



ATWORTH

AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY



ATWORTH HISTORY GROUP

Preface to the Third Edition

The continuing local interest in the Museum and the diversity of activities of the History Group, particularly in hosting visits by other similar organisations, have maintained the sales of this volume. A reprint is now necessary but the contents remain unchanged. The Oral History referred to in our previous edition has made progress. Education is the topic chosen and our aim is to have a new volume in print by the end of the 1986/87 season.

The policy of changing a few of the exhibits in the Museum periodically has been pursued and adds considerably to its appeal. Our survey of barns, now completed, includes a unique set of plans and photographs which provide the basis for a major exhibit. A collection of old toys, at least one dating back to the previous century, also provides an attractive and unusual display. We are grateful to all those who kindly lent us the items that made the exhibit possible.

As to the future, two new exhibits planned are Atworth Scouts and Guides, and The Home. We hope to complete these during the coming winter. Following the end of the barn survey, we intend to embark on a further venture possibly covering hedgerows or footpaths - both highly relevant issues in the Atworth area.

Atworth, November 1986.

The History Group.

Preface to the Second Edition

The widespread interest shown in the Economic and Social History has resulted in the sale of the 200 copies originally printed, and a second edition is now necessary. The text remains almost unaltered and this short Preface records briefly some of the main events for the Group since June 1982. We were fortunate to receive a welcome gift from Mr. Salmon of about 40 old lantern slides (3½") covering aspects of the life and people of Atworth during the 1920's, particularly the peace celebrations in the village to mark the end of the first world war. These have now been converted to the standard 35 mm size and are of great interest locally as well as providing important archive material. A set of prints has also been prepared which will provide the basis for a future exhibit in the museum. As a study of vernacular architecture, the Group has undertaken a survey of the local farm barns. Although these all conform to the same basic pattern, each is unique in its adjacent outbuildings and the purposes for which they have been used. Those surveyed so far are East and West Farms, Ganbrook, Lenton, Manor, Newhouse and Church Farms, also Great Chalfield and Little Chalfield. Our survey of East Farm was timely as the barn has now been converted into a private dwelling. Church farm proved to be of particular interest, being of 14th century construction with many of the original timbers still intact. It must have been the tithe barn for Atworth and no doubt also for the surrounding villages when the area was part of the estate of the Abbey of Shaftesbury. For our next publication we hope to produce an oral history based on discussions with people living in Atworth today. The topics selected so far are social life, education, transport and communication, and farming.

Atworth - June 1983 .



The History Group

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Preface

This little book on the economic and social history of the village of Atworth is the sequel to one already published in 1977 under the title of Atworth: A Little History (second edition 1981). It reflects the ever widening interests of the History Group, during the six years of its existence since its beginning in June 1977. An important event for the Group in June 1980 was the setting up of the village museum in the barn at Poplar Farm House, thanks to the kindness of Mr. & Mrs. Kain. This has provided us with the opportunity of relating what we have written to what we possess by way of objects of many kinds, photographs, maps and records all relating in different ways to the past history of Atworth. We are grateful to all those who have kindly lent or given us these materials; thanks to their generosity and imagination we have the ingredients for a number of new exhibitions which we hope to change annually. Meanwhile, to those who are clearing out attics and cupboards or moving house, please remember that relics of the past which may seem rubbish to you can have considerable historic interest.

The purpose of the present volume is threefold: to remedy some of the shortcomings of the former publication which have since come to light; to bring the reader up to date with the researches of the History Group during the last six years; and to explore certain aspects of the history of Atworth which were either omitted or covered only superficially in our previous account. We hope to illustrate some of the aspects of village life described here by appropriate exhibits in the Atworth Museum later on.

Atworth - June 1982

The History Group



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ATWORTH: AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY

All studies of history consist of the recording, analysis and interpretation of change. But as Professor Hoskins has pointed out in his invaluable book on Local History in England,¹ when studying change, the most logical starting point is the situation as it exists today. This is an aspect of Atworth life that we largely overlooked in our earlier work and it provides an appropriate beginning for the present one.

The Village Today

The spine of the village is the Bath Road (A365) which runs east-west for approximately a mile from Pye Corner in the east to the Bear Garage at its western extremity. Included within this span is that part of Atworth which, in the Middle Ages, was known as Attewarde Magna (Greater Atworth). At the west end, the house associated with the turnpike still stands (number 118) and here a road branches to the south-west, running through the mid-portion of the village referred to in the 15th century as Mechel Attewarde (Middle Atworth). Should a visitor today wish to be directed to a particular part of Atworth, likely as not the instructions given to him would include a reference to the Clock Tower. This constitutes, as it were, the nodal point of the village. It is an imposing little edifice of unmistakable late 19th century design, housing a clock which chimes the hours and half hours, and is situated to the east of the junction of the Bath and Bradford roads. It commemorates the longest reign in English history. A Queen Victoria jubilee memorial appeal for funds to build the clock tower was launched on the 14th June 1897. Part of the circular from the chairman of the appeal committee

(Mr. G.P. Fuller) reads as follows: "It was decided at a public meeting held in the Atworth Elementary School that to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Her Gracious Majesty's prosperous and happy reign (1837-97) a Turret Clock be erected in a central and suitable position in the village and that the names of the subscribers be engrossed on parchment and kept amongst the archives of the parish." The estimated cost of the tower was £80 - £100! Today, its value for insurance purposes is £3,000. Latterly, the tower has also served as a war memorial and on its north-facing wall a marble plaque records the Atworth Roll of Honour in the first world war (1914-18) while on the west wall there is a similar record relating to the second world war (1939-45). Among the names inscribed are many familiar in the village today such as Arlett, Clark, Daniels, Fido, Hayward, Hitchens, Keyford, Mitchell, Pearce and Sealy.

Moving along the Bradford road south-westwards from the Clock Tower for about 300 yards we reach the Foresters Arms. Here the road divides, the branch going south being a continuation of the Bradford Road, eventually joining the B3109 and leading to Bradford-on-Avon. At a cross-roads about three-quarters of a mile along it, the left-hand turn leads to Broughton Gifford and the right to Cottles. Returning to the Foresters Arms, the right-hand fork in the road continues as Church Street and ends at a farm gate leading to a track which runs across several fields until it reaches Cottles (occupied since the last war by Stonar Girls' School). This track used to be the main drive to Cottles House and continued westwards to Hobb's Bottom Farm and thence to the B3109 road. Today it is no longer open at the Cottles end. Running north

from Cottles is a short road known as Green Street which ends in the two sets of buildings which were formerly Cottles and Green Street Farms. The two farmhouses have now been converted into Stonar girls' boarding houses - Fuller and Tennyson.

A brief history of Cottles House, its occupants and their association with Atworth has already been included in a previous publication.² Suffice it to add here that although separated from the village and lying about half a mile to the west, it has always been part of the parish of Atworth and its various owners have played a considerable part in the development of the village, particularly in religion and education. Evidence of this close relationship is provided by the fact that in mediaeval times the Cottles estate was referred to as Attewarde Parva (Little Atworth). Cottles House is one of our many listed buildings. A small part of it is 16th century but most is 18th or later.^{2,3} In the library there is a fine fireplace dated 1547 bearing the arms of the Pawlett family.

Returning to Church Street and moving eastwards, there are a number of listed buildings, mostly on the south side of the road. Among these is the Old Vicarage which is dated 1676, but there is no evidence that it was used for the purpose that its name suggests. The present vicarage is a Victorian building situated at the west end of the road almost opposite the church of St. Michael and All Angels. This has been described in some detail elsewhere.² The mediaeval building of which only the embattled and saddleback tower now remains, was completely reconstructed by Thomas Beaushin, owner of Cottles in 1451. The remainder of the church became dilapidated and was

destroyed, being replaced by a Gothic revival type building designed by Mr. G.E. Goodridge of Bath³ and completed in 1832. Due south of the church, a narrow road leads to Church Farm where the house and main barn are listed buildings, the house being 18th century, the barn early 14th.

Rejoining the Bradford Road (i.e. walking east) and facing the Foresters Arms, in the foreground there is a wide space known locally as the Market Place. On the right is a triangular patch of grass, the village green, complete with seat and council notice board, its boundaries on the west and north sides being the gardens of 109 and 110 Bradford Road. Following the road south towards Bradford-on-Avon, in about 50 yards we come to the last of the houses in Middle Atworth. This is Manor Farm, an imposing 18th century listed building presenting a curiously thin appearance in relation to its height when viewed from the side. Returning eastwards along the Bradford Road, number 110 is of some interest being one of the oldest houses in the village. Built about 1650, it was originally an inn (the Three Horseshoes). Later it became a small local industry based on a forge. It is now a private dwelling re-named, appropriately, The Old Forge. Opposite is the school, the original buildings of which were provided by Mr. Robert Blagdon Hale, the then owner of Cottles and M.P. for West Gloucestershire. A plaque on the west wall of the entrance to the old school bears the date 1828 and the crest of the Hale family. Evidently, the school began using its newly acquired premises about 1830. The origins of education in Atworth and the subsequent history of the school during the 19th and 20th centuries have ready been described.²

Undoubtedly the most imposing building in the Bradford Road is Poplar Farm House (formerly Poplar Farm but now a private dwelling). This stands back from the road on the north side and is fronted by a row of Lombardy poplar trees bordering the road from which it derives its name (these are known locally as the 12 Apostles). The house, which is a listed building, is early 18th century with mullioned windows, a later doorway with Tuscan columns and a pediment, and a mansard roof behind a parapet.³ It is associated with various farm buildings, the most impressive being a fine, recently re-roofed barn, the upper floor of which houses the village museum. There is also an elegant pigeon loft which is preserved but no longer functional.

The majority of the houses on the south side of the Bradford Road from Manor Farm to the Clock Tower are between 100 and 200 years old. They present a wide variety of shapes and sizes, the general impression being of picturesque maturity which is a characteristic feature of this part of Atworth. At the extreme east end of the road another short branch, Coronation Road, leads southwards. On its east side is a fine listed 18th century house (65 Bradford Road) formerly known as Fairview. It has recently been much reconditioned and re-named The Old Farm House. Almost adjoining it to the east and next to the Clock Tower, is the Atworth Independent Church, formerly a Congregational chapel of about 1790. This is fairly typical of its kind having pointed windows and a rather austere stone exterior. The roof is peculiar in being hipped; it is sloping at the two ends instead of being vertical.

Turning left out of the Bradford Road into the Bath

Road we pass a house on the corner (number 118) which was formerly the site of the turnpike which was discontinued about 1900. Proceeding westwards down the hill we come to the Bear Garage which was once a smithy (the forge is still to be seen in the workshop at the rear of the building). Almost in front of the garage where the depression in the road reaches its lowest point is the site of the ford after which the village acquired one of its many alternative names - Atford. This version finally vanished from use in favour of Atworth about 1890. The derivation of the modern name is almost certainly from two Saxon words, Aetta - the name of an individual who farmed the area in the 13th century or earlier, and worth - a locality or homestead.

Eastwards along the Bath Road, there is further evidence of the antiquity of the village but the number of older houses becomes progressively less. The agricultural complex at West Farm on the north side contains several interesting buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries. Further east, Prospect Farm (43 Bath Road and the site of a former bakery), also dates from the 18th century. Further along on the north side Gordano Farm House, formerly East Farm, is another listed building, while the nearby White Hart is a good example of an 18th century inn with its three widely spaced bays and mansard roof. Almost opposite the present Post Office is an unusual early 18th century house which was formerly the New Inn but is now a private residence. Moving further eastwards along the Bath Road we come to the northward turning to Purlpit. Near the beginning of the road there are some interesting buildings 100-200 years old such as the Ebenezer Chapel (now converted into a private house)

and number 180 Purlpit Road. Carrying the road over a small stream (Castle Brook) is a fine pack horse bridge probably dating from the late 18th century.

To the traveller along the Bath Road through "Greater Atworth" from west to east, the predominant impression is of development since the last war, some of it as late as 1980. Thus to the north we have the enclave of bungalows forming Mead Park (36 houses) with its entrance not far from the White Hart. Further east are the new buildings of Purlpit and the estate comprising Mount Pleasant (30 houses). On the south of the main road almost opposite West Farm, is the entrance to the bungalows of Chapel Rise (11 houses) while to the south again is the recently added (1980) Hayes Close (5 houses). A further enclave of modern bungalows is to be found at the end of Post Office Lane (6 houses). But the largest complex of modern buildings in the village is that of our only major industry Dowty Fuel Systems Ltd. which provides an important source of employment. Further east still is a string of modern houses bordering the road and finally the estate comprising Fleetwood Rise and Shell Court (36 houses).

The general picture of Atworth today is thus of contrasting stability and development. The middle of the village located in the Bradford Road retains much of its mediaeval simplicity and charm. Moreover, many of the essential ingredients of village life are still there - the church, the public house, the shop, the school, the village green and market place. Although circumstances have vastly changed, these remain as important to the village as they were. Along the Bath Road, too, much of the time-honoured structure of Atworth is still visible,

particularly towards the west. But as development has pressed eastwards, fresh complexes of modern buildings have sprung up. Some of their inhabitants have identified themselves with village life and play an important part in it. Regrettably, there are many who have not and who merely use the village as a base for commuting. One of the strengths of Atworth as a community is that it has so far managed to retain much of its coherence as a village and has not suffered the fate, so common elsewhere, of becoming merely a disparate conglomeration of commuters.

The Parish of Atworth

For the purpose of study, we decided that the history of Atworth should include not only the village but the parish of which it forms part. Some idea of the relationship between the two can be gained from the distribution of population (a topic discussed in some detail later). Thus of a parish population of around 1100, some 850 (77 per cent) live in the village.

The boundaries of the parish are not easy to describe precisely and are best explained by reference to predominant landmarks. The northern boundary is provided by the old Roman road whose outline is still discernible, running east-west through the Neston estate roughly half a mile north of the centre of Atworth. Its westerly extremity is where the Roman road meets the B3109 to Bradford-on-Avon. Here it turns south following the line of a small brook (Lynch Bottom) to the west of Hobb's Bottom Farm. This eventually joins another stream which runs from west to east passing under the road a few hundred yards south of the former Poor House (now a private dwelling). Here the boundary turns east and

follows the course of the stream south of Little Chalfield and Great Chalfield to a point about half a mile short of Broughton Gifford. It then turns north, skirting Broughton Common, crossing the Bath Road (A365) near Pye Corner and continuing northwards past Mount Pleasant and to the east of Purlpit Bridge until it meets the Roman road not far from Brittle Wood.

Within the parish area and excluding the village itself, there are five other farms, Hobb's Bottom to the north-west, Lenton, Newhouse and Studley to the east, and Denleys Farm bordering the Neston Road in the north. Ganbrook Farm situated about the middle of the area is now a private house. Finally, bordering the southern boundary are two large houses and their associated out-buildings, Little Chalfield and Great Chalfield. The latter is of particular interest and has already been described in our previous publication.² Suffice to add that since it possesses its own chapel within the grounds of the manor which serves the small local community, it constitutes a parish in its own right (a sub-parish of Atworth). The house and its surrounding lands cover some 701 acres, the history of a building on the site dating back to the Charter of Aethelred 11 in 1001.⁴ Great Chalfield Manor as we know it today owes its existence to Thomas Tropenell who completed it and the chapel in 1480. It provides a superb example of 15th century architecture and became the property of the National Trust in 1943.²

The Village in the Past

There is little doubt that if anyone living in Atworth today had been able to visit the village a hundred years ago, he would have found much of its layout familiar. The Clock Tower would not have been there and the east

end of the village along the Bath Road would have been largely open country. The early maps show the sites of several small roads and buildings which have since disappeared. Thus at one time a fairly substantial route connected Cottles and Green Street Farms with the Bradford Road, running through the fields to the north of the buildings in Church Street and emerging in what is now the farmyard of Poplar Farm. No signs of this road remain so that its exact course is unknown. Among former buildings, one quoted on several occasions in the records is Moxam's Farm. This may well have been a substantial house but precisely where it was situated has never been established with certainty as no trace of it exists today.

But apart from the buildings, the most striking difference between today and a hundred years ago is the range of services existing within the village now and then, also the provisions for communication both within the community and with the outside world. It is with these that we shall now be concerned.

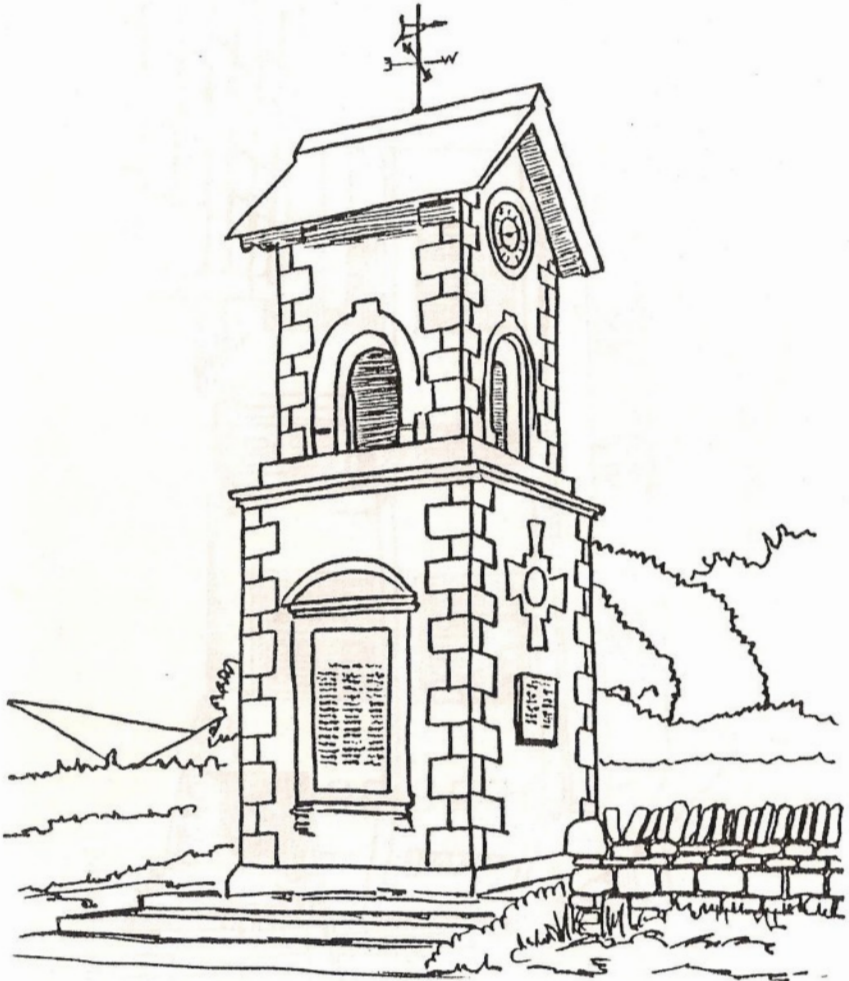
Roads and Streets

Anyone living in Atworth during the early years of this century or before will remember the Bath road during the dry periods of summer as a dusty place. Instead of their familiar greenness, the hedgerows will have exhibited a depressing shade of grey. The road surfaces will have been composed of broken stone, mostly obtained locally from such quarries as Hobb's Bottom, the barn ground at Manor Farm, Applecroft Farm and in the vicinity of Neston House. As this was crushed and pulverised by passing vehicles potholes developed in areas of weakness. Once begun, further degeneration proceeded

rapidly and during wet weather, large puddles of water and areas of liquid mud were commonplace. Writing during the early years of the 19th century Jane Austen made several references to the hazards of the Bath Road and the discomforts of riding along it by coach due to the vagaries of its construction. At the same time we must remember that even as late as the end of the second world war, the volume of traffic was only a fraction of what it is today, so the need to improve the roads was not particularly pressing. Precisely when the surface of the Bath Road was tarred is unknown but this will have been somewhere during the early 1920s. Presumably, similar treatment of the Bradford and other minor roads will have been carried out somewhat later.

Transport

Until the early years of this century the village was to a considerable extent an economically self-supporting community, as is evidenced by the diversity of trades and occupations represented. Visits to the neighbouring towns of Melksham and Bath must therefore have been infrequent, and when they occurred they were no doubt regarded as events of some consequence. The requirements for transport were essentially local and these could be met largely by horse-drawn carts and traps. We must remember, too, that people were prepared to walk much further in those days than we do today. Thus it was not at all uncommon for a child to walk a mile to school in the morning, return home for lunch and go back again in the afternoon. In later years, another well-known trek for those wishing to visit Bath was from the top of Kingsdown Hill where public transport ended, to the Crown



CLOCK TOWER



14-

POPLAR FARM HOUSE

Inn below Bathford which was the terminus of the tramways. The return journey up the hill, laden with shopping, must have demanded considerable stamina on the part of the housewives concerned. By the 1920s, the village possessed its own taxi and car hire services, while public transport had much improved. The bicycle, too, was an important means of local movement. The wheels of the early coaches and carts were fitted with solid tyres, and besides giving a bumpy ride, they added greatly to the wear and destruction of such road surfaces as existed. By the time tarmac arrived, pneumatic tyres were universal and both the comfort and efficiency of motor transport had been transformed. Since the end of the second world war the volume of motor traffic passing through Atworth has steadily increased, particularly along the Bath Road. Besides private cars, great juggernauts now thunder through the village, and in spite of a 40 m.p.h. speed limit, the survival of the pedestrians walking along the narrow paths bordering the roadway becomes daily more precarious.

Services

Water.

Throughout history, one of the main attractions of the Atworth area for human habitation has undoubtedly been the ready supply of water available only a short distance below ground level. The geological background to this situation has been described in our previous publication.² Before the advent of piped water in the late 1930s, the village supply consisted of some 76 private wells and six public water pumps in the Market Place, the Bradford Road (Pump Row), the Bath Road (opposite the Post Office), next to the White Hart Inn, in Purlpit and Titchen Yard. The

introduction of piped water pumped untreated direct from the ground dates from about the middle of the last century. At first the installations were only localised; for instance, a windmill and mechanical pump situated at Hobb's Bottom Farm pumped water into a reservoir above Green Street. Again, a windmill and engine located in a field to the south of Church Farm supplied a reservoir behind Rookery Nursery. The first scheme for a public water supply by way of Whitley dates from 1940 when it was proposed to install piping to provide the village with 1000 gallons of water daily. A pumping station was to be set up at Purlpit bridge feeding a tank of 3000 gallons capacity. However, this scheme never materialised and fell into abeyance until after the war. The first regular water installation reached the village as an extension of the Neston Park private supply. The system as we know it today was planned by the Bradford and Melksham District Council about 1935 and completed soon after the war. In 1962, responsibility for the public water supply was taken over by the North Wiltshire Water Board and this in turn handed over to the Wessex Water Authority in 1974.⁵

Gas

The early history of the use of gas in the Atworth area is somewhat uncertain. Unconfirmed records suggest that it may have been brought to Purlpit from Melksham as early as 1905. There was certainly some lighting in the streets of the village in 1924⁶, the gas being supplied by the Melksham Gas Company. In 1937, the Bath Gas Company, in competition with electricity, were awarded a contract to supply street lighting in Atworth, and it is significant that the gas main was laid from

Bath (possibly via Box) and not from Melksham.⁷ Evidently, the village continued to be lit by gas until 1949⁸, when it was replaced by electricity. However, it is worth noting that a few houses such as 71 Bradford Road, are still lit by gas today.

Electricity

Electricity reached the village in December 1933, the authority concerned being the West Wiltshire Electricity Company Limited.⁹ At the annual Parish Assembly in July 1949 a proposal was made to accept the scheme put forward by the Southern Electricity Board (which had meanwhile taken over from the West Wiltshire Electricity Company) to install 24 street lights with 80 watt mercury vapour lamps at a total cost of £533-12-6, the cost of operation per lamp being estimated at 17 shillings (85p) per season. This is the arrangement that exists today. Little is known about the date when electricity was installed in private houses, but fitting continued gradually from 1933 onwards, stopped during the war and was completed in most houses soon afterwards.

Sewerage

The traditional way of disposing of household waste (other than solid refuse) was by means of cesspools or septic tanks. Each was associated either with a single house or a group of dwellings close together. In some of the more outlying parts of the village such as Church Street this arrangement still persists today. Main sewer pipes were laid through Atworth in 1955-59, house connections being made during the following two years. For most of the time since then the village has had its own sewage disposal beds and pumping station

situated on the south side of the Purlpit Road, a short distance beyond Purlpit Bridge. Although adequate to meet the needs of a population of about 850, the sewers were working at full capacity and it was intended that the Atworth sewage system would eventually be connected to the Melksham Town Sewage Treatment Works. This was achieved in 1980.

A major factor limiting the construction of more houses in the village at present is the capacity of the sewers themselves and an addition of 50 extra dwellings is regarded as the maximum if overloading of the system is to be avoided. Should further development ever be envisaged, the sewage pipes throughout the village would need to be enlarged and re-laid at considerable cost. Since there is apparently ample capacity for sewage transport and treatment elsewhere in the area, it is unlikely that new industries and the housing required for them will be introduced into Atworth in the foreseeable future.

Communication

A good deal has already been said about the development of the road system in and around Atworth from the 1920s onwards. Since then the progressive increase in the efficiency and availability of transport has played a considerable part in improving communication, not so much within the village as beyond it. Postal services, too, have played a large part in furthering communication with the outside. The first Post Office in Atworth was at 67 Coronation Road about 1880. In 1900 this moved to 135 High Pavement (The Maltings) while today it is at 47 Bath Road.

A major influence on communication both within the

village and with the outside was the arrival of the telephone. The first record of an installation in Atworth was in 1884. Since the earliest days our local exchange has always been at Melksham. The first exchange was installed there in 1898 by the National Telephone Company. This was taken over by the Post Office in 1912 and a 141-line exchange established in Leicester House, High Street, Melksham in 1931. The first automatic exchange with 400 lines was opened in 1951.¹¹

In the early days, using a domestic telephone must have been a frustrating experience. Since the lines available to the main exchange at Melksham were so few, it was frequently necessary to group subscribers together on a common number each being provided with a party line. Thus an entry in the telephone directory of Smith, J. Atworth 3 x 6 indicated that the number of Smith, J. was Atworth 3 and that he was on party line number 6. All numbers were obtained via an operator and when making a call it was necessary to give both pieces of information. To call Atworth 3 x 6 the operator plugged in to Atworth 3 and then rang the bell six times! For the subscribers such a procedure must have been tantalising, since on every occasion when the telephone bell rang it was necessary to count the number of rings before answering. Moreover, while a conversation was in progress, all the other parties on that number were able to listen. The opportunity thus provided for the less scrupulous to contribute to the fund of village scandal must have been almost unlimited! There has long been a telephone call box opposite the building in the Bath Road that used to be the New Inn, but exactly when it was erected is not known.

From around the 1920s onwards, radio has become an increasingly important element in everyday life extending communication ever more widely over the earth's surface. The development of the transistor and later microcircuitry have reduced the size of receivers from the monsters of the pre-war period with their large H.T. batteries and rechargeable accumulators, down to items of pocket size. Their existence is now so universal that they no longer need a licence. Television, also a product of the post-war era, is now taken for granted, and most houses in the village possess a set. Besides providing opportunities for education and entertainment never even dreamed of a few years ago, its programmes also provide a fertile topic for village conversation.

The Roman Villa

No account of the Parish of Atworth in the past would be complete without some reference to our most important antiquity, the Roman Villa. The site is at the edge of a field lying south of Cottles Wood about half a mile to the north west of the village (MR 856664) and is now no longer visible from the ground. The following brief account is based on that of Mellor and Goodchild (1940-42).¹² Later research on the villa has been carried out by Erskine between 1970 and 1975.^{13,14,15.}

For many years it has been known that the Romans inhabited the area of Atworth. As long ago as 1902, coins found locally proved to belong to the period A.D.270-390. In 1936, a coin picked up in a field near Poplar Farm was identified as Roman, belonging to the period of Constantine I, i.e. the early 4th century A.D. Subsequent investigation of the field in question led to the discovery of buried masonry, some of it no more than

six inches below the ploughed surface. Preliminary digging soon revealed the existence of an extensive building covering a far greater area than had originally been suspected. Subsequent excavation showed this to be a Roman villa. It seems likely that the stone used in its construction was quarried on the spot or nearby. It consisted of compact limestone, used chiefly for flagstones, thicker Forest Marble which provided the principal material for the walls, and softer freestone from the Bath Goolite used in the foundations and elsewhere. All these materials are to be found in the older houses of Atworth today and it could well be that some of them represent the recycled remains of earlier Roman building.

The Atworth villa proved to be an L-shaped building, the main dwelling house lying across the slope of the field and facing south. From its east end a long wing ran 120 feet southward down the slope, terminating in a suite of baths. To the south there may have been a yard enclosed by more buildings, but this is not certain. Unfortunately, the ravages of time had caused much destruction so that evidence of the original floors and terraces was obscured. In addition to natural deterioration, there was evidence of deliberate destruction, this apparent "robbing" being particularly prevalent at the east end of the dwelling and the bath area, where walls had been purposefully removed and their foundation trenches filled with small stones.

The fortunes of the villa seem to have passed through four distinct phases. Early in its existence the dwelling house and east wing were separate buildings. Evidently, a lack of a covered way between the two proved inconvenient

for we next find a corridor being constructed thus protecting bathers wishing to pass from the main building to the bath house. Interestingly, the stoker responsible for the furnace heating the water was not provided with cover from the corridor as his furnace-house lay beyond it. The third phase saw the climax of the villa's prosperity when some reconstruction of the roof and walls was carried out and further baths added. Many of the passages were also re-paved with stone slabs. The main dwelling house enjoyed an efficient system of central heating as is evidenced by the discovery of an elaborate hypocaust - a hollow space under the floors for heating the house and baths from a furnace. This is of particular interest in that it combined two different methods of heating widely used by the Romans but seldom found together in a single building. One consisted of a series of pillars on which the floors were supported leaving a gap underneath for the circulation of hot air, the other a system of piers forming channels for heating ducts. The first of these can be seen today well illustrated in the heated rooms adjoining the Roman baths at Bath.

The last stage of the villa's existence shows a gradual decline including some evidence of burning. Reference was made earlier to the "robbing" of masonry and this seems to have continued to an increasing extent, culminating in radical changes such as the destruction of the bath area. The final stages of the villa thus appear to have been accompanied by considerable squalor and economic decline.

The dating of these various events must remain largely guesswork based on the limited number of finds,

such as the coins and jewellery of the period. It looks as if the villa may have been constructed late in the 2nd century (perhaps around 190 A.D.) and achieved its climax about a hundred and fifty years later. By the early 400s it was already in decline. We know that the Roman occupation of Britain ended in 407 A.D. but this does not imply that all the Romans resident in the country promptly left. The subsequent decline in culture and living standards which we know occurred must have proceeded gradually. The rather sad picture presented by the last days of the villa at Atworth would seem to illustrate with grim reality the kind of degeneration in the economic and social fabric of society which was taking place throughout Britain at that time.

The People Today

In 1978, the History Group aided by children of Atworth School, conducted a parish survey by means of a questionnaire for the purpose of obtaining such information as the age-structure of the population, the degree of stability of the community and the range of trades and occupations represented in the village. Questionnaires were completed by 705 out of an estimated total population of 1100 (60%). The age-distribution was found to be - under 11 years, 30%; 11-16 years 7%; over 16 years 80%. This picture of an ageing population serves to support the argument put forward on other grounds (for instance, the declining numbers of pupils in the school) that there is an urgent need for young families to be attracted to the village. Evidence of age-distribution correlates closely with that on length of residence. Thus 15% of those living in Atworth today were born there; 6% have lived in the village less than one year; 43% less than

10 years; and 51% more than 10 years. There is thus much evidence to support the claim made earlier that the Atworth community is a mature one and has not been subject to the radical population changes that have occurred in many other villages as a result of commuter inroads and domination. Of those over 16 who had left school, 7% were still receiving full-time education. Of the remainder, 69% were employed, 11% unemployed and 20% retired. Among the working population, no less than 35% were employed within the parish area, the remaining 65% commuting mainly to Bath, Corsham and Melksham.

In broad categories, the distribution of trades and employment was: factories 15%; distribution (shops etc.) 6%; offices 16%; agriculture 8%; building 4%; professional 36%. A more detailed analysis of the range of employment reveals that among the 41 occupations quoted few are directly related to the life of the village. Exceptions are grooms, cooks, teachers, domestic helps, licensee, gardeners and agricultural workers, and the vicar. This is in marked contrast to the situation that prevailed 100 years ago.

The People in the Past

Reliable figures for the population of the parish of Atworth are available as far back as 1811,¹⁶ and are as follows:

1811	549	1891	767
1821	642	1901	768
1831	705	1911	785
1841	824	1921	795
1851	625	1931	750
1861	660	1951	719
1871	964	1975	1100 +
1881	1018 *		

* Included South Wraxall. + The figure used for planning by the Wiltshire County Council.

Two points of particular interest emerge from these figures:

(i) during the 60 years from 1891-1951 the population fluctuated far less than during the similar period 1811-1871. This suggests that the community became stabilised during the latter part of the last century and remained so until the various post-war building projects at the east end of the village resulted in the inevitable increase in numbers.

(ii) the population of the parish in 1841 was about a hundred less than it was 100 years later - in spite of the considerable amount of new houses built during this period. Among the factors which contributed to this situation, two of the most significant may well have been the reduction in the size of families which occurred nationally and a lessening of the need for different families to share accommodation. Thus the building that took place in later Victorian and Edwardian times may well have had the effect not so much of attracting new settlers, as of redistributing the residents already present.

As was emphasised earlier, one of the most striking changes in the village over the last hundred years and more has been a gradual reduction in the extent of its self-sufficiency. The magnitude of the changing situation is highlighted in the next section on shops and trades. It is closely correlated with the range of occupations represented in the village as is clearly shown in the



1851 Census, which provides a revealing comparison with the situation existing today. Incidentally, it is worth noting that whereas in 1978, of a population of 1100 only 15% were born in the village, in 1851 out of a total community of 625, no less than 91% had lived there all their lives. Almost all the occupations represented were directly related to the activities of the village and included schoolmaster, curate, police officer, farmers (13), agricultural labourers (109), publicans, stone miners (12), maltsters, hauliers, bakers, dressmaker, shoemaker, servants (23), grocers, carpenters, thatchers, toll gate keeper, blacksmiths, laundresses, game keeper and bailiff. When compared with the findings of our 1978 survey quoted above, there could hardly be more striking evidence of the profound changes that have taken place in village life during the last 130 years.

Shops and Trades Today

Today, Atworth boasts a curious assemblage of businesses, trades and enterprises, most of them largely unrelated to the maintenance of the village except in so far as they provide opportunities for employment. In the Bradford Road we have one public house (the Foresters Arms) in the Market Place, the Atworth Stores, the Deep Freeze Refrigeration Company, and a small engineering firm, Richmond Precision Services, in Coronation Road. In the Bath road, moving from west to east are the Bear Garage, Jordan Radio and Television, Hilary's Hairdressing Salon, Post Office Stores, New Hall Antiques, second-hand furniture store, a second public house (the White Hart) and Douty Fuel Systems Ltd. There are two nurseries at opposite ends of the village, the Rookery nursery at Cottles and the Bath Road nursery. A Farm and Garden shop selling fruit, vegetables, groceries and garden necessities is located at 154 Bath Road. In addition, we also

possess a small number of self-employed craftsmen such as plumbers, carpenters, painters and builders. However, the majority of the activities outlined above relate to a clientele far wider than the limited environs of the village.

Shops and Trades in the Past

In contrast with today, the shops and trades of a hundred years ago were closely related to the requirements of village life and their trade barely extended outside the parish boundaries. Most were one or two-man establishments and they were distributed in a haphazard manner throughout Atworth. Many are unrecorded in official documents such as censuses and in order to obtain anything approaching a complete picture it has been necessary to rely largely on human memory. For this reason the following account refers mainly to the situation as it was at the turn of the century or soon afterwards. At this time almost the whole village formed part of the Neston Estate (Mr. G.P. Fuller) which employed a large staff of more than 100 craftsmen and others. The various quarries in the area such as those in the vicinity of Corsham and Neston were still in active production and therefore a source of local employment. Masons, tilers, decorators, and carpenters were in demand, and since transport depended largely upon horses, grooms and blacksmiths (farriers) were also needed. In November 1949, many of the houses in Atworth previously owned by the Neston Estate were sold, a number of them being bought by their existing tenants. At this time the village was still largely self-supporting.

For a brief survey of the shops and trades in the early part of the century, it is convenient to begin at the east

end of the village (Pye Corner) and work westwards. From about 1900 to 1920 a milkman, Mr. William Angell, lived at 2 Pye Corner, deliveries in the early days being from cans slung over the handle bars of his bicycle. Later he used a horse and trap. His round was probably quite small for much of the milk needed by the village was provided direct from the farms that produced it, being transported by the labourers who worked on the farms. Today, with a centralised scheme for collection, pasteurisation, bottling and distribution, hardly any of the milk produced locally is consumed by residents of the village.

At the beginning of the lane which now leads to the goods yard of Dowty Fuel Systems Ltd. (17 Bath Road), there was a small butcher's shop about 1915, the proprietor being Mr. Fred Watts. He also owned the surrounding land and some buildings where he raised the cattle and pigs required for his business. The shop was finally closed about 1930, the land sold and bungalows erected on it.

By far the biggest source of labour in Atworth today is Dowty Fuel Systems Ltd. which was established in 1922.¹⁷ The previous history of the firm is interesting and extends to before the first world war when it was located in Chewton Mendip under the name of the Mendip Motor and Engineering Works, the foreman being Mr. George Thatcher. He was later joined by his brother Mr. Arthur Thatcher and together they designed and planned the Mendip car. After the war, the Thatcher brothers in conjunction with their father Mr. W. Thatcher produced the car in some numbers (each being assembled individually) and 500 were eventually sold at £355 each. The firm then moved to larger premises at Southmead, Bristol, but on the death of the owner, Mr. W.H.B. Hope, the Thatcher brothers came

to Atworth and started up in a metal shed on the present site in 1922. By now, the production of the Mendip car had been discontinued. The family lived in a house on the main road which was later pulled down to make way for the modern office block. The company was now called the New Mendip Engineering Company (known locally as "the Mendip") and soon achieved distinction as producers of high class engineering materials. At the beginning of the second world war the company expanded rapidly adding new workshops and the administration block. It played an important part in providing components for the aircraft industry. By now the total workforce had reached 600 - 200 men and 400 women. The business was sold to the Dowty Group in 1951 and later changed its name once more to Dowty Fuel Systems Limited. As the name implies, its products are now of a more specialised kind but the firm still retains its close association with the aero-industry. The reputation of the company for the quality of its engineering has grown steadily over the years until it is now world-wide.

To the west of the Dowty buildings (23 Bath Road) is a bungalow built in 1920 by Mr. Albert Andrews who was a builder and decorator. Another small building business nearby was that of Mr. Harry Hayward who, with a few others, built bungalows in the area in 1932. The business (32 Bath Road) is carried on today by his son, Mr. Reg Hayward. A well known village bakery was that of Mr. Eli Watts at Prospect Farm (43 Bath Road) which was established before 1900. Bread and cakes were delivered at first by horse and cart, later by motor van. He was assisted in his business by his sons Herbert and George Watts. About 1925, Mr. Herbert Watts ran a milk collecting round for the local farms, and also owned one of the first taxis in

Atworth. In his spare time he did signwriting and poster work.

Mr. George Watts and his relation Mr. Len Jordan started a small electrical and wireless shop in about 1930 in a wooden building on a piece of ground which is now part of the car park of the Judo Club. This proved very successful and moved in 1934 to 54 Bath Road to become the business of L.S. Jordan, Radio and Television.

The present Post Office site (47 Bath Road) was formerly occupied from 1897 to 1918 by a baker and grocer, Mr. F.W. Greenman. The business subsequently changed hands many times finally becoming a post office and store in about 1935. Nearby, in about 1910, Mr. Tom Sleightholme ran a cobbler and shoemaker's business at the bottom of the Institute yard, 54 Bath Road (now the site of Hilary's Salon). He also organised coach trips and outings from the early days of wagonettes to the later charabancs. Memories recall that while some of his excursions succeeded in reaching their destinations, others were less successful.

An old established business dating from 1880 or earlier, once stood on the site of the Village Institute which was erected in 1914. This was the firm of Mr. F. Titt, carpenter, wheelwright and wagonmaker. In its prime this must have been quite a large business and it was here that the existing pews in Atworth church were made. The large house now known as The Old Farm House (65 Bradford Road) and the glasshouses near the Clock Tower were formerly a smallholding owned by Mr. Butler and in the early years of this century were brought by Mr. H. Bird and developed into a nursery

which it is at present. Adjacent is a small engineering firm Richmond Precision Services (Mr. Hand) founded about 1970.

On the west side of Coronation Road (number 66) was the former firm of Mr. Lewin Sealy and Son who specialised in stone tiling, house building and repairs. They built the original workshop of the New Mendip Engineering Company on the site now occupied by the modern office block. Mr. Sealy delivered the famous "Queen of the West" brand of flour made by his relative in Bath to the surrounding village stores by horse and trap.

The store next to the school (84 Bradford Road) was founded by the Andrews family at the beginning of the century and has always been noted for its wide range of merchandise covering almost every human need. Its location has established it as the obvious focal point for children requiring purchases of sweets. The shop was taken over by its present owners (Newman and Carpenter) in 1968 and today serves the triple functions of an indispensable village asset, a tuckshop for Stonar School and a social centre.

Further down the Bradford Road, the Foresters Arms was occupied by Mr. Castleton from 1911 to 1914 and thereafter by Mr. and Mrs. Wills, and Mrs. Hill, until 1939. Mr. Wills was also a tailor and specialised in livery, particularly uniforms for chauffeurs and coachmen. The present proprietor, Mr. G. Pearce, took over in 1961.

An enterprising development in 1916-21 was the Atworth Cooperative Society, based in houses lying to the north of the Bradford Road at its west end in the enclave known as 106 The Hulberts. The business aimed to cater

for the requirements of the farmers in the district such as animal foodstuffs, seeds and fertilisers. As the enterprise expanded it outgrew its accommodation in Atworth and moved to Melksham in 1921 when it became the forerunner of the present West of England Farmers Limited.

Opposite the school, 110 Bradford Road (The Old Forge) was formerly the Three Horseshoes Inn in about 1650. Around 1700, for reasons unknown, it was renamed the Hare and Hounds. Early this century it became the business of J. Hampton and Sons, wheelwrights, blacksmiths and makers of wagons and carts, also tools for farming. At its height about 1906 it was quite a large establishment (known locally as Hampton's Forge) and must have employed at least four or five craftsmen. Today, the house is a private dwelling. At about the same time another business was started on the site of a former inn. In 1908 the building of the old Lion Inn was divided into two private houses and in one of them (120 Lion Place) Mr. Houkes started a harness making business. Later the shop sold sweets and ice creams, and became the village newsagent. On the retirement of his father, the business passed to his son, Mr. L. Houkes, who later sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Barnett who carried on until they eventually left the village. Today the shop is a private house. It is worth noting that remnants of the former inn still survive in the form of the mounting block and its associated ornamental ironwork.

Returning to 1908, the other half of the former Lion Inn was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. E.W. Greenland. Mr. Greenland who had formerly been employed as a craftsman by Mr. Hampton at 110 Bradford Road, now set up his own blacksmith's shop on the site of the present

Bear Garage where the former forge still remains. It may well be questioned how a village the size of Atworth could have supported more than one blacksmith. The answer is that before the era of mechanisation and mass production the jobs undertaken by a smithy extended far outside just the shoeing of horses. Thus a smith worked closely with a carpenter in constructing the ironwork needed for wheels and the supports of carts and carriages. The repairing of implements used in farming and quarrying was another major undertaking as was the making of tools such as bill hooks, hay forks and equipment such as rakes for gardening. In those days, the iron hoop was a favourite children's toy and when necessary, these were repaired at a penny a time! The shoeing of horses required great numbers of nails and these were invariably home-made as were many of the nuts and bolts used in the construction of carts.

With the advent of mechanised transport the village blacksmith became the local motor mechanic and garage engineer. Sales of petrol and oil gradually increased and there was a need for a forecourt with pumps. By now the blacksmith had become a garage proprietor. Thus E.W. Greenland, Blacksmith in 1908 became E.W. Greenland and Son, Agricultural and Motor Engineers, Mr. W.E. Greenland joining his father in 1930. In 1972 the business was sold to its present owners and became the Bear Garage.

At the east end of Coronation Road (adjoining number 68) was an Undertaker's business run by Mr. Fred Sheppard (an employee at Hampton's Forge) which lasted until 1957.

Eastwards along the Bath Road on the north side was the former Post Office (number 133). This was occupied in about 1910 by Mr. and Mrs. Lewington. Mr. Lewington

kept a smallholding in the buildings behind while Mrs. Lewington ran the Post Office. After its closure in about 1940 the premises became a butcher's shop, the proprietor being Mr. F. Ash, who also ran a fish and chip business at the same address. This eventually closed and became Hayward and Sheppard's Hardware Stores. On its closure in 1977 the house was converted to a private dwelling. Numbers 134, 135, 136 and 137 Bath Road were originally a single long building which housed part of the Atworth Cooperative Society with vehicle access at the rear. This venture was concerned with processing the milk from the local farms into cheese and butter, the surplus whey being run off into a large underground storage tank. This was then sold back to the farmers as a food for pigs. The business was unfortunately short lived and closed in about 1920 when the single building was converted by the Neston Park Estate into farm cottages.

Opposite the present Post Office was formerly another of Atworth's old inns, the New Inn. About 1914 the proprietor was Mr. John Buckland, a big burly man who also rented out a pony trap. The business was later taken over by Mr. & Mrs. Barker and on its closure as an inn it became the New Inn Dairy, Mr. Barker doing a daily milk round. The shop also sold groceries and other provisions but was later converted into a private house. Another grocery store was located at 154 Bath Road, the shop being owned by Mr. J. Brooks, some of whose ornate handbills are on show in the village museum. Later, the business was taken over by Mr. & Mrs. Bath who eventually closed it on the retirement of Mrs. Bath in 1978. The premises is now a private house.

East Farm next to the White Hart Inn was once a

smallholding and also a coal merchants run by Mr. A. Adams and his sister. It ceased trading in about 1930 and is now a private dwelling. Another coal merchant was Mr. T. Clark at 148 Bath Road, the house now occupied by Mr. & Mrs. T. Keyford. At 195 Bath Road was a greengrocers and smallholding business run by Mr. Reg Brooks, a well known character in Atworth who used to deliver his goods by horse and cart. Later he changed to a Ford truck which he fitted with benches for use at weekends when driving cricket and football teams about.

As was emphasised earlier, this account of the economic and social conditions in Atworth roughly 100 years ago makes no claim to completeness being based entirely on human memories. Besides the businesses mentioned, there existed a multiplicity of other smallholdings and tenant farmers, also part-time traders often pedalling a diversity of wares to meet the particular needs of the local community. But as economic conditions changed, these little enterprises no longer remained viable, and as their tenants died or moved away so they ceased to exist. From the picture that emerges one thing is clear; economic and social life in Atworth a hundred years ago was far more diverse and colourful than it is today. Then, the village was a largely self-supporting community; now it is almost wholly dependent for its survival on facilities provided by the outside world.

Village Institutions

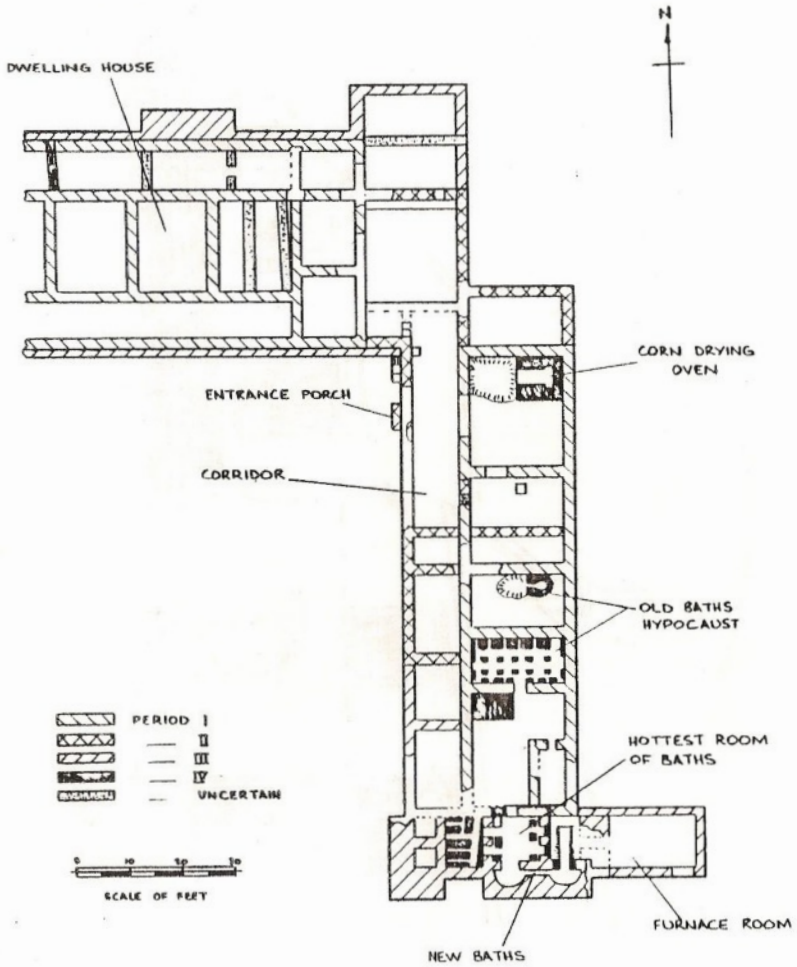
Reference was made earlier to the findings of the Atworth Parish Survey carried out by the History Group in 1978. These showed that by far the most frequented

institutions in the village were the two churches (used by about 32% of the population). It should perhaps be added that precisely what was meant by "used" was never clearly defined.

Our previous account² includes a brief history of the church of St. Michael and All Angels which assumed its present form in 1832. However, we know that a chapel must have existed on the site from Saxon times since King Aethelred II granted permission to the Abbess of Shaftesbury to build a church at Atworth in 1001 which was duly completed in 1070 and mentioned in Domesday Book in 1086. Of more recent origin is the Congregational Chapel, now known as the Atworth Independent Church which dates from about 1790.

A third church was built in 1860, Ebenezer Chapel, and is situated at the west corner of the turning from the Bath Road to Purlpit. It later became a Baptist Chapel and was attached to the Priory Street church at Corsham. The congregation gradually dwindled until it was no longer possible to continue and it closed in 1979. The building consisted of a main chapel with school room attached. Under the floor of the chapel was a large tank which was filled with water when required for baptisms, from Alpha Cottage next door. Weddings and burials were performed in the chapel in Bradford Road. The 19th century building has now been converted into a private house.

The history of Atworth School, another important component of village life, has been covered previously². Suffice it to add here that, in common with the rest of our educational system, the school now faces two major problems which threaten its survival. The first of these is a drastic reduction in resources, the second and



PLAN of the ROMAN VILLA

(After Shaw-Mellor and Goodchild)



40

SCHOOL HOUSE AND SCHOOL

more serious, results from a decline in the national birth rate which has reduced the number of pupils to 59 at the time of writing, of which about two-thirds come from the village. Faced with a similar predicament, many small primary schools elsewhere have already suffered closure or amalgamation. At the moment, the future of our school seems uncertain and we can only hope that it will survive and continue to play its traditionally important role in the life of the community.

The public houses of the village are another aspect of social and economic life which has already received attention². The fact that they have declined in number from 11 in the mid-19th century to only 2 today, illustrates further the theme of the previous section, that the last 100 years have seen a drastic decline in the pattern and diversity of social and economic life in Atworth.

An important village institution deserving special mention is the Atworth Institute. This occupies a site almost adjacent to 54 Bath Road (L.S. Jordan), formerly the location of a carpenter and wheelwright's yard established by Mr. F. Titt. The building (constructed largely of materials from the Neston Estate) and its contents were presented to the village as a gift by Mr. G.P. Fuller. The new Institute (described by the *Wiltshire Times* as a model of its kind) was officially opened by Mrs. Fuller on the 13th April, 1914.¹⁸

In its original form, the main building was divided internally by folding doors into three, a reading room, a games room and a room for juniors. The three rooms could be thrown together into one big hall when required for large gatherings such as dances. At the rear were men's and women's toilets, also three slipper baths with a good

Supply of hot water. The Institute thus served a triple function of providing facilities for meetings, recreation and ablution. Lest the last of these be thought incongruous, it must be remembered that at that time many houses in the village were without bathrooms, so the slipper baths fulfilled an important personal need and remained in demand until they were eventually removed when the boiler burst in 1963.

The method of administering the Institute is of some interest since it is held in trust by the Atworth Parish Council and is administered by a group of residents who form a Committee. The Committee is responsible for the upkeep and heating of the premises, the maintenance of its contents and the regulation of the activities taking place within it. Throughout the 66 years of its existence it has undergone numerous vicissitudes and changes, but it still fulfils the most important of its original functions in providing a focal point for the majority of the indoor occasions that take place in the village.

Sport and Entertainment

In the days of self-sufficiency sporting and recreational facilities had to be organised almost entirely on a village basis. So it is not surprising to find that from late last century onwards there was a wealth of clubs, societies and entertainment.¹⁹ Football and cricket have always been popular and the recreation ground has provided the necessary facilities. Both clubs were in existence in 1897 and have continued more or less ever since. Tennis came much later and evidently there was at least one court on the recreation ground in 1932. Of comparatively recent years Judo has

become a recognised sport in Britain and a flourishing club was established at Atworth about 1954 and still continues.

Evidence of the traditionally close relationship between the Neston Park Estate and the village is provided by the setting up in May 1896 of a "Coal and Clothing Club" under the auspices of Mrs. Fuller. This was apparently a local scheme to encourage savings in order to meet the severities of winter. Interest of 2s.6d. (12½p) was paid on every 15s.0d. deposited.

Information on the pastimes and entertainment available in the village was no doubt disseminated through the Parochial Magazine which existed in 1896, but how long it lasted is unknown. A local Pig Club probably functioned in 1894 and there was an Atworth brass band about 1880. A Womens' Union was formed around 1889, and there is a record of the Atworth Friendly Society holding its annual festival in May 1895. After meeting at the Workmen's Hall there was a march to the church where a special service was held. This was followed by a luncheon in a tent near the centre of the village. Another annual event was the entertainment of the Bible Class and Sunday School. The tradition had already been established by 1897 when it took place at Cottles on 24th September. Later the event was transferred to Neston. A local organisation which evidently overlapped neighbouring parishes was the Girls' Friendly Society which was flourishing in 1898. Thus on June 29th of that year 200 girls gathered at Neston for the day and later attended a service in Atworth church. In the same year there is a record of the revival of Mothers Meetings on November 7th.

The Atworth Amateur Dramatic Society (now the Drama

Group) started in 1948, its first production taking place in the Institute on May 14th. Two plays were performed, "The Dear Departed" and "The Monkey's Paw". From the enthusiastic review in the Atworth and South Wraxall Parochial Magazine, these were a great success. The following year the society produced Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Niggers". Judging by the programme, it must have been quite highly organised for included are numerous advertisements by familiar businesses also one for a Grand Fete, Sale of Work and Sports in the Church Hall and on the Field, July 16th at 3.p.m.

Late last century before the advent of the cinema, lantern entertainments were a popular feature of village life and these usually took place in the school. The reason is not far to seek for the headmaster, Mr. J.P. Inkpen, was an enthusiast for lantern slides which he used extensively in his teaching. Fortunately, his projector has survived and is now housed in the museum. This is a somewhat ungainly affair by modern standards and the light was produced by a two-wick oil lamp. Incidentally, the Institute also possessed a rather similar projector but this was lit by acetylene. The slides were 3½" square consisting of two glass plates (one of them with the picture) bound together by adhesive tape. The variety of subjects covered suggests that either Mr. Inkpen's collection of slides was remarkable or that a hire service was available. Topics included "The Land of the Rising Sun" (February 1895), "Street Life" or "People we Meet", "An Adventure with a Bicycle", and "The Wonderful History of Jack the Giant Killer" (November 1895). Sometimes, these occasions were used to raise money for a local cause. Thus, in December 1897 and March 1898, the proceeds from lantern pictures on "The Gem of the Indian

Ocean" and "The Holy Land" were used to pay for the painting of the interior walls of the church. With the arrival of 16mm cinema film, the lantern lectures were replaced by weekly cinema shows which took place in the Institute every Monday from 5.00 - 7.30 p.m. How long these continued is unknown, but that they were eventually unwanted is evidence of the rising influence of broadcasting, greater mobility and an increasing range of entertainment provided by the surrounding towns.

A tradition which must rank as one of the longest established in the village is the annual outing of the Church Choir. The earliest record appears to be in 1895 when there was a trip to Weymouth on July 29th. Incidentally, in the following September a Sunday School Treat consisted of 140 children assembling at the school followed by a march with flags flying to the "Rookery" for games and tea. An Atworth Guides Troop was founded about 28 years ago and Brownies somewhat later. Both still exist today.

A branch of Toc H was established in 1939 with an initial membership of 31 and for twelve years it served the important functions of a social base and a means of raising money for a variety of good causes, particularly those concerned with welfare such as St. Dunstan's and the field of medicine. But the coming of the National Health and Welfare Services put an end to many voluntary support organisations such as Toc H and the local unit, having fulfilled its original purposes, closed down in 1950. The Women's Institute also had a flourishing Atworth branch founded in 1945. For many years it enjoyed considerable popularity but more lately it has found difficulty in recruiting the necessary officers and it finally closed down in 1981. Some of its former possessions such as the

inscribed hand bell and crockery are now in the museum. A St. John's Ambulance unit was started in 1953, flourished for a time and came to an end about 1966.

The Recreation Ground (known locally as the Rec) has traditionally played a key role in the playing of football during the winter, and cricket and tennis in the summer. Incidentally, the first tennis court in the village was situated in a field adjacent to Prospect Farm before being transferred to the Rec in about 1932.

As was pointed out earlier, the development of recreational and sporting opportunities in the neighbouring towns such as theatres, concerts and cinemas, also the excellent sports centres in Bath and Bowerhill, public tennis courts at Box and elsewhere, have altered substantially the kinds of facilities appropriate to a village like Atworth. Today, the emphasis is not so much on particular sports and pastimes as on the wider requirements of specific age-groups. Thus there are well patronised Toddlers' Groups and Play Groups. The Beaver Club founded in 1980 aims to cater for the requirements of children aged 7 - 12 before they are old enough to use the facilities provided by the Youth Club which serves the needs of older children. Although the Women's Institute has ceased to function, there is an Atworth Women's Fellowship, an 18-80 Club and also a 60-plus Club.

A Junior St. John's Ambulance unit was started during the winter of 1980 and is still going strong. The Ladies Choir, which still flourishes, was founded in 1965, while a Spinning Group was formed at Manor Farm in 1979 and gave a demonstration of its skills both in spinning and knitting on the occasion of the opening of the new exhibits at the Museum in June 1981. The first meeting of the History

Group took place on 7th December 1973. A basic principle of its monthly gatherings during the winter is that only half of these involve visits by outside speakers. The remainder are concerned in a variety of ways with the study of different aspects of Atworth. Some of the results of these studies in the form of the Museum and our two publications are now available to all.

Mention was made earlier of the existence of a Parochial Magazine in the late 19th century which was subsequently discontinued. However, an Atworth News reappeared in 1979 under the title of Yer 'Tiz. In addition to village gossip and short articles on such things as cooking recipes, the publication plays an important part in reporting the activities of the various organisations in the village and announcing their future programmes. Evidence of its widespread readership is provided by the fact that, whereas it was formerly found necessary to circulate every member of the History Group individually before each meeting, now that future activities are included in Yer 'Tiz all those interested are usually aware of them, making reminders no longer necessary.

Atworth and the Future

This account has been concerned with the evolution of a village community over a period of a hundred years and more. While the size of the population has fluctuated within fairly narrow limits, its composition in terms of trades and occupations has altered drastically. Such change has been closely paralleled by a corresponding decline in the number and diversity of small businesses. This social and economic upheaval has been traced to a number of causes, predominant among them being the greatly

increased mobility resulting from modern methods of transport, a rise in the affluence of society and an increasing reliance on the facilities of the towns for recreation and the essentials of life. Thus, in a relatively short period of time, Atworth, like many other country communities, has changed from being largely self-supporting both economically and socially to being almost wholly dependent on the outside world.

As to the future of villages, the picture we see all around us does not provide much food for comfort. In many the former community structure has virtually disappeared giving way to an incoming and disparate society of commuters and week-enders with little sensitivity for the country environment or its values. Many have lost their post office, their shop and their public transport; or if they have not done so already these are likely to disappear in the foreseeable future. In the interest of so-called rationalisation, some have already lost their schools or are in the process of doing so.

In the midst of all this change and uncertainty where does the Atworth community stand? What are its chances of survival in the form that we know it today? It would be a brave person who attempted to answer these questions with any degree of certainty. However, some important pointers to our possible future have been forthcoming in the previous pages, for instance from the results of our recent parish survey. Thus it is encouraging to find that the village institutions and clubs are so well patronized, central among them being the two churches. We still have our school, and we are fortunate to possess our Post Office and two stores which cater so effectively for our everyday

needs besides fulfilling an important social function. However, in the years to come they will face increasing competition from the supermarkets of Bath and Melksham, and if we wish them to continue as village assets we will need to patronise them all we can. Their eventual survival is in our hands.

As we recorded earlier, some of the most encouraging social developments of recent years have been designed to cater for the needs of specific age groups - the toddlers and play groups, the Beaver Club, the Youth Club, the 60+ Club and the 18 to 80s being typical examples. It has even been said that the village now provides such a wealth of social activity that there is insufficient time to exploit it to the full. If this is a fault, at least it is on the right side, for a readiness to communicate with one's fellow beings and the facilities for doing so are essential ingredients of any lively community. In these respects Atworth stands high, and as long as it remains so, its future as a village would seem to be reasonably secure.

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