

Our Village Series

CHALFORD

- ★ Rare Fun and Heavy Drinking
- ★ The Oldest Inn
- ★ Cloth, Silk and Sticks
- ★ The "Black Gutter"

EVERYBODY who drank was gay, and everybody who did not stayed at home—or else left early in the morning on a "Temperance Outing." That was "Chalford Feast," which dated from the reign of Queen Anne, commenced on the Sunday after August 12, and provided a couple of days of rare fun and heavy drinking.

Within a stone's throw of the canal the "feast" had its heart—not unexpectedly—in the three taverns that thrived there. "The Greyhound Posting House," the "Company's Arms" and the "Old House." Savings clubs were popular in those days, and as the money saved was generally spent at the inns, the "hand-out" usually took place at feast time.

THE GREASY POLE

The feast was held in the Bottom and the stalls and wild beast shows stretched from the Police Station to the bottom of Hyde Hill. Barges used to climb the greasy pole for legs of mutton and pigs, and when sufficiently tipsy fought one another with pillows until the less sober had a cold douche in the canal and instantly found himself the more sober of the two.

During this century the feast gradually declined until it was nothing more than a fun fair, and since the war the feast has become nothing more than a memory.

BACK TO FRONT

The oldest Inn at Chalford is the 16th century hostelry. "The Company's Arms." What is now considered as the front of the house facing the road, is really the back. The real front of the building faces the railway, and it was from this side that the London coaches used to enter and discharge passengers or goods under the covered way.

One, Daniel Cox, kept the "Company's Arms," and ran a coach and horses every day to Bristol, their fine qualities being described by the boys of the day in the following lines:

"A bandy-legged coachman,
A wooden-legged guard,
And three blind horses,
That could not run a yard."

Politics may be behind the fact that the old "Greyhound Tavern," of which Mr. G. Gardiner was landlord in the early part of the 19th century extended its name by the addition of the words "Greyhound

and Reform Tavern," a forerunner of later Chalford Radicalism.

Next to the Company's Arms Inn is the old Round House that has stood on the side of the Thames and Severn Canal for over 150 years. It was the official residence of the canal lock-keeper who had the management of a considerable length of canal and its locks

CLOTH, SILK AND STICKS

The chief sources of Chalford's prosperity during the 19th century were the manufactures of cloth, silk and sticks. Few can remember when Mr. Nathaniel Jones, of Green Court, Chalford, manufactured cloth at what has long been known as Seville's Mill, and this was the last place in Chalford where cloth was made. The bobbins were spun by hand and the cloth was then woven in the cottages of the people and returned to the mill for "dressing" and other processes.

The cloth was then taken to the "Rackhill" for drying. Thomas Witts, the cloth passer, was also superintendent of Ebenezer Wesleyan Sunday School.

The woods on each side of the Chalford Valley supplied plenty of raw material for the numerous small mills that sprung up on the upper reaches of the Frome. Among these were Daneway Mill, Pucks Mill, and Valley Mill at the upper end of Chalford. They did a large trade with Birmingham in the middle of the last century, the chief articles being Beech plane blocks, gun stocks, bedstead frames, fork and shovel handles. These were sent to Birmingham by canal boats which returned with cargoes of coal and salt.

The period from 1875 to 1890 probably marked the height of Chalford's industrial prosperity. At that time the extensive manufacture of umbrella and walking sticks, pen-holders and bone work then carried on by the late Mr. William Dangerfield at Bliss Mills, provided work for nearly a thousand people. Almost any man, woman or child could obtain employment by standing on the "Chapel" Bridge as the Master passed by to dinner, when the following conversation would take place:—

Master: "What are you standing there for?"

Answer: "Nothing to do, sir."

Master: "Very well come and see me to-morrow morning."

BELLS OF STEEL

Christ Church, the Parish Church, was erected by the inhabitants in 1724, and repaired and enlarged 1841. In 1890 the interior was thoroughly restored and reseated, the chancel being refitted in oak and a new roof constructed at a cost of £1,300. Chalford was formed into an ecclesiastical parish, from the parish of Bisley, in 1842.

The six bells of the Church are made of steel. It is believed there is only one other such ring in the country.

In the Church is one of the early masterpieces of a famous sculptor. It is a female figure of charity and children by John Thomas, who was born at the "Valley Inn," Chalford, in 1813. Thomas became well known during the 19th century, and exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The present Vicar is the Rev. T. F. Taylor.

In 1740 the Rev. Thomas Overbury, pastor of Tetbury Baptist Church, founded Chalford's first Baptist Church. Their first place of worship was called "Coppice Chapel," and is now a part of the Sunday School. It was probably named from the little wood (coppice) on the rising ground across the little valley towards France Lynch.

One of the most notable ministers within memory was the late Rev. D. R. Morgan. Large numbers were added to the church during his ministry, and the building of the present Tabernacle was another notable achievement. The death of Mr. Morgan in 1900 was deeply regretted, and the opening words of the funeral address by the Rev. Cornelius Griffiths expressed the feelings of all. He said, "I am come to speak at this grave, but I would rather weep at it."

What is probably the longest pastorate in local Free Church history is recorded upon a two-tier table tomb in front of the Coppice Chapel. The inscription runs: "In memory of Rev. James Deane, who was pastor of this church 50 years and five months. He entered into rest January, 1857, aged 84 years." Another old tombstone inscribed, "The Infant Children of Thomas and Sarah Smith," bears the inscription:

"Why should we weep for those who die,

Those blessed ones who weep no more,

Jesus hath called them to the sky,

And gladly have they gone before."

2d. A DAY

In 1841 as the result of efforts by the Rev. James Dean, of Coppice Chapel, and the Rev. John Rees, pastor of "France Meeting," a day school was established at Chalford. Scholars paid 2d., 4d. or 6d. according to their age, and some attended the school until 18 years of age. The G.W.R. line through Chalford was begun in the next year (1842) and this resulted in a large increase in the number of scholars, which varied from 120 to 150.

The Tabernacle's new minister, the Rev. Kenneth P. Welford, was inducted earlier this month.

A Seventh Day Adventist

Church has recently been opened at Chalford.

One hundred years ago there was at Millswood, Chalford, a Swedenborgian Chapel. The local leader of this sect was a Mr. Townsend Hook, a North country man who lived at Millswood and who carried on silk work at what are now Victoria Cottages. The sect must have had a considerable following, and there is good reason for believing that the field at the top of the Dark Lane was their burial ground, although no traces of any graves can be found. The Chapel closed when its leader left the district. The wooden pulpit from the Chapel was bought by a Mr. John Freeman, of Bourne, who kept it for a time in his garden.

THE "BLACK GUTTER"

Running along the southern edge of Chalford is a beautiful stream grievously mis-named the "Black Gutter." Some old residents have said that the "Gutter" has the same source as Cherington Lake, and, certainly like that Lake, it is icy cold. The historian Rudder, writing in 1779, refers to the petrifying qualities of this stream, which he describes as being "A remarkably clear spring of water issuing from the hill side. Its effects are seen from different articles lying in its course, but especially on a mill wheel, where in the course of years, it forms an incrustation nearly an inch thick."

At one end of the "Gutter," where the old Greyhound Tavern and Posting House once stood, and in later years became the first Co-operative Society in the district, now not one stone remains. Some of the leading spirits of that early experimental co-operative effort were:—Thomas Lewis, who was

mainly responsible for getting a Methodist Chapel built at Oakridge; William Burford, who was presented with a gold medal for founding a branch of the Rechabite Sick Benefit Society at Chalford; and Jesse Griffin, who was a woodturner by day, and ran his own boiler, steam engine and workshop at his home where he hand-turned table, chair and bedpost legs at night.

In its later stages the "Tavern" became Chalford Vale Reading Room, the headquarters of Chalford Liberal Association, a debating society and a grocer's shop.

First formed by the late Mr. J. Pearce, the Chalford Silver Band is still a feature of the village.

TOP OF THE POLL

Top of the poll at Chalford's local elections in May this year was white-haired Mr. Fred Tyler. A veteran campaigner he has fought every election at Chalford for the last 18 years. Mr. Tyler has lived in Chalford all his life. When he was 11 he started working part time for his father's firm. When he was 12 he went to work full time.

Later he took over the firm, which employed about nine men. In the First World War he served in France. On his return he re-started his business and also began his local government career. He is this year's president of the Stroud and District Baptist Association.

Next to Mr. and Mrs. Tyler's home stands the shop where, for 40 years, Mr. H. G. Peacey has carried on his butchery business. Last month the shop changed hands, the new owner being Mr. R. F. Plant from Lincolnshire, who was stationed at Aston Down during the war.