



East Meon 1905

A Brief History of East Meon A Hampshire Village

By Keith Vokes

It would have been impossible to write about every Hampshire Village. There are after all well over 300, so I have taken a typical Hampshire Village, in this case East Meon because of my own ancestor's brief spell of habitation there. My ancestor Thomas VOKES married Olive PORTER here in 1779 and one generation later, their son William married Charlotte BAILEY. Charlotte lies in an unmarked grave in the churchyard; their son, my GG Grandfather was born here in 1813. I am fortunate that East Meon is a well documented village and an excellent history is available (see Book Reviews)

The village of East Meon and the county of Hampshire did not exist until Saxon times. Both are creations of our Saxon ancestors. Much evidence of ancient man perhaps as old as half a million years has been discovered around the parish of East Meon. But it was not until farming was introduced that man could settle in one place and begin the slow process that continues today. Early farmers settled the chalk downland, because it was easier to clear the scrub and till the shallow soil. His burial mounds (long barrows) and stone tools are found across Southern England. This period is known as the 'Neolithic' or New Stone age and covers the time span (approx 3200 - 2000 BC). This period ended with the introduction of early metal working by immigrant peoples from the continent of Europe who buried their dead in round barrows and were known as 'Beaker

People' after their habit of interring beaker like pots in the graves. This period is generally known as 'the Bronze Age' and continued until about 700 BC. Round barrows can also be found all over the downland of Southern England.

The East Meon has been settled since these early times and must have been important. Evidence too of Roman occupation was discovered in 1937 to the north west of the parish when a part of a Roman Statue (a woman's head dated to the 2nd Century AD) was found in the garden of Edward & Geoffrey JENNINGS. In 296AD the army of Constantius Chlorus defeated his rival, Allectus at Woolmer common near Liss about 12 miles from East Meon.

Eventually the Saxons came and being hard working farmers found the area much to their liking. The heavier soils of the river valleys were more easily worked by the heavy Anglo Saxon Ploughs leaving the indigenous Romano-British to continue farming the uplands. The Jutes are widely believed to have been the people who settled and farmed the area at what became East Meon. They became known as the 'Meonwara'. Bede says *'The River Hamble runs through the land of the Jutes, which belong to the Gewissae'* (the Anglo Saxons). Jutes also settled much of Hampshire including the New Forest. Some scholars believe that East Meon was the farthest the Jutish vessels could navigate the River Hamble so here they settled. If this is true then West Meon may well have remained Romano British while the Jutes built their new settlement nearby, indeed even today there is a certain rivalry between the two villages which may have its roots back in the 6th Century. In the Pipe Rolls of 1263 and 1301 the area is called 'Ytedene' meaning 'Valley of the Jutes'. This could be the same as 'Eathins' in the 1636 map of East Meon and 'Eadens' in the 1851 Terrier. In 1842 whilst repairing a turnpike road Richard FORD found a brooch like object, which was assumed to be a relic from the nearby 'Battle of Cheriton' during the English Civil War. Many years later it was discovered to be a Jutish Buckle of gilt bronze. Today it may be viewed in Winchester Museum. Meon is mentioned in a grant of land by King Beotric in 790AD and when King Alfred died in 899 he willed East Meon to his son.

This was a time of Viking raids, of buildings made of wattle and daub with earth floors and thatched roofs. The only buildings made of stone were ecclesiastical or royal dwellings. In 956, King Edwy granted his thegn, Eadric, 50 Hides of land including Steep, Langrish, Oakshott (in Froxfield) and Oxenbourne all of which was called 'Meone'. Indeed grants continued to mention the area in some detail so it was obviously much sought after. In 1032 Alwin Bishop of Winchester granted East and West Meon to the monks of Winchester. The Bishop may have been granted the Meons by King Harthacnut. Between 1075 and 1150 All Saints Church was constructed. Was there an earlier church?, no-one seems to know but nearby Warnford's church was reputedly founded in 782 and Corhampton church also has Saxon foundations.

By the time of the Domesday Book, (see illustration) East Meon was a small part of the third of Hampshire which belonged to the church. Upon the death of Archbishop Stigand in 1072 William seized the Hundred but by this time almost all the old Saxon families had been deprived of their estates. We can use the



This illustration of East Meon at the time of the Domesday Book was created for the Domesday 900 Exhibition which took place in Winchester in 1986. I am grateful to Winchester City Council for permission to use it here.



The village is still in the daub, wattle and thatch stage, All Saints Church is still being constructed (on the site of an earlier Saxon Structure ?) and the Court House is the next most prominent building. It still exists today but has been reconstructed.

Domesday survey to gauge the 1086 population of the Hundred. As there were 138 male villagers we can estimate the total population as being roughly 430 and it was probably during the time of Walkelin, Bishop of Winchester that All Saints church was built (or rebuilt) and became the mother church for the area. Pevsner called it 'One of the most thrilling churches in Hampshire' It contains a 'Tournai Font' made of black marble brought to England about 1150 and carried up the River Meon to rest in East Meon Church. There are seven such fonts in England and four are in Hampshire and were probably a gift of Henry of Blois.. One being in Winchester Cathedral There is a tradition that King John was married at East Meon but there is no proof of this.

Opposite the church is the 'Court House' which dates from the 14th Century but is built on earlier foundations. Apart from the church it is the most impressive building for miles around and indicates the importance of East Meon as an administrative centre at this time. Here the Court Leet was held, fines were levied and cases tried. The Pipe Rolls survive back to 1207 when Richard and Thomas (no surnames) were the 'Reeves' and Geoffrey and Audelinus the Clerk of '*Menes Manor*'. The estates were largely sheep farms (and had been since pre Roman Times) and brought the landlords huge wealth to fund the enormous building programme of the Norman period and as well as the normal output of wheat, barley, rye and oats, wool and sheep products, significantly the estate produced over 1000 gallons of wine possibly from a huge hollow just east of the village known today as 'Vineyard Hole'.

The ancient records deal with the day to day running of the village and of various persons being fined for certain misdemeanours. Many of the items consumed in the village were shipped through Fareham, the nearest port including '*3 lasts of herrings bought at Portesmouth and delivered to Thomas of Fereham 78s.2d*'

In 1348 the Black Death struck East Meon and plague mortality continued until the late 17th Century. The Pipe Rolls report '*Default through Plague*' in 1348 and not only the tenants but also their heirs perished. John GLAST, John CURTONN and John de HOO of Oxenbourne and Adam de POUNDERE, Richard de Poundere and Margaret COLEVILLE of Meon were listed as victims. Heriots (a medieval tax) were payable on 78 deaths so the possible toll may have been around 240 or 28% of the local population. The resulting labour shortage had far reaching consequences and servitude to the local lord decreased and had largely died out by the mid 15th cenutry. The survivors continued to live on and off the land and to thrive.

In the latter part of the 14th Century the Court Hall was rebuilt possibly under the guidance of William of Wykeham. In 1563 an especially serious recurrence of plague struck East Meon and 31 died against an annual average of 12. Nearby Petersfield was especially hard hit loosing 139 from a population broadly similar to East Meon's. Between 17th - 25th July Margaret, Henrie, John and Nicholas CORPS were buried and between 27th August and 14th September Nicholas, John ANTHONIE and Steven STEELE died.

Between 1558 - 1588 we see an increase in the appearance of militiamen as these were troubled times with England at war with Spain and the village weaponry being held in the church. By 1570 the musket had largely replaced the bow although no doubt many bows and arrows were kept in good fettle for several years after. As 1588 approached and the Spanish Armada, Hampshire, especially those parishes nearest to the coast were ever alert to the danger of invasion. Taxes were levied and a voluntary fund set up to which 80 Hampshiremen contributed including Nicholas WRIGHT (Presumably the wealthiest member of East Meon) East Meon was also responsible for maintaining the beacons on nearby Butser Hill. In the period aproaching the Civil War, the Muster Roll of 1626 shows that East Meon was able to field a substantial force consisting of 52 corselet wearers and 77 musketeers together with 12 pioneers, 20 victuallers, 20 carters and 81 'spare' men led by Sergeant FRY and Captain Wm BOLDE. Much of the early skirmishing was further east around Harting and Petersfield but in March 1644 the Parliamentarian Horse mustered at East Meon, commandeering the lead lining to the font and turning it into bullets. The Royalists advanced from Winchester and after some manoeuvring the battle was finally fought on the 29th at Cheriton. For the remainder of the conflict east Meon remained untroubled, but legend has it that four soldiers were buried beneath the church floor, their supposed remains being discovered during renovation in 1877. However the church register lists the following

'1644 Apr 22nd A soldier buried who dyed at Thomas Jarman's house'

In 1625 the plague returned increasing the annual average from 16 to 57 including 5 CAGERs, 6 HENCOCKEs, 4 ABURROWs and 5 SURKETTs

In 1641 Parliament ordered the removal of 'images, superstitions, pictures and relics of idolatory ' from churches, and soon after Deans and Chapters were abolished.

In 1643 much of what remained was removed including altar rails and '*crosses about the church*'. In Winchester and Chichester the libraries and other trapping were burnt in the street. In 1646 the episcopacy was abolished and many bishops charged with treason. In 1647 all marriages had to be civil and burials took place '*without any ceremony*'. Observance of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun was forbidden as were many common pursuits including cock fighting, horse racing, betting or even taking a Sunday walk. Later the same year the Manor of East Meon was surveyed prior to its sale. In 1653 it was decreed that a '*register*' (Registrar) be appointed to look after the church registers John EARWICKER being elected to that post on the 9th December 1653. Although the entry may have changed the ancient parchment register was still used and between 1653 and 1657, 31 non-religious marriages took place normally before a Justice of the Peace. With the Restoration, East Meon's lands reverted to the church and in 1661 East Meon's constables were called upon to enforce the new Hearth Tax. From these we know that the village had 59 homes of which 32 paid the tax. The largest houses (with 8 hearths) were occupied by William RANDOLL and by William PARVIN. Anthony TERRYLL had 7 hearths, Robert RANDOLL had 6, and the Vicar, Mr Richard Downes had 5.

The plague that struck London in 1665 reached Petersfield the following year and claimed 235 victims, but this time, perhaps by luck, East Meon escaped with only 13 deaths that year (below the yearly average of 16). One way of preventing transmission was to leave trade goods at agreed locations, cash payment being left in a bowl of vinegar. It was to be over 200 years later that the true cause of this disease was known.

During the 'Commonwealth' no copper coins were issued and many places including East Meon had their own 'tokens' struck, the East Meon farthing bearing the name of John WITCOMBE, possibly the landlord of 'The Angel'. In 1703 East Meon erected its first 'Pest House' rather too late to combat the plague but no doubt used against the 'smallpox'. It survived until superceded by the Petersfield Workhouse in 1834 and is today a family home re-christened 'Mount Pleasant Farm'

Between 1700 and 1800 the population of Great Britain doubled to 10 million. In the middle of the century 54% of children died before they reached two years and almost 50% before they reached the age of 12. In 1798 after much experimentation Edward Jenner invented vaccination and at last smallpox could be treated. The early part of the 18th Century saw the pace of enclosure increase. Gradually the open 'common' land disappeared and increased mechanisation meant that agricultural employment sank to new low levels bringing much hardship. The Revolutionary War with France resulted in increased food prices and the infamous Speenhamland Resolution set poor relief at the cost of a gallon loaf of bread. Ag Labs slowly sank into increasing despair and demoralised poor health. East Meon's Workhouse situated in Workhouse Lane came about in 1722 being converted from a terrace of ancient thatched cottages until burnt down by a spark from a passing steam wagon in 1910. The Workhouse Book for 1727 - 1733 survives to this day and throws much light on social conditions of the time. One common nickname that appears throughout being 'Goody' or 'Goodman' presumably the male and female equivalent. In 1727 Smallpox hit the village and deaths for that year rose from the yearly average of 13 to 24. Inmates were set to work 'spinning', 'a washing' or working in the fields for men and the stronger women while children attended the livestock. Sadly all too often the many illnesses resulted in death.

Paid for Goodman Richrds Coffin.... 7s 0d

Paid for ringing the nell and digging the grave (to J.Richards) 1s 6d

One dozen of bear (beer?) for them that carried him to church 1s 0d

Many of the Workhouse Coffins were made by Peter STIGANTS who received 4d for this task (increasing to 6d in 1729)

By the 19th Century poverty was so widespread that the Workhouse could no longer cope and relief was provided to allow families to stay in their own homes and the Overseer's Relief Book is full of examples of grants to buy farming implements, clothing or food. 'The Swing Riots' of the 1830's were but one manifestation of the resentment that the poor felt for the 'Upper Classes'

Schooling in East Meon

Schooling had certainly begun in East Meon by 1816 when part of the church was converted for that purpose, and the Church Rate Book refers to William VINN, schoolmaster in 1794. In 1833 Parliamentary allocated the sum of £20,000 for the erection of schoolhouses (for the whole of England & Wales!) and East Meon's first purpose built school was constructed in 1845 at a cost of £696. It housed about 60 boys and somewhat fewer girls at a cost of 1d per week for most augmented by donations from local land owners and the Bishop. Several of the brighter pupil were instructed as 'apprentice teachers' including Sarah GREEN and Elizabeth BEAGLEY who became the first pupil-teachers at an annual salary of £12.10s.0d. Worthy patrons would occasionally make various gifts to the school. John BONHAM CARTER II presented 'winter cloaks' in 1863 and the School Inspector (Wm WARBURTON) allowed them 'a game of play in the afternoon, as a reward for their good conduct at the Inspection'. The next year, evening classes for men and boys commenced and the local gentry were encouraged to be 'guest teachers', Mrs LeRoy LEWIS giving the children lessons on items such as sugar, tea and silk following this up with an invitation to 'a treat of tea, cake and bread and butter in her own home' Other Ladies followed suit. Children temporarily 'in the workhouse' (in Petersfield) and those sick were 'encouraged' to attend school in order that it should receive the full 'Capitation Grant'. In 1876 attendance was made compulsory but many children still failed to fully attend being required to work in the fields. 1878 saw several young children dying (possibly of typhoid) The winter of 1888/89 saw 139 children stricken with measles and in June 1890 the assistant teacher Miss SLAUGHTER was 'laid up with nervous debility and over taxed brain!' Later that year 10,000 soldiers descended on East meon from Aldershot 'on Manoevers'. In 1902 the then master William Stephen TREGGAR dropped dead while teaching. The period between the two world wars saw conditions improve but the school by this time was very old fashioned and in Dec 1961 it was reported '*School very cold. Two classrooms were 32 degrees at 9am*'. And the following month '*Impossible conditions this morning. Temperature again only 39 degrees at 9am.*' By 10.15am the temperature was only 42 degrees. Children are really cold and jumping and running activities taken regularly throughout the day to keep warm'. In 1964 a new school was opened!

Farming in East Meon

Farming at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign was still as predominantly manual as it had been since the beginning of time. A man cost 1 shilling per day plus beer. Mechanisation, when it came, was viewed with suspicion, mistrust and then anger and violence by the Ag.Labs. Exacerbated by the low wages, poor standards of living and increased prices that followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815) which culminated in the 'Swing Riots' of the 1830's. Nevertheless, once mechanisation had started there was no stopping it and gradually machine replaced man and horse until work that took many weeks of back breaking manual labour is today the effort of one man and his machine. In 1851, there were 1.48 million Ag.Labs in England & Wales and the wheat acreage