



The Carriers, Stockton

## *The Heart of England - Stockton Village (Wessex)*

*The narrative below can be found in a set of yellowing papers displayed in The Carriers at Stockton and reproduced here with grateful thanks to Laura, proprietor of the Inn. It is uncertain of the date that this history was recorded and presented to the Inn but possibly late 1960's*

Long before the dawn of Christianity, people were living in the Stockton village area. Relics excavated from a settlement on the Down just North of Stockton Wood included bronze and enamelled brooches, bronze necklets and wristlets, beads of many kinds, pottery from Italy, Gaul and the New Forest, draughtsmen and counters made from broken fragments of pottery, and there were other sundry items including spoons of bronze and bone. These finds indicate that the Stockton people were in an advanced state of civilisation for that period (about 100 B.C.) but doubtless the area was occupied by the ancient Britons long before that.

Since those early days much has been discovered and recorded about Stockton. The Romans were in the vicinity during their long occupation of Britain. An existing Saxon charter of A.D. 901 shows that in King Alfred's day the Lord of Stockton was a noble named Wulphere. Later on King Alfred's son, Edward the Elder granted the estate to Ethelwulf, who passed it on to his wife Deorswith, who later disposed of it to the monastery of St. Swithun at Winchester; and Domesday Book records it as still belonging to that monastery. The priors of St. Swithun took good care of the estate; the boundaries of Stockton have remained unchanged since A.D. 901 to the present day. The lovely old church of Stockton was founded about A.D. 1200 and it still shares a delightful setting with its neighbours. The 13th century almshouses. The Lords of the Manor are all recorded from R. Vernon, prior of St. Swithun, 1285-1346, to Henry Brooke (1530). He was the last ecclesiastical owner of Stockton, and then in 1559 Henry VIII appointed the first lay Lord of the Manor since Saxon days. This was William Herbert, the first Lord Pembroke (of Wilton fame). For those who come to look at the entrance gate to the drive leading up to the Church will see the plaque "Air Raid Warden's Post", a relic of the 1939-1945 war.

The population of Stockton in 1200 consisted of four families, since then it has varied little:

A.D. 1300 sixteen families

A.D. 1400 thirty families

A.D. 1500 twenty-two families

A.D. 1600 forty-six families

A.D. 1700 forty-four families

In 1847 there were 46 cottages. In the 1940's there were 56 inhabited houses containing 186 people. (When Tom Farley died during the war he brought an end to a family which had lived in the village of Stockton for 500 years. "Farley's Cottage" still stands today)

The various occupations of the Stockton people in recent years are of interest.

"Nicholas Fleming had been the carpenter in 1694, and the trade was still in his family in the 19th century"; "and the Giles were the blacksmiths for a hundred years from 1809". "In 1847 there were three carpenters, one tailor - 'John Dyer sat cross-legged at the window of No. 22' and who also 'played the 'cello in Church'" - three shoemakers, two grocers, one pig dealer, two blacksmiths, one wheelwright, one butcher, one Maltster, one curate, one parson, and one beershop". But there was no baker for it is said that every woman in the village was proud to bake her own bread.

In the first half of the 19th century the nearby railway began to make its appearance. Whilst the building was in process the village people provided a soup kitchen for the navvies. In return for this kindness, Mr. Bowden at the level crossing started a little school for the village youngsters in his hut. But the naughty boys used to put sacks over the chimney so that the class should be driven out by smoke. Mrs. Giles who remembered the village in 1877 said "It was much the same as it is today", the inhabitants were "genuine Wiltshire people, friendly, contented, and happy, and always ready to lend a helping hand". Stockton Feast on the Sunday after July 6th was the great day of the year. It always began a week of jollity. Five or six of the villagers got temporary licences for the week and sold beer in their own houses, for "tea was too expensive". There were "stalls by the roadside from No. 11 Almshouse Lane", and at these were sold "sweets, cakes, ginger beer and other fairings"; while Charlie Topp from nearby Codford did a roaring trade in cockles and winkles".

On Shrove Tuesday the children paraded the village, singing their Shrovetide songs. On May Day the children paraded with lovely garlands. These beautifully made garlands are remembered today by the older inhabitants. On Whit-Monday, the Stockton Club marched up to Stockton House with a band, and there spent the evening dancing on the lawn till well after the moon was up. At the Harvest Home there were suppers given by the farmers, and at Christmas time mummings and carol singers filled the air with all sorts of music.

Coming to 1930 the village occupations included one keeper, one clerk of works, six gardeners, three railwaymen, two grooms, six farmers (one of which was also a coal merchant), one houseman, one motor driver, one rector, one innkeeper, and one butler. At Stockton House there were three manservants, including a chauffeur, five maids, and seven gardeners; while at Long Hall the staff was five maids, a groom and three gardeners. Agricultural wages then were thirty shillings to thirty-six shillings weekly, and rents were three shillings to six shillings. Today in adjacent villages council cottages were seen "to let" at twenty-three to twenty-seven shillings weekly. In 1937, in recognition of its beauty and of the pains taken by its inhabitants to maintain this beauty, Stockton was the only Wiltshire village to appear in the 'Coronation Royal Record".

The great Stockton House itself is sited in a well planted park at the end of the village. The actual date of the building is unknown, but the coats-of-arms of Elisabeth and James I in the Great Bedroom suggest that it was begun in the one reign and finished in the other.

In the mellow red brick building of Long Hall, situated further down the village, hangs a vellum map of 1640, bearing the names of the tenants in the middle of the sixteenth century, and showing the open-field system of that date.

The quiet peacefulness of Stockton has not always remained untroubled by wars. A glimpse into the neighbouring village churches will give proof that Crusaders, too went forth from this area. There are also simple tablets and memorials to the fallen.

Apart from its own sons who had gone off to fight in other lands, Stockton has sheltered fighting men of our own and other lands. Carved on the white chalk of the low hills just across from the Carrier's Arms can be seen a huge replica of the Australian military badge cut out by Australian soldiers when they were stationed thereabouts during the 1914-1918 war. This badge looks down on the adjacent village of Codford in which there is an Australian and New Zealand military cemetery containing the remains of our cousins who came back to the old country in its time of need. Another similar cemetery can be seen quite nearby. During the 1939-1945 war Stockton House became the home of a large military headquarters. American fighting men with their armoured tanks were quartered in the vicinity prior to the great D-Day invasion. "Sonner" Cooper is fond of telling the story of the day when he was bringing his cows in for milking and the Americans caused the great stampede by starting up their motors. "Cows and tanks were mixed up all over the place in the narrow road of the village and those fellows just sat on their tanks, grinning, and filming away like mad". "Sonner" himself is a veteran of the 1914-1918 war having fought in the Middle East. He holds the distinction of travelling via Russia and through Europe in a cattle truck to reach home. The villagers also remember the German bombs which fell during the 1939-1945 war. The previous host of the Carrier's Arms, Frank Calvin, too, knew what war was like at first hand. He delivered the message given by General Percival in Malaya to those whose duty it was to make the last stand and blow up the Johore Causeway - the gateway into Singapore from Johore. He was eventually captured by the Japanese and spent the remainder of the 1939-1945 war as a prisoner in the notorious Changi Jail in Singapore, and later in Japan. His treasure possession is a souvenir book compiled by the inmates of the infamous prison camp "Aomi Hall", Japan.

Now Stockton is back in its old peaceful ways once more. On Saturday, 14th July, 1962, the village was practically deserted as most of its inhabitants had accepted an invitation from Mr. Yeatman-Biggs to attend his wedding in Warwickshire on that day. They had left the Carrier's Arms by coach at ten in the morning and returned in the evening for a final jollification. How reminiscent was this of the day many years ago when the village was en fete to welcome back from the Sudan, General Yeatman-Biggs, a kinsman of their host.

Many good books have been written about Stockton. Mr. T. Miles, the parson, compiled a book in 1847 which gave particulars relating to the village. Nearly one hundred years later Mr. Yeatman-Biggs of Long Hall, made a similar book and had collected personal recollections of the previous sixty or seventy years from old inhabitants.

Edith Olivier's book "Wiltshire", written in 1945-1946, also provides valuable information on Stockton. The old church will also provide the visitor with a wealth of study.

For those with the time, a visit to other nearby villages will be of rewarding interest.

May this loveliest part of Wessex forever remain as it is today.

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Since the foregoing was written other facts concerning the Church have come to light.

The roof had an inscription on the Western beam; "this roof was framed by N. Fleming in June in the year of our Lord 1757", when it was repaired. (See previous mention of Fleming).

The iron work of the brackets for the wall lamps and the curtain-rods on the South door were all made in 1878 by H. Giles of this village. (See previous mention of Giles).

On leaving the porch there is a tombstone in the path; this is Ann Raxworthy's, a lady's maid, who having been pensioned off and allowed to live at the cottage to the North of the Church, used always to come to Church in a black silk gown. On her deathbed she felt she had been too proud and asked to be buried where everyone should walk over her.