

# "Our Village" Series

## SAPPERTON

- ★ *The Village with Everything !*
- ★ *When Jones "Went on the Booze"*
- ★ *Named after Pears, Salt or Soap?*
- ★ *Farmer Hits the Band for Six*

**S**APPERTON — the village that has everything! A beautiful and ancient church, a day school, an inn, a modern and spacious village hall, a piped water supply, a Garden of Remembrance and now mains electricity.

High among the Cotswold hills, this ancient village lies quietly off the beaten track, but being on the main Cirencester-Stroud bus route, is rarely isolated in winter.

It has a distinction which few villages can claim—having been owned by only four different families in 900 years; the Tedenis, the Pooles, the Atkyns, and now the Bathursts.

### WONDER OF THE AGE

To most people "Sapperton" means the railway tunnel, or perhaps, the once more famous, canal tunnel. When it was opened in 1789, the two and a half mile canal tunnel was the longest in the country, and the wonder of the age.

Boring the canal tunnel was begun from each end, and the method used was to dig pits every 220 yards over its course. The labourers were paid about £5 a yard, out of which they had to find candles and gunpowder.

As Mr. Edward Barnsley said in his letter last week, the tunnel is far from straight, probably because the mason-miner Charles Jones, the only person who could keep a true course underground, frequently "went on the booze." During the absence of Jones the tunnel would go off course, and the loops were of considerable length, since it took Jones several weeks to get back into a true line.

There was no tow-path inside the tunnel, and the men used to lie on their backs and

opened. In time this new service took much of the trade away from the canal. Work on the railway tunnel at Sapperton began in 1837. Originally it was intended to build a longer tunnel at a lower level, but to save time and money the present tunnel, which is 133 feet higher than the canal, was constructed. Because of this there is a fairly steep gradient to the railway line as it approaches the tunnel.

Travelling from Stroud to London, you pass through a cutting 64 feet deep, then comes the main tunnel, which is just over a mile long. Then a short open cutting and another tunnel 350 yards long, at the Kemble end.

On certain Sundays in the year the tunnel is closed for the brickwork to be examined and renewed, also track relaying. When this happens travellers are taken by bus to Swindon.

### DOMESDAY BOOK

The first known reference to Sapperton is in 969, when Bishop Oswald of Worcester leased some land at "Sapertun" to Eadric. Both Sapperton and Frampton are mentioned in the Domesday Book, where it states, "In Biselege hundred Robert de Todeni holdeth Sapelthorne and Fantone." In 1660 the last male heir of the Todeni family sold the village to Sir Robert Atkyns. The name Sapperton probably originated from the Anglo Saxon, "Saep, sap, Pere, pear," meaning the enclosure of sapling pear trees. On the other hand, it is possible the name came from "Sealt" meaning salt, because at one time the village was on the ancient Salt Way, along which, in the Middle Ages,

house, while the tenant provided the labour. The tenant, his son and grandson, occupied the house rent free, after which it reverted to the landlord. In one or two of the cottages so built the occupiers were still living rent free in 1912.

### SAD FATE

The sad fate of Sapperton Village Band is one of the many interesting stories in "By Chance I Did Rove," a collection of local reminiscences by Newman Jewson.

The village band lasted for nearly 20 years after it was banished from the Parish Church in 1887. Always in demand for weddings and other festivities, the band played for both Gimson's and Sidney Barnsley's weddings. But not many months afterwards the band came to a sudden and dramatic end.

In the neighbouring village of Daglingworth, the band was playing outside a house where there was a wedding party, one dark, moonless, autumn night when there was half a gale blowing. It had been a "big market" day in Cirencester, and a farmer, who had stayed late drinking with his friends, was driving home in his gig accompanied by his daughter. The fact that the farmer was "drunk as a lord," did not matter, as the old horse knew his way home and was going along at a spanking pace.

The horse may have been deaf, or else the high wind blowing from behind him prevented him from hearing the band. But the band itself was

the dining hall rather than leader of the psalm.

The church is dedicated to the mythical boy saint, Kenelm.

Sapperton is proud of the Whittington Coat of Arms on the oak cornice of the Parish Church, linking the parish with the famous Lord Mayor of London, Dick Whittington's mother, or his grandmother, according to one reckoning, was Joanna Mansell. The Mansell family owned property at Frampton as early as 1325. The Whittingtons married into the Poole family (of Sapperton Manor), who in turn were eventually connected by marriage with the Bathursts.

Outside the Church, beneath the fine old yews, among other families, rest generations of the Hancox family, of Dane-way House. Beneath one tombstone lies Mary, daughter of William and Jane Gardner. "Her husband so void of humanity to perpetuate her memory, her son in respectful remembrance caused this tablet to be erected over her sleeping dust." It will be seen that the married name of Mary is omitted. She died in 1792.

### KNIGHT IN ARMOUR

Sapperton Church is famous for its tombs. A well preserved freestone tomb (1574) of a knight in armour probably commemorates one of the



The Sapperton Parish Church of St. Kenelm: (Right) "Here Resteth the bodies of Sir Henry Poole Knight, and of Anne his wife,"—one of the famous tombs in the Church.

Pooles who owned the manor in Elizabethan days. More remarkable is the finely coloured monument to Sir Henry Poole (1616) who kneels in steel breast plate, full breeches and an ermine lined mantle, beside his wife.

The largest tomb of all, is the white marble tomb of Sir Robert Atkyns, who died aged sixty-five in 1711. Sir Robert elegantly reclines with one elbow resting upon a pillow, his left hand toys with the pages of an open book, no doubt his famous history of the county.

Atkyns was a man of many parts. He represented the county in Parliament, and at fifty was made a judge, only to be dismissed from the Bench because his integrity and honesty were an embarrassment to the Court. Sir Robert, who was Lord of the Manor of Sapperton, retired to Pinbury Park.

More recently the Park has been the home of the Poet Laureate, John Masefield. In the wooded grounds of the Park there is an exceptionally tall avenue of yews, called Nun's Walk, because of the convent which formerly stood there. The ghost of the nun-housekeeper is said to roll double Gloucester cheeses down the walk!

(To be continued)

LET

length, since it took Jones several weeks to get back into a true line.

There was no tow-path inside the tunnel, and the men used to lie on their backs and push the barge along with their feet. There were professional leggers, who hired themselves out to propel the barges through the tunnel.

A cousin of Sapperton's rector, the Rev. A. N. Ruck, was one of the last people to go through the tunnel. This was in a motor boat, about 1911.

On Whit Monday, 1847, the G.W.R.'s line from Swindon to Gloucester was officially

On the other hand, it is possible the name came from "Sealt" meaning salt, because at one time the village was on the ancient Salt Way, along which, in the Middle Ages, pack horses brought salt from the mines in Worcestershire.

It has also been suggested that the "Sap" comes from soap, the village perhaps being at one time a centre for soap making.

Many of the cottages in Sapperton were built under what was called "the three life system." Under this arrangement the landlord provided the site and the materials for the

The horse may have been deaf, or else the high wind blowing from behind him prevented him from hearing the band. But the band itself was making too much noise, to hear anything coming in time to get out of the way, so before they realised what was happening they were being knocked over like ninepins. Somehow the horse managed to put his foot through the big drum, and then took fright and ran away carrying one small boy, whose trousers had got caught up in the step of the gig, several yards before he was dropped off. The horse ran up a bank, overturned the gig, tipping out the farmer and daughter.

One bandsman had a broken arm, two others broken ribs and other minor injuries. Besides the big drum several other instruments were damaged but no doubt the band would have got over it if the unfortunate affair had ended there.

Unluckily, the farmer was advised to bring a case against the band for obstructing the road, so the band had to consult their lawyers and cross-sued the farmer for assault and battery. Their slender resources soon melted away in lawyer's fees, while the farmer went bankrupt from the same cause.

#### WOODWORK FROM MANOR

Sapperton Church, built about the early part of the 13th century, and almost entirely rebuilt during the reign of Queen Anne, possibly stands on the site of a forgotten predecessor. When the church was rebuilt during the reign of Queen Anne, stones and Jacobean woodwork from the near-by manor house of Sir Robert Atkins were incorporated in the building. The squire's ornate pew, decorated with three carved classical figures, and reached by a few steps, would suit his lordship better at the head of

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