An aerial photograph of the village of Beercrocombe, showing a cluster of houses with grey roofs and a prominent church with a white tower. The village is surrounded by large, open fields in various shades of green and yellow, with a winding path or stream cutting through the landscape. The overall scene is a typical English countryside.

# Beercrocombe

*A Brief History*

*Edited by*  
**Brian Howell**

# Beercrocombe Households in 1999



Beercrocombe 1999  
Not drawn to Scale



# Beercrocombe

## *A Brief History*

*Edited by*  
Brian Howell

Digital Edition by  
Bob Burrough

Researched and Published by the  
Beercrocombe History Group

# FOREWORD

History is alive, it is here and now and constantly being made. Yes, of course it covers past events such as the Norman Invasion in 1066, the reign of Queen Victoria and everything else that happened in times gone by, but everything we do now and in the future is part of our history we are constantly creating it. The document which follows is absolutely splendid and all who have contributed to it are to be warmly congratulated. A great deal of time, study and research has been spent on it and for this we are very grateful.

As a source of reference it has no equal and future generations of residents in the village of Beercrocombe are indeed fortunate in having it to turn to. I hope a copy of it will be found in every household.

George Ranken - December 1999

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# INTRODUCTION

While researching the history of my own house, several people said to me '*there is not much to find out about Beercrocombe*'. It was soon obvious that they were quite wrong. With the approach of the millennium I thought it a fitting time for villagers to research a brief history of their community which, despite being very small and having welcomed many newcomers over the years, still retains a strong 'village spirit'.

After sowing the seed, the Beercrocombe History Group was formed. What follows is the result of their hard work over the last few months. The booklet quickly grew into a small book and rather than struggling to find something to put in, it became more a question of what to leave out. Financing the production of the book was a problem until Help the Aged made a generous grant of lottery money which they administered and which was specifically earmarked for this type of project. Without this grant we would have been unable to proceed and we are very grateful that Help the Aged made it possible. This was topped up through the kind assistance of Beercrocombe Parish Council, The Beercrocombe Village Trust, South Somerset District Council and The Rural Development Area Community Chest..

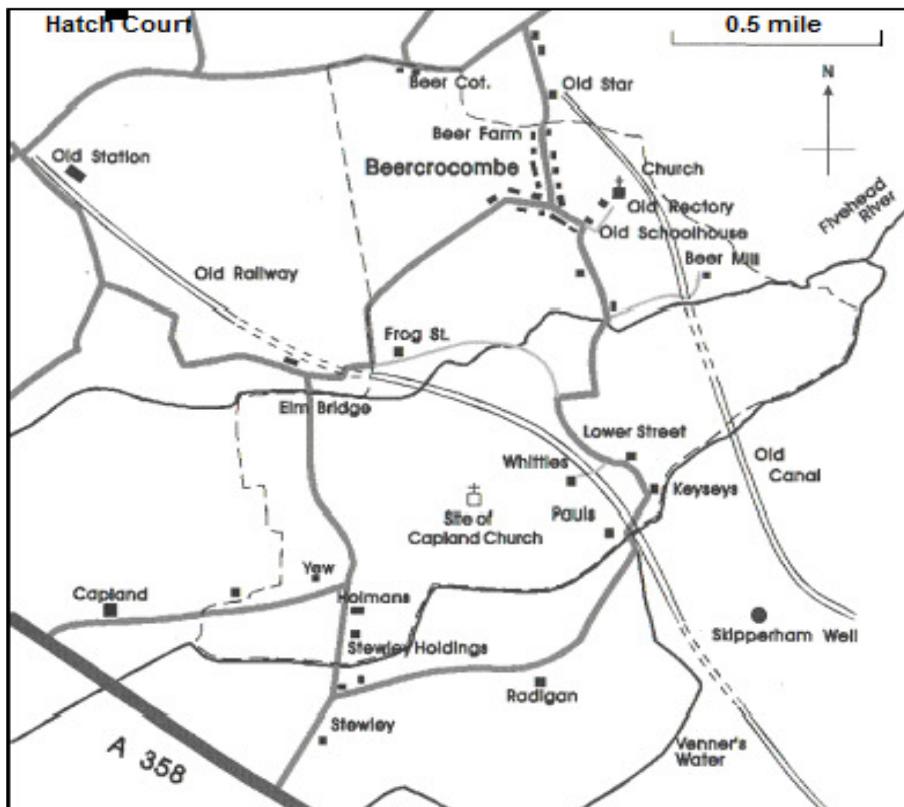
Many people have contributed to this project but thanks must go in particular to Brian and Maureen Longstaff for their constructive criticism and for writing the chapter on the church together with the Sports and Pastimes section. Also Gill and Tony Reed who looked at the text with scholarly eyes, contributed the maps and the geology section and in addition wrote 'Beercrocombe at War' together with the chapter on the school in conjunction with Tony and Diana Talbot Williams. Ian Macleod acted as our treasurer and contributed towards the section on village houses and David White researched and wrote the transport section. Sue Prideaux contributed 'Flora and Fauna' and spent many long hours researching the parish registers. The sketches were drawn by Liz Botterill and Patience Egan. Finally thanks go to the many residents past and present who have contributed valuable memories and photographs.

Even a small village like Beercrocombe has a long and complex history. Everyone who has lived here, even if only for a very short time, has left their mark however small. For most, history does not record their lives. For others we are left with tantalising glimpses. This little book does not attempt to provide a complete history of Beercrocombe, merely a brief look at a hamlet where our predecessors have lived for over one thousand years of good times and bad.

For those who might wish to carry on the work in years to come we hope this provides a starting point. We hope you enjoy it and that you will forgive any errors or omissions.

Brian Howell - Beer Mill Farm

*December 1999*



*Beercrocombe and the surrounding area*

## **The Parish of Beercrocombe**

Much effort has been expended in the past trying to explain the name Beercrocombe but it still remains something of a mystery. In Old English *'baeru'* means wood or grove and *'baer'* is pasture. One of these may have been transformed to *'Bere'*, by which name Beercrocombe is referred to in the Domesday Book of 1086. In several documents up until the mid 1500s it is called simply Beere, Beare or Beare (1569), but in one document dated 1320 we find the village named as Bere Malherbe after a family who had an interest in the manor at that time. However, in both 1362 and 1403 it is referred to in legal documents as Beere Craucombe or Bere Craucomb. From about 1600 Beer Crocombe or Beer Crowcombe became the norm although Beere or Beer is often used until the late 1700s. Beercrocombe as a single word is a fairly modern form.

In the West Country a 'combe' usually means a valley although further east it often means a clump of trees on a hilltop. Some people have taken the name

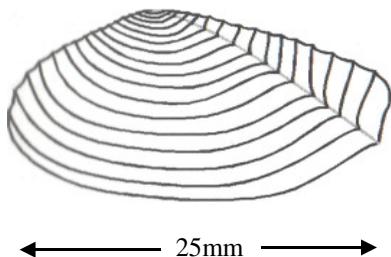
literally as 'the valley where the crows are found' or alternatively 'the valley where the crocuses flower'. Tracing the history of the name Beercrocombe is complicated by the fact that there are villages called Beer and Crowcombe in other parts of Somerset. Crowcombe, north of Taunton, did belong to the Beauchamp family from Hatch Beauchamp in the 14th century. Some people believe that the tenants at Crowcombe had links with Bere (Beercrocombe), hence Beer Crocombe, but there is no firm documented evidence for this. They may well have had a connection with the village of Beer to the north east of Taunton which is much nearer. A Godfrey De Craucomb was connected with the Manor of Bere in 1227, as is a Godefrido de Craucumb in 1244. The name Beer Crocombe may well come from this era but there is no evidence to connect Godfrey/Godefrido with the village of Crocombe.

There is a series of letters preserved in the records of the local papers with detailed explanations of the name but unfortunately they are all different! One interesting thought suggested recently is that Beer (Beercrocombe) used to be in the Deanery of Crewkerne, and it might be that it was known as Beer Crewkerne, corrupted over time to Crocombe to differentiate it from the other Beer to the north east. The truth may emerge one day but at the moment it is an interesting area of research.

## The Geology of Beercrocombe Parish

Beercrocombe parish lies at an altitude of 26m to 40m above sea level between the Blackdown Hills to the south and the Fivehead escarpment to the north. The geology affects the landscape and the characteristics of the soils. The underlying rocks are classified as shales and limestones of the Lower Lias series deposited about 200 million years ago but there are also clays and marls. A sticky whitish clay lies close to the surface in the village itself as gardeners well know. It is underlain by the harder shales and limestones which are used as a building stone despite being easily weathered.

Older rocks, belonging to the Rhaetic period, were excavated when the tunnel for the canal was being built in 1847. Charles Moore, a geologist, studied the waste heaps near the present site of the house called Bellrope and identified some fossil species new to science including one rather insignificant bivalve which he named *Pteromya crocombeia*. So Beercrocombe, if not famed, is at least known in the world of fossils.

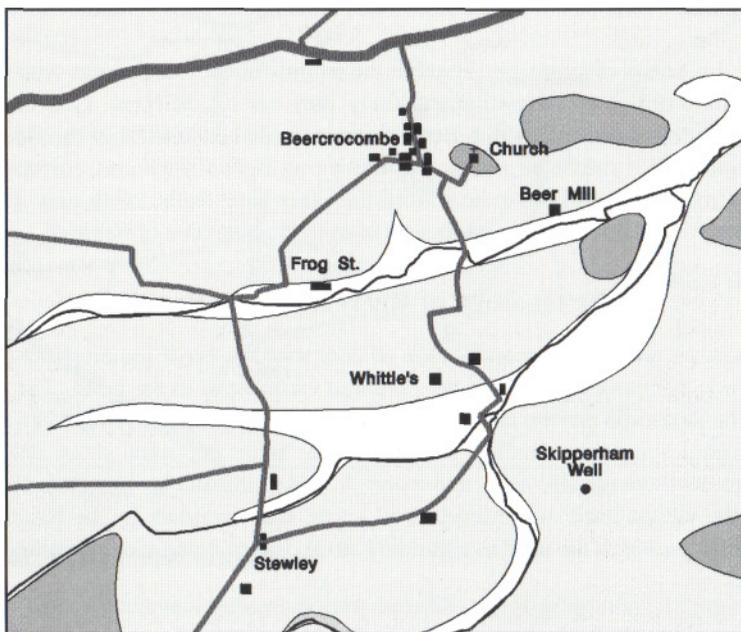


*Pteromya crocombeia* (originally called *Pteromya crowcombeia*) is a small bivalve rather like a mussel. The left valve shown here has a series of concentric markings and a distinctive ridge.

There is a small deposit of valley gravel and rainwash surrounding the church and

Old Rectory with a larger deposit just to the east. This was laid down at the end of the last Ice Age about 10-12,000 years ago and explains the slightly elevated position of the church.

The streams flowing from the Blackdown Hills, the Fivehead river, Venner's Water and others are tributaries of the Isle and over a long period have carved out valleys resulting in the undulating landscape of the parish. Heavy rain on the Blackdowns results in sudden increases in the volume of water in these streams causing deep channels to be eroded. Even so they are not adequate to prevent frequent flooding. Along the valley floors there are deposits of alluvium, a fine silt with some gravel.



*Geological map of Beercrocombe*

	Alluvium	RECENT
	Valley Gravel	RECENT
	Shales & Limestones	LOWER LIAS

Skipperham Well outside the parish in the S.E., is a chalybeate spring containing iron sulphate and sodium chloride like the water at Capland Spa. In the past people from this and adjacent parishes drank the water for its supposed curative properties.

## **Some glimpses of Village History to 1800**

At the end of the last Ice Age most of Somerset above the levels was covered in natural forests called Wildwood. About 4500 BC Neolithic Man began clearing this woodland. Bronze and Iron Age farmers continued the process and by the time the Romans arrived much of this Wildwood had disappeared. The Romans subjugated a tribe known as the Durotriges, who occupied this area of Somerset and large parts of Dorset and remained for some three hundred years. Ilchester was the nearest large Roman town being connected to Bath and Exeter by the Fosse Way which still survives in parts as the A37. Unfortunately no Roman artefacts have been recorded in the village.

With the breakdown of Roman rule the Anglo Saxon peoples arrived and by the end of the Saxon period Somerset, together with most of England, was growing increasingly prosperous. The inhabitants were known as Somersetas (summer settlers). In addition to Ilchester many nearby towns such as Taunton and hamlets including Ilton, Ashill and Curry Mallet were founded before the Norman Conquest.

In common with much of the West Country, Beercrocombe at this time would probably have been more a scattering of farmsteads than a collection of houses around a village green, such as is often found in the South East of England and the Midlands. Compared to our time the land would seem very sparsely populated. The entire population of England was in the region of three million compared to the fifty five million today. There were unlikely to have been traffic jams in Taunton during the rush hour!

Exactly how and why the hamlet of Beercrocombe grew up where it did we shall never know. It lies off any main route and has no significant features that would have encouraged early settlement. The small Fivehead river would have provided a water source but other than that, relatively shallow wells would have been dug. The majority of the land was heavy clay, difficult to work with primitive ploughs although the alluvial deposits along the river edges would have been rather easier but liable to flooding. As with many other settlements, it was probably the result of gradual forest clearance and an expanding population moving on to less favourable lands in the late Saxon times. The position of Beercrocombe on the edge of the Forest of Neroche in the 14th century would indicate this.

### **The Norman Conquest**

It is often forgotten that the Anglo Saxon kingdom which William Duke of Normandy invaded was, for its time, a civilised and highly organised country with a reasonable system of roads and a fairly sophisticated civil service. Beercrocombe (known at that time as Bere) was in the possession of a Saxon landholder called

Algar who also held land at Bishopsworth near Bristol, Radstock, Thornfalcon and North Perrot. Beercrocombe was noted as paying 'Geld' (Saxon land tax) for '5 hides'. In theory a hide was an area of land sufficient to support a household. This area would vary according to the type of land available

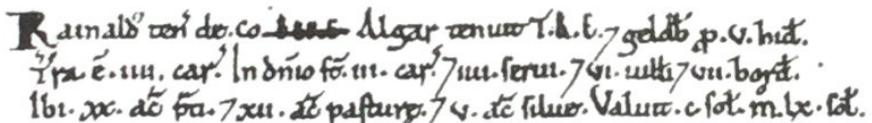
When William invaded in September 1066, Harold Godwinsson had just defeated the Viking army of Harold Hadrada near York. Harold force marched his regular army of Housecarls back south, gathering local levies as he travelled, but after an epic struggle was defeated at Hastings. Beercrocombe villagers were unlikely to have been involved, being so far off Harold's route, which was just as well as casualties amongst the poorly armed and untrained local levies would have been very high.

After the death of Harold and much of his family at Hastings there was no clear leader remaining and William was crowned King at Westminster. For a while the country was relatively peaceful and life in Beercrocombe probably went on much as before. However, in 1067 a series of uncoordinated revolts broke out, all of which were subdued with a ruthless ferocity and by 1071 almost the entire Saxon ruling class had been killed or dispossessed. Beercrocombe would certainly not have remained apart from the turmoil and the next recorded landholder is a Norman, Reginald Vautorte. Whether Algar was killed or merely dispossessed history does not tell us.

### The Domesday Book

The Domesday book was the result of the great survey of 1086 ordered by William (the Conqueror) and the extract concerning Beercrocombe is reproduced below.

For the South West of England there are in fact two surveys in existence. The Exchequer version and a further book known as the Exeter Domesday which contains additional information. In the case of Beercrocombe this concerns livestock kept. The additional information from the Exeter Domesday is inserted in brackets.



Rainald' tenet de co. ~~Beere~~ Algar tenet T.R.E. 7 geld' p. v. hid.  
7 pa. e. iiii. car. In dno fo. iii. car. 7 iii. serui. 7 vi. uilli 7 vii. bordar.  
lbi. xx. ac. fra. 7 xii. ac. pasture. 7 v. ac. silue. Valua. c. sol. m. lx. tot.

*'Reginald (Rainald De Valle Torta) holds of the Count, Beercrocombe (Bere). Algar held it T.R.E. and it paid geld for 5 hides. There is land for 4 ploughs. In demesne are (4 hides and) 3 ploughs and 4 slaves (serfs) and 6 villans and 7 bordars (with one hide) (there are 8 beasts and 4 swine and 21 sheep and 20 she goats) there are 20 acres of meadow, and 12 acres of pasture and 5 acres of woodland, it was worth 100 shillings now 60 shillings'*

The Count referred to was Count Robert of Mortain the half brother of William the Conqueror and one of the greatest Norman landholders who ruled his lands from his castle at Montacute near Yeovil.

Rainald de Valle Torta also known as Reginald de Vautorte was the sub tenant who held two other manors in Somerset, 11 (possibly as many as 26) in Devon and a large number in Cornwall.

The next part of the translation reads '*Algar held it T.R.E.*' This refers to the previous Saxon landholder. The term '*T.R.E.*' is an interesting example of medieval spin doctoring. It translates as '*in the reign of Edward*'. William invaded England claiming that King Harold had no legitimate right to the throne and it was deliberate policy not to refer to Harold in the Domesday book. All notes on previous ownership refer to his predecessor, King Edward the Confessor.

The second half of the entry concerns what was in the Manor at the time of the Domesday survey. Land for 4 plough teams is mentioned. These were usually teams of eight oxen. The amount of land is difficult to calculate since it varied from place to place according to the difficulty of working the soil. Beercrocombe farmers and gardeners, who struggle today with the heavy clay soil covering most of the parish, know that it probably was not a large area! The figures of acres mentioned do not correspond to modern measurements.

The next phrase '*in demesne*' means land held directly by the lord not by tenants. He (Reginald de Vautorte) directly held 4 hides of land, 3 plough teams and 4 serfs or slaves. The remaining land was worked by 6 '*villans*' (villagers) and 7 '*bordars*' (smallholders or peasants lower down the social scale).

The Domesday Book is our only record of the early years of Beercrocombe. What life was like for the villagers we can only guess. Nothing remains of the village dating back to this period. Until the church was built in the 13th century the buildings of Beercrocombe, like those in hundreds of other villages, were temporary structures rarely lasting more than a generation.

No evidence exists of a manor house in the village and any such building is unlikely since Beercrocombe always seems to have been part of much larger land holdings. Beer Farm, which was certainly the largest farm in the village in the 18th century and possibly before that, does show features not consistent with a simple farm house and it may be that the local overseer or agent lived there at some time.

There was quite likely to have been a village mill. The Domesday survey shows 5624 mills, one for almost every hamlet. Beer Mill Farm was a water driven mill in the 17th century and it may be that a mill existed on the site prior to that although no evidence remains today. One of the more unpopular aspects of medieval life was

that all flour had to be ground at the village mill owned by the Lord of the Manor, for a fee of course! Ownership of even a hand operated milling device was illegal.

### **Hundreds, Manors and Parishes**

In Saxon times the civil unit of administration was the 'Hundred'. This continued after the Norman Conquest and up to modern times. In 1316 the parish of Beercrocombe was listed as in the: *HUNDREDUM DE ABDYCK*, including:

<i>Beauchamp</i>	(Hatch Beauchamp)
<i>Bere</i>	(Beercrocombe)
<i>Cory Malet</i>	(Curry Mallet)
<i>He Abbatis</i>	(Isle Abbots)

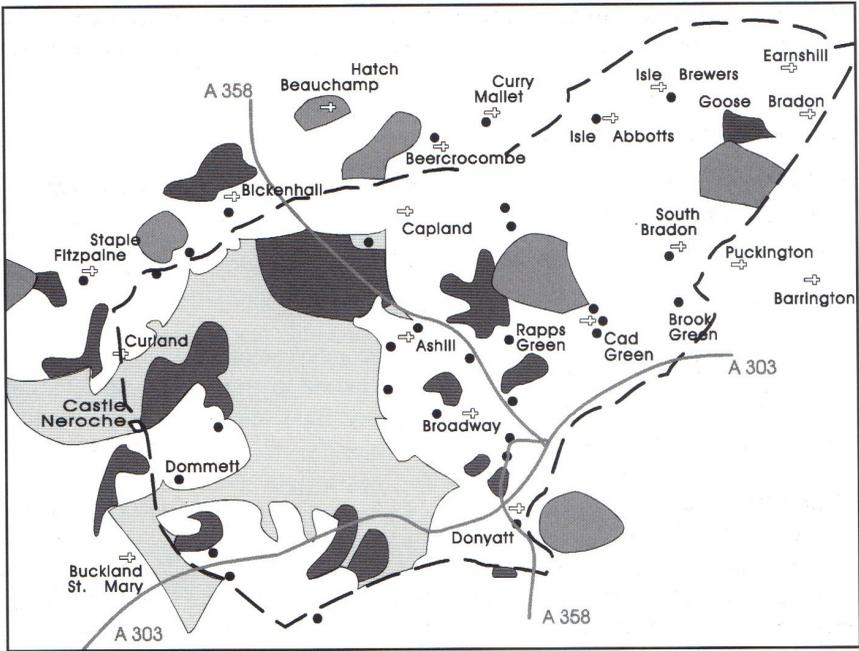
The above were later amalgamated into the Hundred of Abdick and Bulstone.

'**The Manor**' was a specific area of land held by a Lord of the Manor who either farmed the land himself or let it to tenants. The Lord of the Manor himself owed a duty of service to his Lord. At the time of the Domesday Book this overlord would have been Count Robert of Mortain who in turn pledged allegiance to the King. Beercrocombe formed part of the '*Fee of Mortain*'. There was a Manorial Court which decided disputes at a local level and recorded changes of tenancy. All tenants were obliged to attend these courts on pain of a fine.

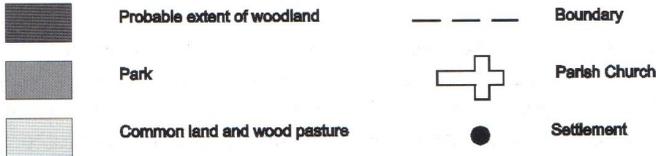
'**Parishes**' arose when the landowners built churches and appointed Rectors to administer to the local people. These Rectors collected '*Tithes*' to support themselves. When the churches were built by the local landowner the area of the Parish coincided with that of the Manor as at Beercrocombe. The power to appoint the Rector remained with the Lord of the Manor and when the Manor was sold or inherited this power known as the '*Advowson*' went with it, although it could be sold as if it were property, separately from the Manor. The Parish gradually took over from the old Manorial Court system and eventually went on to become the basis for local government.

### **The Forest of Neroche**

For much of the Middle Ages, the southern part of Beercrocombe was in the royal hunting forest of Neroche which at that time stretched from the Blackdown Hills right across to Isle Brewers and Earnshill. Even today a memory of this is preserved in Beercrocombe. On the southern edge of the parish lies Stocks Lane leading from Stewley to Hatch Beauchamp. In 1830 an Act of Parliament enclosed the remaining sections of the Forest and the enclosure map shows there was a gate into the forest near Holmans Farm called Stocks Gate. There was another gate at the junction of Stocks Lane with Radigan Lane called Stewley Gate.



The probable extent of the Forest of Neroche (shown by dotted line) c1400



The term 'forest' was as much a legal definition as a description of a heavily wooded area. In medieval times numerous laws governed the forest areas designed to protect the royal deer and to provide revenue by way of licences granted for various activities. These licences, and the frequent fines for transgressors were a huge source of income for the Crown. The forest was patrolled by 'Foresters' who were supposed to be assisted in catching offenders by the 'Bordars' or smallholders. In 1299 a 'perambulation' of the forest by Lady Sabina De Leche and others to mark the boundaries mentions Stewley, Ashill and Beercrocombe.

In 1391 a Thomas De Baupine was fined for trespass in the Forest of Neroche. However, afterwards he obtained a licence from the King (Edward the third) to 'lop as often as he pleases, the branches and boughs from the oaks and other trees in the kings forest of Rachich (Neroche) belonging to his Manor of Beere' (Beercrocombe). Three years later he was released from the annual payment of 105

shillings *'in consideration of the great damage sustained by him in the lands, meadows, woods and pasture of the premises by the frequent feeding of the kings deer'*.

Beercrocombe villagers living next to the forest must have been extremely frustrated watching the King's deer damaging their crops and eating their valuable grazing. They were unable to do anything about it as killing a deer was a capital offence. One can only imagine how many animals were quietly dispatched in the dead of night providing a welcome change of diet in the process. Rabbits were a major food source kept in warrens by the Lord of the Manor. The progeny of these rabbits are still plaguing Beercrocombe farmers and gardeners today.

The exact area of the early Manor of Beercrocombe can only be a matter of conjecture in the absence of any accurate maps or indeed any maps showing details of the area prior to the beginning of the 19th century. But it almost certainly covered a similar area to today's Parish.

### **Capland**

The hamlet of Capland on the western edge of the Parish was split into two at an early date, part being in Broadway and a part known as East or Est Capland which was administered with Beercrocombe from very early times. The Lay Subsidy return for 1327 refers to Bere Cum Capland (Beercrocombe with Capland). A document in the Somerset Record Office dated 1374 is a release of the land and church of Capland from Richard Calweton to Sir Richard Acton and others. The Wyndham Estate accounts for rents etc. usually refer to the two places in the same document Capland today consists of a few houses along Capland Lane in the Parish of Hatch Beauchamp. The enclosure map for the Forest of Neroche in 1830 mentions dwellings along this lane as being part of the Manor of Beercrocombe. Most of the properties are of fairly recent origin dating from the early to mid 1800s. Capland Farm was built in about 1850. The present owner who arrived there at the age of three in 1914 once talked to someone who remembered it being constructed!

In medieval times much of Capland was almost certainly further to the east within the present boundaries of Beercrocombe Parish. The site of the church at Capland is on high land within Whittles Farm, but nothing now remains above ground. As mentioned earlier, a document dated 1374 refers to land and a church at Capland being transferred from one person to another. It may well be that only the church remained by this time as there is no mention of any other property. There is a widely believed, but unsubstantiated story, that some stonework, particularly an archway, from Capland Church is built into the nearby church at Broadway. Why the hamlet was abandoned is not known. It could be that one of the medieval plagues decimated the inhabitants, or that people simply drifted away over a number of years and the hamlet could not sustain itself as a viable unit. As late as 1830 the road to Beercrocombe from Stewley and Broadway followed the line of the

present footpath across Whittles Farm past the site of the abandoned church and presumably the old hamlet.

### **Ownership of the Manor**

Many manors such as Beercrocombe, formed groups of manors often spread over several counties. These medieval manors were commercial enterprises producing revenues in the form of rents and taxes due to the Lord of the Manor. If a tenant died, a '*Heriot*' or tax was levied on his family. If a tenant's daughter married, a tax known as a '*Marchate*' was levied and if a Lord allowed a tenant to live outside the manorial boundary a charge known as a '*Chevage*' was payable. There were a number of other taxes and obligations due to the Lord of the Manor including work for a specified number of days on the land farmed directly by the Lord and attendance at the Manorial Courts.

As well as being passed on through inheritance, or as part of a marriage settlement, a manor could be bought and sold or leased for a period of years. Over a period of nearly one thousand years the ownership of Beercrocombe is naturally a little tangled in places and certain periods are somewhat obscure. The Manor of Beercrocombe appears from time to time in various court records, sometimes on its own and sometimes together with other manors. What follows is based on the best available evidence but it may be that future research will reveal more details.

As was noted earlier, the first recorded landholder in Beercrocombe was a Saxon named Algar, prior to the Norman Conquest in 1066. At the time of the Domesday Survey in 1086 the land was held by Reginald De Vautorte, a sub tenant of Robert Count of Mortain and at this time it formed part of the '*Fee of Mortain*'. The lands of Reginald de Vautorte later became part of the Barony of Tremartin in Cornwall. In about 1190 a Simon de Vautorte married a daughter of Robert de Beauchamp the 3rd. of Hatch Beauchamp. Simon took the name Beauchamp and it may be that Beercrocombe and the other Somerset holdings became separated from the Cornish lands at that time.

Godfrey de Craucombe is noted as holding the manor of Beercrocombe in 1226 and in 1244 we find the '*Close Rolls*' referring to Godfrido de Craucumb. '*Ordered that G. De Seagrave administrator of the forest that he should have two bucks and two does which are living in the forest of Neroche transferred to Godfrido de Craucomb to his park at Bere (Beercrocombe) as a gift from the King.*' (Witnessed by the King at Windsor)

In 1315 the '*Nomina Vilarum*' lists Willielmus Malherbe as Lord of Bere and in 1320 we find John de Bere being appointed Rector of Bere Malherbe with Margaret Malherbe as his Patron. This is the only record of this name for the village. However, by 1327 the '*Lay Subsidy Roll*' notes a Johanne de Actone as being of Beercrocombe. 1347 sees a court case where a John de Clyvedon quits

any claim to the Manor of Beercrocombe to John, son of Odo de Acton, after payment of 100 marks of silver. Seventeen years later, in 1367, John de Acton acknowledged the right of Richard de Acton to the Manor of Beercrocombe. The manor was held at that time by Agnes de Acton, wife of Roger de Acton and would have gone to John after her death. Richard de Acton gave John 200 marks of silver.

In 1367 Sir Guy de Brien, John Bays of Yeovil and others gave Richard de Acton 300 marks of silver for Beercrocombe and five other manors (Beercrocombe was still held for life by Agnes de Acton).

Effigy of Sir Guy de  
Bryan K.G. in  
Tewkesbury Abbey



### **Sir Guy de Bryan (or Brien)**

One of Beercrocombe's more interesting Lords of the Manor, he was secretary to Edward the Third, had a long and varied military career, distinguishing himself at the Battle of Crecy and was amongst other things Inspector of Sewers!

Richard Acton granted the Manor of Beercrocombe and Capland to Thomas de Baupyne in 1392. Thomas was a member of Parliament for Bristol and for a short time, in 1390, for Somerset. By 1403 he had died leaving four daughters, one of whom, Margery, married John Harewell ringing with her the Manor of Beere Craucombe. In December 1500 a descendant, William Harewell, died. It was noted that amongst his lands were the Manors and Advowsons of Beer Crowcombe and Capland worth 40 shillings. In 1505 William's son, John Harewell Esquire died '*seized of the estate*' (holding the estate), leaving five daughters one of whom, Elizabeth, had Beercrocombe as her share. She married first an Anthony Raleigh and then a Leonard Rede. Anthony and Elizabeth Raleigh are still noted as holding the Manor in 1532 but by the mid 1500s Beercrocombe was in the hands of the Wadham family of Merryfield near Ilton.

This family originated in Wadham, North Devon, migrating to Egge or Edge in Branscombe c1377. About 1400 Sir John Wadham seems to have acquired Merryfield, a large house and the centre of a great estate. In 1524 Nicholas Wadham was granted a licence from the King to '*make a Park in his Manor of Merryfield 200 acres of pasture and 40 acres of woodland*'.

Another Nicholas Wadham was born in 1532. He was apparently a prudent man. His estates brought him in £3,000 per year and out of this income he saved £14,000, an enormous sum in those days which he '*determined to put aside for the*

*foundation of a college at Oxford'*. Nicholas Wadham died on the 20th of October 1609 and was buried in Ilminster Church. His widow, Dorothy, founded the Wadham College, Oxford of today. Nicholas and Dorothy had no children but Nicholas had three sisters. One of them, Florence Wadham, married a John Wyndham taking with her the Manors and Advowsons of Beercrocombe, Ilton, Bradon and part of Silverton and Rewe.

The Wyndham family came originally from the Crownthorpe and Felbrigg areas of Norfolk. In 1487 a John Wyndham was Knighted for services in battle but was later beheaded by Henry the Seventh for high treason having supported the Yorkist side in the Wars of the Roses at the wrong moment, an occupational hazard at the time!

A later Sir John Wyndham married Elizabeth Sydenham in 1547. She was the daughter and heir of a John Sydenham and Sir John Wyndham thereby acquired through marriage the Orchard Estate in Somerset. The estate then became known as the Orchard Wyndham Estate. Their son, yet another John Wyndham who died in 1572, married Florence Wadham as mentioned above. An interesting tale concerning Florence Wyndham is recounted in the '*Wyndham Family History*'.



The Wyndham Arms

After the marriage in 1558 Florence and John lived at Kentsford. The following year Florence '*fell into a mystical fit*' after which she was pronounced dead and placed in the family vault at St. Decumans Church about half a mile away. That same night the sexton, named Attwell, knowing that she had some valuable rings crept into the vault and tried to cut the fingers off the corpse to get them. To his horror the body moved and he fled. Florence then made her way home arriving at the house where she was taken to be a ghost! All the future owners of the Wyndham Estate and consequently of Beercrocombe were descended from her son John born after this incident. Had the sexton not gone back to the vault, the history of the village for the next three hundred years would have probably been quite different.

The son of John and Florence, another Sir John Wyndham, inherited the Manors from his mother and Beercrocombe became part of the vast Wyndham Estates. Sir John Wyndham apparently disliked Merryfield and on his mother's death he demolished the house. By 1790 nothing was to be seen of the house but a barn. Merryfield airfield now occupies some of the site, but a moat remains. Sir William Wyndham was created the Earl of Egremont on the 9th of September 1661. The 4th and last Earl of Egremont, George Francis Wyndham, died in 1845 when the peerage became extinct. Beercrocombe remained within the Wyndham family estate until 1920 when it was parcelled up and auctioned.

## People

The names of the ordinary Beercrocombe villagers start to appear occasionally in various documents from the early 1300s onwards and then in greater numbers from about 1600. A large amount of information has been unearthed and for those who would like to take research further, some sources are listed at the back of this history. One difficulty often encountered is that many families used the same first names over and over again which can be very confusing. The earliest record uncovered so far is a *Lay Subsidy Return* of 1327. This was a tax return listing the principal inhabitants. Beercrocombe is listed as Bere Cum Capeland (Beercrocombe with Capland).

*'De Johann de Actone (noted in the section about ownership of the manor) Walter atte Hull, Willelmo Payn, Johanne Smert, Richard atte Forde, Johanne atte Hurne, Adam Haukyns, Margeria atte Purie, Thoma Raules, Johanne Sany, Richardo Redberd, Martino Pakeware, Willelmo atte Fenne, Jordano atte Oldeland.'*

On the 13th of November 1623 an Ecclesiastical Court held in the Deanery of Crewkerne noted a certain Francis Bullen of Beercrocombe *'that he absenteth himselfe from his parish Church on Sundaies and holy dales etc'*. On the 27th November he was again cited for the same offence and on the 12th of December he was excommunicated and the decree posted on the doors of the Church.

A snapshot of Beercrocombe is found in the *Hearth Tax Roll* of 1635 (See appendix III). The Hearth Tax was a very unpopular tax of 2 shillings (10p) for every hearth, *'in all houses paying to the Church and the poor'*: this was collected half yearly. *'BereCrocombe'* is listed as having 53 hearths most houses having 1 or 2. The total revenue produced was £4.18s.0d (£4.90). William Barker the Rector had three hearths and Jacob Bisse and Alice Dorman had four in their house. (Jacob Bisse is noted in other records as a 'Magister' and a sub deacon of Wells Cathedral).

1635 was not a good year for a certain Edward Thomas, against his name is the note *'The house fallen downe'*. Joane Watts also had her difficulties. She has two hearths listed with a note *'one is fallen downe'*. Richard Tyse had problems filling in his form as he *'returned one too many by mistake'*. He is also listed as the Tythingman or village representative with the Collector being Henry Drew. As a matter of interest Curry Mallet is listed as having 136 hearths producing £13.2s.0d, (£13.10) one house having 16 hearths. Unlike Beercrocombe, Curry Mallet produced a protester. Richard Collier has a note against him *'shutts his door and refuses entrance'*.

Some of the most interesting information available to any local historian is available in the wills left by former inhabitants. Unfortunately very few have been preserved for Beercrocombe but a small selection is set out overleaf.

## 1538 Thomas Durman

<i>To be buried in the trinity of Bearecrokam</i>		
<i>To the Cathedral Church of Wells</i>	12d	(6p)
<i>To my parish church (Beercrocombe)</i>	6s.4d	(17p)
<i>To the Parson Ghostly Father</i>	4s.4d	(22p)
<i>To every one of my godchildren</i>	4d	(2p)

plus 20d to Curry Mallet and Hatch Beauchamp Churches.

He was obviously particularly concerned about the fate of his spoons after his death.

*'After the death of my wife Jane my three dozen of spoons to my three children. The best to my son Francis, the second to my daughter Elizabeth, the third to my daughter Edith, and my wife to make them as good as his sisters three dozen.*

*Residue (of the estate) to my wife Jane and my son Francis'.*

*Executors and witnesses*

*Sir Richard Watts parson      Thomas.....      John Wynslowe*

In a small hamlet Thomas Durman would have been one of the wealthier tenant farmers. The Durman name occurs in the Beercrocombe records for the next four hundred years. Francis Durman, the son, is listed in the Muster Roll of 1569 and noted as possessing the only set of body armour in the village. There is a will for a George Durman dated 1591 and although no details have been preserved he is recorded as a '*gentleman*' which would indicate the position of the family as being above that of ordinary villagers. The first recorded location for the Durmans is at what is now Allens in 1792, with possibly a different branch of the family at Frog Street Farm from the early 1800s. As tenant farmers they would have moved around the village on various leases.

## 1723 Nicholas Huddy

*'The true and just account of Elizabeth Huddy the Relict and Administrix of all singular goods and credits of Nicholas Huddy late of the Parish of Beercrocombe in the County of Somerset.'*

On an estate valued at £4.19s.10d Elizabeth Huddy had to settle debts including:

<i>For the funeral of the deceased.....</i>	<i>£1.12s.0d</i>
<i>Mr. Wakefield for exchanging one life and adding another on an estate the deceased had bargained for before his death .....</i>	<i>£4.2s.0d</i>
<i>Thomas Vile for corn and other small things .....</i>	<i>£0.10s.0d</i>
<i>Phillip Harves for shoes .....</i>	<i>£0.5s.0d</i>

*Plus several other debts giving a total of £12.9s.6d leaving a shortfall of £7.9s.8d.*

The Huddys would seem to have been tenants at Allens Farm on the village green. By the mid 1700s the Durman family were in the property and it may be that the death of Nicholas Huddy leaving large debts was the point that the property changed occupants.

The last example is the will dated 1804 of **Jane Durman** widow, who lived at Allens Farm. In it she leaves small gifts to her son, son in law and grandson, a house and garden in Beercrocombe to her daughter Hannah Jeffrey and another house in Curry Mallet to her daughter Joan Burnett. Another daughter, Sarah Jeffrey and her husband George took over Allens Farm. Although a tenant, Jane Durman was obviously a lady of some wealth.

Beercrocombe villagers appear occasionally in the Quarter Sessions records. These were held in different towns and were concerned with the granting of licences for various activities, the regulation of apprentices, as well as criminal trials. A selection of entries concerning Beercrocombe appears below.

Wells, 13th. - 16th. January 1635

*'Whereas yt appeareth unto this Court that one Robte Edwards was heretofore bound forth an apprentice unto William Elliott of Ileabotts, yeoman, (who) hath assigned over the said apprentice Edwards unto one William Rowsewell of Beare Crocombe, Mason, forasmuch as the said Edwards is a very lewde fellowe and now in the Gaole for breaking a howse and Stealinge of certaine goods out of the same howse whereby no man will sett the said Rowsewill on work yf he bringe with him the said Edwards'.*

Two years later at Wells Quarter Sessions, William Elliott and William Rowsewell from Beercrocombe finally got rid of their troublesome apprentice! William Rowsewell appears on the Protestation Return for Beercrocombe in 1641.

Wells, 10th. - 13th. January 1637

*'It apperaeth unto this Courte that the Apprentice Edwardes is a very lewde fellowe and hath bin burned in the hand for felonye and Burglarie. It is therefore thought fit and ordered by this court that William Elliott shall henceforth be freed and discharged of his said apprentice, Robert Edwards.'*

Wells 12th. - 16th. January 1636

*'William Crooch, son of William Crooch of Beercrocombe, labourer, who was bound an apprentice unto Robert Lutley, late of Beercrocombe aforsaid, Clark, and the said Robert Lutley now deceased, Johane Lutley his Widdowe and Administratrix of the said Robert Lutley having little or noe employment for him the said Wiliam Crooch hath moved the Courte to be freed of the said Apprentice William Crooch. And it is conceived by the Court that the said Apprentice William Crooch was not legally placed with the said Robert Lutley, in regarde that he was a*

*Clergyman and therefore was not capable of apprentice, and further that the said Robert Lutley being dead the said Johane Lutley is not compellable to keep the said apprentice. Ordered to be freed and discharged from his apprenticeship'.*

It would appear that William Crooch was apprenticed to Robert Lutley the Rector of Beercrocombe at the time. Unfortunately for him, Robert Lutley died and his widow went to court to break the agreement, otherwise she would have had to maintain him under the terms of his apprenticeship. As these agreements were often for up to seven years she would naturally want to get rid of the liability. The court found that as Robert Lutley was a clergyman he was not legally able to take on an apprentice and so declared the agreement void.

Parish Records indicate that William Crooch was 14 at this time. He was born in Beercrocombe and sadly his mother Agnes had died when he was only one year old. His fate after this case is not recorded. (See appendix IV for other examples).

Several sets of accounts exist for the Manor of Beercrocombe. These contain the names of tenants and the rentals they paid. A typical one dated the 24th of April 1661 is *'The account of Francis Howse of the rents and monies due unto Sir William Wyndham Knight out of the mannor of Beare Craucomb and Capland for the year 1660 for the rent of a Mill the year ending at Michealmas and the farm rents the year ending at Michealmas in that same year.'* Mentioned among others are a Thomas Paul paying £2.10s.0d for *'Firzland'*, Thomas Lumbard for *'Beare Orchard'* £2.4s.6d, and Richard Morley paying £3.13s.4d *'for his tenement'*. Total income for year was £45.7s.10d.

In 1771 the Parish Meeting agreed to *'bind out such poor children apprentices to such estates as are hereto mentioned.'* Two families were involved, the Honeybuns and the Perrises both of whom appeared frequently in the parish records as receiving regular payments. The villagers were obviously trying to reduce their liabilities by getting the children out to work. The children were aged between nine and twelve. Mary Honeybun went to Sarah House at Beer Mill and others went to various farms.

Another set of accounts dated May the 9th 1790 is *'Rental of Beercrocombe belonging to the Right Honorable the Earl of Egremont for one year to Lady Day 1790.'* The main tenants were Thomas Slade paying £192.0s.0d for *'Beer Farm and other lands'* and George Durman paying £50.10s.0d. At the other end of the social scale we find William Huxley paying four shillings (20p) for *'a cottage and garden on waste'* and Mary White paying three shillings (15p) for the same. Total revenue is given as £451.14s.0d.

The Parish Records kept at the Somerset Record Office contain the accounts of the Parish Overseers who made payments to the poor and needy of Beercrocombe.

One person was appointed to keep the records each year and three others including the Church Warden approved the accounts. All the officials were appointed from the villagers annually. The entry below is a typical page dated February 1787.

<i>February 12th my fourth month begun</i>	£..s..d
<i>pd. James Baker four weeks</i>	0..8..0
<i>pd. Hannah Warbutton four weeks</i>	0..10..0
<i>pd. Mary Hunibun four weeks</i>	0..6..0
<i>pd. Perres 4 weeks at 2s a week</i>	0..8..0
<i>pd. Adams four weeks</i>	0..6..6
<i>pd. Adams for a bottle of drops</i>	0..0..3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>
<i>pd. and towards a new hook</i>	0..1..0
<i>pd. also for 3 yards and... ..for a shirt at 1s for the making</i>	0..4..3
<i>pd Pools towards the cost of a waistcoat</i>	0..2..6
<i>pd. Townsen four weeks</i>	1..3..6
<i>pd. Bet Pilton when Mr. Slade turned her out of his house</i>	0..1..0
<i>also pd. John Paddock for her bed and bed head a rugg and blanket 2 sheets a table board and a chair and looking glass</i>	0..19..3
<i>also the price for bringing the same</i>	0..1..6
<i>pd. for two summons to examine Mary Pyke</i>	0..1..0

*Account of what Anne Cook hath had since she was brought into the parish January 14 1787*

<i>first her examination and special warrant</i>	0..2..0
<i>pd. the first week for keeping and lodging</i>	0..2..0
<i>pd. for the second third fourth and fifth weeks</i>	0..7..0
<i>pd. for making clothes for her child</i>	0..1..6
<i>pd. for man and horse to go for the doctor</i>	0..1..1
<i>also for keeping the doctors horses</i>	0..1..0
<i>expended at this lying in</i>	0..3..0
<i>pd. her and her tender the first week</i>	0..6..0
<i>pd. her and her tender the second week</i>	0..6..0
<i>pd. the doctor bill and medicines</i>	0..15..0
<i>expended at Bridgewater about the fellow</i>	<u>0..1..0</u>
	7..12..4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>

*The 11th March seen and allowed by us*

Each page hints at fascinating stories. Was Mr. Adams one armed, hence the hook? Why did Mr. Slade turn Bet Pilton out of his house? Where did Anne Cook come from? She certainly cost the parish a large sum of money. The Mary Pyke mentioned halfway down the account is noted elsewhere as 'having a base child'.

The records begin in 1757 where we find entered '*Beer Poor Book bought by Thomas Slade*' and later '*payd for the poor book 3s.6d*'.

The destitute were often returned to their home villages by other parishes trying to avoid a drain on their resources. Normally only those who could prove they were born in a particular village would receive help from that parish. We find in the Poor Book entries for 1760 a number of items relating to the building of a '*Poor Hows*' in the village but unfortunately no location. It would seem to have been a building to house destitute people rather than a Work House in the later Victorian sense. Francis Lumbard and John Slocombe were paid 1s.0d and 3s.0d respectively for several loads of stone, Thomas Vile 10s.0d for 58 feet of timber and for '*digging and carying 2 loads of white earth*'. James Veneen was paid 14s.3d '*for work about the Poor Hows*', the local jobbing builder perhaps?

Throughout the 17th. and 18th. centuries the main tenant land holders in the village seem to be the Slade, Lumbard, Morley, Maundry and Durman families. Other names come to light, featuring in tax returns, accounts and as signatories of various letter. (Appendix V gives a typical Land Tax return).

These include:- Thomas Warre and John Blinman (letter 1613). John Blinman and Thomas Greenslade (letter 1630), James Bisse, Thomas Lumbard, Francis Baller, Francis Pinney, Henry Morley, William Tise and others (letter c1635). John Pyne, Francis Huddy and John Pynney (letter 1635). Abraham Dixon and John Maudsley (letter 1673), John Jeffrey, Thomas White, John Scott, William Warbuton, Mary Littlejohns, Margaret Whittle and others (letter 1727). Mr. Vile, John Uttermare, Mary Warbuton '*widdow*', Mr. Manley Rector and Mrs. Scott '*widdow*' (tax return 1766). These letters and documents together with many others which are preserved in the County Record Office are mainly concerned with the church and land matters.

By 1800 Beercrocombe was an agricultural hamlet, part of a huge estate owned by a single family. Life for ordinary people was centred on the church and the scattered farmsteads much the same as it had been for hundreds of years. At that time the Parish covered an area of 871 acres and had a population of 137. Interestingly, one hundred years later the inhabitants numbered 129 indicating a very stable population despite that of Somerset having doubled in size from 250,000 to 500,000 people in the same time. During the nineteenth century the farms would become larger, swallowing up the old medieval holdings, a canal and a railway would be built through the village, a school provided, proper provision would be made for the poor and local government would begin to emerge. All this will be covered in later sections of this history.

## St. James Church



### **The Building**

St. James Parish Church is pleasantly situated on a slight rise just to the east of the village. Apart from The Old Rectory, adjacent, the church stands alone with no trace of any habitation nearby and from its castellated tower the view extends from Neroche Forest in the West to Stoke-sub-Hamden in the East and from Hatch woods in the North to Windwhistle in the South.

The church has been dedicated to St. James since its earliest days and is now in the Deanery and Archdeaconry of Taunton, in the Diocese of Bath and Wells. It was at one time in its history in the Deanery of Crewkerne. It is a simple church, unadorned by statuary, gilt or ornament and with no sign of a benefactor, which quite properly conveys an air of rustic peace and tranquillity.

One intriguing feature of the church concerns its orientation. Traditionally the axis of a church connects with the point on the horizon where the sun rises on the day of the Saint to which the church is dedicated. St James is orientated about 9 degrees South of East, which corresponds very closely to the day connected with St James in an Eastern Calendar (Maronite), ie the 9th. of October and not with his

day, the 25th of July, in the Church of England Calendar. This was verified at 7.25 am on the 9th of October 1999.

Research indicates that there was a church on the present site from the 13th century, a time when many newly established parishes acquired their own church. Church building was seen as a sound investment, bringing both financial and spiritual rewards. Most new churches were paid for by manorial lords who endowed land, i.e. 'glebe' and therefore claimed a major proportion of the tithes and other revenue of the parish as well as the right to select the priest.

Gifts were made to the church by other individuals. *'The Somerset Chuntries and Rentals List'* of 1548 notes *'three closes of pasture called Packewere contaynyng five acres and worth yerely thirteen shillings and four pence in the occupying of Richard Tyse'* for the provision of a light in the church at *'Beare Crocombe'*. This area of land can still be identified and is next to the disused railway bridge at Frog Street Farm. The provision of a light to be placed in front of a saint's image was a common practice. One hundred years later a Richard Tyse, quite probably a relation, is noted as a Church Warden.

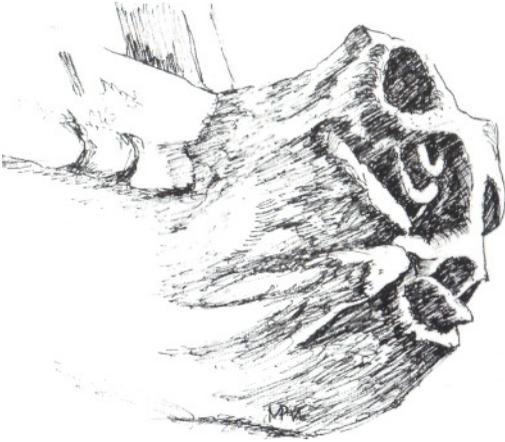
Some evidence of a 13th century church remains, in particular the lancet window on the north wall, but the church is predominately 15th century, built in the Perpendicular style. The tower was built in the 15th century with further additions and alterations made to the church in the next century. Research carried out by the antiquarian Mr. L. Vivian Neal suggests that the present church may have been built by John Harewell, the son in law of Sir Thomas Beaupyne - the manor being settled on him and his wife Margery in 1402.



*On the right is a drawing of the small priests' door on the south side of the church with a more detailed section shown to the left*



It seems likely the church was originally thatched, and we do know the chancel roof-line was altered following storm damage in 1703, but it is reasonable to assume that the church as we know it was completed by the early part of the seventeenth century. The oldest bell is dated 1626, but otherwise there is little to reflect on any changes until we have the Vestry records in the 1850s.



*One of four gargoyles  
high up on the exterior  
of the church tower.*

### **The Interior of the Church**

On entering the church one is greeted by a small nave capable of seating 80 people on mainly Victorian pews. To the rear of the Church are four early pews considered by Dr Robert Dunning to be dated between 1180 and 1220. Curiously this pre-dates our 13th century Church and if so they must have originated elsewhere, maybe from Capland. The nave has a wagon roof installed during the 19th century which replaced an older roof of similar type. The wagon roof of the chancel is considerably older and has some carved wooden bosses. The only stained glass is the altar window which was installed towards the end of the 19th century. There are two interesting early 19th century wall texts, one in the baptistry behind the octagonal font, and one near the Jacobean pulpit. Under the tower is a fine 15th century wooden fretwork tracery screen which is a good example of the craftsmanship of the period.

Immediately facing the entrance porch is the Achievement restored in 1997. George Ranken found that the 1762 version that we now see is a palimpsest of an older one, probably 1660. He surmised that in 1762 the old one, being rotten and worm eaten was trimmed and a new Achievement made using the old boards. George noted that the boards were not assembled in the same sequence but that the old design and artwork *'must have been superior'*.

On the north wall there appears to be a Tudor fireplace but closer inspection suggests a tomb recess. The tomb dates from the 14th century but church records do not give any clues as to who may be buried or indeed if anyone is buried beneath the tomb. Such tombs could also serve as monuments and do not necessarily mark the place of interment, however it should be remembered that only the *'great and the good'* of society enjoyed the privilege of being commemorated within their parish churches.

There are two tombs within the church beneath the nave carpet and these commemorate the burial of members of the Durman family. The Durman family, sometimes spelt Dorman, are recorded as living in the village as far back as the Muster Roll of 1569 when one Francis Dorman is recorded, and up to the 1930s there were still Durmans in Beercrocombe. Why this family is buried in the church, history does not recall. There are two Ham stone floor tablets, the one nearest the west end is the larger but the inscriptions on it have worn away, the other is partly worn but the words that can be identified are as follows:

In Memory of  
Rachel Wife of Francis Dorman  
Who died the 27th. Day of  
December 1767 aged...  
Likewise George...  
Also in memory of  
Francis and Rachel...  
Who died the...  
February 1796.  
The above inscription...  
Order? and?...  
Jasper Dorman...  
Francis and Rachel...  
Here lieth ye body of  
Francis Durman of  
Ye Parish which departed  
this mortal life December ye  
29th. 1749 Aged . . .4 years  
Parted from his wife and children dear  
By death who caused his lying here.

Visitors to the church should also note the Hunky-Punks, the local name for stone carvings at the base of archways. St James Church boasts two horrors towards the base of the tower.



Lest the visitors becomes frightened, there are some angels here about and they tell an obscure story. On the south wall of the nave, next to the windows, are four angels of which one is praying and the others are carrying a shield, a rolled cloth, and a scroll. What is the message? A walk outside will show on the south Chancel window two little angels, one pointing to his heart and the other carrying a large bowl. An early warning of the dangers of over eating perhaps? On the east chancel

window arch should be noted the faces of a bishop and a king. Whether these are symbolic or are meant to represent actual people is unknown. Hunky Punks would not be how you would describe the two dignified effigies just above the entrance to the west door. John and Margery Harwell perhaps?

## **Phases of Restoration**

As with any building, various improvements and repairs are always required but prior to the restoration of 1890, which is recorded in detail in the County Record Office, very little is known and can only be surmised and deduced from other information.

Set in the north wall of the nave is a Date Stone with the date of 1634 and underneath the initials W.M:R.T. Date stones were often used at this time to commemorate repairs or alterations to a church and often included the initials of the churchwardens or incumbent. The Lay Subsidy rolls of 1641/42 show the only people resident in the village with these initials as William Maundry and Richard Tyse. Maybe they were the churchwardens at the time. There is also a Date Stone set in the buttress at the rear of the church, date 1621 but no initials. These stones show the 17th century was obviously a time of rebuilding and repair but exact information is not available.

The Rev. John Collinson, in his survey of Somerset in 1791, describes the church as *'consisting of a nave, chancel and porch, with a clumsy tower at the west end'*. Presumably the porch was on the south side as now. There is the remains of a doorway on the north wall and it may be that the church could also have been approached from footpaths across the fields.

The tithe map of 1837, and an earlier map of 1782 both show the church slightly remote from the village and approached from the south. An early photograph shows a gate across the lane at the school house, so going to church was not always an easy matter.

A print by John Buckler in 1840 shows the front of the church. However the window detail is different to what we see today. This could have been artistic licence or it may have been prior to one of the phases of restoration. Vestry records of 1894 allow for an iron fence from the school house to the church at a cost of two shillings and sixpence per yard.

We know a major restoration took place around 1850. A drawing of the rear of the church in 1850 by W.W.Wheatley in the Braikenbridge collection states, *'St. James Beercrocombe.....the old part of the Church. The other side recently altered'*. This drawing shows the rear of the church looking exactly as it does now but with a

centre buttress which was taken down in 1997. The north wall of the church is built of small pieces of blue lias stone in a random construction while the stonework at the front is of large rectangular blocks laid in courses. It may be that most of the front of the church was rebuilt around this time and it would be reasonable to suppose that the porch, which is of similar construction, was also rebuilt then.

A visit recorded by Sir Stephen Glynn on the 13th of February 1857, says of the church *'it is in a bleak lonely position, the interior is remarkably neat and has undergone recent restoration.'* He goes on to give us some idea of the interior of the church at that time, *'the interior roof is covered with ribs and bosses, the chancel roof is blue. The nave is fitted with open seats, the chancel is stalled, and there is a plain perpendicular rood screen.'* Other details of the layout of the church around 1850 can be inferred from the paperwork concerning the next restoration that took place fifty years later.

The plans for the restoration of 1897 are lodged at the County Record Office and give detailed specifications and costings. The restoration was to commemorate Queen Victoria's long reign. A public appeal supported by the Bishop of Bath and Wells was launched and the church was reopened in July 1897.

From the scale of the work required, the church was obviously in very poor condition at this time. Outside, the works included removing and repairing the rough cast to the north wall of the nave, repair to the east gable of the nave and repointing the three buttresses, providing new drains, gutters, downpipes and lead flashings and a new lightning conductor, repairing the roof timbers, new slates as necessary and new Hamstone ridge tiles.

Major work also took place inside the church. The seats, pulpit, font, stove and other fittings were removed and whole floor area within the walls of the nave and tower concreted, the vault being excavated and filled with concrete. The interior was replastered and the dressed stonework cleaned. Some new pews were provided, a new wood block floor laid and a new base and steps to the pulpit built. The north doorway was blocked up. One hundred years later this made removing the tenor bell for repair very difficult as the other doors were narrower.

In correspondence between the Rev. R. Hardy and the Diocese several interesting points are made.

- Entrance via the north doorway was difficult since pews were in the way.
- The font was moved from behind the door to the base of the tower to increase the number of seats in the church from 88 to 102: if only we had that problem today!
- There was concern that filling in of the vault with concrete may constitute disturbing the dead.

Anyone reading this list of repairs will feel very familiar with the problems encountered in 1890, as very similar repairs were necessary 100 years later during the restoration of 1993-1997.

Time seems to have moved slowly in those days, since at the vestry meeting held on the 5th of April 1894 it was resolved to ask the Diocesan Architect to report on the repairs needed, and on November the 16th 1894 the specification and estimates were submitted.

At the vestry meeting of the 19th of November 1896 the plans were approved and it was resolved to obtain tenders for the work. The work was to cost £370 of which £175 was already promised. At a meeting on the 7th of January 1897 it was agreed between the churchwardens, Messrs E.J.C.Prew and W.I.Jeffery and the Rector the Rev. R. Hardy, to borrow upon their joint security the balance required and as we know from the plaque in the church, the debt was not cleared until 1903.

1950 saw another phase of repair. The east wall of the church was pulling away from the main building and large cracks appeared in the stonework of the chancel. The wall was underpinned and no further problems have occurred. At the same time the church was treated for woodworm. While all these works were taking place services were held in the Old School House which, at that time was the village hall.

The most recent restoration took place during the period 1993-1997, with details of the work recorded in a commemorative book on display in the church. Once again the font was moved, this time from its position at the base of the tower to what is felt to be its 'original' position, in the south west corner of the nave - a much travelled font! The other major works were re-rendering the tower, laying a new oak floor, fitting glazed doors to the porch entrance and a small but highly effective improvement - the installation of oil-fired central heating. Those who can remember the old coal stove more or less in the middle of the church will also remember the smoke, the fumes and especially the cold when the fire refused to stay alight. Many a churchwarden's patience was tested in the last minute search for electric heaters or paraffin stoves. Our great thinkers may reflect on declining attendances but a warm church helps!

St James' has never been a wealthy church, always struggling to stay in good repair and, from the above details, it is obvious that each generation of villagers must play their part if they wish to have a church in the village. We are fortunate to be entering the third millennium with a church in probably as good a state of repair as ever. These sentiments were summed up by the Rural Dean the Rev. Nigel Venning, who after a recent visitation, wrote, *'much time, care and money has been lavished on this much loved little church and it is wonderful to see it in such good condition. I offer my congratulations and good wishes to the whole congregation.'*

## The Contents

We are indebted to many people for gifts to the church. These gifts, which are recorded in the church archives, were often given in memory of loved ones and are respected as such, enhancing the simple beauty of a rural church.

Still in regular use is a very fine silver chalice dated 1573, kept in a mahogany box made by John Brightwell of West Hatch, to protect it from damage. Also in regular use is the 19th century chamber organ, which was rebuilt by a Taunton organ builder and fitted with an electric blower.

Part of the responsibility of the Rector was the provision of the altar linen and we were fortunate in having a Rector with good taste and a pocket to match, most likely in the person of the Rev. R. Hardy, who was Rector here from 1891-1898. For 100 years the red, white and green alter frontals he provided from Watts and Co. of London have adorned the altar. Now the red and white cloths are needing attention, the lovely Victorian embroidery on the red cloth, still in excellent condition, will be lifted and positioned on a new white frontal, with the Victorian fringing and braid decorating a new red frontal. The white frontal will be used for the first time at the Millennium.

Tucked away in a vestry box is a collection of old Bibles and Prayer Books . In poor condition is The Book of Common Prayer dated 1712. Inside are some written notes by a George Dorman and a George Durman in 1716 and 1717 (which illustrates the problem we have in consistency of name spelling!). Notes were made more as a reminder to the '*Clark*' of the various texts or psalms to be used. Some unusual prayers were noted:

*'Gunpowder Treason  
For King Charles the Martyr  
For the restauration(sic) 1660'*

## The Bells

No church is complete without its bells and unfortunately the bells at St. James' had not been rung since the 1920s. On a few occasions itinerant ringers gave a few peals but the damaged tenor made the sound less than welcome! The reason was the state of the tower. The rendering was falling, the stonework was crumbling, the mortar had disappeared in places and the stairs were dangerous to use. With all of this being put right during the restoration in 1997 it was time to reflect on how to return the bells to ringing order.

The launch of the Millennium fund 'Ringing in the Millennium', which was prepared to give a grant of 50% for the restoration to ringing order of any church bells that had been silent for more than 30 years, gave a unique opportunity to restore

the bells. With the help of other grant giving bodies, private donations and gifts, the total of £36,000 needed was raised in 1999.

The church will now play its part in welcoming the new Millennium when, at noon on the 1st of January 2000, all the church bells in England will ring .

The four original bells were:

Treble cast by Bayley Street & Co. 1756, inscribed "*Praise ye the Lord with one accord, Thomas Vile Churchwarden*"

2nd Bell cast by John Taylor, Loughborough, in 1861

3rd Bell cast by Robert Austen, Compton Dundon, in 1626.

Tenor Bell cast by Thomas Wroth in 1721, inscribed "*Mr. Robert Jefferies Churchwarden*"

The third bell also has the inscription W.T. most likely a William Tyse who was a church-warden at around that time (1626). It also has ornamental bands of Tudor Roses and Thistles, in allusion no doubt, to the then recent union of England with Scotland.

The bells were moved to Loughborough on the 11th of August 1999, an auspicious day, with the total eclipse of the sun in parts of southern England. The tenor bell proved to be larger than the doorway of the church. Fortunately, since it was due to be recast, a section could be removed from the rim of the bell to allow it to leave the church.

On the 9th of September, a group of the bell ringers and other villagers travelled to Loughborough to watch the new treble and tenor bells being cast. All work to the bells was carried out by the John Taylor Bell Foundry at Loughborough. The cracked tenor bell was recast retaining the original decoration and inscription. The original 2nd, 3rd and treble were repaired and retuned with the original treble bell becoming the 2nd in the ring of five.

From old Vestry records it was discovered that Beercrocombe did have five bells at one time but in 1861 a broken bell was removed for scrap and until the 1920s when ringing stopped, the tower had four bells. After much deliberation among the new team of bell ringers it was decided that the inscription for the new bell should be:

**Another bell rang back along  
Now here am I to sing my song**

Also inscribed on the new bell are the names of the two church-wardens who held the office in 1999, Maureen Longstaff and Elizabeth Davies.

On the 25th of October 1999 the five bells arrived back at the church and a bell-hanger from the foundry, assisted by a team of local volunteers, began the complicated task of rehangng them in the tower. Finally, at 6.30 pm on Friday the 29th of October 1999 the sound of five bells rang out over the village for the first time in nearly 150 years, the culmination of years of planning and hard work.

### **The Churchyard and Muskay or 'The Plot'**

The peaceful churchyard contains the remains of many people who have spent their lives in Beercrocombe, worshipped in the church and been confronted by all the worries of every day life, no matter what century they lived in. Only very few have headstones to mark their resting place.



There are three box tombs and five headstones. The inscriptions are worn but a project is underway to decipher and record the inscriptions.

The oldest memorial is the box tomb nearest to the gate. It is in memory of Henrie Morley who died in 1644, his son Roger Morley who died 1635 and another member of the family, Richard Morley who died 1708. In 1674 the churchwardens are noted as Richard Morley and Henry Morley, probably sons of Henrie Morley.

To the north of the church, approached through wooden gates, is a small piece of land originally known as 'The Plot'. This was marked No. 30 on the 1839 Tithe map and is shown adjacent to No. 31 known as Muscay; sometimes spelt Muskay. Until the early 1980s 'The Plot' was overgrown with brambles and impenetrable. The Wyndham Estate sale documents do not record 'The Plot' being sold, which led to some uncertainty of ownership. This was resolved in 1988 by an agreement between the Parochial Church Council and George Wyndham's Will Trust that, for a nominal rent of £1 a year the land was available for use by the village. The villagers cleared the site, planted trees and seeded grass, making a small haven of peace and tranquillity. The land was renamed 'Muskay'. Still a mystery remains. Why 'the Plot'? Was it the site of a former house long gone and is it indicative of more houses nearby?

### **People**

So much for the fabric, "bricks and mortar," yet the church is much more than that. For over 700 years generations of villagers have looked to St James as their centre,

not only for worship and spiritual guidance, but also for community and fellowship.

Today the parish is one in a group of eight. Beercrocombe was joined with Hatch Beaucharnp in 1929, with West Hatch in 1961, with Curry Mallet in 1976, and with the quartet of Orchard Portman, Staple Fitzpaine, Stoke St. Mary and Thurlbear in 1997. However sharing a Rector was not new to Beercrocombe since the living was linked for some years to that of the villages of North and South Braden on the incumbency of the Rev. Jeunes in 1635. There is a list of Rectors, up to the time of the linking with Hatch Beauchamp, displayed in the church.

In times past a Rector was one who received the tithes of the parish and was responsible for maintaining the chancel and the rectory as well as providing service books and vestments. The Rector was nominated by the patron of the parish. The patron of Beercrocombe being the owner of the Manor of Beercrocombe. Thus we find in the church records: *'7th October 1519 - Sir Thomas Craunger appointed priest to Beercrocombe on death of Sir Alexander Sharpies, presentation Anthony Rawley (also sometimes written as Raleigh) Esq. and his wife Elizabeth.'*, and again *'30th January 1532 - Sir Richard Wattes appointed chaplain to Beercrocombe, vacated by resignation of Sir Robert Hyde, clerk, presentation Anthony Rawley Esq. and his wife Elizabeth'.*

Looking at the list of Rectors in their church, which must look today, much as it did to most of them, it is difficult to imagine the stress and strain of ecclesiastical politics through the centuries, the Reformation, the Protectorate, Non-Conformism, never mind the local dictats from the Diocese of Wells. Yet no signs remain of the problems confronting our clergy. Apart from that of the Rev. Aurthur Voules, there is no tomb or grave to remember them by. Perhaps the Rev. Voules is one who had a special affinity explaining his wish for his mortal remains to spend eternity in the church he served so well - *'Rector of this Parish for 40 Years'*.

Helping the Rectors in their duties were the Churchwardens. In fact until 1894, when civil and ecclesiastical authority were separated, the role of the churchwardens was of greater significance in the parish than that of the Rector. Two churchwardens were appointed at the annual Easter Vestry meeting; a Rector's Warden and a People's Warden. Their duties were wide but included managing parish property, collecting rents and maintaining the fabric of the church. The churchwardens represented the views of the parish and were responsible for encouraging church attendance and ensuring the young were baptised. Proof that churchwardens took the responsibility of caring for the church seriously is shown by their names on the brass plaques, recording the various restorations and by the churchwardens names inscribed on the bells. They often gave many years service to the church, Vestry records show Mr. Jeffery retiring on April 2 1907, after 31 years as People's Warden, while Mr. Edward Prew retired after 58 years as Rector's Warden.

The churchwardens were aided by other parish officials, who were also appointed at the Easter Vestry meeting. These were the Overseer, responsible for the administration of the Poor Law, the Waywarden, responsible for the maintenance of the highway and the Parish Constable responsible for the punishment of parishioners referred to them by the churchwardens.

Records of Vestry meetings show who were entitled to make decisions, all under the chairmanship of the Rector i.e. *'we the majority of Rate Payers assembled do nominate and appoint....'*. The names of those attending were not noted but it was the occasion when the parish could witness the administration of their affairs. The Vestry meeting also levied a parish rate e.g. in 1852; *'rate in the pound of 5d, for the necessary Relief of the Poor and other purposes'*. These other purposes often meant highway repairs, e.g. in 1850 *'2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d in the pound for the necessary relief of the poor and other purposes chargeable thereon, Repairs of the Highway.'* Incidentally that part reading from *'relief to thereon'* was crossed out in the minutes. In 1860 the rate was deferred due to *'repairs to the Church Bells'* and in 1864 the church rate is mentioned as *2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d*. By no means are the rates mentioned every year; one supposes that the rate is recorded only if it is changed.

Also required for the smooth running of the church were a sexton, organist and a cleaner. Occasionally the Vestry minutes record the name of those who filled the posts. In 1890 Mr. George Vile became sexton, with the duties *'to keep the churchyard in order, to cut the ivy, to do what may be necessary in the chancel, and to attend to the bells, for the sum of three pounds seventeen shillings per annum'*. In 1907 Mr. Edward Collard was sexton at the salary of 52 shillings, *'with the additional duty of ringing bells for service, and 10 shillings extra for attention to the lamps and lighting the same'*. After Mr. Collard's death Mr. Samuel Stodgell became sexton. Today some of these duties are performed voluntarily, but of course we now have such labour saving devices as electric lights and oil fired central heating.

Some contentious issues which would affect the appropriation of the rates are minuted and examples given in the extracts show some idea of the workings of the Vestry Meeting.

### **Extracts from the Vestry Minute Book**

1852. *'No road repairs, materials (to be) carted without permission of the Waywardens'*. The Waywarden was given power to *'pound all stock found on the highways and roads of Beercrocombe'*. This is an insight to the care, or lack of it, of hedging, fencing, and general security of animals and the use of the village pound (still visibly in existence in the 1980s, adjacent to the garden of Little Portion and on the roadside to Broadbridge). Prior to this it was on the site of the school house.

1854. There were five Vestry meetings in this year - quite exceptional, including a meeting to elect five Parish Constables being William Aplin, Richard Collard,

Benjamin Baker, Thomas Slade and John Webb. At another meeting '*it was unanimously agreed that each farmer should keep his hedges (bordering the roads) cut and drains cleaned*'. Interestingly the comment in brackets was added later! The last meeting in this year put up the Poor Rate and Highway Rate to 10d in the pound each, an unprecedentedly high rate. Incidentally, the same names do seem to occur each year being Thos. Jeffery, Benj. Baker, David Slade, Edward Prew, D. Crabb, T. Slade and J. Durman, and of course the Rector, Arthur Voules.

1859. Here is the first reference to repairs of the church.

1860. Rate deferred...'*Rector and Churchwardens are able to report repairs of the Church Bells*'. At another meeting that year '*The broken bell was ordered to be removed to the Churchwarden's house and weighed in order to ascertain.... repair the...*' (here the words are indecipherable).

1862. An Act of Parliament was considered, apparently rate valuations were being changed and each farmer was asked to provide '*particulars of his farm and field dimensions*'.

1865. Parish Constables become David Crabb, John Warfield, Rob. Alpin, Jas. Collard and Rich. Bulpin.

1867. Mention is made of a legal difficulty in obtaining Church Rates from the '*B.&E. Rs. Coy.*' - does this refer to the company building the railway?

1868. Problems emerge on rate evaluations and Edward Prew is elected to represent the parish.

1869. The new Act of Parliament '*Rating of Small Tenements*' is applied. Rebates are agreed, showing the fiscal power of the Church at this time.

1872. Mention is made of a woman for the first time! Mary Baker (head of the family at Whittles Farm), although her son represented her at the meeting. A member of the Jeffery family is noted as John Lumbard Jeffery.

1873. Note is made of the need of a new stove. £3.10s.0d is in hand and other money sought. (Meetings were usually held in the Church in March with a small coal or coke stove only - enough to test anyone's faith!). A vote was made to thank Mrs Augusta Jeffery for looking after the school in the absence of a teacher. £10.0s.0d was agreed as a salary for the new school mistress.

1879. Mention is made of a '*voluntary*' Rate, and liaison between the Trustees and Tenants of the Earl of Egremont's Estate. The Overseer's Book sometimes notes a cost of rates not paid. Perhaps it was a voluntary arrangement until the true beginnings of Local Government?

## **The Life of the Church**

So much for the officials of the parish but the ordinary people also played their part in the life of the church.

As early as 1523 a William Mede left 20d to the Church at Bere Crockam for '*tithes forgotten*'. Thoughts of his demise having concentrated his mind!

Even in the early part of the 20th century there was more than one service each Sunday. Older inhabitants could recall walking to church in all weathers, in winter carrying a lantern to light the way in order to attend the evening service. In 1905 one of the duties of the church cleaner was to *'light the stove when required, including Wednesday night'*, presumably this was for services on a Sunday and also on a Wednesday evening. Attending church was a way of life and everyone was expected to attend. No doubt in times past we have also had some 'fire and brimstone' preachers to reinforce the need for regular attendance.

As today there was a need for fund-raising events. From the Vestry records of 1908 there is mention that planning was underway for a bazaar to raise funds for the bell cage which was *'seriously out of repair'*. The bazaar was held in July and raised £29.10.0d. So nothing in life really changes, holding a bazaar, or in modern terminology a 'fete', is still one way of raising funds.

### **Capland Church**

A church existed at Capland and was abandoned in the mid 16th century; the last incumbent probably being Robert Hyde appointed in 1532. Capland Church is not listed in the survey of 1563. Its Advowson, as a piece of property, was still mentioned in 1606 and Henry Jeunes was appointed Rector of Beercrocombe and Capland together in 1635 (these details were kindly given by Robert Dunning). He was unable to confirm the anecdotal comment that part of Capland Church, the Chancel Arch, was incorporated in Broadway Church. Again the patron is the owner of the Manor of Beercrocombe.

Some records exist to show the appointment of priests of Capland, note the various spellings in the records.

**18 January 1444** *'Institution of Sir Robert Markes chaplain as rector of the church of Capelonde vacant by resignation of Sir John Coke on presentation of Thomas Herberd and Agnes his wife'.*

**15 November 1508** *'Sir Thomas Mawdeley Chaplain to the church of Capland vacant by death of Master John Strete on the presentation of Lady Agnes Harwell relict of William Harwell Esq. By promising to resign if any other patron be found'.*

**31 August 1519** *'Sir Thomas Brassington, priest to Capelond, vacant by death Sir Thomas Mawdeley, presentation Anthony Rawley Esq. and his wife Elizabeth'.*

**24 May 1532** *'Sir Robert Hyde, chaplain to the free church of Copelond, on presentation of Anthony Rawley Esquire and his wife Elizabeth'* (Robert Hyde resigned as clerk at Beercrocombe to become chaplain of Capland).

From this date the records always show a Rector for Beercrocombe with Capland.

## **John Wesley**

In 1985 George Ranken corresponded with the Rev. N. Richardson, Tutor of Wesley College, Bristol, resulting in these extracts from Wesley's Journal as follows;

September 1746 Thursday 18th *'about one I preached at Beercrocombe'*

June 1747 Wednesday 24th *'we rode to Beercrocombe, hoping to reach Tavistock the next day'*

July 1747 Monday 27th *'once more to Beercrocombe'*

September 1748 Thursday 15th *'I rode to Beercrocombe, where, between six and seven I preached to a serious congregation'*

August 1750 Wednesday 1st *'hence we rode to Beercrocombe and the next day to Cullompton'*

August 1751, Wednesday 21st *'we reached Beercrocombe in the evening, and Cullompton the next day'*

September 1751 Friday 27th *'In the evening I preached at Beercrocombe, and on Saturday came to Bristol'*

So, for a period of six years, the village was privileged to listen to one of the most influential thinkers of the time. A pre-eminent Methodist who certainly affected the course of religion and the lives of many, there must have been a very good reason for his visits. Was it the *'serious congregation'*? Or was it some cosy B&B at Whittles Farm? One of those little mysteries.....

## School Days



*Beercrocombe School at the beginning of the twentieth century*

Now a private house known as 'The Old School House', Beercrocombe School was built on land owned by the Egremont Estate with funds given by the Countess of Egremont, widow of the 4th and last Earl of Egremont who had died in 1845.

The school, which was to be a Church of England school, opened in 1861 under the Rector, the Rev. Arthur Voules, with the first treasurer being Mr. Edward Prew of Beer Farm. Names on the register at that time were Alice and Julia Boon, Becky and Harry Knight, Vile, Male, Hussy, Collard and Brunt.

Religious education was supervised by the Rector who visited at least once a week. The children were tested annually on scripture and catechism by a Church Inspector and later yearly visits were made by an HMI (His Majesty's Inspector of Schools) to test progress.

Secular education was dominated by the 3Rs but singing, history, geography, natural history walks and drawing are mentioned. Older girls at one time went to Meare Green for cookery classes. The Schoolmistress of the 1914-17 period gave a fuller record in the logbook than did some of the other teachers. There is mention of sales of work produced in the handicraft classes with tea, singing and recitations. Older boys began to cultivate part of the playground. There are references to a poem which had to be learned by heart and a school play given in 1913 was 'The Sleeping Beauty'.

The school leaving age was 14 but there are references to children of 13 and younger leaving with or without special dispensation to go into service or onto the farms. A few children left to go to grammar school at Ilminster. The school logbook which is preserved at the Somerset Record Office gives us a fascinating insight into the life of this small country school.

Poor attendance dominates the logbook and H.M.'s Inspector attributed lack of progress to this. Weather played a considerable part but it appears that truancy was accepted at hay making and harvest time. Illness was another factor frequently mentioned for poor attendance. In 1888 it was noted that *'some of the older children stayed at home for very flimsy reasons or none at all'*! Also in 1888 *'The weather being fine, the older boys were required for haymaking'* was recorded. In both 1888 and 1889 there was only a two week holiday because haymaking was late. When the School reopened in 1896 only 12 children were present. *'A good many were working for a local farmer and one was blackberrying for two weeks'*.

In January 1888 *'being without coal for the school fire and in consequence of a heavy fall of snow the children were unable to attend from the 13th to the 21st'*. March 1890 saw the schoolroom flooded by heavy rain and 1891 again saw severe snowstorms with 1897 being one of the worst winters on record with flooding of the adjoining lanes and heavy snowfall frequently closing the school. In March 1914, of the 34 children on the roll only 13 were present on one day *'and all were very wet and had to be dried out'*. This happened again in 1915 when only 11 attended and then had to be sent home for the day. The next year the schoolmistress, Miss Jennings, was unable to get to the school because of floods and in 1917 the roads were impassable because of snow.

There was only one teacher, always a woman, who changed frequently, ten being appointed between 1887 and 1904. The first qualified teacher was appointed in 1892 when progress improved rapidly. In 1889 the log notes *'every child that has passed in all three subjects has been presented with one shilling and all that passed in two subjects with sixpence which is the gift of the executors of the late last Lord Egremont'*. However by 1893 there is a note that geography was discontinued this year *'to concentrate on the three Rs'*.

A report in 1900 said that the schoolmistress *'is enthusiastic and would do well but for the irregularity of attendance'* (of the children). The log for the year notes that Lucy Brunt left school to go into service (presumably under age) and that a number of boys worked for local farmers (Mr Prew at Beer Farm and Mr Jeffrey at Allens Farm). One of the difficulties for the schoolmistress was that the children's ages ranged from 3 to 14 years all in the one class.

The building itself was far from ideal. In December 1890 plans were drawn up for improvements as all the children were taught in the same room, but nothing appears to have been done to answer the need for a larger schoolroom or an

additional room. The heating was inadequate, the chimney smoked and the lobby fire was frequently unlit. Before 1904 there was no sanitation and even when it was introduced the boys' W.Cs were poor and often blocked. In 1909 it was noted that *'the boys offices (W.Cs) are offensive and the cesspit should be emptied more frequently'*. An inspector's report in 1916 noted that the temperature in the classroom was below 50 degrees F and that a radiating stove should be substituted for the open fire.

The school logbook makes frequent reference to the various illnesses and accidents suffered by the children. These included diphtheria, scarlet fever, and jaundice as well as measles, mumps, chickenpox and whooping cough. In 1902 the school was closed on account of a measles epidemic and in 1918 the school was again closed, this time for a month owing to an outbreak of *'epidemic sickness'* possibly the influenza epidemic which killed millions at the end of the First World War.

There is occasional mention of events outside the village in the log. Various royal weddings and coronations warranted half day holidays and in 1909 the County Council ordered the school closed for the day on account of the King's funeral (Edward VII). However by 1922 the Local Education Authority decided to close the school because it was small and costly to run and there were two other schools within two miles.



*Beercrocombe School with the church and Rectory in the background*

On the 31st of March 1922 the School Mistress recorded the following in the log. *'the school closes today until further notice. The Rev. J.E.Rogers addressed the children and took final prayers.'*

## **The Beercrocombe Village Trust**

The Beercrocombe Village Trust has been in existence since May 1978. The idea of setting up a village trust came from George Ranken who lived at Staddles in the village. The Old School House and school room were given to the village by the Wyndham Estate when they sold the village in the 1920s. For a number of years the school room was used for village activities and a tenant lived in the school house but by 1977 the schoolroom was in a poor state of repair and the tenant, a Mrs. Stone, had moved to an old people's home.

The initial Trust discussions involved Mr. Ranken, the Rev. Tim Edwards, the then Rector and the Chairman of the Parish Meeting, Tony Davies. After lengthy consultations with the Charity Commission, the old school buildings were sold and the resulting funds lodged in investment bonds for the Trust's benefit.

In the intervening years somewhere in the region of £30,000 has been paid out to a large number of beneficiaries, ranging from individual grants to children to finance school trips to larger awards towards the cost of Beercrocombe Church restoration. Other organisations to have benefited include various local educational establishments, village halls and youth groups. The Trust also contributed to the construction of the village bus shelter in 1999.

There is no doubt that the village of Beercrocombe and the local neighbourhood has benefited greatly from the Trust as many successful local projects would not have been possible without its financial backing.

## **Highways and Byways**

Ease of communication was certainly not the reason for the development of a village here as it lies away from any main transport routes. Consequently this chapter deals with the development of transport systems affecting the village even though the canal and railway just passed through the parish en route between Chard and Taunton. However the railway and the station at Hatch Beauchamp opened up enormous opportunities to the villagers. The Industrial Revolution had finally arrived in 1866!

## **The Road System**

There is little recorded information available on the development of the road network in the locality of Beercrocombe and yet one's eyes are drawn to the difference between the majority of our lanes and for example, those of Capland Lane and part of Stocks Lane (see the reference earlier to the gateways into Neroche

Forest). The former are narrow and winding, closely bound by hedges with little or no drainage and often subject to flooding. Conversely the two lanes are straight, cambered, wide with large grass verges and well drained. Possibly they are much older roads although another explanation is that up until the early 1800s the land in that area was unenclosed waste with no field boundaries to divert them from a straight line. Quite why these two excellent roads end abruptly at their right-angled junction at Yew Farm is not obvious, however examination of maps prior to 1830 shows that the route to Beercrocombe from Stewley was not down Radigan Lane but a right turn from Stocks Lane across Whittles Farm past the old church and abandoned village of Capland.

This track, now downgraded to a footpath, connected with the road past Frog Street Farm which has itself fallen into disuse. Although now called Frog Street, this road was known as Broad Street in the 18th century. Where the name Frog Street came from is one of those little mysteries waiting to be solved, it does not appear in any village records before 1837.



*Members of the Baker family at the entrance to their farm Whittles c1900*

Broadbridge Lane is another lane which has altered since the early 19th century. Until the mid 1800s this lane from the village ended at the Fivehead River near the entrance to Beer Mill Farm and was not connected with Radigan Lane. The river followed a different course, flowing away from the village in the direction of Lower Street Farm. At some point in the 1800s, probably when the canal was constructed, the course of the river was changed to flow more directly towards Beer Mill Farm. A stone bridge was constructed and Broadbridge Lane was connected to Radigan Lane and Stewley. At this time what is now the track past Frog Street Farm became redundant although it was still used by local people.

The earliest mention of roads in the village is recorded in *'The Smale Book of the Clerk of the Peace'*, where an entry from 1594 records that *'the causeway in the forest of Neroche is foundrous from Blackwater to Capland in the tything of Beer*

*Crocombe*'. The fine is listed as two shillings, probably against BeerCrocombe Parish although there is no clear record of liability.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the upkeep of the roads was the responsibility of a 'Waywarden' appointed each year from among the villagers. The village records contain notes of payments made for materials for road repairs and money for repairs to the forest gates.

Grundy's *'Ancient Highways of Somerset'* lists the route from Curry Rivel to Curry Mallet as one of the Ridgeways which runs along the ridges which project into the great marshes of mid Somerset. Probably it communicated with the Great Ridgeway of the Blackdown Hills (referred to above as the causeway in the forest of Neroche) but when other roads were developed connecting it to Taunton the part of the road connecting it to the Blackdowns passed out of use and vanished.

In *'Somerset Roads - The Legacy of the Turnpikes'* by J B Bentley and B J Murless, the route from Rock House through Hatch Beauchamp, Hatch Green and Capland, through Bickenhall to Neroche is listed as being included within the 1778 Act. However, the 1820 Returns confirmed that it was never turnpiked. The section from Capland to Holman Clavel was the subject of a significant proposal published in 1782. The proposal shows a road wider than most roads of the time, indicating a major road, but it seems never to have been built.

The lanes through the village from the 1920s onwards are remembered as being in quite good order. Narrower than at the present time, they were ditched either side. These ditches were later piped to gain extra width. Mr White who lived at Broadbridge maintained the hedges and ditches, calling on extra help from the local council if needed.

## **The Chard Canal**

Soon after the start of the canal era circa 1760, the idea of a ship canal linking the English Channel and the Bristol Channel had been promoted. Various proposals were advanced between 1769 - 1824, all choosing the obvious route beginning at Beer or Seaton on the south coast, making use of the river valleys of the Axe, the Isle, the Tone and the Parrett and crossing the Blackdown hills at Chard, the narrowest and lowest point. This canal with 30 miles of works and a 250 foot high watershed to cross was a most ambitious project and expected to cost £1.75 million.

Whilst these proposals were surveyed, they were all shelved with the advent of economic recession and not seriously revived until after 1830, prompted by the increasing demand for the cheap transport of bulky goods and the relatively expensive costs of road charges. Chard was affected by the Industrial Revolution with the development of water driven wool and lace mills producing large quantities of

goods. Between the censuses of 1811 and 1831 the population of the Chard Boroughs increased by approximately one third, generating further increased traffic in foodstuffs and building materials.

The prospect for the success of a canal in a rural area, with a hilly topography, complicated construction and sparse population restricting potential revenue, was not favourable. However, an experienced engineer James Green, who had already designed a successful canal incorporating an inclined plane to rise some 225 feet at Bude in 1817 and later the Torrington and Grand Western Canals, was commissioned to make a survey for a canal from Chard via Ilminster to the Taunton Bridgwater canal which had recently opened in 1827. The survey was completed in 1833 with an estimated cost of £57,000. Green's proposals were accepted with minor modification and in 1834 the Chard Canal Company was launched and the necessary act of Parliament achieved royal assent in June 1834.

The canal was to be 13.5 miles long and incorporated the following features:

- Five main levels linked by four inclined planes at Chard Common, Ilminster, Wrantage and Thornfalcon.
- A single lock at Dowlish Ford.
- Three tunnels at Crimson Hill (2000 yards), Lillesdon (500 yards) and Herne Hill (300 yards).
- Approximate width - 23 feet. Approximate depth - 3 feet.
- Water for the canal was to be provided mainly by the Chard reservoir and also from the river Eley and flood waters rising around Chard.

Work started on the construction of the canal in June 1835 at Wrantage and by 1837 the progress on the tunnels at Crimson Hill and Lillesdon was such that the cutting of the canal from Ashill to Chard was started. Much of the labour was carried out by Irish and casual labourers using ordinary spades, wheelbarrows, horses and carts. The tunnels were built by sinking vertical shafts and excavating outwards from the centres of the hills. The shaft near Beer Cross is still visible.

1841 saw the opening of the canal to Ilminster and the entire canal was finally completed when the Chard Common inclined plane was opened on the 24th of May 1842. The total cost of £140,000 was almost three times the original estimate.

After a busy start, trade quickly fell in the face of competition and by the 1850s the average traffic was just 10 tub boats (26 ft long, 6 ft 6 in wide) per day, most boats returning empty. These boats were mostly pulled by horses although earlier boats would have been pulled by gangs of men. The annual tonnage fell from 33,284 in 1845 to 25,168 in 1856. The 1856 revenue totalled £2,071.

From the beginning the canal was unable even to meet the interest on the mortgage raised to build it and within four years of opening the future prospects were so dismal that a proposal was made to convert the canal to a railway. This required repayment of all debts and had no chance of success. Consequently in 1853 one of the main mortgagees obtained the appointment of a receiver who made another attempt to convert the canal to a railway, again without success. To stop its competitors, the London and South Western Railway Company purchasing the canal and converting it to a railway, the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company promoted their own Taunton to Chard railway and bought up the canal for £5,945, less than 5% of its original cost.

The Chard canal closed on the 29th of September 1866 after only 24 years of use. All serviceable equipment and surplus land was sold off, whilst other parts reverted to previous owners. The two aqueducts at Wrantage and Creech were dismantled and the canal began its long decay. Some elements of the canal are still visible around the village of Beercrocombe as follows:

- Crimson Hill Tunnel, Wrantage incline and aqueduct (accessible from the A378 Taunton Langport road) - the north stone entrance to the tunnel is well preserved with stops for stoplocks just outside. The tunnel is stone lined with regular holes in the sides, possibly for drainage. There are metal fittings in the roof probably for boatmen to hook onto to haul the heavy boats through. Close to the tunnel is the tunnel keeper's house. The incline is short and well preserved and at the bottom of the incline is a pond for waiting boats together with a well preserved piece of canal. The embankment continues until the aqueduct across the main road and is well preserved to the south but with the trough removed.
- Canal from Merryfield Aerodrome to Beercrocombe - here there is a well preserved embankment with the bed of the canal clearly visible, and it is best seen just east of Keyseys Dairy House. The canal is still preserved and filled with water as it approaches the south entrance to the Crimson Hill Tunnel. The tunnel entrance has collapsed completely. Near this point is a lagoon used to marshal boats and reaching across the edge of this was an intriguing small aqueduct which was destroyed in the late 1970s because of possible danger.
- Lastly, just over the parish boundary into Curry Mallet is Old Star Farm (of which further mention is made in the section on village houses) which was once a public house, with a coal merchant's yard next door taking in deliveries from canal barges for sale to the local population.

## **Railways - The Chard Branch**

Plans to build the Chard branch date back to 1830 when the Devon County Engineer James Green was commissioned to make a report on the feasibility of building a canal between Taunton and Chard. His report recommended that a railway would be more appropriate and viable, but his advice went unheeded and the canal was duly built as detailed earlier in this chapter.

The later threat of a railway prompted the Chard Canal Company to apply to Parliament to convert its canal to a railway, changing its name to the Chard Railway Company. The Act was passed in 1847, but the poor financial state of the company prevented the plans from coming to fruition.

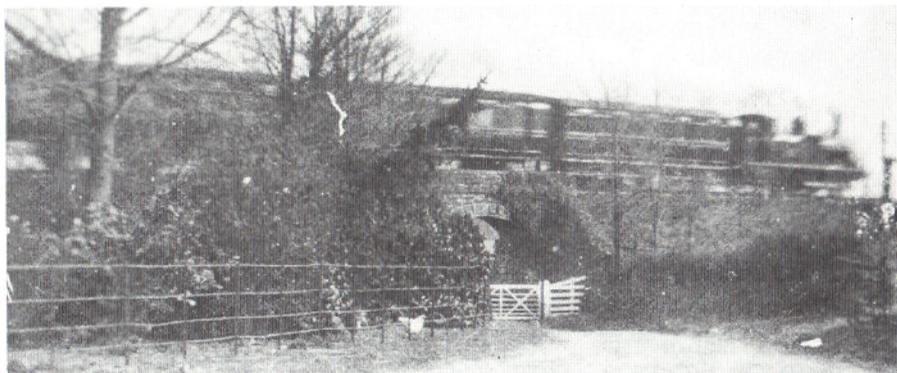
The proposal was revived in Chard in 1852 with an Act passed the following year allowing the conversion and an extension to Taunton. Yet again a lack of capital frustrated this project, but Chard was at last connected to the railway by a short line linking the town basin to the London and South West Railway's Exeter line passing three miles to the south of the town. Work started on this line on the 1st of November 1860 and after the financial failure of two successive contractors, work was completed and the line opened on the 8th of May 1863. Formal consent for the London and South Western Railway to take over this line was granted by an Act of Parliament passed on the 22nd of June 1863.

A continuing desire for a rail link to the county town gave rise to the Chard and Taunton Railway Act of 1861 giving both the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company and the London and South Western Railway Company the power of subscription. Failure to attract sufficient investment resulted in a further act passed in 1863 giving the Bristol and Exeter Railway Company powers to take over the Chard and Taunton Company and to build a broad gauge line.

Work on the line commenced in September 1863, the contractors being Logan and Rennie and the engineer, John Fox of Hatch Beauchamp. The line was designed to accommodate double track throughout, although only one was laid. The line was opened for passengers on the 11th of September 1866, but due to incomplete goods sheds, freight could not be carried until March 1867.

A new joint Bristol and Exeter Railway Company and London and South Western Railway Company station was built at Chard and in 1867 the link at Chard between these two lines was opened. Intermediate stations were at Ilminster and Hatch Beauchamp and later at Thornfalcon which opened in 1871. Later, to combat bus competition, unstaffed halts were constructed at Donyatt and Ilton. Sadly the potential for further development to create a route from the Midlands to the south coast resorts of Seaton, Sidmouth and Lyme Regis, was never realised. Passenger services between Taunton and Chard were gradually increased from five per day in 1869 to seven per day in 1914 (weekdays only).

A report on the Chard branch, published in 1925 by the Great Western Railway Company, stated that coal and universal wagons of general goods were sent and received daily and 626 wagons of livestock were carried over the branch line that year, as were 83,789 milk churns.



*A train crossing the now dismantled bridge at Whittles Farm c1900.*

Due to insufficient traffic, the passenger service was withdrawn from the 10th of September 1962 and the goods service two years later on the 6th of July 1964. (Dr. Beeching's Strategic Review.)

Today little remains of the general route although some decaying bridges and the old stations are clearly visible. Perhaps the most obvious remnants in Beercrocombe are at Elmbridge and the bridge over Radigan Lane close to Pauls Farm. Reminiscences by elderly Beercrocombe residents recall local children begging rides on the workman's buggy, using the timetable of passing trains to dictate daily routines, and the daily newspaper dropped from the bridge close to Whittles Farm so that Baxter Baker always had an early read! During World War One the railway was known to carry machinery and coal and was later used in conjunction with Merryfield Aerodrome in World War Two. One spectacle enjoyed by all passengers on one train was a spilt trailer load of eggs from the poultry farm near Elmbridge due to the lorry running down the bank towards the line.

Whilst the trains never stopped at Beercrocombe, the existence of the railway with the sights, sounds and smells of steam engines passing by for nearly a hundred years, will remain an important part of memories of the village.

## Sports and Pastimes

Most people in our parish were employed as tenant farmers or farm workers and their attendance on the farm was required just about every day. The normal working day was over 10 hours, for very low pay plus some cider. In short there was little time or money for indulgence in sport. It was not until the Industrial Revolution of the mid 1800s that the working class was enabled to participate in the newly organised sports of football and cricket and this was mainly in the large industrial towns of the North. Our rural community would, like others, celebrate national events with a holiday, perhaps meeting on the village green for some cider and enjoying a game of skittles in the barn, now the house called Staddles. The best example we have of a regular holiday is the fun each year around Skipperhams Well, which is mentioned later.

It was not until the 1920s that a cricket team was established on a pitch outside the village beyond Broadmead. A football team also played in the late 1920s and early 30s, organised by Stanley Turner, son of the dairyman at Keyseys.



*Beercrocombe football team in the early nineteen twenties*

We have Mr. Ron Burrough of Capland Farm to thank for information on the cricket team. Mr. Burrough was captain and secretary of the Hatch Beauchamp club. He described the friendly matches played against Beercrocombe where a score of 35 was often enough to win and how the pitch was a mown area fenced off from the remaining long grass where cows and sheep were allowed to graze prior to the match (cow pats were a problem when fielding apparently!).

Beercrocombe had an old railway goods wagon as a shed where the ladies would set up a tea urn and provide sandwiches and home made cake. As to the team, Sydney Dibble was captain at one time. Though a small man he was a good bowler and a pleasant man who enjoyed sport. Henry Dibble, one of his sons, was a very good cricketer who also played for Taunton. Willie Slade, a nephew of Baxter Baker, organised the cricket team and acted as manager for many years. Ron Styles who lived in Taunton and had a paper round in the area, played for Beercrocombe. Other players were, Raymond Dibble, Arthur Wilcox (Vice Captain), Bert Everleigh, Len Manning and Harold Mannings. Apparently there was only one distant away fixture each year, an all day match against Bridgetown on Exmoor, the match held on a Bank Holiday and starting at 11.30am.



*Beercrocombe cricket team 1926*

After the war the Beercrocombe team joined with Hatch Beauchamp to be called the Beercrocombe and Hatch Beauchamp Cricket Team, but as with all things, by the late 1940s it was known simply as Hatch Beauchamp Cricket Team.

As to other sports, although the Taunton Vale Foxhounds would have hunted in the area, there is no evidence that the village tenant farmers were other than passive observers of the sport. Apart from Hatch Court outside the village, there does not appear to have been the wealth for patronage or even participation, although local people often followed the hunt on their bicycles.

Similarly the geology and lack of wide water expanses preclude game hunting other than the odd rabbit for the pot, leaving the villagers to take their enjoyment at the one big annual event, the May Fair at Skipperhams Well.

## **Skipperhams Well**

In the 19th century it was common practice for many farm workers to be hired annually, and on some fixed date, usually Michaelmas, Martinmas or May Day. Masters and men resorted to the hiring fairs where some horse trading would be carried out by the gypsies, and fun had by all. Skipperhams Well, sometimes called Skivern's, St. Nipperhams, Skiverton, or Skippertons, is situated beside the railway line to the south of Keyseys Farm. It is what is known as a 'boiling well' since it is constantly bubbling with calciferous water reputedly having health giving properties. It was also believed that the red deposits in the water denoted the blood of Christ, giving it its healing properties.

The Somerset County Herald in 1932 and 1936 records a series of 'replies to queries' and correspondence concerning the boiling wells at Beercrocombe and at Capland. Skipperhams Well at Beercrocombe should not be confused with that at Capland Spa which was a much more enterprising affair, with a lodging house and facilities for taking the water. The name - Skipperns, is associated with Capland, but who or what was Skipperham?

The combination of health giving water and hiring of workers seems a good enough reason for a fair and by all accounts it was a very good fair indeed. People walked from long distances to attend. Most of the recollections of the fair are stories passed down from parents, although Kitty Baker of Whittles Farm recalls watching the fair from the safety of the railway line when she was a young girl, just after the turn of the century. Intriguingly all stories mention the game of rounders as being a major part of the fair. It appears these fairs stopped around the time of the First World War.

## Farming Life



For nearly one thousand years the lives of the villagers of Beercrocombe were dominated by agriculture. Prior to the Second World War almost every family in the village depended on agriculture for their livelihood.

*Haymaking in Beercrocombe*

Once again the Domesday Book provides our first glimpse of the agricultural life of the village. Four plough teams are listed (usually drawn by six to eight oxen) and the farm animals included cattle, pigs, sheep and goats. The farmed land is noted as meadow, pasture and woodland.

During the Middle Ages, Beercrocombe, like most other villages in the area, would have worked what is known as the Open Field System. Two or three large open fields held in common, with each villager working arable strips, often spread around to share out the better land, with large areas allocated for grazing. The grazing land rotated with the arable land to provide the essential fertiliser. These open fields would have gradually been enclosed to form the basis for the later farms.

Villagers in Beercrocombe still held Commoners Rights in parts of the Forest of Neroche and Sedgemoor until the last Enclosure Acts of the early 1800s. In some villages, particularly where fields have been used for stock grazing, evidence of the old strip systems can be found but in other areas modern deep ploughing has wiped out all traces. No evidence remains in Beercrocombe but aerial photography in a very dry season may reveal some traces.

One aspect of village life often forgotten today was that, up to comparatively recent times, communities were almost self sufficient in food and clothing with almost all other essential items being produced in the village or the immediate surrounding area. This made villages very self contained and travel outside the immediate area was rare. Annual holidays being of course non existent apart from the odd Holy Day! Travelling salesmen 'Tinkers' would have brought manufactured goods to the cottages and farms.

## How much were people paid?

This is a question often asked. It did vary according to the area, but as an indication, a list from the late 17th century (although not from Beercrocombe) includes the following:

'A Bailiff having meat and drink 'per year	£6.0s.0d	
Hay making		
'Labourers for mowing of grass by the day'	£0.1s.2d	(6p)
'Labourers for mowing by the acre'	£0.1s.6d	(7.5p)
Harvest		
'The man reaper by the day having meat and drink'	£0. 1s.0d	(5p)
'The woman reaper by the day having meat and drink'	£0.0s.8d	(3.5p)
'For working the whole harvest'	£1.10s.0d	(£1.50p)

It is tempting to try and equate the above with modern wages as it is when rents are quoted. However this is an almost impossible task since it involves complicated calculations concerning the pattern of spending and the value and availability of particular items. Many have tried and failed! At the very simplest level Bank of England calculations give £1 in 1270 as being worth around £350 in today's terms (1999). £1 in 1700 equates to £60 in 1999 and £1 in 1900 would be £45 in 1999.

Both men and women were often hired at annual hiring fairs, sometimes called Mop Fairs, after which they would go to live on the farm. Children always worked on the farms and this continued well into the 20th century as the Beercrocombe village school records indicate.

No specific information is available on the agricultural life of Beercrocombe until the eighteenth century when the names of the individual farms begin to emerge including Beer Farm, Whittles Farm, Beer Mill Farm and Allens Farm. These are all identified on land tax records from the 1760s onwards. The farms were certainly in existence well before that but the names often changed with each new occupant and are difficult to identify.

The Rev. Collinson writing in 1791 notes that *'This (Beercrocombe) is a small parish containing thirty two houses'.....'in a flat rather unpleasant situation; the soil whereof is a wet clay and the lands are almost equally divided between pasture and tillage. The principal crops are wheat, beans, peas and vetches but the soil being very heavy is unsuitable for barley.'*

There is another gap in the information available until 1837 when we come to the Tithe Map.

## The Beercrocombe Tithe Map

As an agricultural community, Beercrocombe paid a tithe of one tenth of the produce of the land to the local church to maintain the Rector. This custom, increasingly resented by the nineteenth century, stretched back to medieval times and was originally paid in kind but by the end of the eighteenth century was usually a cash payment. The amount of cash seemed to vary according to local custom and how vigorous each particular Rector was in collecting his tithes. Parliament passed an act in 1836 known as the Tithe Commutation Act which converted the tithe to a cash payment system known as a rent charge. This was calculated according to the way the land was cultivated and the price of corn.

In 1837 a detailed survey was carried out and maps for each parish were made with accompanying documentation listing the landowners, (in our case the Earl of Egremont), with the name of the occupier of each plot of land and how it was cultivated (arable, orchard, meadow, pasture or garden). The name and exact area of each plot of land was recorded with the amount of tithe due from each occupier. Each cottage and farmhouse was noted but not, unfortunately, its name.

The total crop weights for Beercrocombe on which tithes were paid were oats 472 bushels, barley 328 bushels and wheat 185 bushels. Total land area is noted as 860 acres. The Rev James Upton is shown as holding 93 acres of Glebe Land (land rented out to provide income for the Rector).

Among those listed on the Tithe Map as occupants, or in the case of Beercrocombe tenants, was Edward Prew of Beer Farm. This was listed as a farmhouse, outbuildings, orchards, arable, meadowland and other land which included Viles Orchard (the land opposite Adlestrop), Mead Backside and Keyseys Hill; 159 acres in total making it the largest farm in the village at the time. Other farm tenants at that time included Thomas Slade at Beer Mill with 42 acres, Thomas Jeffrey at Allens Farm with land totalling 104 acres, Thomas Crabb at Whittles and James Durman at Frog Street Farm. Some other families mentioned were, Collards, Hussys, Uttermares, and Lumbards, all names associated with Beercrocombe for hundreds of years but who had virtually all gone by the 1950s.

A useful aspect of the Tithe Map is that it is possible to identify a number of the older holdings which had been, or were in the process of being, incorporated into the larger farms. Two examples of this were along the RUPP (road used as a public path) passing through Whittles Farm and Frog Street Farm. One property was known at that time (1837) as Walbuttons House and is listed as having a house, outbuildings and a court (yard) with four fields and an orchard totalling just over nine acres occupied by a Thomas Jeffrey. The census of 1841 notes a George Jeffrey, dairyman, aged 60 and his wife Hannah living there. Hannah had been left the property by her mother Jane Durman in 1804. Their son Thomas aged 30 lived at

Allens Farm and it is likely that George and Sarah had moved out to allow the younger family to take over the farm. By 1851, George, who was by then 70, is listed as a retired farmer with a granddaughter, Susan Jeffrey aged 31 as a housekeeper. Susan had previously lived with her parents at Allens Farm in the village. By 1881 the property was known as Whites and census records show a George Jeffreys (an S had been added) with his sister Susan, by then aged 62, living there. George is noted as a Dairyman Farmer who had previously lived at Allens Farm with his elder brother Thomas and his family.

The second property was on the same road with a house, barn, four fields and three orchards totalling just over six acres occupied by a James Aplin. In the census of 1851 an Elizabeth Aplin aged 71 is noted as a farmer at the property with a son Robert (carpenter) and Elizabeth Bud aged 13 as a house servant.

Walbuttons House remained part of Allens Farm and was sold with it in 1920 although it was by now known as Warbuttons House. Subsequently it fell into disrepair and disappeared. The second property (Aplins) was incorporated into Frog Street Farm in the latter part of the nineteenth century and by 1920 was simply a farm cottage. That too was abandoned by the 1940s and only the foundations are now visible. Both of these properties would have been viable units despite their small acreage. As is mentioned earlier, the road from Stewley used to pass directly alongside them until the mid 1800s and they were not as isolated as they would seem today.

Careful study of the Tithe Map and Census Records can tell other such stories in the village. Both the map for Beercrocombe and the accompanying documentation which is known as the Tithe Apportionment are available at the Somerset Record Office together with the Census Records.

Kellys Directory for Somersetshire published in 1861 notes that the chief crops are wheat, beans and oats. There is also mention of 50 acres of Glebe Land. The farmers of Beercrocombe were listed as Robert Aplin, Benjamin Baker (Whittles Farm), Daniel Crabb, James Durman, Thomas Jeffrey (Allens Farm), Richard Kewer, Edward Prew (Beer Farm), Thomas Slade (Beer Mill Farm) and Samuel Dennis (dairyman).

In 1864 Thomas Slade of Beer Mill Farm auctioned off his stock prior to giving up the tenancy. The sale details give a picture of a typical small farm of the era. Included were a total of *'70 sheep including a rare Devon Ram, 4 dairy cows, 7 other cows and calves, 2 oxen, 3 capital carthorses warranted sound, good and staunch in harness and 3 large store pigs plus 2 other pigs'*. Various items of farm equipment were listed and the crops sold included meadow hay, winter beans and *'50 bags of cider apples, excellent cider fruit'*. This description of livestock and crops would have fitted most of the farms in the area until the 1930s.

Nearly every farm would have had a cider orchard and a cider press with the labourers being supplied with cider each day. Even the small farms would have had a number of people employed on them. One local farmer recalls that when the steam threshing contractor from Curry Mallet arrived, his father would never start work without at least twelve men being present.

By the 1950s there were only six working farms in the village: Frog Street Farm, Allens Farm (Harry Jeffrey), Manor Farm (previously Beer Farm) (Parker family), Lower Street Farm (Dibble family), Whittles and Keyseys Farms (Dare brothers).

The major worry for all livestock farmers then and now is disease, Foot and Mouth being one of the most feared. There have been a number of outbreaks recorded in the area and one of the worst was in 1937. Beercrocombe seems to have been chosen as a central point for the collection and disposal of carcasses. Any herd found to have the disease was automatically slaughtered and the carcasses brought to the village to be burnt in the field behind what is now Old Manor Barn. All persons or vehicles entering the village had to pass through disinfectant baths across the roads. The burning went on for weeks, with tankers bringing in tar oil to keep the fire going. There was a huge mound of earth and carcasses which people used to cycle from Taunton to see (what the smell was like can only be imagined!).

An unusual crop grown in Beercrocombe and its surrounding area until the late 1950s was teasels. The teasel heads with their fine hooks were and indeed still are, used to finish the very finest cloth such as snooker table cloth. The soil in the area, due to its high molybdenum content, suited their growth. They were not an easy crop taking two seasons to mature and requiring fresh land each planting. Teasels were often grown under contract, the farmers supplying the land and the contractor supplying the plants and the labour. Workers recall that the heads were picked then bound onto sticks *'39 to a stick plus the last one bound round the top'*. They were dried then sent to the North of England to be used in the cloth industry.

Teasel harvesting was not popular with the workers, but even worse, more back-breaking, was apple picking. The branches were whacked with a stick and the pickers had to bend down to collect the fallen apples. Most of these were cider apples. Blackberries were harvested until the 1950s and were sent off in barrels for use in making dye.

Pigs were not farmed on a large scale in Beercrocombe but they were a very important part of the ordinary villager's life. Nearly every cottage had one or two sties where pigs were fattened on anything available, including household scraps. Slaughtering the pig was a big event and it was said that every part was used except the squeak!

Many today look back on the farming of yesteryear as some sort of rural idyll but for most ordinary farm workers and indeed for many farmers it was a hard,

miserable existence. The hours were long, usually six days a week, more at busy times, little or no holiday, very poor pay and often dreadful accommodation.

The image of sunlit fields with workers doing everything at a leisurely pace by hand or with horses, everyone in tune with nature, is not the one remembered by most farm workers. They are likely to recall backbreaking hours in the sun and rain, starting before dawn to get horses fed and harnessed with the same to do when work was finished and no pension when your working life was over.



*Teasel heads on poles ready for drying at Whittles Farm*

Although today's farmers have the advantage of modern machinery, they have to do far more work with less people, the hours are just as long and they are at the mercy of political decisions over which they have no control. In real terms most farm products are worth much less in 1999 than they were fifty years ago.

## Houses and Farms

In common with many small villages in the area, many of the earliest houses in Beercrocombe today date from the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This was a period sometimes called '*the Great Rebuilding*' when increasing prosperity enabled the construction of more permanent buildings to replace the less solid structures of earlier times. A second great wave of building and extension occurred in the 19th century. Whittles Farm is a very good example of an earlier farmhouse extended by a more prosperous Victorian tenant.

Most of the earlier buildings are constructed of locally quarried blue lias stone with walls roughly one metre thick infilled with rubble. There was, until recent years, a quarry to the left of the Curry Mallet to Hatch Beauchamp road near Halfway Cottage. This quarry which was noted as Manor Quarry in a survey of 1910, was filled in some years ago. Houses in Beercrocombe would normally have been built with thatched roofs but once the canal and railway system allowed the transport of heavier materials many properties were reroofed with slates or clay tiles. Blue lias is not the ideal building stone, being subject to weather damage, consequently most of the early houses were later rendered. This tended to cause damp problems as the walls could not breathe and some of the properties such as Beer Farm and Keyseys had the render stripped off again.

Apart from the farmhouses, most housing in Beercrocombe up until the 1950s consisted of very basic cottages. At least two of these surviving cottages, Little Portion and Wayside Cottage are almost certainly what are known as 'cottages built on waste'. Meaning they were built on the waste ground adjoining the highway as can be seen by the very narrow garden at Wayside Cottage and the shape of the original plot of Little Portion.

One source of information about the village is house deeds or Indentures. As Beercrocombe belonged to one landowner, all property was leasehold until 1920. Originally property was held 'Copyhold,' the details of each holding were copied into the Manorial Court register which was the only evidence of a holding, hence the name 'Copyholder'. Later, 'Indentures' were written, these were leases written twice on one sheet of parchment then separated by cutting a curved line causing indentures, hence the name. In any dispute the two halves could be matched together to prove both sides still had the original documents. These agreements were for a number of years, often 99 and/or three nominated lives, the lease ending when the last named person died. Three early indentures are known to exist, two for Beer Mill Farm (1709 and 1759) and one for Little Portion (1735).

In the first indenture for Beer Mill Farm, dated the 29th of September 1709, the agreement is between Sir William Wyndham and Richard Weaver yeoman of the Parish of Curry Mallet. It notes payment of '*£135 of good and lawful money of*

*Great Britain and two broad pieces of good old gold'* for a lease of three lives. A large sum of money in those days.

The Indenture for Little Portion is dated the 29th of September 1735 and is between Sir William Wyndham and *'John Durman husbandman of Beercrocombe'*. The yearly rent was one shilling (5p) and it is described as *'a cottage and garden on waste ground'*.

Identification of various properties is not an easy task as, apart from the farms, house names were not normally used, houses usually being known by the names of the families living there at the time and changing each time a family moved on. Since everyone knew where the Viles, Southwoods, Honeybuns, Watts etc lived, it was not necessary to identify the properties separately.

### **The Sale of Beercrocombe**

In Beercrocombe we are lucky to have one very informative document: the 1920 sale particulars.

As has been written elsewhere Beercrocombe was in the ownership of the Wyndham family for hundreds of years and was kept as a single unit, with all property being leased. On the 2nd of September 1920 William Wyndham sold some of the family lands at auction including the properties at Beercrocombe. The sale took place at the George Hotel in Ilminster and the agents were C.R.Morris, Sons and Peard from North Curry.

It was advertised as *'part of the important and extensive estates of William Wyndham Esq'*. Comprising *'11 Farms and Homesteads, Small Holdings, Corn Mill, Cottage Properties and enclosures of valuable detached accommodation lands'* in Beer Crocombe and surrounding villages.

In all there were 33 lots amounting to 2000 acres including the rights to the 'Manors' (in the legal sense) of Beercrocombe, Ilton and South Bradon. The land and properties were shown as producing a total of £2511.7s.0d in rental income, with the farms and land all let on Michaelmas tenancies, that is, renewable on September the 29th each year, as indeed is still the case with many farms today.

As mentioned earlier, the 'Manors', including Beercrocombe, with all their rights and privileges, were included in the sale. By this time very little if any, of the old rights and privileges would have remained and importantly the Advowson (the right of appointing the Rector) did not go with it. Unfortunately it is not recorded who, if anyone, bought the rights to the Manor. There may be a Lord of the Manor of Beercrocombe out there somewhere or the Lordship lapsed and no longer exists.

## **Brief descriptions of some village houses and their occupants**

### **Adlestrop**

Adlestrop was previously known as Orchard View as it looked out on an extensive orchard opposite, known as Viles Orchard (the Viles were an old Beercrocombe family) which is now gone. Although now one house, it was originally two cottages. In 1881 the east cottage was occupied by Mary Collard aged 54 and her two sons, while in the west cottage lived a George Vile with his wife Hannah and four children. By 1910 an Emily Collard and an Edward Vile were living in the two cottages which were valued at £100 and a weekly rental of two shillings (10p) each was being paid. In the 1920 auction of Beercrocombe it was noted as 'two cottages built of stone with a slated roof, large gardens each containing a piggery'. Emma Collard and Edward Vile were still the tenants at that time. The sale price was £300 for the two and the purchaser was a Mr. Rowsell who incidentally gave the Christening Bowl to the church, which is still in use today.

### **Allens (Allens Farm until 1920)**

Allens originated in the 17th century and possibly much earlier as there are references to the Allen family in Parish records from 1546 onwards. It was the farmhouse of Allens Farm up until the end of 1920 when the then owner, Harry Jeffery, moved into the cottage and former dairy on the south side of the village green which then became known as Allens Farm.



*Allens c1900 when it was Allens Farm with the Jeffreys family outside*

The house is built of blue lias stone presently under a slate roof, although it was originally thatched. In the roof space are timbers from a much earlier and lower roof which extend down to the present ground floor ceiling level suggesting that the house was originally single storey. It has been extended over the years, most recently in the 1920s when a two storey extension was built on to the south east wall and in the 1970s when the former tractor house was enclosed to give yet more accommodation. The gardens in 1920 were described as having a tennis court in the north-west corner of the field known as Huddys Croft (formerly known as Huddys Backside!). There is a well at the rear of the house and a pump. A second well and pump is said to have been by the side of the lane at the southern end of the house and was used by the villagers.

The immediate plots of land around the house have the name Huddy attached i.e. Huddys Orchard, Huddys Backside (as in the rear of a house) strongly suggesting the name of a previous owner of the holding. A Mr. Huddy is noted as a person of substance in the village in 1635 and a will exists for a Nicholas Huddy of Beercrocombe dated 1723. Nicholas Huddy died leaving large debts and it may be that the occupancy changed at that time.



Allens in 1999. The copious creeper covering the front of the house in the 1900 photo has long been removed and the front porch has been moved to the left.

The next recorded occupier was a George Durman who figures in the Parish Records as both Church Warden and Overseer (of the poor) on a number of occasions in the 1700s. Paying rent to the Earl of Egremont for *'West field and other Lands £50.10s.0d'* and Land Tax for *'Allens'* in 1792. William and Jane Durman were listed in 1798.

One of the few wills preserved for Beercrocombe is that of the above Jane Durman, *'widow'* dated March 4th 1804. In it her executors were named as *'Hannah Jeffrey and Sarah Jeffrey - daughters in the residence'*. The daughters had obviously married two brothers. Sarah was the wife of a George Jeffrey and Hannah was the wife of a Thomas Jeffrey. At this point the tenancy of Allens Farm passed to the Jeffrey family.

At some point before 1837 a small farmstead at Frog Street, commented on in the section on the Tithe Map and owned by the Wallbutton family for many years, became part of the Jeffrey landholdings. Various members of the Jeffrey family

were noted as living there during the 19th century including Sarah Jeffery (Jane Durman's daughter) and her husband George, after their son Thomas, took over Allens Farm.

In 1837 Allens Farm is noted as being occupied by Thomas Jeffrey farming 104 acres. Four years later in 1841, Thomas Jeffrey then aged 30, his wife Sarah, brother George and sister Kitty were listed at the farm. 1851 sees Thomas as a '*farmer of 122 acres employing 4 labourers*'. Also in the house were his wife and four children, a brother and a house servant, Elizabeth Williams age 17.

By 1881 only a William Jeffrey aged 25, by now noted as farming 150 acres, lived in the house with his sister Lousanne aged 36 and a general servant, Mary Taylor aged 11. An Inland Revenue Survey of 1910 gives an N.E. Jeffrey as the occupier paying rent of £160.

In the auction of 1920, the sale particulars give a Harry Jeffrey as the sitting tenant and paying rent of £184. He purchased the property, owning it for only one day before selling what is now Allens and other land then moving across the road to the farm cottage which was renamed 'Allens Farm'. The price at the auction for the whole of Allens Farm and its land which totalled 133 acres and cottages was £2915 plus £215 for the timber.

### **Allens Farm**

The house now known as Allens Farm is thought to have been constructed in the early 18th century of blue lias stone and subsequently rendered. It was originally thatched and later tiled. To the left of the house was a cider house taken down in the mid 1980s. The house was originally a cottage and dairy belonging to Allens (then Allens Farm) on the opposite side of the village green.

The 1837 Tithe Map gives the occupant as a Richard Kewer with the property listed as a house, outbuildings and garden with a total acreage of one eighth acre. However in 1851 he is noted as being '*a farmer of 47 acres employing two labourers*'. Where the land was is not clear and it may have been out of the village. In the same year Kellys Directory for Somerset lists Richard Kewer of Beercrocombe as a butcher.

By 1881 the property is no longer listed separately and may have already been incorporated into Allens Farm (now Allens) by that time. In 1920 the cottage, as it then was, is described as having a kitchen, pantry, sitting room and three bedrooms. Nearby at that time were various stables, trap house, pigsty, cowstall for 21 and cow pens, mixing house with chaff loft, an engine house, implement shed, 2 enclosed cattle bartons (yards) and rick yard together with other buildings: a typical example of the various buildings needed for a mixed farm at that time.

After the auction in 1920, the purchaser, Harry Jeffrey, who had been the sitting tenant of Allens Farm, sold off the farmhouse (which then became known as Allens) and other land including Wayside Cottage. He then moved across the green into the cottage next to the farm buildings and named it Allens Farm. Harry Jeffrey lived in the cottage for many years and was a much respected figure in the village marrying in later life. Jim Tucker then purchased the property running it as a dairy farm. His son John continued to run the farm until the 1980s when the buildings and land were sold. In 1997 the by then derelict buildings were demolished and three new houses were constructed on the site. Some of the timbers from the old barns were incorporated in the new houses.

To the east of the house on the site of three recently constructed dwellings were former farm buildings including a large barn.

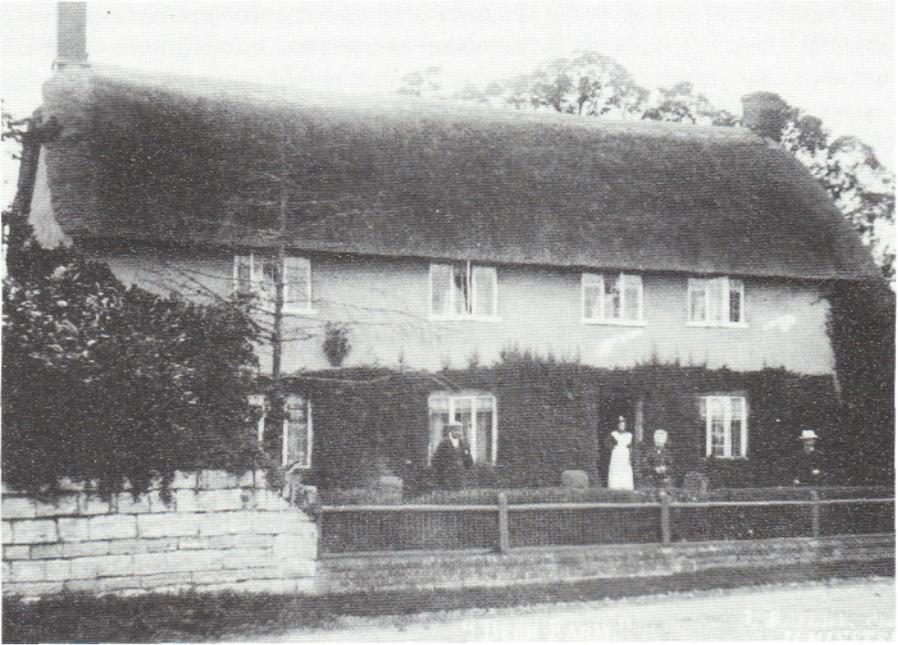


## **Beer Farm**

Beer Farm was described in a survey carried out in 1980 by E.H.D. Williams as *'a very fine example of a 16th. century building and because of its cross beamed and heavily decorated middle and inner room ceilings, clearly of superior status'*. The quality of the timber work would perhaps indicate that it was built for a Bailiff or Reeve although no documentary evidence can be found for this. In the Hearth Tax records of 1635 one dwelling larger than the others in the village was indicated and this may have been Beer Farm. In common with many old buildings a new roof has been constructed. This would seem to have been of inferior workmanship indicating perhaps a downgrading to an ordinary farmhouse.

Thomas Slade of Beer Farm features in village records as Parish Overseer in 1761 and as both Churchwarden and Overseer several times up to the 1790s. He also features in Land Tax records for that period. In 1790 Thomas Slade paid rental to the Earl of Egremont of £192 for *'Beer Farm and other lands'*. The same is recorded in 1799. By 1837 Edward Prew was tenant of Beer Farm which extended to 159 acres.

In 1851 Edward Prew aged 56 was noted as *'a farmer of 210 acres employing 4 labourers'*. Also in the house was his brother James, a housekeeper and a house servant. Both Edward and his brother were born in Bridgwater. Thirty years later in 1881 another Edward Prew aged 41 lived in the property with his wife Sarah and seven children, including Benjamin Prew aged 4 who was to figure prominently in village affairs in later years. Also in the house were Annie Keats, a nurse girl, and Emily Gillard a general servant.



*Beer Farm c 1900*

Papers from the Wyndham Estate show that Beer Mill Farm was incorporated into Beer Farm in 1865 and that the rent for the whole farm was £305 per year. Land leased by the Chard Canal Company reverted back to the Wyndham Estate in 1869 and this was also incorporated into the farm. In 1879 the rent was reduced from £325 to £274 and then from £274 to £230 in 1885. The rent still remained at £230 45 years later in 1920, only £38 more than the rental 130 years previously! An Inland Revenue survey of 1910 gives the occupier as E.J.G.Prew and son with a gross value of £4900, the highest valuation in the village at that time.

The auction particulars of 1920 describe Beer Farm as '*an attractive and valuable holding with well built and comfortable dwelling house*'. The land holding totalled 168 acres including three cottages. Two of the cottages were what is now Little Portion and the third was Beer Cottage on the Curry Mallet to Hatch Beauchamp road. The sitting tenant of the farm is noted as an E.J.C.Prew. There is a note on the sale details that it was purchased by a Benjamin Prew (possibly the same person) for £2800 plus £224 for the timber.

### **Beer Mill Farm**

At various times it has been known as Beer Mill, Beer Mill Farm, Beer Mill House, Beer Mills and finally Beer Mill Farm again.



Among the occupants over the last 350 years were Francis Lumbarde in 1690, Richard Weaver in 1709, Francis House in 1759, Sarah House in 1766, John Uttermare in 1791, Thomas Slade in 1837 Edwin Collard in 1881 and Charles Brunt in 1947.

The earliest documentary evidence for the house, which was at one time a water driven corn mill, is an entry in the accounts for the Manor of Beercrocombe dated the 24th of April 1661 referring to a mill. There is a Date Stone of 1661 on the lounge (previously the kitchen) fireplace. An original deed for the property dated 1709 found at the Somerset Record Office together with another deed dated 1759, refers to a house and land with former mill attached. This would suggest that the date of 1661 may have been when the mill was converted to a farm.

Why the mill should have been constructed in such an isolated position some distance from the village is not clear. Until the mid nineteenth century the present road out of the village towards Ashill ended at the Fivehead river and so the mill would have been at the end of a long dead end track. There is a footpath past the house leading to Curry Mallet church and it may be that this was a trackway in the past. There is also a substantial stone bridge across the Fivehead river in the middle of the field adjoining the house with no obvious track leading to or from it which may have been a route to Ilton at one time.

Beer Mill Farm was constructed with walls of blue lias stone under a thatched roof. In its original form it followed the fairly standard pattern of a 17th century yeoman's house with a front door opening on to a central passageway with roughly equal sized rooms to either side.

In 1920 the property was described as having five bedrooms (one with a fire place), kitchen, parlour, dairy, wash house and scullery. By 1947 it was described as having a kitchen with open hearth, sitting room with register grate, scullery and store house with three bedrooms. A new tiled roof was constructed in the 1950s leaving the old roof in position underneath and the exterior stonework rendered.

The house is located approximately 90 yards away from the Fivehead River. Water was brought from the river to a mill wheel on the right hand side of the house by means of a leat or cutting before looping back to the river. The mill machinery was in what is now the dining room.

Evidence of the leat remains in the fields adjoining the house but much of it was covered over when the Chard canal was constructed in the mid 19th century. The cutting from the river to the mill is shown on 19th century maps. In the 19th century the farm was run as a traditional mixed unit. An advertisement for a farm

sale at the property in 1864 lists cattle, pigs, sheep and evidence of arable crops and apple orchards. After 1864 it became part of Beer Farm until 1947 when it was sold to a Major Fox for £2000. A tenant at the property prior to 1947, Charles Brunt, grew extensive areas of teasels, renting additional land for the crop. In the 1950s and 60s it was run as a small dairy farm.

### **Broadbridge Cottage**

Broadbridge Cottage is thought to be 17th century and was originally two cottages used to house farm workers for Lower Street Farm.

In 1837 the cottages were occupied by two families. One was the Channing family, John Channing aged 63 an agricultural labourer, with his son James also a labourer and his wife. The second was occupied by the North family headed by John North aged 38 with his two sons, both labourers, and a daughter aged 16 who was a glover. The cottages were purchased by Sidney Dibble in 1920 as part of Lower Street Farm and later converted to one house.

### **The Cottage**

The Cottage is one of the oldest properties in the village. A detailed survey carried out in the early 1980s found that the main part of the house could be as early as 1500 being a two bay hall house open up to the roof with no first floor. The roof originally came right down to low level on both sides which it still does on part of the rear.



*The Cottage early 20th century when it was two dwellings with a thatched roof*

It would seem that at some time in the mid 1600s a first floor was added and windows inserted into the thatch. At that time a kitchen was added to the left hand side of the house with a large fireplace the length of one wall with a smoking chamber for preserving food. A circular stone staircase was also added to the right hand ground floor room to allow access upstairs.

Around 1780 a further stone staircase was added in the dining room. The historians who carried out the 1980s survey were puzzled by some quite refined work in what was a humble property when built. It was thought perhaps that craftsmen had helped build the cottage and had added their own touches. (Later research has revealed that the property was a small farmstead rather than a simple cottage and this would perhaps account for the better workmanship). A fourth room to the extreme left of the ground floor was originally a stable but by the 1970s it was used as a washroom with a copper boiler in one corner.

Over the centuries many alterations have been carried out including the building of a kitchen and larder to the rear of the house.

*The Cottage in 1999*



In 1837 the cottage was shown as '*late Viles*' and formed part of Allens Farm whose occupier was Thomas Jeffrey. Prior to that date it had been occupied by a family named Vile whose name went back many years in the village.

The Tithe Map field names surrounding the house i.e. Viles Orchard, Viles Mead, Viles Backside etc. would certainly indicate that this once formed a small farming unit, but by 1837 the land around it had been split between Beer Farm and Allens Farm. 1851 census records show a William Aplin age 36, a shoemaker with his wife, two sons, a daughter, a nephew and a house servant living at '*Viles*'. Kellys commercial directory of 1851 lists an Aplin as the only shopkeeper in Beercrocombe and this would almost certainly have been William. By 1881 the Aplins had left Beercrocombe and the house name disappears.

Around 1900 it was divided into two cottages. In 1935 The Cottage was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Prew formerly of Frog Street Farm. They returned it to one dwelling, had the thatch removed, the roof line raised and larger windows inserted upstairs. The Prews were an old Beercrocombe family and featured in village life over several generations. Tales of the Prew family are recounted in the Beercrocombe Remembered section.

## Little Portion

Little Portion was probably constructed in wattle and daub but later reconstructed in blue lias stone and is now rendered with a thatched roof. It was originally two cottages, one of them only one room up and down. Workers constructing the canal were said to have been housed here. It would seem to have been a house built on the waste ground to the side of the road. Although with a substantial plot today, older maps show the house as having only a very narrow strip of land on either side.

The earliest reference to the house is a deed of 1735 showing the house already in existence. The occupier was a John Durman who paid one shilling (5p) rent per year. Described as '*all that dwelling hows or cottage'... 'lying near the comon road or highway'*'. In the early 1800s the property was known as Parkes Cottage. Parish records show a James Parks marrying Joan Holford in 1772. Sadly, in 1784 their son Joseph died '*a pauper*'. The fate of James and Joan is not known. In 1795 Thomas Lumbarde gave five pounds five shillings (£5.25p) for a lease of three lives on the property. One of those named was Frances Lumbarde and the 1837 Tithe Records show him as the tenant of '*Parks Cottage*' with 14 perches of land.



This type of house was known as a moonlighter house as they were built overnight. It was noted in 1735 as being opposite the common pound where the future school house was to be built.

In the census records of 1851 Parks cottage was divided into two with John Baulch an agricultural labourer, his wife, a glover and two children living in one part together with a lodger Ann Verrier age 78. The other half was occupied by Robert Mear another labourer, his wife Sarah and five children two of whom were also glovers. They must have been rather crowded as one half only consisted of two rooms! Parish records show that two of the Mear children died in the same two week period that seven other village children died. The circumstances of their deaths are unknown.



*Thatched  
outside toilet at  
Little Portion*

By 1881 Richard Baulch, John's son aged 31, was living there with his wife Elizabeth and a son named Alban. Next door was John Mear, age 25, son of the Robert Mear of 1851 together with his wife and daughter. An Inland Revenue survey of 1910 shows Richard Baulch paying one shilling (5p) per week rent. By 1920 the two cottages were owned by Beer Farm and Richard Baulch is still noted

as renting Parks Cottage, the smaller of the two, containing living room, backhouse and bedroom at a rent of £2.12s.0d per annum. In the 1930s and 1940s the cottages are remembered as being in very poor condition. But Little Portion, now one house, is once again in good order.

### **The Old Rectory**

The Old Rectory was constructed in 1894 to replace an older Rectory, sited between Allens Farm and Staddles (which had been the cow byre to the Rectory). It is not known when the original Rectory, known as the Parsonage, was built but by the early 1800s the Rector of Beercrocombe did not live in the village, occupying instead a house in the grounds of Ashill Rectory. In 1837 the Parsonage was rented by Edward Prew, the tenant of Beer Farm, who used it to house farm labourers and their families. Richard Collard and James Keats with their families were there in 1851 and a William Collard and his family lived there in 1861. When what is now The Old Rectory was built in 1894 the Parsonage was demolished and money raised from the sale of its materials was used by the church authorities to help fund its construction.



*The Old Rectory (1904) with the Rev. Peart and his family*

The Old Rectory was simply built having only 4 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, 3 reception rooms, a kitchen, scullery and pantry. An enclosed yard led to an outside toilet and adjoining store (both now converted into a kitchen annex). In the yard was a well with a pump, replaced at some time due to a Rector's wife objecting to drinking water from so close to a graveyard!

Originally occupying a plot size of just over three acres incorporating an orchard, a meadow and a separate paddock, the house was erected on that land known as Muskay and it is assumed that a new road was laid to the church at the same time. The house had a stable, a stall for a cow, shelter for a carriage and a working space which housed a generator. These were demolished in 1992 together with other sheds and an insubstantial garage. Some of the oak timbers of the stables were substantial and were from some other previous building (possibly the demolished Parsonage) judging from their size, shape and cut. Over the last 25 years or so, various extensions have been made to increase the living area. In 1993, Huddys Croft was purchased from Allens to create a new tennis court. In the north corner of Huddys Croft is the remains of an older court last used in the 1960s. There is no evidence of any older buildings on the site. The Old Rectory was last used by the Clergy in 1932 before it was sold for £700. Mr Fox, the retired Station Master from Hatch Beauchamp, lived here with his wife until 1956.

### **Frog Street Farm**

This is a stone farmhouse dating from the same period as Lower Street Farm, Whittles Farm and Beer Mill Farm. Although seemingly isolated, it is immediately alongside Frog Street, a RUPP (Road Used as a Public Path) the only one in the village, which runs from Broadmead Lane to Broadbridge Lane coming out by Whittles Farm. Older village residents remember using it with horses and carts despite the fact that it uses a river bed for some of its length! Where the name of the farm comes from is unclear. Frog Street itself is a fairly recent name being marked on the early ordnance survey maps as Broad Street.

The first recorded occupants were the Durman family, also to be found at Allens Farm, who, as has been mentioned previously were prominent in the village from the 1500s onwards. In 1837 James Durman occupied Frog Street Farm, farming 95 acres of land, mostly around the farmhouse, but including a small farmstead consisting of a cottage and a few acres at the very southern end of the parish along Capland Lane. In the auction of 1920 it was noted as *'having a comfortable house, suitable buildings and valuable closes of productive meadow, pasture, orchard and arable land'* total acreage was 182 and the rent was £192. The property was purchased by the sitting tenant R.H.Prew for £2000 plus £232 for the standing timber.

Among the many interesting field names listed in 1920 were Sawpit Meadow (before mechanical, saws sections of timber were hand sawn by two men one of whom stood in a pit below the timber, always the junior partner apparently!), Parsonage Acres, former Glebe Land, (the rent from which would go to the Church) and five fields known variously as Forest Allotments and Higher and Lower Forest Capland, almost certainly relics of the old forest enclosures. One fascinating name is Backward Mead, an odd name which has very ancient origins. On the Tithe Map of 1837 it is marked as Packward Mead (meadow). This dates back to the 16th

century when income from land known as Packwere provided money to the church. A Martino Pakeware is known to have lived in the village in 1327 and it may very well be that the name dates back to that time (more information is given in the section on the church). Henry and Veronica Cole, the owners in 1999, are successful breeders of race horses. They have achieved both 2nd and 4th in The Grand National amongst other races.

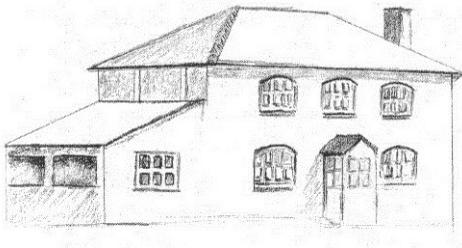
### **Holmans**

In 1837 Holmans Farm on Stocks Lane at the southern end of the parish formed part of a small holding of just over eleven acres jointly tenanted by Thomas Crabb of Whittles Farm and James Durman of Frog Street Farm. Included with this property at this time was a cottage now known as The Orchard in Radigan Lane. The holding seems to have been created from the forest enclosures since several of the plots of land are noted as forest allotments.

### **Keyseys Dairy House**

Keyseys is built of blue lias stone and currently has a tile roof. It may originally have had a thatched roof although as presently constructed the roof does not have sufficient pitch to suggest this.

Where the name came from is not clear. No family of that name has been recorded in the village. In 1774 reference is made to land or a holding known as Keyes and this is probably the origin of the name. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a nearby field was known as Keyseys Hill and another as Keyseys Meadow. In 1837 Keyseys was occupied by Thomas Crabb of Whittles Farm and listed as a dairy house, and outbuildings. The 1841 census recorded a family by the name of Lawrence living there but by 1851, Jack Knight, a dairyman, and his wife Sarah, a dairy woman, with their five daughters were in occupation. In the 1871 census it was known as Whittles Dairy and occupied by John Richards (dairyman), his wife Anna, a daughter and Ann Player a general servant aged 13. The Richards were still there in 1881. It was sold with Whittles Farm in the 1920 auction when it was described as having a '*parlour, kitchen, large dairy and four bedrooms plus other rooms*'. The outbuildings included '*3 piggeries, two cow stalls for 15 and 19 cows, 2 calf pens and a fowl house*'.



In the late 1930s a Mr. Turner lived here. He rented the dairy from Mr. Baxter Baker of Whittles Farm. Mr. Baker owned the cattle and supplied a replacement if one died. Mr. Turner was responsible for everything else.

What is now the dining room to the left of the front door was used for cheese making and the cheeses were then taken upstairs for storage.

### **Lower Street Farm**

Lower Street Farm is a stone farmhouse of a similar age to the other farms in the village. The name Lower Street Farm is first recorded in 1837 when a Samuel Webb occupied the house, outbuildings and 55 acres.

In 1841 John Webb aged 33 lived here described as a '*farmer of 60 acres employing two labourers*'. Also in the house were his wife, Sarah and two daughters together with Martha Vile, age 21, a house servant. By 1881 Lower Street Farm was occupied by Adolphus Doller aged 42 described as a '*farmer of 120 acres*'. Also in the property were his wife Elizabeth, three daughters and a Frank Stocker age 14 described as an indoor servant. 1910 saw George Scott as occupier paying rent of £110 followed in 1918 by a W.J.Woollway.

Described as a '*Desirable Holding*' in the 1920 auction, it was purchased by Sidney Dibble, the sitting tenant, with 80 acres, farm house, buildings and 2 cottages (Broadbridge Cottage). The purchase price was £1800 for the whole plus £60 for the standing timber. He had previously paid rent of £106 per annum. Sidney's son John took over the farm and still lives in the village (1999). Lower Street is now farmed by John's son Phillip Dibble.

### **Old Star Farm**

Although not strictly in Beercrocombe, Old Star Farm is right on the village boundary and has an interesting history. Listed in Kellys Directory of 1861 as a public house, the publican, Alfred Bulpin, was also listed as a coal merchant. The coal no doubt would have originally been brought along the canal which runs along the rear of the property. The remains of the coal yard are to be found in the smallholding to the right of the house. Between the house and the coal yard was apparently a small shop although nothing can now be seen. In addition to serving the local community the Star would have done extremely good business from thirsty workers while the canal was being constructed and perhaps that may have been the reason for its existence.

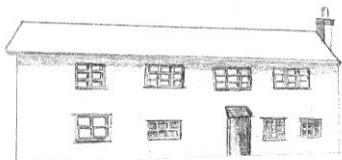
### **Pauls Farm**

This was originally a Somerset Long House of Tudor design and like many other local farmhouses it was a timber cruck construction with clay and wattle infill that had been replaced with blue lias facing. Like Beer Mill Farm it consisted of two lower rooms divided by a through passage. The space over the living area was a divided loft with steeply sloping walls lit only by a small window on the eastern end and probably reached by a ladder. The width of these houses was dependent on the

length of the big oak or elm beams, usually 16 to 18 feet. There was a barn wing on the west end of a similar construction but faced with very wide elm planks. Like the rest of the village the roof was once thatched but now has a tile covering. There is no evidence of a well at the property and neighbours can remember the occupants collecting water from Skipperhams Well using a yoke and milk pails.

The Paul family name features in Beercrocombe from the early 1600s and while there is no direct link it is almost certain that the house takes its name from them. Thomas Paul is noted as paying tax for one hearth in 1642 and paid £2.10s.0d rental for land in Beercrocombe in 1660. There were Pauls in the village during the 19th century but not at this property. If they had been landholders they were no longer so, featuring in village records as receiving frequent payments under the Poor Law.

In 1837 the house was known as Pauls House and together with outbuildings and bartons (yards) formed part of Whittles Farm tenanted by Thomas Crabb. Like other properties in the village it would seem to have been a smallholding absorbed into a larger unit. Adjoining it at this time was a field called Pauls Orchard. In 1841 a farm labourer, Phillip Vile, his wife and seven children lived in the house together with a lodger. They were still there in 1851, this time with eight children, but by 1881 Phillip's son Henry with his wife and three children had taken over.



*Pauls farm in 1999*

In 1920 the then occupant of Whittles Farm, Baxter Baker, sold Pauls to the sitting tenant Arthur Perry the day after buying it at the auction of the village properties. When his daughter married Arthur Perry split the house into two to accommodate them but it is now once again a single house.

### **Stewley Holding**

Situated at the south western end of the parish Stewley Holding was occupied by a Jacob Whorfield in 1837 and was known as Forest Road Cottage in 1841. By 1881 Mary Warfield was the head of the household, noted as a farmer of 7 acres. Also in the property were her two sons James and Robert (a carpenter) and a daughter Mary. Robert later had quarries at Buckland St. Mary and transported stone used in road construction.

By 1920 it was known as Stewley Holding and consisted of a cottage, buildings and 7 acres occupied by a Robert Warfield who paid rent of £22 per year. It was purchased by him at auction for £750 plus £4.10. 0d for the timber.

## Staddles

Staddles is a converted cow byre which once formed part of the buildings and stables belonging to the Parsonage on the site which was demolished in 1894 as mentioned in the section on the Old Rectory. In the 1920s and 30s it was sometimes used for skittles and other village events.

## Whittles Farm

The parish register for 1658 records the burial of Anne Whittle wife of Francis Whittle. Smallpox was rife in Taunton in 1658 and since Anne was one of a number of villagers buried at this time it may be that she was a victim of the disease. It is most likely that the farm took its name from this early family. A Thomas Whittle was noted in the Parish Records as living in Beercrocombe in 1707. In 1727 a Margaret Whittle witnessed a document signed by most of the village tenants. This was an unusual thing for a woman to do and she may have been a widow at this time and therefore head of the household. The first documentary evidence for the property is in the Land Tax records of 1766 where Lord Egremont (the owner not the tenant) paid 6s 9d (34p) for 'Whittles'.



A survey carried out in 1975 found that the earliest part of the house was constructed in the late 16th and early 17th centuries with a large 19th century extension to the front of the property. The walls are of blue lias with rubble infill and the roof was originally thatched.

The survey also notes that the large extension denotes a change of status for the property, perhaps when the farm was enlarged and the tenants became more prosperous.

The great Methodist preacher John Wesley is known to have preached at Beercrocombe in the 1740s and according to his journals stayed in the village several times. It is believed that he may well have stayed at Whittles Farm on those visits. In the 1780s three children from the Crabb family who lived at Whittles Farm were baptised by John Wesley and the christening jug survives to this day.

James Crabb of Whittles is listed as a Churchwarden and an Overseer (of the poor) at various times in Parish records in the 1770s and 1780s. By 1841 Thomas Crabb, his wife Sarah and eight children together with a Mary Awsley aged 75, lived at the farm. Four of the children had left by 1851 and Mary Awsley had been replaced by a George Awsley aged 21, listed as a farm labourer. The Crabb family lived at the farm until 1862 when the Baker family became the tenants.

Kellys Directory for Somerset in 1875 lists Mrs. Mary Baker (farmer) and the 1881 census shows Mary Baker age 66 as head of the household and farming 268 acres. The other occupants were Mary H. Baker (daughter) and Benjamin B. Baker (farmers son) aged 23. Benjamin was apparently always known as Baxter Baker and farmed at Whittles until the 1940s. Also in the house in 1881 was Elizabeth Southwood, age 16, listed as a general servant. Baxter Baker later became a well known local figure very active in village affairs.

An Inland Revenue survey in 1910 notes a Benjamin Baxter Baker paying rent of £240 per year. The auction of 1920 describes Whittles Farm as '*a very productive and valuable holding with a well built and roomy farmhouse*'. The rent was £276 per annum and it was sold with 263 acres of land, much the largest farm in the village at that time, with a considerable number of outbuildings. Three cottages came with the property, two at Pauls Cottages (now Pauls Farm described elsewhere) and Poplar Cottage (now disappeared but described in the section on Broadbridge and Broadmead). The property was purchased by Baxter Baker the sitting tenant for £4200 plus £226 for the standing timber.

When next sold in the 1940s the dairy house and land to the left of Radigan Lane was made into a separate unit now known as Keyseys Farm. The two farms, Whittles and Keyseys were bought by two brothers named Dare who married two sisters. In 1975 Whittles Farm was purchased by its present owners from Cuthbert Dare. It is now a dairy farm.

### **Wayside Cottage**

Almost certainly like Little Portion, it is a cottage built on waste ground to the side of the highway as is evidenced by the long narrow strips of garden each side. Although probably constructed in the 18th century, the cottage is first recorded on the Tythe Map of 1837 in which a Richard Boon is noted as occupying the cottage, orchard and garden of  $\frac{1}{8}$ th acre. In 1841 the property is described as being occupied by Richard Boon aged 80 a carpenter and his wife Hannah, also aged 80, but they are no longer listed there by 1850.

### **Yew Farm**

Situated in Capland Lane at the far south western end of the parish, Yew Farm was occupied by a Martha Owsley in 1837 when it was noted as a '*cottage with an orchard of one acre*'. It is the sole survivor of a number of cottages along Capland Lane which can just be recalled within living memory. Some of these cottages and their lands were created by the last enclosures of the Forest of Neroche in the early 1800s. Many of the old field names such as Forest Plot, Higher Forest Capland and Forest allotment reflect this.

One cottage next to Yew Farm, but no longer standing, had the interesting name of Honeybuns. In 1841 a Charles Small and his mother lived here but in the 18th century a family called Honeybun occupied it who required frequent assistance from the Overseers of the Poor in the parish.

In 1972 the land adjoining Yew Farm was the site of the first bush apple orchard planted by Taunton Cider. The farmhouse was sold off but the 40 acres of fields became the prototype of over 800 contracted acres to the company. The style, apple varieties and cultivation were all designed to be farmed by one worker.

### **Local Authority houses at Broadbridge and Broadmead**

These were built by the District Council in the 1930s and 40s to house workers from the local farms who were living in cottages described as being in very poor condition.

Among the old cottages which they replaced were several at Frog Street, one known as Poplar Cottage near Whittles and one known as Watts Cottage opposite Broadbridge Cottage on the site of what is now a small piece of scrub next to the Broadbridge houses. Some of these were built of blue lias stone and others were constructed of cob (a mixture of clay, grit and straw ) with thatched roofs. All have now disappeared.



Mr Les Durman described visiting his grandparents who lived in Poplar Cottage (pictured left) in the 1930s. In the 1800s this was known as Southwood Cottage and later as Durmans.

There was one large downstairs room with a small room to one side with a copper boiler for washing clothes. At one end was a large open fire always alight. Hanging from an iron hook was an iron cauldron which provided all the hot water. You climbed up a ladder through a hole in the ceiling to get upstairs. All the children slept in the landing area and there was a small bedroom for the parents. The house lacked electricity or drainage and all the water had to be brought from a pump by the side of the road near Whittles Farm about 200 yards away. The garden was very neat and always full of vegetables. *'No flowers - you couldn't eat flowers!'*

Watts Cottage, previously mentioned, was occupied in 1837 by James Watts, an agricultural labourer and his wife Ann. In 1851, aged 77 and 73 they were described in the census return as *'paupers'*.

## **Houses built post war**

Following a long period when no new houses were built, the population of the village increased in the post 1945 period when land from Beer Farm was sold and new bungalows and houses were built along Beer Street and Broadmead Road. The last three houses to be built in the village in the twentieth century were constructed in 1997 on the site of the disused yard of Allens Farm. South Somerset District planners have decreed that no further housing development will be permitted in Beercrocombe

## **Utilities**

### **Water**

Prior to mains water arriving in the early 50s all the farms and many of the village houses had wells. However those that did not had to collect their water from pumps by the roadside. There was such a pump outside Allens opposite the bus shelter. Further away from the village, cottages such as Pauls Farm and the now disappeared Durmans Cottage had to collect water from some distance away.

### **Electricity**

There was some resistance to mains electricity which arrived in 1947 as it was thought that unwelcome development would follow. Many farmers had their own generators prior to that time and retained a standby generator in case of power failure.

### **Gas**

A mains gas supply came to most of the village in the 1980s.

### **Mains drainage**

Mains drainage came to most of the village in 1993, previously houses had either cesspools requiring emptying at regular intervals or septic tanks. Some of the farms and a few of the houses still use these systems. Because of the impervious nature of the subsoil, ditches and overflowing tanks caused contamination with obnoxious smells sometimes pervading the village particularly in the summer.

### **Refuse**

This was collected in the 1930s but not all properties used the service. There appears to have been no general village tip. At Lower Street Farm the various ponds were filled with rubbish. At that time most waste was biodegradable in the long term with little or no plastic material. Items such as bottles were returnable and packaging was minimal compared to today.

## Flora and Fauna

*'The elum idden a tree, he's a weed,  
because if you d'stick a elum powst  
in ground he d'sprout an grow'*

In 1973 dutch elm disease hit Somerset and millions of trees died back. They were the predominant species in the hedgerows of Beercombe (and much of the lower lying land in Somerset). We lost some magnificent trees but most were smaller. Since their demise the views have been opened up as hedges are now cut low. Those that have been allowed to grow on again succumbed in 1998 and 1999 to the beetle and we will lose their pale yellow autumn leaves. Hedges otherwise usually consist of field maple, ash, oak, elder, wild roses, bramble, and honeysuckle and are a joy in mid summer. They provide pathways, shelter and larders for small mammals and birds.

The rivers and canal in the village are bordered by crack willows (withies) - some pollarded - some overgrown, and alders. There is a magnificent 10 trunked alder upstream from Broadbridge that has grown from a coppiced stool (cut to the ground). There are a number of good oaks and ashes, but none are veterans. The river Kenny has huge hybrid black poplars but many have recently fallen in storms.

Heron from Fivehead heronry come to fish in the rivers and garden ponds and there are certainly kingfishers along the Kenny river at Keyseys Farm and along the Fivehead river at Beer Mill Farm. The fish fry they all feed on can be seen in low water in summer.

Buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks trawl the ground for small mammals and birds. Magpies and crows take their toll and more recently jays, little owl and barn owl numbers have fallen dramatically but tawny owls are being encouraged by nest boxes. The starling is in serious decline and although messy and noisy they eat soil pests voraciously. We used to have great flocks wheeling like scarves in the winter sky over Merryfield Woods prior to going to roost.

Swifts, swallows and house martins scream overhead in the summer. Nightingales arrive on about the fifth of April and have found the scrub on the railway embankment and canal provides good cover, one every two hundred yards along some sections. They are also active along the Fivehead River at Beer Mill Farm. Cuckoos and the small summer warblers they prey on herald the warmer days. Redwings and fieldfare enjoy the apples in the various orchards in early winter, long tailed tits gather in the hedgerows and goldcrests feed off the wild teasel heads. There are still some skylarks to be heard over the wheatfields. Some garden birds are in decline. The song thrush struggles but mistle thrushes do well. Apple trees, poplars and often willows are covered in mistletoe. Great spotted and green woodpeckers plus tree creepers enjoy the old orchards.

There is evidence of otters using our two rivers, foxes, badgers, hares, roe deer and above all rabbits are breeding successfully. Hedgehogs are rarely seen, they probably drown in the ditches before even getting to the road to be squashed by cars! The endangered dormouse can be found as well as field mice, rats, weasels and along the rivers mink have been found. Slow worms, grass snakes, adders and toads live in the area but frogs and newts are not so usual as fewer natural ponds remain.



In spring, primroses, celandines and cowslips can be found in some hedgerows and fields

Bluebells are remnants of the old Neroche Forest. Queen Annes lace and cow parsley froth along the narrow lanes together with ragged robin and pink campion in May. There are many vetches, an unusual and attractive one is pea grass, a vermillion miniature sweet pea on a slender grass stalk found near the railway line in June. Old mans beard and goose grass are rampant in some hedges. The highly poisonous thorn apple was found a few years ago. The nightshades and ragwort are also highly toxic and the various fungi should be picked with care.

There are still some good mushrooms to be found in unimproved pastures if you know where to look.



## Beercrocombe in times of War

The documentary evidence of the effects of war on such a small village is sparse but rumours and counter rumours of war must have alarmed the occupants of Beercrocombe on many occasions. The village was not in existence at the time of the Roman conquest but people in the area experienced the Anglo-Saxon settlement and the disturbances caused by the Danes in the ninth century. Alfred the Great was King of Wessex who, after a surprise raid, survived at Athelney until he built up sufficient strength to defeat the Danes decisively at the battle of Edington in 878.

In very early times men were required to enlist on the Muster Rolls where their names, and sometimes their home villages, were recorded. These Rolls gave the names of 'Ablemen' in each Hundred who the king could call on should he need to raise an army. In one example, the Muster Roll of 1569, under the Hundred of 'Beear' (Beercrocombe) one finds:

### *Tything of Beare*

#### *Ablemen*

*John Lamberd - archer Richd. Whytt - archer.*

*John Palpytt - billman Thos. Bullen - billman.*

*Armor One tithing corslet furnished (body armour) Francis Durman,*

*Andrew Lamberte with others provide*

*iii pair of almain rivets furnished (a very basic type of breast plate)*

*vi bills*

*iii sculls.*

*Over and besides the said armour there is in readiness, of benevolence (i.e. voluntary) iii calivers (a type of light musket).*

It is fascinating to see the name of Durman in this 16th century list. (There are still Durmans at Hatch Beauchamp, Rapps and Creech St. Michael although continuity has been broken at Beercrocombe).

## The Civil War

In the 17th century the English Civil War became inevitable as resentment grew among ordinary people as Charles I increased taxes and tried to enforce conformity to Roman Catholicism. By 1640 many of the county gentry were alienated from the King and court and recruitment of armies in support of the Royalist and the Parliamentary causes began in Somerset. The first encounter in the county was at Marshall's Elm on the Poldens in August 1642. Two years later a Parliamentary

force passed through Chard and on to Taunton to besiege the castle. In the same year King Charles marched through eastern Somerset to Ilchester where he gave a speech aimed at recruiting more countrymen to his cause. News of these events probably reached the villagers of Beercrocombe. The Parliamentarians were constantly harassing royalist supply lines and scouring the countryside for their own supplies of horses, fodder and food for their men. When Charles I's army returned from victories in Cornwall his ten thousand strong army was billeted at Chard and neighbouring villages. Feeding and supplying these large numbers must have been a serious problem for local villages. Edmund Wyndham, who was active at the siege of Taunton on the Royalist side, may well have demanded supplies from his family's estates which included Beercrocombe.

Taunton, which had become a Parliamentary stronghold, was besieged in 1644 and again in 1645 when, on the 8th of May, the Royalists succeeded in taking East Reach. The next day the Parliamentarians were reduced to holding only St. Mary Magdalen, the Castle and part of the market place. When a relief force arrived Taunton was secured for Parliament but two thirds of the houses had been destroyed and thatch from the remaining buildings had been fed to the horses. One hundred defenders were killed and two hundred wounded.

In July 1645, while taking a rest on the banks of the river Isle, a royalist force was surprised by Fairfax, the parliamentarian general, who took 500 prisoners. Two days later the Battle of Langport was fought between a royalist army of 7,000 and Fairfax with 10,000 men. Three hundred were killed; all but twenty of whom were royalists, whose force dispersed north towards Bridgwater. This battle marked the end of the royalist campaign in Somerset. Was Beercrocombe involved? We cannot be sure but the effects of these armies on the countryside can be imagined. In addition general disaffection with the Civil War among country people had given rise to bands of 'clubmen' (i.e. armed with clubs) who were against soldiers of either persuasion although by 1645 more support was given to Parliament.

### **The Monmouth Rebellion**

Similar, though mercifully briefer, disruption came in 1685 with Monmouth's Rebellion. James Scott, Duke of Monmouth and Buccleuch, was the illegitimate son of Charles II. He was a Protestant and many dissenters hoped that he would succeed his father rather than the legitimate heir Charles' brother James. After the failure of one assassination plot in which Monmouth was involved he lived, briefly, in exile finally moving to the Netherlands after the death of Charles and the accession of James II. Much plotting went on before the decision was made for a rebel uprising in Scotland and, at the same time, another in the South West led by Monmouth. On the 30th of May 1685 he sailed from Holland in a hired Dutch warship and landed at Lyme on the 10th of June. Five days later he marched out of the town towards Taunton despite the efforts of the Devon and Somerset militia. Monmouth camped

overnight on the 17th of June at Winterhay at the foot of Beacon Hill, Ilminster, where he recruited 54 men. Local tradition says that next day his army turned '*left at Hatch Green*' reaching Taunton via Stoke St. Mary and Shoreditch. He lodged at the Red Lion in East Street opposite the former County Hotel, now Waterstone's bookshop. A new regiment, the Blue, with 400 men was raised in Taunton.

Monmouth sent out a small cavalry patrol to find out how closely his movements were being followed by King James' men. Brigadier Churchill was the royalist officer then at Chard and he had also sent out scouts. The two parties met unexpectedly at what for a long time afterwards was known as Fight Ground on Barrington Hill in Ashill parish. Four rebels were killed and two or three royalists wounded. In Taunton the Duke was proclaimed King Monmouth (there was already a King James on the throne) and next day left the town with his 7,000 strong army. The march culminated in his defeat at Sedgemoor on the 5th of July and his execution on the 15th of July at Tower Hill in London. There remained the retribution meted out by the infamous Judge Jeffreys in Assize Courts held in Devon and Somerset towns including Taunton.

The Monmouth Rebellion would certainly have been a great talking point in Beercrocombe and it seems probable that occupants would have had some direct involvement. The names of rebels were recorded in the Monmouth Roll. In Taunton Deane Hundred 66% of the 538 rebels were from Taunton itself and a further 22% from parishes like Wilton and Trull now part of Taunton. It was essentially urban support for Monmouth. In the Hundred of Abdick and Bulstone 53% of the rebels were from Ilminster and 24% from Curry Rivel and Ashill. The names of the 24 rebels in the remaining parishes of the Hundred, of which Beercrocombe was one, are grouped together and account for 23% of the total. In the rebellion records we find William Lewis of Beercrocombe described as '*out in the rebellion.*' William's fate is unknown. Interestingly many of the Parish Records from this period have been removed, whether to aid prosecution of the guilty or to protect the innocent is not known.

## **The Great War**

The effects on Beercrocombe of the First World War are better documented. Though small it suffered, as did almost every other village in the country. The Hymn Board in St. James' serves as a simple memorial to three soldiers '*who fell in the Great War 1914 - 1918*' namely:

William James Durman  
Baxter Slade Baker  
Ernest Samuel Warfield.

The story of two of the above has been uncovered. William James Durman served in the Somerset Light Infantry and died on the 31st of December 1914 near Ypres and was buried near there. He was particularly unlucky as an unofficial cease fire

as being observed at that time. Baxter Slade Baker also served in the Somerset Light Infantry and died on the 16th of August 1917 when his battalion was relieving another regiment in the Ypres salient. He has no known grave but is remembered on a plaque at the Tyne Cot Cemetery near Passchendaele.

Baxter Baker lived at Whittles Farm and William Durman lived at Poplar Cottage, the nearest cottage to the farm, so they would have played together as youngsters and both attended the village school. The Misses Baker, formerly of Whittles Farm, recalled in 1999 that the Baker family always *'appeared to be in mourning for Baxter Baker'*. From evidence on family gravestones in the churchyard two others died in that war. They were:

Ivan James Collard S.L.I, who died in India 1 April 1918.

C. Hodges Sapper R.E. who died 5 October 1918 and is buried at Flesquieres.

The Beercrocombe school log records that in 1914 the Rev. J.C. Bellinger said goodbye to the children *'as he is going as a chaplain to Lord Kitchener's army'*. In November 1914 the children were *'taken to Hatch to watch 1200 soldiers marching through'*. In the following spring the children *'wrote letters to soldiers at the front'* which were sent *'with twenty-one 1 oz. packets of tobacco paid for by the children'*. Strangely enough the log contains no further references to the war or the Armistice.

## **World War II**

As the political situation in Europe worsened during the late 1930s preparations for war began. As part of these the Observer Corps began to organise its posts. These were to be *'the eyes and ears'* of the Royal Air Force maintaining a watch on the skies with direct telephone links to their group centre. Hatch Beauchamp, with a lookout tower at a high point on Belmont Road, was one of the Observer Posts in No. 22 group centred on Yeovil and founded in March 1939. Their other function was to ensure the efficient working of the air raid warning system, the *'alert'* and *'all clear'* sirens.

The Local Defence Volunteers, later the Home Guard and immortalised as 'Dad's Army' were recruited from civilians on a part-time basis. The 2nd Somerset (Taunton) Battalion was formed in 1940 and the 11th Somerset (Ilminster) Battalion in 1943. When recruiting began the war office instruction was that *'six volunteers were to be enrolled for each rifle'*. Others should *'arm themselves with an axe or heavy stick'*. Later, rifles were given by the U.S.A.

As men joined the forces, a shortage of workers on the farms and a need to grow more food were anticipated by the formation of the Women's Land Army. Mrs Ruby Collard recalls that she was a Land Girl for four years having joined despite being too young. She met her husband Jim on a farm and moved to Beercrocombe in 1952.

The Taunton Stop Line was a strategic defence line, mainly constructed in 1940, which ran from the North Somerset coast south to the mouth of the Axe in Devon. Its aim was to curtail eastward movement of any enemy forces which might land in Devon or Cornwall from France or Ireland. It followed natural barriers where possible and consisted of pillboxes every 300 yards, anti-tank blocks and other concrete obstacles which could halt or delay vehicles in the hope that they could then be destroyed. In Beercrocombe the line followed the disused Taunton and Chard canal. The building of the line was organised by Stansell's of Taunton and in the Beercrocombe area construction was by Polish refugees. The pillboxes were, where possible, hidden or disguised. Mr John Dibble recalls that one at Beer Mill Farm was made to look like a barn. It was blown up after the war. A number of the concrete tank traps still remain along the canal bank.

Mr Ronald Burrough of Capland Farm recalled '*one very interesting point about the war.*' There was a secret network formed of certain people in each area who in the event of an invasion were supposed to supply information about troop movements. The idea was that one person from each village would be responsible for passing this on. For Beercrocombe this was Harry Jeffreys of Allens Farm. Mr Burrough was the person in Capland. The local organiser was Dr. Griffin from Hatch Beauchamp. '*It was very secret and for many years afterwards they were not supposed to talk about it.*' They all had to attend meetings where they were instructed in identifying tank markings etc. However, Mr Burrough did not think it would work very well as they had no communications equipment! '*Harry Jeffreys was supposed to come across the fields to Capland Farm with any information.*' Then Mr Burrough was supposed to walk to Buckland St. Mary '*to pass it on up the line.*'

The most important immediate effect on Beercrocombe during World War II was the use of Merryfield aerodrome, one of thirteen in Somerset. Four had grass runways but the remainder were tarmac. These included Merryfield with three runways, the main one, running approximately east west, being the second longest in Somerset. This was necessary because it was planned as a bomber and troop carrier base. Construction began in late 1942 and, despite the obstacle of the Taunton and Chard canal, was quite rapid. Even before completion two planes made emergency landings in February and March 1943. From April 1944 a USAAF squadron of troop carriers including gliders was based at Merryfield and began training for D-Day. The camp could house 1500 personnel with more near by and a field hospital was built on the south east side of the airfield.

The D-Day operation began on the night of the 5th-6th June 1944 when a total of 91 aircraft took off from Merryfield at an average interval of 10 seconds. They carried the parachutists in C47 Skytrain (Dakota) planes. Mac Hawkins in his book describes the scene over the brightly-lit aerodrome. '*The sky was temporarily filled with twinkling lights for, in addition to the normal navigation lights of peacetime, each aircraft carried recognition lamps on the leading edges of the wings. The*

*sight would never be forgotten by those who witnessed it, for it was truly spectacular'. This was part of the enormous wave of troops and equipment sent to invade France from the airfields of the South West. On the following day fifty more aircraft and fifty more gliders took off from Merryfield. This was the climax of action at the airfield.*

Soon after, the USAAF personnel moved away and Transport Command took over on the 30th of November 1944 sending troops to India, Australia and the Middle East. The last planes left in September 1946. From then on Merryfield was used intermittently as a flying school for jet pilots at the time of the Korean War, by Westlands for testing and by the Royal Navy until June 1958. It was then given 'care and maintenance' status and used by learner drivers, courting couples, travellers and others until May 1972 when it was reopened. As HMS Heron, RNAS Merryfield is a pilot training base for helicopters from RNAS Yeovilton.

A large influx of Polish then American and British forces must have made quite an impact on a rural area. Airmen walked through the fields to local public houses for relaxation in their off duty time. Activities at Merryfield generated constant noise but no one has mentioned that. Village people do recall incidents such as a glider landing at Capland and being guarded overnight by troops from Merryfield. A barrage balloon came down behind Broadmead and there was a searchlight unit in Perry's Mead at Whittles Farm. John Dibble who lived at the adjoining Lower Street Farm, recalls his mother feeding a stream of soldiers from the unit. In March 1944 a night fighter shot down a Junker 88 over Isle Brewers. Thornfalcon and West Hatch were the nearest places to Beercrocombe to experience bombing during the war when an enemy plane off-loaded a stick of four small bombs in June 1940. The Nag's Head public house and nearby cottages were damaged as were a number of houses in Wrantage. Several evacuees came to Beercrocombe staying at Broadbridge Cottage, Pauls Farm and Allens. The girl at Allens later returned to work there and was married from the house.

The end of the war in Europe, V.E. Day the 8th of May 1945, was marked by an impromptu service in St. Mary Magdalen church in Taunton and on the following Sunday a large service, with all uniformed organisations represented, in Vivary Park. VJ. Day followed in August and with it the beginning of peace. Everyone had suffered the tensions, worries, shortages and privations of the war but never to be forgotten are the two servicemen from Beercrocombe who gave their lives:

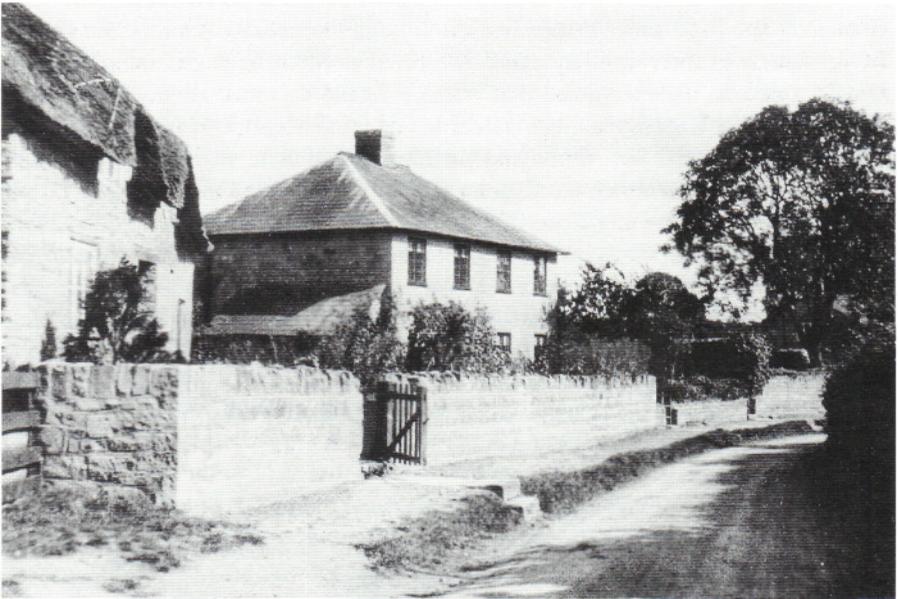
Sub-Lieutenant Patrick A.J. Hegarty R.N.V.R.  
who died 29 November 1942

Harold Brunt D.C.L.I.  
who died 28 November 1943 and is buried in the Sangro River Cemetery in Italy.

## Beercrocombe Remembered

People in their 90s in 1999 can recall the pre-1914 era but most of the recollections of the villagers who were interviewed are of the 1930s onwards and particularly of the 1950s. These memories confirm that change was very slow for a long time, accelerating after 1918 and again, more rapidly, after the Second World War.

As late as the 1950s most people, despite the rapid mechanisation of agriculture, worked on farms in the parish. At that time Mr George Ranken (until 1974 Deputy Chief Education Officer for Somerset) and Edward Prew (solicitor) were the only two to work outside the village. Women often made extra money to put towards Christmas expenses by stitching gloves for a Yeovil company (Dents) continuing a tradition dating back to the early 19th century. Mr Les Durman's grandmother was one of these outworkers who collected the stamped-out patterns from Curry Mallet and stitched the gloves together with thick black hemp. They were large and rough, rather like present day gardening gloves.



Beer Street c1920

There were a number of fruit and cider orchards in the parish. To the west of Beer Street was Viles Orchard containing cider apples and blackcurrants now the site of the house called Cherry Orchard.

Hardly surprisingly in Somerset, cider played a significant part in village life. Most of the farms had a cider press *'unless they were chapel people'* and workers at hay-making and harvest expected to be given cider to keep them going during the

long working day. There was a cider making shed which is now a barn for the house known as Inverlauren and a cider house where cider was stored and drunk at Allens Farm on the site of the present lawn. The cider was brought in barrels to lie either side of the house. It was not sold, merely dispensed to all and sundry, traditionally in a two handed mug. The *'drill was to drink the mug dry before handing it back to Uncle Harry Jeffrey'* who kept the cider house, for his turn. It was not done to leave before the ritual was over. Mrs Jeffrey, May, continued to live at Allens Farm after Harry died and Mr and Mrs Ranken, next door, remember *'the clunk clunk'* as May tapped and bunged the barrels before 7 am - possibly taking out the breakfast cider?

Memories of the post 1945 period highlight for us, looking back from 1999, the extent and rate of change in rural life. Before the days of almost universal car ownership, and the arrival of the twice weekly mini-bus service to Taunton, the villagers of Beercrocombe had to rely on travelling salesmen and deliveries of essentials from shops in the towns although, of course, farmers visited the cattle markets. County Stores in Ilminster and Taunton delivered groceries, fish and vegetables. In the 1950s and 1960s two bakers came daily, one from the Co-op and Bungy Burgess from Ilminster. His nickname was derived from his spongy loaves. For 38 years he was a driver for Hayman's and was presented with the British Empire Medal by the Lord Lieutenant for Somerset. Newspapers, milk and meat were also delivered daily. (There were two butchers, one a Mr Sandy). These supplies were supplemented by a salesman with an old (then!) lorry or van who sold general goods - everything from oil to clothes pegs, tinned goods and medicines. His arrival was a big event. Perhaps this man is the Mr Jackson referred to by Mr and Mrs Ranken as delivering paraffin.

A fish and chip van came to the village every week. The fish and chips were cooked in the van and were very good *'The smell perfumed the village'*.

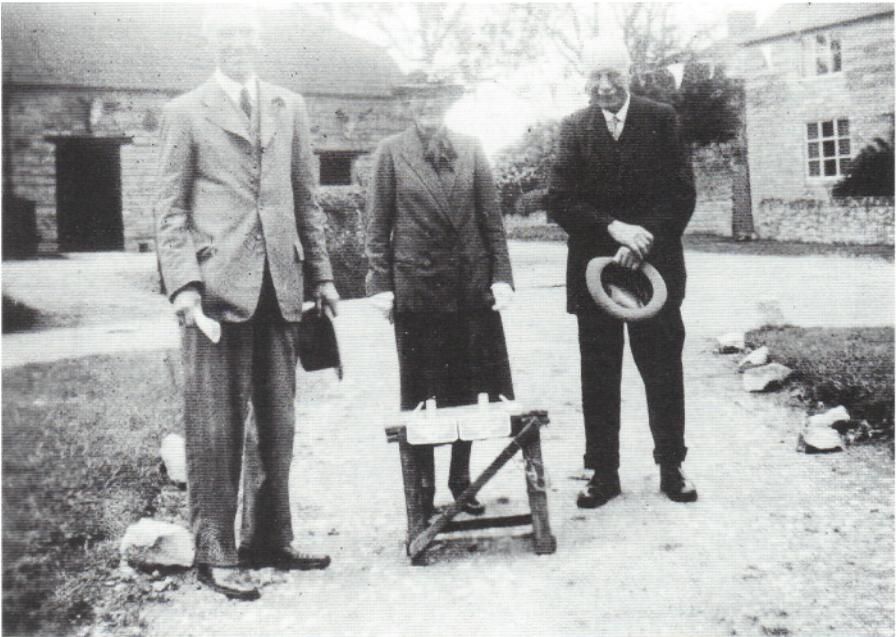
There were no real shops in the village but Freddie Forward, who lived in one of the council houses along Broadmead Lane, had a licence to sell tobacco and cigarettes and did so from his front room. Just beyond the parish boundary there were lime kilns at the rear of Old Star Cottage which was a public house in the late 1800s, as mentioned previously. The last crop of teasels harvested in the village was filmed by a T.V. company. One of the few houses then to have a television set was Allens; all the village crowded into the house to watch the programme on a very small black and white screen.

Mrs Hegarty at Allens had a cook, parlourmaid, housekeeper and driver/handyman. Farmers were the first to acquire telephones followed by Mrs Prew at The Cottage. Mrs Prew's was also one of the first three or four cars in the village at that time. The nearest doctor (Griffin) and district nurse were at Hatch Beauchamp. Miss Eva Priddle, who lived in one of the council houses, used to assist at births and

also to 'lay out' people when they died. The policeman, who lived at Hatch Beauchamp, patrolled the village on a bicycle. Later a constable came round from Ilminster on a water cooled Velocette motorcycle which was very quiet so 'you couldn't hear him coming'.

At Whittles Farm, with a large number of cousins living nearby, there was no shortage of playmates. Simple games, swings, wildlife, ponies, see-saw and a grass tennis court in one of the fields provided plenty of activities for the children. On occasion they used to walk on the railway line, often scolded by workmen but also offered rides on the buggy. Mr Les Durman recalls learning to fish in the Fivehead River and catching brown trout at Beer Mill Farm.

In 1936 the Silver Jubilee of King George V was celebrated by a party held in the barn at Allens Farm where three new houses now stand. Mrs Vi Bawler recalls her father singing as part of the entertainment.



*Mr Walsh from Allens, Maud Baker and Baxter Baker from Whittles Farm at a tree planting ceremony on the village green to commemorate the Coronation of 1937.*

After 1922 the schoolmistress's rooms were occupied by a tenant but the Old School House remained a focus of activities. The school room itself was used for jumble sales four times a year, people coming from miles away. The clothing was washed and ironed, queues formed and buyers had to be quick. Parochial Parish Council Meetings were held in the school room as well as whist drives in the winter.

One day a week a library was open there, organised by Sidney Beard who lived in Wayside Cottage. Books were delivered in boxes by the County Council and it was very well patronised.

The field next to the Old Rectory was frequently the venue for fêtes etc. Mrs Ruby Collard one year won the skittling for a pig. She recalls being amazed when she was handed a live pig which she did not know what to do with.

The big event of the early 1950s was the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. There was an early church service attended by all families in the village with the one exception of a family of Jehovah's Witnesses. All the children received copies of the New Testament. Mary Davys, Eric White and John Dibble were the only teenagers qualifying. Most people crowded into Whittles Farm to watch the Coronation on television. Afterwards a party, lasting all day, took place in the Old School House and the field now attached to the Old Rectory with games and food. Harry Jeffery killed a pig and there were salads, trifles and cakes - '*a real feast*'. Finally, despite the onset of rain (experienced in London too) there was a bonfire.

At Whittles the passing of the trains punctuated the daily routine: 11.30am: put the potatoes on to boil: 12 noon: time for lunch. The daily newspaper was '*dropped by Jack*' from the train as it passed over Whittles bridge, now gone. '*Father always had his paper early*'. The last train of the day went past at 9pm and five minutes later Mr Durman of Poplar Cottage (Durmans) stood by his gate and gave two piercing whistles. This was the signal for all the children to return home from wherever they were and '*woe betide any who were late*'. Mr Les Durman in 1999, recalls that his grandfather was a very large man 6'6" and over 18 stone. After his death the Durman cottage was in such a poor state of repair that his grandmother moved into the then new houses in Broadbridge Lane.

The memories recorded in interviews show that Beercrocombe had its share of village 'characters'. In the 1940s Mr and Mrs Charles Brunt lived at Beer Mill Farm. He was a very hospitable person and liked his cider. What is now the lounge was a large kitchen with a long scrubbed pine table stretching the length of the room. There was always a barrel of cider and pots at one end of the table and drink would be pressed on any visitors.

The track to Beer Mill Farm was extremely rutted and difficult to negotiate. Charlie Brunt never owned a car and could not drive. He used a trap with a piebald pony which he always drove to Taunton market on Saturdays. On his way back he would make it as far as the Hatch Inn at Hatch Beauchamp where he would meet the local policeman from Curry Mallet who arrived by bicycle. There they would both get extremely drunk on cider and at 6pm Charlie Brunt, the policeman and his bicycle would be loaded into the back of the trap, the pony slapped on the rump and

set on its way. The pony would wander along the road to Curry Mallet, turn right to Beercrocombe, go through the village with the bicycle hanging over the back and arrive at Beer Mill Farm. How the policeman got back to Curry Mallet is not recorded!

Mr Jeffrey at Allens Farm was an old-fashioned man, extremely well thought of, and known to all as *'Uncle Harry Jeffrey'*. He was married late in life to May Prew and had no children but was very kind to the village youngsters leaving part of his barn clear for them to play in. He was always willing to play cricket with them in the evening. The *'one thing he could not abide was scrumping of his apples'*. *'Children could always have some if they asked but were not just to take them'*.

Rachael and George Ranken, who lived at Staddles from 1950 to 1989, commented on the fact that security was not a problem. Their key was under the mat and both bread and meat delivery men used the key, put goods inside, the meat on a plate in the refrigerator, locked the door and left. In 1999 car and house alarms sadly indicate the changing times.

George Ranken was a churchwarden at St.James' Church from 1956 to 1978 and took a keen interest in the history of the village. Just by his back door was an old table covered in pieces of pottery and glass dug up in his garden which was the site of the original Rectory demolished at the turn of the century. Mr and Mrs Ranken (Rae and George) were very much liked and respected during their 40 years at Staddles.

Minnie Hicks lived at Wayside Cottage and she was the village postmistress, riding her bike round the village, a *'large and comfortable lady'*. Mrs Hicks made exquisite lingerie for Fortnum and Mason, she emigrated to Australia to live with her son, died there, was cremated and her ashes interred in Beercrocombe churchyard. Musical evenings were held at Wayside Cottage in the 1950s.

Mrs Ginny Prew lived in The Cottage with her husband Ben and son Edward. Mr Prew died in the 1950s when Edward was 18 and training to be a solicitor. Mrs Prew was considered to be the uncrowned queen of the village. Her sister was Eliza Rowsell who lived at Orchard View (now Adelstrop) and was thought by the Rankens to be a much sterner person, summoned in need by Mrs Prew by two unanswered rings on the phone. Mrs. Rowsell visited Mrs Prew, never Mrs Prew visiting her sister. Mrs Prew was the person who would *'phone for help in any emergency'*. *'At night you would throw gravel up at her window'*. She had a little Austin car in which she always turned in the opposite direction to that which she had indicated. That was not quite such a potentially disastrous habit as it would be in today's traffic. Mr. Stone a former signalman from London and his wife, retired to The Old Schoolhouse in the 1930s. Mr Les Durman was sometimes taken there for a cup of tea by his grandmother and hated going because Mrs Stone looked like a

witch with long, unkempt, grey hair and glasses perched on the end of her nose. The house smelled very musty; the windows were never opened and Mrs Stone put lard and dripping on the cracks in the ceiling to keep out the water. She complained that this was unsuccessful!

Among the comments made by older people who in 1999 either live, or once lived in Beercrocombe, are references to the greater isolation of villages in the past. People seldom travelled far as the village was the centre of social life and families were more self-contained than now.

Mrs Stone was a retired schoolmistress and Seventh Day Adventist. Often to be seen sitting near the window reading her bible. She attended church sitting at the back near the door. She was an eccentric. When able, she walked miles collecting money for leprosy charities. She never had any heating, the most being a candle in the grate. If she was cold she would put on more clothes, frequently wearing two hats and two skirts. She cut her hedge with scissors. George Ranken would take her shopping to Curry Mallet for which he was presented with a bag of demerara sugar as a thank you.

Once while George and Rachael were away on holiday Mrs Stone was found to be near death since she had had no food or drink for several days. She declined to be rescued but Dr. Butterworth was called and admitted her to hospital. Later, she was treated at a nursing home in Chard and bathed, which transformed her from the rather 'grey' person she had been. She later died in Moorhaven nursing home in Taunton. After Mrs Stone went into the home George and Rachael checked the house and found large sums of money in notes and coins stuffed into cupboards.

Freddie Forward who lived in one of the Broadmead Cottages apparently never washed and was said to have stored coal in his bath. A visit to hospital resulted in a miraculous change and he was not recognised on walking home through the village.

Mr Les Durman, whose family lived in Beercrocombe for many generations, says *'they were very proud of Beercrocombe'*. Mr Durman claims that *'the roads and ditches were always clean and tidy as was the village itself. Everyone knew everyone else and there was a very good atmosphere'*.

## **Appendix I** Sources (a small selection of those used)

### **A) A select bibliography**

The Victoria County History of Somerset  
Aspects of the Medieval Landscape of Somerset - Micheal Langston  
The Forests and Deer Parks of Somerset - Rev. William Greswell  
Village and Farmstead - Christopher Taylor  
The Making of the English Landscape - W.G.Hoskins  
Latin for Local History - R.E.Latham  
Medieval Local Records - E.A.Gooder  
Ancient Highways of Somerset - Grundy  
Somerset Roads The Legacy of the Turnpikes - J.B.Bentley and B.J.Murless  
Branch Lines of Somerset - Colin C.Maggs  
Somerset at War - Mac Hawkins  
The Monmouth Rebellion - W.MacDonald Wigfield  
Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum - David Underdown

### **B) The Parish Records**

The Parish Registers for Beercrocombe date from 1542, some of the earliest available. They are held on microfiche at the Somerset Record Office and although written mostly in Latin they provide a wealth of information about local families. One drawback is that no addresses are given for those mentioned.

### **C) Church Records**

These are records relating to the Diocese of Bath and Wells which give much information on the church and the rectors.

### **D) Wyndham Estate Papers**

There are many documents deposited at the Somerset Record Office by the Wyndham family which provide details about their ownership of the village.

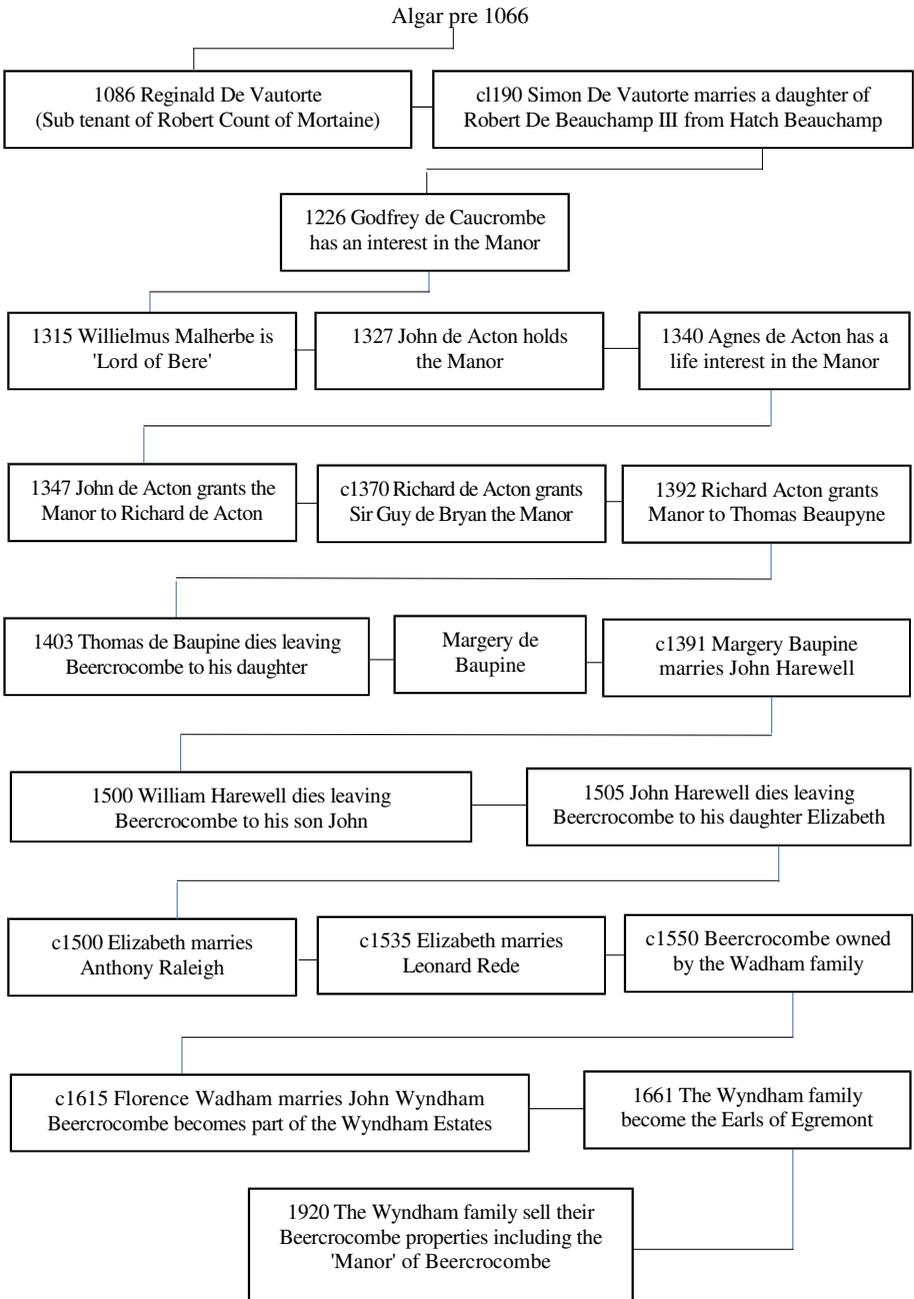
### **F) Parish Disbursements**

Records of payments made to the poor of the parish in the 17th and 18th centuries. These are available on microfiche in the Somerset Record Office

### **E) Some of the other sources used**

Manorial Court Records	Census Returns
Hearth Tax Records	Lay Subsidy Returns
The Tithe Apportionment	1910 Inland Revenue Survey
1920 Village Auction Records	Land Tax Records 1766 - 1825
Poor Law Records	Personal Reminiscences

## Appendix II Ownership of the Manor of Beercrocombe



**Appendix III**    **Hearth Tax Return for Beercrocombe 1635**

**Bere-Crocombe**

<i>£ s</i>	<i>£ s</i>		
3	6	<i>William Barker clerk (rector)</i>	<i>iii (hearths)</i>
3	6	<i>Tho. Keisar and Jerome Mead</i>	<i>iii</i>
	4	<i>Fran. House</i>	<i>i</i>
1	2	<i>Rich. Tyse</i>	<i>ii returned one too many by mistake</i>
3	6	<i>Fran.Pinney</i>	<i>iii</i>
2	4	<i>Rich. Tyse sen.</i>	<i>ii</i>
1	2	<i>Jo.Ball</i>	<i>i now Rob.Sherwood</i>
2	4	<i>Wmi. Towning</i>	<i>ii</i>
2	4	<i>Edw. Vile</i>	<i>ii</i>
2	4	<i>Jonas Baker</i>	<i>ii</i>
1	2	<i>Rob.Chicke</i>	<i>i</i>
1	2	<i>Tho. Paul</i>	<i>i</i>
2	4	<i>Rich.White</i>	<i>ii</i>
1	2	<i>Thomasin Wyatt vid</i>	<i>i</i>
1	2	<i>Wmi. Strode</i>	<i>i now John Collier</i>
1	2	<i>Joane Watts</i>	<i>ii one is fallen downe</i>
1	2	<i>Fran.Pinney</i>	<i>i now Henry Virgin</i>
2	4	<i>Henry Morley</i>	<i>ii</i>
1	2	<i>Chris.Collier</i>	<i>ii now Abigail Collier</i>
2	4	<i>Tho.Lumbard</i>	<i>ii</i>
1	2	<i>Eliz.Mayes and Rob.East</i>	<i>ii returned one too many by mistake</i>
2	4	<i>Wmi.Symes</i>	<i>ii now Rich.Pinney</i>
1	2	<i>Rob.East</i>	<i>i</i>
1	2	<i>Roger Coxe</i>	<i>i now Rich.Allen</i>
0	0	<i>Edw. Thomas</i>	<i>i the house fallendowne</i>
4	8	<i>Jacob Bisse and Alice Dorman</i>	<i>iii</i>
1	2	<i>the same for another tenant</i>	<i>i</i>
1	2	<i>RobAllen</i>	<i>i</i>
2	4	<i>Rich. Morley</i>	<i>ii</i>
<hr/>			
<i>£2.9s</i>	<i>£4.18s</i>		<i>Tot...liiii (53)</i>

*Henry Drew Collector*

*Richard Tyse Tythingman*

The hearth tax was based on the number of hearths in a house and calculated on a six monthly basis hence the two columns. The largest number was in the property occupied by Jacob Bisse and Alice Dorman (Durman) who also paid the tax on another property. On present evidence Beer Farm would seem to have been the largest house in the village at the time and this may have been their residence.

**Appendix IV** Typical extracts from the Parish Records

1571 (no record of baptisms)

*Marriages*

*Edmundus Chamber and Editha Maundry* 13th. of May  
*Andreas Murley and Marcia Weppell* 16th of February

*Burials*

*Johan Murley widow* April  
*George Murley son of Richard* September  
*Henricus Murley son of Richard*

1671 (no marriages recorded)

*Baptisms*

*Thomas Allen* son of Richard and Allicia  
*Joane Davis* daughter of John and Elizabeth  
*Elizabeth Day* daughter of John and Catherine of Curry Mallet  
*George Durman* son of George and Joanne

*Burials*

*Richard Moggridge* 'of his own salvation was buryied'  
*George Watts* son of George and Mary  
*John (Lumbard)* son of William and Julia  
*Thomas Paull* dyed the 6th of.....buried the 9th of the same month  
*Anne Bisse* the wife of James Bisse buried December  
.....*Virgin* wife of Henry buried December  
*James Bisse* buried 5th of February  
*Robert Tyse* buried 5th of February

1771 (no marriages recorded)

*Burials*

*April 14th.* John son of Joseph and Mary Snook  
*August 25th* Nicholas Huddy  
*September 1st* William Hunnibun son of Thos. And Elizabeth  
*November 17th* Thos. Hunnibun son of Thos. And Elizabeth  
*December 8th* Elizabeth Hunnibun was buried

(sadly it would seem that Thomas Hunnibun above lost his wife and two sons within four months)

*Baptisms*

*Mary Daughter of* John and Sarah Whaitts January  
*Sam.* Son of Richard and Martha Parkes of Curry Mallet  
*Thos.* Son of Betty Hwmibun

**Appendix V** Land Tax Record for Beercrocombe 1789

<i>Proprietors (tenants, except the Earl of Egremont)</i>	<i>Occupiers</i>	<i>£ s d</i>
<i>Earl of Egremont for the farm (Beer Farm)</i>	<i>Thos. Slade</i>	<i>1..14..10</i>
<i>for high rents</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..15..6</i>
<i>for herzers</i>	<i>the. same</i>	<i>0..2..11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for Perrises Copland</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..1..0<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for Caplan fields</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..1..0<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for Common Mead</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..2..2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for late Goodwyns</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..2..4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for Westfields</i>	<i>George Durman</i>	<i>0..7..1</i>
<i>for Allens</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..4..3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for late Huddies</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..1..0<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>for late Whitts</i>	<i>himself</i>	<i>0..2..3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>John Pyne. Esquire</i>	<i>Wm. Paul</i>	<i>0..11..10</i>
<i>Mrs. Lumbard</i>	<i>hirsself</i>	<i>1..9..0</i>
<i>Mr. Upton Rector (Glebe Lands)</i>	<i>Thos. S(ade</i>	<i>1..3..0</i>
<i>Mr. Uttermare</i>	<i>John Mead</i>	<i>0..5..9</i>
<i>Mr. Holeman</i>	<i>Robt. Pope</i>	<i>0..2..5</i>
<i>Mr Boddy (Beer Mill Farm)</i>	<i>Wm. Crabb</i>	<i>0.5.2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>Mr. Gamlen</i>	<i>James Crabb</i>	<i>0.3.9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>Mrs. Turner</i>	<i>Geo. Tucker</i>	<i>0..2..6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>Mrs. Palfrey</i>	<i>hirsself</i>	<i>0..2..3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>Mr Warbutton</i>	<i>himself</i>	<i>0.3..4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>Nich. Collard</i>	<i>himself</i>	<i>0..2..5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
<i>Mr. Barrington</i>	<i>the same</i>	<i>0..6..0<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
	<i>quarterly</i>	<i>10 17 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></i>
	<i>yearly</i>	<i>43..10..6</i>

*Thos. Slade and Geo. Durman Assessors*

## Appendix VI Beercrocombe Diary 1999 - 'A year in the life of the village'

### Regular Events:

St. James Church	regular services throughout the year.
Bellringing Practice	most Friday nights.
Meals on Wheels	Monday and Thursday lunchtimes.
Short Mat Bowling	Village Hall Thursday evenings.
Mini bus to Taunton	Wednesday and Friday mornings.
Round Window Club	Alternate weeks at the Village Hall.
Senior Citizens Club	3rd Thursday afternoon each month
Library Van	Alternate Tuesday afternoons.
Women's Institute	1st or 2nd Thursday evening monthly at Hatch Beauchamp.
Parish Council	Bimonthly meetings at the Village Hall.
Beercrocombe History Group	various meetings.

### Special Events:

4 March	Skittles evening at the Nag's Head.
17 March	Bridge Drive at Allens in aid of church funds.
21 April	Annual General Parish meeting.
6 May	Parish and District Council elections.
8 May	Plant and cake sale on Village Green in aid of church and other funds.
15 June	Barbecue and dancing by Taunton Deane Morris Men on the green. Formal opening of the new bus shelter.
23 June	Round Window Club excursion to Sidmouth.
26/27 June	Flower Festival at St. James' church. Ploughman's lunches teas and competitions in aid of bell fund.
17 July	Village Hall Fete.
9/11 August	Church bells removed from belfry.
11 August	98.5% eclipse of the sun in Beercrocombe.
21 August	Flower, vegetable, craft show and Fete for Hatch Beauchamp and eight surrounding parishes at Hatch Beauchamp Village Hall. Ceilidh and Barn Dance in the evening.
11 September	Sponsored bicycle ride in aid of Somerset Churches and Chapels.
September	Open Day at Merryfield airfield for surrounding villages.
September	Visit to Taylor's foundry at Loughborough to watch the casting of the new treble bell.
24 September	Barn Dance in aid of Village Hall funds.
25/30 October	Rehanging of the bells at St. James'
12 December	Dedication service by the Bishop of Taunton for the new bells at St.James'.
16 December	Carol singing on the village green.

**1 January 2000 the church bells ring out at noon to mark the next millennium.**

## **And Finally.....**

Beercrocombe may not have any grand buildings or spectacular scenery but it is a real community and today's residents are just as proud of their village as those of earlier times. We hope this little book conveys something of the spirit of this small Somerset village and end our story with two pictures. The first is of villagers watching a tree planting ceremony on the village green to mark the coronation of George VI in 1937. The second, taken in 1999, is of villagers looking forward to the next millennium and another thousand years of village history.



*Villagers watching a tree planting ceremony on the village green in May 1937. Edwin Priddle (centre of the three boys in the front row) and John Dibble (small boy in the white shin third from the right) are both in the next photograph.*

## Some of the villagers in 1999



*Beercrocombe villagers in front of Allens on the village green 5th December 1999. Two of the people in this picture, Edwin Priddle (first on the right, second row) and John Dibble (fourth from the right, back row) were also in the photograph taken in 1937.*

***Francis Lumbard is my name and England is my nation  
Beercrocombe my dwelling place and Christ is my salvation***

*(Written into the Beercrocombe Parish Records in the 18th century)*

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