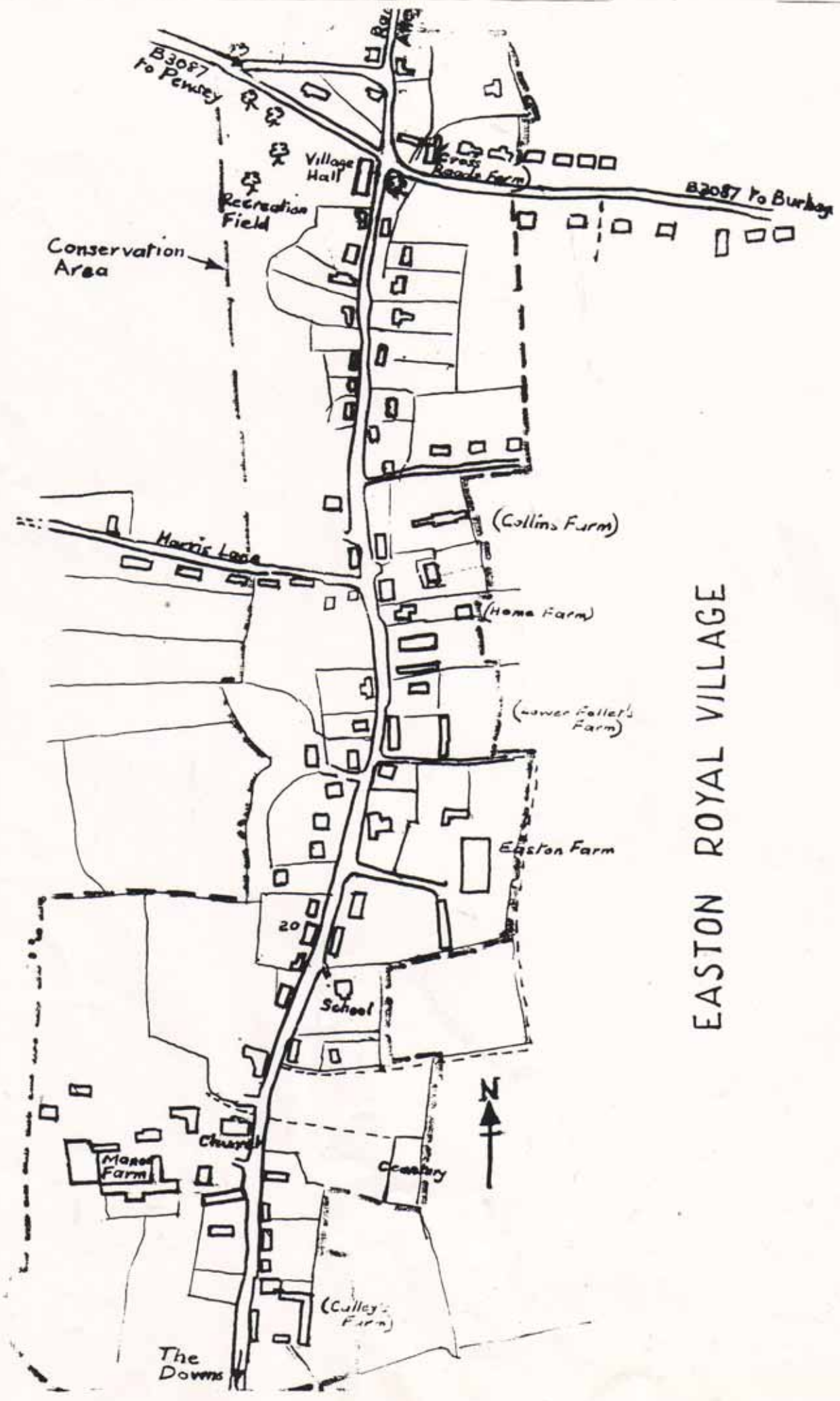


EASTON ROYAL



EASTON ROYAL VILLAGE

## EASTON ROYAL VILLAGE APPRAISAL.

### **I. Introduction.**

Even a small village like Easton-Royal needs, at times, to think seriously about itself and its future. By making known those pressures considered to be unacceptable, higher level authorities and planners can be encouraged to take note when making decisions which affect our community.

The decision to undertake a village appraisal was made at a Parish Council meeting on the 9th November 1988.

With the assistance of the Community Council for Wiltshire an introductory meeting, with video presentation, was held in the village hall on 21st February 1989. The meeting was well attended and 16 residents volunteered to form a working group to organise the appraisal. A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared, with advice from the Community Council. This was divided into four parts:-

- A. General information on population, employment, public services, etc.
- B. The village hall and recreation ground.
- C. Housing, including a questionnaire provided by Kennet D.C.
- D. Village Map, including opinions on rights of way and features valued for preservation.

The questionnaire was delivered by hand to each house in the parish by members of the working group during June 1989. The completed forms were collected by, or returned to the same members three weeks later. Care was taken to preserve the confidential nature of the information given and the source of individual returns could not be identified from then on. Ninety two percent of the questionnaires distributed were returned, a most encouraging response, which makes the results of the study very reliable.

It had been hoped to use computer analysis for the factual data in the replies, but this proved to be impracticable within the resources of the parish. Consequently, manual

analysis of the 99 replies was undertaken, very bravely, by all 16 members of the working group and was completed by the end of September '89. At a meeting on the 25th October the working group agreed procedures and format for drafting the report.

Facts and figures supporting each section can be found in appendices to this report.

### **2. Physical Features of the Parish.**

The parish of Easton Royal, at the eastern end of Pewsey Vale extends from the Bruce's Arms public house eastwards to Bowden Farm and from the Western end of Ram Alley hamlet in the north to the southern extremity of Easton Hill (2km. south of the Clump) in the south. This means it is only 2½km from west to east, but 6km from north to south.

In the parish there are no features considered worthy of mention in "A Guide to Archaeological Sites in Dorset and Wiltshire", or in the "Shire Guide to Wiltshire". However, the Shell "Guide to Wiltshire" finds us worthy of a note, though hardly flattering. After mentioning the Priory site it goes on:-

"...Except for a great deal of over-head wiring this is a neat and pretty village, sloping its way down a long street to the church. There are many thatched cottages and Georgian houses with the Downs a sweeping background. The very late Perpendicular church was built by the Earl of Hertford in 1591. It has been sadly and badly Victorianized."

A picture of the church in 1806 prior to this latter work can be compared with the present church. Some of the thatch cottages are said to be, basically, 14th century on their original sarsen foundations.

The church is a grade 2 listed building and in addition there are 31 dwellings, a barn and 8 chest tombs in the churchyard all listed Grade 2. This is an impressive number of listings in a parish of only 114 domestic dwellings.

PAGES 3 & 4 NOT FOUND! J.D. 3011

### 3. History of the Village.

The history of Easton Royal has been mainly associated with Savernake Forest and a small Trinitarian Priory which once existed there.

William the Conqueror appointed Richard Esturmy as first warden of the forest, but though mention of a settlement was made much earlier, the village of Easton did not appear in the records until 1199. A "tun" was a collection of dwellings, probably associated with a farm, and was perhaps designated East-tun to define it from Middle-tun(Milton) and other hamlets.

The small Priory was established in about 1245, although an earlier parish church already existed. In the next century the village possibly reached a peak of influence in the neighbourhood with the aid of the Priory brethren. However, by 1368 the village had declined, probably due to ravages of the plague, and being unable to maintain the church it was given permission to demolish it and to use the materials to enlarge the Priory chapel.

The Priory, too, then had a chequered life of gradual decline despite efforts of the Esturmy family (at Wolfhall) to maintain it. A major fire in 1493 destroyed much of the Priory and adjacent buildings. It was still in a dilapidated condition when, at the time of the dissolution, it was assigned to Edward Seymour, the King's brother-in-law. His father, Sir John Seymour, was buried in the Priory, but his tomb was moved to Great Bedwyn when the Priory was pulled down in 1590.

A small Elizabethan village church was built the following year, but the present church is the result of renovation in 1852/53 which mask the old church. The village became Easton Royal in the mid-16th century and the Seymour family appear to have maintained the Priory mansion until about 1680. It was a substantial house as evidenced by the "hearth-tax", 30 hearths compared with the 6 of the next largest house.

Members of the family lived in the village until about 1735.

A map of Wiltshire published in 1773 then shows no evidence of a large house in the Village and it lapsed into and remained a small rural community. Many cottages in the village were built throughout the centuries of influence of the Royal Forest of Savernake. When the village was sold by the Savernake Estate in 1929, the cottages were still occupied by agricultural workers and they did so until the 1950's when the farms, generally, had dairy herds and sheep.

Alec Choules' family have lived in the village for generations and he recounts memories of the village as related by his father and grand-father. He recalls the time when the village roads were surfaced with flint and local sandstone - very muddy in winter and very dusty in summer. More than 100 cows were driven up and down the village street twice a day for milking and, in addition, many horses provided power for farm machinery. The rights of way paths were much used then rather than negotiating the unpleasant roads.

There were many more thatched cottages when he was a boy, but they were evidently more expendable than now. He tells how his grand-mother had to scramble out of a cottage near the chapel, with her three sons, when it started to collapse around her. They then lived in a cottage in Lucky Lane, which ran from the Wootton Rivers turning towards Conygre Farm and no longer exists. All the cottages had a field and/or substantial garden in which vegetables were grown and a pig was kept. Bacon was very fat and salty and was stored in a rack suspended from the kitchen ceiling for up to a year. The last of the store was referred to as being "rafty". The pig food was cooked in the kitchen copper following the weekly wash.

Easton Royal has no stream so wells and ponds traditionally provided a water supply. There were two ponds at the bottom of the village, two more on the footpath from the church to

Before the B3087 road was straightened the cross-roads was the village green and grouped around it was a village shop, open all hours, the village blacksmith, a carpenters' shop and the village policeman's house.

School days in Mr.Choules' time were pretty tough. Up at 5.30 a.m. to work in the dairies or to do chores around the cottage garden; then school; then back to work until 5.30 or 6.00 p.m. There was a special "holiday" to work these long hours in the fields for haymaking. Harvest lasted much longer, but of course coincided with school holidays. Girls wore frocks and pinafores and had plaited hair. Boys wore long shorts, jackets buttoned up to the neck and celluloid collars. All wore woollen stockings to above the knees and leather boots with steel tips.

Protective clothing was very poor. Hessian sacks being used as capes and hessian wrapped round the legs served as wet weather wear.

During the '14-18 war children were paid 1½d. per pound for picking blackberries to make jam for the troops. Shopping was then an all day outing by horse and cart to Marlborough or Devizes.

An interesting custom was carol singing round the village, accompanied by the village band, which took place between midnight and 3 a.m. on Christmas morning. The older children were allowed to join in.

An idyllic rural scene, but a hard life!

Most of the above history was taken from:-

"Easton Royal - a Short History" by Sir Henry Bashford, 1961 and from notes prepared by Mr Alec Choules.

Milton Lilbourne (one is still there in the Whithy Bed Copse), another in the south east corner of the recreation field, one on the Wootton Rivers road (earlier called the Pig Path), another in Ram Alley, and one more at Breach Cottage. In addition the farmers pumped water from wells, usually by hand, much of which had to be taken by horse and cart to troughs on the downs. Easton Royal Waterworks, established by the Savernake Estate in 1908, was run by the farmers providing a clean water supply to the dairies. A reservoir was sited near the cross-roads and this provided a piped supply to the farm houses. Although later replaced by the public supply, the Waterworks still exists, supplying water to stock and some gardens in the village.

The loss of ponds has led to considerable reduction in wild life and, happily, in the obnoxious smells caused by animal and dairy waste washed into the ponds.

In the late 1940's the village had many more farms.

Starting from the bottom of the street there were:-

Culley's Farm, which produced milk, butter and cheese.

Minor Farm.

Easton Farm.

Home Farm, built in 1845 at a cost of £78.10.1d.

Lower Farm.

Collin's Farm. Before the last war this farm included racing stables

and Easton Down had a gallop.

Cross-roads Farm.

Conygre Farm.

Breach Cottage was a small holding with several fields.

In those days there was also in the village a post office, a shop and a bakery.

Earlier in this century there was a saw-pit where the school now stands and the school house was a thatched cottage in an orchard opposite Easton Farm. Voluntary attendance cost 1d. per week. At the time of the '14-18 war there were 70 pupils in the present two class-room school. There were three carpenters shops in the village, one south and one north of the old school house and one near the cross-roads. The one north of the school house was also the sexton and undertaker. No.20 was a pub called "The Bleeding Horse", with a malt house and a brew house nearby. The pub lost its licence because of its rough reputation.

## EASTON ROYAL

From W.A.N.H.S. journal Vol 46 1932-34 p422

### *Monasteries of Wiltshire*

#### Easton

At Easton near Marlborough was a hospital or priory, said by Dugdale to have been founded by King Stephen for Trinitarian friars for the Redemption of Captives, but at the Suppression, it was called a head house of Cross canons of St Augustine's rule. It was then valued at £45 14s and contained only two priests. The church and mansion were in ruin by default of covering and the outhouses were in great decay. The bells in the steeple belonged to the parish. The priory estates were at Easton, Froxfield, Figheldene, Milton and Grafton. It was also granted to Seymour, whose family, about 1591, pulled down the old church and built the present one for the use of the parish.

*Also noted*

W.A.H.N.S. journal XLIX pages 391-434  
*The Metes and bounds of Savernake Forest*

*Easton Royal: our village appraisal 1958*

*Village Life in Easton Royal 1914-1929* by Alec Choules, 30 Easton Royal, Pewsey..

Sir Henry H. Bashford

by

A SHORT HISTORY

EASTON ROYAL

## EARLY HISTORY

**T**HE VILLAGE OF EASTON—it was not called Easton Royal until after the year 1536—was not sufficiently important to have been mentioned in Domesday Book. Nor was its nearest neighbour Milton Lilbourne. Burbage, on the other hand, appears in the book and so does Wootton Rivers, which then apparently embraced a large enough area to have included two churches. 'Tun' was the Saxon name for an enclosed farm or collection of dwellings and, when a tun was east of some particular landmark or place of significance or of some other neighbouring tun, it was sometimes called East Tun. In this case, it would seem to have been the easternmost of three small villages or hamlets, the middle one of which was called Middle Tun, now Milton. The westernmost is not now called Weston, but is probably represented by the present Fyfield.

What is probably the first reference to Easton in an historical document occurs in connection with Savernake Forest, and the first mention of Savernake itself appears in a Charter of the year 933, during the reign of the Saxon King Athelstan, grandson of Alfred the Great, and in this Charter it is referred to as the 'woodland called Safernoc'. This was probably part of a much older and more extensive forest area, portions of which had been cleared by Roman and afterwards by Saxon settlers. Even at the time of the Norman Conquest, there were probably fewer actual trees upon it than there are today. It must be envisaged as a district of woods and copses, interspersed with areas of marshland and rough grass, with a few patches of arable land and pasture, each containing its little farm-house and perhaps a few labourers' cottages. It was, however, rich in the wild animals, such as the deer, that the Norman and Plantagenet kings loved to hunt, and it was retained by William the Conqueror as a sort of royal

game preserve. He appointed one of his followers, Richard Esturmy, to be its first warden and gave him a home and some land at Burbage, formerly belonging to a Saxon called Alaric.

The Esturmy family thus became the Hereditary Wardens of the Forest and, in course of time, acquired a good deal of land of their own round about the outskirts of the Forest area and in other parts of Wiltshire; and William's successors on the throne also added very considerably to the original royal holding. This did not mean that they dispossessed existing land-owners or tenants, but these came under what was known as the Forest Law, with its special restrictions as to the killing of game and therefore of a farmer's ability to protect his crops from periodical damage or destruction. In the end, this Forest Law became so unpopular that the Crown had to bow to the storm and, by the year 1330, Savernake Forest had been reduced again to approximately its present size. During this time, there were official perambulations of the Forest—what might be called beatings of its boundaries—and it is in connection with one of these, made in the year 1199, that the name Easton appears. The Forest area then reached from East Kennet on the west almost to Hungerford on the east and included the present Boreham Wood, West Woods, Oare, and Martinsell. To the south, it touched Inkpen, Vernham Dean, and Collingbourne Kingston and, between Collingbourne Kingston and Pewsey, the boundary, we are told, ran past Falstone or Stonehill Pond, now dry, about a mile to the south of Easton Hill, and thence up the middle of Easton village—almost certainly along the line of the present village lane—to the King's Highway or Herapath at the top, now the Burbage-Pewsey road.

At that time, one of the principal inhabitants and land-owners of Easton, was a knight, Sir Adam of Easton, who

had a son Stephen and two daughters\*. One of his daughters married Henry Esturmy, then Warden of the Forest, and the other married Sir William Druceys, another principal local land-owner and inhabitant. The son Stephen became a priest and, in or about the year 1210, he was presented to the living of Easton, which had evidently acquired a parish church by then, probably of Norman structure. Unfortunately, there were two rival claimants for the right of appointing parish priests to Easton. One of these was the Abbot of a monastery in France, Mont Sainte Catherine, near Rouen, and it was he who appointed Stephen. The other was the Prior of Bradenstoke near Malmesbury, whose priory held lands in Easton and drew tithes from it of wheat, hay and cheese. The Prior of Bradenstoke dispossessed Stephen and a controversy ensued, occupying several years, which was finally settled in Stephen's favour by Pope Honorius III. By this time, however, Stephen had settled at Tisbury in South Wiltshire. There is no evidence that he ever returned to Easton as a priest and before the year 1245, when he died, he had become Archdeacon of Wiltshire.

Meanwhile his father, Sir Adam, had also died and left to Stephen his house and at any rate some of his land in Easton, and Stephen decided to use these for the foundation in the village of a small Priory, Friary, Hospital, or Hostel—the words, as they appear in documents, being loosely interchangeable. For this purpose, he chose the relatively small and obscure order of the Trinitarians. This was a mendicant order that had been created in France about fifty years earlier. Each of its houses or priories or friaries had originally been arranged to consist of a minister in charge, three clerks in holy orders, and three lay brothers. They were forbidden to

\* A John de Easton was Constable of Marlborough Castle in 1229. P. 5. COLLECTÆANIA, RECORDS BRANCH, WILTS ARCH. SOC.