Stoke sub Hamdon

History of a Somerset Village

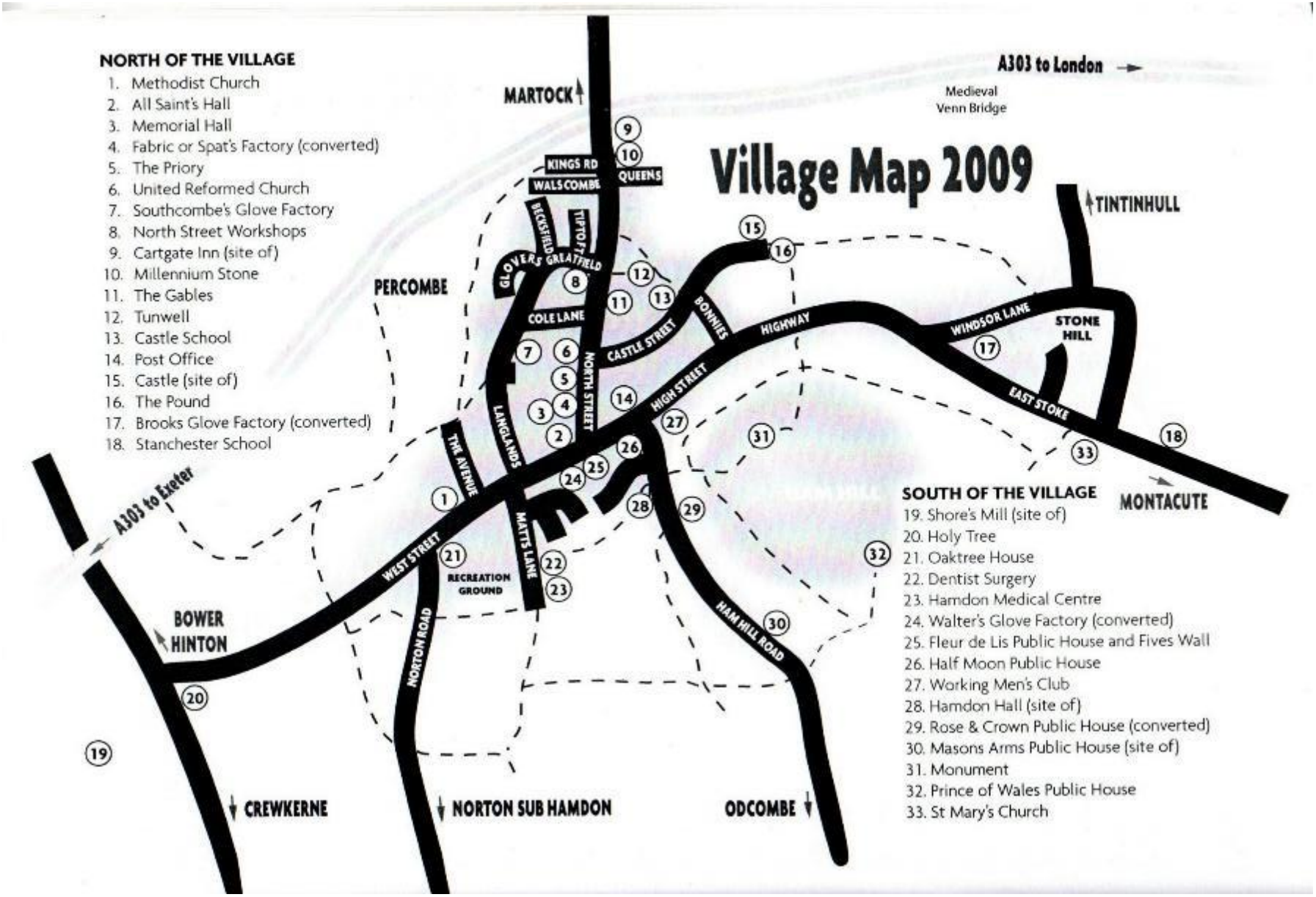
By Alan Richards

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Pages

CONTENTS

Any errors or omissions accepted.


NORTH OF THE VILLAGE
1. Methodist Church
2. All Saint's Hall
3. Memorial Hall
4. Fabric or Spat's Factory (converted)
5. The Priory
6. United Reformed Church
7. Southcombe's Glove Factory
8. North Street Workshops
9. Cartgate Inn (site of)
10. Millennium Stone
11. The Gables
12. Tunwell
13. Castle School
14. Post Office
15. Castle (site of)
16. The Pound
17. Brooks Glove Factory (converted)
18. Stanchester School
Village Map 2009
A303 to London
Medieval
Venn Bridge
MARTOCK
TINTINHULL
PERCOMBE
KINGS RD
QUEENS
WALSCOMBE
BECKSFIELD
TIPTOFTFIELD
GREATFIELD
GLOVERS
COLE LANE
CASTLE STREET
BONNETS
HIGHWAY
WINDSOR LANE
STONE HILL
EAST STOKE
NORTH STREET
HIGH STREET
LANGLANDS
THE AVENUE
WEST STREET
MATTS LANE
RECREATION GROUND
NORTON ROAD
HAM MILL ROAD
A303 to Exeter
BOWER HINTON
CREWKERNE
NORTON SUB HAMDON
ODCOMBE
MONTACUTE
SOUTH OF THE VILLAGE
19. Shore's Mill (site of)
20. Holy Tree
21. Oaktree House
22. Dentist Surgery
23. Hamdon Medical Centre
24. Walter's Glove Factory (converted)
25. Fleur de Lis Public House and Fives Wall
26. Half Moon Public House
27. Working Men's Club
28. Hamdon Hall (site of)
29. Rose & Crown Public House (converted)
30. Masons Arms Public House (site of)
31. Monument
32. Prince of Wales Public House
33. St Mary's Church

Introduction

The first "History of Stoke-sub-Hamdon" appeared in 1970, published by Alan Richards and printed by Variprint of Yeovil.

A revised edition, "Stoke-sub-Hamdon – A Somerset Village", was written in 1993 as further knowledge of the history of Stoke-sub-Hamdon came to light, and was published by Andy Jacobs.

This third edition comes at the request of the Stoke-sub-Hamdon History Group, which was set up in 1999 to present a Millennium Exhibition of village history.

Since 1993, additional research has proved the necessity to reprint, add, augment and update where authenticity was suspect or past information no longer applies.

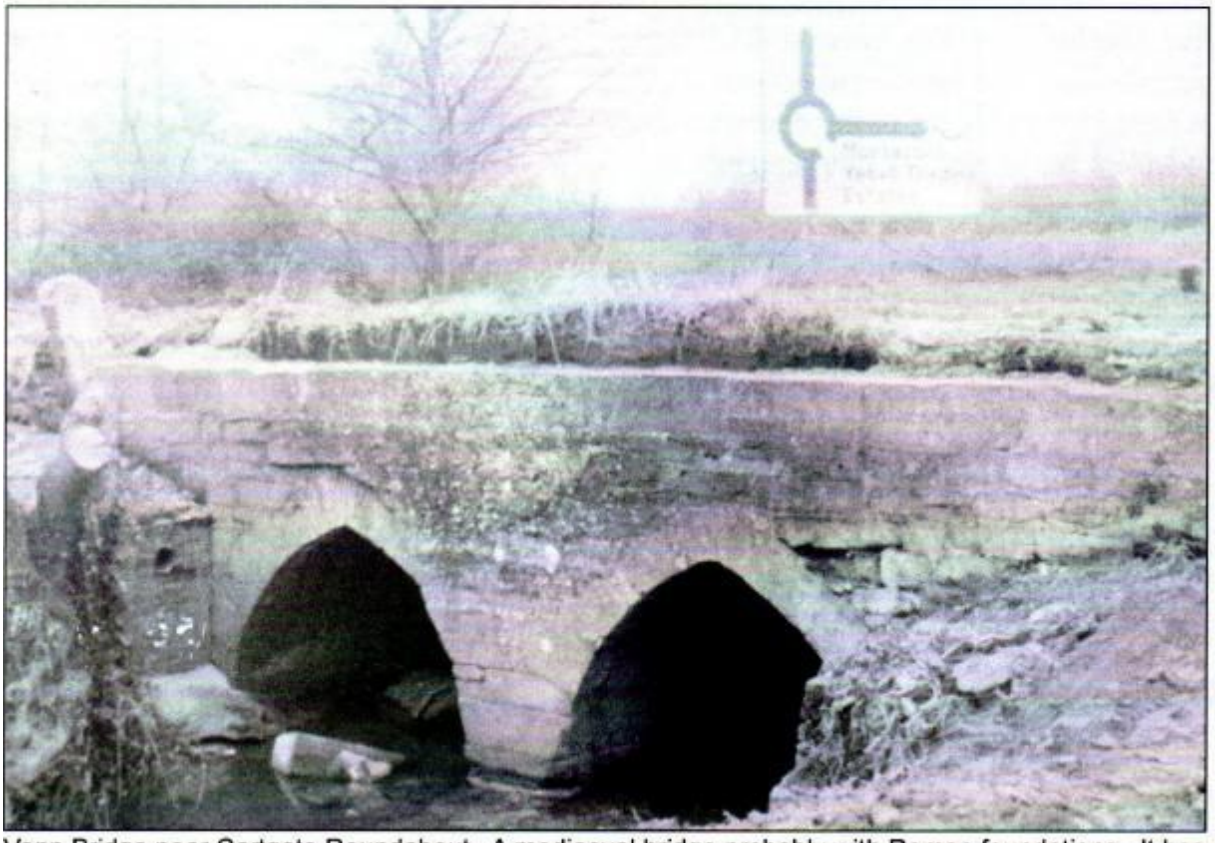
There are, however, a few pages we cannot reprint due to Andy Jacobs' copyright, therefore the foreword and the epilogue have been omitted.

The heraldry drawn on the 1993 book cover was by local artist Anthony Wood. In this edition we have redesigned the cover and obtained illustrations for five shields from the internet. The Tiptoft shield we have used with Mr Wood's permission. The Strode shield was copied from the monument in the parish church at East Stoke (except in the church the colours are reversed). Credit must be given to Moira Hulett for her help and advice in designing the cover.

The History Group is soley a research group and not an association. We would like to dedicate this edition to the late Alan Perry, a member of the Stoke-sub-Hamdon History Group, who worked very hard to reproduce all the parish registers and census returns of Stoke-sub-Hamdon, in a computerised format and fully indexed.

Sadly, Alan Richards, also a member of the Stoke-sub-Hamdon History Group and author of the previous editions, died suddenly in September 2008. He will be greatly missed in the village by his many friends, but he will live on in this book about the village that he loved. The members of the history group: Derek Coward; Angela Hodges; Carol Parker; Norman Patch, and Roy Watson, hope that he would approve of the way they have brought this project to a conclusion.

An aerial view of Ham Hill, mid 1920s. The cropped grass shows up the Iron-Age ramparts, the excavations of the Iron-Age or Roman enclosure and the clear lines of the circular amphitheatre, locally known as the 'Frying Pan'.



Venn Bridge near Cartgate Roundabout. A mediaeval bridge probably with Roman foundations. It has now disappeared due to the building of the A303 dual-carriage way in 1989-90.

Earliest Times to the Anglo-Saxons

It is sometimes difficult to know where to begin writing a village history when there is no documentary evidence for most of the first millennium. Indeed, we know very little about Stoke until well into the Saxon period.

We are, therefore, fortunate to have within our boundary, perhaps the most interesting part of Ham Hill. Moreover, it is a place where the Yeovil Sands Escarpment meets the Somerset levels which adds to its importance, at least from a tactical point of view.

The hill has also yielded much to the archaeologist as far back as the New Stone Age. Flints, bronze, iron objects and pottery have been found during quarrying and ploughing. Some of these objects date back to Neolithic times and suggest that the hill was a place of occupation from very early times. But it was during the Iron Age period, from about 600BC to 45AD, that the hill became a centre of permanent habitation.

The L-shaped hill fort, with a circumference of three miles, was constructed of a double bank and ditch. There were two original entrances, one on the south-east perimeter at Batemoor Barn and the other at the head of the combe separating the north-western spur from the main plateau. Probably the largest hill fort in Europe, it was occupied by a Celtic tribe called the Durotriges, known also to be at Maiden Castle, Dorset. To the west were the Dumnonii and to the north were the Belgae. In 1923 on Ham Hill, a Belgic cremation urn of about 200BC was found containing a rare bronze mounted dagger.

The Romans arrived in earnest in 43AD, and their capture of Maiden Castle was nothing less than a massacre. It is, therefore, doubtful if the Ham Hill Celts offered much resistance and they would no doubt have been driven from the place around 43AD. The Romans used the north spur as a military station, defending the Fosse Way (now the A303). When the Roman military campaign moved to Wales and North Britain, they probably abandoned the hill and established a more permanent settlement at Ilchester.

Over the centuries, much Roman pottery and equipment has been found on the hill. Perhaps the best example is of scale armour, the finest in Britain, consisting of over 300 scales alternately tinned. This is now kept at Taunton Museum.

There is a well in the grounds of the Prince of Wales Inn on Ham Hill, said to be Roman and some 170 feet deep, and in 1905, a Roman villa was excavated at Batemore Barn in Montacute parish on the south-eastern edge of Ham Hill.

One of the greatest legacies left by the Romans to modern day Britain was their road network. The northern boundary of Stoke is formed by the A303 which is part of the old Fosse Way, linking Lincoln to Exeter.

At Venn Bridge on the Fosse Way (west of the Cartgate Roundabout), remains of another villa were found in 1919. Also, at Venn Bridge in 1930, an interesting, inscribed column was discovered. The writing when translated read, "To the Emperor Falvius Valerius Severus, pious and fortunate, most noble Caesar". He ruled very briefly as emperor from 306-07AD under the title of "Augustus in the West" but was forced to commit suicide in 307AD.

South of Venn Bridge, an interesting aerial picture was taken in July 1990, showing considerable circular and rectangular markings. These could be either Roman or possibly the early Saxon Stock. Today we know the area as Stanchester, not to be confused with Stanchester Community School half a mile to the south-east. Perhaps we should get the "Time Team" to have a look.

In 410AD, the Roman legions withdrew to defend their homeland. Britain was then subjected to wave after wave of Anglo-Saxon invasion, but it took over 200 years for the Anglo-Saxons to reach the River Parrett in 658AD.

By the time of Edward the Confessor (r1042-1066), Stoke was under the control of Glastonbury Abbey and leased to five thanes (holders of land by military service). We know the names of four: Alfgeat; Sweet; Edwy, and Alfred. But all this was about to change with that most significant date, 1066.

Anglo-Saxons to the Normans

Today's civil parish of Stoke-sub-Hamdon consists of the two former manors of West and East Stoke – manors which, although neighbours, have experienced different histories, resulting in two distinct communities.

After the Romans left Britain in 410AD, the Romanised Celtic tribes were subjected to waves of invaders, the Anglo-Saxons, from across the North Sea. Originally settling in the East of England, they had reached Stoke by 658AD and for nearly a century the River Parrett became the border between Wessex (Anglo-Saxon) and Dumnonia (the Celtic tribe of Dumnonii). The River Parrett forms the western boundary of Stoke.

In the centuries between the departure of the Romans and the conquest of the Normans, it is evident that much of the land in this part of Somerset was owned directly by the Crown. South Petherton manor was probably a long-standing possession of the Saxon royal house and belonged to the Crown in 1066 and Martock was a pre-conquest royal estate.

The earliest mention of Stoke is when King Athelstan, between 924AD and 939AD, gave land at Stoke to Aelfric and Aelfric gave it to Glastonbury Abbey. Also Uffa, a widow, was said to have given an estate of five hides at Stoke to the Abbey. A charter, now lost, recorded a gift of land at Stoke made by King Ethelred II to his thane Godric; this also passed to Glastonbury. This helps to explain how Stoke was leased by the Abbot of Glastonbury to five thanes in the time of Edward the Confessor.

Stoc, Stoca, Stock, Stocket, Estocket, Stoke Beauchamp, Stoak under Hampden, Stoke-under-Ham and Stoke-sub-Hamdon are all labels which have been linked to the village down the ages. Stoc is a Saxon word, which has many meanings depending on the location and circumstances. Examples include an outlying settlement, homestead, hamlet, even holy place.

If perhaps it means "holy place", this could explain why the parish church was built at East Stoke, bearing in mind that nearby is a spring, listed in the Duchy Survey of 1775-76 as Holy Lake. Or could it mean that Stocket or Estocket was the main homestead in earlier times, and West Stoke was the outlying settlement.

However, the county histories tell us that Stoke was a manor comprised of three parts, one part in the east and two parts in the west.

The following is a translation of the Exchequer (Winchester) Domesday 1086, taken from the Victoria County History of Somerset for East and West Stoke. To help understand the entries, you should know that a hide represents an amount of land sufficient to support a peasant and his household and could vary from 60 to 100 acres. A virgate, is again of varying size, being one quarter of a hide, but this time in a long strip. It was the amount of land which could be ploughed in a single season, using one plough and two oxen.

The division of hides in each community was based on different criteria, depending on the type of land; therefore, no single definition of size is possible.

For East Stoke:

Malger hold of the count STOCHET (Stoke-under-Ham), Alwin held (it) before T.R.E. and paid geld for 2 hides and 1½ virgates of land. There is land for 3 ploughs. In demesne are "1 hide and 3 virgates" and 2 ploughs and 7 serfs and 1 villein and 1 bordar "who have the rest of the land". "There are 2 beasts and 20 sheep". There is a mill paying 40 pence and 10 acres of meadow. It is worth 40 shillings. "When the count received it, 60 shillings".

For West Stoke:

Robert holds of the count STOCHE (Stoke-under-Ham). Five thegns held (it) "in parage" T.R.E. and paid geld for 5½ hides. There is also 1 virgate of land which did not pay geld T.R.E. There is land for 8 ploughs. In demesne are "3 hides and" 2 ploughs and 5 serfs and (there are) 2 villeins and 14 bordars with 3 ploughs "and 2½ hides and 1 virgate." There (are) 2 mills paying 9 shillings, and 25 acres of meadow and 2 furlongs of pasture and 3 acres of wood (land). "There are 6 cows". It was, and is, worth 7 pounds.

Robert holds of the Count STOCKET (Stoke-under-Ham). Three thanes held (it) "in parage" T.R.E. and paid geld for 2 hides less half a virgate of land. There is land for 2 ploughs. There are "1½ hides of demesne and" 4 bordars "who have the rest of the land" and 10 acres of meadow and 15 acres of pasture and 4 acres of wood (land). "There are 6 cows." It was, and is, worth 40 shillings.

Of course, the parts East and West are clear enough, but the third part is not so easily recognised and therefore requires further explanation.

Fortunately, as well as the Exchequer Domesday in the West Country, we also have the Exon Domesday, so called because the original manuscript is kept in the library of Exeter Cathedral. It covers Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, part of Dorset and one holding in Wiltshire.

The Exon Domesday ignores Malger or Mauger's holding of Estocket as well as his other holdings. This may well be explained by the following entry "Mauger has not paid tax on three hides in Abdick Hundred and in other places".

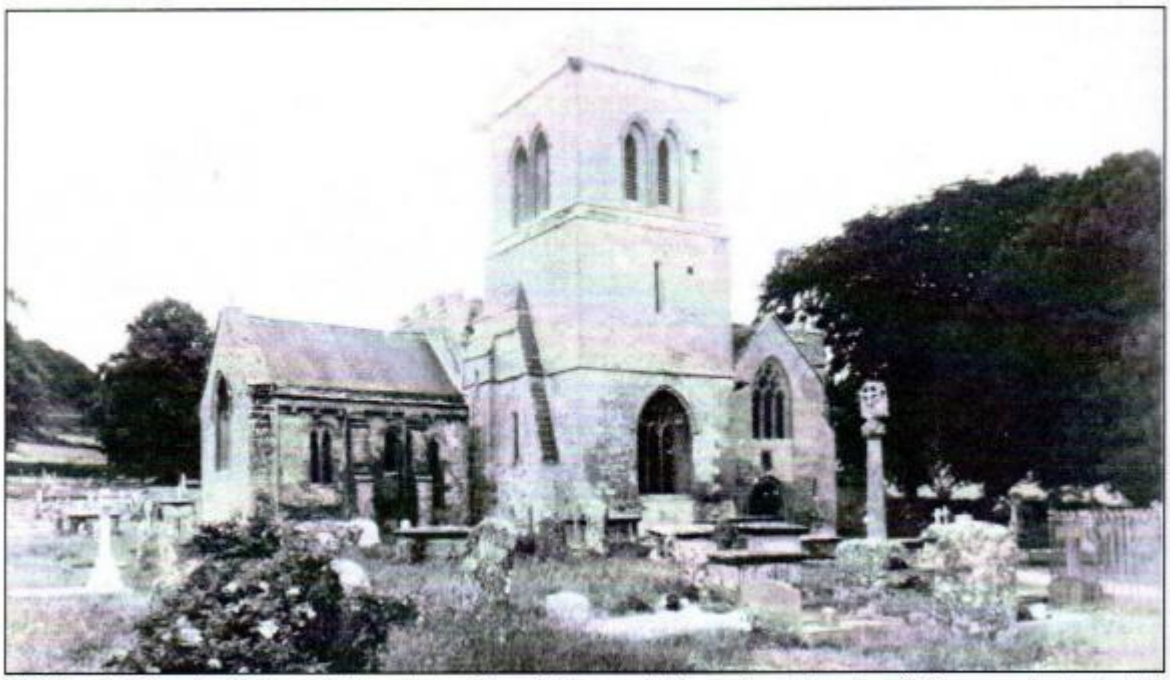
The Exon Domesday, like the Exchequer Domesday, splits West Stoke into two parts. One part includes the mills and was jointly owned pre 1066 by Edwy and four brothers. They were all thanes. From this information, we can draw the conclusion that the mills and Edwy's holding (Edwunescrofte – now the site of Queens Crescent, North Street) are in the western and Cartgate area of Stoke, not to be confused with the Cartgate Roundabout further east.

The other part was held by three thanes, Alfgeat, Sweet and Alfred, and was the area from Cartgate to the boundary with East Stoke. Since the Domesday states that five thanes held West Stoke before 1066, it must be deemed from the above information that three of them held land in both parts of West Stoke.

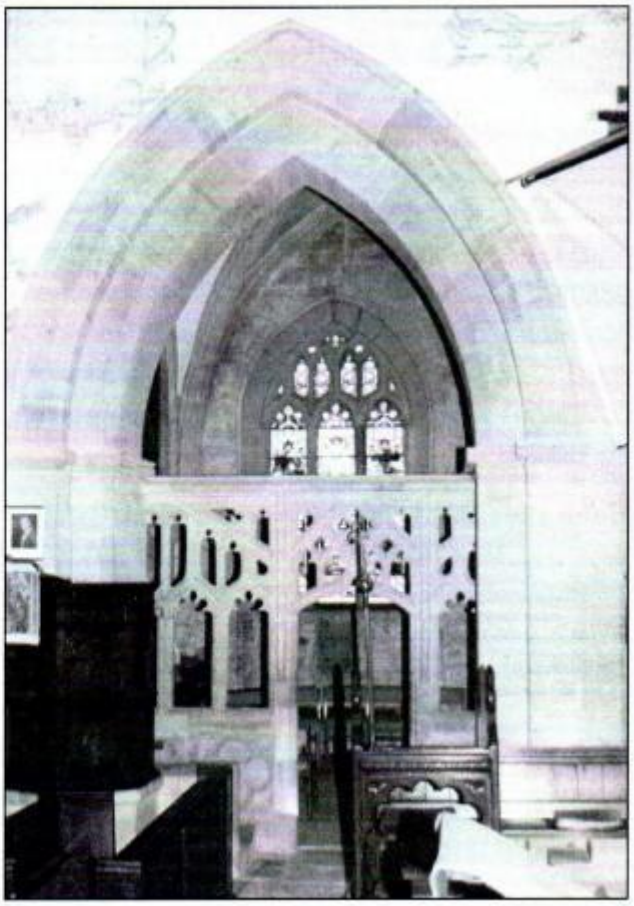
From now on this book will treat Stoke as simply being in two parts, East and West.

The boundaries of the whole parish appear to have altered very little from mediaeval times. The Fosse Way (A303) forms the northern boundary from Petherton Bridge to Wellhams Brook. The north-east boundary runs along Wellhams Brook, turns south for about 250 yards near the connecting road to the A3088, turns east and crosses the road, heading for Masons Lane. It runs south along Masons Lane, turns west along the northern boundary of the allotments, crosses the road again, and heads south to join the Montacute to Stoke Road. It then turns west to meet the lane which goes to Hedgecock Hill. Following the path, it heads over Hedgecock Hill and west along the northern edge of Ham Hill, passing the Prince of Wales Inn, where a few boundary stones can be seen. The boundary continues to run westwards, to a stream dividing Norton from Stoke, until it reaches the River Parrett. The south-west boundary follows the original course of the river to South Petherton Bridge.

The present parish of Stoke measures nearly three miles west to east and one and a half miles north to south at the widest point.



St. Mary's Church, Stoke-sub-Hamdon. One of the most interesting churches in Somerset, due to the various building styles used over the centuries. The original Norman church would have been built without the tower and porch.



The north transept arch, St. Mary's Church, East Stoke. The 15th century stone screen probably came from the chapel of St. Nicholas at the castle, which was in ruins by the end of the 17th century.

The Beauchamp Family

The name Beauchamp (in Latin "Bello Campo") comes from the Norman-French, meaning beautiful field. The Beauchamp family connected to the West Country probably came from Avranches in Normandy and they became a major player in the history of mediaeval Stoke.

In 1066, William the Conqueror invaded England and placed his half brother Robert, the Earl of Mortain, in charge of many estates in the West Country. One small estate was Stoke. In turn the Earl sub-let many of these estates to those in his service, men who would join him in times of war. Among them we find one Robert of Ivo, also known as Robert the Constable.

Robert of Ivo had many manors in Somerset which included Hatch Beauchamp, Shepton Beauchamp, Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Babcary, Chew Stoke in the Mendips and Marston Magna, also Charmouth in Dorset and Frithelstock near Great Torrington in Devon. It can be seen that these manors are widely scattered, as was the usual practice, to prevent a Norman landowner gaining too much power in one county. When succeeding to their estates, the Beauchamp family in Somerset sub-let most of them, keeping Hatch Beauchamp and Stoke for themselves.

Their original residence was at Hatch Beauchamp, but in the early reign of King Edward I (r1272-1307) they constructed a manor house and a free chapel at Stoke.

Robert of Ivo must have departed this life by 1092 as we then find Robert Beauchamp I, who may have been a son of Robert of Ivo, witnessing a charter associated with the Count of Mortain.

In 1104, William, the Count of Mortain, rebelled against King Henry I (r1100-1135) and lost all his estates, so we then find Robert Beauchamp I emerging as tenant-in-chief under the King, but after that no more is heard of him.

His successor was Robert Beauchamp II, of whom we know very little. Rather more is known about Robert III, who was Sheriff of Somerset and Dorset in 1163 and again 1176-83. He must have been a somewhat ambitious character. In 1166, he made a bid to marry the King's daughter, presumably Princess Matilda, declaring his Barony of 17 manors held directly from the Crown as his credentials, but no match was arranged. Perhaps both the King and the Princess had their sights on bigger fish.

We later find Robert III in the service of King Richard I (r1189-99). However, while Richard was imprisoned in Austria, Robert supported Prince John in his unsuccessful attempt to seize the throne, which resulted in the confiscation of his lands upon Richard's return.

Robert III died in 1195, leaving no son. His heiress was a daughter, Muriel. After the death of her father, the family estates were fortunately restored to her, no doubt after a fine was paid. But it now looked as though the Beauchamp line was at an end.

However, Muriel was married to one of Robert's tenants, Simon de Vaultort, who held seven of the Beauchamp manors. They had a son, Robert IV. Unfortunately, Simon died before 1199, and Robert assumed his mother's maiden name. During his minority he was made a ward of that renowned justiciar, Hubert de Burgh, who more than once defended his interests.

Perhaps the most critical time was when the Vaultort family laid claim to the Beauchamp estate of Shepperton in Middlesex, and it was decided to settle the matter by trial of combat. The Beauchamps chose one Duncan the Scot to be their champion, but unfortunately, he died shortly before the trial and was replaced by William de Champneys.

The combat took place and the Beauchamp champion was declared the victor. The Vaultorts then released their claim in consideration of 200 marks.

Robert IV, better known as Robert FitzSimon Beauchamp, probably came of age before 1213, when he was assessed for his 17 manors. His wife was called Juliana and is thought to have been a member of the Brett family. She may have been related to an earlier Brett, one of the assassins of Thomas a' Becket. In 1223, Robert IV is recorded as Sheriff of Somerset and Dorset.

Up until now it would seemthat the Beauchamp fortunes were somewhat shaky, but from now on we shall see their star in the ascendant. The future would bring prosperous marriages, wealth, position and the acquisition of many more manors.

At Frithelstock in Devon, there are the remains of a priory said to have been founded either by Robert III or Robert IV. In 1224, we find Robert IV in conflict with the Prior of Frithelstock over the advowson (the right to appoint the vicar) of Stoke church; this was settled in Robert's favour. In 1236, he was again assessed for his 17 manors by King Henry III (r1216-1272).

On the local scene in 1248, he was granted a charter to make the woodland and pasture of Ham Hill into a rabbit warren. He died around 1250-51.

His estates passed to his son, Robert Beauchamp V, who married Alice, daughter of Reginald de Mohun of Dunster. Reginald de Mohun gave the couple the "Soke de Mohun" for a wedding present. This was for the rights and privileges of the Mohun Estates in the city of London and without.

It is known that Robert V and Alice had two sons: John I born no later than 1249, who succeeded to the Barony, and Humphrey, who was given the manor of Ryme Intrinseca and other estates in Devon.

As Robert V held many manors in chief of the Kind, he was frequently called to military service by Henry III. Between 1244 and 1264, he was engaged in military campaigns against Scots and Welsh.

We also know that he went to battle in 1263-64, possibly to fight against Simon de Montfort who rebelled against the misrule of the King. In 1265, Simon de Montfort was responsible for summoning a Parliament composed of elected representative from every shire, thus founding the first House of Commons.

Robert V died about 1265-66. However, great changes were about to take place. Robert V's son, John I, married Cecily, daughter and wealthy heiress of William de Vivonia. Not only wealth, but several more manors were brought into the Beauchamp fold, including Compton Dundon near Somerton and Welton in Midsomer Norton.

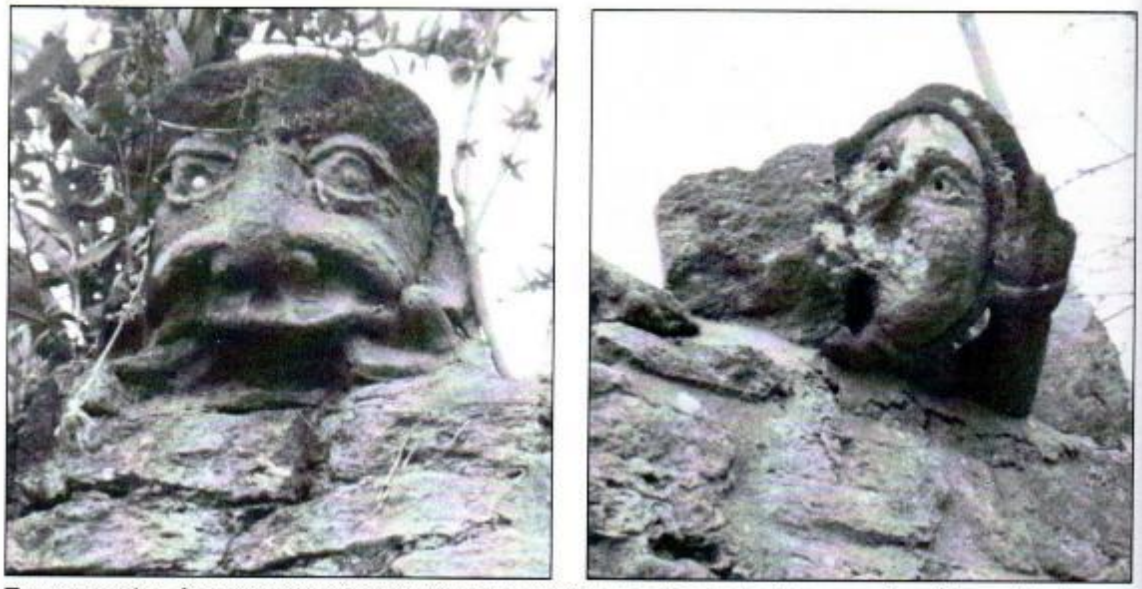
The building of their private chapel and manor house at Stoke (not called castle until it was fortified in 1333) probably began in the 1270s. John II was buried in the chapel of St Nicholas in 1283.

The Beauchamps of Hatch made Stoke manor house one of their main residences. From here they would summon their liegemen to war, (men who owe allegiance and service to a feudal lord) receive due homage and fealty, conduct their affairs, give their daughters in marriage and baptise their infants. It was often the custom to invite many villagers to the baptisms.

Records state that John I and Cecily had two sons: John II, the eldest, was born about 1274, and Robert who later became a Rector of Stoke. They also had two daughters. Eleanor married Fulk 2nd Baron Fitzwarin and so by a quirk of fate became connected to Alice Fitzwarren, wife of Dick Whittington. Beatrice married first Peter Corbet and second John le Leyburne. Beatrice, having had no children with either husband, left her estates to her great-nephew, John Beauchamp IV.

In 1277, John I was summoned by King Edward I to take up arms against the Welsh prince Llewellyn. The muster was at Worcester, but first John had to summon all his own men-at-arms which included a standard bearer. To this, add a baggage train and no doubt other camp followers. It is reasonable to assume that they assembled at Stoke manor house before setting off to war and it must have been a thrilling sight to see.

It would appear, however, that from Worcester they were dispatched to West Wales and not to the main event in the north. Whilst there, John I was made a Governor of the important royal castles at Cardigan and Carmarthen, which he garrisoned for the King. He also witnessed several charters in connection with Carmarthen Priory.



Two gargoyles, from the chapel of St. Nicholas, which was situated in the grounds of the castle. In use until 1548, but like the castle it fell into ruin and the stones re-used, as can be seen in various properties around the village.

View of the Pound and Highway taken from Ham Hill in the early 1890s. The Pound is mentioned in the 1615 Duchy Survey. It was the responsibility of the Waywarden and was last used to raise pigs and chickens in WWII.

Sadly, like many of his family, John did not make old bones and died whilst staying at Hatch Beauchamp on 24th October 1283. His body was brought to Stoke and buried in the chapel of St Nicholas.

John Beauchamp II was only ten years old when his father died, and he was placed under the guardianship of his uncle, Peter Corbet, who received £100 a year for this service.

His mother, Cecily, took control of Stoke during his minority and in 1287, compiled a very informative inventory.

It recorded several fields in Stoke, some of which are known by name: Stanchester 44½ acres – an area near the north-east boundary of the village; Langelonde 54½ acres – the present Langlands; Edwunescrofte 29½ acres – probably "the Croft" where Queens Crescent now stands; Schepcombe 59½ acres – part of the present Recreation field; Le Ryxe 27½ acres – Rixon Common; Hamedon 80 acres – Ham Hill; Helfuwys 49½ acres – Huish, south-east of Holy Tree and Byestedon 45½ acres – location unknown.

The farmland in the village was divided into meadows, permanent pasture and three big open fields used for arable cultivation. The arable fields were divided into strips, and the crops were grown in rotation. Most of the manor was "demesne" land, for the sole use of Cecily.

Cecily's inventory informs us of the value of the land and details of the tasks performed by the freeman and the villeins. The reeve is mentioned, whom she chose, and he would be responsible for the overall general management of the village. He also had the honour of eating at her table when she was in residence.

The freemen of the village had more privileges; they rented strips of land and grew crops to sell at the market, generating income for themselves. They still worked unpaid for Cecily, but at times were renumerated in kind for their work and as freeman, they could leave the village and marry without permission. One of the freemen was also nominated as the lord's standard-bearer in times of war.

At the bottom of the ladder were the villeins or peasants. They were unpaid and spent most of their time working on demesne land or on tasks connected with the manor. In return they were allowed a few strips of land and a cottage; also they needed permission to leave the village and marry. Both freemen and villeins paid scutage (tax).

A Christmas feast was held at the manor house with the villagers supplying the bread and malt for the beer. Both freeman and villeins, if they held half a virgate of land, had to plough two acres of land and work three days a week from Michaelmas (29th September) until Christmas to pay for the feast!

Several villagers are mentioned: Isaac the smith; Walter the miller; Gregory the cook; Hugh Trot; John ate Holeweye; Nicholas Stokye; Roger Olyver, and John Cole. Cole is the name that remains with us today as Cole Lane and Cole's Pool, which was near the United Reformed Church. The bakehouse is listed and held in turn by Hugh and Nicholas Pistor.

John II is the best documented of all the Beauchamps, probably because he lived the longest. Apart from his compulsory war service, his interest in the well-being of the church projects him as a man of piety and benevolence. He was created 1st Lord Beauchamp of Somerset in 1299, and is recorded as being summoned to Parliament in 1299, 1300 and 1327.

He fought at the siege of Caerlaverock in Scotland in 1300, and was invested as a Knight of Somerset in 1306 and called again to the Scottish campaign. As Governor of Bridgwater Castle in 1323, he made a considerable effort to get the castle repaired. In 1327, he was back fighting the Scots in Newcastle.

John II married Joan Cheney or Chenduit, whose family held Poyntington, as well as other Dorset Manors. It is recorded that they had three children; William, who died in infancy, John III born about 1307, who later inherited the titles and estate, and a daughter Joan.

At the manor house apart from the preparations for war, there must also have been pageantry and feasting. The wedding of Joan to John, 2nd Baron of Cobham, would have been such an occasion. There were sad times too. Henry, 1st Baron of Cobham, died there whilst on a visit in 1316 and was buried in the chapel of St Nicholas.

John II's greatest interest seems to have been with the church. There already existed a long family association with Forde Abbey and it can be said that the Beauchamp shield is incorporated into the abbey seal. There were also connections with Athelney Abbey, since the Beauchamp family had often been benefactors.

In 1302, John gave land out of his manor at Ilton in return for prayers for his family from the Abbot Osmond and monks of Athelney. A little later John granted income to Polsloe Priory in Devon out of his manor at Marston Magna. This was to provide for "one honest nun" whom he was given the privilege to nominate.

Perhaps his most notable act was to establish a chantry in the chapel of St Nicholas at the manor house in Stoke in 1304. He did this with the consent of his mother Cecily, and his friend Walter Haselshaw, Bishop of Bath and Wells.

The foundation deed (a full account can be found in The History of Somerset Vol III by Collinson) is printed as follows:

"A college or chantry for five chaplains (one of them to be named and to act as Provost) to say five masses, accompanied with other office, every day and to offer devout prayers for the souls of Lord John de Beauchamp his father, Robert Beauchamp his brother, his progenitors, successors, and all the faithful deceased, and for the good estate of Edward King of England, Walter Haselshaw Bishop of Bath and Wells, of the said Cecily de Beauchamp, and of himself the said John de Beauchamp, and of Lady Joan his wife, and their children, Aleanor and Beatrix his sisters, and also his relations, friends, and benefactors, during their lives, and for their souls after their decease".

The foundation deed required the Provost and chaplains to wear white surplices. On the left side of the surplice was stitched a cross and the arms of the Beauchamp family. John also required that the poor of Stoke be fed every 24th October, on the anniversary of his father's death. The original deed which Bishop Haselshaw recorded is lost, but fortunately it was also entered in the register of Bishop Drokensford. Many of the letters written by John II concerning appointments and the deaths of chaplains, have survived. They are reprinted by the Somerset Records Society.

Cecily, the mother of John II, died in 1321 and his wife Joan died six years later, in 1327. John II died in his early sixties in 1336. Presumably they all would have been buried in the chapel of St Nicholas at the castle.

Although the Beauchamps were not a powerful Norman family, they were still of great importance in Somerset. If a person required a court order, a foundation deed, or a grant of land, they were on safe ground if they had Beauchamp approval.

John Beauchamp III married Margaret, daughter of John St John of Basing. Her mother had descended from the Courtenay family, Earls of Devon.

It is known that there were four children: John IV born about 1330; Hugh; Cecily, and Eleanor. Cecily married Roger Seymour, and therefore became a direct ancestor of Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, and his sister Jane Seymour, a Queen of England. Eleanor married John de Meriet, last by one of the de Meriets who were of Saxon descent, from Harding and Ednoth the Staller.

John III succeeded to the title of 2nd Lord Beauchamp of Somerset in 1336 and was summoned to Parliament in 1337. He made his homage to King Edward III (r1327-1377) in 1338. He would have knelt before the King, placed his clasped hands into those of the King and sworn to be his liegeman, life and limb. He would have also received homage from his own liegemen likewise. Even religious houses were not exempt, as it is recorded that the Abbot of Ford, John Childhaye, paid homage to John in 1341.

During his military service, he took part in the early French wars of King Edward III but did not live long enough to be at the great Battle of Crecy in 1346, as he died in 1343. There exists a muster roll taken at Stoke in 1343, which lists his men-in-arms.

The last of the male line was John Beauchamp IV. He was probably only 13 years old when he inherited his father's estate. It is unknown if he was made a ward of anyone or who took charge of his affairs.

He was engaged in military service in Gascony with Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, whose daughter, Alice, he married. He was certainly summoned to Parliament from 1352-1361.

On the face of I,t his prospects could hardly have been better, he was a Lord and a Knight of Somerset with a place in the King's parliament. He held a Barony, greater than that of his predecessors, with manors in Somerset, Devon, Dorset, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Middlesex, and the estates he had inherited from his late great-aunt Beatrice.

On top of all that, he allied himself to the powerful Earls of Warwick. He possessed castles (fortified manor houses) at Stoke and Hatch Beauchamp and two manor houses at Compton Dundon and Merrifield, near Ilminster.

He also invested a large sum of money in the wool trade. For this he borrowed £2,000 from Matthew de Gournay whom he had met in Gascony, a sum which in modern terms must be over half a million pounds.

It seemed that the world was his oyster, yet for all that our story ends tragically. A childless marriage and his death in 1361 brought it all to an end, and a few weeks later his mother Margaret died at Merrifield, near Ilminster.

The Beauchamp estates were divided between his sister Cecily, and thence to the Seymour family, and his nephew John de Meriet. Even West Stoke was divided, part going to each and some going to his widow Alice for her dowry.

The effect of it all on the village would have been immense. It was a watershed in our village history and we can only begin to imagine what it might have been like if the Beauchamp family had survived.

There was, however, one spark of light left. We turn to the sister of John IV, Cecily, who died in 1394 and whose second marriage was to Sir Gilbert Turbeville of Coity in South Wales. Although Cecily could not know, she was to do what Robert Beauchamp III failed to do in 1166. She was to bring the family into royal bloodstream; her direct descendant through her first marriage to Roger Seymour was Jane Seymour, the third Queen of Henry VIII and the mother of King Edward VI.

If you ever visit Hampton Court, pause at the great gate and look above you. There you will see the royal coat of arms of Henry VIII conjoined with those of Jane Seymour. One quarter displays the Beauchamp arms vair (blue and white horizontal lines alternating with wavy lines), showing Jane's direct descent from the Beauchamp family.

The Beauchamp family at this time was also involved with Swell parish church, five miles from Hatch Beauchamp. In the church can be seen the best surviving example of the Beauchamp shield in mediaeval glass.

The importance of the Beauchamp family history is shown by the existence of a document called "The Beauchamp Cartulary", written in the reign of Edward III. The book is a history of the Beauchamp family and opens with a reference to Robert I in 1092. Robert may well have been the son of Robert of Ivo, mentioned in the Domesday Book.

The book came down the line as a family heirloom to the Seymours, but was probably confiscated when Edward Seymour was convicted of treason. It eventually ended up in the Public Record Office in London.

A slip of paper stored with the book describes it thus: "The Beauchamp Carulary, written in a fine hand (in Latin) with decorated initials in blue and red upon sheets of parchment made up into sections of various sizes. The sections are sewn onto six bands, laced and pegged into beech boards covered with white sheepskin".

When John Batten wrote "The Barony of Beauchamp of Somerset" in 1890, it was a great source of information to him. Likewise, his Paper, printed in Volume 36 of the Proceedings of Somerset Archaeological Society, has been of great assistance to the authors.

The mediaeval Tunwell - town well, a public water supply situated between North Street and Castle Street. It was scheduled as an emergency water supply in WWII. Restored in 2000.

The Conduit in the High Street. An area known as the Conduit was in existence by 1624. The stone work shown here, was constructed in 1882 when the Working Men's Institute was built. In use as a water supply until 1927.

Sir Matthew de Gournay

Sir Matthew de Gournay must surely be the most remarkable man ever to feature in the history of Stoke in connection with the Beauchamp family. Before dealing with his association with the village, we must take a look at his life and background.

We can trace his descent from the family of Perceval, who were the Domesday tenants of Richmont Castle, East Harptree, near Bristol. The family changed their name to Harptree, but in the time of King Henry III (r1216-1272), one Robert Harptree changed his name to Gournay, in honour of his mother. Matthew was a direct descendant.

Matthew's father Thoma,s took part in the hideous murder of Edward II at Berkeley Castle, resulting in the confiscation of his estates, the chief portion being Englishcombe near Bath, where the site of a castle can still be traced and no doubt was the scene of Matthew's childhood. Thus denied his inheritance, Matthew became a soldier in the armies of King Edward III (r1327-1377) and the Black Prince, becoming very rich through the spoils of war.

There is frequent mention of his military exploits in the Gascon rolls and by Jean Froissart, the 14th century historian. Although a soldier, he took part in the famous sea-battle of Sluys in 1340, the Battle of Crecy in 1346, Poiters in 1356 and Auray in 1364, where he commanded the 2nd Battalion of the English Army. He also fought at the great Battle of Najazza in 1366. At one time he was imprisoned in the Tower of London for starting his own private war, but after two years he was back fighting in Brittany.

In 1380 he was Constable of the forces in Spain, and in 1381 he went on an expedition to Portugal with his brother-in-law, Sir Thomas Beauchamp II. In 1386, he was made commissioner to raise men at arms in Somerset and Dorset "to guard the coasts thereof". According to Dr Robert Dunning he was on an expedition into Guienne (south-west France) with John of Gaunt in 1393. This must have been his last active service on the continent.

John Beauchamp IV died in 1361; shortly before his untimely death he had borrowed £2,000 from Matthew de Gournay. Matthew was then obviously concerned about the repayment of his £2,000 loan, of which £1,000 in gold was in the castle.

In staking his claim, Matthew produced a deed which promised him £1,000 a year as a rent charge out of all John's manors and lands in England. As part settlement, Cecily, John's sister and his nephew John de Meriet, conveyed to Matthew their parts of Stoke and agreed, not without question, to grant him rent charges out of other Beauchamp estates that they had recently acquired.

Not being completely satisfied, Matthew de Gournay then must have turned his attention to John IV's widow, the Lady Alice. Whether he eventually wooed her or simply moved in with her is difficult to say, but they were married some ten years later, between 1371 and 1374.

Matthew purchased from John de Meriet his interest in the manor which was then conveyed to Alice's brother, William Beauchamp of Warwick, one of her feoffees (holder of legal title of property but not the equitable owner).

Alice and Matthew could not have spent much time together as he continued his adventures on the continent. Alice spent her last days at St John's Hospital in Bridgwater, where she died and was buried in 1383, although it must have been her right to be buried in Stoke.

The death of Alice in 1383 was to bring more problems to Matthew; the estate was divided, one half passing to Cecily and the other half to William Beauchamp of Warwick, Alice's brother, as her surviving feoffee.

In order to remedy this, Matthew and Cecily in 1386 drew up a deed by which, if Cecily would convey him her part of Stoke and other Beauchamp manors, he would release all the rent charges out of her share of the estate. Cecily agreed to her part of the agreement, and by 1389 Matthew had acquired the whole manor.

Unfortunately, Stoke was still held in chief of the King, then Richard II (1377-1399), but Matthew forgot or ignored the royal licence which must have incurred a penalty. What form this penalty took has never come to light, but it is thought that Matthew agreed to revert the manor to the King after the death of himself and his wife.

By this time Matthew had taken yet another wife; he married Philippe, a widow of Robert Asheton, Knight of Pitney, and co-heiress of Sir John Talbot of Richards Castle, Hereford. Some would say he was a glutton for punishment, but the main reason probably was for money and property.

After his last expedition with John of Gaunt in 1393, he must have spent his remaining days at Stoke Castle, where he died in 1406 at the great age of 96 years. He was buried, no doubt with great magnificence, before the choir door in the chapel of St Nicholas.

It is not difficult to see how he came to be regarded as the subject of "A Knight's Tale" from "The Canterbury Tales" by Chaucer. The 17th century writer Thomas Fuller wrote of him, it is a wonder that "He who did watch so long on the bed of honour, should die in the bed of peace".

Philippe outlived him and by making her homage and fealty to King Henry IV (r1399-1413), was allowed to keep Stoke for her lifetime.

Sir John Tiptoft to the Wars of the Roses

By 1408, de Gournay's widow Philippe, had left Stoke to marry Sir John Tiptoft, a man who was probably much younger than herself. He may well have only been interested in the many manors she would add to his estate, as she had inherited her share of John Talbot's estates, plus Stoke and maybe other Gournay manors.

John Tiptoft had already secured himself an important position of influence in the royal household. In 1405-06, he was Speaker of the House of Commons and from 1408-10, was Lord High Treasurer, apart from being a Knight for the shires of Huntingdon and Somerset.

Under King Henry V (r1413-1422) the great warrior King, he represented Somerset in the Parliament of 1413 and became Seneschal of Aquitane in 1415.

When Philippe died in 1417, he could well have lost Stoke to the Crown, but his influence at court seems to have secured the village for himself at least until 1421. After that, he held it by leasehold only, due to the Crown's reversionary interest in favour of the Duchy of Cornwall.

His second marriage was to Joyce Cherleton in 1422, daughter of Lord Powys; by her he had three daughters Philippe, Joanne and Joyce, and a son, John. To digress a little, John, the son, was a very well educated man and an interesting character. He became Earl of Worcester and due to his ruthlessness in the Wars of the Roses, was called "The Butcher", but he was also a patron of Caxton the printer. He married three times and was finally executed for treason in 1470. He and two of his wives have magnificent canopied monuments in Ely cathedral.

Returning to Stoke, throughout all this time the castle was probably abandoned, perhaps even looted, although part of it may have been used on occasions or even let. John Tiptoft would certainly not have lived there, although he did present to the parish cure, enabling him to appoint vicars. These were Robert Wyche in 1420 and Thomas Bishop in 1436. It is, however, likely that he did not attend the presentation himself but sent a deputy.

He died in 1443, some say at the hands of an assassin, and it is a mystery where he is buried. As for Stoke, this was now well and truly Crown land with a non-resident "Lord of the Manor".

In normal circumstances this would not have been too bad, but in the case of Stoke, the Lord of the Manor was King Henry VI. When the Wars of the Roses began in 1455, this must have heralded some 30 years of hardship and deprivation for the village.

We now take a closer look at the list of landlords after the death of Sir John Tiptoft.

For a while, the Crown appointed keepers of the castle and manor. In 1443, there was Thomas Yonge, a Bristol merchant. In 1444, the manor was granted to Edmund Beaufort, Marquis of Dorset, but was returned to the Crown in 1449. Henry Holland was appointed keeper in 1450, but in 1452 the manor was returned to Edmund Beaufort, now Duke of Somerset, until his death for the Lancastrian cause at the Battle of St Albans in 1455.

His widow was granted keepership for a period of seven years, in 1456. She was succeeded by her son Henry, 3rd Duke of Somerset, who was beheaded after the Battle of Hexham in 1464 by the Yorkists.

Stoke then passed to the Yorkists, in the person of George, Duke of Clarence, who is reputed to have died in 1478 by drowning in a vat of malmsey wine. He had, however, lost Stoke by 1470 when the Lancastrian King Henry VI (r1422-1461 and r1470-71) was placed back on the throne by "Warwick the Kingmaker".

Generally speaking, the country was not greatly affected by these wars except where they were fought, due to the countryside being plundered. They were wars fought between private armies. Those who were not involved were making huge sums of money in the wool trade. We only need to look at the magnificent church towers of the era for which the West Country has become renowned, to see the level of that wealth.

Unfortunately, none of that wealth came to Stoke, which was caught up in the mainstream of events, tossed from one side to the other at least half a dozen times. King Henry VI complained that he was not getting enough income from the village and in later years the Tudor Prince Arthur complained someone else was getting it!

The fortunes of Stoke were therefore bound up with the Wars of the Roses. In 1472, after the Yorkist King, Edward IV, regained the throne, Stoke was again annexed to the Duchy of Cornwall. Throughout the period, the Crown still retained the right at Stoke to present the advowson (the appointment of vicars) at the parish church and the Beauchamp chantry. The chantry continued to function in spite of the patrons being long gone.

In 1482, an Act of Parliament allowed Stoke to be part of the estate of William Herbert, Earl of Huntingdon. The Act was declared void in 1495 and Stoke became part of the estate of Tudor Prince Arthur.

The Crown continued to lease the manor until 1545. Part was leased to Paul Gressham, and the reversion of this and the rest of the manor to Christopher Perne in 1557. The reversion of the second lease was granted to Helen, Marchioness of Northampton, and in 1606 was conveyed to her second husband, Sir Thomas Gorges, (died 1610) after her death.

The manor was formally settled on Charles, Prince of Wales, in 1615 when a survey was taken. In 1616, however, Sir Edward Gorges received a lease for three lives, to be effective after the death of his mother. When she died in 1635, he succeeded her and was himself succeeded by his son Richard in 1650, who retained possession until his death in 1660. Since then the manor of West Stoke has been directly under the control of the Duchy of Cornwall.

Before closing this chapter let us reflect, starting from the time when the castle ceased to be a lordship's residence. No longer do the people who once lived within its walls occupy the centre stage of village history. From now on we see the villagers emerge to form their own identity. We see them build a community, names become known of farmers, craftsmen and traders. We learn of the lives they led, the houses they built, and the stories they told.

The parish registers and many documents dating from the mid 16th century have proved to be valuable sources of information. Thus, a true picture starts to unfold of the development of the village down through the ages.

The Gables, probably built in the late 1500s. Associated with the Rodbard family from 1757. The residence and surgery of Dr. Winter W. Walter from 1856 until 1904. He also housed his local history museum here.

Extensive ruins of Shores Mill on the River Parrett, taken in the early 1890s. The Shore family was associated with the mill from at least 1759 to 1884, when a fire destroyed the mill. All that now remains is a bridge and wheel pit.

The Seventeenth Century

At the beginning of the 17th century, the most prominent families in Stoke were the Strodes of the Priory in West Stoke and the Chaffeys in East Stoke, at Lower East Stoke Farm, as East Stoke House had not yet been built. Notably, both these families owned property and land in Stoke that had no connection with the Duchy of Cornwall.

The Chaffeys were looked upon as squires, which indeed they were as far as East Stoke was concerned. Although two manors existed for centuries, one parish was by this time in existence and was treated as such by the survey carried out for King James I (r1603-1625) in 1615.

This survey was conducted by the officers of the manor: Sir Robert Phelips; John Seward; William Baron, and William Chaffey (bailiff). There were 37 articles in the survey (not all complete) and too much to print, but here are a few:

Article 4 mentions "Demesne" lands (land and property belonging to the lord of the manor) and states a castle stood within certain grounds called "gardens". This refers to cleared land around the castle and on old maps marked "Castle Close".

Article 5 quotes the "heriot" or mediaeval tax, enforced upon freeholders in the village; payable to the Prince of Wales, who at this time was still a minor.

Article 8 mentions 15 common fields.

Article 10 tells us that "Robert Chaffey and his heirs and assigns are, and do, stand charged to provide yearly bread, cheese and drink to those who go in perambulation", in return for using part of the common.

Although the parish boundaries were fixed, in Rogation week in April, villagers went in procession (perambulation) to bless the crops and establish the boundaries of the parish by "beating the bounds". In later years "beating the bounds" became club walking.

Article 11 tells us that (Mrs) "Thomas Thorne, a poor widow having three small children hath lately builded a little new house in the Kings highway for herself and her said children to dwell therein but by what warrant or rent they know not". Perhaps we have an example of a time when, if you could erect a little house on waste land in one day, it was yours in perpetuity.

Article 23 mentions a custom water mill at Petherton Bridge to grind corn. The tenant being Joan Carter, widow, paying £4 yearly and that she is required to keep the mill and floodgates in good repair. Thomas Brain is mentioned as having a little hand mill to grind malt.

Article 24 mentions the stone quarries on Ham Hill.

Article 31 mentions the yearly fair held on 25th April, St Mark's Day.

Article 32 tells us that a stone bridge, called Petherton Bridge, was partly maintained by the parish; presumably the other half was maintained by South Petherton. Venn Bridge on the King's highway, half a mile north-east, was also the responsibility of the parish. Both bridges were said to be in good repair.

THE CIVIL WAR (1642-51)

Practically nothing has come to light with regard to any village involvement in the Civil War, but the Strodes of Stoke and Netherbury, were known to support the Royalist cause.

As for the villagers of Stoke, they had little or nothing to thank their landlords for. Considering the rapid rise of non-conformity in Stoke, from now on we have to believe that sympathy, at least, was with Cromwell.

Even the Strodes seemed to accept Theophilis Crabbe as Presbyterian minister at Stoke parish church and it is a remarkable coincidence that the minister appointed to Netherbury was one Josef Crabbe. Records show that the name Crabbe was closely tied with that of Strode for over 200 years.

However, the area was not without involvement in the Civil War during this period. On 5th July, the Royalist army under the command of Colonel Goring was camped at Somerton whilst a strong force of Roundheads under Colonel Fairfax was based at Crewkerne.

Goring had previously destroyed Petherton Bridge but left it inadequately protected. On 6th July, Fairfax sent a large party of horse and dragoons under the command of Colonel Fleetwood to Petherton Bridge. They overwhelmed the Royalists and chased them to Long Load. The bridge was then rebuilt.

On 7th July, Fairfax moved his troops and ordnance across the river, which had been a major obstacle to their progress. They continued to pursue the Royalists and a few days later on 10th July, completely routed them at the Battle of Langport. The battle destroyed the last Royalist field army and gave Parliament control over the West Country.

THE COMMONWEALTH (1649-1660)

As we have already seen, surveys and custom rolls were sometimes issued by the Duchy of Cornwall – 1615, 1657 and 1661 to mention a few. However, there was one in 1650 that was completely out of character with all the others before or since. The language and date make it Cromwellian.

It was concerned with the rights and possessions within the manor of East and West Stoke, of the late Charles Stuart, Prince of Wales and Duke of Cornwall. Among other things it demands to know the profits, fines and penalties of the courts, details of waifs, strays, felons and goods of felons, fugitives and condemned persons. It requires royalties of hawking, hunting, fowling, fishing and other royalites amounting to the value of £120. It reminds us of Domesday when all had to be declared down to the last swine.

It also declares that the village was years in arrears with rents, copyholds, tithes and heriots (Fines), probably due to the Civil War.

A further certificate was then issued by order of William Webb, a surveyor general. This was the order for sale of the Honour and Manor of Stoke belonging to the late King and Queen and dated 14th November 1650. There is no record of the sale taking place, probably there was no buyer. There was a lease to one Richard Gorges who died in 1660, which was all very convenient as the restoration of the monarchy took place at that time and the Duchy of Cornwall made a new custom roll in 1661.

STRANGE SOUNDS OF A BATTLE IN STOKE IN 1661

The following account is taken from Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries, Vol.IV, and may well be regarded as a hoax. On the other hand, we may be dealing with the supernatural, as there have been several reports of spectral armies in action in Britain from a variety of witnesses.

"About the beginning of September 1661, upon a Monday or Tuesday about two of the clock in the morning at Stoak under Hamden in Somersetshire, four persons went forth together to cut beans in a field; and as they began to enter on their work, they heard first a very great noise as if it had been the crack of a great tree when it breaks and falls: they heard it again the second time, whereby they were so terrified that they let off their cutting of beans immediately.

After this they heard the noise of the beating of a drum, and one of the company being a drummer (and now in the King's army) could distinguish the several beatings, who affirms there was a first call beaten, and after that a Battle, which continued a good space of time and in the midst of it a great shrieking, and a harsh confused noise, like the clattering of armour and the groaning of dying men; this whole scene was repeated for several times successively.

They heard the noise, sometimes as near them, sometimes as further off, till the daybreak, and then all ceased; only immediately after it they heard a more than ordinary bellowing and roaring of cattle that were in pastures adjacent. These persons were so exceedingly affrighted at what they heard that they were sometimes resolved to run away from fear, but being four of them together, they animated one another, and stayed to it.

They have often been examined and threatened about this thing, but they all jointly attest the truth of the whole relation, which is so notoriously known in these parts, that he who will take the pains to enquire after it, will receive ample satisfaction in the premises".

MONMOUTH REBELLION

In 1680 James, Duke of Monmouth, made progress in this area, being the guest of the Spekes of Dillington and the Syndenhams of Brympton. It is recorded that hundreds of people turned out to greet him on his progress and it is probable that his route took him through Stoke.

Many in the West Country joined his ill-fated rebellion in 1685. The recorded contingent from Stoke is relatively small and is listed as yeomen and husbandmen. The fate of Andrew Axe and Caleb Dymick is unknown. John Pryor and Thomas Rayson were both tried at Dorchester and transported from Weymouth to Barbados in a ship, inappropriately called "The Happy Return". John Haynes, a curate at Stoke church, was reported absent by the constables, after which there is not further mention of him.

NON-CONFORMITY

Henry Parsons, born about 1630, was a man who was very influential in Stoke in the 17th century. He was a man of great learning, fluent in several languages, especially Greek. When a young man, he became headmaster of Bridport Grammar School. During the Commonwealth he was a Presbyterian minister of Burstock, but was evicted in 1662 after the restoration. According to one source in Dorset, he refused an offer to be vicar of Uplyme and came to Stoke instead, to lead a congregation of dissenters.

At the time of the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685, he was thrown into a dungeon full of rotting corpses and dismembered parts of rebels, and another time was kept in the Devon County jail for months.

His daughter, Mary Cole, when a very old lady in 1774, wrote that it was in 1688, at the time of the Glorious Revolution (when William of Orange was proclaimed King), that Henry suffered for his non-conformity. He was frequently thrown into Ilchester and Dorchester jails, because the size of the crowds who gathered to hear him preach alarmed the authorities. On one occasion, while preaching at Taunton before a large crowd, he was seized. When they were out of town he was made to dismount from his horse and walk barefoot to Ilchester; his feet bled, and he was cruelly whipped.

The Toleration Act was passed by Parliament in 1689, thereafter Henry could preach more freely. He probably used the area now known as Holy Tree as a local rallying point. By 1710, he had received a license to use his house in Stoke for public worship. It is believed that this house is number 10, the High Street (see page 117).

In 1715, he was described as the preacher in a Presbyterian meeting at Stoke. Henry Parsons survived well into old age, dying in 1717 at 88 years old. He left behind him an extensive family and a well-established free church in Stoke. Mary Clark and Thomas Clothier are listed as successive Presbyterian ministers in 1751-53 and Samuel Clark in 1776.

At the close of the 17th century the most notable families were still the Chaffeys of East Stoke, who were in the ascendant, and the Strodes of West Stoke, who were soon to go into decline.

The 'gloving donkey' was invented by James Winter of Stoke in 1807. It made a big difference to the sewers, as the glove could be clamped and the needle passed through grooves, which ensured regular and even stitching. *By kind permission of Dents' Gloving Museum.*

The parade of the Congregational Sunday School 'Treat Day', passing the glove factory of J.H.Walter Ltd., West Street, about 1930. The parade ended up on the 'Plot', now the Memorial grounds, where a tea and entertainments were provided.

The Eighteenth Century

"God be thanket

I, William Prankett in 1701

Caused this water here to run"

So runs the inscription on the Conduit in the High Street, a public running water supply in use until 1927. Fed by a spring from Ham Hill and now merely fed into the drains, it marks the first of many 18th century developments, which helped make Stoke into the village we know today.

An area known as the Conduit was in existence in the 1600s. The parish register lists a burial of Avis, wife of Richard Chaffie, on 25th September 1624 at the Conduit.

Apart from springs at Lake Lane and Wambury, the water supply at that date came from wells such as the Tunwell, a corruption of town well.

By this time, another well-established local family in ascendant were the Tatchells, recorded as living in Stoke since the mid 1500s.

The Rev Christopher Tatchell, born in Stoke in 1713, took holy orders and became vicar of Combe St Nicholas. Here he met and befriended a young man called Joseph Winter. In doing so, he may have changed the course of Stoke's history.

The Tatchell family produced yet another Rev Christopher Tatchell, born in 1733, who was a curate at Norton-sub-Hamdon, and later vicar of Long Sutton. Christopher, was one of the so called "stray curates", serving Stoke church between 1776 and 1812.

The family lived at Castle Farm for many years, where a window was engraved "John Tatchell 1767". Incidentally, Castle Farm itself is anything but 18th century. Although some of the outbuildings look to be around 1600, we know that the main house was rebuilt using the old windows after a fire in the 19th century, which is presumably why the porch commemorates Queen Victoria.

However, returning to Joseph Winter. In 1990, Charles Durham Bird from Canada, a descendant of the Winter family, kindly sent me the Winter family history. His records state that Joseph Winter was born about 1720 and had married Grace, the daughter of John and Grace Tatchell of Stoke-sub-Hamdon, by the early 1750s.

Joseph and Grace had the following children: John, born 1755, died 1764; Joseph, born 1758; and James, born 1763. Jospeh was a Churchwarden in 1764, and his name was on a bell cast in that year, although this was obliterated when the bell was recast in 1910.

Records state that he was a glove maker in the village in 1747, and by 1761 had taken out a lease on a property called "Summerlands" in West Street. It is unclear when the factory adjoining Summerlands was built, but it probably developed piecemeal over the decades, as the business expanded.

Shortly before 1784, the business experienced financial difficulties and Joseph had to borrow £400 from his brother-in-law, the Rev Christopher Tatchell. The loan was used to pay debts and save the factory. It would appear that thereafter Christopher assumed the roll of mortgagee, as the surviving children of Joseph and Grace received their legacies and inheritances from him when he died in 1793, rather than from their father, who left them nothing when he died in 1789.

Jospeh Winter II appeared to take no interest in Stoke, preferring to settle into property left to him at Combe St Nicholas. It was therefore James, his brother, who remained in Stoke and further developed the gloving business.

James married Elizabeth Good of Combe St Nicholas in 1785. Their children, all born at Stoke were: Mary, born 1786; Christopher, born 1788; Joseph, born 1790; and James and John born in 1795, assumed to be twins but no record as such.

In 1807, he took out a patent on a "gloving donkey", a clamping device which ensured regular and even stitching. As well as being an inventor, he must have been a more enterprising character than his father, as he established a stagecoach service from Stoke, not only for passengers but also as a means of transporting the goods from his factory.

The James Winter stagecoaches plied up and down the London, Exeter and Bath road for nigh on half a century. This venture turned out to be a good move, because when the slump in gloving came around 1821, the stagecoach business kept the company solvent.

The decline of the stagecoach service came when the railway arrived. The Yeovil and Taunton branch line was built in 1853 and ended when Dr Beeching closed the line on 6th July 1964.

A trade directory of 1830 lists John and Joseph Winter, the sons of James, as glove manufacturers in Stoke. Unfortunately, the factory in West Street caught fire in the early 1840s, but was rebuilt by 1845. John died in 1841, and there is no further mention of his brother Joseph, and James, their father, died in 1847, age 84 years.

Mary, the only daughter of James, married Richard Walter at Stoke parish church in 1809; he was a glove manufacturer from Combe St Nicholas. They settled at Percombe House and had the following children, all taking the surname of Winter Walter: Emma, born 1812; Mary, born 1814; Henry, born 1816; John, born 1817; William, born 1822; and Walter, born 1825.

A true story exists about Mary Winter Walter, which would have been the cause of much village gossip. Described as a well-bred and educated woman, she married one of her grandfather's coachmen when in her late twenties and set up home in a coaching inn in Exeter.

Around 1847 after the death of his grandfather, the factory passed to John Winter Walter, who almost certainly had an interest in it, and thence to his heirs. Hence the name changed from Winter to Walter, and in the 20th century the factory was registered in the name of J. H.Walter Ltd.

An important event in the 18th century was the establishment in Stoke of two coaching inns on the important route from London to Exeter.

The first inn was built by James Winter in 1815. By 1828 it was called the Cartgate Inn, but earlier was known as the Prince of Wales Arms. This inn was strategically sited at Cartgate Cross, where the London Road from Yeovil, which went over Ham Hill, met the Fosse Way (now the A303).

Sadly the inn is no more, although the building with its columnar porch and the traces of a licensee's name above the door survived until 1971, when it was demolished. Its days as a coaching inn were numbered after the coming of the railway. It was later used as a dwelling, and the stables became farm buildings. The last landlord was listed in the 1881 census.

The other coaching inn was the New Inn in the High Street, established by 1861, and renamed the Duke of Cornwall by 1881. Sadly the oldest part of the Duke of Cornwall was destroyed by fire in 1948, thus losing a building dating probably from the 1600s.

A good supply of horses were kept at the coaching inns, to assist stagecoaches up and over Ham Hill, and in winter times oxen were used as well. As on other famous coaching roads, highwaymen were a problem to passing travellers. On the London coach road between Odcombe and Ham Hill, in an area known as Five Ashes, one unfortunate man called Forster, a convicted highwayman, was put in a cage and starved to death – a punishment typical of those callous times.

The state of the through roads in the parish would no doubt have been very rough, until the forming of the Turnpike Trusts. As far as Stoke was concerned this would have involved three trusts. The Ilchester Trust (1753-1874) turnpiked the road from Petherton Bridge to Sparkford, the Crewkerne Trust (1765-1879 turnpiked the road from the Prophet's Lane junction to the Dorset Boundary, and the Ilminster Trust (1759-1879) turnpiked the road from Petherton Bridge through Stoke to Yeovil. Tollhouses are shown at Petherton Bridge also Holy Cross on a map drawn by Samuel Donne for the Rodbard family in 1767.

The western boundary of the village is formed by the River Parret on which the Petherton Bridge Mill is situated. In 1759, the Shore family occupied the mill and did so for the rest of the mill's working life. To this day, the ruins are locally called Shore's Mill, with Shore's Bridge nearby (signed South Petherton Bridge). In 1884, the mill caught fire and was not rebuilt. In the early 20th century, as it was considered dangerous, the great chimney stack was blown up and the stone from the mill ruins was sold in 1931.

In 1775-76, the Duchy of Cornwall earned the gratitude of local historians by ordering a survey of Stoke and the preparation of a detailed map. The work was undertaken by one William Simpson and records every single building, the address and whether the occupants were tenants of freeholders, with the records of copyhold (a rental agreement according to the custom of the manor) going back as far as 1717.

Carrying on a tradition recorded in the 1615 Duchy Survery, Simpson records that the village held a "procession" once every three years. On these occasions, in return for land held in Rixon Common, John Rodbard Esquire, stood charged to provide the villagers with victuals and beer! Field names such as Procession Orchard and Victuals Hams mark its course.

We also know that the standard of farming was considered to be high, with Stoke farmers renowned as the best husbandmen in the area. The "somewhat peculiar practice" was also mentioned, of drowning the meadow from autumn to spring, as deeply as possible, which often produced a good grass crop, but only if the land were naturally dry.

William Simpson's map of 1776 shows that the land was still being farmed on the strip system, with farmers having separate and disconnected parcels of land throughout the manor. This was a direct survival of the mediaeval agricultural systems and shows that Stoke was late changing to more modern ways.

Having said that, a visiting surveyor in 1798 thought that Stoke was "one of the best cultivated manors" within his memory, remarking especially on the custom of planting apple trees around the field boundaries – which gave the impression of gardens and orchards, rather than farms.

As far as enclosure was concerned, the common field state of Stoke remained unchanged in 1809. By 1840, two of the smaller open fields, Huish (east of Holy Tree) and Humbershill, (north of Windsor Lane) had been wholly enclosed. The pace then quickened, though Great field (north-west of the Avenue) was still traditionally cultivated (strip farmed) in the 1890s and traces of this type of cultivation of both Great field and Furlong field (west of the vicarage) were visible in the 1960s.

The 1775-76 survey also showed that there stood an inn, adjacent to the Priory, called "The Plume of Feathers", landlord Robert Rowsell. The building was probably demolished in the 1850s, when Richard Southcombe expanded his gloving business.

The late 18th century was a time of great national danger, with the initial menace to us of the French Revolution and the subsequent rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. The West Somerset Yeomanry was raised in Bridgwater in 1794 and triggered the creation of a local military unit, the Stoke and Martock Yeomanry.

The commander, given the title of Captain, was one Andrew Bain. He was presumably the Dr A. Bain who married Elizabeth Rodbard, daughter of John Robard, owner of the rectory estate (the estate that once belonged to the chantry). At one time Andrew lived in Hanover Square, London and was Physician to the Prince Regent. His Lieutenant (who probably did most of the hard work) was one Sylvester Prior Bean, son of the controversial vicar of Stoke who lived at the Gables.

William Ball served as the unit's Cornet or N.C.O., but we know of no names for the volunteers. They wore the uniform of a Dragoon and are still commemorated locally, in the inn called the "Volunteer", at Seavington St Michael.

One of the earliest forms of local government was the manor court, which in Stoke can be traced back to 1540; from then on it met twice yearly. From the mid 17th century, at each session it was described as View of Frankpledge and Court Baron and in the 19th century, the General Court Baron and Customary Court. There is no house in Stoke known as "The Court", but there can be little doubt that meetings took place at the Church House, which is now known as the Fleur de Lis Inn.

There were two main officers: a tithingman and a hayward who were in existence by 1540. By the 17th century, elections for these offices were held in October, and the number of officers had also increased. By 1728, the Churchwardens were appointed to levy the poor rate. The manor court in Stoke ceased in 1889.

The Quakers attempted to establish themselves in Stoke around 1715, but after several attempts to license a house of worship, no more was heard of them after 1771.

Building in Stoke in the 18th century was somewhat sparse and generally uninspiring. A few cottages still stand at the end of Castle Street, one with a typical 18th century roundel on the west gable. The best example of building from this era is Tan-y-Bryn in the High Street, built around an earlier cottage; this 18th century house has flanking wings, an Ionic porch and a two-seater loo in the house.

The Duchy of Cornwall built the house probably in order to have at least one property in the village that was leasehold and would compare with the Gables and the Priory, both owned by the Rodbards, and East Stoke House owned by the Chaffeys.

The Gaylard family was closely associated with Tan-y-Bryn. Thomas Gaylard is listed in the Duchy Survey 1775-76 as having taken out a copyhold on the property in 1766, for two lives. Thomas was at one time the Parish Clerk and probably lived there until he died in 1773. Benjamin, his son, may also have been in residence until his death in 1796.

In 1794, his son Benjamin II married Mary, daughter of Thomas Everitt of the Church House (now the Fleur de Lis Inn). They had a son, Everitt Gaylard, who married Elizabeth Sprackett at Stoke in 1817.

Tan-y-Bryn was then let to members of the Sprackett family; the 1841 census records Frances and Achap. By 1851 the house was let again, this time to a Mary Atkins, Postmistress. She in turn let part of it to a young doctor, Walter Winter Walter (there is a room still there called the Surgery).

By 1861, Elizabeth Gaylard now Mrs Parry, having been widowed a second time, returned to Tan-y-Bryn and became a fund holder for the local Nursing Association. This fund enabled Stoke to retain the services of a district nurse. By 1881, she was joined by daughter-in-law Annie Gaylard and grand-daughter Bessie.

Bessie, in 1888, married barrister Douglas Lewis of Glamorgan, who died in 1912. Maybe this is when the house acquired a Welsh name, Tan-y-Bryn, meaning house under the hill.

She was a well-known stalwart of both church and parish, and also became the fund holder of the Nursing Association. She had a house maid called Hockey and a goose called Wey Wey, a creature of much character and a law unto itself. With the death of Bessie in 1937, the Gaylard era was at an end.

Schoolmaster Wyndham Fane and his wife Mabel followed, and they continued as fund holders of the Nursing Association until the NHS was formed in 1948.

Michael and Sally Maloney bought Tan-y-Bryn from the Duchy of Cornwall in 1975 and sold it to Victor and Jackie Gane in 1978, except for the coach house and stables which they converted into a house.

At the close of the century, the pecking order in Stoke society had changed radically. The Strodes having vanished from the scene and the Chaffeys taking on the mantle of foremost family. Other notable farming families were the Gundreys, Pryors, Sprackets, Terrells and Tatchells, with the Winter family as glovers and coach owners.

The Nineteenth Century

By the start of the nineteenth century, village life in Stoke was dominated by two factors – the rise of the gloving industry and the associated rise in non-conformity.

Among the free churches, we know that the Wesleyan Methodist church was active in the village in 1812, using the house of one Unity Richards for worship. By September 1813, they had their own chapel in West Street which also accommodated a Sunday School. Their numbers grew steadily, so that by Census Sunday 1851 there were two Sunday services, with 140 worshippers in the afternoon, including 40 Sunday School children, and in the evening 170 attended, including 30 children.

There was a Bible Christian or Zion Fellowship here by 1826 and by 1842 they had their own chapel on the western slopes of Ham Hill. They were part of a large circuit covering an area from Dalwood in Devon to Crewkerne, Haselbury Plucknett, Hambridge, South Petherton and Ilminster in Somerset.

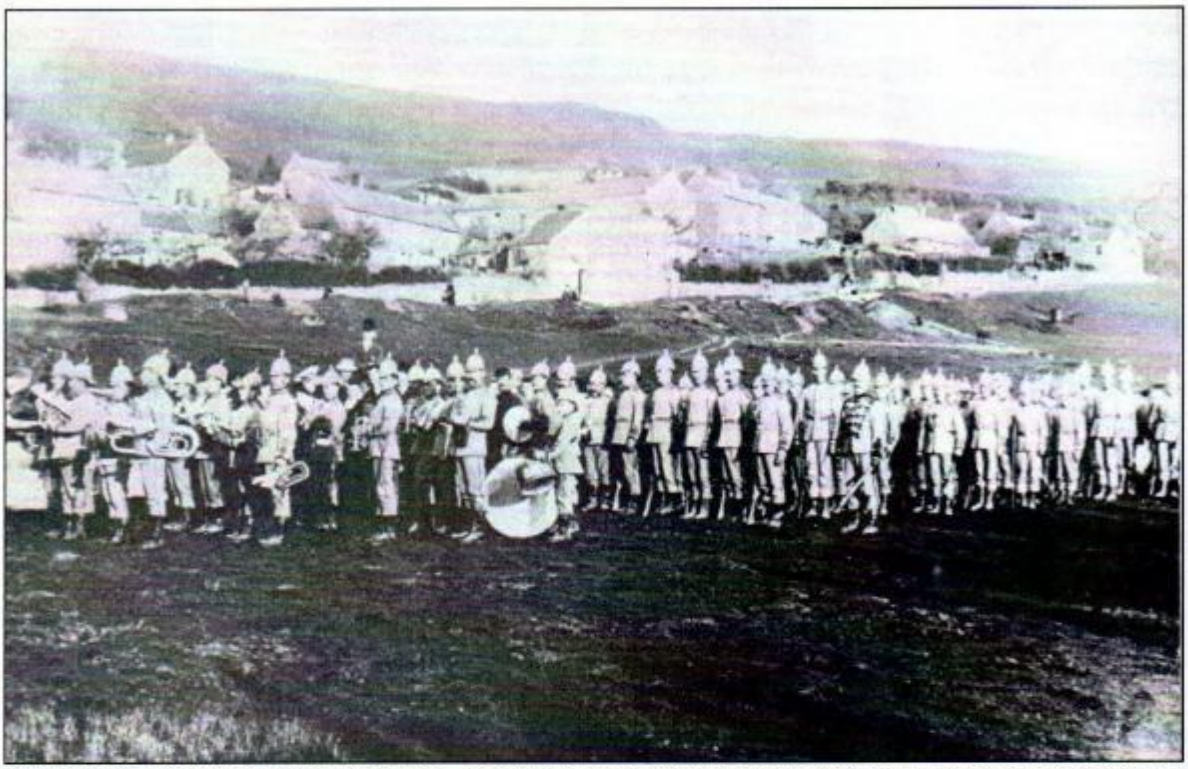
On Census Sunday 1851 the attendance was 43 in the morning, 45 in the afternoon and 50 in the evening. By 1878, Stoke and South Petherton Bible Christian Chapels were described as increasingly burdensome, with no trustees from Stoke.

A report in 1882 states the chapel was closed; however, it was reopened by request in September, only to be closed again by Christmas. It has long since been a dwelling.

In 1767, at the western end of the parish at a crossroads now called Holy Tree, there grew an oak or similar tree. It is thought that the present tree, a Wellingtonia, was planted in 1863 to commemorate the marriage of Edward, Prince of Wales, to Alexandra of Denmark. This tree is now a village landmark.

There is, however, some conflict over the name "Holy Tree". Local tradition says it was a resting place on a pilgrim's way. The position would have been an ideal meeting place for dissenters in the 16th century. The Victoria County History states that the name derives from the open field down to the river, in 1776 called Holloway Field. Close by we have Holy Field Lane and Prophets Lane, recorded as Provosts Lane in the 1838 Vestry accounts.

In 1801 the population of the parish was just 766, a figure which grew rapidly as the century progressed. The community spirit in the village resulted in the founding of the Stoke Friendly Society in 1812 and the Royal George Seven Year Male Friendly Society in 1829, both based at the Fleur de Lis Inn. The Royal George Benefit Society still existed in 1890.



Probably the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry with their own band, assembled on Shelves, Ham Hill, in the early 1890s. They supported the regular army when required, and were made up of volunteers from the area.

Stoke Military Band, c1912. Village bands were often made up of musicians, made redundant by the introduction of the organ into churches, in the late 1800s.

Although there is no early evidence of a school, on 6th January 1594, the burial of John Tatchell, schoolmaster, is recorded and on 6th October 1611, we find the burial of John Epeus, schoolmaster in this parish. There was also Henry Parsons, a former schoolmaster preaching between 1688 and 1717, but no evidence of actual teaching.

The Church School was built on land granted to the parish by Mrs Thomas Hawkesworth for a "peppercorn rent", on the site of an old village pound and opposite the Fleur de Lis Inn. The foundation stone for the school was laid on 6th May 1831.

The 1835 Education Enquiry Abstract stated that Stoke had six infant schools taking between them 48 boys and 72 girls and a day school for 30 boys, supported by parents' subscriptions. There were two Sunday schools. One was the Church School associated with the established church, with 100 boys and 100 girls attending, presumably accommodated at different times of the day. The other was run by the Wesleyan Methodist Church in West Street, with 22 boys and 23 girls attending, neither of the Sunday schools charged a fee.

It is not clear if the Church School was used on other days apart from Sundays. In 1854, Thomas Hawksworth writes in response to a request from an individual who wished to use the school on a weekday, that "The school room was originally built for the purpose of a general parochial school in connection with the church. I cannot agree to the school being used for private purposes and unconnected with the church". The Parish Vestry meetings were also held there from 1831 until 1894, when they moved to the Elementary Day School in Castle Street.

The clock on the Church School (called Ikey after Isaac Pepper, who maintained it), was made by John Baker of Montacute in 1831. There is no evidence as to the date of installation, but it must have been before 1861. The church school caught fire that year and a grand fete was held in August 1862 to raise funds to cover the cost of the rebuilding, also the restoration of the Parish Clock. At one time it was the only village clock, before the installation of the Jubilee Clock in 1898 at the Congregational Church.

The Congregational Church in North Street opened in 1866, with a Sunday School room in the undercroft and a separate Infant School built in 1875. The church records state that the congregation used these rooms in the evenings and at weekends. It is recorded that there was a school in Stoke at least from 1840 to 1876, except for a small "Dame School" run by Miss Ashford in West Street. Families wishing to educate their children sent them to schools in the surrounding villages.

Due to the Education Act of 1870, when schooling became compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 13 years, a new school called the Elementary Day School was built in Castle Street in 1876. It was reported that the children were "in wretched order…very ignorant…and very backward". The school was supported by public subscriptions, a government grant and school pence. Schools were not free until 1891, up until then pupils had to pay a few pence a week to attend - there is evidence that many parents were too poor to send their children. Unique to this area, glove cutters had to pay more pence per week for their children than workers in other occupations. Due to overcrowding, the school was taken over by the Education Board in 1898 and the building extended in 1901.

The gloving industry thrived throughout most of the century. In the 1830s there were six glove factories listed in local trade directories. In 1841 there were around 200 men, women and children employed in the gloving industry. The men were employed in the preparation, dying and cutting of the skins, and the women and children with glove sewing and associated tasks.

In 1807, James Winter of Stoke invented a "gloving donkey". This was a foot operated clamp. The clamp had teeth at regular intervals, and the needle was passed backwards and forwards through the teeth, ensuring regular and even stitching. In 1834, a basic two-threaded gloving machine was invented, but was redesigned several times before being used successfully in the gloving industry in 1870.

Richard Southcombe, from Sheepwash in Devon, was living in the village by 1841. He was apprenticed to his uncle Joseph Guppy, who is listed as a grocer and draper in Upper Street, now North Street. Richard would often visit the old coaching inn at Cartgate, here he met a Mr Elliot, an employee of an old-established firm of I. & R. Morley. Mr Elliot encouraged Richard and guided him in the art of making gloves from silk and taffeta supplied by Morleys. Richard had probably started making gloves by 1847 in a small shed at the back of his uncle's house.

Due to the death of Joseph in 1853, Richard inherited the gloving enterprise, and in 1854 he constructed a glove factory at the back of his premises in North Street. In 1861 he was employing 20 men, in 1865 due to increased business he had extended the factory, and by 1871 was employing 198 workers; this number would have included out-workers. This factory was later known as the Fabric or Spats Factory. By 1877, another factory was built in Cole Lane which had an adjoining tannery.

Richard married twice, first in 1856 to Mary Picken Drake. They had one son, Herbert. Unfortunately Mary died in 1860. His second marriage in 1863, was to a local girl, Mary Jane Hebditch, and they had seven sons and one daughter, Leah. Of Richard's seven surviving sons, six entered the gloving business; these were Herbert, Sidney, Howard, Samuel, Norman and Ralph.

Richard died in 1885 and five of his sons took over the running of the business, which in 1895 became Southcombe Bros. At the latter end of the 1800s the fabric glove trade slumped due to German imports, and to make up this loss they manufactured gaiters and spats. This became a prosperous business until the 1930s, when gaiters and spats were no longer fashionable. Apart from manufacturing gloves, they also expanded their drapery range by selling in their shop in Stoke, mantles, jackets, fur goods, dresses and a wide range of hats.

The Southcombe family were also involved in various ventures in the village, notably the leasing of land from the Duchy to build houses for their employees.

The family supported Liberal policies and took a considerable interest in the Congregational Church. They built a fashionable mansion called Brocks Mount in 1885, next to the Congregational Church, with the coach house and stables on Cole Lane corner.

Richard's brother, John Gill Southcombe, and his family lived at number 10, the High Street, which by 1875 had become the Post Office. On one occasion on a winter's night, Jimmy "the Mail" was too drunk to take the mail coach on to Ilminster, whereupon 12-year-old Henry Warry leapt on to the coach and completed the journey.

Although the Southcombes were leading free churchmen and Liberals, some of their practices were less than charitable. It has been said that you could not get employment unless you joined the Congregational Church. They also obtained property by prevailing upon people to sell.

At Stoke Cross Cottage the occupants refused to sell, with the result that new buildings were erected around them, including Hamdon Terrace and the Spats or Fabric Factory (then four storeys high). The cottage was virtually deprived of daylight and easy access. Part of it is now incorporated into Hamdon Terrace, where the adjoining "truck shop" in North Street, was to be found.

This shop owned by the Southcombe family, was where the factory workers received a weekly allowance of groceries for their labours in lieu of a regular pay packet. This practice was abolished by an Act of Parliament in 1896. By 1910, the premises had become Jochams, a grocer, drapers and outfitters, and from about 1935 to 2007, the village chemist.

The main glove manufacturers in Stoke from the 1860s to the 1920s were Southcombe Bros, J. H. Walters Ltd and from the 1890s, William Brooks.

In the 1840s, three Hebditch brothers from South Petherton settled in Stoke. These were Joseph Hebditch, John Campbell Hebditch and William Horsey Hebditch. Jospeh and his wife Leah had by 1842, set up a general store (now Priory House) at Stoke Cross. Their daughter, Mary Jane, married Richard Southcombe, the glove manufacturer in 1863. Tragically Jospeh died in 1845, and Leah married his brother John Campbell Hebditch and they continued to run the shop. Their daughter Julia married Lewis Southcombe and became a very accomplished singer and organ player in connection with the Congregational Church.

William Horsey Hebditch was farming in Stoke by 1845. After his death in 1866, one of his sons, Bejamin Samuel, took on the farm in Lower Street. In 1881 he was living at Hoods Farm, North Street, farming 200 acres, he then moved in 1892 to Castle Farm to accommodate his growing family; the farm is still the home of the Hebditch family and the principal Duchy farm in Stoke. In the 1800s the family were strong non-conformists, and with members of the Southcombe, Darby, Staple and Waterman families, were instrumental in the building of the Congregational Church in Stoke in 1865, and later on the Working Men's Institute.

The Working Men's Institute was built in 1882, on land leased by the Southcombe family from the Duchy of Cornwall. It provided for members a reading room and a games and lecture room, with no alcohol being served on the premises.

Although the churchyard was being extended by half an acre, the Parish Council in 1887 considered the provision of a cemetery, and a parish meeting held on 1st June voted in favour. Dr Winter Walter demanded a village poll, again the result was in favour. The argument then dragged on for 10 years before being given up altogether.

The Stoke Military Band was in existence by 1889, and that year they played at the Congregational Sunday School Treat. Like many other village bands, they could have been formed largely out of redundant church bands, this being the age of the organ. Their first public concert to raise funds for the band was in November 1890, led by bandmaster George Dalwood. Thereafter they were much in demand in the 1890s, playing at village celebrations and local fetes.

In the 1800s we can trace the emergence of democratic local government in Stoke. On 21st September 1826, a meeting was held by order of John Phelips, County Magistrate, to form a Parish Vestry in later years called the Parish Council. Among the founder members were Robert Chaffey and Richard Walter. The following year they appointed W. Atkins as the Waywarden at £26 per annum.

In September 1828, they made representation to Yeovil Magistrates to withhold the license of the Rose and Crown Inn on Ham Hill Road, due to the landlord keeping a disorderly house and carrying on irregular practices.

The Parish Vestry organised a committee in 1870 to inspect the sewers and all other "nuisances" in the parish. In 1890, they were granted a loan of £200 to improve the sewers and in 1893, a scheme was drawn up to provide a sewerage system including the purchase of a field from the Duchy of Cornwall for £900. It was, however, due to the cost of the land, shelved until the 20th century.

The population of Stoke had risen to 1726 by 1891. Stoke was by now beginning to look to a new age. Much was being considered to improve life. We have street lighting discussed in 1892 and 34 oil lamps were in place by 1893, costing the parish £120 for that year. Significantly, when the 1894 Local Government Act was passed, the Parish Council was formed.

In 1896, a piece of land called "The Croft", on the site of the present Queens Crescent, North Street, was conveyed to the Parish Council for allotments. This land is probably the Edwynescroft, relating to Edwy of the Domesday Survey and Cecily Beauchamp's inventory of 1287. Other areas of land allocated as allotments were Furlands (still in use), Dannings Close and Shetcombe (now the Recreation Field), Tunwell Lane (still in use) and after 1948, Stonehill allotments.

Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was celebrated on 23rd June 1897, when 400 people sat down to dinner in a marquee on the "Plot" (Memorial Field). A children's tea party took place for 550 at 5 o'clock. Sports took place during the afternoon and evening. Stoke Military Band was engaged for the day with dancing in the evening. The day concluded with a bonfire on Ham Hill at 10 o'clock. The following Monday each child received a commemorative mug.

The Stoke and Martock Yeomanry were active in 1831; they distinguished themselves in suppressing the Reform Riots at Yeovil, under the command of John Tatchell T. Bullen of Castle Farm. At this time John Marsch Templeman was Cornet (the equivalent rank today is 2nd lieutenant).

At the close of the 19th century, the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry, were based at South Petherton under the command of Colonel Blake of Bridge House. One of their number, NCO Frederick Warry of Stoke, mounted a horse and at the midnight hour, galloped around the villages sounding the alarm and ordering the whole company to assemble with full kit at Petherton Bridge at first light in the morning.

This caused quite a scare, as most of them thought they were being drafted to the Boer War. When the muster was complete NCO Warry rode up and announced it was a hoax, then galloped away as fast as he could. For the next few weeks, he kept a low profile until tempers cooled. He was severely reprimanded by Colonel Blake.

A photo exists, taken in the early 1890s, of probably the 2nd Volunteer Battalion SLI in full uniform, including helmet with spike. They were assembled at Shelves, a field off Ham Hill Road, complete with their own band. After 1907 they were absorbed into "The Territorial Force". The modern equivalent today would be the Territorial Army.

Towards the end of the 1800s, in various locations around the village, many terraced houses were built, several on the sites of demolished older buildings.

Without doubt the event of the century was the building of the Congregational Church in North Street. On 18th October 1865, the foundation stone for the Congregational Church was laid, after which 1,000 people attended a tea in a marquee on the Plot. A year later, on 6th September 1866, the church was opened for worship.

A NINETEENTH CENTURY TALE

The following story was told to me by my grandmother, Sarah Jane Richards (nee Stone), who was born in 1857.

In the mid 1850s, a couple lived in a cottage in Whirligig Lane. The husband was a man who enjoyed his ale and one evening he set off to visit his local inn for an evening's pleasure, leaving his wife at home with a considerable amount of ironing to be done.

When he arrived home much later, he found her still busy ironing with no supper ready. At this he became very angry and, no doubt aided by his fill of ale, he grabbed the flat iron and gave chase to his wife, who fled upstairs.

On seeing a chance to escape, she rushed downstairs, but at the foot of the stairs she turned to see if her husband was still on her tail. By then he had returned to the top of the stairs and, seeing his wife standing at the bottom, he hurled the flat iron at her, striking her on the forehead. She was killed instantly.

His deed filled him with remorse, and after confessing to his friend, Tom Southcombe, he drowned by throwing himself down the well, now under Castle School.

Some time later, my great-grandfather, William Stone, moved into the cottage with his family. On a Sunday evening in the early 1860s, William and his wife Lucy, being Calvinistic Baptists, had gone to the "barn" meeting. They left Sarah Jane, her sisters, and Rosina Hellier, a friend, alone in the cottage; their ages ranged from three to twelve years.

Suddenly there was a considerable disturbance upstairs, followed by hurried footsteps descending the stairs. The frightened children hid under the table, but Sarah Jane and one other stared in the direction of the stairs expecting the door to burst open. Instead, an apparition with a wound on its forehead came floating through the door and vanished through the opposite wall.

The parents returned to find the children in a state of hysteria. Strange happenings continued at the cottage and the Stone family moved. Later the cottage was demolished.

THE WALTER FAMILY

The following epitaph carved on the Walter family vault in Stoke churchyard, acknowledges three generations of the family, who were prominent members of the Somerset Archaeological Society. Two of whom were local doctors for Stoke and the surrounding district.

"Beneath the shadow of yon glorious hill
As eventide steals o'er this hallowed spot
There lies the dust of generations three
Its hidden secrets ever strove to gain".

We begin with glove manufacturer Richard Walter, born 1779, who lived at Percombe House. He began excavating on Ham Hill early in the reign of Queen Victoria. In 1849, he attended the first annual meeting of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. In 1853, he produced a paper for the Society on Ham Hill, describing the west side being planted with orchards and gardens and the London stagecoach creeping up through a deep cutting. He was a Superintendent of the Church School and a founder member of the Parish Vestry in 1826. He died in 1878, aged 99 years.

His son, Walter Winter Walter born 1825, was undoubtedly the most notable of the three. He made his home and practice at The Gables, North Street, and later bought the property from Henry Lucas Bean in 1886 for £9,000! Dr Walter W. Walter created a private museum in 1901. He excavated the castle site in 1889 and discovered the site of the chapel of St Nicholas (Proc.Som.Arch.Soc Vol.35). He was a Parish Councillor, and a Churchwarden for over 30 years. He died in 1904, aged 78 years.

His son, Richard Hensleigh Walter born 1862, joined his father's practice in 1897, having gained his MB at Edinburgh University in 1896. In 1898, he married Mary Hillier, daughter of Commissary General Hillier. His house was Hawthornden, West Street, and the surgery stood on the opposite side of the road, in grounds of the present Oaktree House, hence the name Doctor's Corner.

In 1902, and during excavations on Ham Hill, he discovered a Roman villa at Batemore (Proc.Som.Arch.Soc. Vol.52). He was also the first motorist in Somerset, the car registration was number Y1. He died in 1924, aged 62 years. He had two sons, Stanley, who died in Kenya in 1977, and Eric, a Lieutenant Colonel in the 1st Battalion, The Wiltshire Regiment, who died in 1980.

The Walter Charity was set up by a John Winter Walter in 1903. It was administered by the Churchwardens at Christmas for the benefit of widows and their families living in Stoke and was last known to be distributed in 1969.

The Congreational Sunday School Parade in the early 1900s, on the 'Plot'. Southcombes Fabric or Spats Factory is on the left, note the extra floor, and also the bell turret on the Church School. In the back ground is Ham Hill.

Villagers and the 'Liberal Girls' in the early 1900s, walking up Ham Hill Road to a Liberal Demonstration, held in the 'Frying Pan' on Ham Hill.

The Twentieth Century

We now move on to the 20th century, and perhaps a good time to reflect upon the many changes that have taken place in the village during the last hundred years.

TRADES AND INDUSTRY

Take farming, for example. In 1939, there were six large farms in Stoke and at least a dozen small holdings and market gardens. Now there are two Duchy farms and one freehold farm at East Stoke. There were seven herds of milking cows in 1939, now there are none; the last milking herd was sold in 2000. A sight to behold was also the 500 odd sheep being driven through the village everyday, to and from the hill, but this practice stopped in the 1970s. However, in the village there is still a flock of sheep and one or two herds of beef cattle or young stock.

Today's crops are mainly potatoes, cereals, apples and blackcurrants. There is still Great Field, a survivor of the mediaeval three-field system, now planted with cider apple trees. The last remnants of mediaeval strip farming to be ploughed out was in Shetcombe (off Matts Lane), in the early 1980s.

The shops and trades have not escaped the changes either. In 1939, there were two bakeries, two banks, a blacksmith, a boot and shoe shop, a builder, two butchers, a cardboard box maker and printer, two carpenters, a chemist, a coal merchant, a corn and seed merchant, a dentist, a doctor, two dressmakers, a fish and chip shop, a furniture shop, three garages, eight glove factories, three grocery shops, a barbers, a hairdressers, quarries and stone works, four milk rounds, a newsagent, a post office, a radio sales and repair business, and a tailor.

Unfortunately, over the years some of the businesses and shops have closed, but others have taken their place offering a wide range of services. We now have an aerial and reception specialist, B & B accommodation, a beauty treatment service, a book binder, builder, a carpet shop, carpenters, a chemist, a clothing exporter and importer, a courier, chauffeur driven car hire, a chimney sweep, a doctors' surgery, a dental surgery, electricians, an employment agency, a financial advisor, a funeral director, a garage, a glove factory, graphic designers, a grocery/newsagents shop, a hairdressers , hat hire, a heating engineer, a painter and decorator, a photographer, a picture framer, a planning consultant, plant hire, plasterers, plumbers, a printer, a post office, a tiler and a veterinary practice. At East Stoke there is a landscaping business, a mini supermarket and a fruit grower, and at Percombe (on the A303), a business making brass bedsteads.

Gloving has also changed. In 1939, there were eight companies: Southcombe Bros Ltd at Cole Lane and also the Spats or Fabric Factory in North Street; H. G. Harris and Son in Matts Lane and also Castle Street; W. M. Brooks & Son Ltd in Windsor Lane; J. H. Walter Ltd in West Street; Hamdon Glove Co Ltd at Percombe, and Shayler & Co Ltd at East Stoke.

Now there is just Southcombe Bros Ltd at Cole Lane. During World War I they made officers' gloves and khaki puttees. The period 1918 to 1939 was difficult for the company with the financial slumps. In 1928, Douglas the son of Sidney Southcombe, took over the near bankrupt company and during the following years, with the help of his two brothers Dick and Wilfred, the business survived.

When other glove factories were closing, the company was expanding and in the 1960s were probably the largest makers of dress gloves in Europe.

Southcombe's Spats, or Fabric Factory in North Street, was used to billet troops during World War II. In 1948, due to deterioration, the top floor was removed. Glove production recommenced, but sadly the factory closed in 1991 and has since been sold and converted into flats.

Today, Douglas's son Michael (Chairman), and his son David (Managing Director), now run the business. The Cole Lane factory and tannery are still operating and of all the old glove factories, is the only one left, celebrating 150 years of trading in 1997.

Southcombe's factory hooter, made in America in the 1800s, became the village alarm clock, four times a day, starting at 8.00am. During the three-day week in 1974, the hooter blew at 6.00am; this first early morning blast resulted in an unexpected early start for many villagers! Unfortunately, around 2004, after a boiler inspection the hooter was disconnected, as it was considered uneconomical due to loss of steam pressure when used.

The factory of J. H. Walter Ltd in West Street, with adjoining tannery and dye works, specialised in doe and washable coloured skins. In 1916, it was sold to J. P. Boulton from Westbury, Wilts. From the 1880s, the factory was managed by the Waterman family, who purchased it in the late 1960s. Unfortunately, due to the gloving slump, the factory closed in 1974. The property was sold in 1980 and converted into houses.

There were two factories engaged in supplying boxes and packaging material for the gloving trade, one had a print works. These have now closed, and the printing business has moved to Martock. Another printing business has been established in North Street workshops, along with several other businesses. In the 1990s, a small factory in West Street was producing sheepskin products, though sadly this business has also closed.

For a village of its size, Stoke has been more than blessed with drinking establishments, probably to quench the thirst of the workers from the hamstone quarries, and the many glove factories.

Apart from the establishments listed below, there were also two restaurants. The first was situated at Stoke Cross in a building which, since the 1840s, had been used as a hardware and general store, last owned by the Carter family. It was sold in the 1970s and converted into a restaurant called The Black Piper, which became The Poissons et Provence restaurant from 1997 to 2002, and then The Priory House restaurant until 2009. It has now become a private residence. When the Duke of Cornwall in the High Street ceased to be a public house in 1985, it was converted into a restaurant called The Carvery, which later became The Old Duke's Kitchen; this closed in the early 2000s and has since become houses and flats.

At one time there were seven licensed premises, but by the end of the 20th century just four remained:

The Rose and Crown, nicknamed the Nut Tree – closed June 1969

The Fleur de Lis

The Duke of Cornwall – closed 1985

The Half Moon

The Prince of Wales

The Mason's Arms – closed 1937

The Working Men's Institute, now known as the Working Men's Club.

The Rose and Crown was on the Ham Hill Road, almost opposite the site of the old Hamdon Hall (now Princes Close) and has been converted into a residence. It was the oldest known public house in the village, mentioned in the 1775-76 Duchy Survery, when the landlord was Robert Richards.

For the history of the Fleur de Lis (see page 113).

For the history of the Duke of Cornwall (see page 37).

The Half Moon Inn, situated on the corner of Ham Hill Road and the High Street, became a public house by 1891. In the early 1900s, parts of the Half Moon were used as a bakery, a mineral water bottling plant and a wet fish shop. In 1981, the Bass Charrington Brewery sold the property. It became a free house and was subsequently renovated. For at least the past 15 years, it has become a popular venue for live music on a Saturday night.

The old Half Moon was on the opposite side of the road, and was uninhabited in 1891. The property was renovated and from 1900 to 1910 was run as a drapers and grocers shop by the Southcombe family. In the garden at the back of the shop, Ewart Southcombe kept a small zoo, which included wild animals and birds. Mr Southcombe went on to become a director of London Zoo and was well known in London society. In 1910, this property became the village Post Office.

For the history of the Prince of Wales (see page 140).

The Mason's Arms, also on the Ham Hill Road, became a residence after it closed in 1937. It fell into disrepair and eventually became uninhabitable, finally being demolished to make way for four substantial split-level houses that were build in 1966. There was a well on the site and it took four lorry loads of stone to fill up the well and make it safe. To this day, by the roadside you can still see the iron ring bedded in stone, where the customers of the Mason's Arms used to tie up their horses.

The Working Men's Institute was opened in 1882, as a club with a games and reading room. In 1930, due to financial difficulties, it was proposed that a ballot should be held to decide whether alcohol should be sold. This resulted in a majority of three, 57 in favour, 54 against!

The premises were extended after World War I, using a former army hut. This extension was opened by HRH Edward, Prince of Wales on the day the war memorial was unveiled in 1923. He also presented the deeds of the club to the Trustees on behalf of the Southcombe family.

Unfortunately, the army hut was destroyed by fire in 1956. A new hut was erected in 1957, but was demolished in 1969 to make way for a new extension and the modernising of the 1882 building at a cost of over £38,000. It was opened in 1970.

In a feature unique to the West Country, the public houses in the centre of the village have skittle alleys; the skittle teams play weekly matches except in the summer months.

Stoke was never backward in making the best use of innovation and as the new age of travel developed, the village witnessed the arrival of Albert Chant's motorised open-topped coaches called charabancs. The villagers were then able to travel further afield, Weymouth and Cheddar Caves being popular destinations.

The inventor James Archer lived in neighbouring Norton and would almost certainly have used the streets of Stoke during the early part of the century as a testing ground for a new cycle hub gear. Sadly he had no money to patent the design, and it was "acquired" by B.S.A.

However, all was not lost, as Raleigh Cycles assisted Henry Sturmey and James Archer, resulting in the invention of the Sturmey Archer three-speed hub, patented in 1902.

VILLAGE LOCATIONS

Before proceeding any further, we will take a look at street names and locations.

Earlier names have more to do with local hearsay, such as Cole Lane, a family of pre-Duchy origin. The Tunwell is townwell, Whirligig or Whirligog Lane (popular in Somerset) and Locks Lane, off Ham Hill, names after the Lock family (c1870-1916). Matts Lane must surely come from Matts Cottage demolished around 1930, situated on the corner of West Street and Matts Lane; Matthew Clothier lived there in the 18th century. Bonnies Lane (origin unknown) was spelt Bonnings in the 1867 Vestry minutes. The origin of Becks is unknown, but the name is recorded in 1615.

North Street was formerly Lower Street, up to the junction with Castle Street. From there on and up to the High Street was Upper Street. Castle Street was Stones Lane. Lower Ham Hill was The Hollow. Far East Stoke was Church Street.

Since 1900, names have been chosen by the Parish Council. Field names have been an obvious choice such as Langlands, Stone Hill, New Close and Becksfield; other street names have royal connections.

The South Somerset District Council agreed to the name of Great Field Lane for the road which links North Street and Langlands, providing access to the Duchy housing estates of Tiptoft and Becksfield, Glovers Close housing estate, North Street Workshops and Southcombe's glove factory.

Finally, if we are to believe the 17th century parish register, there was a place called "stink", always in connections with the Slade family. In the Duchy Survey of 1775-76, their house, which they probably occupied for two generations, is located where William Brooks later had a glove factory in Windsor Lane.

In the previous chapter, Holy Tree is mentioned, situated at the junction of West Street and Prophets Lane. On 1st December 1992, another Holy Tree was planted by the village tree warden, and vice-chairman of the Parish Council, R.S. (Dickie) Rolph. The blessing was given by the Rev B. J. Dalton, Rector of Norton. The young tree will eventually replace the existing one. The event marked national tree week and coincided with the 40th anniversary of the reign of Elizabeth II.

In earlier times, Norton Path and the road via Holy Tree were the only routes to Norton. In 1872, the Lord of the Manor of Norton first approached Stoke Parish Vestry to discuss cutting a road through a field called "Long Ridges". This road was eventually constructed in 1899 and 1900. The road was originally called New Road, but now the Stoke section is called Norton Road.

Massive changes took place on the A303 in 1989-90, which have had a dramatic effect on the village. The notoriously dangerous Cartgate Cross has disappeared. Sadly, the Cross had claimed the lives of a number of people. One of the last was Claire Dyke, a village girl who died in 1984.

Great machines have carved the landscape into deep ravines, high embankments and mountains of earth, creating the dual carriageways. Flyovers now cross the two dangerous crossing points at Prophet's Lane and Cartgate Cross.

Prophet's Lane has been re-sited and the mediaeval Venn Bridge has vanished, even the stream has been diverted. Stoke is no longer cut off from Martock in the way it was, and no longer do people have to take their lives in their hands crossing this busy main road.

The Plot, a field in West Stoke was formerly part of the Hawkesworth estate. In the Duchy Survey of 1775-76 it is recorded as the "Pigeon House Close", so the name "Plot" may date back to 1835, when it was first used by the "Ham Hill Cricket Club". The history of the site is bound up with that of the Priory and there can be little doubt that it was one of the pastures given to the Provost and priests by John Beauchamp II in 1304, and probably at one time formed part of the Langelonde $54^{1}/_{2}$ acre site.

On 28th May 1852, a document of conveyance for the Plot, was completed between Edith Bridget Hawkesworth, (widow) and Charles Peter Hawkesworth on one side, and on the other, the Parish Council Trustees: W. R. Briggs, S. J. White and W. F. Quantock Shuldham, at a cost of £450. The Parish Council had in fact raised a loan of £700 to cover all expenses.

The new Memorial Hall on the Plot was built in 1975 complete with a stage and back room, toilets, cloakroom and kitchen, funded partly by the sale of an area of the Plot (now Hill View Close). The hall is run and managed by a committee. In 1991, it was severely damaged by arsonists, putting it out of action for several months. The heat of the fire, which centred on the stage, was so intense that it melted the clock on the wall at the other end of the room. By early 1992, the hall was reopened, fully restored. Stoke is indeed fortunate in having this property situated in the village centre.

The field on which the hall stands is now known as the Memorial Field, part of which is set aside as a children's play area. Both hall and field are always in demand. A large piece of hamstone with a plaque to commemorate the dead of the two world wars was placed near the Memorial Hall.

THE PARISH COUNCIL

At the beginning of the 20th century, few if any, could have foreseen that as the century progressed, our way of life would change out of all recognition. One group of people who were to play an important part in village life would be the Parish Council, formed under the Local Government Act of 1894. A dedicated body of people whose predecessors had spent much of their

time collecting the parish rates and administering the poor law, would now be responsible for making decisions relating to roads, street lighting, sewage, and water etc.

The first notable thing they did in 1901, was to convert the oil street lighting to gas; the sum of £103.10s.0d was allotted for this purpose (the gas was purchased from Martock Gas Company). In those days, as with the oil lamps, the service of the village lamp lighter was called for, as the automatic switches were not fitted until shortly before 1930.

The Parish Council agreed to the introduction of electricity to the village in 1931. Being ready to move with the times, they first introduced electric street lighting with four lights at East Stoke in 1934, and then the rest of the village in 1946, costing £400. Since then, the street lighting has been updated from time to time.

Another essential amenity, the village sewerage scheme was completed in 1914, and improved in 1927.

In 1900, a piped water supply was first considered; at that time many villagers were still using the public pumps at the Conduit in the High Street, the Tunwell at Whirligig Lane and the spring at Lake Lane. Eventually on 26th April 1927, the chairman reported that the new water supply from the reservoir and pumping station in East Stoke Wood was working efficiently.

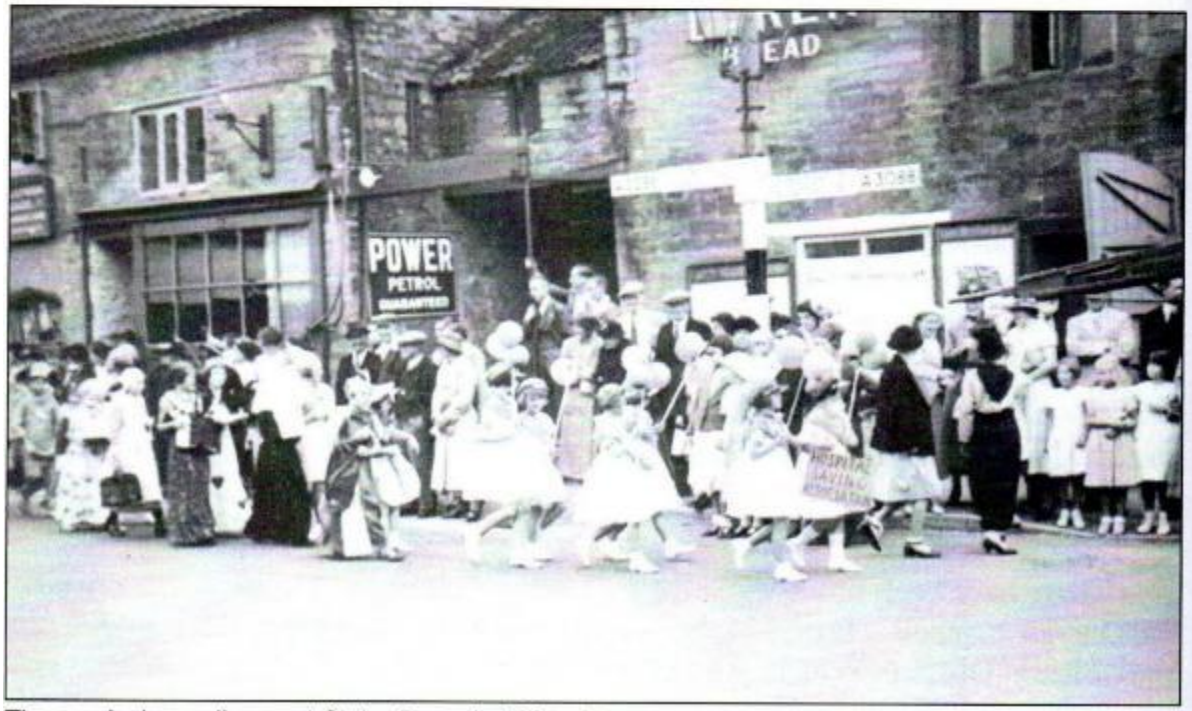
The Council provided a much-needed recreation field in 1938 after two years of planning. Previously football matches had been played in a field at the back of West End Garage and cricket was played on the Plot.

In 1911, being mindful of the dead as well as the living, they expended a sum of £25 on a new parish hand bier, which was used to carry the deceased to the church. These days it is not used and is currently in storage. Ironically, the last person to use the parish bier was Sammy Beer, who was buried at Stoke Church in 1961.

Not all the plans of the Council came to fruition, however. The question of a cemetery was again raised in 1933, having already been voted on by the village in 1887. But in true tradition the matter was shelved, probably for ever, especially with people choosing to be cremated.

There have been times when the Parish Council has had to work closely with the District Council. Pre 1974, the village returned three councillors to the old Yeovil Rural District Council. The 1974 reorganisation combined several rural and urban councils in South Somerset into Yeovil District Council, later renamed South Somerset District Council in 1985. The village of Stoke returned one out of the 60 councillors. This continued until 1991, when boundary changes enlarged the district ward to include Norton with Stoke.

Vernon and Harold Richards outside Stoke Cross Garage, at one time home of Stoke Fire Brigade. Vernon ran a cycle shop next to the garage from 1935 to 1944. He was also the village blacksmith, the smithy was at the rear of the garage.



The carnival parading past Stoke Cross in 1934. Note the old signpost, when the road through Stoke was the A3088 to Yeovil.

HOUSING

Although there has been a dramatic rise in the number of houses in the village, the population has not risen that much as families have become smaller.

The census returns show the following picture:

1931	1,649
1951	1,784
1981	1,881
1990	1,936 (estimate)
2009	2,000 (estimate)

For a village which has practically doubled in size, the population has not dramatically increased.

The building of housing estates in the village throughout the 20th century has significantly changed the village map. Representations were made to the Duchy of Cornwall as early as 1906, since it was necessary to obtain land from them before building began, but it took until the 1920s to make a break through.

The first 12 brick council houses were built in Norton Road in 1921. As there was a problem with the water supply, the Parish Council intended to purchase water from Norton. After negotiations in 1919, this was decided against as the supply was not adequate enough for both villages.

The Parish Council then arranged for a bore hole of 150 feet to be sunk and after testing the water, a 5,000-gallon water tank and a hand pump was installed. Not surprisingly, problems occurred regularly with the overuse of the pump but in 1927 the houses were linked up to the new water supply from East Stoke Woods reservoir. In 1928, eight smaller houses were built on the northern section of this site.

In 1920-21, the Duchy built 18 hamstone houses in Norton Road. These had their own wells, which could signify that there was a geological difference between the west and east side of Norton Road. If you look at the Duchy houses, you will see that they are not all the same design. The firm that won the contract to build the houses went bankrupt part way through construction, so they were completed by another builder. During the change over, some economies were applied and the later properties do not have as many features. The centre house bears the date 1920 and was first occupied in 1922.

A plot of land called New Close in West Street was purchased from the Duchy in 1924. A year later 12 houses were built, but apparently due to a shortage of bricks were not finished until 1926. Eight more were built at a later date.

In 1929, 12 houses were built in Langlands. The name Langlands recalls Langelond, mentioned by Cecily Beauchamp in 1287, and also mentioned in the Duchy Survey of 1775-76. The two private houses in Langlands were built by 1891. A tablet still exists in the wall at West Street junction, which reads: "Private Road, the property of Major Hawkesworth". At one time, private roads were closed one day per year by law. In 1930, the Council built another 44 houses; this estate was called The Avenue.

Another council estate was built and named Kings Road in 1937-38, just south of the A303 at the northern end of the parish. The western section of this estate was extended in 1975.

After the war, from 1948 through to 1963, the Council built houses at Windsor Lane and houses, flats and bungalows at Stonehill. "Winsor" and "Stone hill" are recorded on a map dated 1767.

In the 1960s, two council estates were built of mainly one-bedroomed bungalows. These were Princes Close off Ham Hill Road in 1965, and Queens Crescent off North Street in 1967. Six bungalows were also built in New Road in 1972.

Soon after 1970 North Street Farm became vacant. Most of the land was annexed to other local farms. The old farm buildings have since been converted into craft workshops, in accordance with Duchy policy. The Prince of Wales officially opened the complex in 1985 on one of his many visits to the village. Four additional workshops have been added to the North Street scheme, increasing employment in the village.

At the junction of West Street and New Road (Doctor's Corner), a substantial block of sheltered accommodation was built in 1979. Comprising of 20 flats, two wardens' houses and 12 bungalows; it was first occupied in 1980, with a warden in residence. After great debate, the name Oak Tree House was chosen in recognition of a substantial tree which was incorporated into the site. In the mid 1980s one of the wardens' houses was converted into two flats. Despite representations by the Parish Council at the time of construction, the two-storey block was not provided with a lift. It was not until 1990 that this short-sighted omission was put right.

In 1983, the former Hamdon Hall (see page 127) on the Ham Hill Road became one of the last sites to be built on by the District Council. It added five one-bedroomed bungalows to the existing Princes Close estate, erected in 1965.

From then on, changes in national government policy were to have an effect on the whole country. Effectively, council house building on the scale hitherto seen was to cease.

This had a marked effect on the availability of affordable housing for all. The problem was made worse in Stoke-sub-Hamdon by the decision of the Duchy of Cornwall not to let their empty properties. The villagers felt that action needed to be taken.

The Prince of Wales visited Stoke in October 1985 to open the recently converted farm buildings in North Street. District Councillor, Andy Jacobs, took the opportunity to ask the Prince to change the Duchy policy of selling their vacant properties, and to rent them instead to local young couples. The Prince, whilst making no commitment, said he would bear in mind the comments.

Some months later, Andy Jacobs received a phone call from the Prince's Community Architect. He arranged to visit the village, before reporting to the Prince the best course of action.

This was the start of what became known as the Housing Working Party, which grappled with the problem for over five years. Despite many setbacks, the substantial effort by this group of people has resulted in a scheme of 18 properties being built in 1993, on land to the rear of North Street Farm buildings. Six houses were sold, six were rented and the remaining six were either sold or rented. The name of Glovers Close was chosen for the development, because of the village's long association with the gloving industry.

Now most of the Duchy Houses have been sold and are freehold, which leaves the Duchy in control of only two farms, North Street Workshops and a few houses.

The provision of housing, however, has not just been on the initiative of the District Council and the Housing Working Party. Apart from private buildings filling in the odd gaps in West Street, Bonnies Lane and elsewhere since the late 1940s, a number of private estates have been constructed.

The Hamdon Close and Matts Lane estate was started in 1969 and built in the grounds of the J. H. Walter glove factory. In World War II, this was also an army camp. In 1966, Hamdon Villas were built on the site of the old Mason's Arms on the Ham Hill Road.

New houses and bungalows were also built on part of the Plot, with access off Langlands. The development, called Hill View Close, was built in 1973-74. The proceeds from the sale of the land helped to build the Memorial Hall, which opened in 1975.

Other new homes were built between 1981 and 1986, on the site known as "castle grounds". During these developments, the old castle wall was left standing, but the South Gate was opened up and widened.

Another estate was built at Walscombe Close in 1985-86, on the site of the World War II Women's Land Army huts. Following the sale of the Old Manse, adjacent to the United Reformed Church, one of the Walscombe Close properties was bought by the United Reformed Church and was the residence of the minister until 2008.

The District Council in 1990 was persuaded to use a piece of land at Stone Hill, which over the years had been used as an informal play space and was the site of many a bonfire on 5th November. Six "shared equity" properties were built on the basis of part-rental and part-ownership. This scheme was to house young first-time buyers, and all six were allocated to people from either Stoke or Norton.

In the 1920s, the Southcombe family vacated their family home, Brocks Mount. It was then used as an orphanage for a short time and even considered as an isolation hospital. Unfortunately in March 1930, the house caught fire, Martock Fire Brigade (horse drawn) eventually arrived, and it is recorded that they used 30,000 gallons of water. The house was severely damaged and never fully restored.

The property, except for the stable block, was bought by George Dicks in the early 1930s and in 1934 his nephew Ken Dicks moved there, starting a radio business which later included television. In 1945, Ken purchased the property and set up a mobile cinema which toured around the local villages. In 1948, the large workshop was dual purpose, being used as a cinema on Friday nights and in later years, Saturday and Sunday nights. The cinema shut down in 1958. Kendic Radio was continued by Ken's son John, who carried on the business until he retired in 1999. The house and land were sold to building developers in 2000.

CHURCHES, SCHOOLS AND DOCTORS

Not all buildings in the village have been for housing. Churches, schools and the medical profession have also been active.

In 1917, St Mary's Church at East Stoke became the tenant of the Church School, opposite the Fleur de Lis Inn. In February 1948, the Church School was finally gifted by the Hawkesworth family. After the mission church of St Nicholas on the Ham Hill Road was closed in 1926, the Church School was renovated and renamed All Saints Hall. The Archdeacon of Wells dedicated the building (mission church) to "All Saints" in December of that year. The building now had a vestry, the inside was decorated, new windows were fitted, and the chimney repaired. It was much used for Sunday Evensong in the war years, being easy to "black out".

In 1946 electricity was installed, the roof repaired and the bell turret removed and in 1947, it was redecorated by Gillman and Sons. The building was completely modernised in 1969 and opened by the Bishop of Bath and Wells on 17th April 1970, but now regular Sunday worship no longer takes place there. It is still, however, used by the community and the church and hopefully in 2009 will be redesigned and used as a community coffee shop and meeting room.

A small pipe organ by Thomas Norton, from the church of St Nicholas, was installed in September 1926, and after many years of faithful service, sold to Osmond's of Taunton in 1968. It is now in Hillfarrance parish church, near Taunton.

In 1990, George Carey, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, a man with a gift of teaching and communication, accepted an invitation to visit Stoke from 4th to 7th October 1990. In July of that year, he was elected to become the next Archbishop of Canterbury, so it was a delight that he was still able to fulfil his commitment to the parish.

With him came a team of ministers and musicians, and many villagers enjoyed four days of intense teaching, encouragement and celebration, with supper and entertainment included. All three Stoke churches and Stanchester School participated.

The Methodist Church in Stoke procured in 1907, a site in West Street from the Duchy in exchange for another site in the same area, called Western End. It was on the new site that the present church was built and was registered for worship in 1909. The new building was erected in a space of five months. The main architectural features are a series of two-light lancet windows and a three-light lancet window on the south front. Inside over the rostrum, is a good arch in the Early English style, with shafts and floriated capitals. In February 1969, a new electronic organ was installed. The church, never having had a resident minister, is supplied by the South Petherton circuit.

Unfortunately, a fire occurred in the hall at the rear of the church in June 1994. It was thought to have been started by intruders. There was extensive damage to the hall, which required a new floor. The church itself was only affected by smoke damage.

In 1908, the founder of the Salvation Army, General William Booth, visited and addressed a large crowd at Conduit Cross. David Lloyd George, the great Liberal stateman, also paid a visit. Village barber, Norman Hallett, claimed that he gave him a haircut during his visit.

We now consider education. In 1899, the Elementary Day School in Castle Street was taken over by the Education Board and became Stoker-under-Ham Board School and an infant section was introduced. The building was extended in 1901 and became a junior school in 1940, and since then externally has altered very little. Today it is known as Castle Primary School.

Children from the surrounding villages attended the school for woodwork and cooking, taught in a purpose-built building opened in 1913. Due to World War II, this building in 1944 became a community school kitchen and continued as such until it was closed in 1988. It was converted into a classroom, restroom, toilets and offices, and another classroom was added in 2000.

Senior pupils were transferred to the newly built Stoke Senior School at East Stoke in 1940.

In 1957, due to the unsatisfactory arrangement of pupils eating cooked dinners in the classrooms, a dining room and kitchen were built at the north end of the school premises. The dining room was later also used as a classroom. The building was renovated in the 1990s when the kitchen closed and is now the reception class.

Until 1962, there was a wall down the middle of the playground separating the boys from the girls and infants. A swimming pool was built in the early 1960s and rebuilt in 1991. The school has its own meeting room and IT suite. In 2009, there are about 150 pupils attending the school between the ages of 4 and 11 years.

At the turn of the century Dr Richard H. Walter was the resident doctor in the village, holding a surgery at Doctor's Corner, Norton Road - he retired in 1925. Also at this time, for a short while, a Dr Case practised medicine in North Street. From 1925 to 1958, Dr S. L. Brimblecombe held a surgery at "Pranketts" in the High Street and from 1958 to 1969, Dr Ellis and Dr Nicholls held their surgery at East Stoke House. They then moved to a purpose built surgery in Matts Lane in 1969. Dr Ellis retired in 1983 and Dr Nicholls in 1989. Dr Bulley joined the practice in 1983 and Dr Scott in 1989.

A medical fund was started in 1986, the idea of Mrs Horrocks of Stoke. Nearly £4,000 was raised to improve facilities at the surgery. This developed further with the Stoke, Norton, Tintinhull, Montacute and Chiselborough Parish Councils involved, and a fund called "The Triangle Trust" was set up. About this time Dr Bulley, on behalf of the medical practice, commissioned a new facility to replace the one built in 1969. The new Hamdon Medical Centre was opened in 1990 by one of the patients of the practice, and a resident of Norton-sub-Hamdon, the then Rt Hon Paddy Ashdown MP. It was built on a site immediately adjacent to the former surgery and the old building was converted into a dental surgery.

At present, Hamdon Medical Centre serves Stoke and several of the surrounding villages. There are four doctors, a full nursing support team and associated staff.

ORGANISATIONS

We now move onto the very varied organisations in the village.

In the first years of the 20th century, there was a small string orchestra conducted by Alfred Morgan, and a male voice choir under Roland Waterman.

A group called "The Stoke Entertainers" were directed by George Purrier and became well known over a wide area and often promoted concerts in aid of Stoke Band.

Stoke Military Band was formed by 1889; the bandmasters were George Dalwood and sometimes Billy Palmer. They continued until 1927, when probably due to the economic problems of the times, they folded. On one occasion when they played at Norton Flower Show, band members acquired a nine-gallon barrel of ale which they hid behind the marquee. For the rest of the afternoon there was never a full band playing and by the evening they were too unwell to play for the dance. Needless to say, the band was not asked back the next year. Tommy Woodgate was found the next day asleep in a potato field, still with his circular bass!

In 1945 after World War II, Stoke Military Band was reformed under bandmaster Bert Gillet. It was renamed a "silver band" in 1948 and became a prize band in 1962, taking 3rd prize in Section Four of the South West Brass Band Association contest.

The band is recorded in parish records as participating in the unveiling ceremony on 3rd August 1947, of a plaque on the monument to commemorate those who died in World War II. They played at the coronation celebrations in 1953 and the visit of the Queen to Stoke in 1966. The band also attended the visit to Montacute House in 1975 of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

It won the Southwest qualifying contest at Bristol in 1983 and became the first village band in Somerset to compete at the Royal Albert Hall. In 1989, it won both the 2nd section of the Southwest Brass Band contest and the 3rd section of the Wessex Brass Band contest and was then entitled to play in the Championship Class in the Southwest Brass Band Association.

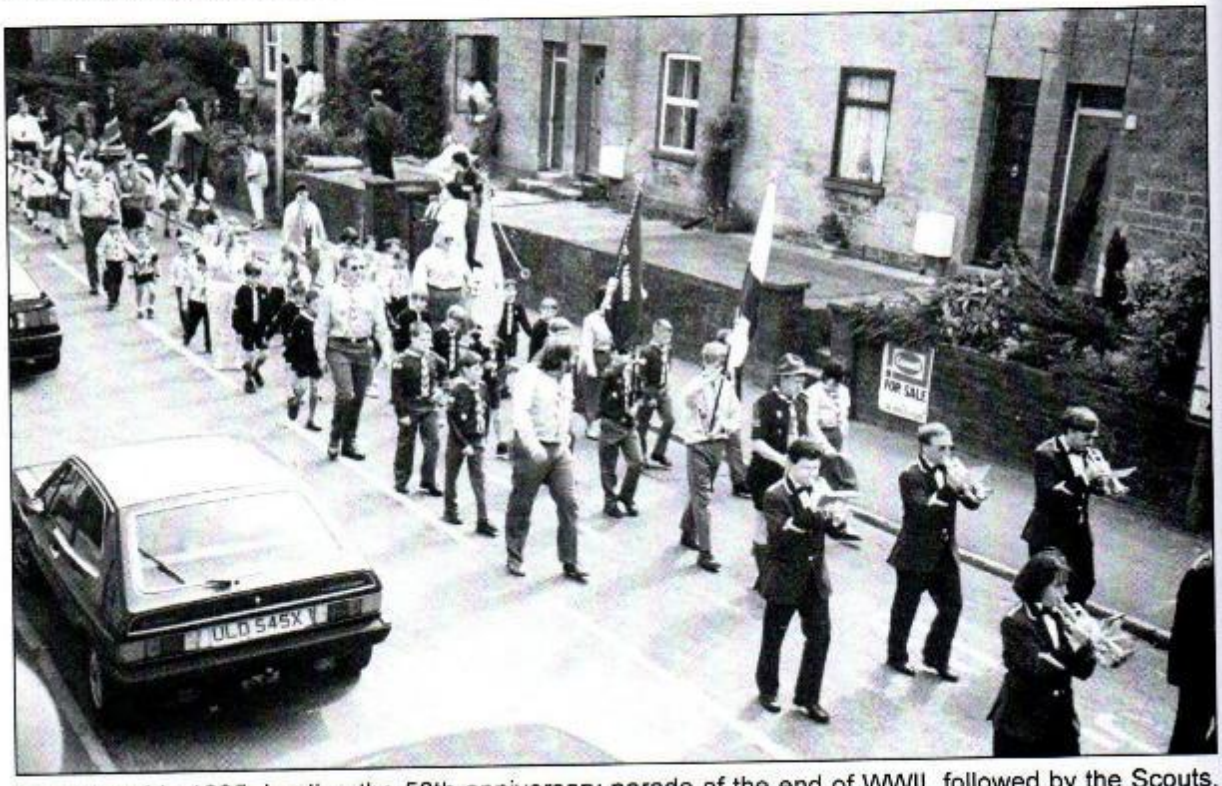
In the 1990s, the band continued to be successful. Apart from playing at contests, it also performed at carnivals, fetes, shows, concerts and other events, not only in Stoke, but other venues near and far. Some of the most notable were the Dillington House concerts, Badminton Horse Trials and the concert of the massed bands of Yeovil, Sherborne and Stoke.

In 1995, the band celebrated its 50th anniversary, a year in which it could be very proud of its achievements.

In the same year, it led a parade through the village to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. Thus, continuing a tradition started in November 1945, when the first engagement of the reformed band was to lead to the Armistice parade for the Stoke and District British Legion.

In 1966, the band changed from a contest to an entertainment band, performing at fairs, fetes and bandstand concerts throughout the summer months. In December, the band holds its Christmas Concert, an event which started 47 years ago in 1962. It also continues a long tradition dating back to the time of the Stoke Military Band (1889 to 1927) of playing Christmas carols and festive music in Stoke and the surrounding villages.

A Royal visit to Ham Hill. H.R.H. Edward Prince of Wales leaving Ham Hill by car on a wet day, after unveiling the war memorial on June 19th, 1923.



Stoke band in 1995, leading the 50th anniversary parade of the end of WWII, followed by the Scouts, Cubs, Beavers and Brownie troops.

The present musical director is Keith Robins, who accepted this position in 2004, after being associated with the band for 15 years. In 2006, the band completed its first overseas trip with Crewkerne Twinning Association and had the honour of performing in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. Although at present all but two members of the band live outside the village, it continues to flourish. In 2009, there are 17 members and regular guests and a learners section; they meet at the United Reformed Church on Mondays and Thursdays.

There has been a football team in Stoke at least since 1903, when Stoke and Montacute were two of the first teams to join the Yeovil & District League. Since then, Stoke Football Club has earned a good reputation for themselves.

Matches were once played on the old football ground behind the present West End Garage. In the 1930s, George Purrier organised comic football matches for the last game of every season, the players in fancy dress. Although there was a funny side to these matches they were also very competitive. When Stoke played their historical opponents from Shepton Beauchamp, tempers used to get a bit frayed!

There was also the Institute "Coop" (cup) and medals to be won. The nicknames of some of the players are amusing; there were characters called Gentleman Jacko, Little Percy, The Mighty Atom, Doc Maconochie, and Bully Beef King. Matches were always supported by a huge crowd. After George Purrier, the tradition of comic football matches was carried on by Walt White up until World War II.

The football club excelled itself during the 1930s, winning the Perry Street & District League Championship five times in a row, starting from the 1933-34 season. They also won other cups during these seasons, and this record has never been equalled before or since. In their five championship years they played 108 league games, winning 91, drawing 13 and losing only four. Mainly due to their success, the football pitch was moved to the present recreation ground just before World War II.

During the war years fixtures were suspended, matches starting again in the 1946-47 season. For four successive seasons, from 1951 to 1955, Stoke won the Premier Division in the Perry Street League. After this the team upgraded to the Somerset Senior League, playing five to six seasons.

Finances forced a move back to the Perry Street League, changing to the Yeovil & District League in the 1970s. Stoke were champions of the Yeovil Premier League in 1975-76 and in 1998-99, continuing the tradition by winning again in 2006-07. In 2009, the two Stoke teams still play in the Yeovil and District League, Stoke team in the Premier Division and the Reserves in Division 1.

The first reference to cricket in the area dates back as far as 1835 to a Ham Hill Cricket Club who played on the Plot (now the Memorial Field). We know from photographs and sports reports that cricket teams played from the early 1900s up to the late 1930s. In 1907, Stoke won the Yeovil & District Senior League; around 450 spectators attended the final play-off in the village. Sammy Southcombe encouraged Stoke's big hitters, even if it did result in broken windows in the Spats factory.

Shortly after World War I, a concrete wicket was laid on the present recreation ground and was used until the early 1960s. During this period, a knockout competition was played between teams from Southcombe Bros., the Hamdon Glove Co., Pittards of Yeovil and of course Stoke Cricket Club, the winners receiving the Coleman Cup.

Stoke Cricket Club was reformed in 1985-86 by Pat Marshall-James, starting with a group of village youngsters playing their first games on a makeshift wicket at the recreation ground. A move to Stanchester School proved unsuccessful, so they returned to Stoke in 1988. That same year, the team entered the local Mid-Wessex League and in the period 1988 to 1995, worked its way from the bottom division to the top.

In 1995, the team plucked up the courage to enter the Somerset Cricket League. It had to start at the bottom, but between 1996 and 2004 it climbed from Division 7 to Division 4. Unfortunately, the club struggled to field a full team during the summer of 2005 and disbanded at the end of the season.

Stoke Fishing Club was started just after World War II. In 2009, there are around 90 to 100 members holding licenses to fish in club waters.

The Stoke-sub-Hamdon Bowls Club was formed in 1994. The club first met on Friday evenings. Due to the increase in membership, Friday afternoon sessions were introduced. The club joined the Somerset Short Mat Bowling Association in 1996 and now plays in the Taunton League as well as playing friendly matches. Every year, the David Farrow Invitation Triples Tournament is held to raise money for charities. The club meets on Fridays at the Memorial Hall.

A successful playgroup was started in 1974, in the schoolroom underneath the United Reformed Church. Now in its 35th year, the playgroup can accommodate 24 children at each session. It opens five mornings a week.

Stoke Mother and Toddlers Group for pre-school children started around 1980, in a building at the back of the United Reformed Church. The group is now known as Little Stoke Folk and meets on a Wednesday during term time at the Memorial Hall. It provides an opportunity for parents to meet and young children to play together in a safe environment.

Although there was some unofficial Women's Institute activity during the war years, it was not until 1952 that the Stoke branch was officially formed. The first meeting was in the Ladies Room at the Working Men's Institute. Kay Webb was the first President and Elsie Richmond the first Secretary. Initially, membership was over 80 people. Since then it has been involved in many activities – educational, creative and cultural. Regular meetings were held locally and at county level.

Over the years it has made a tremendous contribution to village life, even producing an informative booklet on the history of Stoke some years back.

For several years there was a WI choir, directed by Gwyn Crampton-Thomas. In 2007, the Stoke branch celebrated its 55th birthday, but sadly due to lack of members, Stoke WI ceased in November 2008.

The Darby & Joan Club was probably started in the 1950s, or earlier; they organised social get-togethers, coach and shopping trips, and lunches. In recent times it met in the Memorial Hall, but sadly folded in 2004.

Carnivals have been very much a part of village life. The first known events in the 20th century were recorded in 1927, 1928 and 1929, all held to raise funds for Hamdon Hall. The carnivals were held in association with fetes and gymkhanas.

We then move onto the 1930s, and a carnival was held most years until 1939. They were always a great event, usually attended by Townsend Fair, and of course the traction engine that powered the fairground rides, was a sight to see. Various organisations in the village were involved including the glove factories.

After World War II, a British Legion carnival was held in 1946, and then the occasional carnival in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. There was one in 1977, organised for the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations, which included entertainment at the Memorial Hall. One or two carnivals were also held in the 1980s.

A Parish Council Sports and Recreation Committee was formed in 1996, which organised a carnival to raise funds to provide a new sports pavilion. Unfortunately, in April 1997, arsonists burnt down the wooden sports hut on the Recreation Field. There was now an urgent need to replace the sports hut, and that year the Sports and Recreation Trust was formed to raise funds to build a community centre to cater for the sports teams, the bowling club, the youth club and Stoke Band.

Due to the urgent need to raise funds, carnival weeks were held in 1997, 1998 and 1999, organised by the Stoke Sports and Recreation Trust. There was an excellent response, with the WI Youth Club, Playgroup and Brownies taking part. Skittles, a fashion evening, a tea dance, bingo and a treasure hunt were just some of the events organised.

Another regular fundraising opportunity initiated by the Trust were the Fun Days, which were hold most years from 1997 until 2005, providing fun and games for the village. Popular events were the Ham Hill Hash, Welly Wanging and the Tug of War.

May Days have been celebrated in the village for centuries and photographs exist of earlier events in 1905, 1914 and 1923. In recent times the United Reformed Church organised May Fairs from 1952 until 1995, first held on Brocks Mount lawn and later at the Memorial Hall and grounds. From 1996 to 2005, it continued to support the May Day celebrations by organising exhibitions and providing refreshments at the United Reformed church.

In 1996, the Parish Council Sports and Recreation Committee organised a May Fair in Castle Street; this was continued by the Sports and Recreation Trust from 1997 to 2005 (except 1999). In 2006 and 2007 the event was moved to the Memorial Hall and grounds, and in 2008 was successfully held for the first time at the Priory, and the Memorial Hall and grounds. Over the years it featured interesting entertainments for all ages and a wide variety of stalls.

It should be mentioned that the Sports and Recreation Trust have raised over £246,000 since 1997. It has provided a BMX track and skate board park at the combined cost of £20,000, plus a new football pitch costing £103,000, part of the costs offset by grants. The Trust has also had to pay £20,000 for the tractor shed and continual maintenance of the whole recreation complex, including machinery, amounting to around £8,000 a year.

The ongoing problems which have dogged the construction of the sports pavilion should soon be resolved, and hopefully the building will be completed in 2009, the cost being covered by the Trust and associated grants. Although now of a reduced size compared with the original plan, it will be an important asset to the village, providing changing rooms, toilets, showers and a kitchen.

The Sports and Recreation Trust had a fund-raising sub-committee called FORT (Friends of the Recreation Trust), which although disbanded in 2007, has done a fine job of organising the fundraising events. Without FORT, the facilities provided by the Trust and used by the village would not be available. Fund raising for various events continues but are now organised by the Trust with help from volunteers.

Stoke Youth Club was run for 30 years from 1964 to 1994 by Joy and Mike Chorley, who organised games and events for the youth of the village. The County Youth Service took over and ran it from 1994 to 1997, and from then on it has been run on a voluntary basis, meeting at All Saints Hall. In 1995, SAY (Stoke Associated Youth) was formed, which became part of the Sports and Recreation Trust and ran until the youth club was disbanded in 2005.

Moira Hulett ran SAY from 1997 to 2005 on behalf of the Parish Council, for 11 to 16 years olds, with the help of volunteers. The club closed for a short while, but started up again in 2006 for 11 to 14 year olds, under the auspices of the Anglican Church, and in 2009 meets on Fridays at All Saints Hall. Running on a "drop-in" basis, the club provides a pool table (donated by the Working Men's Club), computer games, table tennis, darts, swing ball and board games.

A gardening competition had been organised in the village from 1992 to 2001, encouraging keen gardeners to create summer displays of colour and variety. From this developed the very successful "Flower Pot Trail", which ran from 1997 to 2005. The trail allowed visitors to explore the many varied gardens in the village.

In October 1999, Stoke had reason to celebrate, having won "The Best Village in Somerset" award. Then in December, it won the regional final, beating Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Gloucestershire. Although the village did not win the National Final, they were one of the top six villages in Great Britain. The village was judged on environment, business, care for the young and old and community life.

The first known scout group in Stoke was the church scouts, formed in 1910 by the Rev G. Monck. They regularly organised troop games on Ham Hill, formed their own football club, and engaged in games and manoeuvres with Stoke Boys Brigade.

It was transferred to the Baden Powell County Association in 1918 and was known as the Stoke-sub-Hamdon Troop. The troop continued until 1922, when it was reported they were short of numbers; it then probably folded for a few years.

The troop was reformed by the Rev D. Ballard in 1927 with eight scouts aged eleven years old or over. They met in the scout room at the Vicarage. Some of the tests it took were in semaphore and ambulance duties! Both cubs and scouts were presented to King George V on 2nd December 1937, at Summerlands in West Street. Unfortunately, when the war came in 1939, the pack was disbanded.

In 1948, it was proposed that a new troop should be formed, but this did not occur until 1952. At that time a scout troop was formed in Norton-sub-Hamdon by the Rev E. Pulman, for boys aged 12 to 16 years. It was transferred to Stoke in 1954 and called the 1st Hamdon Scouts. It was a competitive troop and won the Ventura Scout cup in 1955. The troop probably folded in the early 1960s.

It was reformed again in 1974. Due to a hard-working committee and group leaders, troop membership rapidly increased. Thousands of pounds were raised to replace all the old camping equipment and to purchase a 28-seater bus to be used by the scouts and cubs. In September 1998, the group amalgamated with the 1st Martock Troop to form the 1st Fosseway Scout Group.

A Venture Scout group for senior scouts and guides aged 16 to 20 years was formed by Keith Wilmington in about 1987. In 1994, four of the Venture Scouts won the Queen Scouts Award, the first for Stoke Scouting Troop. It disbanded around the early 2000s.

A Wolf Cub pack was formed in November 1935 by Miss Ballard, active from 1935 to 1939, when like the scouts it was disbanded due to WWII.

It was reformed in 1954 by Dr Ross as the 1st Hamdon Cub Pack, for ages nine to 11 years. By the mid 1970s the numbers had dropped but were again built up by a hard-working committee and team of leaders. It continued as a successful troop until September 1998, when it was amalgamated with Martock 1st Troop as the 1st Fosseway Scout Group.

All the above troops and packs were very active, taking part in camps, parades, jamborees, fund days, concerts, trips to places of interest and working towards various scouting badges.

The 1st Hamdon Beavers was formed in 1987 by Karen Michum, for boys aged six to eight years, taking part in some of the activities listed above. It was amalgamated in September 1998 with the 1st Martock Beavers as the 1st Fosseway Scout Group.

By 1926, a Stoke company of Girl Guides had been formed and its new colours were dedicated by the vicar in that year. Unfortunately, after this date there is very little information available about the guides until a pack was started by Mrs Hazeltine, which ran from the early to the late 1950s. The 1st Montacute and Stoke Guide Company was formed in the early 1980s and ran until 1998, when it was disbanded.

The 1st Stoke-sub-Hamdon Brownie Pack, run by Ruth Dalwood, was active from about 1946 until the early 1960s. In 1967, the pack was reformed by Pat Marshall-James and ran until about 1973. In 1987, the pack was reformed again, this time by Jane Herbert. Unfortunately, by 2000 the numbers had decreased, and the pack folded. In 2009, the 1st Montacute pack meet in Stoke.

Guides and Brownies took part in shows and fun days, attending parades, camps, and worked Guiding badges.

The Rainbow Guide Unit for girls age five to seven years was started in 1988 by Ann Goad, and ran until 2005. The girls participated in some of the previously mentioned activities.

STOKE IN THE WAR YEARS

"They risked their lives of their own free will
That England might be England still".

On 8th July 1914, Stoke Congregational Church held its yearly parade. It was the usual happy event, with banners and street decoration. We may wonder if it had any idea of the approaching horror for by 14th August, just five weeks later, we were at war with Germany.

No fewer than 162 men answered Lord Kitchener's call to arms. One was to attain the rank of Captain, three were Lieutenants, two Sergeant Majors, three Sergeants and five Corporals. Of the 162 who went to war, 44 did not return, and those who did could relate many a horrific story. They all thought it would be over by Christmas, but sadly they were in for a rude awakening.

As for the villagers left at home, the war was too distant for them to be involved, but they all knew of waiting, of loss and grief. Many a tale has been told of this terrible war, and one such tale has an amusing side to it as well as a serious one.

Arnold Nelms of Stoke, served in France as batman to an officer in the 1st Battalion of the Somerset Light Infantry. One of his duties was organising ample supplies of whisky and rum from the quartermaster to the said officer. Needless to say, by many a devious plan, Arnold made sure of his share, so that he was never short of courage, even if occasionally it was of the Dutch variety!

As the war progressed, Arnold made a sortie of his own into the enemy lines and came to a substantial German gun emplacement. He ordered the Germans to come out with their hands up, and scampered around the blockhouse shouting in as many different voices as he could to give the impression that he had the place surrounded.

Eventually a German came out with his hands in the air, then another, then another, and so on until there were about 40 of them! It is hard to imagine who was the more astonished, the Germans or Arnold. Having come to terms with the fact that he had single handedly captured 40 or so Germans, he promptly marched them back to the British lines.

The question of a war memorial was considered in April 1918 and finally resulted in the building of an obelisk on the spur of Ham Hill at a cost of over £400. The monument, which is a significant landmark, was unveiled by H.R.H. Edward, Prince of Wales on 19th July 1923.
A plaque to those who died in World War II was unveiled on 3rd August 1947. More recently, the name of a soldier who died on active service in Northern Ireland in August 1988 has been added to the memorial.

The unveiling of the Millennium Stone at Queens Crescent, Stoke on the 1st January, 2001, by Mrs. Mabel Caller who was 103 years old.

Ham Hill Fayre 2007, held yearly in September, providing entertainment for all the family. In the arena are the Romans displaying their military strength.

On 3rd September 1939, Britain was again at war with Germany. Apart from the normal call up of able young men and women, it soon became clear that events would come much nearer to home.

To start with, everyone was issued with gas masks and given drill as to how to use them. I can remember my own disappointment at being too old to get a "Mickey Mouse" one.

Next, there was the arrival of upwards of 200 evacuees from London, as well as a later intake from Bristol. In order to avoid overcrowding at Castle School, pupils from the school, including evacuees, were taught in the Primary Room (Infant School Room) at the Congregational Church. Other evacuees were often taught by teachers who had accompanied them, in school rooms requisitioned from all the churches.

Everyone contributed towards the war effort. For those who could not join the forces, there was the Local Defence Volunteers, known by their initials L.D.V. and by some, unkindly, as "Look, Duck and Vanish".

They became the Home Guard and their headquarters was the Coach House on the corner of Cole Lane and North Street. The Observer Corps had a building on Ham Hill from where they monitored the approach of enemy aircraft. The village had its own air raid wardens who patrolled the streets every night to keep a strict watch on the "black out", and street lighting was banned.

The fire brigade was formed in 1935 and its original inventory included a stand pipe and hose, mounted on a vehicle drawn trolley. During World War II, under the command of Ernest Chaffey, the trailer pump was modernised and kept at Stoke Cross Head Quarters (now No. 4 High Street). The brigade was disbanded in 1945, after just 10 years of operation.

The H.Q. was also the base for the local demolition squad, the Air Raid Patrol, and later in the war, the Air Training Corps. There was a Women's Land Army hostelry at Walscombe Close.

For senior school children there was plenty of farm work at seed and harvest time, for this they obtained non-attendance passes. Castle School kitchen was used by an unofficial WI group for jam making sessions, using any available fruit.

There was plenty of military activity too. The site of Hamdon Close was filled with Nissen huts and war equipment. The Royal Artillery, the Royal Engineers, and the American General Infantry arrived in the village. They took over Hamdon Hall, the Spats Factory and also used the Working Men's Club. Many were billeted at local homes. The whole scene rose to fever pitch as D-Day approached, and after that, it all seemed quite flat.

There was a week set aside every year called “War Weapons Week”. One year Stoke failed to reach its target of £10,000, raised by purchasing war bonds, but more than made up for it the next. Many people built their own air raid shelters, either in their gardens or a nearby field.

We often saw aeroplanes overhead, sometimes Allied, sometimes German. Early in the war there was an air battle or dog fight overhead. It was on this occasion that a young man, standing in a doorway of Harris’ factory in Pound Lane, was killed by flying shrapnel. He was Stoke’s only civilian casualty.

A stray bomb demolished the gymnasium at Stanchester School, fortunately there were no pupils there at the time. The bomb also caused damage to other buildings in the area, including panes of glass in the church. Near the end of the war, some farm workers were machine gunned from the air near Holy Tree, but no one was hurt, and thankfully Stoke never experienced an air riad, although bombs were reportedly dropped on a moonlit night near Creedy Bridge.

In all, we endured six years of sacrifice but came through in the end, aided by our ration books.

In May 1945, the war ended in Europe and nowhere in Britain could the spirit of rejoicing be felt more than in Stoke. Being accustomed to royal visits, there was no shortage of flags, bunting and streamers which decorated the village from end to end. Flood lighting was hastily erected and a band of sorts was quickly assembled, largely from remnants of the old Stoke Military Band. Dancing and rejoicing took place in the High Street close to the Duke of Cornwall and the Half Moon. The whole village celebrated for several evenings.

A traveller passing through from London to the West Country joined in the fun and remarked that he had seen nothing to compare with it on his journey. When the victory over Japan was declared later in the year, the process was repeated and the whole village celebrated again. This display of spontaneous community activity must surely be unique in the lives of all who participated. It was also to spark off the reforming of Stoke Military Band.

Sometime in 1945, a special feast was organised for the children of the village by local businessmen. There were also welcome-home dinners arranged for the demobilised and a memorial service for those who had given their lives in the war.

The 21st Century

Now we turn to the new century, and find that the community spirit in Stoke is still going strong. The Millennium was celebrated with a beacon being lit on Ham Hill and a midnight jamboree at the Memorial Field, concluding with an illuminating firework display on Ham Hill.

The Millennium Quilt was completed by January 2000. The quilt was co-ordinated by Druscilla Perry and was made up of 233 squares and involved 217 people. Many crafts were used in the design, including ceramics, tapestry, knitting, painting and applique, and it represented life and scenes around the village. The quilt is on permanent display in the Memorial Hall.

In November 1999, Stoke Local History Group organised a Millennium Exhibition covering over 1,000 years of village history, which hundreds of people attended. Due to its success, it was repeated in March 2000. An exhibition with different topics but relating to Stoke was held in October 2001 and repeated in March 2002. In November 2003, the group organised another exhibition and produced a book called "Photographic Memories of Stoke-sub-Hamdon". In 2007 they produced and printed a village calendar. They are also responsible for restoring and re-erecting, the original Somerset Automobile Club "Stoke-under-Ham" village sign in lower North Street. They have also provided four new iron seats in various locations around the village.

A Millenium stone was unveiled at Queens Crescent on 1st January 2001 by Mabel Caller, who at 103 years, was Stoke's oldest inhabitant. A time capsule was also placed under the stone, containing many items of interest and information relating to the history of Stoke.

We have seen two new building developments in the village at the turn of the century. The Duchy built 28 houses in 1999-2000, with the first phase completed in Cole Lane, followed by Tiptoft and Becksfield.

The other development, started in 2003 and completed by 2008, was the Brocks Mount Estate, built in the grounds of Brocks Mount, a Victorian mansion and former home of the Southcombe family (see page 62).

Activity groups are still going strong. Quirky Quilters originally met in the Speedwell Hall in Crewkerne but moved to Stoke in 2003. They are a group of patchwork and quilting enthusiasts who meet to stitch, quilt and share ideas. They organise a bi-yearly exhibition of beautiful patchwork and quilts and meet on a Tuesday (alternate weeks) at the Memorial Hall.

Due to the popularity of the Garden Competition and the Flower Pot Trail, Stoke Gardening Club was formed in 2000. Talks arranged on subjects related to all aspects of gardening, and trips to gardens and nurseries are run during the year. They have also organised since August 2001, the popular Flower, Produce and Craft Show, held at the Memorial Hall and grounds each August. The club meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month at the Memorial Hall.

Stoke Village Plan was set up to help the village find solutions to issues raised by villagers in response to the Village Plan questionnaire that was sent out in 2004. The working groups covered Leisure and Culture, Environment, Youth Provision, Community Safety, Local Economy, Transport and Traffic, Health and Social Needs, Housing, Education and Lifelong Learning.

The results of the plan were very positive, resulting in two publications: a "Village Brief", being a general guide to village amenities, clubs and associations, and an informative "Village Directory", an A-Z of village business. A new notice board was erected in the Memorial Hall grounds which shows a map of footpaths in the village, and a litter collection team was organised. A traffic survey and a housing needs survey were also carried out.

The Acorn Pop-In was formed in January 2006 as a result of views expressed by the residents of Oak Tree House Sheltered Housing scheme, in connection with the Village Plan. As the name implies, it provides an opportunity for people to meet together socially and creatively. Talks are arranged on various topics and a wide range of activities organised. The group meets every Thursday at Oak Tree House.

In 2007, the chemist shop which had been situated in the centre of the village for at least 70 years, relocated to the purpose-built pharmacy next to Hamdon Medical Centre in Matts Lane.

Such is life in Stoke during the first decade of the 21st century, and we are left to wonder what is in store. One thing is sure, whatever the future holds, there is a tremendous history on which to build.

Royal Visits

Although Stoke has a long and colourful history, there is only one recorded Royal visit to the village before the 20th century and that was in 1286, when King Edward I (r 1272-1307) stayed at the castle for a few days, shortly before Christmas. He would have been the guest of Cecily Beauchamp, since John II, her son, was still in his minority. John II was later created 1st Lord Beauchamp of Hatch.

Additionally however, King Charles I (r 1625-1649) is believed to have made an overnight stay here in 1644, although this cannot be confirmed.

All other known royal visits were in the 20th century and Stoke has received more than most, being a royal manor and under the stewardship of the Duchy of Cornwall.

On 19th July 1923, H.R.H. Edward, the Prince of Wales, visited Stoke and placed a bronze wreath on the war memorial on Ham Hill. Several ex-servicemen were present, assembled under Captain Robert Chaffey. The Prince then had lunch at the inn on the hill, named appropriately The Prince of Wales.

In the afternoon he visited J. H. Walter Ltd, a glove factory in West Street, where various glove making processes were explained to him. Afterwards he attended a reception at Summerlands House next to the glove factory, where he met his Duchy tenants and other parishioners.

Finally he visited the Working Men's Institute, where he opened the new extension and handed over the deeds of the property. These were kindly given by Mrs Colquhoun (nee Southcombe) and Messrs. Southcombe Bros.

In July 1934, H.R.H. Edward, the Prince of Wales visited the camp of the National Fire Brigades Association which was held at Barwick Park, Yeovil. Here he met 100 Duchy tenants from Stoke.

To commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George V (r 1910-1936), a water fountain was constructed at the top of Ham Hill Road in 1935.

In December 1937, King George VI (r1936-1952) visited Stoke. The village was decked out with flags and banners. The principal reception was again at Summerlands House in West Street, where hundreds of children were assembled and many tenants, councillors and others were presented to the King. In spite of the day being very wet, the event was well attended. His Majesty also toured the glove factory of J. H. Walter Ltd.

Stoke had to wait another 30 years for the next royal occasion, which was on 2nd June 1966, when Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and H.R.H Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, visited. It was a glorious summer's day and once more flags and bunting decorated the village.

The receptions were at Castle Farm, (the principal Duchy farm), and the home of Mr & Mrs K Hebditch and at the Recreation Field, where a large marquee had been decorated with floral displays. Stoke Band played for the occasion. Once again tenants and councillors were presented, and there was free beer for all.

On 12th June 1970, H.R.H. Charles, the Prince of Wales, visited Stoke, this time arriving at the Recreation Field by helicopter. A marquee was erected, where the Prince received the Duchy tenants and Parish Councillors. There was also a large gathering of children from schools in the district and Stoke Band once again gave its services. After half an hour Prince Charles took off in his helicopter for Mere in Wiltshire, accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset.

The most recent official visit took place on 21st October 1985 when the Prince of Wales opened the craft workshops at North Street Farm. He also called on his two tenant farmers. Many people gathered to see him, although this visit was more of a private nature.

Prince Charles has been seen in the village and on Ham Hill on a number of occasions, on unannounced private visits to view his property and estate. It can only be assumed that when a helicopter of the Queen's Flight is seen flying low overhead, the Prince is probably in the pilot's seat, taking a quick look at the village.

The Parish Church

The dedication of the church at present is to St Mary, the Virgin, but there have been a number of previous dedications associated with the church, namely St Andrew, St Michael and St Dionysus or St Denys.

The church appears to us today to have been built in an area away from the main settlement of the village, but East Stoke was probably the original settlement in Anglo-Saxon times.

The suggestion that many inhabitants of East Stoke moved away to West Stoke during the Black Death in 1348 cannot be taken seriously. No doubt the expansion of West Stoke was due to the Beauchamp family establishing a manor house in the west part of the village. The development of the village during the 1800s also left the church isolated.

It has been suggested that there could have been an Ango-Saxon church on the site, which the Normans later redesigned, or used the foundations for their own church. Either way, the Norman church we see today was probably constructed in the early to mid 12th century and the founder is unknown.

The Norman building consisted of chancel and nave only with narrow windows, of which three remain. The roof would have been high pitched and the walls covered with white plaster.

The church is entered by the 14th century north porch, which has a parvis or upper room above the porch. In the corners of the porch there were four interesting carved corbels (supports for the vaulted ceiling) but only one complete example now survives. From these, spring heavy quadripartite rib vaults meet in one plain central boss. On the west side is a small window containing 20th century glass and showing the arms of the Walter family and is a memorial to Dr Richard H. Walter, who died in 1924.

The parvis is reached by a spiral stone staircase, lit by two small windows. It has a stone roof supported by four chamfered arches with evidence of graffito plaster work between the groining of the roof. It is lit by a 14th century decorated window, (a Gothic style covering the period 1280-1350) with elaborately curved tracery.

Within the porch, the original Norman doorway is visible. It has side shafts, one with spiral fluting and the other with a scale motif and fluted capitals, although much of it was obscured by the addition of the porch. The top of the arch is visible in the parvis.

The Norman tympanum at Stoke parish church. The meaning is a subject for debate. Originally covered up in the 1300s when the porch was built, and re-discovered in 1856.

An unusual picture, taken in 1949 of the church bells, before they were rehung in the tower. The bells had been sent to Loughborough to be retuned, one bell was recast and a new treble bell was donated to the church.

The most striking external feature in the 12th century would have been the then fully exposed Norman doorway, with arch and tympanum. The rare and interesting tympanum was walled up when the porch was added in the 14th century. It was only discovered in February 1856 by the Rev William Greenslade, who recorded the find in the Western Flying Post.

A description of the carving on the tympanum is as follows: on the left of the design is Sagittarius bending his bow, on the right is Leo, above which is the "Agnus Dei", (the Lamb of God) bearing a cross, and in the middle are three over-sized birds resting in a tree. Its subject is a mystery, but the two following interpretations have been proposed:

1. Sagittarius, a centaur, represents the Christian bending his bow upon a lion, which represents the forces of evil, who seems unaware of the danger. Above is the tree of life in which the faithful are represented by the birds. Agnus Dei, is placed at the same level as these mortal souls, and his attitude expresses the active interest he takes in their wellbeing.
2. King Stephen, in 1135, contested the throne of England against his cousin Matilda, the rightful heir, whose husband was Geoffrey of Anjou. Sagittarius was the traditional badge of Stephen, and Leo was that of Geoffrey.

After passing through the church doors, we now stand in the nave. The doors were probably replaced in the mid 1800s. At the west end of the nave, the two small windows north and south near the organ, are Norman. In the 14th century, the Norman windows were blocked up and replacement windows were inserted.,

The Norman south door in the nave was probably walled up when the 15th century perpendicular south window (a style, with strong vertical lines and elaborate tracery) was inserted.

The rest of the Norman windows in the nave and the chancel except one, were replaced in the 14th and 15th century by larger windows.

The great west window is 14th century decorated. It is a fine example of reticulated tracery, and is dated about 1350.

A rood loft, or gallery, existed above the chancel arch until 1795 when it collapsed, part of this is thought to be incorporated into the left hand pew, as you enter the church. The small window above the south transept arch was inserted to light the rood loft and is 15th or 16th century.

In 1914, the Reverend G. G. Monck organised the careful restoration of the 15th century mediaeval ceiling. The ancient ceiling is now suspended from steel girders.

The task of rebuilding the nave roof was taken on by the Reverend E. Pulman in 1954. It was during this restoration, while workmen were away, that fire broke out. Fortunately, an American lady visitor raised the alarm and organised a local firefighting team before the fire brigade arrived.

An uncharted vault was discovered on the north side, immediately in front of the chancel arch, when the central heating was installed in 1949. This was about 7 feet long and 5 feet wide and high, with five stone steps at the west end. The walls were as new, with diagonal scoring, sometimes in both direction, forming lozenges. Rumours exist that a skeleton was found in the vault, but this cannot be proved.

The font is Norman and was originally in the centre of the nave, but was moved to its present position in 1916. It has two bands of cable moulding, one being combined with a lozenge pattern. There are pieces of stone inset in the top edge where the locking points were once located for the cover which protected the holy water.

The pulpit is a good example of Jacobean furnishing. The house glass, a giant egg-timer, is on the north wall, and was used to time the length of the sermons. Long services were the norm in the 17th century and could easily stretch to three hours.

In 1862, Benjamin Ferrey, the Diocesan Architect, states that "the church ought also, to be re-seated with open benches corresponding to some of the ancient benches which still remain". This could well have happened, as some bench ends appear to have been carved to fit in with earlier sections.

The vestry was constructed in 1916 at the west end of the church, the architect was C. E. Ponting.

Fragments of 17th century wall paintings are still visible in the nave, notably the four angels high on the east wall, cleaned and revealed in 1988-89. The monuments commemorate several local families but are not of special interest.

The north transept, which is the first stage of the tower, is probably no later than 1190 and is dedicated to St Denys. The ribbed vaulting rises from four beautifully carved corbels of trumpet-shaped flutes and leaves. It is a fine example of Transitional work (a style between Norman and Early English) and is rare in Somerset. The transept arch is also Transitional. The upper sections of the tower were constructed in the 13th and 15th centuries.

The 15th century stone screen, set in the transept arch, is decorated with quatrefoil panels, it is thought to have come from the chapel of St Nicholas at the castle and to be the choir doorway mentioned by John Leland in the early 1540s. The ancient altar tomb, also decorated with quatrefoil panels, has three consecration crosses and could also have come from St Nicholas.

To enable the first organ to be installed in the north transept in 1884, the tomb altar was placed in the churchyard and the 14th century stone screen was moved and set up across the altar recess. A stove was then installed, probably to counteract the damp.

Prior to the organ being installed, music was provided by a small band which played in a gallery at the west end of the church. In the Churchwarden's accounts there is a record of repairs to the bass viol in 1791 (three shillings) and in 1847 (four shillings). The church band existed up to the late 19th century, and it is interesting to note that Stoke Military Band was formed by 1889.

The Rev W. Rowland replaced the old organ in 1904 in the north transept and installed the present one. The organ was built by Bryceson Bros, London. Then in 1915, the organ was removed to the west end of the church and fitted with pneumatic action. The west wall was too damp, so it was rebuilt on a platform by 1923. The organ was restored in 1946 and again in 1970, when it was fitted with electric action and given a new tonal scheme using some extensions.

The north transept was restored in 1915, after the organ, stove and coal heap were removed. The cost of the restoration was paid for by Bessie Lewis in memory of her mother and husband.

The altar tomb which had been moved to the churchyard in 1884 was placed back in the altar recess. The 15th century stone screen with added sections, was replaced across the transept arch and the entrance door from the porch was opened out and refitted. The doorway to the bell tower was blocked, and a piscina and glass partition inserted, the latter to enable the already established squint in the chancel arch to be used. To access the bell tower, stone steps were built at the base of the old rood left doorway, in the nave.

The south transept and archway are probably late 13th century or early 14th century. In the east pier of the arch, but sadly now defaced was a decoratively carved piscina.

The south transept has eight good cusped lancet windows, four east and four west. Between the window arches are six interesting heads, or portraits, in stone. Could they represent royalty, the Beauchamp family or clergy connected to the chantry? The eight windows, together with the cusped lancet south window, all contain 19th century glass donated to the church by John Winter Walter.

In the south recess is a recumbent effigy of a priest of the early 14th century, thought to be Reginald de Monckton who died in 1307, the first Provost of the chantry, established in the Free Chapel of St Nicholas, at the manor house. In the south-east corner is a double piscina, but the shelf may be quite recent. The interesting cusp terminal above the squint was brought here from Montacute Church after 1871. One remaining Norman corbel (roof support), originally outside, can be seen inside the transept above the arch.

The crowning glory of the church is the fine Norman chancel arch, restored in 1862 under the instructions of Benjamin Ferry, the Honorary Diocesan Architect. The stone mason was James Staple. The cost was covered by public subscriptions.

The three main orders used are:

1) Billet 2) Chevron 3) Lozenge ornament

Of the six pillars, three are plain, the others have a chevron, scale and leaf design and all have fluted capitals.

Above the tops of the pillars is a course with a lozenge design and above the arch is a defaced string course.

Now onto the chancel. A geophysical survey in 1999 revealed the possible evidence of a small apse or semi-circular recess, located at the east end of the chancel.

The east window is 15th century perpendicular and is the best of its kind in the church. It was dedicated as a Memorial Window on New Year's Day, 1950. The top lights contain fragments of mediaeval glass. There are four main lights: the two outer ones represent village industries and home life, the two centre lights are the Passion and the Resurrection. Below the main lights are four badges of the armed forces.

There is one remaining Norman window on the south side of the chancel, opened up in 1914. The other chancel windows of one and two lancet lights are late 13th or early 14th century. Those on the north side have later tracery and could have been altered in the 15th century. There are also north and south, two shuttered windows, referred to as low-side windows.

In a recess on the east chancel wall, are the remains of a wall painting. In all probability the wall monument on the south side covers a similar recess.

In the south-east corner, is a c1300 double piscina (a stone basin placed near the altar and used in connection with the celebration of the mass). In the church, there is also one other double and two single piscinas, all but one are of the same period. The number of piscinas would relate to the number of altars once present within the church.

Also in the chancel are two recesses, on the right is an aumbray which probably had a small door attached. Both were used to contain chalices and patens connected with the mass.

The altar is Jacobean, and the communion rail dates from the 17th century.

Built into the north chancel wall is a fine recumbent effigy of Thomas Strode, who died in 1595. He was granted the lease of the "provostrie" (now the Priory) by Elizabeth I in 1582.

Local craftsmen, in 1953, made an oak ceiling to replace the inferior Victorian one, made of plaster.

We now move onto the exterior of the church, which offers several features of interest.

At the west end of the north wall of the church, the head of the Norman window is carved with possibly a Saxon figure of St George or St Michael and the dragon (one of the altars in the church was dedicated to St Michael). Close by is a curious canopy on which is carved a 13th century cross, which existed before the porch was built. Its purpose is a mystery; too short for a tomb, too low for a holy water stoop. Two suggestions are as follows: it could have been an Eaves burial, a state or transition between burial in the churchyard and burial in the church, or maybe a shrine, like that of St Wite at Whitchurch Canonicorum in Dorset.

On the south side of the nave at the west end, a possible leaf design can be seen carved on the head of the Norman window. Alongside is a 14th century window displaying carved stone heads, acting as label stops. To the right is a blocked Norman doorway with two shafts of spiral fluting and scale pattern.

On the east gable wall of the nave, can be seen the dripstones of an earlier roof (projecting ridges to throw off the rain).

On the south side of the chancel, by the priest's door, is a scratch dial and a buttress cuts into the Norman window, which also displays a carved window head. The buttresses appear to have been added in the 19th century, to judge from earlier drawings. Under the eaves can be seen a good example of a Norman corbel table, displaying interesting carvings with a frieze of billet design, both are also repeated on the north side of the chancel.

The most easterly window in the north chancel wall, leans, and could be due to the rebuilding of the wall or to alterations inside the church, when the canopied tomb was inserted of Thomas Strode, (died 1595).

There is a curious sloping buttress on the east side of the tower into which is built the tower stair. The upper parts of the tower are 13th century. The crenelated top and gargoyles are 15th century Perpendicular.

In the churchyard, south-east of the chancel, is a large flat stone which covers the grave of Theophilus Crabbe, who died in 1675, he was the Presbyterian minister in Stoke during the Commonwealth.

Near the gate are parts of the old church cross, re-erected here in 1911. The head of the cross is 15th century, showing the Crucifixion and the Virgin Mary and child. It was lost for some years, but returned to Stoke by Mrs Robert Chaffey of Bristol. The church gateway is 17th century.

In the churchyard are some interesting tombs. When a person died in battle before the era of war memorials, relations of the deceased would sometimes record details on their tombstones. The following can be found in Stoke churchyard.

"In memory of Josiah L. Prigg Sen who died July 1784 aged 34. Also Charles son of the above who was sergeant in the 15th Hussars who fell while fighting for his King and country in the south of France 25th March (year unreadable) aged 31 (?) years under the command of the Marquis of Wellington. Also Samuel son of the above who was also a sergeant in the 15th Hussars and was at the engagement in which his brother Charles fell, died at Stoke November 3rd 1853 aged 75 years".

THE BELLS

The church has six bells, the weight of each bell and its inscription is as follows:

1.	6 cwt 1 qtr 16lbs TREBLE	In memory of Everard Slade Powell, Priest and Ringer 1875-1947. This bell was given in glad adoration. Venite adoremus Dominum. D. Ballard, Vicar F. F. Dyer, S. T. White, Churchwardens 1949
2.	5 cwt 3 qtrs 19lbs	Richard Chaffey & John Chaffey, Churchwardens, Cast by G. Davis, B. Water 1787
3.	8 cwt 2 qtrs 17lbs	Recast 1910 G. G. Monck, Vicar. G. Wakely, W. Taylor, Churchwardens
4.	10 cwt 1 qtr 17lbs	R. S. Ave Maria Gratia Plena (recast 1949)
5.	13 cwt 0 qtrs 15lbs	S. S. Ave Maria Gratia Plena
6.	17 cwt 0 qtrs 15lbs TENOR	Samuel Gundry, Francis Chaffey, Churchwardens, T. P. Anno Domini, 1688

The two earliest bells were cast between 1530-1570, by Roger Simpson of Ash Priors, near Taunton. One of them was recast in 1949.

The tenor bell was cast in 1688 by the famous bell founder Thomas Purdue, of Closworth, Dorset.

From the Churchwarden's accounts it appears that Mr Knight (a Montacute founder) was paid £10.5s.0d. for casting a treble bell in 1743. This bell was recast by George Davis of Bridgwater in 1787 for the sum of £13.0.0d.

Other extracts from the Churchwarden's accounts records more history of the bells as follows:

1730 – Paid for two bell ropes. 5/9d.

1752 – Paid Mr Lukes for hanging the 3rd and 4th bells. 7/6d.

1764 – 4th July "Agreement between Mr Joseph Winter and Mr Thomas Pryor ye younger, Churchwardens, and Thomas Bayley of Bridgwater, Bell founder. Bayley to take down the present broken 2nd bell and recast it and tunet the treble and forth, to make them all agreeable in tone and to be at whole expense of carriage to and from Load Bridge for the sum of £44".

It appears that this particular bell was recast again in 1910. The following is taken from church records.

"Mr Doble of Taunton has got the bell out of the tower and it has gone to Taylors of Loughborough to be recast. This will take a month. In the meantime Mr Doble will proceed with the work of rehanging the other four, the bells have been silent since 1877".

The above account was written in the time of the Rev George Monck in 1910, when the 2nd bell was recast (now the 3rd bell). The old bell cage was also strengthened and a new deadening floor was placed under the bells. The bells could now be rung after 33 years of silence.

In 1949, when Douglas Ballard was vicar, the bells needed attention again. One of the earliest bells was recast, all the bells were removed from the belfry, retuned and rehung in a new steel frame. Mary Powell gave a new treble bell in memory of her husband.

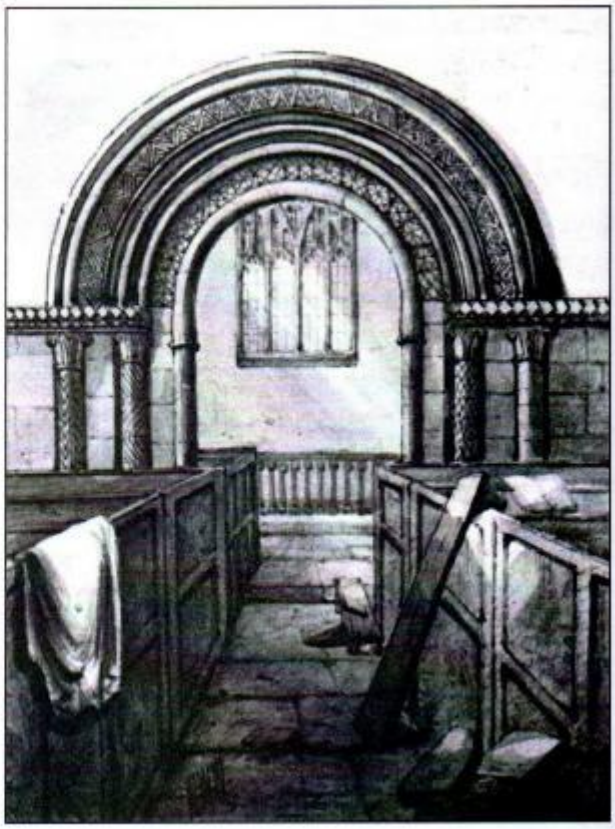
For hundreds of years there has been a bell ringer, or ringers, at Stoke Church. Originally the ringing of each bell would have had a different meaning.

Ringing bells in various sequences is known as change ringing. By the 1700s change ringing had become very popular, and is the style of ringing that we hear today.

The first documented attempt at a "peal" in the history of Stoke Church took place in 1935. A peal can take up to four hours to ring, depending on the weight and the number of bells, and is considered to be both a physical and mental challenge.

There are records of bell ringers meeting regularly from 1909 up until 1990. Unfortunately, from 1990 there was no regular band of ringers at Stoke for Sunday ringing, although the bells continued to be rung by visiting bands of ringers and to celebrate weddings. In 1997, a regular band of ringers was formed and on 1st January 2000, they were part of a nationwide ring of bells to celebrate the Millennium. At present, St Mary's ringers ring on Sundays and for special occasions, and hold a weekly practice on Monday evenings. The bells are also used by visiting ringers.

A picture by W.W. Wheatley drawn in 1848, showing the Norman chancel arch, before it was carefully restored by Benjamin Ferrey in 1862. *By kind permission of Somerset Archeological & Natural History Society.*



A picture taken in the early 1890s of the thatched buildings close to the Church. They were sadly destroyed by a fire in 1900 and rebuilt in 1901, now known as Church Farm.

RECTORS, PROVOSTS AND VICARS OF STOKE

1174	Baldwin	Rector
1195	Osbert	Rector
1285	Gilbert de Overle (with Limington)	Rector
1287	Walter the Parson	Rector
1304	Robert de Beauchamp	Rector
1304	Henry de Wyke (appears on vicars list but was more correctly Rector of St Nicholas	Vicar
1311	Henricus	Vicar
1326	Peter de Sevenoke	Vicar
1341	John de Nelonde	Vicar
1344	William de Corfton	Vicar
1352	Nicholas de Pontesbury	Vicar
1375 or earlier	Thomas Horn (union with the chantry)	Provost
1393	Richard Martyn	Provost
?	Roger Lombe	Provost
1420	Sir Robert Wyche	Provost
1436	Sir Thomas Bishop	Provost
1450 and 1468	Thomas Cokkes – Parochial Chaplain	
1460	John Shirwell	Provost
1468	Robert Botley	Provost
1472	John Trivola	Provost
1473	William Coorte	Provost
1507	John Glyn	Provost
1532	Robert Prydell – Curate	
1534	George Woolsett (called Rector)	Provost
1542	Thomas Canner or Carmar	Provost
1558	John Goodman	Curate
1560*	Hugo French	Curate
1601*	William Chaffey	Curate
1621*	Thomas Tintiney M. A.	Curate

1629*	Johannes Limberye	Curate
1647	Theophilus Crabbe (Presbyterian)	Curate
1663*	Nathaniel Boughton	Curate
1682*	John Haynes (length of incumbency unknown)	Curate
1754*	Reginald Bean L.L.B.	Curate
1776*	P. Mitchell	Curate
1794	Edward Whitley	Curate
1812*	Thomas Gwynne Rees	Curate
1821	William Langdon	Curate
1826*	Richard Colston Phelips	Curate
1826/36	John Jarratt	Curate
1831/4	J. Beagley Naylor	Curate
1836	George Robbins M.A.	Curate
1837	William Truell B.A.	Curate
1852	William Greenslade M.A. (listed as Vicar from November 1868)	Vicar
1875	Frederick Shepherd M.A.	Vicar
1884	William John Rowland M.A.	Vicar
1904	Reyner Edward William Cosens	Vicar
1909	George Gustavus Monck Prebendary of Wells Cathedral	Vicar
1919	Herbert Jocelyn Davis	Vicar
1925	Douglas Ballard, who also held Norton-sub-Hamdon in plurality in 1948 with A.J. Frith as Curate	Vicar
1954	Edgar James Pulman M.A. (also Curate in 1951)	Vicar
1959	Cecil Wallis Whipp (union with Norton dissolved)	Vicar
1967	Francis William Thomas M.A.	Vicar
1975	Jack Edward Marshall M.A.	Vicar
1984	H. Adrian Hallett B.A.	Vicar
2000	Peter Kerton-Johnson Dip.th	Vicar

* Served the parish but no definite proof of having held the benefice.

The first known Rector is Baldwin in 1174. There was a dispute over the advowson (patronage) in 1224. The Abbot of Frithelstock, North Devon, claimed it was part of the endowment of Frithelstock Abbey, but this was settled in favour of the patron at Stoke, Robert Beauchamp IV.

Interesting changes were to develop in 1304, when Robert Beauchamp was Rector. His brother, John II, was Lord of the Manor. In that year, John founded the chantry at the chapel of St Nicholas at the castle and endowed it for five priests, also giving it two-thirds of the income of the parish church. Robert died that year and thereafter the chantry took on the responsibility of the church and thereafter appointed the vicars. In 1375, due to disputes about the vicar's income, Lady Alice Beauchamp gave all the income from the church to the chantry.

After the patrons died out, probably following the death of John Tiptoft in 1443, there were more financial difficulties. From 1444, the chantry was never up to full strength and most of the provosts remained absent. Due to a shortage of income, the chantry could only manage a modest amount of improvements and repairs to the fabric of the church in the 15th century. As a result, Stoke missed out on the great age of church rebuilding in Somerset.

In the 16th century, a wind of change blew through the established church. Monasteries were dissolved, chantries felt insecure.

Dr George Woolsett was appointed in 1534, not as Provost, but as a Rector. He could obviously see the coming of the axe and wished to disassociate himself from the chantry. When Lord Thomas Cromwell's officers came, they took an inventory and left the Doctor and his income untouched. Dr Woolsett resigned in 1541 and the last Provost appointed was Thomas Canner or Carmar. He never actually resided in the village, but remained at St Stevens, Westminster. His two deputies remained at the chantry.

Due to the Suppression of the Chantries Act in July 1548, the King's Commissioners, Sir Hugh Poulett and Sir Thomas Dyer, visited the chapel to assess the revenues and possessions. After the survey, a chalice of silver remained with the incumbent but the lead was stripped from the roof and sold along with the bell metal.

The villagers pleaded for St Nicholas to be preserved as their chapel-of-ease (as the parish church was nearly a mile away), but their wishes were ignored and the chapel was allowed to fall into ruin.

As the parish church had been fully linked to the chantry since 1375, it was now disendowed and in poverty. Afterwards, a stipend was set at £30 per annum, and remained unchanged until 1826.

In 1876, the Rev F. Shepherd mentions the difficulties the church experienced during the Reformation. He states: “The church in Stoke had by then professed a new religion. This was spoilation of the new Church of England (not Roman Catholic) just to pay a King’s debts”.

These events were to have an adverse effect upon the church, the clergy and the village for some 300 years.

After the suppression of the chantries, the patronage of the church passed to the lease holders and later the owners of the rectory estate. The estate would have included all the land and property associated with the Collegiate Chantry.

We now move on to the curates, who replaced the priests and the Provost. John Goodman was nominated curate in 1558, followed in 1560 by curate Hugo French. In 1601, William Chaffey was the curate with a family of 13 children, in 1621, Thomas Tintiney became pastor and was reported for “living in sin” with his wife before marriage and in 1629, John Limberley was minister.

Theophilus Crabbe, in 1647, became the rector during the Puritan period. Nathaniel Boughton was curate in 1663, followed by John Haynes who was appointed in 1682. He also appears on the list of Monmouth’s rebels reported absent, although being absent was not unusual for the vicar of Stoke. However, it must be noted that after 1685, no more is heard of him.

Unfortunately, due to the events of 1548, when the chantry estate was passed to the Crown, there was no vicarage.

How many of the above curates were actually in residence is not known; some may have tried to live in the parvis above the porch or have resided at the Church House (now the Fleur de Lis) in West Street, constructed in the early 1540s.

After John Haynes in 1685, no more vicars were presented and it would seem that the church drifted along with the help of “stray curates”.

The patrons from 1716 were the Rodbard family; they eventually found “a-well-to-do“ friend in Reginald Bean, who came to live at the Gables in North Street. He was never inducted by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, but simply flourished under the title of “Rector Impropriator” in 1754.

Through all these adverse years, non-conformity continued to rise in Stoke.

There then follows a period of 60 years of uncertainty, regarding ministers and curates serving the parish, no doubt due to the lack of a vicarage and the poor stipend.

The Rev P. Mitchell followed Reginald Bean in 1776 and signed the registers until 1780, although he is officially recorded as curate until 1794. Then the Rev Edward Whitley took over from 1780 to 1801, helped at different times by various ministers or curates, but was officially recorded as curate from 1794 to 1812. The Rev W. Langdon signed the registers from 1801 to 1812 and was

helped out mainly by the Rev H. Rawlings. In 1812, the Rev. Thomas Gwynne Rees took over as official curate and stayed until 1821.

One amusing story comes to us regarding one member of the congregation, a John Tatchell, who was a shrewd judge of cattle and usually went to church in full-length boots and carried a billhook to mend hedges on his way.

He loved a hymn and on one occasion slept whilst one was being sung. Waking up with a portentous yawn, he exclaimed to the astonishment of the congregation, "I never made such a bargain in my life". His body was in church, but his soul was in the market!

The Rev William Langdon, vicar of Montacute, was back again in 1821. Although John Jarratt is officially recorded as curate from 1826-36 he, in fact, signs the parish registers from 1822 until 1830 helped by Richard Colston Phelips in 1827. From 1830-36, when he was allowed to resign, he employed other curates, one was J. Beagley Naylor from 1831-34, followed by George Robbins from 1836-37.

The benefice was augmented by a parliamentary grant in 1826 and the worst days were over. The stipend went up to £104, but there was still no vicarage.

In 1831, the patronage passed from the Rodbard family by marriage to Thomas Hawkesworth. He did much to create a stable benefice at Stoke. In 1834, his daughter Jane married William Truell, who in 1837 became curate of Stoke. They lived at The Cottage at Lower East Stoke where their two sons were born: Robert in 1837, became a Major General and was at the Indian Mutiny, and William Henry in 1843, became a vicar.

William Truell in 1842, along with his father-in-law Thomas Hawkesworth, made great efforts to have a vicarage built. They raised over £550, but for reasons unknown the vicarage was never built and William left to become curate of Tyneham, Dorset, where he died in 1885.

On Census Sunday 1851, there was a general congregation of 73 in the morning plus 82 Sunday School children, and 216 in the afternoon with 104 children.

William Greenslade arrived in 1852, he also lived at The Cottage. He signed the registers as a curate from 1852 up until November 1868, from then on he and all the following clergy sign themselves as vicars.

William was quite an energetic character. He discovered the tympanum in the church porch in 1856 and was responsible for organising the renovation of the chancel arch in 1862.

Also in 1868, he took John Darby (a farmer at Parsonage Farm, now the Priory) to the High Court and sued him for turning sheep into the churchyard, stating that he had first objected in 1865. However, as the churchyard was the property of the patron Thomas Hawkesworth and John Darby was his tenant, the court gave judgement in favour of John Darby.

Frederick Shepherd became vicar in 1875 and immediately set about the building of a vicarage. A subscription list was opened and £1,996 was raised. Dr Walter W. Walter successfully negotiated with the Duchy of Cornwall for a grant of land and the vicarage was built in 1878-79. At last all was put right after the wrongs of 1548. Sadly Frederick ended his life by hanging himself in 1884.

During the incumbency of the Rev William Rowland, vicar from 1884 to 1904, a remarkable wedding took place. At the encouragement of some very over zealous matchmakers, John Chislet (nicknamed Jack Poodloo) was persuaded to marry Elizabeth Minchinton (nicknamed Lizzy Chitt). The wedding day was on 18th January 1897. The church was overfull and the vicar had to call order. Afterwards the horse intended to draw the wagon through the village was dispensed with and the wagon was man-pulled, with Stoke Military Band leading the procession. It was like a carnival, the streets were filled with cheering people and the pubs were open all day.

The next vicar in 1904 was Reyner Edward William Cosens who, by 1909, was unfrocked for an adulterous affair.

His successor in 1909 was the Rev George Gustavus Monck, Prebendary of Wells Cathedral, a dynamic and warm-hearted man and perhaps one of the best-loved vicars of the past century. With enthusiasm he set about the long-neglected task of restoration. George Monck retired in 1918 and died in 1920.

In 1919, the Rev Herbert Jocelyn Davis took over, to be followed by the Rev Douglas Ballard, who arrived in 1925. He researched the history of the church's vicars and patrons. During his time, in 1940, electric light was installed at the church, which must have made a big difference to the clergy and the congregation alike.

The Hawkesworth family continued to be patrons until 1947 when the Church Patronage Trust took over. There was a union with Norton-sub-Hamdon parish in 1948.

The Rev Edgar James Pulman became vicar in 1954, followed by the Rev Cecil Wallis Whipp in 1959, when the union with Norton was dissolved.

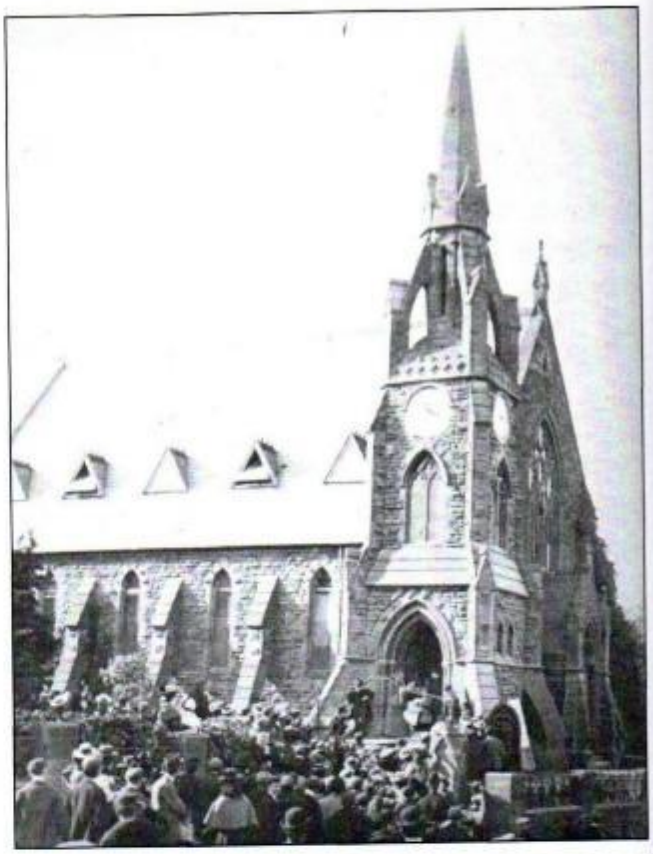
The Rev Francis William Thomas was vicar in 1967, followed by the Rev Jack Edward Marshall in 1975, the Rev Stuart R. Broughton in 1979, the Rev Howard Adrian Hallet in 1984, and the present vicar, the Rev Peter Kerton-Johnson in 2000.

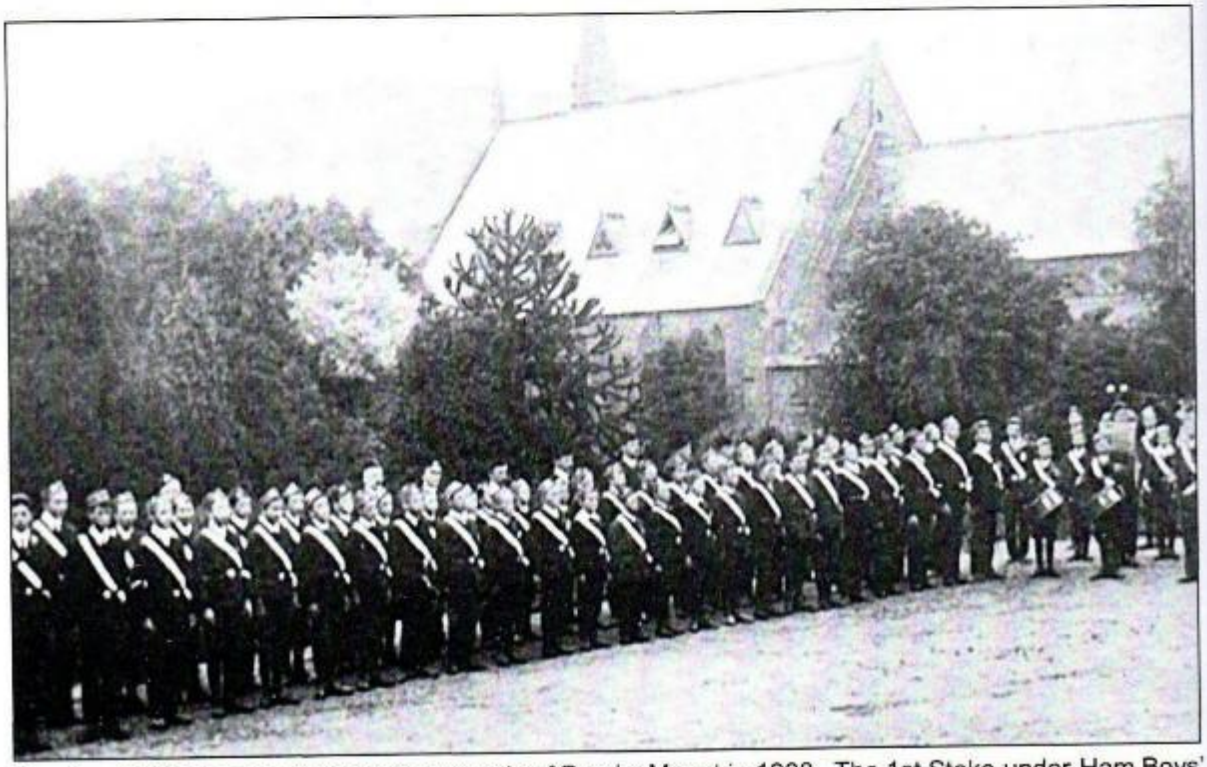
Since the beginning of the 1800s, a considerable amount of restoration has been carried out in the church at a cost of many thousands of pounds. The parishioners of Stoke regard their church

with great love and pride, and with a sense of obligation to preserve the church for generations to come.

The parish registers date from 1558 but are not complete and the Churchwarden's accounts date from 1728 to 1853. Once kept at the church, they are now kept at the Somerset Record Office at Taunton. The first recorded baptism was of Dorothy, daughter of Henrie Palmer. The first marriage was of William Braine. The first burial was of John Lide. The church plate includes a cup and cover inscribed with the date 1635.

The clock on the United Reformed Church, North Street, was installed in April, 1898 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The funds for the clock were raised by public subscription.





The Boys' Brigade on parade in the grounds of Brocks Mount in 1908. The 1st Stoke-under-Ham Boys' Brigade was formed in 1892 and ran until 1979. It was reformed in 2001 as the 2nd Stoke-sub-Hamdon Boys' Brigade.

United Reformed Church

The roots of the Stoke Congregational Church can be traced back to a group of Independents who worshipped in a barn on the north side of the High Street, and Calvinistic Baptists who used a room licensed for worship in 1861, in the glove factory of Richard Southcombe. At this time, many non-conformists travelled to Montacute Baptist Church or the South Petherton and Martock Congregational Churches, to worship on a Sunday.

It was decided in June 1865 that a great effort should be made to build a Congregational Church in the village. A subscription list was opened and permission obtained from the Duchy of Cornwall to build on a piece of land in North Street.

However, before we look at the church, we will describe the area where it was built.

On the site of the Manse and the Infant School Room, there was a thatched farmhouse and barn. Unfortunately, these were burnt down in August 1862 on the day of a village fete. Close to the road and in the front garden of the Manse were three old cottages that were later demolished. To the left and in front of the church there was a dirty pool called Cole's Pool.

The church we now see was built in the Gothic style with a spire. The foundation stone was laid on 18th October 1865. During the ceremony, a document along with two newspapers were enclosed in a bottle and placed under the foundation stone. The church was designed by architect Mr Reynolds, and built by Mr Bennet, both of Weymouth. The opening service was 6th September 1866, after which 300 people sat down to dinner in the school room in the undercroft and 400 to a tea in a marquee on the Plot.

The building cost £1,595, which was raised by subscription and paid for by the end of the day. At the same time, a subscription was also opened for the building of a manse and £100 was raised. The manse was constructed between 1867 and 1870.

In 1875, the church was extended and the Infant School Room added as a separate building at the back of the church. In 1877, the freehold of the church and the manse was purchased from the Duchy for £200.

Further renovations are recorded in 1879, the gallery at the back of the church was probably added at this time. Extensive alterations were also made in 1889, when the organ was moved to its present position. The rostrum was lowered, and room was made for choir stalls, and a platform erected in front of the rostrum. The choir previously sang from the gallery at the back of the church.

The clock was added in 1898 to commemorate 60 years of Queen Victoria's reign. The gallery was enlarged in 1908 by George Fane of Stoke and cost £93. In 1988 the clock was repaired and the spire and roof were rebuilt, at a total cost of £69,000.

The "French" organ was acquired by Julia Southcombe in 1876. It was built by Fincham and Son of London to a French design. It has some unusual features and parts of it are tonally exquisite. It is likely to have been purchased at a very reasonable price due to a cancellation and in 1877 was insured for £250.

Julia is recorded as playing the organ in 1879, and no doubt continued to do so until at least 1910, when she was succeeded by her son Percy Southcombe, who played until 1935. This brought to an end 56 years of playing by the Southcombe family. Mention must also be made of Mildred Brailey, who played the organ for 30 years, from 1953 to 1983.

In days gone by, the Congregational Church was the dominant church community of Stoke. No doubt this was helped by its central position in the village as opposed to the remoteness of the parish church.

In the days of the Congregational "School Treat", hundreds of people would parade throught the streets of Stoke, carrying banners and led by Stoke Band. The parade would end on the Plot (Memorial grounds) where refreshments were provided.

The church has been home to various organisations since its foundation. The main groups were the Men's Own, the Women's Own, the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Build, and for many years it could boast an excellent choir. This was founded in 1867 and was famed for its Good Friday Concerts. In 1893, the choir sang Handel's "Messiah".

The 1st Stoke-under-Ham Boys' Brigade was formed in 1892. It was a very popular organisation, with the boys participating in various activities such as football, camping, cooking, gymnastics, cricket and the Boys' Brigade Band. In the 1950s, a Boys' Brigade Social Club was held in the old box factory at the top of North Street.

A junior version of the Boys' Brigade call the Life Boys was started in 1939 and ran until 1969. The Girls' Brigade was in existence in 1976 and ran until 1982. Unfortunately, the Boys' Brigade finished in 1979, but was reformed again as the 2nd Stoke-sub-Hamdon Boys' Brigade in 2001 in connection with the parish church. They meet on a Thursday at All Saints Hall, Stoke.

The first mention of the Girls' Guild was in 1897 and again in 1910 in the Congregational records. In 1941, the parish magazine states that 69 girls were enrolled, many of them were evacuees. From then on, they are regularly mentioned in the magazine as taking part in team games, general knowledge tests, folk dancing and the annual concert. From 1958 to 1985 the Guild was run by Margaret Affleck, who organised events, including the very successful concerts. The Guild continued until 1990.

In the past at Christmas time, the school room doubled up as a sorting office for Christmas mail; as facilities have improved at the post office, this is no longer necessary.

Until it was sold for redevelopment, the Infant School Room built on a small piece of land at the back of the church in 1875, was home for many years to Stoke Band. The band now practices in a room at the back of the church.

In 1968, the church was united with the Congregational Churches of Bower Hinton and Middle Lambrook and then South Petherton (which closed a few years later). In 1972, the Congregational movement joined with the Presbyterians and created the United Reformed Church.

LIST OF MINISTERS

1866	S. Hebditch
1868	W. Mayberry
1874	R. Henry
1882	T. Webster
1893	W. Bremner
1901	W. H. Meir
1907	E. Skilton
1917	E. Roe
1926	R. N. Davies
1934	C. Hodges B.A.
1951	A. Thackeray
1957	W. O. James
1963	C. W. George
1975	A. Taggart
1981	R. Wiggins
1985	D. Woffenden
1988	Margaret Lawrie
1999-2008	Kathryn Taylor

This building, up until the Supression of the Chantries Act in 1548, was the home of the priests who served the chantry at the chapel of St. Nicholas, at the castle. Bought by the National Trust in 1946 and renamed the Priory.

Stoke Band providing the entertainment at the May Day Fayre, 2008. This was the first time the event was held at the Priory.

The Priory

Only in the 20th century has this building become known as the Priory. It never was one, neither was it ever monastic in any way. It is also not certain that the priests who served there belonged to any particular order, although at least one authority has described them as Augustinian canons. On 18th and 19th century maps, it is called "Parsonage Farm".

Our knowledge of the building begins in 1304, when John Beauchamp II and his mother Cecily founded the Collegiate Chantry for five priests, one to be nominated Provost. Their duties were to serve the free chapel of St Nicholas at the manor house, and to say mass daily for the souls of the Beauchamp family and their friends. For details of the foundation deed concerning the chantry, (see page 19). The original five priests are listed as Reginald de Moncketon who was the Provost, Henry Cros, Thomas de Attebere, John Champion and William de Schipton. Records of successive provosts and brethren have been printed by the Somerset Record Society.

The priests were also involved in farming, healing the sick, caring for the poor, wine making and herb gardening.

As an endowment (income) for the upkeep of the chantry, John Beauchamp II had lands and tithes in Stoke, Shepton Beauchamp and elsewhere. To ensure a permanent income, these lands, with the permission of the King, had to be separated from the Beauchamp estate.

They were also given the advowson of the parish church and two-thirds of its income, while the remaining third was for the support of the vicar which they appointed.

Sadly, life at the chantry was not altogether easy, as one crisis followed another. In 1375, there was a dispute over the vicars income and in January 1349, it was affected by the Black Death.

By 1444, finances were very much in decline. Eventually Bishop Beckington intervened, since the patronage of the Beauchamps had ended. The Provost, Thomas Bisshop, was suspended and the chantry was placed in the control of the Treasurer of Wells, Hugh Kene, who was also associated with the Treasurer's House at Martock.

Bishop Beckington ordered the repair and restoration of the college buildings and what we see today is evidence of the scale of restoration. After his visit in 1444, the college was seldom, if ever, up to the full strength of five priests.

William Coorte became Provost in 1473 and enjoyed 36 years of permitted non-residence, delegating it instead to two deputies, one for the chapel of St Nicholas and one for the parish church. Since the building was not monastic, it was left untouched by Henry VIII, who appointed the last two provosts, George Woolsett and Thomas Canner or Carmer - both Royal Chaplains.

The records of 1540 tell us that ten tenants from Shepton Beauchamp paid the following tithes to the Provost of Stoke: 27 bushels of rye and four pence in money. By 1548, the tithes were valued at 66 shillings and eight pence.

However, the Suppression of the Chantries Act of 1548 brought the Collegiate Chantry to an end and its lands and tithes were seized by the Crown.

LIST OF PROVOSTS

1304 Reginald de Moncketon
1307 Thomas de Netelcombe
1328 Lawrence le Yonge
1393 Richard Martyn
? Roger Lombe
1420 Robert Wyche
1436 Thomas Bisshop (suspended 1444)
1444 John Bowde, Chaplain under Hugh Kene
1460 John Shirwell
1468 Robert Botley
1472 John Trivola
1473 William Coorte
1508 John Glyn
1534 George Woolsett, Doctor of Canon Law, 1522
1542 Thomas Canner or Carmer
1548 Suppressed

LEASE HOLDERS AND TENANTS OF THE PRIORY

After the suppression of the chantries, the property was leased by the Crown in 1548 to Elizabeth Darrell. Her family home was Littlecote in Wiltshire. She was for many years, the mistress of Sir Thomas Wyatt, a cousin of Anne Boleyn.

Elizabeth was related to the infamous Wild Will Darrell, who was suspected in 1575 of throwing a new-born baby onto a blazing fire. Surprisingly, he was never brought to trial, no doubt due to the influence of a relative, Sir John Popham, to whom he later mortgaged his house. Will Darrell was killed in a riding accident at Littlecote in 1589.

Littlecote was often visited by Jane Seymour and it was from there that Henry VIII courted her. Jane Seymour's grandmother was Elizabeth Darrell who married Sir John Seymour. Elizabeth and Jane were probably 2nd or 3rd cousins.

Elizabeth Darrell, in 1560, became the second wife of Robert Strode, who was then living in the provost's house in Stoke. It is unclear when Robert of Parnham, Dorset, moved to Stoke. He married his first wife, also called Elizabeth, daughter of Reginald Huddie or Hody of Pilsden, in about 1522. Her grandfather, William Hody, was Chief Baron of the Exchequer under King Henry VII (r1485-1509).

The Strodes were one of the most notable families in the West Country and in 1623 a sixteen-generation pedigree of them was recorded by the College of Heralds. In 1255, one member of the family is recorded as a witness to a charter of Robert Beauchamp V.

The Queen's servant, Cuthbert Vaughan, acquired the reversion of the lease in 1560, which two years later he sold to Richard Sprynghame. Sprynghame and his wife Mary sold the reversion to William Burde in 1565, who transferred it to the Crown in 1579.

Three years later in 1582, Thomas, the second son of Robert Strode, leased the estate. On the panelling of the drawing room are his initials "TS" and the date 1585. On 11th August 1567, Thomas married Theophila Clifton at St Peters, Cheap Street, London. Her father, who died in 1563, had bought Barrington Court.

Thomas and Theophila had several children: John, born 1568; Thomas, born 1571; Elizabeth, born 1575; Anne, born 1582; also Dorothy and Jane, dates unknown.

Thomas died on 26th May 1595; his effigy can be seen in the chancel of the parish church.

The following extracts are taken from his will:

> "To be buried in the chancel of the parish church of Stoke. Twelve pence to Wells Cathedral. Twenty shillings to the parish church of Stoke. Five shillings to the poor man's chest of Stoke. Ten shillings to the same at Beminster.
>
> To Theophila Strode, my wife, all that the Provostrie, Free Chapel and Rectory of Stoke-under-Hamdon, together with all the houses, buildings, orchards, gardens, meadows, pastures, feeding, leasures, rentes, reversions, tithes, profits, commodities, casualties and advantages whatsoever to the same Provostrie, Free Chapel and Rectory.

If she die or be married, then all the above to the use of John, my son.

To John Strode, my son, the bed whereon I now lye.

Edward Gould of Northover, Barnard Gould of Preston, Richard (?Parris) of Charde owe me one hundred pounds.

To my son Thomas Strode, one hundred and fifty pounds at 21.

To my daughter, Anne Strode, one hundred pounds at 18 and £6.14s.4d. yearly till she is 18.

Will proved 26th May 1595.

Thomas' widow Theophila married Anthony Parsons of Martock at Stoke parish church on 6th March 1596. Therefore due to the conditions of the will, John, the eldest son, inherited his father's property and no doubt resided at Parsonage Farm.

He married Joan Holt and they had the following children: Katherine, born 1602; Robert, born 1604; John II, born 1610; Hugh, born 1611; George, born 1614; Richard, born 1615; Wadham, born 1616; Henry, born 1618; Helen, born 1619; Gregorie, born 1621; Thomas and Margaret, dates unknown.

The eldest son Robert settled at Netherbury, Dorset. John I died in 1621.

A Thomas Strode was occupying the house about 1633, and the family was probably still living on the estate in 1652.

John Strode II married Mary (surname not traced). We can see his signature, dated 1649 in the Stoke parish register. Only two children can be traced, George who was baptised in 1659 and John III who was born around 1660. John II died in 1682.

John III married another Mary (surname not traced) and continued the line. John died in 1725 and was buried in the chancel of the parish church. His will, proved in 1727, mentions two sons and six daughters: Edward, George, Elizabeth, Mary, Ann, Katherine, Sarah and Joan.

One of the daughters, Mary, in 1728 married John Chaffey of East Stoke at the parish church. Edward died in 1769 and was the last Strode recorded in Stoke parish registers.

From 1762 until 1815, the rectory estate was leased or rented to members of the Chaffey family. In 1820, the tenant was Charles Cave; members of the Cave family emigrated to Australia in 1840, including one John Darby Cave, son of Charles. He held several important positions in Burra, South Australia. Descendants of the family still live in Australia.

William Darby became a tenant in 1848 and John Darby in 1873; he was succeeded by the Tatchell, Parker, Moore, Fane and Lord families. The property was purchased by the National Trust in 1946 and renamed the Priory. In 1968, Phyllis Ireland resided there in order to research the history for the National Trust.

OWNERS OF THE PRIORY

So far, since the Suppression of the Chantries Act in 1548, only the lease holders and tenants have been mentioned. The actual succession of owners is a different story.

The property came into the hands of the Crown in 1548 and was held by various lease holders until it reverted back to the Crown in 1579.

In 1591, John Robinson and Laurence Singleton were given the reversion of Strode's estate. By the time of his death in 1610, John Robinson owned both the patronage of the parish church and the rectory estate, but only the reversionary interest in the house.

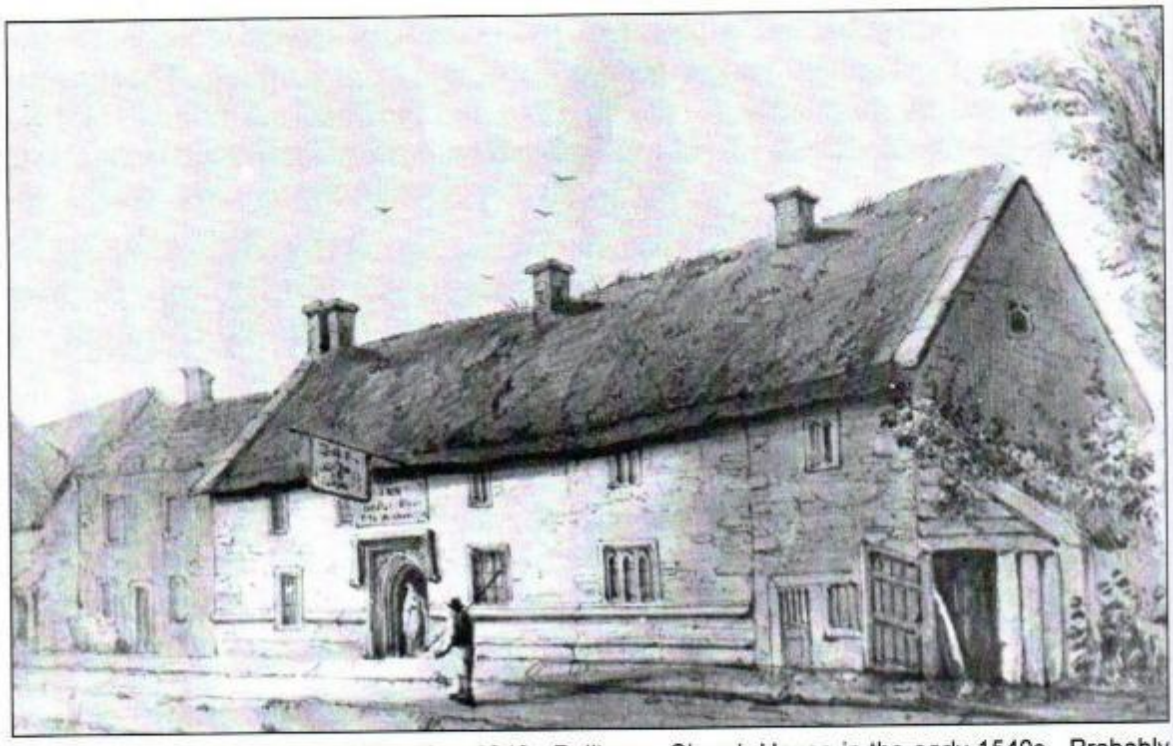
He bequeathed the estate to his second son, John of Gravesend, Kent and the reversion of the house to his eldest son Robert. John bought his brother's interest in 1612. The property then passed to his grandson, Sir John Robinson of Denston, Suffolk.

Sir John died in 1712 and his trustees sold the house and the rectory estate to Thomas Rodbard, who died in 1716. However, in 1713, the estate was conveyed to his nephew John, Lord of the Manor of Merriott and son of William Rodbard of Middle Chinnock. John Rodbard died in 1744, his memorial and heraldic device can be seen in Merriott church.

He left two sons, Henry and John. Henry succeeded as Lord of the Manor of Merriott and later became Sheriff of Somerset. His brother John succeeded to the rectory estate. He was also a linen draper in London and had two illegitimate daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah Ellis. They both later assumed the name of Rodbard by an Act of Parliament and were granted armorial bearings by the College of Arms. They acquired joint control of the estate in 1774. Their father John died in 1780.

Sarah married Sir Eyre Cooten in 1787, and sold her share of the estate to Elizabeth for £2,000. Sir Eyre Coote was a Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath and a Major-General in the army and his grand monument can be seen in Westminster Abbey.

Elizabeth married in 1793, Dr Andrew Bain of Hanover Square, London, and later Hethfelton, East Stoke, Dorset. In 1827, the estate passed to their daughter Sarah Francis Bain, who in 1831 married Thomas Hawkesworth of Weymouth. This, the estate and the parish church, passed to the Hawkesworth family.



The Fleur-de-Lis Inn, by W.W.Wheatley, 1848. Built as a Church House in the early 1540s. Probably became an inn in the late 1700s. The Manor Court was held here until 1889. *By kind permission of the Somerset Arch. and Natural History Society.*

The Royal George Club Day, early 1890s, parading along the High Street. The aim of the club was to provide assistance to its members in time of need. Note the thatched house on the right, burnt down between 1907 and 1913.

Thomas died in 1881 and left the estate to his son, William Bain Hawkesworth. He sold most of the property in 1897, retaining only the house and 34 acres of land. On his death in 1915, he was succeeded by his two sons, Thomas Ayscough Hawkesworth, who died in 1939 and Charles Mackenzie Hawkesworth, who died in 1945. Charles Peter Hawkesworth, the son of Charles, succeeded and sold the property to the National Trust in 1846.

DESCRIPTION

The Priory buildings are approached by the great arched gateway in North Street. Either side of this gateway are supporting buttresses. On the north side is a 14th century pedestrian entrance, now walled up, adjacent to which were the stables. On the gable end of the stables there is an ancient sundial, which was restored by the Parish Council in 1938.

Sections of the building are probably earlier than 1304 and may well have been the residence of Hendy de Wyke, Rector of St Nicholas and private chaplain to the Beauchamps in 1292 (or earlier), until his resignation in 1304.

Most of the mediaeval house was restored by Bishop Beckington in the 15th century, although several ogee-headed features (arch of two curves each drawn from one centre) suggest that parts are of an earlier date. The plan is L-shaped with the principal wing facing north and the east wing facing the street frontage. The principle wing consists of a hall at the west end, a porch in the centre and chapel on the east side, all with supporting buttresses.

After passing through the 15th century two-storeyed porch which has a 15th century window above the archway, you will find yourself in the screen passage, with the Great Hall on the right. The hall became two storeys during the 17th century, but the upper floor has now gone, displaying an arch-braced collar-beam roof, restored in 1961. The fireplace, now filled in, is not an original feature, taking the place of a large window.

The windows were also replaced in the 17th century, except the lower window nearest the porch which is earlier. Between this window and the door is an ogee-headed recess. On the opposite wall between the fireplace and the stone screen is a filled-in doorway, whose purpose is unclear.

The small bay or parlour leading off the hall was also originally open to the roof. Once it had a fine south window, now walled up, but the outline is still visible from the outside. In 1894, it was described as a four light Perpendicular window with carved mullions.

The bay also includes another ogee-headed recess and two fireplaces. The fireplaces and windows are 17th century. Beside the fireplace is a little lean-to building, perhaps a store or a garderobe. The western wall of the hall and bay are not mediaeval and the wall may have originally extended further west.

We now return to the screen passage, on the right of which is an ogee-headed doorway leading to a stairway, now blocked. Next to it are the remains of a similar door also blocked, which gave access to the service rooms.

At the end of the screen passage, another 15th century doorway leads onto an inner courtyard. The dwelling house and attached buildings (not open to the public) have undergone much alteration over the centuries. Two rooms on the ground floor are of particular interest. One is the drawing room or parlour. The chimney projection is an original feature, but the present fireplace and windows are 17th century. This room also has Elizabethan panelling part of which is 1585, with the initials "TS" for Thomas Strode. Unfortunately, over the centuries the panelling has received much repair and white paint.

The other room of interest is the dining room, which has an oak beam ceiling and an impressive fireplace on the south side. In 1967, a brick oven was uncovered to the left of the fireplace.

In the east facing window of this room are two lights of modern glass, placed here in 1969. One commemorates the first Provost, Reginald de Monckton, and one commemorates Bishop Beckington, who restored the buildings in the 15th century. Another light of glass now placed in the north window of the Provost's private chapel, shows the Provost and brethren in 1304, receiving the foundation deed from John Beauchamp II and Cecily Beauchamp, his mother.

Upstairs is a large bedroom which could have been the dormitory for the priests. A window was discovered in the south-west corner during restorations in 1967, suggesting parts of the wing are 13th century. The north-west door led to a gallery above the screen passage and overlooked the Great Hall. The gallery may have been used by musicians.

A doorway on the north wall of the bedroom leads into what was the Provost's private chapel, above this room is the bell-cote. On the south side of the chapel is an original mediaeval piscina in excellent condition, which was discovered in 1967. It has the unusual feature of being a piscina and squint combined, allowing those in the dormitory a full view of the chapel. On the north side is a small 15th century window, probably offset to clear the altar. Whether there was an original east window is not clear, but the existing mullioned window is 16th or 17th century.

It has been suggested that the ground room or undercroft was where "dole" or food was given to the poor. This room has an ogee-headed external doorway, and a doorway and hatch linking it with the former service rooms.

The building at the end of the south range is likely to have been the kitchen which because of the danger from fire, once stood detached from the main building. The structure now joining the two buildings is probably 16th century.

The dovecote is the most interesting of the outbuildings with 500 nesting niches, since it was unusual for the Lord of the Manor to permit any dovecote to be built, apart from the one at the manor house.

The Great Barn is mediaeval in origin and of the ecclesiastical type, but it lacks decoration compared to the Great Barn at Glastonbury. There are several splayed window slots and quatrefoil windows at each end.

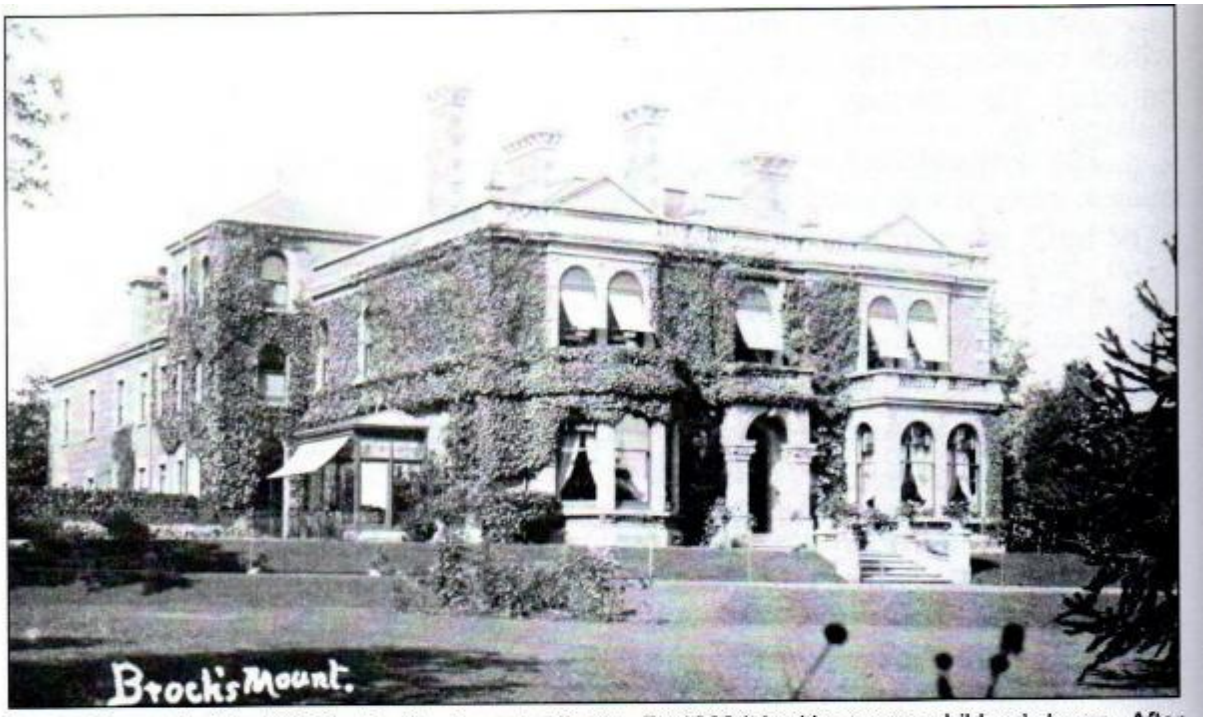
Sadly, on the 20th September 1969, fire destroyed the ancient roof of the lesser of the great barns.

The Priory has witnessed many feasts within its walls, especially Royal events and the Victorian Jubilees. One occasion was the celebration of the marriage of Edward, Prince of Wales, to Alexandra of Denmark in 1863, when a public dinner consisting of roast beef and plum pudding was served to about 1,200 villagers. These feasts were usually followed by a fair and sports in the Plot nearby (now Memorial grounds).

Later that day a dance was held in the barn, the music provided by a German band hired for the occasion and the drum and fife band. In the evening, a torchlight procession marched to the top of Ham Hill headed by the bands, where a large bonfire was lit and a display of fireworks brought the celebrations to an end.

In 2007 and 2008, The National Trust granted permission for the May Fayre to be held in the grounds of the Priory, thus continuing a link between the village and its mediaeval history.

When viewing the Great Barn from Ham Hill, it still looks the most imposing building in Stoke.



Brocks Mount, built in 1885 for the Southcombe family. By 1923 it had become a children's home. After a fire in March 1930, only a section remained which became the home of Kendic Radio. The property was demolished in 2000.

Castle Street and Stoke Elementary Day School taken in the 1890s, prior to the school extension being built in 1901. Note the thatched house at Castle Cross.

Buildings of Note

THE FLEUR DE LIS INN

This building was originally called the Church House but is now known as the Fleur de Lis. It stands on land that did not belong to the Duchy of Cornwall until the 18th century, but was part of the estate associated with the college buildings of the Beauchamp chantry (now called the Priory). The purpose of the building was to serve as a parish meeting house and community room and was home to the Manor Court from the 1540s to 1889.

Evidence in the form of two wills both proved in 1544, points to the fact that the building was constructed around this time. The will of John Hopkins leaves money for the walling and timbering of the Church House while Joan Chaffye, widow, leaves money for the new fabric of the Church House. It is interesting to note that the building was constructed between two significant religious events. The first was the Dissolution of the Monasteries starting in 1535, and the Suppression of the Chantries in 1548.

The main features at the front of the building are two late Perpendicular doorways in rectangular frames, with a foliate design on the upper stonework. The door at the west end was brought from the rear of the building shortly before 1930, where it had been hidden under masonry. Although this type of doorway is usually listed as about 1450, the remaining original two-light window at the rear is late 1400s, indicating that they came from earlier buildings. In Taunton Museum there is a corbel (roof support) taken from the building.

An ancient cross at the top of the stairs, may have come from the chapel of St Nicholas at the castle. On the outside, the original plinth course and moulding remain, while inside the large east-end fireplace is impressive. Although the property has suffered from continuous alteration, the recent renovation of the public bar has, however, given it an old world charm more characteristic of its age.

W. W. Wheatley's watercolour of 1848 shows the building to be thatched and with most of the original windows, giving it much more charm than it now has. One of the bedrooms is reputed to be haunted.

In the Duchy Survey of 1775-76, it is listed as the Church House, orchard and garden, the property of the Duchy of Cornwall, and had since 1765 been leased to a Thomas Everett. The property could well have been bought in 1765 by the Duchy from the Rodbard family, who owned the estate to which the Church House belonged. In the 1905 parish rate book, it is still listed as belonging to the Duchy of Cornwall, but may have been sold to the Western Counties Public House Trust Ltd by 1910.

The inn was owned or leased by the Western Counties Public House Trust Ltd for over 50 years until Eldridge Pope Brewery, Dorchester, bought it in the late 1960s. In 2007, the estate of Eldridge Pope Ltd was sold to Marston's PLC of Burton-on-Trent.

There is no known date as to when the building became an inn. This could have happened in 1765, when the Duchy issued the lease on the property, or later on towards the end of the 1700s. Stoke Friendly Society, registered in 1812, was based at the Fleur.

THE FIVES COURT

In 1754, the Bishop of Bath and Wells ordered that the game of "fives" should not be played against church towers due to the damage caused to the windows, masonry and the churchyard. The result was that several fives walls and courts were constructed in Somerset, one being in the garden of the Fleur de Lis Inn at Stoke.

The wall, one of the best in Somerset, is built of hamstone, finely faced and is not unlike the first stage of a church tower. It has a curved top cornice with a stone ball at each end and is supported by angled buttresses. The design suggests that the wall was constructed towards the end of the 1700s.

The game of fives was played with a ball, probably made from a small piece of cork, around which wool was tightly compressed, it was then covered with leather. At Stoke, players pitched the ball onto a piece of hamstone about six feet square and set about 20 paces from the base of the tower. As the ball bounced up, the player hit it with a bare hand aiming to strike a certain point on the tower. The player had to put a spin on the ball to make it return to the stone square, thereby scoring a point. There was also a referee or caller and certain points on the tower had to be hit at different times. The ball would be struck alternately by each player or team of players.

On other fives courts the stone base might be smaller, as at Martock, where it measured just 15 inches and was known as the "hopping stone". Although there is no clear indication of how the score was calculated, at Martock there remains a rudimentary tally system consisting of a series of peg holes in the church wall. Sometimes the score was kept on a tally stick and was called after each five points until 21 was reached.

In 1855, the Bath Fives Team, the champions of England, accepted a challenge to play on this court against the Stoke players, John Palmer and Frederick Fane. The tower was surrounded on three sides by grandstands and in excess of £60 was taken on the gate. The Stoke team won the game and became the English champions. John Palmer could also strike the ball against the wall and make it rebound onto the inn roof, nearly 38 to 40 yards away.

The last game to be played was probably around 1887, when Frederick Fane was challenged by three Scotsmen. The match was to commence at 7.00am, and the prize a champagne breakfast. Frederick won and was back at work by 9.00am.

THE GABLES

One of the most delightful houses in Stoke is The Gables, in North Street. It looks like a small Elizabethan manor house. It has a central full height gabled porch, and attic gabled windows. The original house was two storeys with attics, three bays wide and one deep and had a central stairway projection at the back.

It is almost certainly on former Priory land and has never been associated with the Duchy of Cornwall.

The house probably dates from the early 1600s, since the date 1615 is scratched on stonework near the front door. The original owner is unknown but could have been the Strode family who were resident in the village from 1560. The Rodbard family was associated with the property from 1757 until 1886.

The most notable feature is the plaster ceiling in the drawing room, which is a fine example of Tudor work with moulded ribs and a floral design incorporating a Tudor rose in the panels. It is reputed to be the work of the plasterers of Montacute House.

The hall contains some original oak panelling, as does the drawing room, which has a Tudor fireplace. In 1911, when owned by Mary Gillet, alterations included a southern extension of the drawing room in which a doorway dated 1726 was re-set.

A new south-east room was added early in the 18th century and contains an 18th century fireplace, windows and panelling, with an adjoining stairway at the east end of the house.

At some time in the past, a small extension was added to the north side of the house, probably in the time of the Rodbard family. Upstairs in the extension, a fireplace was built on which a stone shield was carved showing a double-eagle. The double eagle is also displayed on a brass plaque relating to Henry Lucas Bean in the chancel of the parish church. More early plaster work can be seen in other bedrooms.

In 1757, The Gables became the residence of the Rev Reginald Bean, Rector Impropriator of Stoke, until his death in 1776. He appears to have been a well-to-do friend of John Rodbard, who was the church patron and Lord of Merriott. One can easily imagine a typical 18th century parson of the character of his contemporary, Parson James Woodforde, the author of "The Diary of a Country Parson, 1758-1802".

The following are the children of Rev Reginald Bean and his wife Christian; John, born 1757, died 1764; Reginald, born 1759, died 1784; Ann Pryor, born 1760; Alice, born 1762; Sylvester Pryor, born 1763; and Christian, born 1765.

The Rev Reginald Bean died 1776, aged 45 years. Perhaps his best memorial is the well-documented summer house that he built, which stood in the garden of The Gables until 1905, with a roof gorgeously painted bearing the following legend:

"This parlour was built for to drink and smoke. At the foolish expense of the parson of Stoke."

His only surviving son, Sylvester Pryor Bean, married Mary, an illegitimate daughter of Henry Rodbard, the Lord of Merriott, and Joan Butcher, so he probably held The Gables in her right. Sylvester was also a Lieutenant in the Stoke and Martock Yeomanry in 1794. He died in 1797, aged 34 years.

His widow reverted to her maiden name of Rodbard in 1844, and their son took the name of Reginald Henry Bean Rodbard. He married Emma, daughter of John Robert Lucas. In 1856, their son, Henry Lucas Bean, in association with one John Rodbard, leased the property to Dr Walter Winter Walter, the Somerset antiquarian.

Henry Lucas Bean bought two plots of land in 1858 from the Duchy of Cornwall for £16.17s.6d., one adjoined the Tunwell and Whirligig Lane and the other faced onto North Street on the south side of the house. The land bordering North Street was Fanes Farm; the house and outbuildings were knocked down in the early 1900s and incorporated into the garden of The Gables.

The Gables has a high wall bordering Whirligig Lane, which has arrow slits, but although the wall overlooks the old castle site, these are probably no more than an interesting feature.

In 1886, Henry Lucas Bean sold the Gables to Dr W. W. Walter with grounds and outbuildings for £9,000. Dr Walter kept a museum there until 1901, when he donated all his exhibits to the County Museum. Two interesting exhibits were the flag of the Stoke and Martock Yeomanry and an engraved Charles I sword, found when Gundry's Farm in the High Street was demolished.

After the death of Dr W. W. Walter in 1904, the property was owned by Mary Gillett until her death in 1944. From 1945 to 1957, The Gables was owned by Commander Fletcher R. N., from 1957 to 1960 by the Richardson family and since 1960 by the family of the late Dr F. K. Beaumont.

17th CENTURY PROPERTIES

Several 17th century houses still survive and are easily recognisable by their Jacobean doorways and mullioned windows.

Number 45, the High Street, is a house with a bay and gable dated 1674. It has recently been restored.

At Stoke Cross, a house bears the letters PEJ 1679. This building was used for many years by the Co-op as a bakery. One of the upstairs rooms had a fine floriated plaster ceiling and over the great fireplace on the east side was the inscription in plaster, "Philip and Elizabeth Johnson". Unfortunately this work was destroyed in 1963 when the building was being converted into a shop.

Number 10, the High Street, situated on the corner of the Ham Hill Road, has connections to the free church. Samuel Clark is listed in the Duchy Survey of 1775-76 as taking out a copyhold on this house which was then called Knights, on 24th June 1717. Samuel could have been a successor to Henry Parsons, the well known Dissenter who died in 1717.

Attached to this building was a meeting place, "lately used as a barn", which was licensed for worship in 1773, probably by Presbyterians. In the last quarter of the 19th century, it was the residence of John Gill Southcombe and family. On the east gable are the initials JGS and the date 1885, which is probably the date the building was renovated.

There was also a barn on the north side of the High Street, listed in the 1861 census as being used for worship by Independents. This could be the Barn Chapel founded before 1800 and used by Congregationalists which, on Census Sunday 1851, was attended by 106 people.

Opposite Ham Hill Road stands one of the best known old houses in Stoke, called Pranketts. It was built in 1695 for William Prankett. On the south front there are three gables and a good Jacobean doorway. On the north side, let into the wall, is an interesting stone with a cable moulding, perhaps taken from the castle site.

In North Street stands a house known as Hoods. This too was built in the late 17th century and bears a similar internal workmanship to Pranketts and thought to be by the same builder. Benjamin Hood lived there in 1775.

Terrell's Farm, also in North Street, is another building of interest. The front is typical of a 17th century building but other parts of the house indicate a much earlier age, perhaps as far back as the 16th century. In 1772, it was leased to William Terrell by copyhold from the Duchy.

Another house worthy of mention is situated in Lower East Stoke and bears the date 1696. Known as "The Cottage", it was used as a vicarage from at least 1837 until 1879, when the present vicarage was built. Owned by the Chaffey family, until sold in the 1980s.

A short distance from the Cottage is East Stoke Farm, (see page 132).

The building to the east side of Stoke Parish Church is called Church Farm; however, the name only goes back to 1923 and the present buildings date from 1901. In 1861, it was the site of a thatched farmhouse, cottage and farm buildings. The house was then occupied by farmer John Staple and the cottage by Benjamin Clothier, who probably worked for him.

In 1871, according to the census returns, James, the son of John Staple, rented the house, cottage and farm buildings from the Duchy with 140 acres. Ten years later he had moved to Lower East Stoke Farm, and the house was occupied by dairyman James Hill. In 1891, the dairyman is William Mullins followed in 1896, by Frederick Manuel and his large family.

A disastrous fire occurred in 1901, which was started in an outbuilding. The house was completely destroyed as were nine hayricks and two large barns. Frederick Manuel and family were cared for by neighbours, before moving to Martock.

By 1902, the house had been rebuilt and was occupied by dairyman James Male. James Staple died in 1907 and the Duchy of Cornwall took back the property, renting it out to another dairyman, Johnny Yandle. Johnny died in 1914, but his wife Kate continued to run the business, calling herself "Mrs Dairy".

The year 1923, saw the arrival of George Wakely, farmer, and thereafter it became known as Church Farm. His son William took it over, living there from 1931 to 1939, before moving to Percombe. He was followed by Sidney T. White in 1948, farmer, District Councillor and Churchwarden. After him, the Duchy sold it as a private house, the outbuildings were converted and the land was annexed to other farms.

On the left side of the present Church Farm, was an old thatched house called the "Barton". This house dates back to 1647, and was home to a branch of the Chaffey family. The house was certainly standing in the early 1890s, but could well have been destroyed by the fire.

In the Mists of Time

In years gone by, little or no protection was given to buildings of historical interest and as a result, a number have either been lost or rendered into such a state of disrepair that the observer needs a vivid imagination to picture the original structure. In this chapter we cover a number of such buildings.

THE MILL ON THE PARRETT

The historic portrayal of any mediaeval manor would not be complete without the mill. There were two in West Stoke and one in East Stoke, as recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086. The one in East Stoke was probably on the stream known as Wellham's Brook, which must not be confused with Wellham's Mill, which is in the parish of Tintinhull. A certain Eustace Wellham was named in the time of Edward I (1272-1307).

The 1287 inventory of Cecily Beauchamp records two mills: one held by Lawrence of Henton (Hinton), worth 100 shillings a year, and also a water mill held by Hug Trot worth 30 shillings a year. In 1361, two mills were again declared as part of the Demesne (land and property retained by the lord of the manor).

Up until now we have only mentioned one mill at Parrett Bridge, but two there were, as will be explained.

In 1442, the income from a fulling mill (cloth mill) adjoining Petherton Mill, as it was then known, was described as "new rent", and in 1456-57, the weir had been damaged by floods and ironwork was required to repair the mill.

The Victoria County History states that in 1514-15, Petherton Mill was held by Roger Garland, whilst the adjoining fulling mill was let to John Axe the elder, and that both mills paid rent up to 1545. Only one corn mill was mentioned in 1557 and in 1650 it was held by Mary Carter and called Stoke Mill.

The Shore family was in residence by 1759 and remained there for the rest of the mill's working life. In 1809, there was trouble with the water supply. Joylers Mill, situated further down stream in South Petherton parish, had penned the river, thus putting Parrett Mill out of action, being an undershot wheel.

The census returns show that in 1851, George Shore is a miller along with two others, Thomas Palmer and William Rendle. By 1861, George is a miller and a farmer, with millers John French and Edwin Hurley. By 1871, he is described as a farmer and John Higgens is listed as a partner in the mill.

View of the Prince of Wales Inn on Ham Hill in the early 1890s. On the right side is the Fair House, which by 1826 had become the village Poor House. Note the fir trees in the background.

Hamdon Hall began life as a church dedicated to St. Nicholas in 1903. In 1926, it became a village social venue and during WWII was requisitioned for the use of troops. Demolished in 1975 and now the site of five bungalows at Princes Close.

Finally in 1881, George is employing 10 men and is in partnership with Charles Pratt; William Harris is also listed as a miller. But unfortunately, in March 1884, the mill was destroyed by fire and the Duchy of Cornwall declined to repair it.

Over the following years, the stone was removed from the mill buildings, and in the early part of the 20th century, the tall chimney was demolished for safety reasons. In 1931, the Duchy sold the remaining stone and sadly today, all that remains is a bridge and the wheel pit.

From the above information and documentary evidence, we know that the mill must have been an extensive property, employing at times two or more millers from the 1200s until its destruction by fire in 1884.

THE POUND

At the far end of Castle Street, by the south-east corner of the outer wall of the Castle, stands a circular enclosure known as The Pound. Its purpose was to keep, or impound, stray animals until their owners collected them.

A small portion of the wall has been taken down in recent years, but its complete circumference can still be traced, surrounding the garden of a house. The date of its foundation is not known, but The Pound is mentioned in the 5th article of the 1615 Duchy Survey.

There is further mention of The Pound in the Duchy Survey of 1775-76, when it is referred to as the Manor Pound.

Duchy records state that The Pound belonged to them as "Lords of the Manor" and the Court Rolls contain many references to repairs. Between 1851 and 1899 the Duchy expended sums for repairs to the wall on 12 occasions. At the Vestry (pre Parish Council) meeting of May 1841, the Waywardens, William Terrell and Samuel Hallett, were given powers to impound stray animals. The last mention of The Pound in proper use was in 1854, when John Spracket prosecutes Henry Wills for driving his stock into The Pound. However, during World War II, a resident of the village used it as an enclosure in which pigs and chickens were kept.

STOKE CASTLE

The castle was the home of the Beauchamp family in the 13th and 14th centuries and was built by John Beauchamp I during the early years of the reign of King Edward I (r1272-1307).

In 1333, John Beauchamp II was granted a license to fortify and crenelate his house in Stoke, hence the name "Castle". The works do not seem to have been very extensive, simply a wall built all the way around the house and chapel with a moat on the north side, a large fishpond on the west side, and a smaller pond to the north-east.

The last Beauchamp in residence was John Beauchamp IV who died in 1361; his widow Alice married Sir Matthew de Gournay. She died in 1383 and by then, the manor had passed to Matthew and his second wife Philippe. Matthew died in 1406 aged 96 years and was buried in the chapel of St Nicholas. The manor was then settled on Philippe and her third husband, Sir John Tiptoft, for the remainder of her life. She died in 1417. Due to the Crown's reversionary interest, from 1421 onwards, the manor was leasehold only and it passed to the Duchy of Cornwall on the death of Tiptoft in 1443.

Geographically, the castle was sited at the centre of the manor, located a little to the north-east of the present Castle Primary School, with a good supply of water nearby from the Tunwell. The present site contains Tookery Farm, several cottages and five new houses built in the 1980s and 1990s.

According to Dr Walter Winter Walter, Stoke Castle was a fortified mansion house within a rectangular enclosure. The building was mainly domestic, since it was poorly sited from a military point of view.

When John Leland, a private chaplain to Henry VIII, visited Stoke in the early 1540s he stated, "From Montegue to Stoke under Hamden about a Mile, I saw at Stoke in a Botom hard by the Village very notable Ruines of a great Manor Place or Castelle, and yn this Maner Place remaynith a very auncient Chapelle, wheryn be diverse Tumbes of Noble Men and Wimen".

Dr W. W. Walter states that the castle was probably reduced to ruins during the Wars of the Roses (1453-1487), and in 1791, Collinson's History of Somerset describes it as a series of green mounds.

The moat was filled in by John T. Tatchell (Bullen) of Castle Farm in 1830. The castle ponds were drained but the basin of the larger one is still just visible. The spring water which once fed the moat and ponds is now taken away from the site through a culvert on the north side.

When excavating the site in 1889, Dr W. W. Walter found the foundations of sections of the enclosure walls on the north and west sides. Of the castle itself, very little was found. He writes, "Hundreds of tons of stone have been taken away over the years, even the foundations, for building purposes, some within living memory".

According to Dr W. W. Walter, on the south-west corner are the remains of an old gatehouse on which a 16th century house had been erected. Part of the plinth work can still be seen on the south side, as can the remains of jambs of a double gateway on the south-west and north-west corners of the building. The gate space measured 19 feet and was probably arched over.

Considerable portions of the outer wall of the enclosure still stand for about 80 yards, mainly on the south side.

Also on the south side, is a fine gateway built of ashlar stone (flat cut stones) which was walled up until quite recently, when it was reopened around 1976 to allow access to the new houses being built. There is a smaller similar gateway in the east wall, only 11 feet 4 inches in width and 37 yards from the south-east corner.

On the east side of the enclosure, there is a wall measuring 60 yards in length and varying in thickness from 31 to 37 inches. There is also a series of lookout holes about 7 or 8 inches square at intervals of 12 feet, situated about 5 feet above the inside ground level.

In 1906, Dr Richard H. Walter carried out further excavation at the south-east corner of the enclosure where the ground rises. Here, 17 yards south of the east gateway, he discovered foundations of a wall 4 feet thick for about 20 feet, after that it narrowed to 3 feet 6 inches and continued in a westerly direction for 80 feet before petering out. At the time of the excavation, the site was described as a builder's yard and permission to dig had to be obtained. The purpose was to find the location of the castle building, since the earlier excavations had failed to do so.

The result of the 1906 dig must have been disappointing to Dr R. H. Walter, who only had a week to conduct the excavation. His efforts were not entirely fruitless however, as listed below are some of the items added to the Walter Collection in Taunton Museum:

Fragments of stone tiling with holes for nails.
Fragments of mediaeval glazed pottery.
A 17th century trade token bearing the arms of the Strode family.

The last excavation of the castle took place in 1976, just before the new houses were built on the site. The main focus of that dig was the two gateways and also the area to the north where the ground is terraced. It showed some amount of detail to the eye of an expert, although little to the layman. A detailed report was made, but the conclusion is that the main foundations of the castle are probably under farm buildings.

A story concerning the building of the farm on the site of the old castle was told to me by my father, Vernon Richards, and it relates to his father, Benjamin, who died in 1892.

Benjamin Richards was a mason working on the site of the then new farm. Whilst digging the foundations, the ground gave way beneath him and he fell several feet into a hole. When he came to his senses, he found himself in what must have been the cellar on undercroft of the castle. An enormous fright awaited him, for there before him in a perfect state of preservation was a seated woman nursing a child. When the workmen tried to move the relics, they all crumbled to dust. The hole was then filled in and the building continued. It is impossible to say whether this tale is true or not.

THE CHAPEL OF ST NICHOLAS

It is unclear when the chapel of St Nicholas was built, but it was probably in the early reign of King Edward I. John Beauchamp I chose to be buried there in 1283, probably in front of the altar as was his right, being the founder of the chapel.

John Leland, during his visit to Stoke in the early 1540s, gave the following account of what he saw:

> "From Montegue to Stoke under Hamden about a Mile. I saw at Stoke in a Botom hard by the Village very notable Ruines of a great Manor Place or Castelle, and yn this Maner Place remaynith a very auncient Chapelle, wheryn be diverse Tumbes of Noble Men and Wimen.
>
> In the South West side of the Chapelle be 5. Images on Tumbes on hard joynid to an other, 3. of Menne harneshid and shildid, and 2. of Women. Ther hath bene Inscription on eche of them, but now so sore defaced that they cannot be redde.
>
> I saw a Shelde or 2. al verry of blew and white.
>
> Ther be in this part of the Chapelle also 2. Tumbes without Images.
>
> There is in the Northside of the Body of the Chapelle a Tumbe in the Waulle without Image or Writing, and a Tumbe with a goodly Image of a man of Armes in the North side of the Quyer of the Chapelle "with a sheld as I remember" all verrey and even afore the Quier Doore but without it lyith a very grete flatte Marble Stone with an Image in Brasse flattely graven, and this Writing yn French about it.
>
> "Iei gist le noble Vaillant and Chivaler Maheu de Gurney iadys seneschal de Landes and capitain due Chastel Daques pro nostre seignor le roy en la duche de Guyene, que en sa vie fu a la batail de Beaumarin, & ala apres a la siege Dalgezire sur le Sarazines, & auxi a les baitalles de Le scluse, de Cressy, de Yngenesse, de Peyteres, de Nazara, Dozrey & plusours autres batailles & asseges en les quex il gaina noblemen graund los & honour per le space de iiij & xvj.ans, & morust le xxxj.jour de Septembre lan nostre seignior Jesu Christ MCCCCVJ. Que de salme dieux eit mercy. Amen.

> Ther was beside this Grave another in the Westeende of the Body of the Chapelle having a gret flat stone without Inscription.
>
> I markkid un the Wyndowes 3. sortes of Armes, one al verry blew and white, another with iii Stripes Gules down right in a Feld of Gold. The 3. was Crosselettes of Gold many intermist in one un a Feld, as I remember Gules.
>
> Ther is a Provost longing to this Collegiate Chapelle now un Decay, wher sumtyme was good Service, and now but a Masse said a 3 Tymes un the Weeke. The Provost hath a large House un the Village of Stoke thereby.
>
> The notable Quarre of Stone us even therby at Hamden, out of which hath beene taken many a Day Stones for al the goodly Buildings therabout in al Quarter".

Thomas Gerard of Trent visited the chapel in 1633 and mentioned seeing fragments of a shield as Leland had done almost a century before, but by this time he noted that the tomb of Matthew de Gournay had been defaced, and sadly the brass plate had been removed.

By the end of the 17th century, the chapel was in ruins and like the castle, the stones had been removed and used in other buildings. In Stoke parish church set across the arch of St Deny's chapel is the beautiful 15th century stone screen, thought to be from the chapel of St Nicholas.

By looking at the numerous Perpendicular fragments incorporated in several buildings in the village, it is reasonable to assume that the chapel had some architectural additions in the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly to the windows, ceiling, vaulting and screen.

In 1889, Dr W. W. Walter found and identified the site of the chapel of St Nicholas, which was roughly in the centre of the castle enclosure. The site today is the garden of The Dairy House of Rookery Farm.

At the east end of the chapel was found a large flat stone raised 5 or 6 inches above the level of the floor and measuring 7 feet 6 inches by 2 feet, possibly the plinth of the altar. A little west of this, was buried a stone coffin containing the skeleton of a middle-aged man thought to be John Beauchamp II, who founded the chantry in 1304. The grave was 2 feet deep and measured from 19 inches to 21 inches wide and 5 feet 10 inches long.

Further west by 21 feet, was a cross foundation on which a screen may have rested. This could well have been the choir door spoken of by Leland, in front of which Matthew de Gournay was buried.

The Cartgate Inn, built as a coaching inn on the Fosse Way (A303) in 1815 by James Winter, glove manufacture, who also owned his own coaching business. The building was demolished in 1971 and the flyover constructed in 1989-90.

The Masons Arms, Ham Hill was closed in 1937. Charles Hobbs, a landlord in the late 19th century, was a 'quack doctor' selling various medicinal remedies. The ring to tie up the horses is still visible by the road.

Dr W. W. Walter uncovered the foundation of the north wall and the chancel which measured 19 feet 6 inches across. The floor of the nave was 2 feet lower than that of the chancel. Several encaustic (with colours burnt in) tiles bearing the coats of arms of Beauchamp, Cheney and others were found and were thought to have formed the floor of the chancel.

Also found were a 13th century piscina, also some pieces of a female effigy, and several pieces of Purbeck marble, but all other ornamental work had been beaten to pieces.

However, a paten (a shallow dish used for bread at the Eucharist) in which a silver penny was embedded, had survived and was found in the chapel floor.

The discovery, 3 or 4 feet underground, of several tobacco pipes, probably Cromwellian, suggests the time of this wanton destruction. Another theory is that the chapel of St Nicholas became a beer house in the 17th century, it being the custom then for landlords to give away tobacco pipes.

It must be asked, where have the stones from the castle and chapel gone over the centuries? A number of stone pillars built into the wall of a farm building at East Stoke are said to be from the chapel of St Nicholas, but it is more probable that they formed the doorways and fireplace of the castle. Examples of the use of pillars of similar style dating from the 13th century can be seen in Stokesay Castle, Shropshire.

More pillars are to be found in a farm building at Castle Farm in North Street. In all, there were eight such pillars found in Stoke, varying from 4 feet 10 inches to 5 feet 8 inches high, with capitals (supports) averaging 13 inches square.

Built into the walls of a private garden gateway, there is a 14th century two-light trefoil (three lobed leaf design) window head and on the north side of East Stoke Farm, a similar 14th century trefoil-headed two-light window. In West Street over a pillar box, can be seen more Perpendicular window tracery.

For many years, the local builders Englands of Ash, held the contract for all Duchy of Cornwall maintenance and demolition in Stoke and other villages. In the 1960s, this family built a new house in Ash, of mediaeval materials, as reported in the Western Daily Press of March 1990.

HAMDON HALL

Hamdon Hall, formerly known as the Mission Church of St Nicholas, but locally as the Iron Church, since the outer walls were constructed of corrugated iron sheeting. This building once stood on the site of the five bungalows which were added as Princes Close in 1983. Erected in 1905, the church was given to the village by King George V when he was

Prince of Wales. It was a place of worship until closed in 1926, when the Church School opposite the Fleur de Lis Inn was consecrated and became the Mission Church of All Saints.

At that time, the Rev Douglas Ballard held the deeds of the church of St Nicholas and after its closure, the building became known as Hamdon Hall.

Up to the beginning of World War II, the hall was used as a social venue under the control of the vicar and the Parochial Church Council. During the war, it was requisitioned for use by troops, being returned to the P. C. C after the war in 1945. In 1946, it was put on the market and sold to J. T. Brice from Yeovil for £1,000.

The hall then became a well-known venue for Saturday night dances, drawing crowds from miles around. The building was improved by pebble dashing the south and east exterior. It was sold again in 1950. In 1953, the Village Hall Committee was formed and the building was eventually conveyed to them on 19th May 1954, for the sum of £1,500.

Hamdon Hall continued as a social venue until it became redundant after the opening of the new Memorial Hall on the Plot in 1975. At that time it was owned by Yeovil District Council. They demolished the hall and developed a site of what most people thought would be two-bedroomed bungalows. However, when they were finished, they had somehow become one-bedroomed properties! It was said that if they had been correctly described in the agenda and minutes of the various meetings, the design would have been changed. But once built it was too late.

THE TRUTTS

On the east side of Wellham's mill stream, close to the A303 and the now vanished Venn Bridge, once stood two ancient long barrows called the Trutts. These were always marked on pre-World War II ordnance maps and existed until after the war, but disappeared shortly afterwards. In all probability they hindered the progress of modern farming.

Stocket – East Stoke

Ancient Stoket, known today as East Stoke, was always a separate manor within the parish of Stoke sub Hamdon.

The boundary between West and East Stoke can be traced on the Duchy Survey map of 1776. Starting by the mill stream near the A3088, the boundary goes south along Marsh Lane for about half a mile, then runs directly to the east side of the Well House at Lower East Stoke. From there it heads south-east across the grounds of East Stoke House, and on reaching the Montacute road, turns east for about 250 yards to the present Co-op. The boundary then heads south to East Stoke Woods, runs west along the bottom of the woods to meet the path from the church, and then turns south along an old boundary wall on the east side of Clarcombe Wood. At the top of the wood it crosses into Montacute parish.

Therefore in 1776, West Stoke takes in Lower East Stoke Farm, although we know from documentary evidence that Lower East Stoke Farm and surrounding buildings were always part of East Stoke.

East Stoke was a separate unit from West Stoke and has never been part of the Duchy of Cornwall. We can trace the descent of ownership from the Saxon, Alwin, of Edward the Confessor's time. He held several other estates and could have been slain at the Battle of Hastings.

The Domesday tenant was Malger or Mauger de Cartrai, who held other manors, including Ashill. Robert Vaux held possession of Ashill in 1214 followed by Hubert, probably his son, in 1235, whose daughter, Maud de Multon, was Lady of the Manor of Ashill in 1253. Her effigy can be seen in Ashill church.

In 1284, Ralph de Huppenhall held Stockett or East Stoke under Maud. In 1293, Maud died and Stockett passed to her son Thomas. Ralph de Hull, very likely the same person mentioned in 1284, was holding the tenancy under Thomas in 1297.

Thomas was succeeded by his eldest son, John, who died in 1317, when it passed to his son, another John, who unfortunately died whilst young and the lands were inherited by his sister Margaret de Multon. She married Sir John Streche of Wanbrook, Dorset. Sir John held the mesene tenancy in 1381, but it has not been traced since.

However, with the failure of the de Multon line, the de Hull family appears to have emerged as the new tenants-in-chief. A Robert de Hull was succeeded by his daughter, Catherine, and her husband, Andrew Turberville, who was in possession of Stockett by 1350. Her second husband was Robert Latimer of Duntish, Dorset. When she died in 1361, shortly after his death, it was left to her son, William Turberville, but by 1381, the manor was held by his half-brother Robert Latimer. The estate then descended through the Latimer family.

Sir John Latimer, the son of Robert, died in 1460 and was succeeded by his son, Sir Nicholas, who died in 1505. Stockett was left to his daughter Edith, who married Sir John Mordaunt of Turvey, Bedfordshire, a speaker of the House of Commons. By 1560 it was held by their grandson John; he left it to Lewis, Lord Mordaunt, who sold it in 1597 to Thomas Freke of Iwerne Minster and Montacute.

We now move on to the Chafie or Chaffey family who, by the middle of the 16th century, had arrived on the scene. They can be traced back to the time of King Ethelred II, when they held Chaffcombe (meaning Windy Valley) near Chard, Somerset.

The earliest record of the Chaffey family at Stoke is in the will of Joan Chaffye, widow, proved 1544. She mentions her late husband William and John Chaffye junior. One of the witnesses of the will was Thomas Freke, vicar of Montacute.

The Chaffey family, who were resident at East Stoke, descended from John Chaffey the Elder, who died at Stoke in 1569. One of his sons, Robert, born 1567, is recorded as "farmer of East Stoke", but was also known in the Duchy Survey of 1615 as Robert the Elder. He died in 1631. It was his son, Robert the Younger, who bought the manor from Thomas Freke of Iwerne Minster. The Close Roll of James I, dated 1614, describes Robert as a yeoman who, for £420, "bought the capital messuage and tenement of East Stocket and all houses and land belonging situate".

This document however, appears to be in conflict with the Victoria County History which states that John Seward, an officer conducting the Duchy Survey of 1615, bought Stocket, which was passed to his son, also John, in 1627, who in turn sold it to John Ford in 1649.

If that is correct, then perhaps part of the estate did go to John Seward, but reverted to the Chaffey family at a later date, quite possibly before the death of Robert Chaffey the Younger in 1664.

We now move to a period in history of East Stoke, when for nearly 300 years, it was owned by either a Robert or John Chaffey.

Robert Chaffey, the younger, married Mary Haer in 1628 and died in 1664 "at the Farm", according to the parish register, no doubt meaning Lower East Stoke Farm.

He was succeeded by his son, Robert III, born 1632, who married Agnes Wilkins in 1665. Two years later he was leasing lands in Stalbridge, and in 1713, donated a blank parish register to Stoke church.

Robert's son, John II, born 1671 at "the Farm", came next. He married Mary Strode in Wells Cathedral in 1728. Mary was from the last generation of the Strode family who had resided

in the village since the mid 1500s. John died in 1749, at the age of 78 years, and his death was recorded as "Mr of Farm". Money from the Strode family could well have funded the building of East Stoke House, which was probably constructed between 1730 and 1750.

Their son, Robert IV, was born in 1730; he married Susannah Leach of Odcombe, in Wells Cathedral in 1752. He also held land under the Duchy and died in 1809.

He was succeeded by his son John III, born 1760, who married Mary Priddle in 1792. John held both East Stoke House and Lower East Stoke Farm. He died in 1845. His brother Joseph founded the Martock branch of the family and was a landholder in Martock, Odcombe, Brympton and Chilthorne Domer.

John's son, Robert V, born 1804, inherited the East Stoke estate and married his cousin, Mary Ann Chaffey in 1828. He was granted arms by the College of Heralds in 1846.

Robert became a founder member of the Parish Vestry in 1826 and chairman in 1839. He also held land in Tintinhull. He died in 1875.

His son Robert VI, born 1834, succeeded to the estate. He married Katherine Elizabeth Cobden, the daughter of a clergyman. He was also a Captain in the West Somerset Militia in 1871.

In 1882, he closed the through road on his estate to the public and made this road into the new drive of East Stoke House. At the same time he made a new road from Lower East Stoke to join the Stoke to Montacute road near Church Far. He died in 1900 and was succeeded by his son, Robert Strode Cobden Chaffey, born 1872, a bachelor and last of the male line.

Robert VII, in 1897, was a Lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion of the King's Liverpool Regiment and in 1900, became a Captain in the 5th Battalion of the same regiment.

In 1926, Robert auctioned the Chaffey estate and East Stoke House was sold to Percival Petter of Yeovil. He then moved into The Cottage at East Stoke. The Cottage was probably built by the Chaffey family in 1696.

Robert S. C. Chaffey died in 1932. In 1935, his sister Beatrice, her husband Edward Braddon, and their daughters, Joan and Katherine, moved into the Cottage. After their parents died the sisters continued to live there. Katherine later married Major John Rawlins in 1950, and they sold the property in the 1980s. Prior to this, Joan moved into the Well House opposite and lived there until she died in 1990. Therefore, ending at East Stoke, four centuries of residency by the Chaffey family.

Lower East Stoke Farm is probably the oldest house in East Stoke and was for several centuries the property of the Chaffey family. The chimneys have a distinct Tudor style and one possibly original. Sadly the old house was partially destroyed by a fire in 1890, which accounts for the rebuilt Tudor-style front. The rear part escaped extensive damage and contains a 14th century trefoil-headed two-light window, which suggests that some of the building material came from the castle site. A doorway in the old part of the house is dated 1698.

The Chaffeys had leased out the farm by 1775 to John Bondfield, or Banfield, and it was held by this family at least until the 1830s. Members of this family were also appointed Churchwardens from 1762 until 1809. By 1861, James Drew is listed as the farmer, followed in 1871 by John Staple and by 1881, John's son James had taken over the property. In 1888, the farm was called Staplehurst and James was recorded there in 1901, but had sold the property before his death in 1910.

By 1906, the Candy family was in residence. In 1913, the farmer was William Mitchell, who was killed by a bull in 1918. In 1919, the farm was leased to Nicholas Pomeroy from Devon, who purchased the property in 1926 when the Chaffey estate was split up and auctioned. In 1960, the farm was purchased by Mr and Mrs H. Rex Hill and is now farmed in partnership with their son Nicholas.

Since the 18th century, East Stoke House was considered the chief residence of the Chaffey family and was probably built between 1730 and 1750. The house has Queen Anne and early Georgian influence, although the east wing is earlier. In the ground floor of the east wing is a large bread oven, and the upstairs is believed to have been a meeting room for early Methodists.

The main building is similar in style to Tintinhull House. The south front with bay windows, statue niches, and a porch supported by four massive Corinthian columns, was added in the Victorian era by Robert Chaffey V. The ground floor rooms have a rich and interesting plaster frieze around the tops of the walls and on the ceilings.

One block of outbuildings is dated 1840, with the initials R. C., and an earlier barn has a carved cross on a gable end. In the 1800s, one of the buildings was used as a brewery. The garden enclosure looks 18th century but could be much later. The numerous garden ornaments are interesting and were carved by a master mason who lived rent free in a cottage on the estate.

When the Chaffey estate was split up in 1926, the house and part of the estate was sold to Percival Petter (the Westland Aircraft Works were founded by the Petter family in 1915). In 1936, the house and lands were again auctioned and bought by Mrs W. F. Quantock Shuldham. Her husband, W. F. Quantock Shuldham was Lord of the Manor of Norton-sub-Hamdon and High Sheriff of Somerset from 1954-55. When he died in 1971, the estate

passed to his son, Captain A. F. Quantock Shuldham. Tragically, the Captain's two daughters were killed in an aircrash in 1974 and it is said that this traumatic event brought about his early death in 1975. The estate then passed to his widow, Cecily M. Quantock Shuldham and in 2009, is held by Simon Quantock Shuldham and Melanie A.Quantock Shuldham.

Several old cottages on the old A3088, south of East Stoke House, formed part of the Chaffey Estate which was sold in 1926. The sale also included land for private building, close to and opposite Stanchester Community School. The new A3088 was built on the old railway line in 1983 and links Yeovil to the A303.

Opposite the Stonehill housing estate is a ham stone building known as Ham Hill House. It is shown on the Duchy Survey of 1775-76 as a rectangular building running parallel to the road, and was occupied by the Pullman family until 1846.

By 1851, James Augustus Turner, a solicitor, is listed as the occupier and in 1862, he took out a 55-year lease on the property. It is likely that the house was extensively altered at this time and a section added at the western end. The Turner family were in residence until the early 1900s.

A succession of tenants then followed, including members of the Southcombe family. From 1958 until 1969 the rear of the house became the surgery for Doctors Ellis and Nicholls before they moved to the purpose built surgery in Matts Lane.

A new school was built at East Stoke and opened in March 1940, built on former Chaffey land and called Stoke Senior School. Although the school is named Stanchester, the original Roman site Stanchester is half a mile to the north-west, in West Stoke. The first headmaster was W. R. Biggs. The design of the school badge incorporates a centaur (representing Sagittarius from the tympanum at the parish church).

The school from 1956 until 1974 was called Stanchester Secondary Modern School, from 1974 to 1989 Stanchester Comprehensive School, and from 1989 Stanchester Community School, representing changes in government education policy. In 2009, around 900 pupils between the ages of 11 and 16 years are registered at the school which serves no fewer than 12 parishes.

The school offers a wide range of subjects and facilities, which also include adult education classes on numerous subjects.

The buildings have been considerably added to, as have the playing fields. Other additions include a new Community Sports Hall built in 1985 on the west side of the school, which offers a wide range of sports activities plus a gymnasium. The centre also organises various activities for children in the school holidays.

A Ham Hill quarry. The large piece of hamstone is being raised by steam crane. Accidents were frequent and sometimes fatal. Two companies still quarry the hill, Ham & Doulting Stone on the northern spur and Harvey Stone on the south-west plateau.

Aerial view of Ham Hill taken around 1989, showing the Prince of Wales Inn, the quarry works and the car parks. Note the eastern plateau of the hill has been ploughed and planted with arable crops.

Ham Hill

No book on Stoke-sub-Hamdon would be complete without mention of Ham Hill with its abundant history, including romance, folk lore, natural history and geology. In this chapter, we will deal briefly with the history and folk lore.

The boundary of Ham Hill extends beyond Stoke and into the parishes of Montacute and Norton-sub-Hamdon, the perimeter being three miles long, enclosing an area of 210 acres. The hill rises 425 feet above sea level, and the northern spur is around 200 feet above the High Street.

The hill has yielded much to the archaeologist from as far back as the New Stone Age. Flints, bronze-work, chariot parts, iron currency bars, gold and silver coins, and pottery have been found during quarrying and ploughing. But it was during the Iron Age from 600BC to about 45AD that Ham Hill became a centre of habitation for the Celtic Durotriges tribe.

The L-shaped hill fort was constructed of a double bank and ditch and is probably the largest hill fort in Europe. There were two original entraces, one on the south-east perimeter at Batemoor Barn and the other at the head of the combe separating the north-western spur from the main plateau.

The hill was captured by the Roman Second Legion (Augusta), led by the furture emperor Vespasian around 45AD. They erected a military post on the northern spur before establishing a more permanent camp at Ilchester, at the crossing of the river Yeo. They also constructed a villa at Batemoor Barn on the eastern boundary of the hill.

The Saxon period has yielded little information about the hill, except that it was in the possession of Glastonbury Abbey at the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066.

In 1248, the Beauchamps made the woodland and pasture of Ham Hill into a rabbit warren. However, in 1339, we find the family complaining that 1,000 rabbits had been stolen. A century later the whole area was said to be unstocked and valueless.

Somewhere between the Prince of Wales and Clarcombe Woods stood the village of South Ameldon or South Hamdon, which dates from around 1315.

Montacute Priory had a chapel on Ham Hill which in 1535, was dedicated to the Holy Cross; it probably stood near the Prince of Wales Inn, where a field was called Ham Chapel in 1840. It is said that the consecrated ground was used by local girls, “whose liaisons had got them into trouble”.

The Victoria County History states that a fair on Ham Hill was part of the foundation grant to Montacute Priory by the Count of Mortain around 1102. By 1118, it is recorded as lasting 13 days, but after that date there is no further trace of the fair.

The tolls and profits from the fair would have belonged to the Priory at Monacute, which was of the Cluniac order. The mother house was in Cluny, France. Any records relating to the fair may well have been destroyed during the Dissolution of the Monasteries, starting in 1535.

After the destruction of the Priory at Montacute, the right to hold a fair probably belonged to Sir Edward Phelips. It is certainly recorded in the 1615 Duchy Survey, as held on 25th April, St Mark's Day. By 1767, there was a market for cattle and pedlary (goods sold by a travelling packman), all held close to the fair house near the present Prince of Wales Inn. By 1775, tolls were low, due to Mr Phelips holding a fair in Montacute on the same day.

The tolls and royalites were then let for five guineas and by 1798, the fair house was in decay. By 1826, it was being used as a poor house, but only part of it was habitable, where the paupers were housed. What is left of the fair house now forms part of the north-west garden wall of the Prince of Wales Inn.

Fairs were held on the hill in 1861 and 1866 for pedlary. It was called a pleasure fair in 1872 and a stock fair in 1897. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, the fair had died out.

The fair was revived in 2006 as a leisure and historic event under the auspices of South Somerset District Council, in conjunction with an organisation called "Park It". The fair is now held annually in September, not April.

We now move onto the hamstone quarries. The Romans were probably the first to recognise the fine quality of the "honey-coloured stone", using it for their monuments and buildings. The stone was also in great demand especially from the 13th century, as can be seen in the Norman churches and ecclesiastical buildings of South Somerset. In 1445, it is recorded that 10 quarries were worked by John Dore and partners and by 1466, there were 24 quarries being worked. John Leland also comments on "the notable quarre of stone thereby at Hamden", when he visited in the early 1540s.

When Thomas Gerard of Trent visited in 1633, he gave this interesting description: "I never sawe any quarry to come near this in Couller and goodness save one within two miles of Northampton the principal towne of Nort'tonshire; for lasting, it be of good bed, it endures fire, water and all things else. The masons here have a pretty kind of commonwealth; they have courtes in which all trespasses against each other are judicially tried; and the Quarrys themselves seeme rather little parishes than quarreys, soe many buildings have they under the vast works to shelter themselves in wet weather, and their wrought stones in winter".

The quarries were split between the three parishes of Stoke, Montacute and Norton. Those in Stoke were owned by the Duchy of Cornwall, in Montacute by the Phelips family and in Norton by various Lords of the Manor.

By the end of the 1600s the quarries were in decline, perhaps because the great days of church building and the era of building grand mansions, such as at Montacute and Dillington, were over for the time being.

There was a revival of quarrying in the mid 1800s and by 1880, some 200 quarry men and masons were employed on the hill. The newest quarry was opened near the Price of Wales Inn around 1938. During World War II, the hamstone works were used for war munitions production and in the 1950s, Westland Helicopters used a deep disused quarry for testing engines. The end of full-time quarrying came in 1962.

In the 1980s, the Department for Transport gained permission to remove vast quantities of spoil and stone to use as ballast for the construction of the A303 dual carriageway from Podimore to South Petherton.

At the present time two small quarries remain. Ham & Doulting Stone Co Ltd quarry the area on the northern spur of the hill and Harvey Stonework, the deeper quarry on the south-western side of Ham Hill.

Over the centuries, Ham Hill has become an established meeting place for a variety of events. There was once a location called Ham Stone, said to be on the north-west escarpment of the hill, near the boundaries of the three parishes and close to the road leading down to Stoke. It stood 20 feet high and had steps cut into it and was used as a watch tower and beacon. Unfortunately by 1824, "the girt Ham Stone" had been cut and sold for building stone.

The old couplet about Ham Stone ran:

"When Ham Stone hears Norton chimes at midnight clack,
It rolls down hill to drink at Jack o' Beards and back".

In 1853, hundreds of people gathered on Ham Hill to watch and wonder as the first steam train passed nearby on the Yeovil to Taunton railway line. The scene was repeated nearly 60 years later in July 1911, when the airmen Beaumont and Vedrines flew past in their bi-planes, in the Daily Mail 1,010 miles "Round Britain" Air Race.

The hill is not without tragedies, especially in connection with the quarries, but more recently it has had a good safety record. Except for one evening in 1992, when in very foggy conditions a group of people were having an unofficial party in the bottom of one of the quarries on the hill. Local policeman, P. C. Steve Nickerson recalls that you could hardly see

your hand in front of your face when he was called to investigate the incident. A group of youngsters walking towards the sound of the party had climbed over fences and plunged down one of the quarry faces. One of the group died and another was seriously injured.

There are a number of mysterious stories connected with Sandy Lane which leads up from Little Norton, and an area nearby called "Jack o' Beards". People have described experiencing forceful phenomena, such as being lifted up and thrown down, even at midday. Others claim to have seen the ghost of a tall man wearing a cloak and a broad brimmed hat, carrying a lantern along Norton Path and the east side of the hill is supposed to be haunted by a nun carrying a bundle.

Then there is the story of Rebecca of the Hill. The only record of Rebecca comes from G. F. Mumford, who in 1922, when editor of the Western Gazette, published a book called "Ghosts and Legends of South Somerset". He tells us that around 1730, there stood a solitary hut in a remote area of the hill, in which dwelt a middle-aged woman who in her manner and dress was very eccentric.

She was sometimes seen running along the summit of the hill, her long black hair and cloak streaming in the wind, sometimes uttering incantations that were unintelligible. Yet she was not coarse, but appeared to be cultured and well-educated.

In the valley below on the Chiselborough side, lived a farmer Greenwood and his wife who were childless. One evening, when farmer Greenwood was walking in his fields, he found an infant underneath a hedge, crying with cold and hunger. Taking pity on the boy he took him home. His wife found a note around the baby's neck which read: "Call him Maurice, for the sake of his unhappy mother". The couple decided to keep the baby and in time he was christened Maurice Greenwood.

The years passed and when Maurice was 23 years old, he fell in love with Fanny, the daughter of Thomas Selwin, a farmer from Hinton St George. Although Farmer Selwin did not approve of Maurice, regarding him as a peasant, the couple frequently met in Hinton Park.

One evening in the park they were suddenly confronted by Rebecca. Fanny ran away, but Maurice seemed frozen to the spot. Rebecca told him that she knew why he was unhappy and was there to help. It would soon be Christmas Eve, she said, and old Selwin always opened his house to his friends. Maurice must join the waits (carol singers) and leave the rest to her.

Christmas Eve arrived. The party was in full swing, and in came the waits and minstrels. Then the mummers play began, with Maurice being one of the actors. Suddenly Rebecca came among them, chanting:

"Here come I, Let none oppose my will,
The proud Rebecca of the Hamdon Hill,
To cause a blessing or to wreak a curse,
To bring a wedding or a funeral hearse –
What shall my mission be?"

Maurice removed his mask and Rebecca declared that Maurice was no peasant but of noble blood, whose family dated back to Norman times. Anyone who opposed the marriage of Fanny and Maurice would have a withering blight come upon them. Rebecca then blessed the house and left.

Thomas Selwin wisely consented to the wedding and quickly made friends with Maurice. The following summer, Maurice and Fanny were married and in time inherited the farm.

Some years later at the end of a day's hay making, Maurice was again confronted by Rebecca. She said that the time had come to tell him the truth, that she was his mother and that in her girlhood she was deceived by a high-born youth whose family had received many royal favours. She had learned her arts in order to curse that family for the wrongs done to her and to him.

After a show of affection, she gave him a gold ring with her family crest upon it, then bade him farewell. Soon after that she was found dead in a quarry on Ham Hill.

When G. F. Mumford wrote this story, although he probably knew who she was, he could not publish the identity of Rebecca, although there are clues in the text.

For a family with royal favours nearby, look no further than the Pauletts of Hinton St George, who held the titles of the Marquis of Winchester, Duke of Bolton, Knight of the Garter, Viscount Hinton, Early Paulett and more. For Rebecca's family we can look at the history of the Berkleys of Bruton, traceable back to the Berkleys of Gloucestershire, where the name Maurice is used time after time. A rare exception being Sir John Berkley who helped Charles II rebuild London after the Great Fire of 1666, hence, Berkley Square, Bruton Street, etc.

Sir John's eldest son was another Maurice and he married Rebecca, daughter of Sir Henry Stretham. Of their eight children, the eldest girl was also called Rebecca, and perhaps as a girl she had high hopes of marrying a Paulett.

So far no Greenwoods or Selwins have come to light in the parish registers, therefore it would seem that G. F. Mumford used other names, perhaps to avoid any offence.

In his book, he states the stories were passed to him when he was a young man 40 years earlier (about 1880), and told to him by people who had long since died.

G. F. Mumford also admits that he often added his own touch of romance to his stories, most of which is omitted from the tale recounted here.

There was also Nancy Cooper, who lived in a cave near Batemore Barn and, of course, the story of Betty Hayne. Captain Jack Hayne and Betty lived in a thatched cottage (now demolished) south of Cartgate Crossroads, opposite the present Kings Road. Betty used to visit Yeovil for shopping. On one occasion she was lost in a snowstorm between Odcombe and Ham Hill, but was fortunately found alive the next morning.

This story inspired Richard Walter in the mid 1800s, to write the song "The Snow Dumpling", which was later sung at the Club Festival of the Prince of Wales Friendly Society. It is an imaginary tale, of how Betty missed her footing in a snow storm, causing her to roll down Ham Hill as an enormous snowball to Stoke Cross. Having come to no real harm, she stayed in the snowball until morning puffing at her pipe. It was Jack who found her the next day, amazed to see smoke coming out of a snowball and even more amazed to find Betty inside!

We now move on to the hill itself. The "Frying Pan", a hollow on the north-east side of the hill, could have been used by the Romans as an amphitheatre, but is thought to have been formed in mediaeval times and used as an animal parade or games ring at the St Mark's Day Fair on 25th April.

It is said to be lucky for girls and young women to slide down the side of the Frying Pan, but that would depend on your definition of luck! Egg rolling also used to take place in the Frying Pan on Shrove Tuesday.

In the 19th and early 20th century, the Frying Pan was the scene of Trade Union and Liberal rallies, with several bands in attendance. On one occasion, Barrington Band for a bet, agreed to march and play to the top of the hill. They started off alright, but by the time they reached the last stretch, only the drummer was playing and now and then came a bleat from a trumpet or horn!

One of the largest gatherings on Ham Hill occurred at Whitsun in 1873. It is hard to believe that 20,000 people assembled at the Agricultural Workers Union Meeting, held in the Frying Pan. The meeting was led by Jospeh Arch, founder and President of the Union, and organised by George Mitchell of Montacute, the author of "Skeleton at the Plough". This book describes the appalling working and living conditions of the agricultural labourer in the West Country in the 1800s. The union meetings continued to be held annually on Ham Hill at least until 1885.

The Prince of Wales Inn, situated at the top of Ham Hill, has been a welcome drinking venue since 1875, no doubt opened when several quarries were operating in the area. With the advent of the motor car it has become popular with day trippers and walkers. The property has been extensively altered over the last 30 years and now includes a restaurant and a tea room.

For centuries the hill has been grazed by sheep, and in the 1930s there could be up to 500 sheep on the hill, keeping the turf well cropped. When grazing on the hill the flocks became mixed and at the end of each day they would on their own accord, split into separate flocks and walk back to their farms. Many villagers have said "it was a sight worth seeing".

The last large flock to graze on the hill was in the 1970s, but due to dogs worrying sheep and theft, it has not been viable for farmers to use the hill. Over the last 30 years, with sheep no longer grazing on the hill, the lawn-like turf has disappeared, except in areas where the rabbit population has kept the grass tightly cropped. But to the delight of many, sheep were returned to the hill in 1991, although in a very much reduced way, helping to restore the quality of the grassland.

In 1975, Ham Hill Country Park was established. Yeovil District Council leased 154 acres on a management agreement scheme between the Duchy of Cornwall and the Trustees of the Phelips and Quantock Shuldham Estates. A further 240 acres were purchased by South Somerset District Council in 1996 and 1999.

Initially, some rather ugly car parks were built and the hill was left to run wild. A management plan was then devised and the park rangers have worked with volunteers to restore a balance between conservation and visitor numbers.

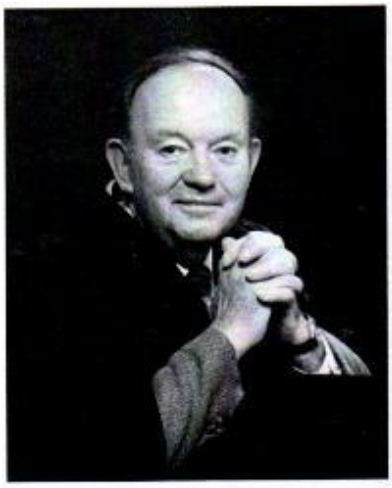
On the northern spur of Ham Hill, from 1996 to 2001, a great stone circle was erected by quarry owner Richard England. In 1996, Somerset County Council also erected the "Time Stones", carved by Evie Body, on the eastern side of the hill.

Regular events are run by the rangers throughout the year for both children and adults. These events are to help increase awareness of the conservation, natural history and archaeology of the hill.

Such then is our brief history of the hill and of Stoke-sub-Hamdon, too. It has been an attempt to meet a thirst for knowledge by an increasing number of people.

Yet there are still many stones left unturned, and when turned, they pose more questions than answers. Of course, the burning question is, what does the future hold? As long as we maintain our curiosity, we will continue to find answers to these questions and learn more about the village and the community in which we live.

The Author



Alan Vernon Richards

Alan Vernon Richards, born 15th April 1930, was the son of Vernon Ralph and Edith Richards. Vernon was, for 40 years, the local village blacksmith.

Alan was educated at both local county schools. From 1944 to 1975 he owned a small cycle and repair business in Stoke and from 1975 to 1994 was employed at Numatic International, Beaminster, Dorset.

His main hobbies were music, gardening and local history. He was a founder member of Stoke Local History Group which was formed in 1999.

Alan was the organist for Stoke Parish Church from 1947 to 1960 except for 1952-54, when he served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

In 1958, he gained a music diploma at Trinity College of Music, London.

From 1960 to 1973, he was organist of Martock Parish Church and from 1993 to 2008, the organist for the United Reformed Church in Stoke.

In 1978, he married Shirley Elizabeth Cottrell, daughter of the late Mr and Mrs E. T. Watts of Yeovil.

Alan joined Stoke-sub-Hamdon Band in 1945, and was bandmaster from 1950 to 1983, retiring from playing in the band in December 1991. He rejoined the band in 1996 and played until his sudden death in September 2008.

His first edition of "A History of Stoke-sub-Hamdon" was published in 1970, a second edition "Stoke-sub-Hamdon – A Somerset Village" was printed in 1993. He has also given many lectures on local history.

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