third piece of information is that in 1227 Weedon was the scene of a murder. The forester was killed and three men were hanged as his joint murderers. More than 500 years later a plot of land was known as 'Dead Man's Field'. Was this name, like so much else, a relic of a far-off past?

Chapter VI

The Fourteenth Century

THE GREAT PESTILENCE

Crumbling Foundations.

A Great 'Divide'. The Great Pestilence, later known as the Black Death, swept across England in 1349. It too marks a significant 'Divide' in the story of many English manors. Weedon was involved.

The Parish in 1332.

A tax schedule. A schedule drawn up in 1332, for purposes of taxation, gives interesting details of the parish which was to suffer in 1349.

The Parson. At the head of all, was Roger de Cantok, the rector from the year 1300. Surnames were uncertain in those times, and he is also called Roger de London. After the early 1330s, he held the land of both half-manors, on behalf of the legal lords, and by this means, dominated the parish in things material, as well as things spiritual. He was the one man of wealth in the parish. Only he owned a pair of plough horses. All other horses were mere ponies, and all other ploughing was done by oxen.

Surnames. Two other names of interest are Richard Blount and William Kirkeby. Probably Richard was bailiff for the Rector and William acted for the descendants of Almar the Saxon, as well as owning the third (small) part of the parish. Today their names are of interest because their names are preserved, after more than 600 years, in fields named Blunt's and Kirby's, and in Kirby's Gardens. Not all the 40 men who paid tax had a surname. Like "Simon Bar Jonah", there were "Sons of"! It is by no means certain that all the names were passed on to the next generation. Thus Thomas Tallboy may be the ancestor of the "Longs" later in the century.

Furniture and Stock. There was little house furniture to be taxed. Chiefly it was a "brass pot" and a "pan of brass". Farm stock was very limited: 48 horses, 15 oxen, 8 cows, 8 young oxen, 11 pigs and 98 sheep.*

*This is the total for Weedon and Hardwicke.

Population. Probably the population of the parish was about 300. Already the parish had its smith, seemingly its carpenter, and a tradesman who carried a stock of merchandise. Money values are strangely different from now. A sheep was valued at 1/- and a pig at 2/-. In addition to

he 40 men named in the schedule, there were numerous bondsmen who had no stock or goods ('moveables') to be taxed.

Plague.

England and Bucks. Plague came in the late Spring of 1349. The previous year it had reached the West Country (near Weymouth) from the Continent. In 1349 it moved eastwards and northwards until the whole country had been ravaged. Probably more than a third of England's population perished. Forty percent of the clergy died. An archbishop died and one of the royal family. Neither prince nor peasant was safe. In some towns the living could scarcely bury the dead. Bucks suffered. Between May and December, seventy of its clergy died. In the one year more than 150 tenants at Winslow perished. On Salden Manor at Mursley only one man was left to recall the terrible tale. Never before nor since has history recorded such a devastation affecting both man and beast. That Autumn there were crops which were never harvested, because there was insufficient labour to gather them in.

Weedon. The first loss sustained by Weedon's manor was the death of the Lady Isobel Botoreux [?] and her husband. She had inherited one of the half manors as a descendant of James Newmarch. Because she and her husband lived in the West of England, they were victims before the pestilence reached Weedon. Among the seventy clergy of Bucks who succumbed was the aged Rector of Hardwicke, Roger de Cantok. In general, it is unlikely that Weedon suffered as badly as Winslow. However, there must be significance in the fact that few of the surnames on the 1332 tax roll are found in the copious records for the half century following 1349. The uncertainty of surnames in unlikely to be the full explanation. That families had been wiped out by the plague is undoubtedly part of the story. If the graveyard at the top of Cook's Hill could yield up its secrets, the year 1349 would doubtless provide a dark page.

Plague. Aftermath.

Labour troubles: general. The aftermath of plague in England included unsettlement and dissatisfaction. Labour was scarce and bondsmen sought freedom to move where the higher wages were available. Labourers in general demanded increased pay as a condition of accepting employment. Lords of manors found it difficult to retain bondsmen, and to secure labour for their demesne land. More paid labour had to be secured - when possible! The mood of dissatisfaction did not pass the church by. Even in an age when

men believed they had a soul with an eternal destiny, and had no questions about heaven, hell and purgatory, the church which held power in those realms was not allowed to pass without criticism. For example, papal intrusion into appointment of clergy to English livings was attacked and declared illegal!

Legislation was passed to meet labour problems, as well as ecclesiastical intrusion. Heavy penalties were to be imposed on bondsmen discovered in flight from their home manor, and a 'wage freeze' was imposed.

Labour troubles: Weedon. All this is related in the earliest surviving records of the business of the Manor Courts at Weedon. Apparently there was land to be taken and enterprising spirits seized the opportunity. Especially was this true of bondsmen named de Longs and Surmans. Others vented their discontent. Tissok the bailiff was kept busy reporting the misdemeanours to the Manor Court. Despite all his energy and activity, a number of bondsmen fled from the manor and made good their escape. Some were never tracked down, and others who were traced could not be brought back. William Sutbury dared to defy both manor and church. The candles he was due to supply, as one of the conditions of holding his land were withdrawn from the church by him. Finally, after much dispute, he tore down the fences of his messuage and left both manor and church to find their own way through. But they never found him!

At one stage, the lady of one half-manor, who held it during her widowhood, lived at the Manor house. Seldom did Weedon have a resident lord or lady. A bold spirit dared to "take away the lady's maid". No-one was sure of respect!

Such were the problems of cultivating the lady's private land that she handed all over to her grandson, who soon leased much of it to a long list of willing tenants. A few pounds in money rent was the easiest solution. A few servants remained to deal with the rest. The record of their wages in 1377 can be seen today. Even there, discontent asserted itself. Despite the Government's 'wage freeze', by 1382 they had secured a rise.

The New Landlord: New College.

This was not the end of the story. The half-manor had probably become more nuisance than it was worth. In 1385, Ralph Russell, a Newmarch descendant, sold it to New College, or rather to the powerful Wm of Wykeham, Chancellor of England and Bishop of Winchester, who gave it to the College as part of its original endowment. For 300 years it had been

held by the same family. For nearly twice that period it has been held by New College. In Weedon's story two dates are significant, beyond others, up to 1802. They are 1236, when James Newmarch died without a son, and 1385, when new College bought the half manor from his daughter's descendant. The old order was crumbling to its foundations, as bondsmen became few, money rents took the place of services, manorial lords changed and 'scutage' replaced military service.

The Church.

The Rector murdered. Two incidents in 1388 bring the church into the limelight. In that year the Rector was murdered when visiting his cathedral city. His body was found on Lincoln Heath.

The Pope opposed! Also the Pope, acting quickly, intruded a successor. A small lay patron might have let it pass, despite its illegality. But now that Wm. of Wykeham and the College had an interest, opposition could be powerful. A year later the Pope's nominee resigned, and a lawful successor was appointed.

Chapter VII

The Fifteenth Century

CHANGE BY COMPROMISE

Century of Compromise.

By 1400 New College had been busy for 15 years organising its half-manor on a basis which was a compromise between old and new. The whole century, up to nearly 1500, had little of radical change, and much which seemed to be a 'marking time' before radical advance.

Death of Simon de Wedon [sic]. Compromise inheritance.

The death of Simon de Weedon in 1440 marked a break in Weedon life. He was the last of Almar the Saxon's descendants, carrying the surname Weedon, to hold land in the hamlet. His rented lands were taken by others, including the plot for which he paid 6d a year, or a fat goose, with seasoning, whichever the College preferred. His own 'two hides' of land passed to his daughter and her husband. The Almar succession was not broken, but the surname was lost. Compromise!

Church Building. Compromise.

This century was also a busy time for church building and alterations. It was between 1400 and 1500 that Hardwicke church was altered in several ways. The Saxon church was enlarged just before the Black Death by Roger de Cantok. The south aisle was then added. As the height of the nave was little greater than the aisle, the result must have been a very squat, sprawling building. This was remedied in the 15th Century, when the walls of the nave were raised to their present height, a new chancel was built and the squat tower built in Cantok's time was raised. The final structure was very little changed again until 1872. But even in the building work of the 15th century, old and new were blended. The lower part of the Saxon wall on the north side was retained, and the small Saxon window over the door remained. Other windows were enlarged: it was unaltered. The fine new roof has lasted 500 years, and probably the north door belongs to that same date. Except for the inadequate entrance from nave to chancel, which was probably produced by compromise, the final result was dignified and quite unostentatious.

Purchases for the Manor.

Purchases on the manor illustrated the same blend of old and new. They were few, because a hamlet like Weedon was almost self-supporting. Salt was essential, especially as shortage of animal feeding stuffs necessitated a great autumn slaughter and salting down. From November there was little meat, until springtime, except salted meat. Tar was another essential, and had been used for treating sheep scab for a hundred years before 1400. Hurdles for enclosing the arable fields and meadows were also essential and because wood was becoming scarce in Weedon and Hardwicke, had to be purchased when local supply failed. Plough shoes [sic. shares? DR] were beyond the capacity of the village smith to manufacture, and were purchased every year. Incidentals like a lock and key, a 'dong' pot, and a sheep bell also occur. The local economy needed such things, and they had to be purchased outside the manor. This was old tradition.

Side by side with it were items which hinted that new standards of building would one day come. Timber structures, with shutters for window spaces, and thatched roofs, were the time honoured buildings. As a luxury, window spaces might be covered with linen soaked in oil, or small windows might have horn to keep out cold and let in light. Glass was a high luxury for churches and very special houses. The chaplain (curate) at Hardwicke is specially mentioned as having windows of glass in his house near the church in 1407. However, the significant new item of purchase in the first 50 years of New College accounts at Weedon is roofing tiles. A great barn was built, improvements to the farm and buildings were made, and tiles replaced thatch. This was new. Two hundred years later (in the 1660s), there is reference to the "Greate Tylebarne" at Weedon. It stood in the East End. Thatch and tiles side by side - compromise.

Manorial tenants. Compromise.

The new tenants who came to Weedon in the period round 1400 were, of course, freemen. By that date most of the land was held by the newcomers. But bondsmen remained on the manor, and both bond and free lived side by side. Indeed, the new tenants occupied 'farmsteads' on sites formerly occupied by villeins, and rented the same number of acres which had formed the villein holding. They paid a money rent, but one condition of the old bondage remained. As 'copyholders' on the manor, they were bound to attend the meeting of the tenants still called the Manor Court, and might be called

to this service, if conditions made it necessary, as often as every three weeks. Again, old and new blended.

Rent and Services together.

Some of the bondsmen who now paid a money rent, could also be called upon for services on the College farm. At autumn and spring sowing, at haymaking and harvest, the bailiff, on behalf of the College, could call on them for a specified number of days' service. The reward, at haymaking, could be a truss of hay. At harvest, three days were named according to the reward offered. On the first, there was no recompense. This was called "Hungry-bed-repe-day". On the second, there was a sheaf of corn. This was called "Shefe-repe-day". On the third, there was meat to eat. This was known as "Flesh-repe-day". The 'services' could be irritating, as the bailiff could choose his days, and might leave the villein with wet days, and take from him the fine ones! Thus, in this century of compromise, money rent (the new) and services (the old) could be claimed on one tenancy.

The Old fading away.

As the century wore on, the old tended to fade. Bondsmen sometimes paid an annual fine to be allowed to live away from Weedon. Quite a number ran away. By 1500, only one family remained in bondage. The ancient structure - the pyramid based on land, with its broad base of villeinage - had crumbled. But the process in this final century was erosion, and not violent destruction.

Portent of a New Age. "Renaissance Rector."

With the wisdom of hind-sight, one may see a portent of radical chage to come in the 16th century, in a presentation to Hardwicke living in 1461. The new Rector was Thomas Chaudler, Warden of New College, and one of England's pioneers in the new learning which was to sweep the European Universities and cultural centres. It is unlikely he saw much of the parish. But the appointment has a forward look.

Legacies for the Future.

But an undistinguished century left its marks on the landscape and in common life. Several 'Copyholds' were named after a fifteenth century copyholder, and the name was not lost until the nineteenth century. Such were Sarmans, in the East End (after John Syrman, a bondsman); Loves, at the top of New Road (after Thomas Love); Longs, later 'The Chestnuts' (after

Wm. de Longs, a bondsman); Berrardes, on the bank near the former Primitive Methodist Chapel; Badys, on the present kitchen garden of the Lilies - and so on. Cook's Hill received its name from a family living on the hill just before and after 1400. The old house, later the 'Wheatsheaf Inn', stands on the site of one called 'Coppid Hall', or 'Corner House', from the 15th century to 1800.

The Great Tyle Barn.

It is a pity that 'The Greate Tyle Barne', Weedon's 'wonder' when it was built in the 1420s, has gone without leaving a trace, or even a memory, except in dusty ancient records.

Note.

The Seamons family of Weedon can be traced back to John Seman, who rented land there in 1493.

Chapter VIII

The Sixteenth Century

CHANGE BY REVOLUTION

Background.

15th Century. The fifteenth century closed with signs of better days. For the most part, it had been a dismal period in English life. It began with an act repressive of freedom of thought in religion; it continued with the long drawn out wars with France, relieved by the victory of Agincourt, but finally overshadowed by the loss of all territory on the continent, except Calais; it culminated in bad, or weak, government, leading to the thirty years of strife known as the Wars of the Roses, when four leading battles made or unmade four Kings. Not until Henry Tudor became King, after his victory at Bosworth in 1485, did England have strong, stable, competent government. In the last 15 years a new prospect dawned.

16th Century 'New'.

So much was new in 1500. The new printing process was superseding laboriously copied manuscript; the new monarchy was strong, capable, and if ruthless, nevertheless dedicated to the cause of making England united at home and powerful abroad, two things she had lacked for many years; the 'new' continent of America had been discovered, and John Cabot, who had found the mainland, was sponsored by England's King; the new learning had reached England from the continent, and in the 1490s Grocyne, Colet and Erasmus had all lectured at Oxford; a new aristocracy was rising up, to replace that which had bled to death in the civil Wars of the Roses, with new landlords occupying lands which had been held by descendants of Norman followers of William the Conqueror right from the 11th century; the new middle class, one day to become powerful when the yeoman of England grew in stature, had succeeded in establishing itself on the ruins of the old feudal order; even the church, that conservative, deeply-entrenched colossus was under attack. How did this affect Weedon?

The New Continent. It took a long time for the discovery of the new continent to make a direct impact upon so remote a hamlet. A place so far inland produced yeomen rather than sea-dogs. Nor was there any strong religious feeling at Weedon in the 17th century which drove men, for conscience sake, like the Pilgrim Fathers and the Quakers, to seek liberty in

a new land. Probably the first from Weedon to set foot on America's soil were the sons of yeomen, who in the 1830s, sought the new world, to redress the balance of the old. When the products of America, such as tobacco and potatoes arrived in Weedon, there is no means of knowing. But other 'new' aspects of the sixteenth century soon touched the hamlet.

The New Printing. The power of the press was felt in 1539, when a printed English Bible was set up in the Parish Church. Already, the Rector had his printed books, including his Missal and other works. Then, in the 1540s, came the printed English Litany, the printed English Book of Homilies, and finally 1549, a printed English Services Book. Only the printing press made these radical reforms possible.

The New Monarchy. The power of Tudor monarchy reached out to every place in the land. Sometimes it was in the form of taxation, for though Parliament had its rights in these matters, every new subsidy was inspired by the crown and its ministers. Records for Weedon are extant, and help to show how the hamlet had changed in the 150 years since the Black Death. The list of assessments for 1524 gives the name of every man with an income of £1 per annum, or more, and indicates that the copyholders and tenants were forming a class apart from the labourers: also, there is scarcely a surname in common with the list of 1332, or the records for the first 25 years after the plague of 1349. Only a very few families were left of old, local, Saxon descent. The government inspired by the monarchy, for good or for ill, touched every place in the land.

The New Learning. As for the new learning, Latin and Greek remained "Double-Dutch"* to all but the parson, for many generations. Yeomen learned to read English, but most in Weedon could not write even their own names, until late in the 17th century. Nor did new ways of thought, and academic changes, affect directly a simple, and unacademic rustic community. But indirectly, the radical changes in the church, which were bound up with the Renaissance, touched everyone by 1550.

* This really is a solecism. The term did not originate until the 18th century.

The New Landlord. The rise of the new aristocracy soon affected Weedon. In 1550, by female descent, the decendants of Almar the Saxon still held the two hides of land granted to him after 1066. Also, in 1550, a descendant of the Newmarch family (again, by female line), still held the half-manor, which, with New College half-manor, had been granted to an ancestor of the 'de Novo Mercato' clan after the Conquest in 1066. By 1525, a

new landlord held both Almar's two hides and the Newmarch half-manor. The old association was snapped, and the two holdings were merged, though, for a long time Almar's land was separately assessed as "Kempson's Fee"*

The new landlord, Robert Lee, was one of a new family, forging ahead to wealth by means of sheep farming. He had secured Quarrendon, Fleet Marston, Burston and half of Weedon and Hardwicke. Quarrendon was gradually depopulated, to become a sheep run requiring little labour to serve it. Fleet Marston was quickly depopulated, to make a larger sheep run. Five shepherds were kept, where once had been a number of copyholders and tenants. Burston had already suffered a like fate before Robert Lee bought it. Only Weedon stood in the way of a magnificent run. But the College had a half-manor, and only by securing that could Lee's great project be carried through, because the lands of the two moieties were inter-mingled. Happily for the people of Weedon the College retained its land. Thus the hamlet survived, to flourish while Burston, Fleet Marston and Quarrendon became mere shades of their former selves. The Lee family became wealthy on the backs of sheep and by the misery of many hard working families who lost their lands. This kind of thing was one cause of vagrancy and pauperism. Weedon had a lucky escape! It might not have done if James Newmarch had left one son, instead of two daughters, when he died in 1236!

*Why this name has still to be discovered.

The New Middle Class. The new middle class, from whom the yeomen descended, was already much in evidence. The old order of society on the manor, with its lord (or his bailiff), its villeins farming their land, and their families serving the lord or their own interests had disintegrated by 1500. Only one family was left in bondage. At the head of the community were the bailiffs, who farmed the two "greate farmes" in Hardwicke and Weedon; next a number of New College copyholders; then the tenants who paid rent to the 'Lee' estate (these copyholders and tenants formed the middle class, with some tradesmen); and finally, labourers who worked for money, and had no security such as the villeins used to have. When the middle class learned to write they became the voluntary servants of the communal life, such as Overseers of the Poor (after 1601) and Church Wardens. The process was evolving at Weedon, as elsewhere.

The New Religion. But the real revolution came in the great stronghold of tradition - the Church. It originated from the King and was accepted by the people of Weedon. At first the change was hardly noticeable. Henry VIII, anxious to secure a divorce from his first wife, and failing to

secure permission from the pope, cut the knot by breaking with both wife and pope. The order was given that references to the pope should be erased from the Service Books. Where the clergy obeyed, few parishioners were likely to know. Latin was used, and only the rector could understand it. As it happened, Hardwicke rector did not fully conform. Hence there was a commotion, and an exciting incident when smuggled books were traced at Whitchurch, involving the rector of Hardwicke. The next stage, when monasteries and abbeys were seized by the King, did not affect Hardwicke and Weedon. No religious houses were near. (At Whitchurch it was different. An Abbey owned the living.) But the next movements; the English Bible in the Church, the Litany in English, the English Homilies, and the English Prayer Book, all came right home. The extreme Protestantism of the next reign brought despoiling to the church. Fragments of ancient stained glass in tracery of windows in the south aisle, bear witness to the savage destruction which took place. When, after the Catholic reaction under Queen Mary, the compromise settlement of her half-sister, Elizabeth, was approved, Weedon and Hardwicke toed the line. Rector Harris reported that he had none in his parish who dissented. But, in the upheaval, two rectors, one a Catholic and the other a Protestant, were forced to resign. Happily, Rector Harris, a gifted, moderate and devoted man, was rector for 49 years, and steered his parish out of troubled waters into a calm haven.

New Building. The glory of Queen Elizabeth's reign, from 1558 to 1603, was reflected in Weedon as a new Manor House was built on the Lilies site, and the old farmsteads began to be replaced by new houses. The first order for bricks in the manor accounts is in this century. But the chief new feature in the new yeoman homesteads was a chimney. Instead of a hearth on the floor, with a hole in the roof through which smoke found its way beyond sooty rafters out through the thatch, a chimney stack, often the central feature of the new house, with two hearths at its foot, was built. The building of new homesteads went on into the 17th century*, but it began in the 16th, in the reign of 'Queen Bess'.

*Most of Weedon's old 'farmstead' houses were of the 17th century. Some, e.g. "The Old Homestead', had Elizabethan work in them.

"The poor always with you". A less happy feature was the poverty of the labouring 'class'. The folly of Henry VIII in his later years, and the chaos of the mid-century destroyed stable money values. Inflation was rampant. But wages were pegged to the old levels. The poor suffered terribly. Someone with generous heart in Weedon, whose name is lost, gave cottages

for "poor widows" in 1570. They stood 'on the bank', in the lane leading to North Croft. Vagrancy touched the parish, as everywhere else. Sometimes it was pathetic, and sometimes menacing. In Hardwicke and Weedon, vagrants died, and also vagrant women, overtaken by their labour, gave birth to their children, before they could be hustled to the next parish. The next century opened with a new Poor Law, to meet the extremes of poverty and need. It was an auspicious beginning.

Notes.

1. A plague swept Weedon and Hardwicke in the winter of 1558-9.

2. A new Rectory at Hardwicke was built in 1551, or a new part added to the old building. Usually the former is stated. I think it likely to be the latter.

3. The field named 'Soper's' at Weedon was so called after a man of that name who held it during the Elizabethan period.

4. Some new families came to Weedon in the Elizabethan period whose descendants were there in the 20th century. e.g. Fleet (1561), Rayner (1580s), Batson** (1561), Brooks (1580)

**No! Batson was at Hardwicke.

Chapter IX

The Seventeenth Century

WAR AND PEACE

Background.

A great period. The seventeenth century was still young when the great Queen died. She had reigned from 1558 to 1603. It had been one of the great periods in English history. When the reign began England was torn by factions and dissatisfactions at home, and was without a friend abroad. As the 17th century dawned, she could feel her land was uncommonly united, and having brought the mighty power of Spain to heel, was to be reckoned with abroad. Marvellously, the country had renewed its youth. Heavy clouds had passed, and the sun was shining. Even the poverty of the poorest, and the bad harvests of the 1590s, could not wipe out the glory of her reign.

A great Queen. In a remarkable degree she had been at the heart of it all. A tempestuous childhood, which had included the execution of her self-willed mother by her erratic, pompous father; a perilous youth, when the half-sister who had no love for her was Queen - such experiences had schooled her in the arts of diplomacy. Throughout her reign she needed them all. By nature she was bold and self-willed. She usually knew what she wanted, and usually got her own way. But it was unusual for such a person, loving her own way, to know when to give way. She was at the helm, but her officers were allowed a share in the steering. England owed her an incalculable debt.

Afterglow.

After her death, the Scottish cousin, James VI of Scotland, became James I of England. Throughout his reign it was his good fortune to make stupid mistakes in the afterglow of Elizabethan glory. There were good things in his years as King, and among them was the 'Authorised Version' of the Bible. Even the elements contributed to the afterglow. For 25 years there was an almost unbroken succession of good harvests.

Stupid Stuarts. Unhappily for England, James lacked the wisdom of Elizabeth, and his son Charles was even more devoid of the art of knowing when to give way. The new classes of squire and yeoman were steadily growing in power, and their demand for a partnership with monarch and

Lords in government was foolishly, and often illegally, resisted by the King. Charles sought to reign without Parliament, and imposed illegal taxation.

A Determined Middle Class. A Bucks squire, John Hampden, refused to pay his share of illegal tax (Ship Money) on land near Aylesbury. He was representative of many. The rift widened to a gulf, and, within 40 years of the death of the great Queen, England was in the throes of civil war. Because religion also entered in, the strife was all the more bitter.

Weedon.

The afterglow. Weedon shared the Elizabethan afterglow. The wills of her yeomen often indicate their growing prosperity. But the afterglow passed, and as the conflict between King and Commons was brewing, the misery of the times was aggravated by another cycle of bad harvests.

War. When war came, the parish was bound to be affected intimately because of its association with Oxford. The university was strongly Royalist. New College was even more Royalist than most other Colleges. The proportion of its Fellows who were expelled when Parliament gained control, was higher than the average. Its Warden (elected in defiance of Parliament), was also Rector of Hardwicke. The Parliamentary powers deprived him of his living, and appointed one who was ready to submit to them.

Weedon a 'No-man's land. But most of all, war came into the village itself. For some time Weedon was in a no-man's land between opposing military forces. Cattle were never safe from seizure by one side or the other. Usually each side picked on someone who was known to sympathise with the other side. Churches were used by both sides for stabling horses and quartering troops. At Dunton there is a reference to cattle being seized by the King's troops, and it seems certain that at Whitchurch the church was used as a stable. Tradition has it that Hardwicke was so used. But tradition may not be truth!

Battle at the brook. One day (the date is uncertain) forces clashed near the ford across the brook on the bounds of Weedon and Aylesbury. The 'skirmish' was fierce. Several hundred men were killed. A pit was dug in a field, and the bodies of men of both sides were buried together. There they lay, and eventually were forgotten. An accidental discovery led to their re-interment in Hardwicke churchyard some 175 years later. The Weedon squire, Lord Nugent, was responsible for the re-interment, the memorial, and an inscription in dignified prose. (Possibly his best piece of writing!) One tradition was that the date of the battle was Nov. 1st 1642, All Saints' Day,

and that the brook was in flood. The misery of men and horses can be better imagined than described.

Puritan Supremacy.

Another new Rector! After the King's death by execution in 1649, the Puritan powers got on with their work of changing conduct by law, and of reforming the Church on a non-episcopal basis. Once more Hardwicke and Weedon were affected. The rector appointed when Warden Stringer was deprived of his offices, could not conform to extremes. He too was deprived! The new Warden, Dr. Marshall, had just the man at hand for a lucrative living - his son-in-law. So the son-in-law was appointed, and the "Intruder Neast" as he was later called, entered on his reformist duties.

The Church despoiled. Once more the church was despoiled of its treasures and colour, and Puritanism in its severity rather than its pure grace, was established by law and authority. The parish registers for the years 1650-1660 were very badly kept. References to Civil Marriage are clear.

Once more - a King.

When the moderating influence of Cromwell had passed, and his son had soon given up the unenviable task of trying to govern, the inevitable happened. Men were tired of "being made good by Act of Parliament", and of the extremes the moderate Cromwell himself could not prevent. The son of the King executed in 1649 was called back to England as Charles II. What Weedon felt about it all is hinted but not recorded. Probably it had been Royalist in the early days of war, in loyalty to the College, but in contrast to Bucks in general; then had been quite content to follow Parliament, but in the end had been sickened by unsettlement and repression.

Weedon and the Thanksgiving Fund. However, when a Thanksgiving Fund was opened to celebrate the Restoration of the Monarchy, there was little response from Weedon! Maybe it had lost confidence in all powers, and decided to 'wait and see'.

Restoration - 1660 onwards.

Church: another Rector! The task of Restoration faced Church and Manor. Intruder Neast was deprived of his living; Warden Stringer had died in 1657, and Neast's predecessor conveniently died in 1660. Thus the way was clear for a new appointment. Dr. Barker, a Fellow of New College who

had always been a Royalist, was appointed. His task in restoring episcopal rule and Anglican practice in the church was less than that of Richard Harris a hundred years earlier. He held the living for only a few years, probably failed to 'adorn' his office as Harris had done (some features of his life are best not written), but left a small charity for the poor. The church settled again to its established order, and in the next 300 years no incumbents were deprived of their livings.

Manor. The watchful warden. On the Manor there was much to be regularised, and the new College Warden, Dr Woodward, set about the task with relish. Once a year he visited the manor, and not only presided at its manor court, but made a personal inspection of its properties. At the end of the day he wrote a careful summary of all he had discovered. A leaking roof had to be repaired by the copyholder before the next year; a repair would necessitate a grant of timber from the College woods at Great Horwood; some matter would involve consultation with the steward of the Lee half-manor, and sometimes consultation ended in altercation. In every thing he was the businessman determined to get the last penny for the College. There was no sentiment. If a tenant had not honoured his obligation to plant young trees, it was noted. "Not enough trees in his backside", he wrote, more than once. Even the College bailiff, a mighty man locally, did not escape an enquiry into what he had done with a small tree taken from Horwood woods without permission. "It was crooked," replied the bailiff, "I used it to make a ladder we needed." The widow who allowed her tenement to get out of repair and did nothing about it, was threatened with eviction. The poor man who sought permission to build a cottage on the waste was brusquely refused what he asked. Probably, never before nor since, in all its history of nearly 600 years has a warden kept such an eye on the manor.

Hospitality! The bailiff, who for the rest of the year was the power of the College on the spot, and who farmed 'The Greate Farme', provided lavish entertainment. For supper one night there was hare, some 'hard meat', pigeon pie, Westphalia ham and tongue, and the Warden fed well, but not wisely. He wrote "At night I was very ill, but after vomiting recovered again, I thank the Lord, and was well."

The last of the villeins. It was this man who met the widow of the last bondsman in the village, and granted her request for the emancipation of her small son and daughter. But the request was granted only after careful consideration, and it was agreed that her son should enter his father's copyhold as a full copyholder when he came of age, on condition that

his mother paid £80 within three or four months. Elizabeth Goldney found the money and so, in the 1660s, feudal bondage ended in Weedon. It said much for the financial standing of the family that she could find such a sum within that time. In the values of 1968 it would be several thousand pounds.

Whatever irregularities had crept into the manor in the years of upheaval, Warden Woodward, with eagle eye, firm hand and legal mind rooted them out. Discipline was restored!

Forty Years of Interest - 1660-1700.

Hearth Tax. The last forty years of the century were a time of considerable interest. In 1662 a tax on hearths was imposed. The newer houses, like the one at the corner at the top of 'New Road' (as named in 1802!), had two hearths. The tax was desperately unpopular, and more than once the tax return has the entry, "He has dug up his hearth." At Hardwicke and Weedon 99 hearths were taxed. No one was likely to complain when the tax was repealed in the 1680s.

Burial in Woollen. In this same period, to help the flagging wool industry, a law was passed that everyone had to be buried in woollen. From about 1679 this was done, and a certificate had to be issued stating the law had been obeyed. The register of "Burials in Woollen" for Weedon and Hardwicke is extant to this day.

"The King's Evil". It was also a period when sufferers from scrofula were sent to London to be touched by the King for healing. There was a religious service and large numbers attended at this time. Whether any were cured the records do not show, but the parish paid for quite a number of its people to be "touch'd for the King's Evil".

'Briefs'. 'Briefs' were another feature of this time. An order came from the King that a collection had to be made for a needy cause. Such causes were the re-building of Buckingham Church after collapse; the relief of sufferers by fire at Warwick; help for Protestant Refugees in Germany; ransom money for sailors seized on the African coast - and so on. Weedon and Hardwicke did well for the refugees. They were not very interested in the prisoners in Africa!

Education. Also, it was within this forty years that the first generation of yeoman in Weedon who could write, as well as read, came into its own. Educational advance had been an objective of the Puritans. Perhaps this was how it secured its hold on Weedon.

Party Government. The rise of Party Government in Parliament was also in this period. By the end of the century we can see the yeomen of Weedon, with an adequate property qualification, casting their votes for Whig or Tory candidates.

Road dis-repair. Records also exist showing the difficulties of keeping the roads in passable condition, when each village had its responsibility for highways which entered its bounds. Not all yeomen were amenable, and the wooden footbridge over Hardwicke brook wasn't always kept in repair.

Yeoman Service. Yeomen can also been seen as jurymen at the Sessions, and suddenly the whole community seems to draw nearer to the gaze of the present day.

The illegitimate child. But it was a strange commentary on the age that the Weedon woman bearing an illegitimate child was put in prison, when the King's bastards were being honoured with titles. Presumably she was a hussey. One might think the King, Charles II, was a hero.

Notes.

1. **Some new names in Weedon in the early 1600's.**

   Watkins, Bates, Provost (Provis), Thorn, Turpin.

2. **London plague** came to the parish in 1665.

Chapter X

The Eighteenth Century

MEETING POINT

Change inevitable.

Life invites change, and no order of society, even in a hamlet, persists without gradual modification, and periodically some radical happening. The Saxon ordering of country life yielded to the Norman, with the feudal system on the manor. This yielded to the ordering in which free tenants had their chance, as middle class grew up, the yeomen had their day, and labourers worked for wages. But both feudal and free tenants at Weedon continued to cultivate strips of land in great fields which were something like huge allotments, and were allocated from the manor court. It was a wasteful economy, and the eighteenth century sounded its death knell. But for Weedon, there was a heyday of the old, before the new was ushered in.

Heyday, before Decay and Change.

Social Glory at the Lilies. The heyday was high-lighted, as the eighteenth century dawned, by a burst of social glory and lavish hospitality at the Lee Manor House, the Lilies. Seldom had the lord of the manor lived at Weedon. Usually the bailiff occupied the big house. When Sir Henry Lee rebuilt his Weedon house in Elizabethan times, it was for his representative, not himself. He had his grand mansion at Quarrendon, as well as the luxury of Woodstock. But, in 1700, there was a widow of the Lee family who had been granted the Lilies for life. She remarried, and her husband, the Earl of Lindsey, was a Lord of the Bedchamber. The Lilies became a social and philanthropic centre. The poor received from the rich man's table, and the luxury of that 20 years became a legend. Nearly 150 years later, Lipscomb refers to it as though it had happened only a generation earlier!

The Poor Rate brings Relief. That there was need for such generosity is shown by the statements prepared by the Overseers of the Poor at this time. Their task was to administer a rate in the relief of the widow, the orphan, the aged, the invalid and those unable to work. The workless were to be found work and the orphans were to be apprenticed. In the accounts for one year, five widows received 1/- a week, or 1s 4d, and an additional 6s 8½d was "laid out" on one in sickness and for attendance. Half a day's "Thresh of Straw" cost 1s 5d for the same widow. Nursing a child for

11 weeks cost 22/-, and "save" (salve) "for Richard Price his leg" cost 4/-. An orphan child died, and 4/- was "paid for his death". One man received 2/- a week for a whole year. But most were set to work. Altogether 400 days of work were paid for. Most frequently the task was "digging gravell". But there were repairs to "Stockell Way", "farming Stockell pond and Fishell pond". The son of a widow received 15/- for "shouting cros" (crow-starving!). Sending vagrants on to the next parish cost 25s 8d. "Passengers" were still a problem, and were beaten on to the next parish unless they moved on very readily. "Copying the Diblycotes" of the accounts cost 15/- (Presumably Duplicates). The poor were always there, ready for Parish Relief and Lilies crumbs.

The Efficient Rector. When Lady Lindsey lived at the Lilies, Dr. Wood reigned at the Rectory. From about 1640, the College held the sole right of presentation to the living at Hardwicke. Dr Wood was one of their most distinguished incumbents. His family circle was exalted, and he was a man of legal distinction as well as clerical efficiency. He lived at Hardwicke and in his own sphere appears to have been as methodical as Dr. Woodward, the Restoration Warden. His records of 'Beating the Bounds' of the parish can still be read. No point escaped him. The removal of a boundary stone would not pass unnoticed by him. The names of the boys who were 'conscripted ' into attendance were recorded. Whether they were 'swished' in accordance with custom, to help them recall the exact bounds before hedges marked them, Dr Wood does not record. John Turpin and Joseph Ray were 'impressed' in 1715. It was an indication of Dr Wood's concern for his parish that he had ten children "taught at his charge".

From Manor House and Rectory there was concern for the parish. It was the nearest approach to a beneficent rule of "Squire and Parson" that the hamlet experienced at any time before the 19th century: indeed the 19th century arrived before another 'Squire' came to live at the Lilies.

Yeoman Heyday. For the yeomen it was heyday. By modern standards their diet was crude. Wesley's description of their fat bacon boiled with cabbage is not inviting to the present-day palate. In Weedon it survived into the 19th century, and was recalled with distaste in the 20th century by old people who had been forced to partake of the mixture in their youth. Also, work was hard. Wesley again recalls yeoman labours from morning to evening - even before dawn and after dusk - and all just to survive. At Weedon, the fertility of the Vale saved the necessity of so much toil for so little reward. Indeed, in 1810 the farmers of the Vale are criticised for indolence because of the soil's ample return. The indications are that

Weedon yeoman could do more than just 'scrape a living'. Some, at least, saved money, increased the number of their acres, and enjoyed a new standard of home furnishing. There are wills which show this to be the case. Some of the copyholders on the College half-manor died without a son to enter their holding, and a daughter, married to a townsman came into possession. Such copyholds were readily sub-let (presumably with College permission) to other copyholders, to enable older sons to marry and have their house. On the Lee half-manor, nearly all the land was let, and the farms were sizeable for the times. Steadily, the land was farmed by fewer people, and prosperous yeomen held more land than their forebears because there were fewer of them engaged in farming on their own, and there were more lands to be let. Copyholders still paid the same rate as their predecessors 300 years earlier, though there was some adjustment to changed money values when a successor was envisaged. The fine on entry was greater and the heriot was more. Also, reversionary rights were 'traded' to a third reversion! But, all in all, this early 18th century was their most prosperous age, and their security appeared to be unchallenged. The second half of the century showed that it was a structure which, like the feudal edifice, would crumble. However, before the new issued its challenge, the old had its heyday. If there was little building in the 18th century, it was because it had been done in the previous 100 years, and the yeomen could enjoy their houses with windows and chimneys without the discomfort of re-building on the traditional sites. There was no waste in the economy. "The cottage taken from the pond", as it was called, showed that when the old Stockaway pond was cleaned out and deepened, the mud was used to build a dwelling at the end of the 17th century. The tracks linking one messuage to the next, were carefully scraped, so that no manure from the beasts who used them should be lost. All provided fertiliser for the soil. The 'side walks' today, a few inches higher than the road, are evidence of the economy which had no place for wastage. Yet, one day it would be seen that the open field system itself was wasteful. Meanwhile, yeomen had their heyday and served their local community.

Yeoman Service. It is possible to see them, not only as Overseers of the Poor, Church Wardens and Parish Constables, but, beyond their parish, as jurors at the Petty Sessions. Much of their business sounds strange today. Some items from the Michaelmas Session in 1709, when a Weedon juryman served, may be noted.

1. Licence of a house for nonconformist worship.

2. Stopping a river and flooding a meadow. (Indictment)

3. Indictments of popish recusants.

4. Assault and stealing 3 gallons of ale. (Indictment)

5. Highways not repaired by local inhabitants. (Indictment)

6. Stealing linen at Aylesbury Fair. (Indictment)

7. Not "cleansing a watercourse". (Indictment)

8. Assessments for "conveying and relieving vagrants and beggars".

9. Payment of £17.12.4 for medicines supplied to the gaol.

10. Payment for maintenance, and clothing a 'County child'.

11. Bakers paid for bread supplied to prisoners. Each prisoner allowed a 2d. loaf each week.

12. £10 paid for 6 months use of a house in Aylesbury as the County Gaol.

13. Orders removing individuals in need of parish relief from the place where they happened to be, to the parish legally responsible for them.

14. Grant of £10 a quarter to the Keeper of the County Gaol to "make pottage or broth" for 19 prisoners who were without money, and because the cost of wheat had risen so much, and the 2d. loaf became so small, were "in misery" and in danger of starving.

15. Sureties for bastard children.

16. "The petition of Elizabeth Miles, that she was aged 98, and had been an inhabitant of Aylesbury for 60 years, but now by reason of weakness she was unable to work, and "being worne out with age and fallen upon the towne, she is allowed but fifteen pence per week, which is little more than what she can expend in fire, being olde and very chilly ...." Referred to justices!

17. Appointments of Petty Constables.

Such was the type of business the yeoman juror of 1708 had placed before him.

Help for the Widows. The more substantial of these yeomen might even be able to provide relief for the needy or education for children. At Weedon, the legacy of 1570, plus small charities to provide bread from Rectors Barker and Dummer in the next century, was augmented in 1723 by Wm. Playstead, a copyholder, who devised two cottages to the purpose of

"clothing two poor widows". (These were sold in 1879, and the proceeds, £132.16.5, were invested in Consols. The dividend of £3.6.4 was distributed among poor widows of Weedon. Five shillings each, among thirteen such, could provide 'living' for 2 weeks in late Victorian times.)

Pointers to a New Age.

Background. The second half of the 18th century pointed to change and new ways. New influences were affecting life in many ways. There was the new religion of the Wesleys, which penetrated the country villages beyond the range of the old dissent of the Baptists, Independents and Quakers. New standards of education were rising as trade grew and villages were linked with a larger world by the improved Turnpike roads. New ideas of farming, with improved breeds of cattle and new crops, called for new methods, and often for larger farms run on businesslike lines. These were but a few of the winds of change which blew across the English countryside as new challenged old in the 18th century. All those named were experienced in Weedon.

Methodism. It was in October 1772 that John Seamons, yeoman, had his house at Weedon registered as a place of worship, to enable Wesley's preachers to take their Services and Meetings there, with the protection of the law legally assured. In mid-Bucks this was the first registration for Methodist purposes. After a time the centre moved to Waddesdon, but Weedon has this distinction: the movement which went into nearly every village in the area, first 'touched down' there. Preachers from Oxford travelled the road used by manor officials from New College for nearly 400 years. It would be impossible to write the story of Weedon in the 19th century without taking Methodism into account. It became a dominant influence. The beginning was in 1772, and the reception was sometimes hostile as new challenged old,

New Contacts. The second half of the 18th century also illustrates the growth of trade and of contact with the wider world. In addition to the smith, miller, carpenter, wheelwright, weaver and cordwainer, the grocer took his place, and the village inn, a small yeoman homestead, took a name to itself, like the inns of city and town. Five small elm trees were planted in front of the thatched homestead, and in the 1780s the 'Five Elms Public House' was registered. (The elms were reduced to mere stumps in the early 20th century.) The Turnpike road, from Aylesbury to Buckingham, established in the 1750s, passed along the western bounds of Weedon.

Though the hamlet had to wait for the 19th century before its carrier made a weekly journey to London, there were regular services from Winslow and Whitchurch using the new Turnpike before the 18th century closed. The old isolation was breaking down, and a new education was provided to help to meet it.

New Education. As far back as the 1620s there was a school-master in the parish. John Evans, "scholemaster" was buried in 1627. It is likely that he taught reading to a number, and writing only to a smaller number. Somehow, the yeomen of 1700, had learned to write their names in the 1650-1700 period. Dr. Wood, in the early 18th century, had ten children taught at his own charge. The big breakthrough came in or near 1785. Once more, the rector was the benefactor. Dr Bridle, rector of the parish from 1760, received a legacy when his brother died. This he applied to founding a school, and a clothing charity for poor children. The schoolmaster, Wm Watkins, died in 1801, at the age of 81. A little arithmetic indicates he was over 60 when the school opened! As time went on, the value of the endowment enabled a larger number of children to be educated. When compulsory education was enacted, Dr Bridle's munificent endowment was the basis of the new development in the parish. The clothing charity, limited until 1897, and then widened to include a clothing voucher and a pair of boots for all school-children of wage-earning parents, was an untold boon between 1897 and 1914, when poverty was still a very real part of village life.

The New Farming. The threat to the old agriculture spread across England rapidly between 1750 and 1800. In a century, hundreds of villages lost their traditional appearance. The great open fields, with hundreds of strips, like great allotments, were wiped out, except for ridges in the soil, and the humps of headlands, which in pasture land linger even today. Neat rectangular fields, with quickset hedges to enclose them, took their place, By this means, a yeoman had his own fields, could choose his own crops, and plan for his own stock. Animals on the open commons, with breeding from the village bull, or a poor breed of ram, were a product of communal life and not personal initiative. In Weedon and Hardwicke, it was the duty of the rector to provide the boar for the sows, in acknowledgement that the tenth piglet came to him, as a tithe.

The scheme of enclosure, to encourage personal initiative came first to Hardwicke. In 1779 it was 'enclosed'. There was no great problem of division of lands, and apportionment of fields in the village, because so much was held by two men. On the Lee estate, nearly 400 acres were farmed by these,

leaving only about 7 acres for others. On the College estate, the division was between a greater number of tenants, but the total number was much less than in Weedon.

Weedon followed Hardwicke in its own time. That time, however, was the opening of the next century.

Conclusion.

Wars. The early 18th century, and its close, had this in common: England and France were at war. Probably the war in the early 1700s had little direct impact on the parish. Armies were small and there was no threat of serious invasion by France to subdue England. (Help given to the Stuart Pretender to England's throne in 1715 did not amount to that!) The order to seize a "dark man" in the parish and conscript him was however a reminder that there was a war. At the end of the century, the Napoleonic wars assumed a different aspect. Threat of invasion, with subjugation of England, was real, and the country was unable to forget it. Every man in Weedon was enrolled, unless he was over 60 years old. Weedon had 101 men between 16 and 60 years of age. Every man over 60 years, if he possessed horses, carts and wagons was also enrolled with the list of personal [?] possessions. Fifteen owned draught horses, with a total of 72 between them. The list of 101 names shows how far Weedon had moved from feudal days. Thirteen were farmers, 14 were tradesmen and craftsmen, one was a bailiff, one was an apprentice, 16 were servants (hired for the year and living in the farm house), one was "Nothing" and another was "Ragman", and 54 were labourers. Happily for England, its "Home Defence" lists were never needed. Napoleon's shadow hung over the whole land; his foot never touched its soil.

Notes.

1. One of the two large farmers in Hardwicke in 1779 was Michael Brooks. His daughter Anne married William Seamons of Weedon, the great-grandfather of Joseph Tom Seamons Rolls of Whitchurch in 1968. The house of Michael Brooks still stands - looking out to the Turnpike, just below the Church tower.
2. Some names in the century: Ming, Fincher, Griffin, Honour.

Chapter XI

The Nineteenth Century

CHANGE AND MORE CHANGE

1802. A Landmark.

The year 1802 provides another landmark in Weedon story. Like 1066, when the Saxon chiefs were removed from their lands; and 1236 when the main manor was divided among two daughters, because there was no son; and 1385, when Wm of Wykeham bought a half manor for New College: and 1440 when the last land holder in Weedon named de Wedon [sic] died - like all these dates, 1802 marks significant change.

A New Landlord. 1801.

In 1801 the last of the Lee family to have an interest in Weedon sold both his half manor and Kempson's fee (Almar's Land), to the Duke of Buckingham. The Lee family had risen from its humble origins, through knighthood, to the nobility. At the head of the family was Lord Dillon. For a long time the mansion built in the grandiose days of Sir Henry Lee at Quarrendon had never been occupied by the family. It had become a ruin, and the church there was following in the same way, despite its magnificent family monuments. On the other hand, the Grenville family was rising, and the head, the Marquess of Buckingham, was on the way to becoming a Duke. The magnificence of Stowe was to become the monument (and the folly) of that family. Meanwhile, just as the Lees had made wealth from sheep, when wool was in demand, the Marquess was out to make money from money rents on improved manors. Enclosure usually brought better farming and higher rents. With Lord Dillon ready to sell his distant estate, and the Marquess of Buckingham eager to buy land in the northern half of his county, the Lee half manor and Kempson's fee, changed hands.

Results.

Enclosure. Two significant results of the purchase were that Weedon was soon enclosed, and the Lilies soon housed a squire.

The enclosure took place in 1802. Probably few of the farmers living at Weedon really wanted to face the expense and upheaval of enclosure. The applicants make an interesting study. At the head was The Marquess of Buckingham, who owned about half the hamlet. Enclosure was of benefit to

him. It would bring more rent! Next were the Trustees of Tirel-Morin, who were farming Weedon Lodge in the East End. Next came three copyholders who did not live at Weedon, but who let out their copyholds for rent. They would benefit. Three Weedon residents who held a Weedon copyhold and lived there were the local signatories. One was widow Turpin, who had two copyholds and could let one; the others were Bernard Bone and Provis Thorne, yeomen, who held the smallest copyholds from the college. Two brothers, Wm and John Ray, blacksmiths on the Duke of Buckingham's estate, also signed. The partnership of tail-coats and leather aprons won the day. Weedon was enclosed and took the shape it has today with a few minor modifications later on.

The great fields were carved up, and such hedged fields as Longlands, Turner's Field, Woodway, Springpiece and Wheathill came into being. Arable lands, commons and meadow lands were all divided into hedged fields. Some new roads were made, chiefly the 'New Road' from the turnpike, and the straight road to East End and Burston Gate. Old tracks almost faded out, where the new roads were a better alternative. Thus the roads from Weedon Hill to East End, from Quarrendon to Burston, with the offshoots to Stockaway, Cublington through Penwick and to the East End, almost faded out, or quite vanished except for a track still marked in the surface of fields. The two old road-ways to the East End, one from North Croft, through 'Turner's Field', and the other from Penwick, south of 'The Chestnuts', became footpaths only.

The old yeoman homesteads, with their adjoining closes, were left much as before. A few old hedged fields, like Blunts, Calicut and Kirby's remained, with modifications to their boundaries. Such modifications can often be traced today. The village pound was no longer necessary, because the open commons with animals belonging to all and sundry were now enclosed, and each farmer had his own hedged land. (The pound was probably by the side of the old track across Penwick, near the entrance to 'The Chestnuts.') The official place for tethering horses, near the stile leading from Snugge into Turner's Field, similarly was no more required. A hundred old names by which strips of land were distinguished, also vanished. Even the old names of the Copyholds, linking up with the 15th century, faded away. Cooks Hill and Norman Hill remained, but Watfords, Goose Acres, Little Offices Gate, 'Goares' Field, Froglands, and many more names ceased, after a generation, to be even a memory.

A Squire at The Lilies. The noble Lord had a kinsman who needed a home. The Lilies mansion was repaired and possibly enlarged. Mr Edward Nugent came to live there, and throughout the 19th century Weedon had a resident squire. After Mr Nugent, there followed Lord Nugent, ambitious, flamboyant, Whig Member of Parliament, Government official at home and in Greece, with a wife who disappointed him in not leaving an heir. She, Lady (Lucy) Nugent, was gentle, generous and concerned for Weedon's poor. Her memorial was in a field to the north of New Road, but was destroyed when the Cazenove estate was built up, and the field on the south of the road was substituted as the Lady's legacy to Weedon poor. A little path at the bottom of The Lilies fields,near 'Fishell Pond', gave easy access to the Foard Cottage, with its painted ceiling in the main room, where lived a Weedon woman who had left for 'service', but who had returned to be endowed with the cottage for herself and the children she had borne out of wedlock and away from Weedon. After Lord Nugent came Dr. Connell, another member of the Duke of Buckingham's family circle. The Duke's bankruptcy necessitated the disposal of his lands. The great banking family, the Rothschilds, secured the Weedon half-manor. From the banker to the stockbroker was no far cry, and by 1870 the Lilies and its small estate was purchased by a Mr Cazenove, of Huguenot descent, and a wealthy member of the London Stock Exchange. This purchase broke into the Lee half-manor. At once it was obvious that the new squire had his own idea of an estate suitable to his means. A copyhold messuage just below the Lilies house was secured, and the College actually sold the freehold. Here was a break with tradition of nearly 500 years. Two other copyhold messuages were secured, with their freeholds, to provide a site for a kitchen garden and glasshouses. Still another, with close, garden and field was secured, in an attempt to acquire a compact estate bordered by the main road and the loop made by its two offshoots. Except in the main village, Mr Cazenove realised his dream. The old manor house was demolished, and a new mansion built, with four houses for estate workers, a head gardener's house, a lodge, and an up to date suite of farm buildings, this latter on the site of the Ray Smithy, and two ancient farmhouses. It was Victorian aristocratic luxury! The golden age of the country gentry, with city business background, had arrived - at Weedon.

The new squire was aristocratic and autocratic. But he was benevolent, and a man of strictly honourable principle. Mrs Cazenove built a school for the infants of the hamlet and paid a teacher. This gave education to children up to six years of age, without the mile long journey to the school

in the village of Hardwicke. In winter, the squire's soup kitchen was open for those who wished to collect a can of soup, of a quality labourers' homes never tasted in the ordinary way. His workmen knew him to be fair in his dealings with them and concerned when there was special need. His name headed the parish subscription lists! It was 'benevolent paternalism' at a high level, and the hamlet was fortunate in its squire.

That his autocracy was not despotism is illustrated in one incident. A parliamentary election was at hand and for the first time farm labourers had the vote. The squire was talking to an aged labourer and said "Thomas, you know you now have a vote. I hope you will use it." Thomas replied "I shall, sir." The squire added "And I hope you will vote for the right candidate." He dared go no further, even if he would have done so! "Yes, sir," came the reply, "I shall try." But the old servant's conscience struck him! He knew the squire meant "Vote Tory", and he intended to vote Liberal. He hated deceit, and added "But, sir, our views of the right man may not be the same." The squire knew what he meant, put out his hand and said "I would like to shake hands with an honest man. Shake hands." To his amazement, the old work-man found his rough, mis-shapen hand clasped by the white delicate hand of his master. Weedon was indeed fortunate in its late Victorian squire.

Problems of Poverty.

In some ways the problem of poverty got worse, rather than better, in the 19th century. More children lived and families were larger. No longer were there open commons upon which a goose could run, and for a few cottagers, on which a sheep or pig could be kept. Men worked long hours for a pittance, and to earn a few pence women made pillow lace, and children made straw plait for manufacturers of straw bonnets in Luton factories. Fuel was scarce and young women sat for hours in the winter lace making, with only a few embers in an earthenware pot, locally known as "Dicky Pot", to keep their feet warm. Then, in the 1860s, machine made lace ruined the pillow lace industry, and the straw bonnet was superseded. Machinery began to oust labour, and imported wheat depressed the home market, so that corn lands began to be turned to pasture, with less need of labourers. Before the end of the century there was large scale desertion of the village by the young men.

Self Help.

In three ways the agricultural labourer tried to help himself. First, there was the Sick Benefit Club, founded in the early 1830s. A small weekly

payment by all, enabled a helpful payment to be made to the few when sickness came. At first it had other 'ideals'. Its members were fined 2d a time for swearing! One lively member* was fined 4d on one evening, for "swearing twice". Next, the development of the allotment fields enabled cottagers with small gardens, to rent a plot which could grow vegetables for a family, and potatoes for family and a pig. By the end of the century there were four allotment fields. The third device to help make ends meet was by keeping a pig in a sty at the end of the garden, where there was a garden of sufficient size. Potatoes from the allotment, swill from the house, and a little barley meal, were enough to feed the animal and the saying was, "The pig pays the rent". Nothing was waste, except the pig's hair and horn on its feet. The grocer had a weekly pig killing and local supply was nearly enough for the need. Most of the villagers seldom tasted meat other than pork. In such conditions of poverty, Bridle's Charity, when in 1897 it was made available generally, was a godsend.

*Joseph Seamons! But not your grandfather! His cousin!!

Population Rise and Fall.

Already reference has been made to migration from the hamlet. Steadily the figures of population rose in the census returns from 1801 to those of 1871. In 1801 there were 385 inhabitants in Weedon. By 1871 the number was 463. Then decline set in. The great slump was in the last decade. Between 1891 and 1901 there was a fall from 413 to 321 - nearly 100 less in 10 years. The hard winter of 1894-5 was the last straw which finally broke the endurance of young men. Weeks out of work, with no money except parish relief, set their faces towards town life. They streamed London-wards, and found work chiefly in railway service. Those who had gone called to those who stayed behind, and there was no lack of response. Already the girls left home when they left school, and went into 'gentlemen's service'. Only a few ever returned to live in their native village - the few who married a youth who stayed on a farm. The average age of the 321 left in 1901 was much greater than that of the 447 in 1851. Increasingly it was becoming a settlement of older people.

Emigration.

The call to emigrate was answered in the early 1830s by men who sought not merely new spheres, but new worlds. In 1832 two migrated to America. They were followed by others. Before the 1840s had passed, the call was from Australia. From all the district men went - usually farmers' sons

for whom a depressed agriculture offered no prospect. (From 1815 to 1845 the prospects were bleak on the home front). Then America called again, and by the 1890s, the voice of Canada was added to that of United States. Sponsored passages across the sea gave labourers the chance which yeomen's sons had taken in the earlier years. Thus the century closed with fewer children in the hamlet, fewer young married couples, more middle-aged parents saying farewell, or even goodbye, to their sons, and because the expectation of life was rising, more people over 65 years of age. The growing towns needed more labour, the new worlds needed more men, the villages needed less labour and fewer men and answered the call to towns and new worlds. Weedon made its contribution.

Contacts With a Wider World.

Meanwhile contacts with the wider world were steadily strengthening in other ways. By 1840 Weedon had its regular weekly service, by carrier's cart, to London. Then came the penny post, used by few in 1840, but by most homes, at some time, by 1890. Sometimes it was a letter with a postal order for a shilling from a servant girl, trying to help home from her £10 a year. Next came a sub-post office, and a daily collection of letters, and later on, two deliveries and two collections. The daily paper was bought by some farmers and the grocer, and possibly a publican, before the end of the 19th century. In 1884 telegraph wires were strung along the old Turnpike road, and a year later a telegraph office was opened at Whitchurch. It was long regarded as an emergency convenience, and Weedon had to wait until after the first world war for its own office. But "sending a telegram" was a late Victorian miracle. Railway connections from Aylesbury expanded from the earliest line, linking up London by way of Cheddington, to the more direct G.W. and G.C. lines. Bicycles with solid rubber tyres were no longer a wonder in 1900 and saving up to buy a bicycle was a young boy's idea of luxury. In 1897 the first motor car passed through Whitchurch. Possibly by 1900 not one had taken the loop road and passed through Weedon, but they were seen on the main road (Turnpike no longer! The 'pikes' had ceased in 1878). All the same, there were those who seldom went out of the hamlet, and in 1900 there were still some who had never been in a train, and were "afeart of an accident". Also, in 1901 there were only about six householders, out of nearly 100, who had been born further afield than Bucks. Contacts were widening in a largely localised community.

Nonconformity.

'Wesleyans'. The rise and spread of nonconformity in the hamlet was a remarkable feature of the century. In 1813, after a lapse of some years, a house was licensed for Methodist services. Twenty years later a chapel was registered. It was a converted barn. In 1854, after the barn chapel had been burned down, a seemly brick building was erected. Later, in two stages, a Sunday School was added. Near the same time a gallery was added to the chapel. The peak was in the 1870s and 1880s. At one time there were 100 scholars in the Sunday School, and the chapel was filled, floor and gallery, on Sunday evenings. In 1871 a burial ground was added.

'Primitives'. Just before 1840 a Primitive Methodist Society was established. For years it met in a wooden building in Stockaway (the offering of an early leader who was a carpenter) and then in 1892 a brick building was erected.

At the 1851 Census, attendances at the chapels on one Sunday were 320. (At the parish church for Weedon and Hardwicke, they were 410). In 1900 just over half of the homes in Weedon were called "Chapel".

Parish Council.

The development of local government included the Parish Council in 1894. Candidates usually were thought of as representing one of three interests: church, chapel or public house! In justification of their existence, the Council instituted 'street lighting'.

Light! Four oil lamps were placed in strategic positions at 4 turns in the road, and on winter evenings provided pools of light where groups stood to talk. The lamps were at least guides as to direction for travellers! Light suggested warmth even where it did not provide it. Under the shop window was another meeting place, and for a favoured few the blacksmith's shop was a haven where light and warmth really met together! The public house, with its darts board, could provide an attraction for youths whether they had a penny to spend on cheapest ale, or not. Occasionally there was real excitement, as when one customer's nose was pierced by a dart thrown by a youngster whose aim was more sure than he expected! The warm and lighted chapels on Sunday evenings provided another respite. All light was welcome! The Parish Council recognised it!

Laughter and Recreation.

Despite hard work and shortage of money, there was laughter and mirth. The two Feast Days were occasions of merriment. One was the Village Feast and the other the Club Feast. In the early 1860s the young grocer organised a village band. At the end of the century there was a brass band. There were cricket teams and Sunday School treats and for day-school children, the Ascension Day treat in the rector's paddock. On May Day there were garlands, and singing before the Squire's door for milk and cake and a new penny! Nor was November 5th forgotten. Christmas brought a joint of beef from the farmers for their labourers, and though it might add to the debt at the village stores, all enjoyed an extra which was luxury. Tops and hoops had their season, and the meet of the hunt was a 'high day'. Strange as it may seem in an age of plenty and luxury, a boy of 1900 can look back in 1968 and say, "It was a happy place, this Weedon, and its memories are sweet".

Serenity.

For some, religion was very real. A firm belief in God and a hereafter, a deep sense that relationship with God was 'right' and that the hereafter was better than 'here', brought with it serenity and happy content. Even in weakness and invalidism such people experienced light in the evening of life and lived with a rare radiance. Life had offered them little by modern standards, but they met it bravely, and possessed secrets which made it 'worthwhile'. Character at its most heroic was to be found in the humble homes of the hamlet, as well as in the pioneer's wagon moving across the great open spaces of the new world. Religion produced it.

War.

Once again a century ended with England at war. This time there was no enrolment for 'Home Defence' as in 1798, and no 'Posse Comitatus'. The fighting was far away, and invasion was impossible. But it was a shock when the forces of the Empire on which "the sun never sets" had to acknowledge defeats. Even the hamlet felt it, for men of Bucks were involved, though not of Weedon. It was a small cloud in the sky, as the sun set on the century of change.

The Talking Machine.

The phonograph, or 'Talking machine' as many preferred to call it, screaming from the carpenter's shop was a reminder that change was still going on, and made the ancients ask, "Whatever next?"

Chapter XII

The Twentieth Century

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

1900 Memories.

A bygone age. The old century expired to the accompaniment of mixed memories. No one remained who could recall the enclosure movement with which it began, though the oldest inhabitant, 96 years of age*, had spanned nearly the whole of the period. Memories of sites of earlier cottages and of significant spots had been handed on to the next generation, but were fast fading away. The fear of Napoleon, countered with an amount of bluster, was recalled in snatches of ribald songs which had lingered in memory. Ghost stories from a credulous age might be recounted by the elders, when the evening thirst-quencher had loosened the tongue. The son of the first Weedon carrier to make the weekly trip to London, recalled Holborn Hill and its hazards on a frosty morning, before the viaduct was built. Older women had stories of gleaning in the harvest field, and gathering enough corn to feed a few chickens for a few weeks. The custom lapsed when the presence of women in the harvest field was frowned upon, for in mid-Bucks, unlike many places, few women worked there. The great fire, when all the houses and buildings on the brow of the hill were destroyed, was remembered from 1853, and some strange treasures from the ruins still exhibited. A few recalled the advent of photography in 1860, when the grocer's son invested in a camera and opened up business. "Grandfather wouldn't have his likeness took," one would explain, "because the Bible is against it." The second commandment would then be quoted. "Thou shalt not make unto thyself ... the likeness of anything ..." Some had their memories of the Crimean War in the 1850s, when life was harder than usual, and the torture of lighting a fire with flint and tinder on a dark winter's morning, seemed worse than ever. A few remembered the joy the old rector in the 1850s found in hunting, and the story of his hiding behind a shrubbery one day when the bishop arrived, or as he put it, "when the Lord passed by". The church, with its gallery at the tower end, and its quaint arch into the chancel - both swept away when the church was restored in 1872 - was another memory. "Church going was

* John Hounslow lived to be 99 years old. He died in January 1903.
Joseph Turpin, who died in Sept. 1901 lived to be 90.
Wm Seamons, of the Wheatsheaf, who died in 1906, lived to be 88.

never the same again after the gallery went," was the comment of one ancient, once a 'music boy' but never renowned for his piety. Nor were the winks of the early Victorian squire as his carriage passed pretty girls forgotten! A few could recall that the hamlet once had a third public house, called 'The William the Fourth'. The carrier was the licensee. After a few years, the Sailor King had to retire before the competition of 'The Five Elms' and 'The Wheatsheaf'. Here and there memories of the old century were aided by relics of bygone employment, such as a lace pillow, a handful of bobbins, a straw-splitter, and even, in one home, a spinning wheel. The bobbin might have a girl's name pricked out on it, signifying that it had been the gift of a village youth to his maid, as token of their pledge of marriage, before the luxury of an engagement ring was ever contemplated. A handle from a flail brought to mind threshing by hand in the great barn in winter time, before the monster machine made its appearance, and the 'thresher' on a sizeable farm spent weeks doing little other than 'thrash'. Similarly a scythe could call up stories of prowess in haymaking time, when fields were mown by hand. An old concertina awakened memories of the band which paraded the village on March 10th 1863, in celebration of the wedding of the Prince of Wales to the young princess from across the sea. An ancient pair of candle snuffers recalled the era before paraffin lamps came into every home but one: in that one the sisters used candles for many more years than necessary because an early lamp explosion had called forth an exclamation, "I'll never use one again", and one's word must not be lightly broken. Only the grocer's assurance that the Almighty would not be severe on them if they returned to a lamp enabled them to 'break their word'! A crinoline frame, somehow lurking in a larger house, was reminiscent of the experience of the buxom lady, somewhat inexpert in 'tipping the crinoline', for whom the top corners at the entrance to her pew in the chapel had been neatly removed. Such memories told the elderly in 1900 that they were bridges with a bygone age.

Memories near at hand. Not all the memories were of distant days. The young married couples could recall the series of wet summers in the 1870s; the squire's free feast on his Silver Wedding day; the jollification in 1887 when the Queen had her Golden Jubilee; the 'big Mission' at the Chapel in 1886; and the Queen's visit to the Baron's mansion, and her drive through the nearby town. Children remembered the 'Diamond Jubilee', and the death of the 'good squire', followed by the removal of his lady to another abode.

The New Age Opens.

But it was the old Queen's death in January 1901, rather than the turn of the century, which brought home that nothing stood still, but times were always changing. Union Jacks, saved from the Jubilee, reappeared, hanging from the clothes poles tied to trees, but hanging at half mast. Then came the end of the South African War, though no one from the village had fought in it. June 1902 brought Coronation celebrations: a church Service, a dinner and tea for all, competitions, pony rides and games! The new age had come, though the King was not able to be crowned until August. No one could dream that the new age would be so very new.

Revolutionary Inventions.

A balloon over the village was an occasional sight in those early years. In 1908 people were startled by a noise reminiscent of traction engines. They looked up, and saw an "arrowplane" flying overhead. The first war was scarcely over when a visitor from London brought a 'wireless set' with him. In a barn, among trusses of hay, it was fitted up and it worked! Another miracle had come. That was in 1922. Very soon afterwards, the telephone arrived, and then, in the late 1920s, the first piped water supply. The W.C. replaced the closet! In 1930 electric light was brought to the village. After the second world war, television appeared. The new Queen's coronation ceremony in 1953 was watched in old yeoman homesteads, such as 'Loves', on the TV screen. Only 52 years had passed since 'The Old Queen' had died! In that time the daily paper had become the privilege (?) of the many and not just of the few. The motor cycle and motor car, almost unknown in the village in 1900, had become common property by 1965.

Withdrawal from the Land.

Two wars took the younger men of the village out to the big world which was forcing its way into their homes. In the first war towards 40 went, and 7 made the supreme sacrifice. Everything conspired to break down the old self-contained community. Agriculture touched new depths around the year 1930. Cheap imported grain made corn growing in small fields unprofitable. At this time not an acre of corn was grown. In turn, less labour was needed. Still more men turned from the land, or were driven from it. In 1900, about a dozen families earned their living in Weedon from business and trade. A few men were retired. About sixty families lived from the land. Today, a few live from the land. The overwhelming majority work outside the hamlet where they live. A revolution has taken place.

Motor Transport and Change.

In the 1920s, motor transport began to supersede the carrier's cart. In the 1950s, the public bus service, with private motor transport and farm machinery, combined to drive the horse from road and field. A village pond is no longer an asset for animals; it has become a receptacle for rubbish - a nuisance. Even the old well where early settlers quenched their thirst has been condemned, its contents being "unfit for human consumption". Thus, one thing leads on to another!

The Squire.

The squire also has gone! After the death of "the young squire" in 1916, a new order came into being. His successors sought to make the estate pay its way: typical of hundreds faced with the post-war heavy taxation and higher wages. As the second war ended, the Lilies opened a new chapter and became a hospital annexe. Another revolution!

Land Ownership.

On the land significant breaks with the past took place. In the 1890s, the College sold some of its old yeoman homesteads, as properties independent of their farm lands. Broadly speaking, however, the half-manor has remained intact. The revolution came on the Lee half-manor at the end of the first World War when the then owners offered farms for sale to the occupying tenants. Thus, what had been joined together from 1236, and earlier, was put asunder.

Building!

Building changes have been many. Some old yeoman homesteads have disappeared. Most of the old cottages with thatched roofs have gone. New building has replaced them. It has been of three types. First, council houses since 1920, with some private building by the College. Second, some very desirable private houses. Third, since the second war, bungalow dwellings, and a solar house! No other century has equalled this for building. The 16th century began to replace the old type dwelling. The 17th century completed the process. There was little in the 18th century to record. In the 19th century the last 'mud and thatch' cottage was built, also some brick houses with tile or slate roofs, and a row of houses named "Providence Place" by the lady who sought to help Victorian families, but called "The Barracks" by those who wished to emphasise their severe plainness. The 20th century has

outstripped all, and probably the hamlet has never looked so trim and prosperous.

'Furriners'.

There has also been a revolution in the population. In 1900 about 19 families out of 20 were of local birth, and belonged to Weedon by ancestral ties. Today probably not 4 of 20 can claim that. Surnames with generations of local association have disappeared, notably, Seamons in 1953, after at least 460 years in Weedon life. Yeoman homesteads have become desirable residences with antique interest; one of them, at one stage, an occasional 'lodging' for a millionaire. Doctors, professional men, and the retired now live in Weedon - in plenty!

Disappearance of Trades and Crafts.

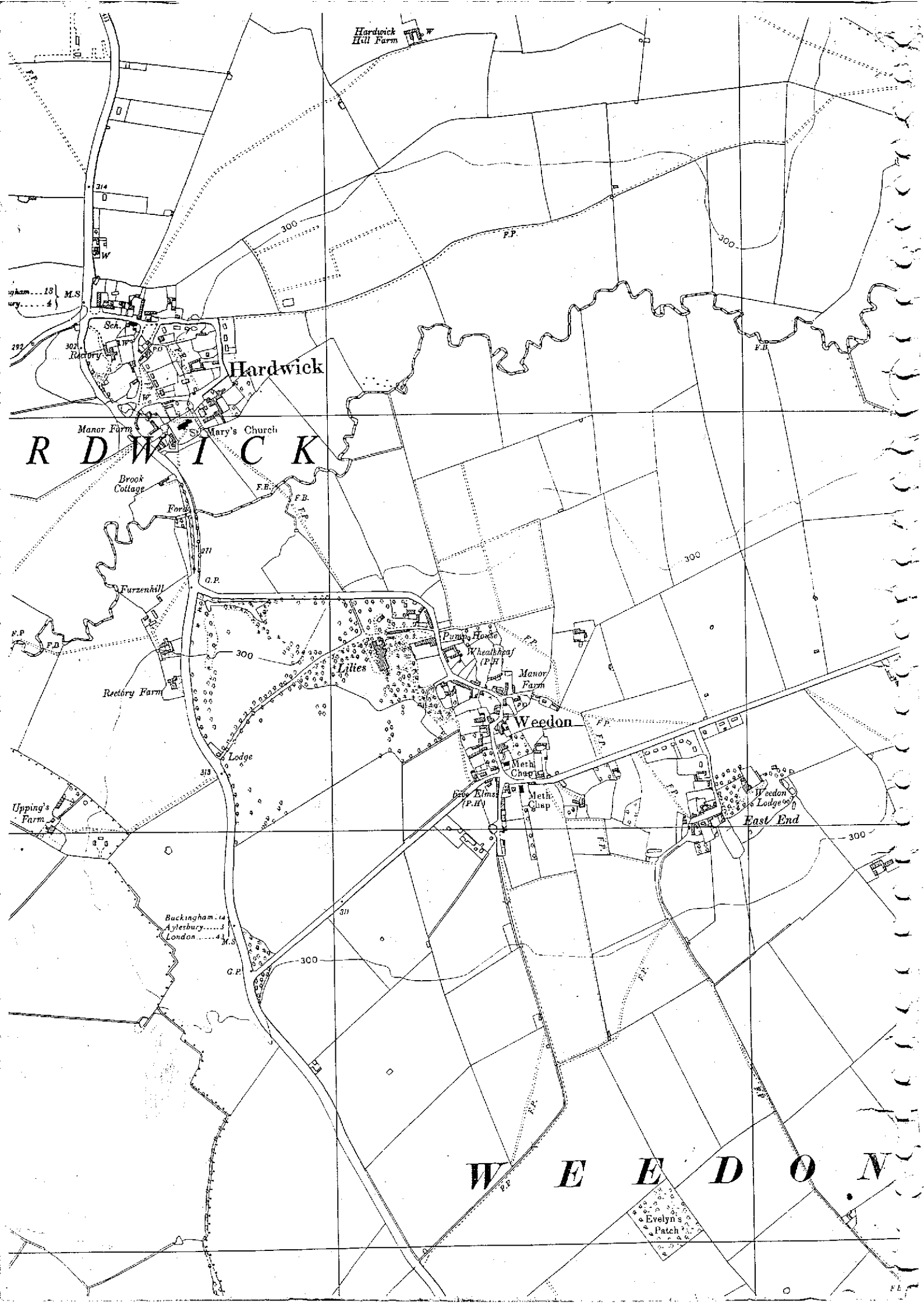
The old crafts and trades have gone. In 1800 the miller had gone, but there were still the weaver, the cordwainer, the carpenter, the wheel-wright, the smith, the tailor, the grocer, the publican and a draper. In fact, there were 5 carpenters, 2 smiths, 2 butchers and two cordwainers. First, the weaver went. In the 1860s, the second cordwainer died and was not replaced. By 1880 only one smith remained, and no butchers. The draper vanished early in the century. In 1900 there was one carpenter only, with one wheelwright, one smith, one tailor, two publicans, a carrier and a grocer (with general stores) and three others who 'kept shop' in a smaller way in their houses. By 1920 these three 'house-shops' had faded from the scene, In 1917 the wheelwright died and was not replaced. The smithy was closed in the 1920s. The tailor shut up shop about the same time. In 1934 the carrier died - his business ended. Since the second war, one public house has closed, and the carpenter's business is no more. Only the public house, and a stores-cum-post office remain to be 'manned'. Another revolution!

Change in Religion.

On the religious scene there has been equal change. The rector is no longer the wealthy man who consorts with the squire and lives a lifetime in his parish. Incumbents, with modest living, come and go with a frequency once undreamed of. Church congregations are a shadow of their former selves. One chapel is closed and the other maintained by a group of 'loyalists'. Secularism has bitten deeply. Many do not 'patronise the church' except for family social occasions, or for funerals. Once, nearly all were 'Church or chapel'. Another revolution.

Conclusion.

The old grinding poverty has gone. Wages have risen, pensions have replaced parish relief, and standards of living have improved immeasurably. Work without statutory limit of time has gone, and the town competes for the labour available in the country. The doorway to education is wide open. In 1900, only one boy in the village had a grammar school education and no-one dreamed of entry to a university. Today the educational doorway is open even to university. In general, amenities for living make 1900 seem a far-off unprivileged age. It is a very attractive picture. The skies have never been so bright. But there are shadows, and the old question recurs in new contexts. "What next?" And no-one can give the answer.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Furzenhill
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Lilies
Pump House
Wheatsheaf (P.H.)
Manor Farm
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Weedon Lodge
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London 4
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