



INDUSTRY and COMMERCE

An AbbPast Publication



Abbotskerswell Village History

Industry and Commerce

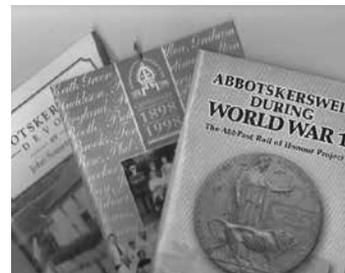


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Introduction

In 2014 AbbPast presented its first publication, *Abbotskerswell During World War 1*, which was part of our Roll of Honour Project which received a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The success of this venture encouraged us to work on an even more ambitious project, *The Abbotskerswell Village History Series*, a four booklet, thematic history of the village; this is the first of that series. The booklets will be written by a variety of AbbPast members with the support of myself, Nick Nicholson, Felicity House and Trish Turner. The research element of this project will build on the excellent work of John Somers Cocks and use a wide range of resource material, and vitally the reminiscences of villagers. We hope this will provide an interesting and informative account of the history of Abbotskerswell, its development and many of its inhabitants. It is important that we are historically accurate whilst giving a flavour of village life, and that can only come from those who lived here.



1. *Industry & Commerce* is the first in our series but we see it as the fourth in a line of village histories; following *Abbotskerswell Devon* by John Somers Cocks, the *Abbotskerswell Cricket Club Centenary* from the Cricket Club and our own *Abbotskerswell During World War 1*. Each will contribute to our series but will stand in its own right and are all well worth reading.

This booklet tells the story of a village's industrial past, through the mediaeval period, into the dramatic changing times of the Industrial Revolution and into the ever changing modern world. We cannot hope to capture all the available material and stories, so if you feel we missed something or have information which you feel would have enhanced our research, please let us know. We have deliberately focused on the whole of the Abbotskerswell Parish; the centre pages have a map which shows the new parish created in 1984; until then Aller Vale was in our parish, so it is the original parish which we use to tell this story. In this way we can tell the industrial story of Aller Vale as well as the religious heritage of The Priory as both have been in our parish at some time.

Chapter 1

A Background to Village Industry

Abbotskerswell exists because of its site; it provided early settlers, several thousand years ago, with the basics they required, which were water, wood and land. These provided all the materials required to exist, to provide shelter, food and drink. The aim of this publication is to explain the work of the villagers, which began with the production of food and then later, as society changed, paid work with which to buy food. A history of the farming industry in Abbotskerswell is therefore an explanation of why the village is here, since the earliest settlers in this valley chose it because they could farm here. These settlers were probably the self-sufficient Celtic people followed later by the Anglo Saxons. The valley offered them all they needed; springs and streams for water, gently rolling hills that gave protection from the south-westerly winds and provided the varied soils to allow them to grow crops and keep animals, and woodland for building materials.

By the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 the pattern of land ownership and farming would have been well established and the Domesday Book of 1087 provided a vivid description of that time. The land was owned by the Abbot of Horton with a third of the land being farmed at the 'home farm' of the Abbot, the rest was rented out. There were ten villeins, who were men who rented land but also worked on the Abbot's land, they were tied to the village and could not leave, as were the nine bordars, who were farm labourers who had enough land to feed a family. The home farm had two teams of eight oxen for ploughing, one packhorse, six cattle, 100 sheep and 30 goats.

It is not clear what method of farming was used in this part of Devon but John Somers Cocks made a sound argument for the use of an 'open field system'. The open, or three field system, had all the arable (crop) land gathered in three huge fields that were sub-divided into strips, with landowners having strips scattered across all fields. Eventually these strips were brought together under the 'enclosure' process to create the modern field pattern that we are used to seeing. John noted that on the 1839 Tithe Map the fields below what is now the Priory show a classic post-enclosure pattern. However, there is no evidence in that pastureland of the 'ridge and furrow' that often still exists showing where the strips once were.

The idea of studying industry in a village such as Abbotskerswell is problematic, in that defining what is meant by industry and then when that industry began, can create debate. One definition could be any work that is done, which allows the study of the self-sufficient style of living that would have been found here up to the 19th century. However, another definition would add 'for profit' to the previous definition, which would then encompass the post industrial revolution period that we live in. Therefore to study industry in Abbotskerswell it is best to use both and in that way see the way it was, with the changes which occurred, and then show how the community became what it is today.

We are indebted to a great many people and organisations for making this series possible; obtaining a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, from their 'Sharing Heritage Fund', has once again meant we can distribute each booklet free of charge and therefore hopefully reach a much wider audience. Without the contributions from AbbFest, and Councillors Smith and Dewhirst we would almost certainly not have achieved our goal of the HLF funding. We hope that in each booklet we will give due credit to all those who have helped our project, if we fail in this then we apologise and thank you now. We must also thank all those people whose doors we have knocked on to seek information and who unfailingly helped without question. We are very grateful to Ray and Chris at Central @ Model Stores for agreeing to help with our distribution by stocking the series.

I always owe a great deal to my fellow AbbPast Research Team members of Felicity, Nick and Trish, for their untiring efforts and support in the research and production of this publication. Once again Pete Cobbold has created another great map, the clarity of which aids our story and we thank Kingfisher Print for the production and printing of our series and Kim especially.

Peter Wade

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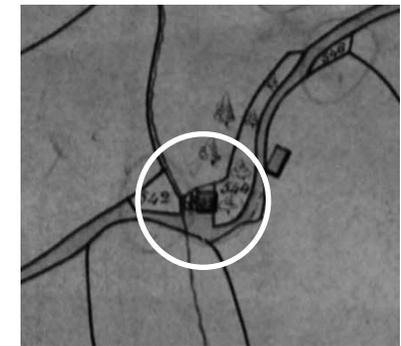
Until the 16th century the land in Abbotskerswell mostly belonged to the Church and farmers rented it from them. However, the Reformation changed this: "The manorial lord ceased to be a distant abbot; instead the manor was granted to John Southcott and John Ridgeway in 1540 for about £1275"¹. During the next two centuries land was bought and farms established with houses and barns; they were small by modern standards, were labour intensive, but allowed for a self-sufficient way of life for the villagers. The chief crops were wheat, barley, oats and rye together with peas and beans. Apple orchards existed to make the cider which most locals drank; those who could afford would have kept a few hens, geese, cattle and pigs. These animals were mostly slaughtered in the autumn, as little animal fodder existed; the meat was cured for use during the winter.

Farmhouses such as Court Farm, Abbotsford, Town Farm, Ruby Farm (now Monks Thatch) would have been built during the 16th and 17th century. A 17th century survey of manors showed that in Abbotskerswell there was no manor as such, so it is assumed that Court Farm was used as the 'home farm' for the monastery. Its land was valued at £123 with arable land valued at £1 an acre and meadows at £4. In those days wealth was mainly generated from land rents and that is clearly shown here with the twelve 'customary tenants' paying a total of £320 a year, the six 'cottagers' £13.5sh and the 23 'free tenants' £2.3sh.

By the 19th century the Enclosure Acts had grouped land together and tended to create bigger farms as the small land holders were squeezed out of business. The Agricultural Revolution produced new efficient methods and modern equipment; horses replaced oxen as the farm source of power. However, life was hard and food limited in both quality and quantity.

During the Middle Ages every farming community needed a mill to grind the wheat and barley for the bread flour and oats for animal feed; Abbotskerswell's has been 'lost'. It was not Carse Mill, which was probably a late 19th century barn that was converted into a house. It appears likely that the actual site was at the end of Vicarage Lane where Rydon Lane met Bitney Lane, just past Rydon Linhay (an outbuilding). *Map 1*, The Tithe Map, shows a 'house' next to the stream, which is stone lined at that point, within fields called Orchard at Mill Door. Across the road was another field called Mill Door Meadow. There was a good supply of water and roads passed by. The 1809 OS Map shows a building on the site, however, by the 1887 version there was nothing left there.

No trace of the mill exists today, which may be because of changes to the streams at this point. The building of the Priory brought a new stream through the site and it is possible that when the sewage works were built the stream bed was altered as it now has a sharp bend on it that is not evident in 1839. These two streams now seem to run through the former mill site. Another factor is that the village Census returns did not feature a miller at any time.



Map1

The 19th Century

In 1839 the Commutation of Tithes Act abolished the tithe (a tenth of a farmer's crop) payment to the Church, replacing it with an equivalent monetary amount; to ensure that this was done accurately a Tithe Map was drawn up and this provides a wonderful snap shot of that time. It revealed there were 1100 acres of farm land, with 650 acres of arable, 300 of pasture, 98 of woodland and 65 of orchards.

The advent of the Census in 1801 gives the historian the chance to study farming in detail, to reveal the farms and their workers. *Table 1* below shows numbers listed on the Census returns; the variations occur owing to how the Census enumerator chose to list occupations. The 1841 Abbotskerswell Census, the first to list occupations, is hard to read and interpret, whilst the 1881 version seems to have used the general term 'labourer' hence the sudden drop in numbers.

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Farmer	17	13	10	10	11	9	10	11
Agricultural Labourer	32	57	74	55	16	26	40	27
Landed Proprietor	1	3	3	3	4	2	1	0

Table1

It is interesting how the number of farms decreases as they merge, with the need to become bigger and more efficient, and how the number of agricultural labourers declines as technology develops. By the end of the century there were 11 working farms in the parish; these are listed in *Table 2*, together with their map reference.

Chapter 2

A New Industrial Time

It was during the late 18th century that the first signs of industrial change emerged in Abbotskerswell, with money becoming the way of obtaining services rather than doing the work yourself; the impact of the Industrial Revolution would initially have been slight in rural Devon but as the years rolled by the evidence of change would have been seen. The first changes came in farming, then transport with improvements to roads and then the invention of railways; these allowed new industries to develop.

Transport

There were many traditional track ways and highways in the area, most giving access to the farm land, but some leading to the local market towns of Newton Abbot and Totnes. These main roads were the ones to be improved by the new turnpike trusts; roads had previously been maintained by parishes using local volunteer labour, now the new turnpike trusts took them over. These were groups of local businessmen who obtained an Act of Parliament to allow them to take responsibility for, and rebuild, stretches of road. To recover the money they had spent on the roads they could charge a toll (a fee) for the use of the road. The tolls were collected at toll-bars or toll-gates, usually with spikes on top to discourage horse riders from jumping them; this is where the name 'turnpike' comes from. A tollhouse was usually constructed on the side of the road, where the toll keeper lived and collected the tolls, as fees were collected 24 hours a day.

Two such roads straddled the village, the first built in 1765, ran between Newton Bushell (later Newton Abbot) and Kingswear, being constructed by the 'Keyberry Bridge and Torquay Turnpike Trust'. Along the original route were a series of tollhouses, beginning with a toll house at Keyberry near to Pennin (this being the original spelling of the area). The road ran south along the west bank of the Aller Brook towards Kingskerswell passing through the parish of Abbotskerswell near to Aller Vale. A tollhouse was constructed at the junction of the road to Abbotskerswell, now Priory Road, near to the newly built Langford Bridge.

Court Farm	A	Manor Farm	B	Ruby Farm	C
Town Farm	D	Abbotsford Farm	E	Fairfield	F
Laburnum Farm	G	Whiddon Farm	H	Langford Bridge Farm	I
Aller Manor Farm	J	Aller Moor Farm	K		

Table 2

At that time there were three main landowners: the Creed family (later the Carrs) of The Manor House, who held the title of 'Lord of the Manor'; Mrs Hare from Court Grange and William Henley from Mallands. Most of the farmers were therefore tenants, although many families had their farms for many generations; the Buckpitts were at Manor Farm for just over a century, the Maddicotts for 50 years at Town Farm, the Bulleys at Langford Bridge Farm for over 50 years. Only Fairfield from Table 2 was owner occupied.



Rick Building on Court Farm 1940s



The tollhouse was a small building constructed of local rubble stone with a slate roof and with a chimneystack of red brick, containing two rooms on the ground floor and two on the 1st floor, with two lean-to additional buildings. When the Turnpike Trust ceased trading in the mid-1800s the tollhouse was sold into private ownership, it became a farm cottage for Langford Bridge Farm. The last resident was Ann Hart who left in the 1970s when the building was considered uninhabitable; she was re-housed in one of the council houses in the village, which must have

been lovely after a cottage with an outside 'privy'.

Despite attempts to save the tollhouse it was disgracefully demolished in 2014 as part of the road widening scheme linking the Decoy Road with the Kingskerswell bypass.

The other turnpike road was the newly improved road from Newton Abbot to Totnes. Until the 1800s the stage coaches came along the Coach Road, turned where the cemetery is now sited, along Firestone Lane, down past Old Barn and out at what is now the Abbotskerswell junction with the A381. This slow and tortuous route was replaced with a new road from Ogwel Cross which we now use. Slowly these new roads made travel easier and increased the opportunities for industry.

Another factor was the arrival of the railway. In 1846 Newton Abbot was linked to Exeter and by 1848 the line to Plymouth cut through the northern corner of the parish.

Occupations

Improved transport slowly brought change to the simple agricultural world of self-sufficiency and from 1841 the Census returns show how new jobs were occurring in the village, many of which are now obsolete of course. A good example of this was a 'cordwainer' of which the village had 9 in 1851;

his job was making new leather shoes, which as people began to earn more they would buy, rather than make themselves. The name largely disappears, replaced by shoemaker and the work disappears as the shoes become factory made. It is a similar story with dressmakers, tailors and laundresses where numbers rise as demand grows from increased wealth but declines as new technology replaces workers. *Table 3* shows how the traditional jobs would decline as 'new' jobs came along.

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
CORDWAINER	9	0	1	0	0	0	0
SHOEMAKER	0	7	4	2	1	0	1
TAILOR	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
DRESSMAKER	7	12	5	6	4	2	3
LAUNDRESS	2	3	5	1	3	3	3
MASON	8	8	3	4	3	5	6
CARPENTER	13	10	6	3	1	1	3
BLACKSMITH	2	3	3	1	2	3	4
WHEELWRIGHT	5	2	1	1	3	2	0
SAWYER	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
CLAYCUTTER	2	7	2	4	5	6	4
QUARRYMAN	0	1	2	4	5	16	14
ROAD WORKER	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
RAILWAY WORKER	1	2	1	2	1	5	5
POTTERY WORKER			1		6	9	11
CYDER WORKER					1	9	12

Table 3

Stone and wall masons, carpenters and sawyers (plank cutters) were traditional village occupations but were declining, whereas transport work was developing and new industrialised businesses evolved as machinery increased production. This was particularly true for blacksmiths and wheelwrights whose traditional work on the local farms would diminish with industrialisation. The village maps show 'smithies' in the barns opposite Westbury, in the old shop that is now The Staging Post and across the road from the Butchers Arms; the last two were associated with the Prowse family who were village blacksmiths for many years. In the wheelwright's trade it was the Partridge family from Odle Hill Cottages who passed the skills from father to son. The last Partridge became a carpenter and used these skills as the village undertaker for many years.

Another consequence of the improvement in transport, which was a factor in depleting traditional jobs in the village, was that larger businesses in the towns began to do the work usually done by villagers. Chapter 4 will reveal the growth of businesses such as clay mining, quarrying, pottery and cider manufacture, which all feature in these figures, to reflect the changes occurring in the job market for the villagers. Now was the time for local men to establish industries within the village; these would grow and wither as technology and demands evolved, and of course still do.

Not surprisingly some of the new businesses were associated with food creation; as Chapter 1 showed farm labourers were now paid hands who had to buy much of their food.

Bakers

The staple food of the English in the 1800s was bread, therefore the miller and the baker were vital to the community. By the second half of the century baking had become an industry, in 1851 two bakers were listed, George Ruby and Samuel Farley; the Ruby's: "... lived at Church House, Abbotskerswell ... in 1849 where George was a baker"¹. The recent discovery of bread ovens behind Rose Cottages supports the 1851 Census in suggesting that this is where Farley was working. By 1861 it is clear that Church House was a bakery as George Elliott was a baker living there, and for nearly the rest of the century this medieval building was a village bakery. Church House was built in 1524 and was used as an amenity for the village, a kind of village hall, but also for brewing ale and baking bread. The bakery appears to have been at the end beyond what is now the kitchen, judging by the chimneys, with other parts used as living accommodation for the baker's family. George Elliott lived in Church House with his wife and two children, however, he left bakery for labouring and by 1870 William Ashford had taken over at Church House as both a baker and a grocer. He and his wife, Mary, were village bakers until around 1878.

In 1871 Arthur Chard, Mary's nephew, was staying with them, he was the son of William and Eliza Chard, who were bakers in Thorverton. However, William died in 1870, probably explaining why Arthur was in Abbotskerswell, and Eliza took over the baking duties in Thorverton. When Mary died in 1877 the Chards moved into Church House with Arthur the baker and his sister, Edith, a Board School teacher. They were to stay in the village until around 1894 as bakers and grocers before they all moved to Plymouth; they were probably the last bakers in Church House. Both Eliza and Arthur are buried

in Abbotskerswell; when Arthur died in 1927 the MDA noted that he was fondly remembered in the village for 40 years' service as a master baker. The reason Church House was no longer the village bakery was that it had been superseded by a new bakery at 3 Model Cottage. In the mid-1860s William Darke was noted as a baker, confectioner and grocer at the 'Bakers Shop' where he employed two 12 year olds to help him. William had moved to the village from Newton Abbot and was probably responsible for building the bread ovens at Model Cottages. By 1880 he and his large family had moved back to Newton Abbot and John Ellis from Tiverton had taken over; he remained there until around 1889. For a few years at that time William Williams and Alfred Harris ran the bakery before, in 1893, Tom Cann arrived in Abbotskerswell.

Tom was born in Colebrook, the son of a shopkeeper, and by 1891 was living at 90 Queen Street in Newton Abbot at the home of Harry Hodge, a master baker. By 1893 he had taken over the Abbotskerswell baker's shop, which would soon be the only one in the village. He married Annie Tuckett in 1896 and by 1901 'The Bakery' was employing two young male servants as bakers' assistants and apprentices. Tom soon became a significant figure in the village, being responsible in 1907 for the construction of the seven houses on the main road, known as Cann's Cottages for a short while, and now Hillside Cottages. In 1911 his bakery and shop were assisted by 17 year old Harold Taylor and Fred Coombe, 14, from Rose Cottages, who was the baker's errand boy, with his wife running the shop selling bread and cakes. Harold, Fred and Tom's son, Tom, would all join up in WW1 but thankfully survived. However, the bakery had been in trouble for the five years up to 1916 when Tom was declared bankrupt with a debt of £343 and had lost £123 in the last year. He was discharged from the bankruptcy in 1919, but the bakery closed around that time as there are no more references to it and in an AbbTalk Mrs Low noted that in the 1920s there were deliveries made in the village: "there were two bakers, one from Ipplepen and the Co-op from Newton, three times a week"².

Butchers

Traditionally it was the farmers who provided what meat the villagers ate and also sent larger quantities to the local markets for sale in the towns and cities. Villagers would have supplemented the farmers' supplies by keeping chickens and pigs, as well as growing vegetables. Chapter 1 revealed how the revolution in agriculture changed farming practices and in Abbotskerswell the Palk family began to develop and dominate the butcher's trade in the

area. Edward Palk was a 24 year old butcher when he and his wife Louisa moved to Abbotskerswell from Kingskerswell in 1851 and by 1861 they were living in Laburnum House with their children Edward, Alfred and George. This was to be a dynasty of butchers because Edward would follow his father in Abbotskerswell, Alfred in Torquay and George in Newton Abbot. Meanwhile Edward senior was going up in the world buying Odle Hill House by 1871.

The 1881 Census reveals the spreading wealth of the Palks, with Edward and Louisa, living in the spacious eight roomed Odle Hill House and Edward Jnr living across the road in Odle Hill Cottage with his wife, two children and servant. In 1890 Edward Snr died and Edward took over both as the 'wholesale butcher' and Odle Hill House. Henry Clinick, who had been at Odle Hill House as a junior butcher, moved into the cottage with his wife Annie. By 1901 Edward's two sons, John and Alfred were apprentice butchers ready to go into the business, but his eldest son, Edward, was in another house, newly built for the dynasty.

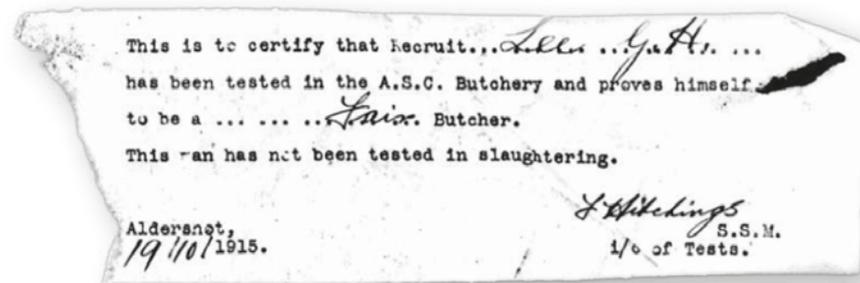


This was Westbury, and as the map shows all three houses were close and with extensive barns in which to ply their trade; in 1901 there were six villagers who were butchers of some kind. However, it was not to be this Edward who would inherit the family firm as he moved to Canada. Therefore in 1910, when his father died, it was John Westbury Palk who became the head of the house at Odle Hill. A good number of village men worked for the Palks.

One such man was George Lee who joined the Army Service Corps as a butcher in 1915, with this glowing recommendation from John Westbury Palk:

This is to certify that George Henry Lee has been in my Father's & my employ for 12 years and has been an enterprising, honest, truthful, and trustworthy man, and I am deeply sorry to lose him for the time being.³

The army's interpretation was a little less glowing however.



John continued the business at Odle Hill House until 1932 when he sold the business to Cecil Ford; he also leased the house, whilst John built Ashley Priors where he lived until his death in 1946.

Industry and employment were changing for the village and its inhabitants, but massive social upheaval had begun that would transform the community. This is reflected in the population of the village which was rising steadily as *Table 4* shows, requiring changes to established practices.

Year	1831	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Population	442	433	460	437	453	435	431	457	474	433	642

Table 4 Abbotskerswell Population



The brand opens at Rose Cottages

Chapter 3

The Farms of Abbotskerswell

The use of the word 'farm' is quite a modern one, since until the Agricultural Revolution of the 18th century most land was farmed in a subsistence way to provide the food for the villagers, with any spare sold at local markets. Villages were clustered around a market town for this purpose; which is why Newton Abbot has a twice weekly market and a weekly cattle market. One of the main changes of the time was land being gathered into bigger landholdings ('farms') which could be farmed more efficiently to provide more produce for the markets. The displaced smallholders then became wage earning agricultural labourers who then bought produce. This chapter tells the stories of the life and 'death' of Abbotskerswell's farms.



Court Farm

Court Farm was the 'manorial' farm for the Abbots of Horton and their successors to the land in the village from the Abbey of Sherborne. Following the Reformation the land was sold and by 1541 was owned by John Ridgeway and it is then that a reference to Court Farm or Court Barton appears. The present building is probably of 16th century origin, with improvements such as the porch dated in 1721 according to the plaque above the entrance. By 1839 this was the largest farm in the village with 124 acres, owned by Nicholas Baker but farmed by John Maddicott. The buildings at that time seem to mainly be the ones that would be there until it ceased being a farm; the brilliant aerial photograph left, from the 1960s, shows the full extent of the site as a working farm.

The 1841 Census names the farm as the Court Estate with John Maddicott, his wife and five children living there. In 1842 Captain Marcus Hare, whose wife would later build Court Grange, bought the estate. Marcus died in 1845 with Mrs Hare and their three children living in London and the farm being managed by Richard Pilgrim, but by 1861 Thomas Rowell and his son William had become the tenants at Court Farm. The Rowells were farming 130 acres and employed four men and three boys and remained there until the late 1870s. With Court Grange completed in c1866 the estate had a series of tenants during the ownership of the Hares, Johnsons and Dences until the 1940s, as *Table 5* shows.

Richard Maye	c1878 - 1881
William Allan	1881 - 1889
Charles Widdicombe	1889 - c1898
John Henry Buckpitt	c1898 - c1906
William Foale Buckpitt	c1906 - c1916
Edwin Thomas	c1916 - 1921
Mr G Chater (the Bailiff for Rev Dence)	1921 - 1928
Henry Barter	1928 - c1934
Christopher Warren	c1934 - 1941

Table 5 The Tenant Farmers at Court Farm

It was William Purkis who purchased the farm from Mrs Dence in c1940, he lived in the main house with his son Melva living in Orchard Cottage. Melva inherited the farm and in c1960 he sold it to Reginald Walters, moving to the new Ruby Farm. However, times were changing and by 1964 the Court Farm was no more as the story of the Court Farm Inn will reveal in *4. Pubs, Clubs & Governance*, with the farm's land sold for housing.

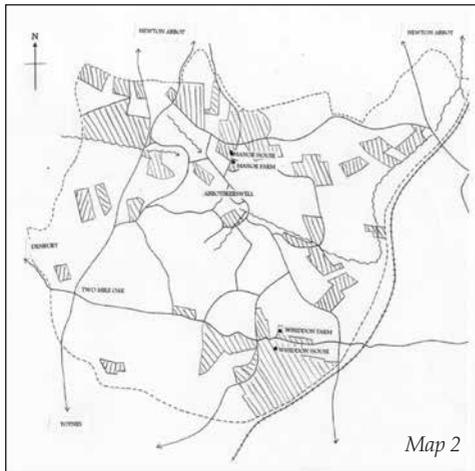


1839. The family also bought the title of 'Lord of the Manor', presumably to reinforce their position as significant landowners in the village.

From the 1850s until the 1890s the farms' tenants were John Grills and Thomas Mudge and by that time the large farmhouse with its courtyard of barns had been constructed.

By 1881 Thomas Mudge was farming 140 acres and employing three men; he appears to have done well as by 1891 he was recorded living in Kingskerswell as a 'retired farmer' at the age of 50. When he retired another a village dynasty would take over at Manor Farm; the new tenant was John Henry Buckpitt. His family had been agricultural labourers from Stoke Fleming but following his marriage to Elizabeth Foale, whose father was a butcher and farmer from Blackawton, he appears to have taken over their family farm and was soon farming 200 acres. By 1891 he and Elizabeth, with their four children were in Abbotskerswell, and the family would be at Manor Farm until 1995.

Manor Farm was large by the standards of the time, over a 100 acres, and was a mixed farm with a milking herd and corn crops grown. It had a herd of around 20 South Devon cattle with its milk being taken to Torquay twice daily in ten gallon churns. Cattle were walked to market in Newton Abbot, with newly calved cattle walking behind a cart carrying their calves. They grew wheat and barley to sell, oats and 'dreg corn' for animal feed. Root crops such as mangolds, swedes and turnips were also grown to feed the cattle, with four shire horses for pulling the farm machinery. Fortunately there is also a good deal of information about Manor Farm from the early 20th century from articles written in AbbTalk by Fred Brimecombe. His description of harvesting the corn was fascinating, with Percy Buckpitt overseeing everything. With the corn almost ripe a binder, waggons and wains were prepared and when the weather was good they began.

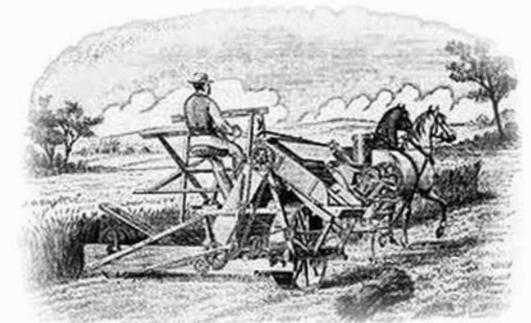


Manor Farm

The Tithe Map shows a farm on the site with its owner, William Creed, having 110 acres, but with 14 tenants, although the farm cottage was empty. His father, William Creed, whose story will be told in *2. Houses & Families*, owned Whiddon House and a good deal of land within the parish. It was the young William who owned the Manor Farm site, whilst living at Heathcot, and seems to have constructed both The Manor

House and Manor Farm in the 1840s, making his mark for the family in Abbotskerswell. He was soon a large land owner, being a 'landed proprietor' rather than a farmer and his descendants would remain in The Manor until 1897. Map 2 shows the scale of the Creed landownership in the parish by

This is a horse drawn binder that cut the corn and tied it into sheaves; one has just been dropped by the binder. Men followed standing them together in stooks to prevent them getting wet or damaged. They were then collected after 10 days and stacked in ricks for the winter. A useful by-product of harvesting was catching rabbits which provided cheap meals.



At Manor Farm it was the work of Bert Stoneman and George Bulley to build the rick on its base of faggots of wood, which keep it dry; when built it was thatched for the winter. The following spring Percy would arrange for the threshing of the corn by having Ern Hall, from Coffinswell, bring his steam thrasher, collecting coal and hiring the grain sacks, which held 280lbs of grain. The day before threshing Lion, the steam engine, the thrasher and the reed comber were brought over and prepared by the driver and steersman.

The barley and oat straw was used for animal fodder and cart loads of douse (chaff) carted away in the waiting wain, shown in the picture. By this time the land would have been ploughed and seeded ready for the next harvest. The farm workers had a hard life, with long hours but there were benefits; they had a cottage provided free, a pint of milk a day, two rows of potatoes and firewood. Bert Stoneman lived at Prospect Place, which were old thatched cottages that are now demolished.



This picture shows the scene as it would have occurred. The man on the rick throws the sheaves onto the thrasher, the corn was collected in sacks by the man in front of the engine and the wheat straw went up the comber to be bound and stacked for thatching.

The local papers also revealed some interesting information about farming life at Manor Farm and also its dangers. In March 1911 a horse and cart bolted throwing its driver out and running over his legs, thankfully no great damage was done and the horse was caught further down the village. In October 1921 a village tragedy was narrowly averted when a straw rick collapsed during its construction. It collapsed in the farm yard and slid across Vicarage Lane with the two men who were working on top ending up in the garden of the Vicarage. Children had been seen playing in the lane and it was feared they were underneath it, but thankfully they emerged unscathed close by. On 21 May 1922 a major fire occurred at the farm causing damage valued at over £600. The fire began in a loft over the cow sheds and spread rapidly to the tarred roof. Animals, implements and fodder were removed from the ground floor before the fire brigade arrived and managed to put the fire out. The villagers turned out to help save as much as possible for a grateful farmer:

Mr Buckpitt wishes to express his sincere gratitude and appreciation to all who so freely gave such valuable assistance and worked so hard at the recent fire at Manor Farm.¹

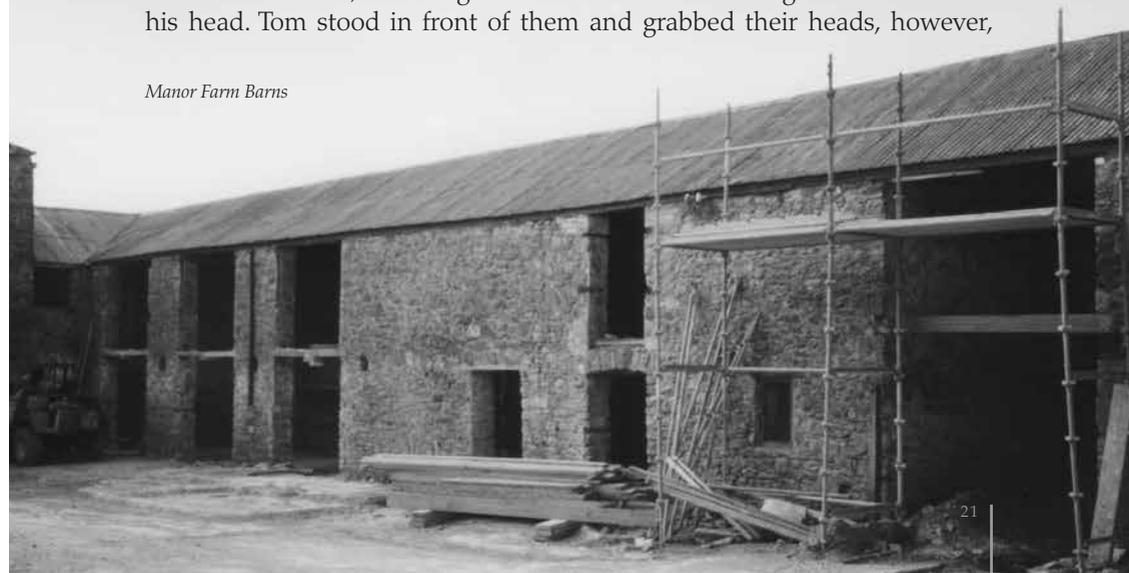
John died in 1930 and since his son John had always farmed in Blackawton, the Manor Farm tenancy passed to his grandson Percy, who had been managing the farm. When Percy died in 1944 it would be his son Michael who would be the last Buckpitt at Manor Farm. By the 1990s Michael, with his sons John and Andrew, was still farming at Manor Farm but times were changing. Increased environmental and business pressures made farming from within the village impossible. In 1994 John moved the dairy herd to a new farm at Milton Damerel in North Devon, whilst the farmhouse and buildings were sold for conversion into housing; this is now the Manor Gardens estate. Michael and Andrew continued to farm in the parish when they created a new 'Manor Farm' at Seychelles Farm, rearing sheep and beef cattle.

Town Farm

This farm in the centre of the village was another referred to on the Tithe Map, when Thomas Maddicott was farming 19 acres; by the 1850s his son, Thomas, was the farmer with 41 acres and employed two men. He continued at Town Farm until his death in 1902 when Robert and Elizabeth Chudleigh, who lived at 1 Town Cottage took over the farm buildings. By 1912 both had died and their son, Thomas, was then the farmer until his retirement, having moved into Town Farm. He was a small farmer, with a few fields scattered around the village, using a horse and cart. He kept about six milk cattle with the milk sold "...at the doors, people bringing their own jugs or can."² Pigs were kept and slaughtered for meat, there was a strong butcher's trade in the village; root crops were also grown.

The dangers of farming were vividly described in the MDA when Tom and his brother William were ploughing with a pair of horses, as they turned the team it bolted, knocking William over and delivering a severe blow to his head. Tom stood in front of them and grabbed their heads, however,

Manor Farm Barns



they shook him off and: "...jumped clear of him, and happily the chains attaching the horses to the plough snapped at the same time, or the share must have caused terrible injuries"³. The horses then bolted across the field but crashed into a cart of mangolds causing them to fall; they at last lay still and allowed themselves to be disentangled with no harm done.

Town Farm and its nine acres were sold by their owners, the Carr family, in 1949 when they sold the Whiddon Estate. When Thomas retired in June 1954 Town Farm ceased to be a working farm, with the house being sold as a private residence to Victor Monks Hooper in 1957.

Ruby Farm

Like Town Farm, Ruby was quite small and in 1839 was farmed by John Ruby who had around 22 acres and had been farming in the village since the 1820s; by 1861 he had 36 acres, employing two men. When he died in 1864 his son George (right), a farmer in Ipplepen, took over the farm until his death in 1874.



Samuel Elliott	An ex labourer from 1 Town Cottage	1874 - c1887
Herman Paddon		c1887 - 1890
Alfred Cole	A farmer's son from South Brent	1890 - 1906
Edward Wilton	From Halwell St Leonards	1906 - c1918
George Wills		c1918 - 1921
Samuel Major		1921 - c1928
Donald Pengilly	A Parish Councillor who went to work for Beares	c1928 - c1936

Table 6 Farmers at Ruby Farm

The Chudleighs outside Town Farm



The last farmer at Ruby appears to have been Edward Seymour who was described as a smallholder in 1937. By 1945 the farm had been sold and renamed Monks Thatch but the Ruby Farm name survived when it was moved to Two Mile Oak.

Abbotsford



Abbotsford Farm was another of those listed in 1839 when it appears to have been known as Home Farm until c1880. It was one of the larger farms with George Ford owning and farming over 80 acres in the parish until his death in 1847.

The early 20th century photograph shows that it was a substantial house but also had large barns with it; the Tithe Map shows that its barns had been even more extensive. John Somers Cocks was of the opinion that it was a 17th century house that was re-fronted in the late 18th century in a fashionable Georgian style.

Alan Perrott	From Coffinswell, farmed 60 acres	1847 - c1860
Elias Ford	A son of George; a retired grocer	c1862 - c1875
Richard Ford	Elias' brother who farmed 220 acres and employed seven agricultural labourers	c1875 - c1889
Robert Reeves		c1889 - c1893
John Haydon		c1893 - c1897
John Cole		c1897 - c1902
Edward & John Mortimer	From Littlehempston	c1902 - c1926
William Brooks		c1926 - c1930
Herbert Allen	Probably the last to farm at Abbotsford	c1930 - c1937

Table 7 Farmers at Abbotsford Farm

By 1937 Abbotsford was owned by William Codner Henley with the foreman cooper of the cider works, Frederick Sydenham, living there. When Thomas Chudleigh retired at Town Farm he purchased Abbotsford. The major refurbishment of the house in the last few years has put Abbotsford back amongst the village's most elegant houses.

Other Village Farms

There were a number of small farms within the village of Abbotskerswell that appeared and disappeared in the 19th and 20th century. The 1839 map shows a Tree or Cross Farm in The Square (now Corner Cottage); John Skinner farmed 55 acres from there between c1860 and the end of the century. By 1901 John was retired and the farming had ceased; the house became Tree House and by 1911 Elm Tree House with his widow Caroline still there. In 1839 Western Farm was shown on a site on the present Orchard Court where the Leakers, an Abbotskerswell family, farmed 50 acres. First was John, then his son Thomas; they were also shoemakers. The farm disappeared and by 1889 the last remaining part of the farm was the barn next to Model Cottages that was demolished when the Model Stores was enlarged; this can be seen in the photograph of the shop shown on page 63.

There were a number of small, short lived farms in the village; one was at Fairfield on Vicarage Lane, whose first reference was in 1883 when Cullifield Barrow was there. The last seems to be in the 1930s when William Rowe still ran a smallholding there. The Priory also had a small farm to provide the nuns with a supply of milk, vegetables and meat. The last farmer was Mr Thorning and when he retired in 1949 the land was taken over by the Buckpitts and Rews. In the 1930s Mr and Mrs Caunter of No1 Hillside Cottages ran a small dairy farm across the road. There were cowsheds there and a milk churn stand, from where the milk was sent to the creamery. He was once prosecuted for watering his milk, claiming a leaking roof had caused the problem!

An interesting farm was Laburnum Farm, which like most is listed on the Tithe Map, and belonged to Joseph Amery and his mother Margaret at that time. It was later owned by the Wilton family whose story will be told in *2. Houses and Families*.

Whiddon Farm

The Whiddon Estate contained the most important house in the parish at the beginning of the 19th century, Whiddon House. It had been bought by the Creed family in 1831 and would be a Creed house all century. In 1839 William Snr and his son John were farming 103 acres from Whiddon. Initially the house had farm buildings, but eventually a new farm was constructed across the road. This appears to have occurred by 1851 as the Census of that year shows a William Heyward as a farmer at Whiddon Farm, with John Creed as a land proprietor by that time. In the 1860s there was also a lodge and two cottages constructed, which were used by estate servants and farm labourers.



Around 1858 William Rendell arrived at Whiddon Farm from his father's large farm in Netherton, he farmed 116 acres and employed four men. However, by 1863 he had moved to Combeinteignhead, and Job Pickard had taken over the farm, moving from Laverton in Somerset. Soon he was farming 173 acres, employing five workers whilst also being an assistant overseer of the poor in the village. He and his wife Elizabeth and their 10 children lived at Whiddon Farm until 1893 when it was the turn of George Fisher to become the tenant. George was miller and farmer from Monk Okehampton, but sadly he died as soon as he and his family arrived at Whiddon Farm. His wife Elizabeth and son Henry kept the farm until c1906 when Henry moved to Gale Farm at Bickington.

The next tenant of the new landowner Susan Carr, nee Creed, was William Sercombe; he moved from his father's farm in Doddiscombeleigh to set up at Whiddon on his own, and was soon married to Beatrice who was a Denbury girl. They stayed at Whiddon until William's death in 1934 after which his nephew, William John Sercombe Brooks, took over the tenancy, farming 150 acres; he had previously been at Abbotsford Farm in the village. The farm and its 152 acres, complete with its tenant farmer, was sold to Mr Nickells of Kingskerswell in 1949 who was a renowned property buyer. By 1951 retired army captain David Keith was at Whiddon, to be followed by Brian Evans and his daughter Fiona, who is there today.

Aller Manor Farm

This was the major farm of the Aller Vale end of the parish, also known as Aller Barton; it is now the Barn Owl Restaurant. In 1839 John Pinsent farmed 277 acres from there, a huge farm for the time.

John Elliott	Farmed 113 acres, employed four men	c1841 - c1865
George Ford	Farm 210 acres with seven agricultural labourers	c1865 - c1880
John Pethybridge	A ploughman from Chudleigh who farmed 80 acres. As with many small farmers he had other employment, being the "assistant overseer and clerk to the school board and attendance officer" ⁷⁴ .	c1880 - c1906
The Mills family	The last to farm at Aller Manor	c1906 - c1980

Table 8 Farmers at Aller Manor Farm



William Mills was born in Hatherleigh and by 1901 he was a dairyman in Kingskerswell. His sons, William and Hugh, worked on the farm, with William joining the Grenadier Guards during WW1. By the time of William's death in 1940 he had handed the farm over to his

son William who had been living in Torbryan. Sadly William only lived until 1949, consequently his wife Francis, a daughter of George Wilton from Laburnum Farm, and son Peter continued at Aller Manor, which they purchased from British Rail. In 1976 the farm was sold to Devon Council when the Kingskerswell by-pass was first planned; Peter moved the dairy operation to Wiveliscombe in Somerset. In 1980 a Mr Bird received planning permission for a change of use; this led to the creation of the Barn Owl Restaurant.

Aller Moor Farm

This was another of the small dairy farms that villages had in the late 19th and early 20th century. It was not until 1881 that the farm on the Newton Road was first noted, when Thomas Wakeham, a Kingskerswell potato dealer, appears to have set up the farm. He farmed 35 acres and was described as a dairyman at that time. He and his son James still farmed there in 1914, although by 1919 Edwin Hill had succeeded them and would continue at the farm until c1936. In 1930 he was accused of tampering with his milk, it was "...alleged to be adulterated to the extent of 17 per cent of added water."⁵ Hill's defence was: "If there is anything wrong it is not my fault. It is just as it came from the cows."⁶; he was found guilty and fined £4. In the late 1930s he was replaced by Charles Webber who had lived and farmed at Hazelbank in Aller. He farmed Aller Farm until the early 1950s to be succeeded by Mrs E St Ruth Carolus.

Langford Bridge Farm

The third farm at Aller was on the turnpike road from Decoy to Kingskerswell and is one of the few to still be working today, albeit with a new farm house on Priory Road. It seems that the land was farmed from Aller Manor farm in 1839 and was first recorded in 1851 when William Bulley was its farmer. By 1861 he had 70 acres with four labourers to help him, with two carters and a ploughman living on the farm; he stayed at Langford Bridge until his death in 1899 when his son, William, took over the farm. When William married they first lived at the old Turnpike House across the road, although he died in 1905 aged 48. However, his wife Elizabeth continued with the farm, assisted by her two daughters and son until 1919 when the farm was sold to the Newton Abbot Co-operative Society. A succession of farm bailiffs ran it; these included George Fletcher and Fred Gameson. By the late 1950s Norman Rew had acquired the land and the family still farm it today.

Farming Today

Although today most of the old farms have disappeared it is clear that the land is still being farmed, it is uncanny how similar the field patterns are to those on the 1839 Tithe Map. One reason for the demise of the old farms was their unsuitability for modern methods, and as a consequence new buildings out of the village have been constructed. In 1951 William Brooks left Whiddon Farm and created a new farm on Oakhill Road which he called Brooklands, he retired but his brother added barns and worked the land; this was developed by Captain Geoffrey Kenyon in the 1960s. He renamed it as Seychelles Farm, a reminder of his days as a sea captain, and built a bungalow next to the farm buildings. It was this site that was bought by Michael Buckpitt. It was sold in 2005 and today is in the hands of the Glynn family. A new Ruby Farm, opposite the Cricket Club on the main road, was created by Melva Purkiss c1960 after he sold Court Farm. It was then purchased in 1964 by Reginald Walters after he sold Court Farm, and when he died in 1968 by Fred Downs; it is still in the Downs' family with father and son Charles and Mervyn working the land. As with many farms today they have diversified creating a waste tip and industrial units. The Rew family continue to farm much of the land around the Priory and down towards Wolborough. But to prove there is continuity in the industry the Buckpitts are still farming in the village, although now with only 35 acres for animal rearing, but that makes 124 years of continuous work.

Chapter 4

Village Industry at Aller Vale and Stoneycombe

During the early part of the 19th century traditional occupations began to undergo significant change, but so did the few already organised businesses. It would be these industries that would see massive change, becoming major employers before most faded into obscurity. Chapters 4 & 5 will chart those industries across the original parish, showing how they either disappeared or evolved until today.

Quarrying

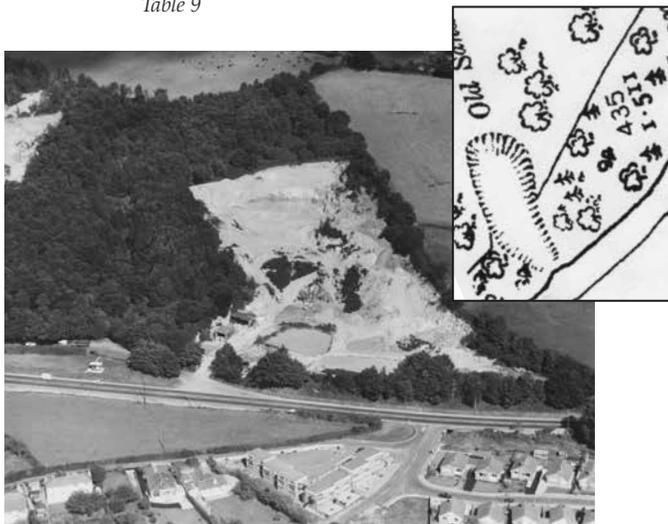
Over the centuries there have been various types of quarrying within the parish; *Table 9* shows the impact of quarrying on employment in the parish. In 1861 it made up 0.5% of the workforce but by 1901 it had risen to 7.2%.

	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Quarrymen	0	1	2	4	5	16	14

Table 9

Sand and Gravel

The early maps reveal a number of these quarries in the Aller area. Today's *Zig Zag Quarry* on Torquay Road had been worked in the mid-1800s, as it was referred to on the 1887 OS map as an 'old sand pit'. It stayed in this condition until the early 1940s when



quarrying was revived and by 1950 it was owned by Peter Lloyd and Jerry Harris; Jerry had been a partner in Harris & Miners hauliers until they were nationalised. After de-nationalisation in 1954 they reformed and owned the quarry until the 1960s when it was acquired by Torbay Contractors, who today are part of Harleyford Aggregates. There was an 'old gravel pit' in 1886 behind the Devon Motorhomes site, which has remained dormant. On the borders of the parish were the extensive Aller Vale Sand Pits, which today is Hanson's concrete plant.

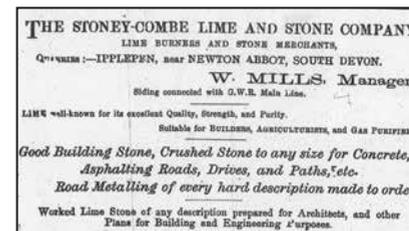
The photograph and map make an interesting comparison of the site in 1905 and the 1970s which shows that it had not expanded that much.

Clay

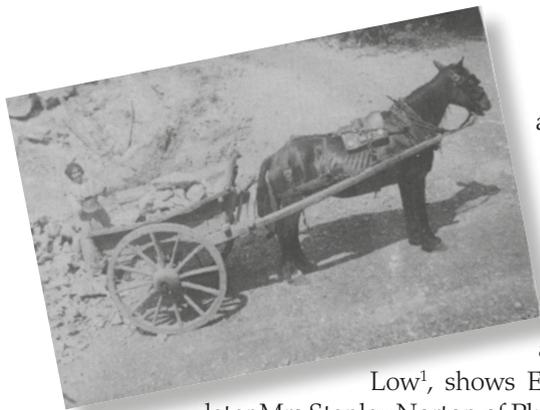
There are a number of references to the digging and processing of clay within the parish, although it must have been on small scale. In 1839 there were two 'clay pits' on either side of the road to Aller just before the railway bridge, as well as referring to a 'clay works' at what would become the pottery. It is possible that these pits provided the clay for the early pottery Aller Pottery Works. The largest clay working was a pit dug in the 1950s on the site of what is now Buckland Athletic Football Club; this was Watts, Blake and Bearne's 'South Quarry' which fell into disuse during the 1970s. In 2005 the site was reclaimed for use by the football club.

Stone

There were a number of quarries situated in the parish as there is a large supply of limestone available. The largest was the Stoneycombe Quarry which straddled our parish at Whiddon. Quarrying began there in 1846, following the construction of the railway and by the 1880s Mary Holloway had created a thriving lime making concern at the site. This was sold to William Wills and Alfred Coleridge in 1890 who together created the *Stoneycombe Lime and Stone Company*, as the 1894 advert from the ESDA showed.



They leased the quarries from the GWR until they were finally purchased in 1926. In the early 1900s Stoneycombe limestone was used extensively in railway track laying, road building and lime production, and nearly all was taken away by rail using the sidings established there. Soon the company



added a 'Tarmac' plant to the site and by 1920 they were employing over 100 men. On the local roads horses and carts carried some of the stone away but by the 1920s steam lorries were becoming common. The picture left taken around 1920, provided by Mrs E

Low¹, shows Ethel Folland from Bridge Cottage, later Mrs Stanley Norton of Plumtree Cottage, who used her horse and cart to carry road stones from the quarry to where they were needed.

C S Daniell adds to this the story of Harry Cooper who was a 'stonecracker'; Harry was a disabled man in the 1920s & 30s who made the pieces of stone used in road construction. His article is a brilliant description of an old time job that would soon disappear:

On these flats were dumped lorry-loads of limestone from Stoneycoombe, all in varying sizes – some too heavy to lift. The tools of Harry's trade were three long-handled hammers, a shovel and two old heavy hemp sacks – one for kneeling on and the other for head cover during inclement weather. Day after day, he would be found hammering away until his stint was completed. What you could see then could almost be classified as a work of art ... a neat triangle or rectangle of broken limestone about three feet high and levelled off so evenly one would swear that he used a spirit level!²

The Mills family continued to run the business; William and John Mills were directors in 1930 and were followed Robbie and Bernard. In 1949 they bought the Whiddon Estate, including Whiddon House, mainly because of the complaints about the blasting at the quarries. They built houses for the owners and workers; bungalows for the Mills family members and Maddacombe Terrace and Stoneyhill for the workers. After WW2 concrete block and ready mix concrete works were added and on the land on the Whiddon side of the railway the quarrying was extended. The making of lime in kilns continued until 1950 when a grinding plant took over production; lime production finally ended in 1999.

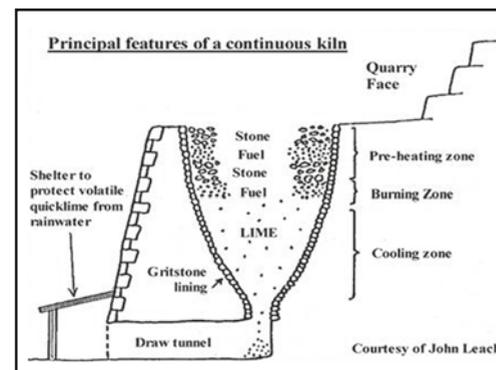
However, the biggest change came in 1960 when the Mills family sold the quarry to the English China Company, but with Bernard Mills staying on as Quarry Manager for a few years. In 1994 an ECC reorganisation saw the name CAMAS used before Bardon Aggregates (now known as Aggregate

Associates) acquired the site. Interestingly the quarry recently received planning permission to extend its prospective life span until 2090.

In the early 1900s the Court Grange Estate had two quarries which were used to produce road stone. These were Grange Quarry in the grounds of the house and Shortland Head Quarry on the road up to Whiddon.

Lime Making

One consequence of the quarrying would provide an early organised village industry, that of lime making. Lime had a number of vital uses: in building, for mortar and a stabiliser in cob, also in agriculture it was used extensively to improve soil fertility. The raw materials for lime production were bulky and with roads being poor most villages had a lime kiln, which was used to produce the quicklime. The raw material was limestone which is mainly carbonate of lime; the lime was made by expelling the carbonic acid using heat. Kilns of various construction were used, burning peat, wood, or coal, according to local supply.



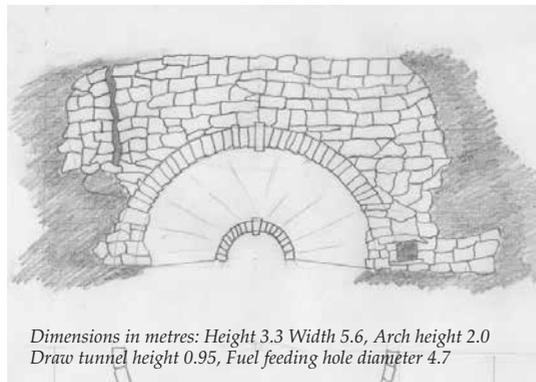
Lime kilns were usually built into the side of a hill, the top of the kiln being on level ground. They were shaped internally like an inverted cone - large at the top and small below. Alternate layers of limestone and fuel were fed into the kiln from the top (hence the level ground), and the fire lit below. A temperature of

900-1000°C would have been required in the kilns to create the reaction that turns the limestone into quicklime. As the fire burned upwards, the whole mass dropped down the tapering chamber, a man at the top keeping it filled, whilst another was at the bottom raking out the burnt lime. The process was kept going for a week at a time. The heat was intense, the smoke considerable and quick lime burns commonplace, therefore making this a very dangerous occupation.

If a village had supplies of limestone then it had a lime burning industry in the 19th century, as Abbotskerswell had. The 1839 Tithe Map shows the industry existed then in a number of places. Plot 126 was Gillards's Wood and

it contained a "lime kiln & waste"³; this kiln was in the limestone quarry on what is now Grange Park. There were others: the field containing Higher Langford House was called Great Kiln Close, with Little Kiln Field being across the road, and a field off Stoneman's Hill was Kiln Field. Kiln Close is now the 10th hole on Dainton Park Golf Course, with Barton Head alongside in which there was a quarry with "waste & kiln"⁴, and nearby was Kiln Park.

The kilns were still active in the mid-19th century since John Frenchard was manager of the Abbotskerswell lime kilns in 1857. The 1887 OS map explains why a manager was necessary revealing five sites with 14 kilns in or on the borders of the parish. The most extensive site was in the Whiddon area. When the South Devon Railway drove its tracks through Whiddon and Dainton large outcrops of limestone were exposed and soon a vibrant lime quarrying and burning industry developed. In 1846 on the Stoneycombe side of the line George Hennett quarried and built kilns with the lime being exported via a railway siding. On the Whiddon side it was George and Mary Holloway who developed the existing kilns there, after 1860. By 1905 the old Whiddon kilns were closed but lime burning at Stoneycombe continued well into the 20th century.



The use of small individual kilns, like a number of ours, eventually became unprofitable, declining with the growth of the railways when it became cheaper to manufacture in larger, centralised kilns and to transport the lime to where it was needed. Although the 1887 OS map revealed lime kilns,

by the 1906 series they were nearly all referred to as being an 'old lime kiln'. In 1881 James Mugridge of 1 Mote Hole worked as a lime burner but by 1891 there were no lime burners in the village and so a once significant industry faded into history. There is little trace of most of the industry today; of our 14 kilns, there are traces near the golf course and in Grange Park, but modern quarrying has swept away those at Stoneycombe. However, the one in the Decoy woods, opposite Crystalwood on Stoneman's Hill is a beautifully preserved kiln it is shown above and on the title page.

Iron Ore

Rather unusually we also had a short lived brown haematite or iron ore mine on the edge of and under the parish; the clue to this is that it was on Firestone Hill, firestone being a colloquial name for iron stone. It was in 1872 that the North of England Iron Company opened the mine having arranged a 21 year lease with the landowner, the Earl of Devon. Andrew Barclay, George Hoey, Ian Harrison and Augustus Smith were the company's four directors who were keen to exploit the recently discovered lode. They employed a well-known local mine captain, William Hosking, to work the mine; he used eight of the plentiful local miners from the Teign Valley. An adit (tunnel) was driven into the hill side to access the lode with a shaft sunk to access other levels. A tramway was built from the old quarry on the Newton road, with over a thousand tons of ore being extracted in the first year. This was sent by ship from Newton Quay to the iron smelters in the Welsh valleys. However, by 1873 the lode had run out and the mine closed. Sadly nothing remains of the site as the agreement with the Earl of Devon was that everything would be returned to its original state.

The Aller Vale Mills

This interesting site at the eastern end of the parish, on the site of the small industrial estate below the Barn Owl restaurant, saw some fascinating industries and would, together with Henley's Cyder Works, be major employers of local people. Throughout the last 200 years these sites would reflect the changing nature of local industry beginning with the expansion of work using regional materials.

Paper Making

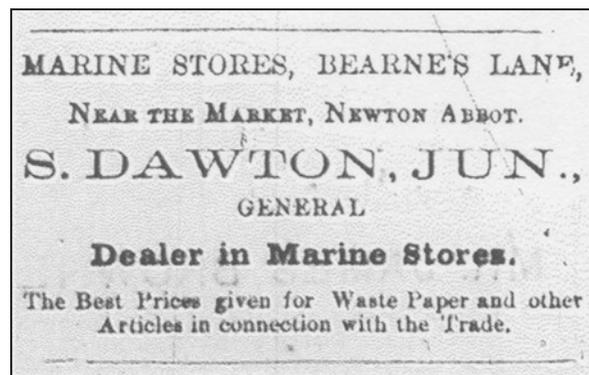
From the Middle Ages until the later years of the 19th century paper was made using cotton and linen fibres, with the invention of the spinning wheel increasing the supply of rags, which led to cheaper paper. By the 1800s, fibre crops such as flax, which provided linen fibres, and cotton were still the primary material sources, although paper was a relatively expensive commodity. The use of wood to make pulp for paper did not begin on a large scale until the 1870s with the first wood pulp paper mill in Sweden. From 1779 to 1797 Francis Fincher and Joseph Turner ran the Aller Paper Mills, although little is known about them. However, from c.1845 – c.1875 *Samuel Dawton & Co* were papermakers based at Aller Paper Mills.

Samuel Dawton was born in Topsham in 1810; he married Ann Selina Lake in Bradnich in 1832 where they settled with their first child. In 1841 the Countess

Wear area of Topsham was a major paper making area, in which the Dawton family were heavily involved. Samuel and Ann's next two children, John and Samuel, were both born in Topsham. However, their fourth and fifth children, Elizabeth and Selina, were born in Abbotskerswell which indicates that their mill was running by 1850. In 1851 the Census reveals Samuel to be a paper maker who employed 19 hands; he certainly employed a good number of family members who had followed him from Topsham.

It is interesting that in 1857 the company was described as papermakers, rag merchants and bone crushers, and later as handmade writing paper manufacturers. This confirms the nature of paper making at the time which required large quantities of rags. The rags were washed and went through the rag-breaking phase in a washer/beater, called the 'Engine' when they were immersed in water, circulated in an oval and cylindrical roller probably driven by a waterwheel; a leat fed the mill from the Aller Brook. Next the fibre was separated from the water in sieves and laid on sheets of woollen cloth, called the hand felt, and piled up and pressed to remove the remaining water. This 'pack' was then removed to a drying loft and air-dried. Once the paper sheets had been 'sized', which allowed the paper to bear ink, they could be sorted for quality and then counted into quires and reams.

It was a slow and labour intensive process which probably helps to explain the demise of Dawtons by 1878. Samuel was described as a paper manufacturer between 1851 and 1871, but by 1881 he had moved to Salisbury, although he was still a rag merchant; he died in 1891. The number of papermakers shown in the village census also reflects the steady decline of the business; there were 11 in 1851 but down to 4 in 1861, 3 by 1871 and none after that. A post script to the story was that Samuel's son, Samuel, stayed in the area and set up as 'marine store dealer', however, he was bankrupt by 1876; this is reinforced



by the advertisement taken from the ESDA in January 1876, by July it was no longer there. He eventually went back to paper making, taking his wife and 10 children to another paper making centre at Wookey Hole in Somerset.

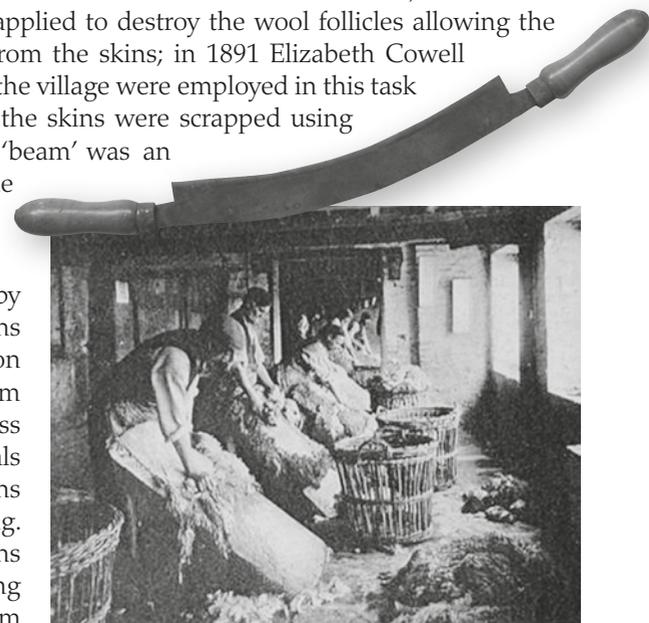
Fellmongering

By 1878 a whole new business had grown up at Aller Mills, and would remain there for half a century, George Stockman jnr and his *Aller Bone & Manure Company*. George was born in Highweek, in 1846 and by 1871 he was a salesman who lived at home at Newton Mills, where his father was the miller. In 1873 he married Elizabeth and moved to Abbotskerswell where their first four children were born. It would appear that around this time he acquired the Aller Mills from Samuel Dawton and set up his business. By 1881 he lived in Kingskerswell and was described as a: "'fellmonger master' who employs 3 men and 1 boy"⁵, one of these was Thomas Morgan who lived at the mills.

A 'fellmonger' was a dealer in hides or skins, preparing skins for tanning. Firstly the hides were soaked in water to allow them to swell, next a sodium sulphide solution was applied to destroy the wool follicles allowing the wool to be separated from the skins; in 1891 Elizabeth Cowell and her daughter from the village were employed in this task as 'wool pickers'. Next the skins were scrapped using a fell beam knife, the 'beam' was an arched wooden or stone bench; these are shown in the pictures.

This was followed by deliming, when the skins were soaked in a solution of water and ammonium sulphate. The last process to remove all chemicals and natural proteins and was called bating. Once washed the skins were clear of anything that would make them rot and they were then ready for tanning. Some of the skins would not have been put through the "pulling" process, being salted down for skin rugs.

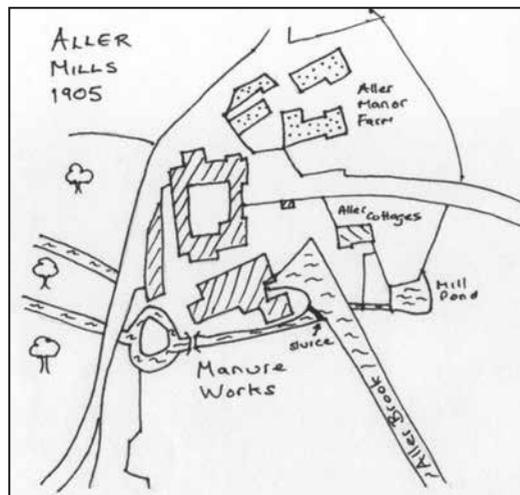
George Stockman's Aller Works business continued until the early 1890s. In 1891 he was living in Kingskerswell with his wife, seven children and a servant girl in 'Hazel Brae' on Yon Hill. However, by 1893 a new company



was at Aller Mills and in 1901 George had fallen on harder times, working as publican's assistant in The Anchor Inn at Cofton near Dawlish.

The new company appears to have been a much bigger concern than that of George Stockman's. The *Devon Hide, Skin and Manure Co Ltd* had a registered office in Bank Chambers, Fleet Street, Torquay; the Company Chairman was Mr A S Rendell, with the manager being Henry Bamforth. Henry was born in Wath-on-Deerne, Yorkshire in 1860; he was the son of a farmer and fellmonger, trades that he had taken up himself by 1881. In 1891 he had moved to another sheep farming area at Beccles in Suffolk, where he was a fellmonger. His background seems to have been ideal for the new company and he was appointed as the manager.

The new company developed George Stockman's bone and manure works entering into all three elements of fellmongering, bone crushing and manure (fertiliser) making. In 1904 the Company was being forced by the Medical Officer of Health, Dr Mapleton, to: "... deal, with the fumes, etc., arising from our works."⁶ At the 1904 Annual Manure Audit Dinner, Abbotskerswell farmer Robert Maddicott, responding to the Chairman's address, commented that: "... to get the best crops and cattle it was necessary to use the best manures, and he could speak highly of the Aller Vale manures ... he had never had a failure."⁷ By 1905 there was an extensive array of buildings at Aller, and importantly, water supply from the Aller Brook, which has since been diverted away from the buildings, plus a mill pond behind what is now Bramble Cottage.



The site was described as a 'Manure Works'. In 1901 there only two villagers working in the trade, a hide & skin gatherer and John Facey, who was the foreman at the hide works and lived at Aller Mills. However by 1911 it was a growing business with eight villagers working in the skin trade.

By 1901 Albert Victor Judd had taken over as the new manager. Victor Judd, as

he was known, was born in Launceston, Cornwall in 1875; his whole life appears to have involved the skin and hide trade like his father Frederick, who was a merchant in skin and hides, as well as a Wesleyan Preacher. Victor was an assistant to his father when they lived in Hacombe in 1891 and by 1901 he was a 'manager, hide, skin and manure'; presumably at the Aller Mills. In 1911 Victor lived at the Aller Mills with his wife, Marianna, and daughter Winifred. The jobs listed in the 1911 Census provide a picture of the development of the company, as in addition to the wool pickers, there were labourers in fellmongery and manure work. John Facey's role had become the foreman at the manure works and Victor Judd was the manager at what was then called a chemical manure works. The move into manure production in addition to fellmongery was perhaps inevitable as the two, in addition to bone crushing, were often housed in the same buildings.

The general idea was to waste nothing that arrived at the Aller Works: "It may be taken as a broad principle that Chemical Manures consist of Phosphates, Potash, Salts, and Nitrate of Soda"⁸. This chemical manure was added to the available farm yard manure to re-fertilize the land following harvesting; this was the new method to replace old crop rotation methods but to increase crop yields. The process of making 'chemical manure', really a chemically enhanced organic fertiliser, began with the fellmongers who removed all the wool with its waste products; this contained nitrogen and was a valuable part of the artificial manure. Added to this were the carcasses of slaughtered animals, bones, blood and offal from butchers. This was placed in large copper cauldrons, heated by furnaces, which boiled the mixture to remove oils. In the mixing stage it was treated with sulphuric acid to fix the nitrogen and make the phosphates soluble. It was then dried with sulphate of lime and mixed with bone, mineral phosphates, and sulphate of ammonia. The finished material looked like congealed mud or dust! This also explains why they had their own bone crushing business where the animal bones were ground to different degrees of fineness to be added to the manure mix. As mentioned earlier, smell was a major problem for such works.

With the company growing they had added a Secretary to the management structure in 1914, this was Charles Rivers who was an agent in finances, land and houses, with offices at 32 Fleet Street in Torquay. His role was probably financial control as following his death in 1919 Victor Judd became the Secretary, presumably adding this to his position as manager.

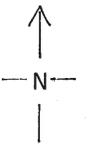
The end of The Devon Hide, Skin and Manure Co. Ltd is not clear. The MDA described a very dramatic and major lorry fire at the Aller Mills in March

Newton Abbot

Newton Abbot

Newton Abbot

Newton Abbot



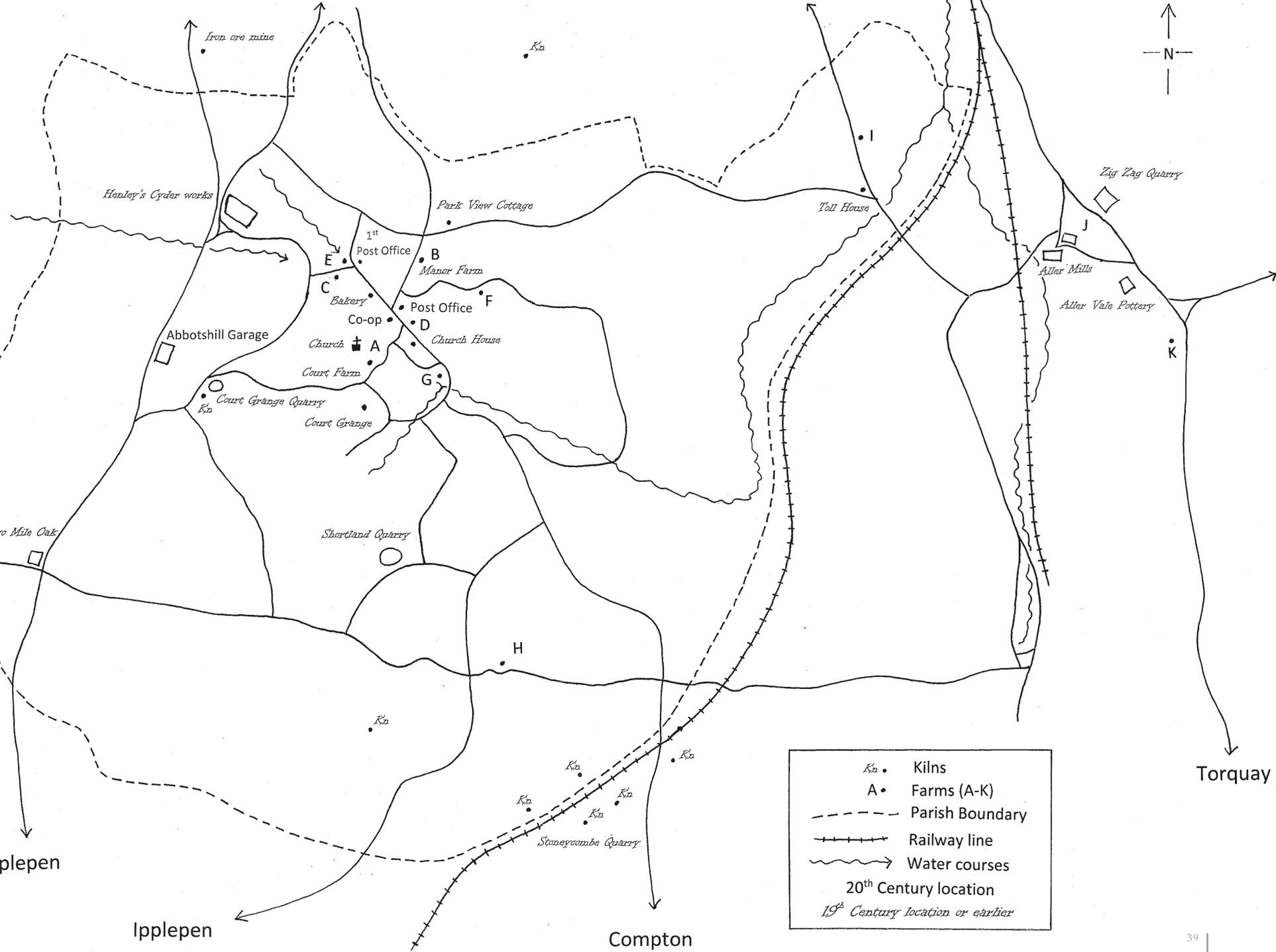
Denbury

Torquay

Ipplepen

Ipplepen

Compton

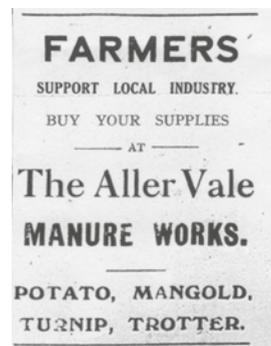


<i>K12</i> •	Kilns
A •	Farms (A-K)
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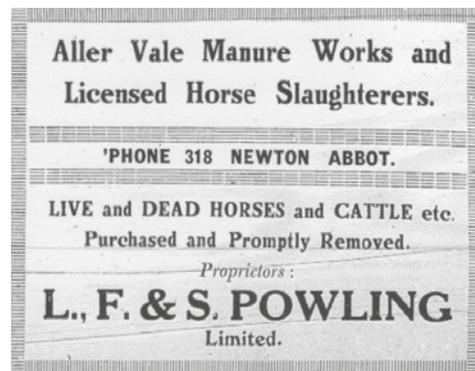
1922, and by 1926 the trade directories reveal that the company was no longer trading, with a new business having taken over the site. Victor died in 1923; a rather confused article in the MDA in 1963 claimed that Moor Park House in Aller was haunted by Victor Judd's ghost following his suicide in '1915' (sic). Although the date is wrong, perhaps Victor's death was linked to the closure of the company?

### Manure Manufacturers

The company of *L F & S Powling Ltd* was a manure manufacturer, and appear to have taken over the Aller Mills site from the Devon Hide concern in the mid-1920s. Leonard lived at the Mills while Frank and Sealy lived in Kingskerswell. It seems likely that the fellmongery side of the work had become unprofitable, possibly because of the growth of the Vicarys in Newton Abbot, consequently the Powlings concentrated on the manure production side, as revealed in their advert in the MDA in 1927.



In addition to the manure works *L F Powling Ltd* were horse slaughters with branches in Exeter, Chard and Spreyton in Mid-Devon. The huge number of horses used on farms and in transport at that time meant there was a vital need to dispose of old, infirm or dead horses and it seems that the Powlings had a complete service by making 'chemical manure' from them, as their 1928 advert in the MDA shows.



However, as with the other Aller Mills companies changing times caught up with them, by 1939 with more machines in use on farms and the arrival of new chemical artificial fertilisers. They appear to have tried an additional business for a while, becoming waste paper merchants in 1936, but by 1941 the Powlings concerns were gone. It continued to be used as

a 'knackers yard', but also by Aller Concrete Works which was run by a group of former RAF men who made concrete building blocks, and by William Press & Son Ltd who were civil engineering contractors.

The Aller Mills site is still active having become industrial trading units; The Supa Roofing Centre and Hydropool Devon are to be found there. The aerial photograph of the 1970s shows the site much as it was; however, the site has now been modernised and the only obviously original building is the one facing the main road.



### The Aller Vale Pottery Site

As Torquay Road enters Kingskerswell, just past the 'Barn Owl' there is a right hand turn on to Moor Park Road, by taking the second left turning there is an entrance into the 'Aller Vale Buildings Trading Estate'; this is the site of a number of Abbotskerswell industrial companies, most notably the Aller Vale Pottery. Now you would be within your rights to question the use of 'Abbotskerswell' here but until 1984 this was in our parish; look at the centre page map and you can understand how the original parish went some way the other side of the Torquay Road.

The Tithe Map of 1839 shows that this site was in use for clay working at that time, with reference to the 'Clay Works' and Moor Park House. By 1870 it was noted that:

About forty years since, a pottery existed here for the manufactory of coarse red ware, also a kind of terra cotta ..... Subsequently bricks and roofing tiles, etc., were the only class of pottery goods made⁹

It is also likely that one of the other buildings on the map was in use for the next clay related industry.

### The Aller Ochre Works

In 1857 William Bradford was running the *Aller Ochre Works*. William was a Wolborough man who, in 1851, was an Ochre Merchant living in Aller; since most of his children were born there from 1846 it is probable that the

works date from that time. He was a man of wealth because the 1841 Census described him as having independent means and in 1851 his household boasted 3 servants.

Ochre is a natural earth pigment containing iron oxide, its colours range from yellow to brown; a variant of ochre containing a large amount of iron is called "red ochre". It is likely to have been found in the local clays extracted from the mines in the Bovey Basin with the local ochre being of high repute, it was "especially suited for the purpose of the present works"¹⁰. The raw clay may contain only 10-20% ochre which was washed to separate the particles of ochre, the water was then drained off, the ochre dried and then classified by colour and quality. These processes are reflected in the local Aller workforce where the Sweetman family contained two ochre scrapers and one ochre miller. Although there is still a reference to a clay and ochre works in 1870, only one Sweetman was still working there in 1861 and no local workers in 1871, so it would appear that the Aller Ochre Works had disappeared by then.

The best quality ochre was used for artists' pigment, but it was an important product for the British fishing industry. The ochre was boiled in great caldrons, together with tar, tallow and oak bark, it was then combined with oil and used to coat sails to protect them from seawater. This is what gave the Brixham trawlers their distinctive reddish coloured sails.

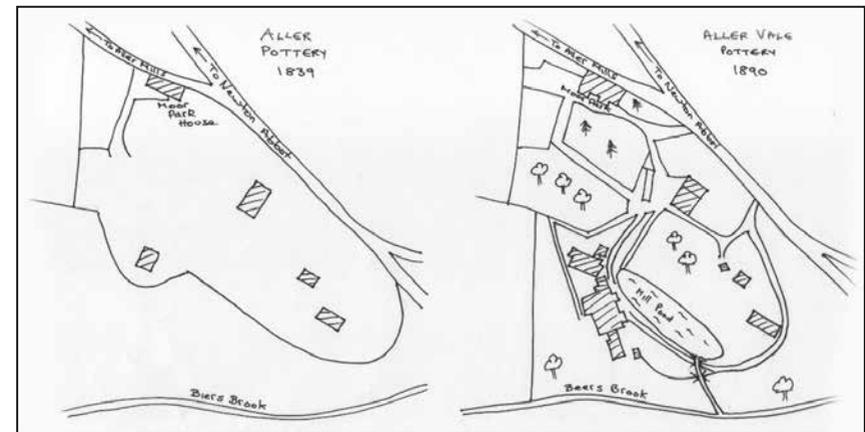
## The Aller Vale Pottery

By 1870 the buildings at the old clay works were being rebuilt for a much bigger concern that was to produce fine architectural and terra cotta ware; this was "*John Phillips and Co.*, manufacturers of architectural pottery and fire bricks"¹¹. John Phillips would have a significant role in industry in Abbotskerswell for the next 30 years, both as an employer and as an educator. He was born at Shaugh Prior in 1835, the son of William and Margaret, one of their ten children. William was a china clay merchant and a partner in the large Lee Moor Porcelain Clay Works; John joined him and he was described as a "China clay merchant and brick manufacturer"¹². However, in 1861 William died and John's services were dispensed with by the company and as a consequence he set off to create his own company.

*John Phillips and Company* was established around 1870 and was soon employing 28 people, with John living at Aller House (usually known as Moor Park House) with three of his unmarried sisters and three servants. By 1878 the business was described as "architectural pottery, sanitary pipe and terra-cotta manufacturers"¹³, although in 1881 he was only employing

13 men and two boys. The work at that time was described at a village bazaar in glowing terms, the "terra cotta ware manufactured at the Aller Pottery Works, for delicacy of colour and beauty of finish would compare favourably with that produced at any other pottery"¹⁴. It appears likely that two events caused John to change the focus of his company; the downturn in the company's affairs and a fire that caused a great deal of damage. The consequence of these is seen in the 1890 listing of *John Phillips and Co.* as a fine art pottery company and the expansion of the firm to be employing 70 men by 1893. The explanation of this is shown in 1893:

During the years 1882-92 cottage art schools have been held in this village [Abbotskerswell] in which young men have been trained in designing and art handicraft, and many of these find permanent employment at Aller Vale Pottery works.¹⁵



The late 19th century saw the rise of a national movement called 'The Arts and Crafts Movement'. It was born of a desire, in the newly industrialised Britain, to return to the 'idyllic' rural days of the past; of course it was an illusion, but many prominent people supported the idea. Phillips became greatly influenced by William Morris a socialist writer, designer, artist and craftsman, and the social reformer John Ruskin. Their idea was to create rural based industries, with rural skills that local people could use to avoid having to move to the towns for work. In Abbotskerswell the manifestation of this movement came in the shape of John Phillips. He was dedicated to developing the skills of the local talent and chose to develop these skills by creating weekly evening classes in the '3 Wells'; Abbotskerswell, Kingskerswell and Coffinwell. Children and young adults from 14 to 23



*Park View Cottage is on the left*

were taught skills using materials such as wood, metal, clay and textiles. The intention was to both equip them for life and help them obtain employment within their own community. His obituary described the importance of his work: "Probably, no man has achieved such success in solving the problem of how to brighten village life and make it attractive to growing generations."¹⁶

In Abbotskerswell Phillips first tried to use the new village school but was refused permission, so instead he found a house that could be used in the evening; this was Park View Cottage on Priory Road. So in the early 1880s the classes began in Mrs Bulley's little cottage.

Mary Bulley, nee Burrige, was born in Abbotskerswell and by 1881 was a widow with two children, Herbert and William, who lived at 2 Vulcan Place. Her connection with the pottery industry began after that time with Herbert being an early pupil and later a teacher at the classes. In 1891 he was working in art pottery when he was a lodger with William Hart who was a foreman at the Art Pottery works at Aller. By 1901 Herbert was living at Moor Park and was himself foreman of the works. He went on to become a pottery manufacturer and when he died in Newton Abbot in 1912, aged 44, he was

a wealthy man. It was probably through this connection that Mary, who lived at 2 High Burrow Cottage (Park View) from 1891 until at least 1911, became involved in John Phillips' school. The classes were described in the Newton Times at the time:

The decoration of pottery has given regular employment to a number of young villagers, and the wood carving has brought an order from Princess Louise for a carved chest .... Visitors to our Cottage Art School have been greatly entertained and interested by the bright and merry group of young people who greeted their entrance.¹⁷

The development of the Aller Vale Pottery and its wares continued through its 'Arts & Crafts' phase producing various styles such as dragons, loving cups and grotesques:

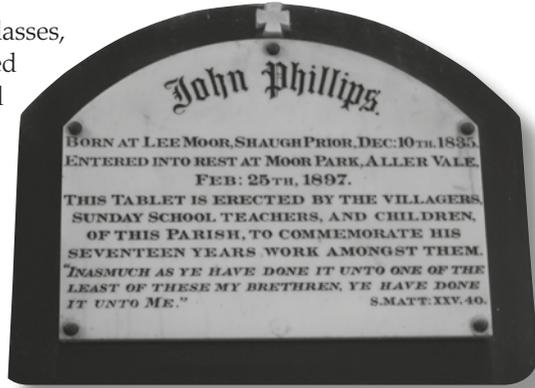
Phillips prided himself that at the Aller Vale Pottery all the work, apart from doing entirely by hand, was also completely original and that no other contemporary pottery's designs or shapes were copied ....¹⁸

Famously a visit in 1886 by Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise, in which she bought some pieces, led to a period of royal patronage. As a result the pottery was renamed as the 'Royal Aller Vale Pottery'; soon other members of the Royal family became customers, including Princess Alexandra, and between 1887 and 1901 Aller Vale Art Pottery was stocked by Liberty & Co in London. Decorators and designers included Domenico Marcucci, Charles Collard and Bill Howard.



The works used local clay and traditional methods using a water wheel to clean the clay and settling pits to achieve a solid state. A thrower made the pots using a metal disc driven by ropes worked by a boy in the old way. The pots were polished, decorated and fired in a biscuit kiln, the glazed and fired again in a box oven.

Sadly for the village and the classes, John Phillips died in 1897 aged 61 at Moor Park and is buried beside the Church porch in Abbotskerswell. "We have lost one of our best friends" was how the ESDA described village sentiment on the day of his funeral, when nearly the whole of the Aller Pottery workforce and many villagers ignored the pouring rain to attend his funeral. A plaque was commissioned by villagers in his honour and still hangs inside the church.



There were many epitaphs to John Phillips, here are three of them:

He was an enthusiast – well some called him a 'crank'. The world is deeply indebted to its cranks.¹⁹ A friend

In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.²⁰

When the history of technical education in England is written no name will occupy a more prominent or more honoured position than John Phillips.²¹

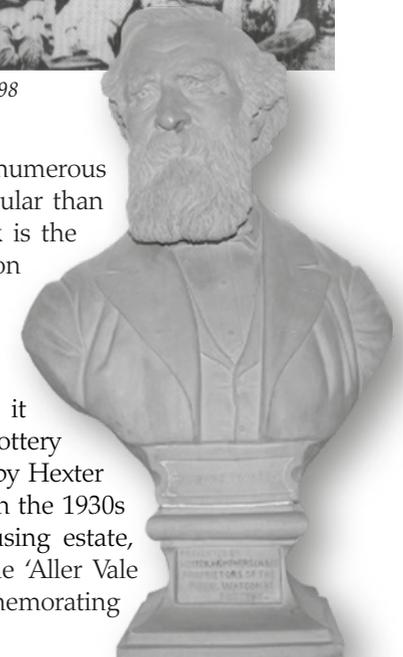
The classes appear to have continued for a few years but without his guidance they eventually died out. However, the company continued its successful ways, but now under the ownership of Messrs. Hexter, Humpherson & Co. who had bought the company's assets for £150 in 1897. The partnership was responsible for the building of a large works in Kingsteignton (now the Kingsteignton Trading Estate on Pottery Road), which manufactured bricks, tiles and drainage pipes. Moor Park House continued to be the hub of the site, with Herbert Bulley, the works foreman, and Thomas Wilcocks, the clerk, using the two parts in 1901. In 1911 it was Ernest Hexter, the works manager, and Frank Evans, the company accountant residing there. In 1913 Hexter Humpherson's won a gold medal at the International Exhibition in Ghent for



Moor Park with the employees of the Aller Vale Pottery c1898

their "unique art pottery, which judging from numerous enquiries recently received, is now more popular than ever."²² An interesting example of their work is the bust of John Passmore Edwards in Newton Abbot Library.

The developing holiday trade in the area changed the style of pottery to 'Mottowares' which were produced at the works until it closed in 1932, having become a subsidiary pottery to the larger Watcombe pottery, also owned by Hexter Humpherson & Co. The site fell into disuse in the 1930s and today the majority of the site is a housing estate, although parts of the pottery remain as the 'Aller Vale Buildings Trading Estate', with a plaque commemorating its famous past.



## Chapter 5

# Village Industry in Abbotskerswell and Two Mile Oak

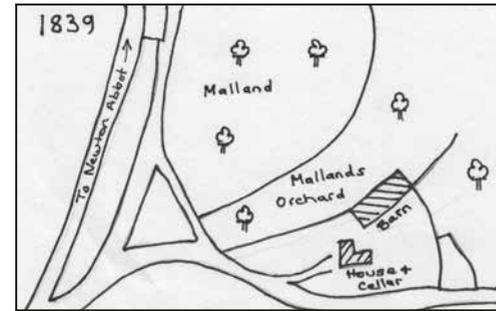
Although for a great deal of the 19th century Aller was the focal point of village industry there was one company that was steadily growing, making use of a local product – apples.

### Henley's Cyder Works Site

Of all the industries of Abbotskerswell perhaps the most iconic was that of Henley's Cyder, they always spelt cider with a 'y' in the traditional Devon way. The business began in 1791 and although sold to Whiteways in 1933 the Henleys name continued, with the site still making cider until 1965. Even then the site changed its nature and still features large in the village's industrial scene today.

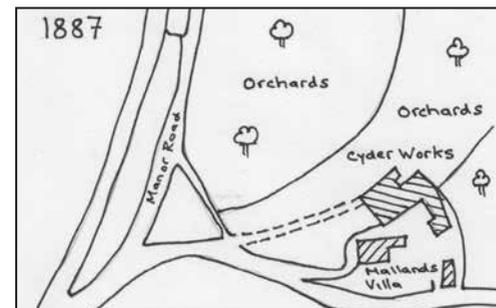
It is likely that the founding father of the company was Richard Henley (1755–1846) and his marriage to Mary Codner would produce the middle name of generations of Henleys; in fact all three of their sons had Codner as a middle name. The Codners were also an Abbotskerswell family and since Richard and Mary's

children were all born in the village it is safe to assume they were living in the village. The Tithe Map of 1839 shows a house on the site of the modern Mallands House and a building that must have been the original 'Cyder Works', these were labelled as 'House and cellar etc'. The original barn still stands today and as the photograph (left) shows, it is still in use.



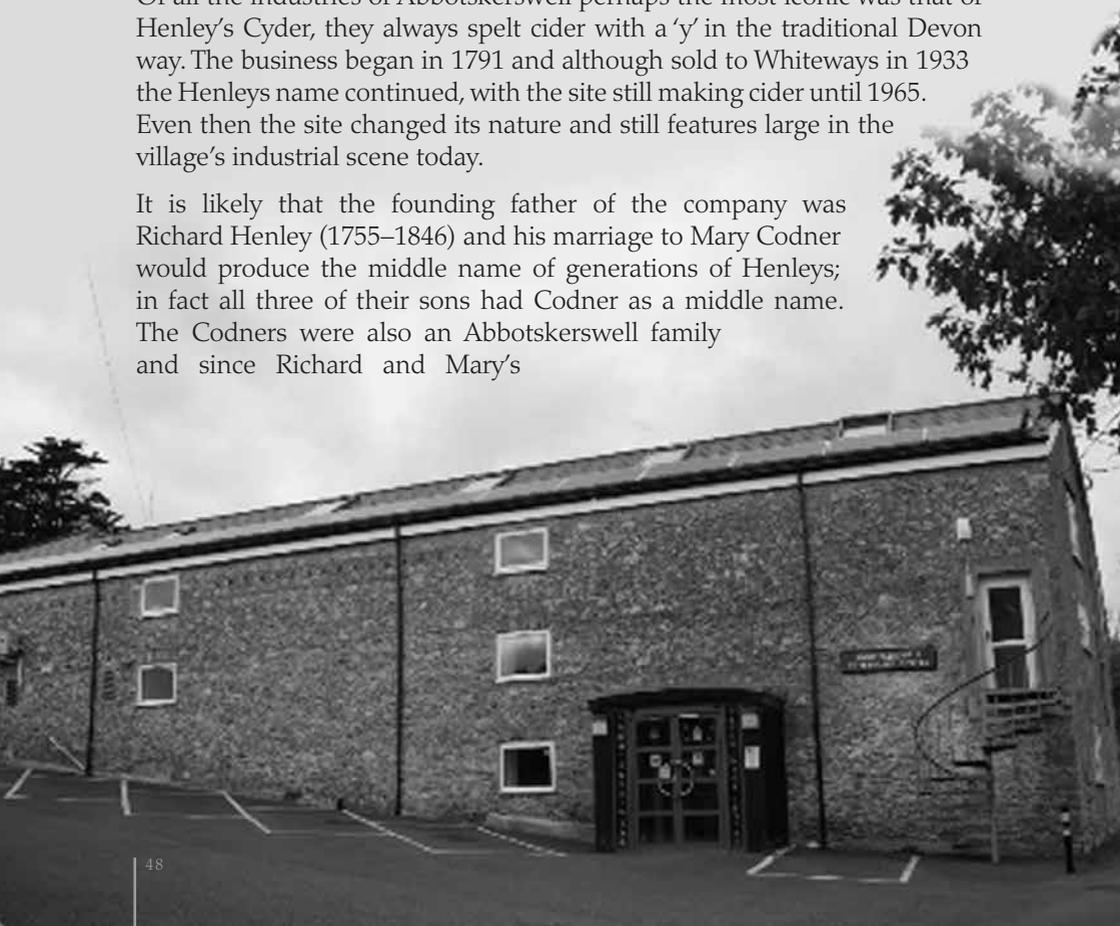
The site was chosen because of its water and plentiful orchards locally; in fact there were over 50, covering 60 acres around the village. In 1839 the house, named after the orchard it once stood in, and surrounding land was owned by William Codner Henley (1790-1856).

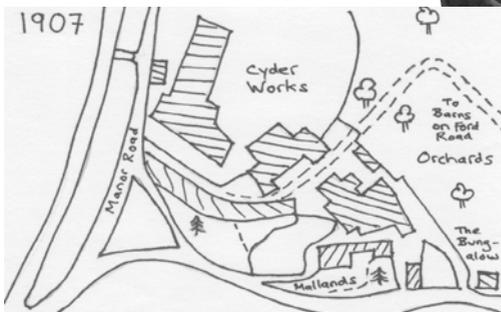
Although the youngest son, it appears that William took over the running of the cider business, as in 1851 he was living at Mallands Villa and was described as a Cyder Merchant. He had developed the works by installing new cider presses in 1835; these replaced the manpowered ones with stone rollers pulled round on a circular whim by a horse. His eldest son, William Codner Henley (1819-1884) took over the business from his father despite the fact that he mainly lived in Croydon. By 1887 additional buildings had been added, with a new driveway into the site, and the additions to the house.



However, it was to be William's eldest son, (another) William Codner Henley (1864-1922) who would be responsible for a huge development of the Henley Cyder brand. He had moved to Abbotskerswell from Croydon following his marriage to Ada Bennett and

they lived at Mallands with their four children. The Henley and Mallands story is described in *2. Houses & Families*. In 1906 Henley's undertook a major development of their operation as the 1907 map shows. There were major new buildings, horse driven presses were replaced with new electrically driven ones, a new driveway with a lodge, a house on Manor Road for Samuel Lang, the overlooker at the Cyder Works, called Oakleigh (now Henley Lodge).





In a recently discovered addendum to a map, dated 26/11/06, W C Henley valued "Mallands House, stables, mills, stores etc, including the building just completed" at £7500.



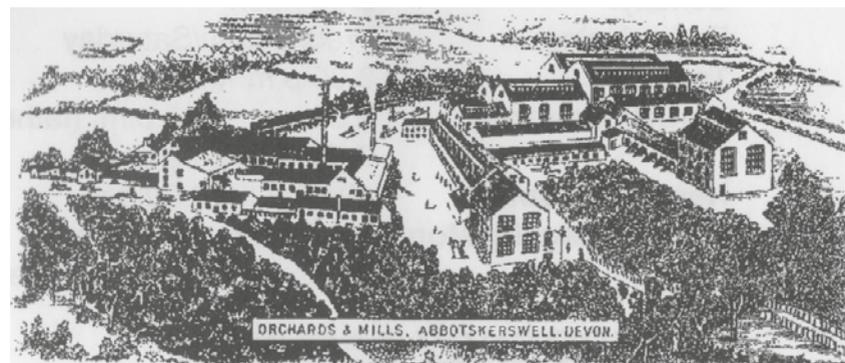
There was also a new Head Office and bottling stores at the Teign Stores, now Tuckers Maltings, having previously been at Jetty Marsh. The land was purchased by Henleys in 1908 from the 'Queen Anne's Bounty for the Augmentation of the Poor Clergy'. There was a cooperage and bottling plant which was next to the railway line with its own siding to load wagons straight from the stores as the photograph below shows.



On the roof of the left hand building is written 'Henley's Famous Cyder' and the covered wagons shown were loaded directly from the stores.

Things did not always go well, when the overlooker, Samuel Lang, featured in a dramatic event in February 1908 when he was attending to the steam engine; there was "... a loud report, the whole of the building being at once engulfed in flames"¹. He was severely burned but saved by the workers who put the fire out before the Newton Abbot fire brigade could attend; the cost of the damage was estimated at over £100.

The 1911 Census revealed how dramatically the Cyder Works had grown as it was employing twelve villagers by then compared with one in 1891; the works were employing over 20 men by the 1910s. This stunning view of the Abbotskerswell site, from a 1920s bottle label, shows the extent of the site then and dramatically called the 'Steam Mills'. Mallands is on the left with Manor Road running around the top, behind the buildings.

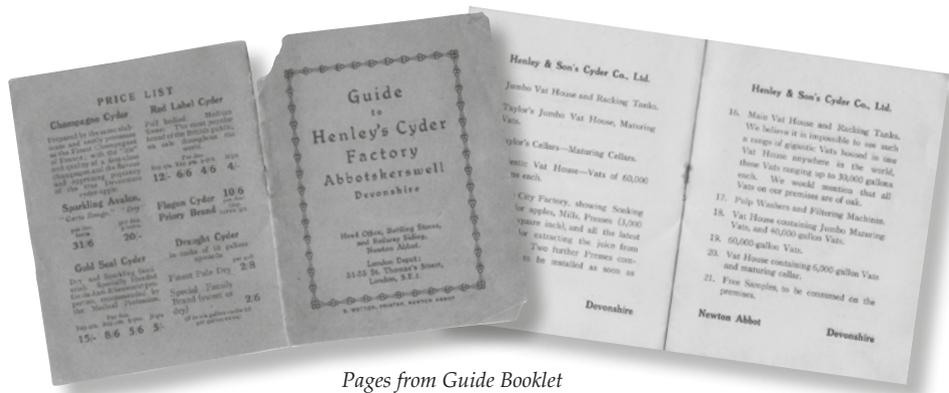


Other changes by the early 1900s were a new central office, bottling stores and cyder depot at 51-55 St Thomas Street in London. Henleys also had local stores at Paignton, Blagdon Monkton, Highweek, Ash, Kingsbridge, Pinhoe & Dodbrooke Quay, Totnes, Ashburton and Ledbury.

In 1922 William Henley died and a new phase for the company began when John Henley and Sons became a limited liability company; William's sons William Codner, John and Ronald being directors. In its prospectus Henleys was seeking to raise £50000 in cumulative shares and £65000 in ordinary shares at £1 each share; it was noted that the company's assets were valued at £98770 and net profits were £9000 a year.

The scale of the business can be seen in a guide produced in the 1930s for visitors to the works; it was open on 3 days a week.

The guide made an interesting suggestion, that Henley's should be drunk "for the good of your health, the delight of your palate and for the love of England"². The guide gives a brilliant description of the whole works, reflecting the massive investment of 1907. A walk around the site for the visitors revealed two mill and press houses to pulp the apples and extract the juice, complete with pulp washers and filters. There were 13 major buildings of which nine were 'Vat Houses' containing cider vats varying in size from 3,500 gallons to a number that contained 60,000 gallons. Six buildings were designated as maturing cellars, some with maturing vats. One building was described as: "we believe it is impossible to see such a range of gigantic Vats housed in one Vat House anywhere in the world, these Vats ranging up to 30,000 gallons each"³. This was a truly impressive site.



Pages from Guide Booklet

However, there were signs during the 1920s that perhaps the Henleys had overstretched themselves. As early as 1900 there was a hint of a major and long lasting issue between the Cyder Works and the village, when Newton Abbot RDC was approached by Abbotskerswell Parochial Council regarding trade waste. This re-emerged in September 1926, when Henleys was asked to carry out a scheme of improvement before the village's sewage outfall was improved; it seems that the village stream was so polluted that cattle could not drink from it. A Ministry of Health water analysis of the Cyder Works waste found it to be "highly charged with putrescible matter and was capable of causing a serious nuisance"⁴. Messers Henley agreed to do what was necessary to improve their waste, however, this was a problem that never went away.

It is possible that the rapid expansion of the Henley & Sons Company had caused them serious financial problems because in 1930 Ronald Whiteway, a director of Henry Whiteway & Co a cider maker in Whimble, received a letter from a company broker, HJ Nathan of London, who was proposing the sale of Henleys to Whiteways because it had not been profitable for a few years. The directors John, William & Ronald Henley had decided to approach Whiteways to discuss a merger. Discussions continued through 1931 and 1932 with auditors providing accounts; on 17 December 1932 agreement was finally reached and Henleys was sold for £65,000. John and William retired but Ronald received a six year contract to manage the Henley branch at Abbotskerswell and became a director of Whiteways. He continued in this role until he retired in 1964. Most of the staff at Abbotskerswell stayed on, including Walter Batty in accounts, Lesley Oaff of the clerical staff and George Gooding in the cellars. Although Whiteways now owned the company they continued to use the Henley & Sons brand name for marketing.

The Whiteway's years saw continuing development for the Abbotskerswell site as well as the continued issue of waste into the village stream. Once again in 1935 there were numerous complaints from villagers and the Parish Council, that Whiteways had gone back on promises not to dump trade waste. Amazingly they asked permission to put all their waste in the sewer whilst washing out tanks for one month; this was refused and an injunction to stop the nuisance was threatened. In 1948 four new AEC diesel lorries were acquired for transporting ciders and wines to bottling plants, these replaced numerous hogsheads in open rail trucks. They were based at Abbotskerswell and each could carry 1800 gallons in the stainless steel road tankers.



The tankers pictured at Abbotskerswell

In 1950 a 100,000 gallon tank house was added with concrete vats lined with a plastic compound called 'Ebon'. An interesting story from that time involved Hans Sinn, a German PoW who described his time at the works in 1947-8 in a letter to AbbTalk: "It was a very nice time for me"

The Henley family were still heavily involved in the village with William, his wife Ethel and daughter Jane continuing to live at Mallands. They were important figures in village life, involved in many events especially the Cottage Garden Society. Jane married Major John Pierson and they would be the last Henleys to live at Mallands, leaving in 1978 when it was sold. In 1951 Ronald was appointed joint Managing Director of the Whiteways Cyder Co. and was also in charge of the South Devon group, which included Crabbs Park Winery in Paignton, Abbotskerswell and Staverton. In 1960 his son Jeremy also joined the company at the Cyder Works.

However, the problem of waste effluent was still there; villager Phyllis Ford remembered the problems in the 1950s:

"... the stream became heavily polluted with thick black sludge ... When the stream ran low the stench was unbearable and the residents around these areas were unable to open their windows... Whiteways men would drive their tractor and trailer through the village putting lime into the stream to kill the stench but they were not very successful."⁵

In 1965 the insoluble difficulties with the Water Authority over drainage problems meant that Henley's Cyder Works was closed. Some staff transferred to Whimple where Whiteways made £755k profit on sales of £7.9m in 1968. Whiteways shut down Whimple in 1989 with a move to the old Harveys Bristol Cream Sherry plant at Whitchurch in Bristol. Thankfully the Henley's site did not end there because in 1965 it was sold to WaterMota, and so the story carries on.

## The WaterMota Years

WaterMota was created in 1911 by Walter Fair at the Pembroke Engineering Works at Hampton Wick, Kingston upon Thames. Initially they produced American Waterman marine engines under licence but soon began to develop products of their own, notably a variable pitch propeller which would stay in production until the late 1990s. During World War 1 they switched to producing parts for machine guns and aircraft before returning to marine engine production in the 1920s. Their K1 and K2 engines became the mainstay of production and were successfully used in racing by Walter Fair's son Colin, as the poster (right) showed.



In the 1930s WaterMota continued to develop new engines and gearboxes for marine use, often taking car engines and giving them a marine use. In 1938 production had outstripped the Hampton Wick site and they re-located to Two Mile Oak, constructing the buildings on today's 'garage' site. A fire at the site in 1952 had caused major

damage but they continued adding other constructions into the early 1960s as the company grew, including the second storey on the main building. In 1959 WaterMota became a limited company, with John Wilson and Aubrey Denton taking over the firm. The new owners sparked a new round of engine development; possibly their most successful one at that time involved taking the Ford Anglia 105E engine to create their Sea Wolf marine version, which "led to WaterMota becoming one of the world's leading petrol engine marinisers"⁶. The Two Mile Oak plant saw a whole new engine assembly and test shop built to deal with the rapid expansion, these were in the units at the back. This success led to a second move for the company and this time to the iconic premises that many will remember at the Old Cider Works. With Whiteways scaling down their production in Abbotskerswell prior to closing down in 1965, WaterMota bought the whole Manor Road site. They quickly put into use the parts of the works that they needed, once again a whole new machine shop and modern production plant was developed; complete with its own monorail system to move the engines and parts easily.





1. Engine development
  2. Stores, Machine Shop, assembly
  3. Packing
  4. Kitchen, Machine Shop
  5. Assembly Shop
  6. Stores
  7. Water Tower
  8. Offices
  9. Canteen (which burnt down)
  10. 'Football pitch'
  11. Toilet block
- Not used by WaterMota

At this time WaterMota was employing 23 people but the move coincided with a rapid increase in business. In 1968 they developed the Ford Escort/Cortina Crossflow engine to create their Sea Leopard engine which in turn led to the creation of the Sea Panther, which was perhaps their most ambitious engine ever constructed. Based on the Ford 1600cc Crossflow petrol engine, they changed a number of the major components to create a mighty diesel marine engine that would be used on fire pumps, generator sets and even air conditioning sets for buses. It would eventually be taken up by Ford to become their Fiesta and Escort XLD engine. During the 1970s WaterMota were employing around 80 people, in what became the most productive period in their history. They were producing around 700 gearboxes and a 1000 marine diesel engines a year as well as 200 propellers a month.



It was also around this time that the parts of the old cider works that WaterMota were not using were developed as an industrial estate. Whiteways had sold parts of the works, the Cooper's Yard, at the bottom of the site to JN Electrics; today, as JN Building Services Ltd, they are a multi-disciplined

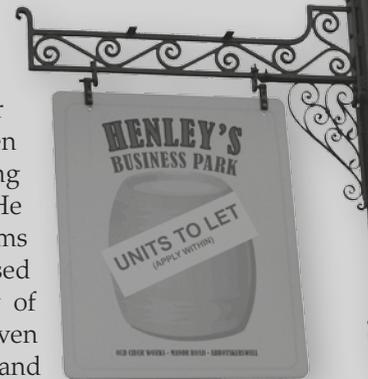
building services company involved in electrical installations, fire and security Systems, air conditioning systems, motor and power tool repairs. WaterMota also developed parts of the site into industrial units; during the late 1970s companies such as GMPT, Booths Kitchens, Dove Meadows, Tuckers EMS and Greenacre Pumps all established bases there; the site is a busy one today with many of the original businesses still there.

However, by the 1990s times were changing and serious competition from the Far East caused a change of direction for WaterMota. In 1995 it was

bought by Mike Beacham who had worked in the engine business for many years, with famous engine makers such as Cummings and Lister. He realised it was time to change the company's approach and moved them from being a manufacturer to a distributor of marine engines, he also moved the plant for a third time. In 2005 WaterMota left the old Henley's Cyder Works site for a new unit on the Heathfield Industrial Estate. Today it distributes engines such as Doosan, Hyundai and Westerbeke for the fishing, work boat and pleasure industries.

## Henley's Business Park

Following the departure of WaterMota from the Manor Road section of the old Cyder Works its former premises lay dormant and decaying until 2007 when Andy Elliott bought the site and demolished the ageing buildings and replaced them with 11 modern units. He did keep faith with the past by using the same roof beams of the old WaterMota machine shop. He also recognised the significance of the site to the industrial history of Abbotskerswell by using the Henley name and even purchased an old poster advertising Henley's Cyder and used it on the site's name board.



It is this site, together with the old cider works buildings that are the mainstay of village industry and judging by the number of cars parked daily at the top of the village business is good. The evolution of village industry is shown with new hi-tech companies such as Racaw Ltd, Apollo IT and Vetric Services Ltd.

*This modern photograph showing the new industrial makes an interesting comparison with the earlier view*



## Two Mile Oak Site

There are also a number of businesses sited in the Two Mile Oak area of the parish, these have developed since the late 1930s. By 1939 Sidney Mitchelmore had set up as a caravan builder in this area, this became the Moorland (later Woodliffe) Caravan Company run by Ivor Lloyd, which was based on Totnes Road, where Toby's Sheds is today. The industrial area had been an apple orchard until Bert Fordham built a garage on the corner of Totnes and Whiddon Roads which he sold to WaterMota when they relocated there as described earlier. When WaterMota left in the 1960s the Fordhams bought the site back and established a garage on the main road whilst the buildings at the rear became four industrial units.



In the 1980s Shadowfax Radiators was established in Unit 3 and Lewis Ray created a shed making business in the yard, this would become Toby's Sheds (named after his dog!). In March 1986 he moved to the present main road site taking over from

the caravan business; in 1995 the present owners, Ian Cardus and James Denning, acquired the business. In 1986 Frank Hatton-Brown opened Acorn Televisions, a TV sales and repair business, in Unit 2 which continued until 1998. Frank remembers 'Bog Roll Bill' in Unit 1 who tried to create a toilet roll business. A significant development on the site occurred in 1990 when Robert Ash moved his building firm, Bradley Construction, into Unit 1, naming it Bradley House which is still used today. In 1994 he diversified into furniture sales when he established Prestige Pine; business boomed and by 1998 they had taken over all four units.

He re-located the business to Heathfield in 2004 and it continues to thrive as Prestige Furniture. They were followed by Sapphire Windows and today Jade Joinery have all four of the units, although sadly in a rather rundown state.

By the 21st century the nature of industry has changed radically, although many of the old sites are still in use. There are industrial units at Aller Mills, Henleys Cyder Works and Two Mile Oak, but also new ones at Ruby Farm and Broomhill Farm Properties Business Park at Whiddon; and of course there is the impact of the internet with businesses going on in houses too.

## Chapter 6

### Village Shops

The nature of shops has changed dramatically in the last 150 years, from farms to small additions to houses, selling bread, shoes, milk etc to very specifically focused businesses. Abbotskerswell has had all of these and today still boasts a village shop, unlike many villages.

#### 19th Century

An early reference to a shop in Abbotskerswell is found in the 1850 'White's Directory' which lists John Lee as a shopkeeper, however, the 1851 Census describes him as a cordwainer, so was his a shoe shop? The Billings Directory of 1857 notes Dinah Dolton as a shopkeeper, she lived at 3 Town Cottages but we do not know if the shop was also there. There is also a reference to a Thomas Bovey, but there are no other traces of him.



It would appear that various people sold some goods, publicans and bakers are sometimes listed as 'grocers'. In 1869 Mrs Ann Prowse was listed as a shopkeeper; she lived at Vulcan Place (at what would eventually become the Post Office) and her first husband, James, was a blacksmith. She married her second husband, James Casely, in 1881 and together with her daughter Ellen, they ran the village shop until her death in 1892; Ellen carried on with the shop and her story continues later when she took over the Post Office in 1900.

## 20th Century

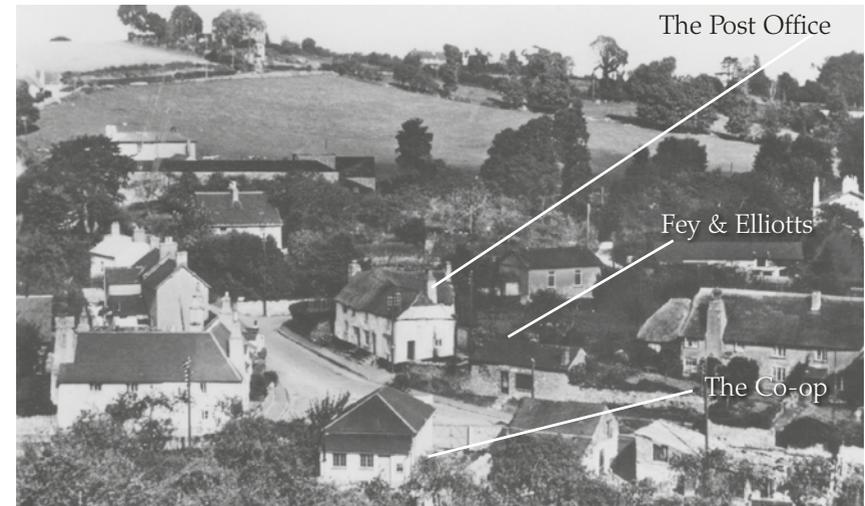
In the early 1900s Tom Tretheway opened a shop at 5 Prospect Place; this was in a group of thatched houses above Monks Thatch. He was a Cornish man with a background in selling, as in 1891 he was described as a 'licenced hawkker' but by 1902 he, and his wife Rose, had opened their shop which sold coal, oil and sweets. He also delivered coal in a pony and trap, shown in the photograph. After he died around 1910 Rose and her children John and Sydney continued the coal supply business during WW1.



In the early 1920s a new shop opened on The Square, next to The Post Office. Henry and Lavinia Sutton created a village store in an old smithy which they would run until around 1927 when two sisters, Violet Elliott and Olive Fey bought it from the Suttons. 'Fey & Elliotts' continued until the mid-1930s when Violet, now Mrs Bowhay, withdrew to become a mother. Olive continued until she took over The Post Office described later.

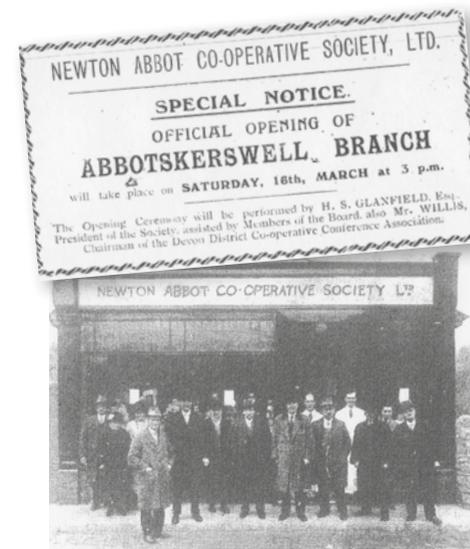
## The Newton Abbot Co-operative Society – Abbotskerswell Branch

In 1929 a whole new shopping experience arrived in the village, the 'Co-op'. The Co-operative Society began in Rochdale in 1844; the idea was for workers to have cheap, good quality food and goods. A share of profits



1930s village shops in The Square

was given to its members according to purchases, this was the Dividend. Each town created its own Society and by 1900 there were 1,439 co-operative societies registered. Each member had a 'Dividend Book', or 'divi' as it was known, where the amount they spent was logged and then they were given back money based on that.



On 16th March 1929 the Newton Abbot Co-op opened a branch in Abbotskerswell in a new, purpose built shop on The Square on what had previously been Mr Chudleigh's orchard. The picture of Fey and Elliott's shop above also shows a rear view of the store which does not have the extension that it has today; the MDA photograph of the opening also shows this. Sadly the MDA also reported on 30 March that the branch had been broken into with 9 shillings and some cigarettes stolen. This robbery was repeated in 1932 when Mr Wood was the Manager.



The Co-op extended the shop and remained in the village, with Mr Harper as its manager, until 1969 when it was taken over as an independent shop by Fred Holmes, who changed the name to F H Holmes. Fred and his wife Valentine were from Jersey, with Fred training as a grocer with the Co-op, working in their Bank Street shop. They built a very successful business before selling it to Alan and Jessica Asprey in 1983; sadly Fred died 18 months later.



Fred is fondly remembered in the village as an 'old school' grocer who would sell one egg, or deliver a loaf of bread on his motor bike; his trick of pulling items off a high shelf with a stick was something to witness. When they left the Cricket Club presented them with an engraved silver salver in thanks.

In the next decade the shop fared less well with a succession of owners trying to make a living, but it seemed that the village could not sustain two shops, despite attempts to modernise and diversify the business. By August 1985, as their advert shows, Gabby and Derek had taken over.

By May 1988 Dave and Jacqui were in charge until December 1989 when Dave and Helena had a go, and lastly by sisters Alice McNulty and Brenda Pugh who kept going until February 1994.



The forlorn picture of the empty and closed shop up for sale was just before it began a new lease of life. Paul and Irene Coombe had run a business at the old Sinclair's Garage site between 1974 and 1980 but following its re-development Paul managed the Motorist Discount Centre in Newton Abbot until 1982, when he and his wife

set up *Coombe Electrical & Plumbing Services*. This was run from their home in Court Road until they took over the shop site in 1994 and opened 'The Shower Centre'. A good many villagers were bemused by the village having a shower shop, however, the reality was that its main business was in being service agents for most national shower and bathroom manufacturers, covering the whole of the South West. In 2000 Paul and Irene launched

another venture in the old Co-op; the Shower Centre was moved to a larger new industrial unit at Brimley and The Post Office was relocated. The details of that period are in the section on The Post Office.

When the Post Office closed in 2009 it was acquired by Pauline and Graham Hart who created 'Hart's Emporium'; this was a mix of antiques, memorabilia and a tea shop. Since then the shop has been a café and today is Babbinis.

## The Model Stores

As previously described Tom Cann had established a bakery with a shop at 3 Model Cottages, however, it was closed when he left for Newton Abbot and does not appear to have been used as a bakery after that.

By 1923 the site had been taken over by Percy Warren who was a 'motor car agent'. In 1935 Percy and his sons, Fred and Jack were motor car proprietors, with the old bakery, then known as The Garage, as their base: they also ran a taxi firm from there, with the garage being where the later Model Shop extension and hairdressers is now situated. In 1939 the premises and taxi business were taken over by Fred Olver, who ran it until his death in the early 1950s. After that the 'garage' was not used, with 4 Model Cottages let as a residence.

In 1961 Gilbert Eales moved into No 4, which was a smallholding called Fairacre. By 1963 he had rebuilt the barns alongside it creating a shop and in 1968 established his building firm that would go on to construct many new houses in the village; he also took over No 3 Model Cottages to make one house. In the early 1970s the old barn (shown on the photograph) next to the shop was demolished and a hairdressing salon built, which was first occupied by Carol Knapman and then, in 1980, Sharon Tolchard.

*Model Stores building c1908*



By the mid-1980s the shop was further extended with the hairdressing salon moving upstairs and there *Hair Cair* remains, with Sharon still in charge. Sharon was once asked why she hadn't moved into a town: "certain things come and go, but aspects of village life stay the same"¹ was her answer.



With closure of the Village Stores in 1994 the Model Stores became even more important to the village and steadily increased its range of products, to such an extent that it won 'Best Village Shop in Devon' in a Women' Own Magazine competition. In 1999 Gilbert's daughter, Lynn, took over the running of the shop developing

a wide range of services, and The Model Stores carries on serving the village's needs. In 2015 Central Stores, a regional convenience chain store based at Ringwood, took over Model Stores and change is underway.

## The Post Office

The General Post Office (GPO) was officially established in England in 1660 and it eventually grew to combine both the postal and telecommunications system. The GPO was a monopoly covering the dispatch of items from a sender to a receiver; the postal service was known as the Royal Mail because it was built on the distribution system for royal and government documents. The GPO created a network of post offices where senders could submit items and they were transferred to distribution sorting stations; from there the post was then sent on for delivery to the receiver of the item. Initially it was the receiver of the item who paid the fee, and they had the right to refuse to accept the item if he did not wish to pay. The Abbotskerswell Census for 1851 shows this as William Venning was described as a 'letter carrier'.



In 1837 Rowland Hill wrote a pamphlet called 'Post Office Reform; its Importance and Practicability'. He pointed out that the country needed a cheap, quick and efficient mail service with the sender paying the fee. In 1840 the Uniform Penny Post using adhesive pre-paid stamps, the famous 'Penny Black', was introduced. The stamps were bought at the local post office and by 1860 there were 1,900 post offices in Britain.

In 1837 Charles Wheatstone and William Cooke invented the electric telegraph and by the mid-19th century private telegraph companies had been established, however, the Telegraph Act 1869 granted the GPO a monopoly in telegraphic communication in Britain. The nearest telegraph office to send a telegram for Abbotskerswell people was in Newton Abbot, the service began around 1878, with telegrams delivered to the door. In a similar way the telephone system also developed. Invented by Alexander Graham Bell the first telephone exchange was opened in 1879 and by 1911 the GPO had taken control of the country's telephone services. Interestingly in the 1911 Census there were five linesmen lodging in the Butcher's Arms. The first public telephones began to arrive in villages in the late 1910s.

## Abbotskerswell Post Office



By 1857 the new service had reached Abbotskerswell: "letters from Newton Abbot, which is the nearest Money Order Office"² was being announced. In 1870 there was a wall letter box with clearances at 6.30pm on weekdays and 12 noon on Sundays; the letters arrived at 7.30am. It is unclear where the first box was but the one recently uncovered in the first Post Office, shown in the photograph³ left, is not of the new 1857 metal design.



*1 Well Cottage was the first Post Office with the post box shown above in the house wall at the top of the steps. The photograph above shows the box housing from inside house today*

The first Abbotskerswell Post Office opened in 1872 when George and Ellen Jeffreys ran it at 1 Well Cottage, the site of the letter box.

Ellen was 27 years younger than George and not surprisingly outlived him. She re-married, this time to Richard Harvey, and in 1891 they were referred to as 'sub-post master/mistress'. This was useful to Ellen as Richard died not long afterwards and she was able to run the



office on her own until she died in 1900. At this time the letters arrived at 6.40am & 5pm with collections at 8am, 2.35pm & 6.50pm.



*This view of the PO shows James and is thought to date from 1905. It is certainly early as there is no post box under the window. In the 1910 picture of the Prowse shopfront shown earlier, there is a wooden post box.*

Mrs Harvey's death saw a change of venue for The Post Office, moving to the village shop previously run by Mrs Casely; following her death in 1892 her daughter, Ellen Prowse, took over the shop. Ellen was 36 years old and had been a dressmaker, or as the 1881 Census put it in the archaic form a 'drefmaker'. Her stepfather had left to live with his daughter, so it was left to Ellen and her brother James, to be the postal service from 1900 onwards at 2 Vulcan Place, part of what is now 'The Old

Post Office'. The move was reported in the local press in November 1899, where it was noted that the shop was being altered and that parishioners were very pleased. Ellen was the sub-post mistress and shopkeeper and James was the 'rural postman'.

It was a sign of the development of the postal service that in 1902 Postal Orders were available to the villagers and soon there were wall mounted post boxes at The Post Office, on the main Road and at Whiddon. In 1908 52 year old Ellen married Charles Symons, a 77 year old widower. Between their families they would run the village Post Office until 1935.

In 1911 Ellen was being helped in the shop by 16 year old Mary Fidler, but following Charles' death in 1914 her nephew, Sidney Smith, arrived as clerk; he was Ellen's sister Anna's, son. His story is told in our *Abbotskerswell During WW1* booklet as he died during war service. The services at The Post Office continued to develop in the 1920s; in 1924 it was proposed to have a telephone in the shop, however, the GPO wanted £14 5s 6d as a guarantee of use, which initially the PC opposed. Eventually the desire for modern technology prevailed and the MDA of 15 November 1924 announced that the PO "is a telephone call office". In the shop was a large mahogany kiosk which was very public and only available during office hours, but it was grandly declared that: "The telephone may be used for calls to all parts of the country"⁴. It is interesting to note that in 1929 the PC was having to make up the £1.17s loss made by the phone.

Ellen continued as sub-post mistress until she was 70, but in 1926 she gave way to Charles and Olive Platt. Olive was Ellen's niece, her sister Anna's daughter; she had married Charles in 1917. It is probable that Olive, a shop assistant in Brixham in 1911, moved to Abbotskerswell to help Ellen following

the death of Olive's brother, Sidney in WW1, and then she and her husband took over from Ellen. Local knowledge suggests that the Platt's were helped by John Henry Symons, Ellen's stepson and 'Smackell' Smith (the nickname derives from him being an ex.mackerell fisherman from Brixham).

Charles died in November 1935, his Will described him as being "of the Post Office Abbotskerswell"; his wife Olive moved to Brixham, although she died in the village at Carsevilla in 1938. It was an iconic village figure who took over next and would remain as the sub-post mistress for 54 years. This was Mrs Olive Fey who was persuaded to close her village shop to take over The Post Office by the Postmaster in Newton Abbot. Olive Elliott was born in Abbotskerswell in 1896, attended the village school before becoming a secretary with an electrical firm. She joined her uncle, Charles Collard, at his Honiton pottery, then joined the solicitors, Michelmores in Torquay and then in Newton Abbot. Olive married Alfred Fey in 1924 with Rev. F Gordon Campbell officiating and Miss Dence from Court Grange playing Mendelssohn's Wedding March. As described earlier she had run a village shop with her sister until taking over the Post Office.

Initially The Post Office was only a small lock-up shop with a counter; it was entered up the steps in the middle of the building. When Olive took over as sub-post mistress sending a letter still cost 1d; the village had one postman who used a bike to carry letters and parcels. One early change was the arrival of a red telephone box in 1938, replacing the wooden kiosk inside the office.



*Mrs Fey behind her counter in 1986*

Mrs Fey converted the living accommodation and transferred the grocery business from the old shop next door together with her assistant Edie Sandford. Alfred and Olive continued to live at Grange View "so each evening the security items had to be carried in a box to Mrs Fey's house ... and taken back again next morning"⁵. During the 1950s the thatched end part of The Post Office house, facing Vicarage Lane, was demolished. In 1959 the Feys bought the whole building, discontinued the grocery side and The Post Office became the end part of the building with a door and steps at the end.

## Chapter 7

### Service Industries

In the early years of industrial development the main function of most companies was making or growing things, but as the population grew the need to provide services became apparent. Consequently villagers were laundresses and railwaymen; perhaps the main service was in the public houses, but their story is told in *4. Pubs, Clubs & Governance*. It was the development of the motor car that produced the first large scale service industry and garages would soon become a feature in Abbotskerswell.

#### Sinclair's Garage

In 1922 William Sinclair, an Abbotskerswell butcher, married Florence Hart of Emmett's (Yeoman's) Cottage; he set up his own butchers business using the barns alongside No 1. William and Florence had three sons, Alex, George and Colin. Alex and George set up a garage in the barns after WW2 and then also constructed a purpose built facility, complete with a petrol pump at the front at the top of a slight rise. The map shows the entrance to the rear of the garage before the building of the houses either side, those of Little Orchard and Nirvana; whilst the photograph¹ shows a rear view of the garage.



November 11th 1982: Mrs Fey, 4th from the right, with the Lord Lieutenant of Devon on the occasion of the presentation of her B.E.M. Next to her is Mrs Joy Adderley who assisted Mrs Fey.

In June 1982 Mrs Fey's long service in the village was officially recognised when she was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for 46 years' service to the Post Office. She was also a major figure in village life having been the church organist since the 1920s, trained the choir and arranged Music festivals.

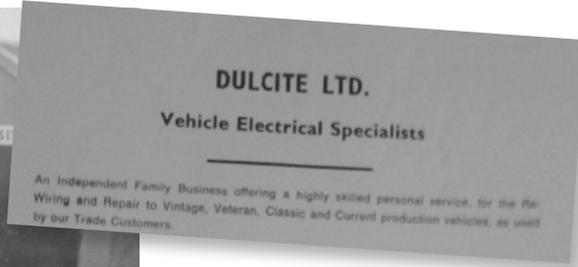
Mrs Fey continued as sub-post mistress until her death in 1990, when her niece Joy Adderley took over the role. Joy ran the Post Office until 2000 when ill health dictated that it was time for retirement; in preparation for this she had converted and extended the old Fey & Elliott shop into a house, creating Staging Post. In February 2000 AbbTalk carried a story that was to prove accurate in the coming years; the Editor, Ruth Davey, noted that Post Offices were not

allowed to advertise but warned that "I feel it is necessary to highlight the current situation as there is a very real possibility that our Post Office might face closure..."⁶ At that time our Post Office was to continue in the village but in a new venue, as it moved across the road to the old Co-op.

Paul and Irene Coombe took over the running of the Post Office in November 2000, when they moved their Shower Centre to Brimley and revamped the old Co-op. The photograph above shows the transition, when the village seemed to have two Post Offices; notice the wall post box which was replaced by a pillar box and that the telephone box was removed. Paul continued to run The Post Office until his retirement in June 2004, when it was taken over by Les Martin.

By the mid-2000s The Royal Mail was making huge losses and was instructed to close branches to reduce costs and although initially the Abbotskerswell branch was not a target it was suddenly announced in November 2008 that it was to be closed. Despite a desperate campaign by the village, with a suggestion of moving it to the Model Stores, 137 years of village history was lost on 8 January 2009 when The Post Office closed.

It was thriving business and in addition to the garage they ran a big Buick taxi and a Bedford Coach. However, during the 1960s the garage failed and although William saved the business, because he owned the land, the sons moved on to other work; with Colin setting up a coach business, Alex emigrating to Australia whilst George bought a guest house in Torquay.



In 1974 the workshops were taken over by Dulcite Electronic Engineering Ltd, who were vehicle electrical specialists. Dulcite was owned by Paul and Irene Coombe

with Dennis Terry working for them. Mrs Coombe ran the business from their home in Court Road whilst Paul and Dennis worked on the vehicles. They re-wired many old and vintage vehicles, as well as more modern vehicles as their flyer shown above reveals. Paul's daughter Tracey recalls that "they had a very large collection of specialist cotton-covered cable stored in the workshop for re-wiring - I remember seeing racks and racks of it. Mum told me once that they had the largest collection of it in the UK."

By 1980 George Sinclair had become the owner of the site and when it was sold for building land Dulcite closed down. In 1982 four houses were constructed on the site, these being Emmett's Place. However, Paul and Irene featured earlier in the village's commercial story when they moved to the old Co-op store on The Square.

## Abbotshill Service Station

With car ownership growing rapidly in the 1950s the need for more petrol stations on main roads became apparent and Abbotshill Service Station was one of these new places. It was built by Mr Walker in 1961 on land bought from George Hutchings and from the 1970s it was run by the Daniels family, who lived above garage, with Danny staying until it was sold.



Abbotshill's

AbbTalk advert from 1985 shows its range of services and the forecourt photographs² reveal its 1970s petrol station style, complete with canopy erected in 1979.



However, in 1985 Danny's partner, Jimmy Greenhill, retired and in January 1987 Abbotshill was acquired by Pascoe & Gill of Newton Abbot who were adding a petrol station to their car sales business and moved their self-drive fleet there. Chris Gill commented that: "We are going back to the traditional approach. Motorists will be treated

to the services of our pump attendant who will check oil, clean windscreens etc., as well as serve up good BP petrol!"³

However, by the end of the 20th century these smaller, traditional service stations were suffering from the cheaper fuel being offered by larger chains of petrol stations and supermarkets, consequently in 1995 Abbotshill was acquired by Mike Perryman of Denbury Diesels. By 2001 he had demolished the old service station and built their modern showroom and workshop.

## Two Mile Oak Garage

After WaterMota left in 1965 the buildings were sold back to Bert Fordham who turned them into a garage. In 1979 Dave Fordham had petrol storage tanks installed, with a new forecourt to create an Elf Service Station. By 1985 Paul Power & Derek were offering 7 days a week petrol and repairs, however, by 1995 the site changed when it was acquired by Torbay Trade Cars. An MOT bay was added and the forecourt changed from petrol pumps to car sales, with repairs continuing to be offered; this has continued until the present day. As with Abbotshill this old style petrol service station had disappeared from a country road.

## Other Village Businesses

Of course over the years of the 20th century there have been many other small companies in the village employing a few local people. George Chudleigh of Highburrow (Hillsborough) Cottage was a road contractor, William Chudleigh ran small farm, a hauliers and a coal business at *Westbury*, as well as owning property in the village. In the 1940s there were various smallholders such as Fred Croydon at Higher Langford, Harold Savery at Fairfield and Gordon Warne at Berrington. Then there were the builders such as Mark Rowe who used the old Wesleyan Chapel on Vicarage Lane that later became Michael Norrish's motor body repair shop, W S Beavis at Ladywell, Stephens and Bowhay and of course Gilbert Eales whose story was told in Chapter 5.

An interesting and unusual business was the *Crystalwood Apiary & Sweet Factory*, which became infamous. It was run by Frederick Whitehorn and his sister Emily and was first registered in 1933; the business was based in the sheds at the side of Crystalwood, which he had built, on Stoneman's Hill.

They produced a range of sweets all labelled as 'Crystalwood', such as 'Crystalwood Humbugs', Nut Toffee, Devon Honey Fudge, Pear Drops and Ainiseed Balls, all sold in refundable glass jars with a 2/6d deposit on them. It appears to have been closed down, possibly on health grounds in 1939. The businesses achieved notoriety in January 1938 when Frederick, Emily and Reginald Brookman, the manager of the business, were prosecuted under the Merchandise Marks Act. The prosecution at the Devon Quarter Sessions was described as being of: "... "considerable county importance," a case in which [the] three accused admitted selling Empire honey as "pure Devonshire honey, ..."4. It appears that the business was in financial trouble when they knowingly sold honey wrongly labelled to Messers Whiteways and other companies. Frederick was fined £15, Emily £5 and Brookman £20, with £50 costs split between them. The Chairman hoped the fines: "... would have some influence on those who thought it was quite safe to indulge "in this sort of dirty tricks" .5

21st century Abbotskerswell can still offer a range of small service businesses around the village; Hedgelands Financial Services on Manor Drive, Hair Cair, Abbotskerswell Veterinary Centre at the Old Cider Works and The HouseVet at Church House.

Rural communities such as Abbotskerswell have undergone huge changes over their histories, from their original agricultural base through the industrial revolution to the modern day, hi-tech era. Each change would have caused problems, discontent and heartache as traditions and ways of life were swept away and the individual workers forced into new ways of working; our story has shown all of these, but life carries on and industry is still vibrant. A major impact of the changes was on how and where people lived and it is that element of village life that will feature in our next publication *2. Houses & Families*.



## References

### Chapter 1

- ¹ *Abbotskerswell Devon* John Somers-Cocks

### Chapter 2

- ¹ *www.linleyfm.com*⁴
- ² *AbbTalk* No77
- ³ *www.Ancestry.co.uk*

### Chapter 3

- ¹ *Mid Devon Advertiser* 27.05.1922
- ² *AbbTalk* No54
- ³ *Mid Devon Advertiser* 13.03.1922
- ⁴ *Kelly Directory* 1893
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- ⁶ *ibid*

### Chapter 4

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- ² *AbbTalk* No 46
- ³ *Apportionment of The Rent-Charge In Lieu Of Tithes In The Parish Of Abbotskerswell*
- ⁴ *ibid*
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- ¹⁰ *ibid*
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### Chapter 5

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- ² *Guide to Henley's Cyder Factory Abbotskerswell Devonshire*
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- ¹ *AbbTalk* No267 July 2010
- ² *Billings Directory* 1857
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- ⁴ *Mid Devon Advertiser* 15.11.1924
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- ³ *AbbTalk* March 1987
- ⁴ *Mid Devon Advertiser* 12.01.1938
- ⁵ *ibid*

# Glossary of Terms Used

OS	Ordnance Survey
MDA	Mid Devon Advertiser
ESDA	East & South Devon Advertiser
GWR	Great Western Railway
PC	Parish Council
RDC	Rural District Council

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