

"OUR VILLAGE" SERIES

SHEEPSCOMBE

*Formerly Wildest and Most Lawless
in District ★ Three Cloth Mills ★
Gallows On The Green*

IN 1825 Sheepscombe was called "The Peaceful Valley", yet up to 1817 it was one of the wildest and most lawless places in the whole district." It was also one of the poorest.

At that time the population numbered about 500, there was no church or school but eight unlicensed ale-houses. In 1837 there were 170 habitations but 120 of the inhabitants were too poor to pay the five-penny rate.

The majority of the men were employed in the village's three cloth mills but we are told that their conduct was "so riotous that the owner of the Mill was sometimes obliged to turn them all out and close the Mill for the greater part of a day to quell the tumult." In 1812 one was shut for a fortnight.

Nothing is known of Hore's Mill which was formerly situated on the stream below Ebworth Park, but the name of Flock Mill indicates what purpose it served. Wight's Mill thrived until about 1820 when it was affected by the depression from which it never recovered.

To keep a Sunday School alive in those hectic days was obviously no easy task. By 1817, a class started by a weaver in 1780 had dwindled to a few lads occasionally gathered by one old man who could not control them.

NEGLECTED STATE

Sheepscombe, however, soon came to the notice of the Rev. and Mrs. Charles Neville, of Painswick. Aroused by the neglected state of the village, Mrs. Neville determined to try and open a Sunday School for the rough lads, and, though strongly dissuaded, regularly trudged from Painswick to Sheepscombe to meet her constantly growing class.

It soon became apparent that the distance from Painswick was too great for a real hold to be maintained and Mr. Neville began by collecting money from Army men, whose help obtained through his father, an old Peninsular

general. The site was freely given by the Lord of the Manor.

Gradually Sheepscombe residents began to take an interest, too, and offered to "help put up the church." Thus the weavers set to work, after long hours in the mills, levelling the top of the knoll for the foundations, very often continuing until midnight.

The church was soon built, the fabric being completed within less than a year, and in February, 1820 the consecration took place. Immediately after the consecration the whole village, old and young, "joined hands and danced round the building singing a hymn" (similar to the Painswick Clipping ceremony). Mr. Neville then resigned from the living of Painswick and was instituted as Sheepscombe's first vicar.

A description of the church in 1837 said: "It is a small but neat edifice, scantily endowed. A house, pleasantly situated near it for the resident minister, was erected by private gifts, assisted by a grant from Queen Anne's bounty. The population is chiefly agricultural, with a large sprinkling of masons, carpenters and sawyers . . ."

MR. GEORGE SOLLARS

The present vicar, the Rev. Peter Aullum, was instituted in 1951. His warden, Mr. George Sollars (73), has taken an active part in both the social and administrative life of the parish. He is a native of the village and about 35 years ago started a builder's business, though this has now passed to his son, Mr. James Sollars. Mr. Sollars, snr. is a Rural District Councillor and was one of the instigators of the village garden produce show, which is run in conjunction with the W.I. Mr. Ernest Workman has been secretary of the Show for many years. Mr. Sollars has been secretary of the local branch of the Holloway Benefit Society for about a quarter of a century.

In his possession is the first minute book of Painswick



Mr. Gilbert Scott, whose family than a century and a half, co W

Parish Council (Sheepscombe Ward), the first entry being signed by the Rev. Robert Strong. Incidentally, a survey map of 1881 on the wall of his office gives the name of the village as Shepscombe.

BAKERY

Speak to Mr. Walter Workman, who, at 82, is the oldest native living in the village, and one finds that this is how it is pronounced too. He should know, he was employed by the late Mr. Harry Boulton who owned a bakery and farm at The Croft. He baked for three days and worked on the farm for the rest of the week. Eventually the bakery was handed over to him.

For about 30 years Mr. Workman was sexton at the church—the Rev. K. K. Richards was the vicar when he first started. He will recall quite readily, the blacksmith's shop below the school which was owned by Mr. Robert Williams and later by his son Harry.

This, of course, was not the only smith in Sheepscombe. A Mr. Philips carried on his concern just past Sheepscombe House. Mr. Gilbert Scott, though noted more as a wheelwright, is still smithing. His business was started by his grandfather, Mr. Samuel Scott, over 150 years ago. Mr. Scott is a Cotswold craftsman—hallmark of quality.

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Just along the road Mr. Montague Smith carries on the builder's and undertaker's business which he started about 30 years ago. In his young days Mr. Smith played cricket for the village team, but since boyhood his passion has been music. When the Sheepscombe Band was in existence he conducted it, later it was Painswick Band and for about the past two years he has conducted Avening Band. Mr. Smith is also a member of the Sheepscombe British Legion.

METHODIST CHAPEL

Almost next door is the Methodist Chapel. For information about this building a visit to Mrs. E. Hatherell at St. John's Villa is essential. "According to my grandmother," she told us, "it was once a wool store." Much later it became a branch of the Baptist Church at Painswick and in 1863 it was bought by the Methodists.

Mrs. Hatherell has been the organist at the evening services at the chapel since her very young days. On Sunday mornings she plays the organ at the church. Mrs. Hatherell also relates that the early carrier services into Stroud were run by Mr. William West and Mr. Charles Nicholls. They were followed by Mr. H. G. Brown, who now owns a general store in the village, the late Mr. G. D. Thorp, who operated from Stroud, and then by Mr. "Dick" Reyne, an Australian, who became associated with the Red Bus Company, eventually amalgamating with the Red and White.

5 kept the shop for about 33 years, taking over the Post Office about 23 years ago. Mr. Brown is a Londoner by birth and spent seven or eight of his early years in Canada. He is a former Parish Councillor and is now a trustee of the Village Hall.

The Hall was formerly a number of old cottages which were converted. It was given by Mr. T. P. Rose. Mr. Horace Brown and Mr. Sollars were made life trustees.

Sheepscombe has very little

history, its main claim to fame being the gallows which stood on the green below the church until about 1722 when they fell into decay. They were erected by Sir Anthony Kingston, who, according to Sir Francis Hyett in his History of Painswick, was Provost Marshall of the king's army in Cornwall. "His cruelty in repressing an armed rising for the restoration of the old liturgy," said Sir Francis, "has been compared to that of Judge Jeffreys."

By 1790 only the stump of the gallows remained. The copper beech which was planted to mark the site was accidentally destroyed by lime and is now marked by an oak.

NO TRACE

Mr. T. M. Gildow, who came to the village from Birmingham in 1946, says that no trace can be found of anyone ever having been hanged on the gallows. Soon after he arrived in the village Mr. Gildow reformed the Conservative Association branch, building it up from four members to 104. The present secretary is Mr. K. French.

Mr. Gildow has been clerk of Painswick Parish Council for about eight years and was stage manager of Sheepscombe Dramatic Society, in which the Misses Turquand played a great part.

The Women's Institute now have a drama group, one member being Mrs. Halliday, wife of Mr. Albert Halliday, who is licensee of the Butchers' Arms Inn. Mr. Halliday is a native of the village, the Inn having been "in the family", so to speak, for over 100 years. He is also a keen cricketer. The licensee of the other Inn in Sheepscombe, "The Plough", is Mrs. E. A. Sollars, who took over the licence when her husband, Mr. Frank Sollars, died in 1928.

Sheepscombe today is a favourite village for townspeople who have retired or simply want to "live in the country". They choose well for, almost inevitably, Sheepscombe is still very much a village community and, unlike many other villages nearer the town, can still live up to the name of "The Peaceful Valley."