

The Parish of Kempsford with Whelford, Dunfield & Dudgrove

A Village Appraisal 1991

This quiet spot a story can unfold
of stirring time and thrilling deeds of old.
The grey stone Castle – Home of England's Kings -
The Church, that raised men's hearts to better things
Than earthly pomp and fame passeth fleet -
That Royal house and home of prayer might meet -
Together stood. And through the ancient door
Both chivalry and beauty came of yore
To chant God's praise in his most holy place
To sue his mercy and to plead his grace.
Great John of Gaunt, old England's man of might,
To his dear Blanche, that peerless lady "White"
Did build the tower from whence the bells do ring
To summon men to worship God their king.
From legend and traditions wealthy store
Are culled again these tales of ancient lore.
For past and present each their pattern weave
Across the warp of time. Our god doth leave
The weft of his design in hands of man
On the great canvas of his age-long plan.

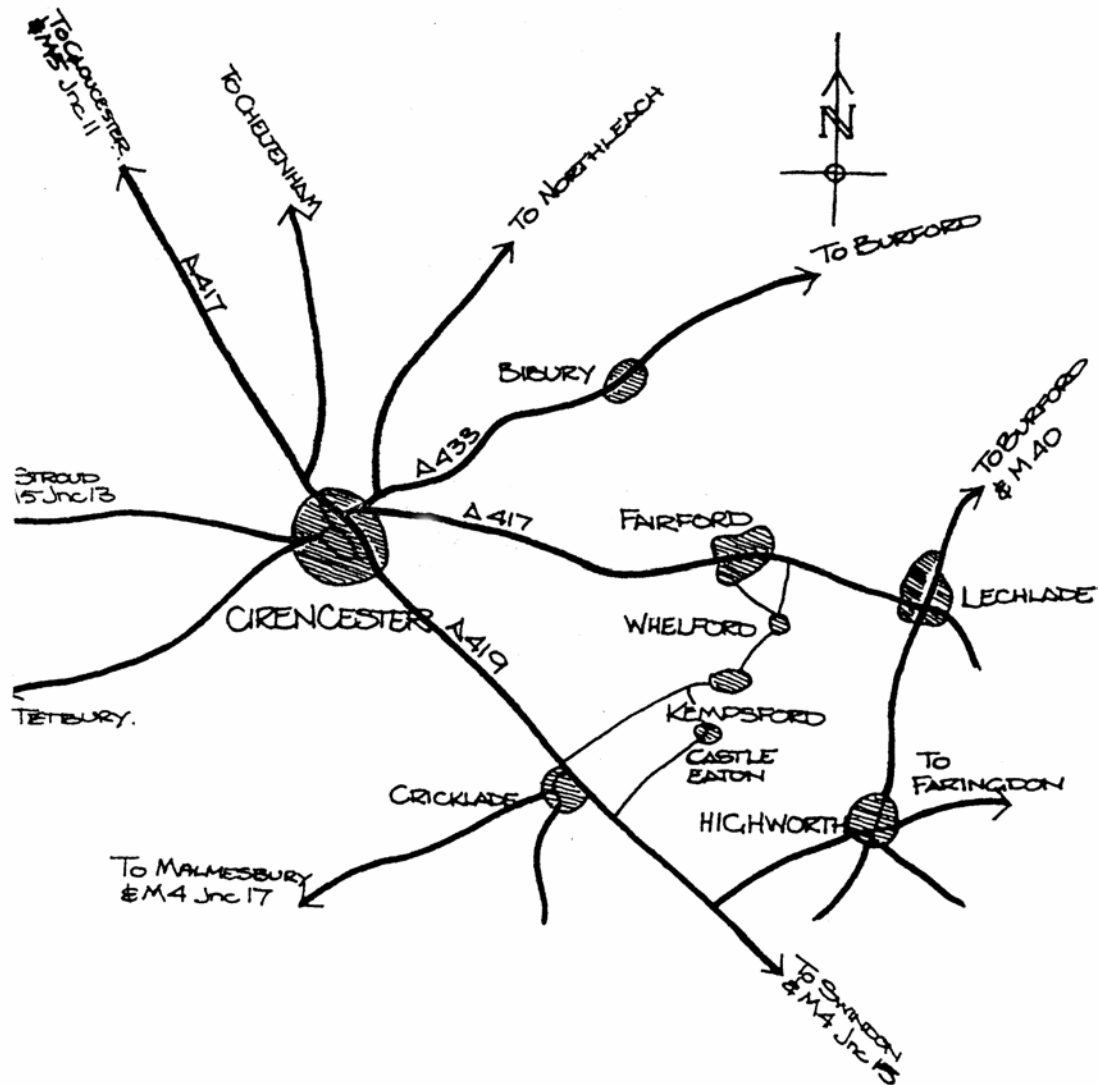
Kempsford, which includes the hamlets of Whelford and Dunfield, lies in Gloucestershire upon the Thames halfway between Cricklade and Lechlade, where the river divides Gloucestershire from Wiltshire. The Parish has most of its boundaries on watercourses with the River Coln providing part of the northeast boundary. The south boundary with Wiltshire is formed by the River Thames, having its source only some 12 miles away. The west boundary, also the county boundary, is marked by the watercourse formerly called the County Ditch. Kempsford is situated approximately 10 miles South East of Cirencester and 10 miles North of Swindon.



Kempsford around 1930

Most of the Parish lies on very flat land with extensive gravel workings having been carried out over the years, now providing water sports facilities and Nature Reserves within the area. Woodland is limited to a few small copses.

The North West boundary of Kempford is dominated by the airfield of Royal Air Force Fairford, with its main runway extending across the centre of the Parish. This airfield is only occasionally used now by US Air Force Aircraft; however, it is still allocated the biennial Royal International Air Tattoo which attracts many thousands of visitors.



The History of Kempford

Kempford was formally known as Kynemeresforde which means "The Forde of the Great Marsh" and is rich both in historical and legendary lore. Many ancient families have played their part in the National History and that of the village.

The situation of Kynemeresforde adjacent to the River Thames at the boundary between Gloucestershire and Wiltshire was not always as peaceful as it is today.

Some twelve hundred years ago this part of the River witnessed a bloody battle being fought on the Meadow, known as the Butts, and which marked the site of the Archery ground of the soldiers and retainers of the castle. In Saxon times there was a forde over the River Thames across which Hwicce of Mercia and his army marched in 800 A.D. to be defeated by the men of Wiltshire in "Battle Field" on the West Bank.

A church was built near this forde and also a moated manor House with internal and external courts and thus the village of Kynemeresforde gradually developed as a long street of loosely grouped dwellings. Between 1086 and 1551 the population grew from 62 inhabitants to 240.

The villagers were half free cottagers closely tied in their work and obligations to the Lords of the Manor and the Kempsford Estate including the hamlets of Dunfield, Whelford and Horcott, Traditional Cotswold agriculture based open fields and downland sheep pastures were carried on and the people lived in dwellings of mud walling and thatch.



Kempsford Church

At the time of the Norman Conquest Kempsford already had a prospering rural community and the castle became the Royal Residence of the Plantagenet Kings.

In the 9th Century the manor lands were held by Osgod. The Domesday Book shows that the Manor was granted by William the Conqueror to Arnulph or Ernulph de Hesding. He came from a family of rank and influence in France. The Barony of Kempsford passed in 1100 to Patrick de Cadurcis or Chaworth, his Son-in-Law. The manor passed down through Father and Son until in 1283, the last Patrick died leaving a Daughter, Maud.

The Lady Maud de Chaworth, heiress of Kempsford, was given in marriage by King Edward I to his nephew, Henry Earl of Lancaster, who then became the Lord of the Manor upon his marriage to Maud. Whilst Henry was in Wales the Lady Maud was vainly wooed by a Knight of the Earl's retinue. She spurned his advances and was later to pay for her rebuff of the Knight. The lovely Maud unknown to others, as she thought, offered refuge to her brother, to whom she was devoted. The Knight

discovered her plans and reported to the Earl of Lancaster that his wife had a secret lover and suggested that the Earl go to the Green walk at the dead of night. It was there that Henry saw Maud in secret conversation with a stranger and stabbed her on the steps of the Terrace; in his mad fury he then hurled her body into the river. Too late Henry learned the truth and the Lady Maud's ghost is said to haunt a walk, known as Lady Maud's Walk, at the present Old Vicarage.

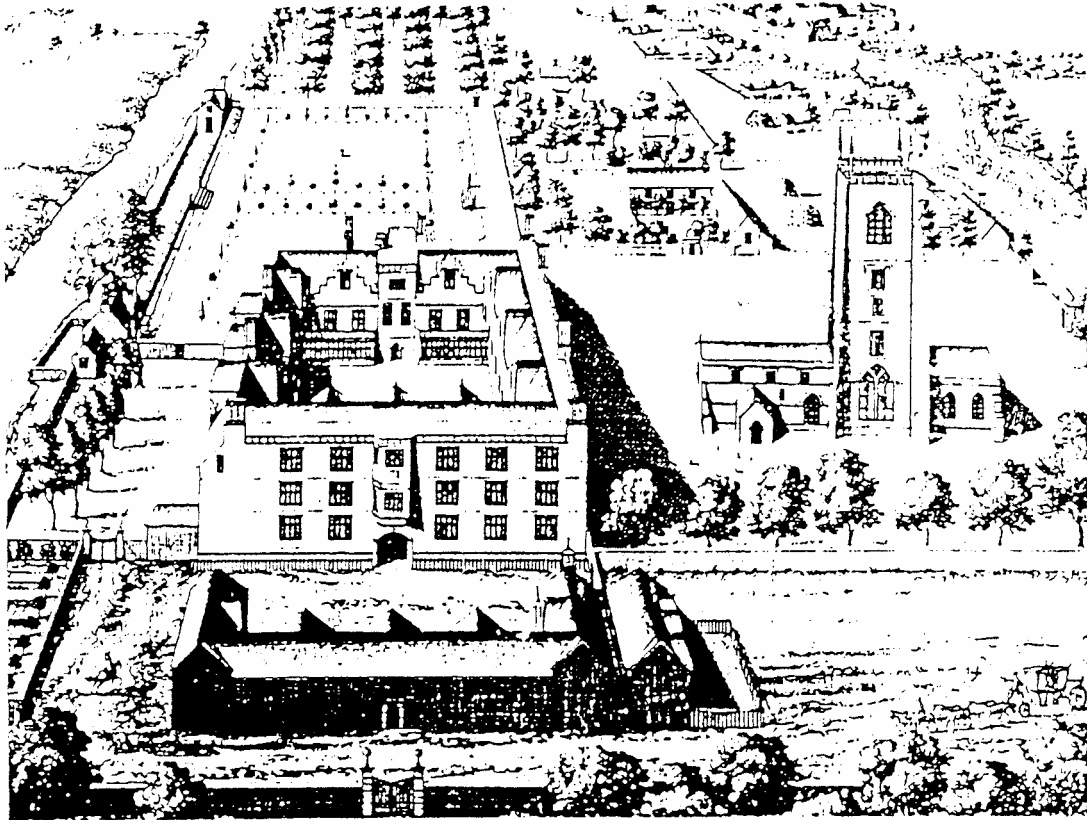
"Dear Lady Maud, so loyal and so true, Our Village, still doth often speak of you. For on the lone Green Walk at dead of night 'Tis said thy spirit roams by pale moonlight. The Walk of Lady Maud! A mystic spell The Mist-Wraith weaves - as Kempsford knows full well.

After the tragic death of his wife the Earl left Kempsford only to return when old and blind. It was then that he rebuilt the Chancel of the Church, in memory of his beloved wife and founded in 1331 a Hospital at Leicester in honour of God and Mary the Virgin. Disaster again struck the family when Henry, the heir, was drowned whilst playing on the banks of the Thames, his bereaved Grandfather inserted the West Window in the Church to perpetuate the memory of the lost boy. The father's boy, Henry Earl of Derby, later to be made Duke of Lancaster in 1351, left Kempsford to forget his sorrow and his horse cast a shoe. The folk of Kempsford nailed the horse-shoe to the door of the Church in token of affection and esteem for their Lord of the manor.

"And still his horse-shoe nailed to the Church Door Doth tell of tragic fait all Kempsford did deplore."

The Duke extended the hospital founded by his father and gave the Estate which included Hannington and Inglesham to the Collegiate Church of the Annunciation at Leicester, which he had founded, in whose possession it remained until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1548.

The Duke left two daughters, one of whom, Blanche, married her cousin John of Gaunt. Their son later became Henry IV and the present church tower is said to have been erected by John in the memory of his wife. There is no historical evidence of this or that John of Gaunt's family ever resided in Kempsford, yet it is recorded that John visited Cirencester in 1374/5.



The Manor House and Church in the early 18th Century with the river Thames on the left

At the Dissolution, the Manor, which included a sheep house at Dudgrove, was granted in 1549 to Sir John Thynne and Lady Christiana, his wife, and remained in the family of the Viscounts of Longleat for several generations although they were mainly absentee Landlords. The Old Castle of Kempsford was rebuilt as a Manorial Mansion by Sir Thomas in the reign of James I. It was one of the famous Homes of England and was reputed to have as many bedrooms as there were days in the year.

In 1587, a total of 5117 sheep and 884 cattle were kept in the Parish, Robert Hitchman to whom there is a brass memorial in the Church having 390. Three tailors and a weaver were the only recorded tradesmen in 1608.

The Manor House was demolished and rebuilt around a courtyard in 1639 and a school was started in 1693 by Thomas, Lord Viscount of Weymouth. On the 2nd November 1709 Thomas gave by Deed of Settlement the sum of E10 annually to teach poor children to read and write. The gift was augmented by the next Lord Viscount Weymouth with the gift of timber and land. The building of Kempsford School began.

In 1710 there were eight houses in Dunfield and by 1775 the Parish population had increased to nearly 500. The cottages were rebuilt in stone during this time. There is a record showing that there were four mills in the Parish, one at Horcott, two at Whelford and a derelict Thameside mill depicted in an undated print is thought to have stood in the meadows downstream of Hannington Bridge. Stocks and a small Cross appeared on Kempsford Village Green to the South of the main street and common arable land was situated in Upper and Lower Ham Fields. Rotation of two

crops and a fallow was the practice until the Inclosures, also flooding the meadows in winter to bring on spring grass.



The Mill House, Whelford

Owners of several upland estates in the neighbourhood owned or used parcels of land in the Parish and the original estate began to break into smaller holdings following Inclosure by private agreement of a large common pasture called the moors alongside the present Kempsford - Whelford Road. Tuckwell Farm and middle Farm are small stone farmhouses thought to date from this period and also the older surviving cottages and the present Kempsford Manor (which received this name in the mid 19th Century). The families of Iles, Barker, Pope, Jenner and Coxwell also became prominent in the district. A new school building was built in 1750 by a subscription among inhabitants.

In 1776, the Manor House, by then derelict through lack of use, was sold by Henry Thynne to Gabriel Hanger, Lord Coleraine. It passed in turn to his three sons, the last of whom, Lord Coleraine, a boon companion to the Prince Regent, used it to pay gambling and other debts owed to his nephew Arthur Vansittart. Fearful of being buried underground, Coleraine's tomb was placed in the Church and later, when the Lady Chapel was built in 1859, the casket was moved to the side Chapel where it still remains, within the Organ Chamber# the top of the coffin being placed level with the flooring.



The George Public House

The Manor House itself was demolished in 1784, trees were felled and gardens dismantled. Some of the building material supposedly was used for the present Manor Farm but the vast majority was used to build Buscot House.



Warf Lane

The Thames and Severn Canal was built in 1789 causing a big increase in population to 1007 in the succeeding Century. The Agent's house and warehouse and the canal boat turning area can still be seen in the village. The Old church House was in use as a poor house at this time and a Parish Surgeon had been appointed.

In 1801 the Inclosure Act came into force dealing with 2,224 acres of open fields and common meadows leading to the creation of substantial freeholds including Reevey Farm bought by Thomas Packer Butt.

By 1818 all the poor children of the Parish were attending Charity School but there was a large expenditure on Parish Relief, greater even than in the surrounding towns. Arthur Vansittart sold the Manor Lands and Dudgrove Farm to his brother Robert, and the rest of the estate passed at his death in 1829 to his son. At this time, 27 families were supported by trade compared with 142 by agriculture and the Queen's Head inn had opened at the South end of Whelford. (This pub closed in 1950).

In 1841 the Estate was sold to Sir Gilbert East, Bart, who built a new Manor House (Manor Farm), near the site of the original one by adding a front in 17th Century style to an existing house on the site. In 1844, a house at Dunfield was being used by Primitive Methodists and in 1864 a Chapel at Ease, St Annes's designed by G.E. Street was built at Whelford. It comprised of a nave with bellcot and apsidal chancel. A south transept was added in 1898. Prior to the building of the Church, services had been held in a granary. A Church School for infants was started at Whelford by 1867 having previously been held in a cottage. In 1871 East's son sold the Estate which comprised of eight farms to William Faulkener. A Reading Room was opened in 1879 and in 1891 it is recorded that there were three Public Houses in the village, The George, The Axe and Compass and The Cross Tree (Closed 1940).



Whelford Church

At the turn of the Century, the population had declined to only 700. Arable land had predominated over grass but there was also rich meadow land on which dairy farming, particularly cheese making continued to thrive and oxen were still used for ploughing.

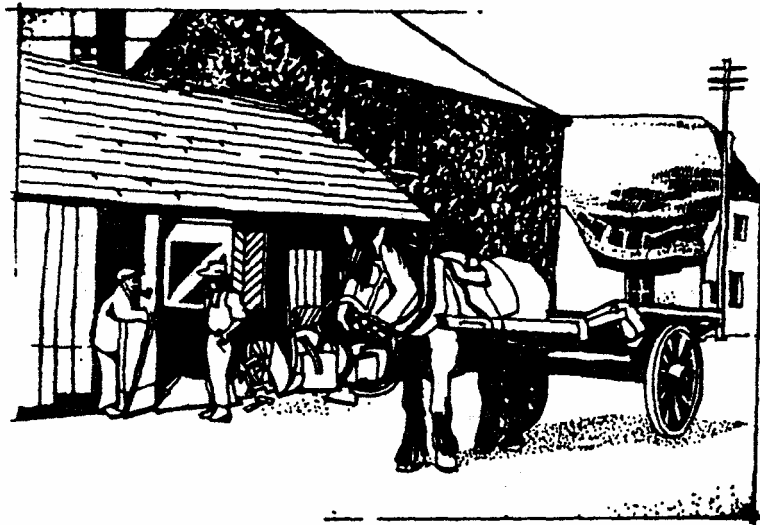
"Happy are the people who have no history

An old proverb adapted probably describes the quiet, happy days of Village Life under the beneficent rule of the holders of the Manor during the 19th Century.

The Great War saw that the sons and daughters of Kempsford were not wanting. Many of the villagers served their King and Country in the hour of the National need.

In 1920, Council Houses were built in the Street and in 1927 the ailing Thames and Severn Canal was finally closed. The present village Hall was built by public

subscription in 1932 and in 1938 gas and electricity first became available. The Old Forge was still operating at this time.



The Old Forge, 1930

On the death of William Faulkner, the Lord of the manor in 1883, the Kempsford Estate was divided between his three sons, the last of whom, John, died in 1941. For a time he had lived at Benbow House, later called Riverside House and more recently to become Kempsford House, before moving to Dunfield.

In 1944, "Modern" Kempsford began to grow when Fairford Airfield was opened as a troop transportation centre and development of the area really gathered Pace. In 1945 the standard of housing was considered poor, 201 houses in the Parish were described in a housing report as "working class" of which 53 had been built since the Great War. Of the remaining 148 older houses, 58 needed demolition, many of them thatched cottages, and 27 were to be reconditioned. 100 houses were affected by damp, had no drains and were insufficiently lit. In 1948 piped water came to the village and the eight "new Airey" houses along Ham Lane became tenanted. The population at this time was a steady 650.

In 1950 the Air Base was taken over by the United States Air Force and handed back to the Royal Air Force in 1964, later being used for the testing of the Concorde Supersonic Air Liner. It reverted to the USAF in 1976 and was in use by B52 Bombers during the Gulf War in 1991.

Since 1970 there has been much building development and in-filling changing the character of Kempsford although Dunfield and Whelford remain much the same.

Most people work away from the Parish which sadly is now becoming a commuter settlement. Nevertheless, there are many families still living in the Parish, whose forbearers can be traced back as Parish Residents for several generations. In particular, the Couplings, who were Masons and were brought from Oxford specifically to build the Church Tower in the late 14th Century; the Arkells have lived locally since at least the Mid 19th Century and the names of King, Bullock, Lappington, Ponting, Akers, Edwards, Wakefield, Chesterman, Pool, Higgs, Parker, James,

Hedges and Carpenter appear as contributors to a presentation scroll dated 1886 given to Mr. & Mrs. Hampson Jones, village benefactors.

..... And so to the present

An age of change or re-discovery?



Kempsford Post Office

Conservation

The Thames-side village of Kempsford lies in a pleasant tree studded, flat agricultural landscape through which the stripling river winds gently from it's source about twelve miles away. Swindon and the Marlborough Downs are ten miles to the South whilst Cirencester and the Cotswolds are ten miles to the North West. The roads from Swindon drop suddenly and dramatically at Blunsdon and Hannington a few miles from the village and from the crest of these hills the Upper Thames valley is laid out below like a huge green chess board with the noble tower of Kempsford's ancient church dominating the landscape for miles around.

Although rarities are few, the area is rich in wild-life, especially species of birds despite the preponderance of cereal and rape fields. The river, drainage ditches and the old canal attract water birds such as moorhen, Dabbchick and Mallard. Swans breed along the river and large numbers winter in the water meadows. Sadly, these are now mostly under cultivation. Five species of Tits have been recorded together with all the common Warblers and Finches. Once Barn Owls hunted the fields, but of recent years are rarely seen. Kingfishers, a Sparrowhawk, Heron, Cuckoos and a Tawny Owl are resident and many summer migrants pass through including some Waders. House Martins nest in several colonies in the village and Swifts scream overhead. In winter, when the river floods, huge flocks of Lapwing, Golden Plover and Black Headed Gulls feed in the residual mud.

The flower list is not so exciting although there are still Snakeshead Fritillaries growing within the Parish boundaries and Marsh Marigolds gleam in the ditches in

spring. Queen Anne's Lace burgeons along the road sides and Water Crowfoot, Yellow Water Lily, Arrowhead and Bog Bean can be found.

Species of Dragon and Damsel Flies are quite abundant but sadly, Butterfly numbers seem to be reducing. Apart from small Rodents and Hedgehogs the only mammals frequently seen are Foxes, Stoats and, unhappily, Mink. Frogs abound in many village gardens and Newts, Toads and Grass Snakes are also recorded.

The charming hamlet of Dunfield, half a mile away is also part of the Parish. It has pretty Cotswold Stone Cottages, a beautiful 17th Century Farmhouse and a brook which in spring is lined with primroses.



Dunfield

A150 within the Parish is the attractive farming village of Whelford. This village lies alongside the Royal Air Force Base on the road to Fairford. The miniature Church of St. Anne, a unique building unchanged since it was built in early Victorian times, serves the Community. There is a lovely old mill on the River Coln and gravel pits along the road towards Dudgrove attract a variety of water birds especially in the winter. The Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation at Whelford Pools Nature Reserve is open to the public and is a popular haunt of bird watchers and others interested in natural history.

Kempsford Village Appraisal Committee

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Thanks also conveyed to the following:

Mr. J. Baggott – sketches
Mr. R. Cox – Maps
Mrs. K.A. Horner - Typing and Compilation
Mr. G. Toogood - Cover

Copy right acknowledged for the picture of the Manor House and Church to Oxford
University Press

There are approximately 344 dwellings in the Parish, each of which received a village Appraisal Questionnaire in June 1990. A big thank-you goes out to all the 236 who returned them. Yes, they were long, but they were essential if a good overall picture was to be obtained.

The aim of the Appraisal, was to bolster community spirit, increase the appreciation of the environment and to allow, sensible development which we, as a Parish, want. Hopefully, the Powers that be will have taken some notice of the facts and figures provided.