

A Great Flood On The Plain

WRITING before 1914, Edward Hutton declared that “there is not in all Wiltshire a lonelier road than that which lies up over the Downs between Shrewton and Tilshead”. He was of course referring to the road from Devizes to Salisbury, across the Plain.

In the village of Tilshead was built a row of cottages bearing the following interesting inscription describing their origin :

“These cottages” “buidled in the Year of Our Lord 1842 from a portion of the fund subscribed by the public to repair the losses sustained by the poor of this and five neighbouring parishes in THE GREAT FLOOD OF 1841 are vested in the names of TWELVE TRUSTEES”.

It goes on to say how they are to let them at 3/- a week and that any surplus money is to be spent on fuel and clothing for the poor of these parishes. Distribution of this was to be made annually on the anniversary of the never-to-be-forgotten flood. These surplus gifts seem to have come to an end after the last war. In all fourteen cottages were built in the various villages at a total cost of less than £1,000.

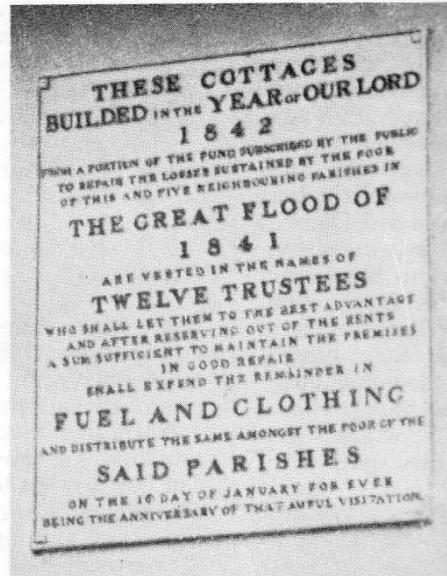
A. G. Bradley, writing at the beginning of this century, describes how he met at Tilshead an old man of ninety-one, who described to him the flood and how he had only saved his sow by carrying her in his arms upstairs into his bedroom.

It is difficult to imagine a flood here, high upon the Plain, capable of destroying seventy-six houses in several villages, but so it was. On January 16th, 1841, there was a sudden thaw of deep snow and with the ground frozen and springs breaking out as they did in winter, a great flood of water and snow rushed down from the higher ground to reach the level of the ground floor windows in many of the houses.

It is equally curious to read that soon after the Norman Conquest Tilshead was as large as Calne and twice as large as Warminster. It had then sixty-six burgesses and nine mills.

It still has a fine mediaeval church.

Not far from Tilshead, on the road to Devizes, is a stone marking the spot where in 1839 a Mr. Dean of Imber was attacked by four highwaymen. The inscription describes how



they were chased and how one fell dead on Chilterne Down, while the rest were captured and transported for fifteen years. It ends with a warning to those who “presumptuously think to escape the punishment God has threatened against Thieves and Robbers”. The biblical reference is not given! Is there one? (by M. Wight)