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EAST MEON, THEN & NOW

East Meon, Then and Now

"A delightful corner of Hampshire, it lies with its interesting old cottages in the rich meadows of a winding valley, the chalky hills above it crowned with lovely trees.... here still remains the lovely medieval manor in which the Bishops of Winchester held their Courts."

(Hampshire with the Isle of Wight — Arthur Mee)

"And here you will find the finest village Church in all Hampshire. I think the finest village Church that I know in all the South of England."

(Hampshire and the Isle of Wight — Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald)

Long Ago

A Jutish tribe, who took their tribal name of Meonwara from the Celtic name of the district, settled in this neighbourhood after Britain was left defenceless by the evacuation of the Romans at the end of the third Century. From Saxon times this area was rich with its fine arable land and hill pastures, water meadows and timber.

King Alfred willed the Meons to his younger son in 901, and Alwin, Bishop of Winchester, who died in 1047, bequeathed the lands to his successors for the benefit of the Monastery at Winchester.

Bishop Stigand held the Manor to the day of his death in 1070 when it was seized by William the Conqueror and held by the Crown until the middle of the twelfth Century when it was restored to the Church.



All Saints Church

"One of the most thrilling village churches in Hampshire" (Buildings of England — Pevesner) may have been built by Bishop Walkelin, the Conqueror's cousin, builder of Winchester Cathedral. The Norman tower, nave and transepts were finished by 1150.

The Lady Chapel and aisle, with their early English arcades, were added about 1230. Around 1500 the former was rebuilt, with the chancel, in the perpendicular style. There are signs that there were once many wall paintings, the "Doom" (of the Last Judgement) over the chancel arch, was still remembered in 1900.

The Tournai marble font, Norman like the Church, is one of seven in this country. There are others in Belgium whence it came, and in France and Germany. This is one of the finest. In the tower hangs the fifth heaviest peal of eight bells in Hampshire. Every Spring the banks of the churchyard are bright with a host of daffodils.

The Gentleman's Magazine of October 1819 mentions a School in the north transept with 160 children.

Court Hall

Standing opposite the Church, as it has done for centuries, it was rebuilt by William of Wykenham in the 14th Century and, until a hundred years ago, was the administrative centre of the whole East Meon Hundred. For more than five centuries the reigning bishop and his entourage assembled in the Hall to hold Courts Leet and Baron, and often resided in the adjoining apartments. The Manor of East Meon was for a time leased to Elizabeth I, probably for the enjoyment of the hunting afforded by the deer park.

It was then occupied by a local farmer until it was restored by Morley Horder, the architect, when he came to live there in 1927. The Hall's single-trussed, raftered roof, with king posts and tie beams, is original. The blackened oak indicates the use of a simple centrally placed fire on the floor, before the addition of the fireplace in the south wall, with its friezed overmantle. Stone corbels representing four crowned kings and four bishops support the curved braces.



Fire at East Meon 1910 at what is now Mr Witts shop and showing old Barnards Cottages.

Kelly's Post Office Directory of 1855

"East Meon is a village and parish comprising the tithings of Ramsdean, Bordean, Langrish, Oxenbourn and a few smaller ones. It is situated 5 miles west of Petersfield and 59 from London, in the Hundred of East Meon, Petersfield Union and division, North Hants, containing 1,543 inhabitants, with 11,601 acres of land, arable pasture and waste. The Bishop of Winchester is lord of the manor. There are several gentlemen's seats in the neighbourhood. Westbury House is a fine mansion, and the surrounding scenery is picturesque. Langrish House, the residence of J. H. Waddington, Esq., with its fine lawn and beautiful gardens, is also much admired. The church, erected prior to Winchester Cathedral, is a very ancient edifice, of Norman and Gothic architecture, consisting of a chancel, nave, side aisles, a beautiful font, stone pulpit, steeple, and 6 bells. The living is a vicarage; tithes commuted at £680 per annum, in the diocese of Winchester, and in the gift of the bishop; the present vicar is the Rev. Thomas C. Kemp, M.A. Here is a spacious National school for boys and girls, and an Independent chapel.

It also showed that the village was virtually self sufficient, as its varied list of traders implied. These included grocers and drapers, a butcher, baker and miller, boot and shoe makers, mill and wheelwrights, blacksmiths, a harness maker, brick and tile makers, a builder and a drillman, a beer retailer and of course a carrier, a postman and surgeon as well as bailiffs, a registrar of births and deaths, and nearing thirty farmers. There were also the two inns, the George and the New Inn.

It is amusing to note the division of the village into Gentry and Traders in 1855. The Gentry included George Forbes, John Waddington, Magistrate, and the then Vicar, the Rev. Thomas Cooke Kemp, whilst amongst the Traders were the Surgeon, George Pink, and most of the farmers, amongst them Henry and James Barnard, George Berry, John Christmas, James Lock and William Weeks, to give but a few with familiar names. Another familiar name was George Kille, shopkeeper.

East Meon 1973

This is still easily recognisable from its description in William Page's 'History of Hampshire', 1908.

"Park Down, which rises to the north, seems to dominate the whole village, and has the schools, a row of cottages, the church and the vicarage standing on its lower slopes with the Court Farm nearly opposite the church. The main village street follows the line of the Meon, which is here a small and shallow stream running westwards and spanned by several bridges. The almshouses, erected in 1863 by Mrs. Forbes of Bierly House in memory of her husband, are beside the George Inn. The main street is picturesque with its timber and plaster houses, and a notably fine house with heavy cornice and moulded brick door and window-heads, which dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century. In contrast are a series of quaint thatched cottages, one of the prettiest of which, with a rose-covered porch and deep-eaved roof, serves as the butcher's shop. The Smithy stands at the corner of a narrow lane leading through to Leythe House."

As recently as 1964 a new school was built and the "National School on the lower slope of Park Hill" was later converted into a private house. It is interesting to note that whereas the school now has about 80 pupils, in 1844 there were 180 when there were many more farmers and labourers and families were much larger.

The river channel and bridge arches at the centre of the village were widened in 1957 when a new diversion channel was made. Thus the floods along the High Street became a thing of the past to the great relief of the inhabitants.

Today some of the old cottages have been restored and modernised and some, sadly, have disappeared. Though no longer a butcher's shop, the cottage "with the rose-covered porch" is still as it was. The Smithy remains and does a wide range of iron work, but no shoeing. Small groups of modern and Council houses have also been built. In 1970 the main part of the village was designated a Conservation Area by the Hampshire County Council. The surrounding neighbourhood is still, as for many years past, almost entirely farm land with the beautiful Old Winchester Hill, some two or three miles away, now maintained as a nature reserve.

The Exhibition, East Meon Then and Now

This was held in the village primary school in 1973 and included many exhibits of domestic, trade and farming interest lent by local families with long connections with East Meon. These ranged from some beautiful Bryden etchings of the village in 1905, some willow pattern china once used in the George Inn, a copper dollywasher and bicycle oil lamps to an engraved tea wrapper and a sovereign till both originating from a still existent grocer's shop, Kelly' Post Office Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight 1855, babies' robes and bonnets and a beautifully decorated map of lands in the Tythings of Oxenbourne and Meon Church of 1751.

Amongst the farm exhibits were an old lambs' tailing stall still in use, a sheep's boot for its injured foot, shepherds' crooks and holland smocks, a collection of old sheep's bells, some with the leather and wood yoke collar, a large wooden shovel made from one piece of timber, a butter churn and mould, and a milking yoke and stool.

Many old photographs and pictures of village scenes and events were of special interest and the Aburrow (Wheelwright) collection, once used in East Meon, was kindly loaned by the Curtis Museum in Alton.

The primary schoolchildren also added their own project on a study of the village today, with maps and drawings of their own houses, together with the old original school log books from 1863.

The organisers of the exhibition wish to thank most sincerely the County Museum Service, Winchester, for their help with the exhibition, as well as all those who so generously lent their precious possessions and those who gave such invaluable assistance.