

"Our Village" Series

30. NOV., 1956.

CHALFORD Part 2

- ★ "A Warning to Swearers"
- ★ Charle's Ford or Calf Ford?
- ★ New Road Overnight

A WARNING to gamblers and swearers in the awful death of Richard Parsons of Chalford" was the title of a penny broadsheet sold in the London streets a century ago.

The broadsheet told how on February 26, 1766, Parsons and some friends met in a Chalford house to play cards. Following a violent argument Parsons swore the oath that he might never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and that his flesh might rot off his bones, if he were not in the right.

After further play at another house Parsons complained of a pain and swelling in his leg. Later a doctor was called but, "not withstanding all the applications that were made he was in great agony, chiefly delirious, spoke of his companions by name, and seemed as if he imagined he was engaged at cards. In a dreadful fit of shaking and trembles he died on Tuesday, March 4." His flesh was discoloured and spotted. Next day he was buried at Bisley.

A copy of the broadsheet is in the Stroud Museum. This story is also recorded in the "Gloucester Journal" of the time.

NEAR A FORD

The name Chalford indicates that its first inhabitants settled

side, and passing through Blacknest and over Brown's Hill, it ran down Skate's Hill into Chalford.

In 1814 an Act of Parliament was obtained for making a new road from Stroud through Brimscombe to Chalford, and then linking up with the Cirencester-Stroud turnpike road. There was a good deal of opposition to the plan from the millowners and landowners through whose property the road would pass.

So the Commissioners named in the Act assembled a large body of labourers, who by starting work in the middle of the night, had levelled all hedges and other obstructions on a considerable length of the intended road before the landowners arose in the morning. And, incidentally, before any contracts had been made for the land.

Needless to say, the new road was of great advantage to everyone. As all the mills in the valley lay on the route of the road, in addition to much easier transport, there was an immediate increase in the value of the property.

Mr. F. T. Hammond, the Chalford historian and student of family trees, was once offered half an estate if he could prove someone not entitled to it was its heir.

Mr. Hammond refused. The



For over 150 years the Round House has stood at the side of the Thames and Severn Canal, at Chalford. It used to be the official residence of the canal lock-keeper.

they had to be pushed up overnight.

Towards the end of the 19th century there was quite a lawless gang in Chalford, led by one, Tom Bobbin. Tom lived at "Undaunted Villa," on the ground behind Chalford Tabernacle. After an evening session in one of Chalford's Inns, Tom and his gang—many of whom came from good homes—would go through the village taking gates, posts, and even shoe scrapers. In fact, anything that they could carry off to "Undaunted Villa" where they would sell it by

auction, quite openly, at a later date.

The nearest policeman was at Bisley, and Tom and the gang led him a merry dance, so that eventually two Chalford citizens, John Cromack and Robert G. Taylor, made a joint petition for a resident policeman at Chalford. But when this petition was successful and a policeman came, these two were, for the time being, extremely unpopular. Eventually the police were able to stamp out the hooliganism, and Chalford has had its own constable ever since.

time.

NEAR A FORD

The name Chalford indicates that its first inhabitants settled near a ford on the River Frome, probably on the old highway from Minchinhampton to Bisley. Fosbrooke's History says that "Mr. Archer Blackwell is possessed of a charter dated the last year of Richard II (1399) which mentions John Blakwelle of this place, as of Chalkford." Fisher in his recollections says he has seen a title deed of 1677, in which it is written Chafford. Even now it is sometimes called "Chalford," the "l" being dropped in its pronunciation.

Some people still believe the old yarn that King Charles II after his defeat at the Battle of Worcester fled to Cirencester and then travelled down the Golden Valley. Where Charles forded the River Frome it was called Charles' Ford—hence the name Chalford.

The complete untruth of this can be easily shown, since there are references to "Chalford and "Chalkford" in documents dating back to the 13th century—nearly 400 years before Charles was born. There is no disputing that "ford" means a crossing place of the River Frome, but opinions differ as to whether the name is derived from "Chalk-ford," or, as Mary Rudd suggests, "Calf's-ford," being part of an ancient British cattle way.

A WHOLE DAY

The road from Stroud to Chalford 150 years ago was so inconvenient and winding that it took a team of horses a whole day to draw a loaded wagon from Chalford to Stroud and to return; although the distance, as the crow flies, was only four miles.

The road left Stroud by Lower Street and then, according to Fisher's recollections, it travelled by the field until approached the sharp western edge of the Valley of Horns; which caused it to turn down the steep descent to Bowbridge. It turned sharply up the hill side to Thrupp, and after crossing the two roads from Brimscombe up to Quarhouse and the Lypiatts, then descended into and across Toadsmore Bottom at the Bourne. After this it again ascended the hill

offered half an estate if he could prove someone not entitled to it was its heir.

Mr. Hammond refused. The offer and its sequel illustrated the quality of his research and honesty of purpose. He is a prominent local preacher, Deacon of Chalford Tabernacle and Sunday School teacher. He is a partner in the Precision Engineering Company, Brimscombe, where machines that turn out modern engineering components are driven by water that has flowed down the valley longer than the family trees he has traced.

WATER WHEELS

Water power from the River Frome and its subsidiary streams was the source of Chalford's industrial power until the 1850's and the sites of 20 water wheels have been traced. In 1840 the Northern mills began to go ahead because of their advantage of cheap coal power, also Northern mills were quicker to change to the production of cheaper cloth. Many local mills who persisted in the production of the traditional broad-cloth went bankrupt, and in the depression which followed the Napoleonic Wars, aggravated by a strike of local weavers, all the cloth mills, except that of Nathaniel Jones, closed down. The wool industry was partly replaced by silk "throwing" and wood turning.

Until 1866 Bisley Common stretched from Chalford to beyond Bisley, but in that year Sir John Dorrington of Lypiatt Park managed to enclose the Common through Act of Parliament. The amount of land people received was according to the rateable value of their property, so that those people who had nothing got nothing.

Needless to say, this made Sir John very unpopular, and whenever he stood up to speak at a public meeting he was greeted with cries of "Who stole the donkey's dinner?" or "Who drove donkeys from the common?" Until the common was enclosed squatters would steal a piece of land by erecting a cottage on it almost over-night. A number of these cottages still remain and the reason why some of the cottages on Chalford Hill are such "jerry" buildings is because

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