MINCHINHAMPTON LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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Minchinhampton Local History Collection,
The Trap House, West End, Minchinhampton,
STROUD, GL6 9JA

MINCHINHAMPTON LOCAL HISTORY GROUP COMMITTEE 2002/2003

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Mrs. Diana Wall – Chairman
Dr. Hugh Kearsey – Vice chairman
Mrs. Sarah Cole – Secretary and Treasurer
Mrs. Sue Smith
Mr. Brian Keen
Mr. Bob Petersen
Mrs. Juliet Wilson

PROGRAMME OF PAST MEETINGS

2003	November	A.G.M. and "Minchinhampton Life in Victorian Times" - Mrs. Sue Smith
2004	January	"The Cotswold Garden Trail" - Mr. Tony Russell
	February	"History of the Arts & Crafts Movement - The last hundred years" - Mrs. Jenny Bailey
	March	"The Stroud District's Good Causes" - Mr. Philip Walmsley
	May	"Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton" - Mr. Reg Acock
	July	"Guided Walk around Tetbury"
	September	"The Stroudwater Canal" - Mrs. Joan Tucker
	October	"Friends and Neighbours" Exhibition
	November	A.G.M. and "The Francis Frith Photographs" - Mr. Howard Beard

A New Home for the Local History Collection

In July 2004 Minchinhampton parish council moved into a new Parish Centre in the former hairdressing salon at "The Trap House" in West End. This Listed Building has now been renovated to provide a parish office and committee room on the ground floor, with storage and other facilities in the basement.

The parish council acts as a custodian trustee for the Local History Collection, and kindly offered to store this in the larger room downstairs. Shelves and the filing cabinet were moved; Mrs. Sue Smith and the Library Service made donations of bookcases; the large desk from the former office was manhandled down the spiral stairs and the computer installed. After many volunteer hours the books, files, papers and maps were unpacked from the archive boxes and put into their final places. The room now forms an excellent space for working or for councillors to hold one-to-one meetings.

With a move imminent people were asked to hold on to any donations to the Collection until this was settled. However, over twenty hard-backed books on local history themes have recently been donated by the Library, many photographs were scanned into the computer at the "Friends and Neighbours" exhibition, and various maps received from the Parish Council. There is a backlog of work waiting to be done, including processing of newspaper cuttings from the 1970s, and pasting into scrapbooks – this is a task which could be done at home if anyone has a few hours to spare.

The intention was always to offer research facilities to those who need to consult the Collection and since September members of the committee have opened the Trap House from 2.30 to 4.00 on Monday afternoons. Visitors have been helped with family and building history, a good number of publications have been sold and other items or reminiscences given to the Group.

And for the future? It is hoped that some of the display material can be regularly shown in the meeting room, for those who have not visited recent exhibitions and during the summer the opening would be extended to Saturday mornings, although this will depend on **YOU**, as it cannot be done without a willing pool of volunteers.

After years of working in a cramped space, with no table or desktop, the Collection has found a worthy home, for which the Local History Group owe the Parish Council a great debt of gratitude.

VICTORIAN GARDENS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Glimpses from Minchinhampton

Diana Wall

"I know nothing so pleasant as to sit there on a summer afternoon, with the western sun flicking through the great elder-tree, and lighting up our gay parterres, where flowers and flowering shrubs are set as thick as grass in a field"[1]

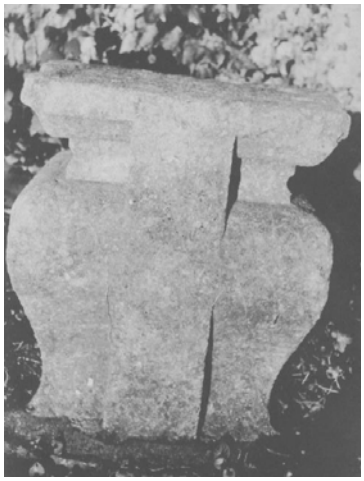
This masterly description of a Victorian garden is in complete contrast to the green "natural" parkland created around the Gatcombe Estate and similar properties by the early years of the C19th. The great landscape gardeners of the previous century had brought informality to the parks of Gloucestershire, whether large like Badminton, or Dodington, or small like Bownham.[2] Within a few years all this was to change.

The C19th saw the rapid advances in manufacturing that made Great Britain the centre of a worldwide Empire, improved agriculture bringing wealth to the rural population and an expansion and transformation in all branches of the arts and sciences. A spirit of great confidence characterised the Victorian Age and this is apparent even in their gardens. From the "picturesque" where the landscape appeared as if in a painting, designs moved to the "gardenesque", where the hand of man was evident, and indeed celebrated. These two themes occur throughout the period in question and "*it is possible to see the history of Victorian and early C20th gardening as a constant struggle between formality and naturalism*"[3]

As the British Empire spread, and countries such as China and Japan opened their borders to outsiders, so new tree species and flowering plants began to reach these shores. "*Whereas Brown and Repton had worked in a palette dominated by shades of green, the next two hundred years would embrace every colour available to nature. The founding of the Royal Horticultural society of London in 1804 marked the beginning of plant collecting on a scale never seen before.*"[4] Nurserymen provided plants for their patrons, and to show off their acquisitions in their best setting, terraces, formal beds, urns and planters were reintroduced into the area surrounding a house. Stone was in plentiful supply in the Cotswolds, but in the Severn Vale the early form of cast concrete, "Pulhamite", made these features affordable for the smaller landowner, and encouraged the provision of rock gardens, ferneries or a "wilderness", modelled on the Alpine scenery visited by increasing numbers of Britons.

[1] "Our Village" by Mary Mitford (1787 – 1855)
[2] "Changing Garden Design" by Diana Wall in Annual Bulletin 16, 1999
[3] "Gloucestershire Country Houses" Volume 3 by Nicholas Kingsley 2001
[4] "Travelling Trees" Royal Cornwall Museum, 2004

One of the earliest Gloucestershire landowners to reintroduce formality was R.S. Holford at Westonbirt House in the 1840s. The south front faces onto a garden with terraces, urns and cherubs; there is a Pulhamite rockery and ornate pavilions, fountains and pools in the Italian garden. Locally, Longfords House is on a more modest scale, being created for a local clothier, but the land sloping down to the lake behind the milldam was ideal for creating a terraced garden. This was enhanced over the years, with a conservatory and billiard room being built to the east, all taking advantage of the views over the gardens. A similar garden was created at "Highlands" (now Beaudesert School) in Pinfarthings, again on a sloping site, and at Moor Court the terrace, with its central steps outside the Drawing Room, dates from c1864.


Stone in three Gardens

Longfords House **The Lammas** **Park House**

The fashion for stone ornaments was extended to include gate piers, often with a surmounting ball, and at "The Lammas" garden ornaments were provided by reusing materials from the nave of Holy Trinity Church, following the restoration of the 1840s. The font was only returned after many years serving as a garden trough.

The best-known introductions of the plant-hunters - rhododendrons, camellias and azaleas - would not flourish on the Oolitic Limestone with its alkaline soil. However, the use of planters and introduced soil enabled these to be displayed, albeit in somewhat more limited spaces than in the great gardens of Cornwall. Lower down the valleys, as for example at Holcombe and in the lower parts of Scar Hill, the Liassic Clay is at the surface and postcards show that there was a shrub cover incorporating some of these introductions by the latter part of the Victorian era. Many of the exotic plants brought to this country were tender and did not survive the Cotswold winters without protection. Gatcombe Park has a fine curving

conservatory that was in existence by 1829, and housed many ferns, palms and fruit trees. The manufacturing advances during the C19th meant that greenhouses and conservatories became cheaper, with a greater proportion of glass and were available to those with modest incomes, as the advertisements in the increasing number of gardening journals show. Thousands visited the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace of 1851, travelling to the capital by train, and returning eager to try to emulate the horticulture displayed. Some of the interior photographs that survive[5] show the large potted plants for which this period is renowned, and which could be moved to enhance the terraces during the summer months. The professional gardeners tried to outdo each other, especially at the annual Longfords Show.

Terraces at Highlands, now Beaudesert

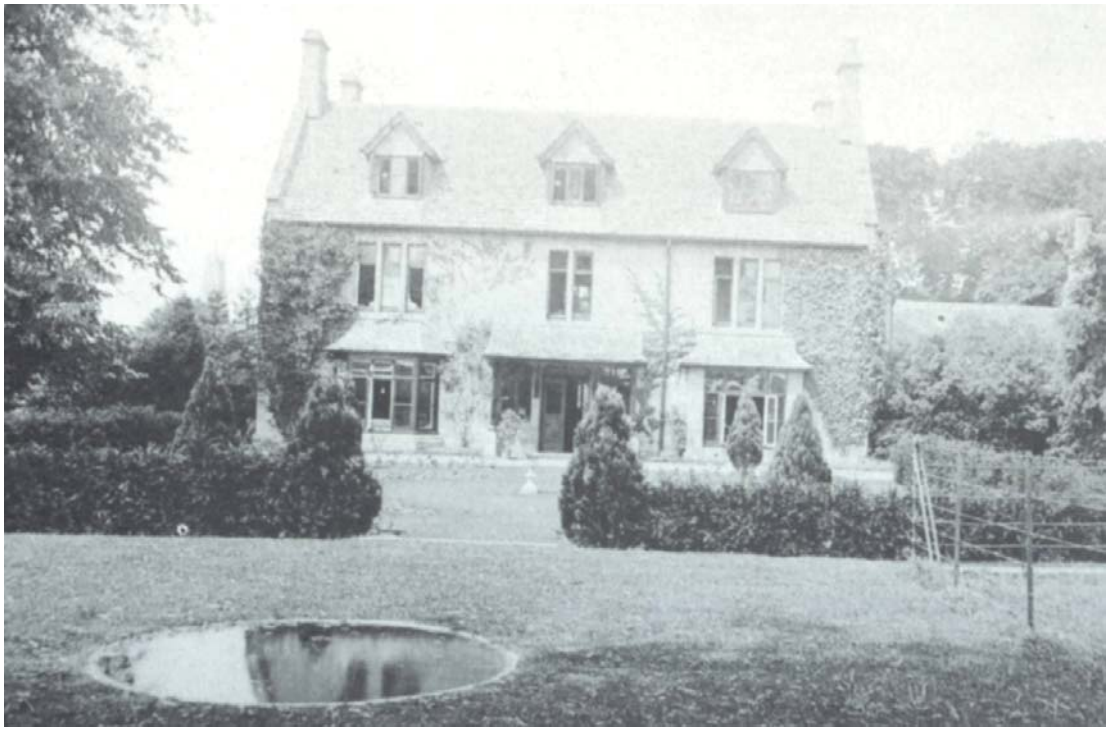
Labour was a "cheap" commodity, and an analysis of the 1891 Census for Minchinhampton shows that over seventy men described themselves as gardeners of some sort. Together with the heavy manual labour that was necessary for the construction of terraces and similar features, the abundance of this workforce was vital in the shaping of garden design. Longfords House had a head gardener, with his two sons permanently employed as under-gardeners, and other jobbing gardeners from the locality were used as required. Duties would include attending the boilers in the glasshouses, providing fruit and vegetables in season, and even the flowers for decorating dining tables; these tasks and the routine cultivation

[5] "The Lammas" in "Minchinhampton Life and Times", Vol. 3, 2002

were labour-intensive, although the local invention of the lawn mower by Edward Budding removed one onerous task previously carried out by labourers wielding scythes. A sixty-hour week was worked in most gardens, with often-unpaid Sunday duty, in return for a wage of about £1 per week for a head gardener, although often a house was provided.[6] Many gardeners' cottages survive in the area, notably at Amberley Court, Highlands and Burleigh Court.

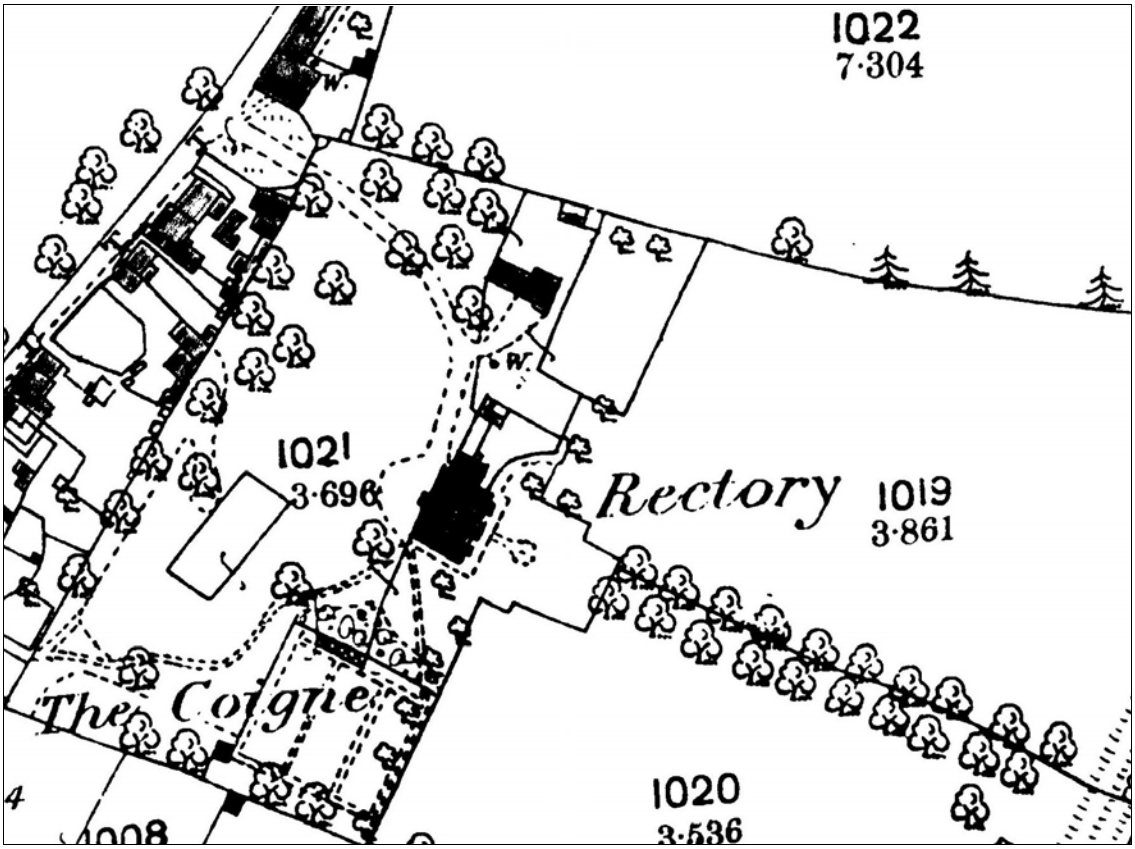
These themes can be illustrated by the development of the gardens at Stuart House, which was the Rectory in Victorian times. The Rev. E. C. Oldfield, who was appointed by Henry David Ricardo in 1865, altered the rectory considerably. The distinctive porch was added to the west front, which became the main entrance, in preference to the lime avenue, of which a few traces remain. Formal gardens were laid out to the east and the south, where there was also a glasshouse. The centrepiece was a stone urn, and the map overleaf shows a circular pool, which can be seen on the photograph from the first part of the C20th. The Oldfield family enjoyed the house for twenty years and then the Rev. F. A. Mather was incumbent until 1896. He employed five indoor servants, and an assistant gardener lived in a cottage in the grounds. It is likely that the head gardener was living in Butt Street, where a bothy still exists, or in Friday Street.

Stuart House Gardens



The East Front

[6] "A History of British Gardening" by Miles Hadfield, 1960



1884 Map showing Garden Layout

These gardens did not belong to any member of the aristocracy, simply to a country parson, but serve to illustrate how the fashions of the rich were beginning to be accessible to the middle classes. Ideas were also spreading more rapidly throughout Britain, thanks to the medium of the railways and the penny post. It is likely that Rev. Mather had chrysanthemums, hybrid roses, peonies and dahlias in the formal beds. One of his contemporaries was Rev. H. Ellacombe, of Bitton, renowned for sharing his plants with other clerics[7]. It would be nice to think of informal gardening chats occurring in vicarages around the county.

Conifers were rare in England until David Douglas travelled the American northwest in the 1820s, Archibald Menzies the Andes in the 1830s and James Bryant New Zealand in the 1840s. Each brought back seed and specimens for Kew Gardens and the large London nurseries, and the impact of their introduction into areas such as the Cotswolds, where oak, elm and beech were familiar, must have been great. The largest gardens soon contained a pinetum, where these novelties could be admired, and single specimens were planted to add emphasis, often in the centre of a lawn. A Wellingtonia was central to the design at the Lammas,

[7] "In a Gloucestershire Garden" by Henry Ellacombe, 1895

specimen Cedars at Forwood Grange, Holcombe and Park House, Corsican Pines at Windmill Place, and Douglas Firs were planted alongside the lodge to Gatcombe Park. By 1884 when the first large-scale maps of Minchinhampton were published, many of the smaller gardens also had conifers, their position marked by conventional signs.

"*If one thing dominates Gloucestershire's nineteenth century gardens, not always happily, it is the tree, used not in the Georgian way as part of a clump or plantation to shape a landscape, but as a specimen to be admired in itself for its rarity or its angular silhouette*"[8]. The parks of Minchinhampton were not large enough for arboreta, like those at Batsford or Westonbirt, where the conifers were interplanted with deciduous exotics like maples, or even contain as many alien species as those in Stratford Park in Stroud. However, in autumn, a glance along the skyline above Burleigh Court, Bownham or Moor Court will reveal shapes and colours introduced during the Victorian period, in stark contrast to the native trees. Conifers are faster growing than many other species, and those today are often third or fourth generation of plants, but the trend for the specimen tree continues today.

The examples cited above have been of ornamental parks and gardens, but for a large household the provision of food for the table was an important consideration. Many exotic plants could also produce fruit – pineapples and bananas were grown in the stove houses of large properties all over England. The restoration of the kitchen gardens of Heligan in Cornwall and Walpole in Cambridgeshire have identified the cultivation techniques, intensive labour and expense involved in such enterprises in the C19th. Longfords House had a large walled kitchen garden and orchard to the south of the main block, of which traces can still be seen. The brick used for the garden walls retained heat, which was utilised by the espalier fruit trees grown alongside, as well as protecting more tender plants from wind damage. However, in the well-wooded Avening valley there was already shelter from the worst gales.

Cotswold Stone (the Greater and Lesser Oolite) has always been the preferred building material locally, but the different properties of brick led to its introduction for many garden walls, and it is this contrast that often points to the existence of a kitchen garden in the past. One of the best preserved was until recently that of

[8] "Historic Gardens of Gloucestershire" by Timothy Mowl, 2002

Rodborough Manor, towards the bottom of the Nailsworth Valley, but just far enough above the stream to prevent a frost hollow effect. The house, which was destroyed by fire in the early part of the C20th, was on the hillside far above, but map evidence suggests the existence of greenhouses in a more convenient position for the kitchen staff. When William Whitehead drew up plans to build a large residence on the site of the old Sheppard manor house close to the church in Minchinhampton, he got as far as the kitchen garden walls before the money ran out – their remains can be seen either side of the Library. Another town centre kitchen garden is behind Greylands. Within these productive enclosures mass manufacturing was increasingly playing a part – in the tools used, the plant labels, ironwork supports and flowerpots. As the costs decreased these improvements could also be utilised in the smallest of household plots.

The cottages in the centre of Minchinhampton, although opening directly onto the street at the front, had small rear gardens. This was a place for growing vegetables, keeping a few chickens and perhaps a pig – and of course for the privy! The whole family would undertake cultivation in whatever time they could spare from other tasks. This type of husbandry was considered vital to the local economy, and the Boy's School had its own garden for teaching techniques, and at the previously mentioned Longfords Show there were classes for "*cottagers*" and "*tenants*"[9]. Manure from the animals made the plots fertile, herbs, vegetables and culinary flowers were grown together, but it was only when seeds became cheaper, yields higher and families smaller, that the poorer people could indulge in decorative areas of the garden. Minchinhampton Parish Council came into being in 1894, as a result of an Act of Parliament, in which one of the duties was the provision of allotments that could be rented for growing food. The picture of the "cottage garden", with borders, flowers and fruit intermingled with vegetables with roses around the door is a C20th idealisation – but that is another story!

Although fashions changed slowly in the rural areas of England, by the start of the new millennium the gardens of upper and middle class Minchinhampton were formal in design, with decorative features of stone or ironwork, and a wealth of colourful flowers and exotic trees and shrubs which were unthinkable a hundred years before. Fresh produce was available all year round, thanks to cultivation under glass, and the constant efforts of skilled workers. The garden was a place to enjoy, a picture to be admired, but not yet a place to work in, although it did provide a suitable topic for conversation or literature. The great social upheavals of the first quarter of the C20th were to change the face of gardening in dramatic fashion.

Acknowledgement: All the period photographs are from the collection of Howard Beard, copies of which are stored digitally in the Local History Collection

[9] "Victorian and Edwardian Minchinhampton" in "Minchinhampton Life and Times", Vol. 1, 2000

MEDIEVAL CHRISTMAS IN MINCHINHAMPTON

Claire Forbes

After William the Conqueror had invaded England and declared himself King, he gave presents of land to monasteries and abbeys in France. The estate of Minchinhampton was given to the Convent of the Holy Trinity at Caen, L'Abbaye aux Dames. The Abbess never lived in Minchinhampton but the Abbey received all the profits its agriculture which went towards the kitchen of the nuns and for the support of guests. In the Abbess's absence the estate of Minchinhampton was administered and supervised by a seneschal or steward.

Many documents still exist from Minchinhampton Manor from as early as 1157 AD and research revealed a little about how Christmas was spent for the wealthy and the poor.

In 1170, the Lord of Minchinhampton Manor ruled that "from any house which smoke comes from, they owe a chicken [to the Lord] at Christmas". In the same year the Lord's "household" were each given a tip or bonus of 7½d. The household comprised the wealthier tenants: the reeve, the beadle, the hayward, the carter, two ploughmen, three drovers, three shepherds, a cowman and a dairymaid.

Although not strictly slaves, the majority of tenants living on the Minchinhampton estate, known as its Manor, were unfree. That is they had to give certain services and dues to the Lord of the manor. For example in 1307, Agnes of Longford (she lived at the present Longfords in Minchinhampton) had to pay 8d a year rent for her house and piece of land. To be allowed to take a small amount of firewood from the woodland, she had to give to the Lord of the Manor a fowl at Christmas, five eggs at Easter and do a certain amount of haymaking, reaping and hoeing throughout the year on the Lord of the Manor's land. Similarly Richard the Turner "owed to the Lord at Christmas 12 trenchers." These were wooden plates on which food was served. Most people, however, ate from trenchers made from bread on which all the courses were served. At the end of the feast the rich would throw their bread trenchers and waste from the meal to the beggars and poor who waited outside the Manor House gates. Other tenants who gave chickens at Christmas included John de Sencle (today's St Chloe), John Beneyt of Hide and Julia de la Box, places that can be identified today.

According to accounts which were made in 1307, the peasants on the estate provided the Seneschal's (Sir Thomas Goelone) "household" with the following items for Christmas Day:

One and a half sides side of bacon, one sheep, half a lamb, eight chickens, four geese, five quarts of barley for bread, ¼ bullock, and a pig. Also one quart of herrings and 1 salted conger which would have been eaten on Christmas Eve, 7½d of saffron and 2 wastrell (loaves of bread); four bushells of wheat malt and 2½ quarts of dredge malt for ale.

The peasants also provided the food for their own Christmas dinner. The seneschal was in charge of receiving these items and the peasants prepared their own meal and ate together. For their Christmas dinner in 1307, the peasants provided:
One lamb, 39 chickens, 71 capons, eight geese, three pigs, two hoggetts, (two year old lambs) and 11 cheeses weighing two stones and 2lb of wax for candles. Although not recorded they would also have eaten bread and drunk ale. The meat would have been made into a stew and soup.

All the tenants were given twelve days holiday over Christmas but the shepherds had to take the Lord of the Manor's sheep to their own land and look after them there. This gave the shepherds an added advantage of the extra sheep dung which they used as a fertilizer, such a commodity being sought after in this period when the land was intensively farmed.

Bibliography and references:
Chibnall, Marjorie (1982) Charters and Custumals of The Abbey of Holy Trinity, Caen (Oxford University Press)

1846 TYPHOID FEVER OUTBREAK IN MINCHINHAMPTON

Sue Smith

The restoration of the church in 1842 caused a large part of the Churchyard to be removed to make way for the new Nave. Old graves were dug over and piles of black soil left to be spread on pasture land and some was taken away and used as garden manure with disastrous consequences.

Dr. Daniel Smith, a medical practitioner at Minchinhampton, wrote to Dr. Southwood Smith, a medical officer in the new Health of Towns Association.

"Our town is situated on a considerable elevation; each shower of rain produces a little torrent which passes through the streets with considerable power, our streets are wide and the inhabitants tolerably(!) clean; no offensive business being carried on and the place is proverbial for health. I have practised as a surgeon here for sixteen years and, until the last two years, I have no recollections of having a single case of typhus fever. Within the last two months, we have had upwards of 150 so as to induce a public meeting. The Rectory had cartloads of the black soil placed in their garden, his wife and one of his children died of the fever, also his gardener. The outer areas surrounding the parish remain healthy".

Mr Smith wrote letters from November 1846 to February 1847 to the Gloucester Journal, The Times, Sun and Daily News until the fever of Minchinhampton became notorious all over the country.

The parish took sides. One party included Mr David Ricardo, Patron of the Living, Mr Bruce of Hyde House and many others, many of whom had used the soil on their gardens as manure. On the other side were Dr. Daniel Smith, Dr. Southwood Smith, Mr J. G. Bell, solicitor and coroner who lived in Minchinhampton, and almost everyone who had suffered from the disease. The letters to the press became so acrimonious that the editors decided not to publish any more.

Life as an R.A.F. Ferry Pilot at Aston Down 1951 - 1957

John Muir

I wanted to tell my story as it occurred to me that I was probably the "last of the line" of those who served in No. 2 Ferry Pool at Aston Down in the years after World War II. Most of my fellow pilots and navigators had served in wartime, and were as much as twenty years older than myself, so I made a point of reminiscing to Di Wall, to aid the research into the R.A.F. base.

In 1949 a school friend and I decided to check out jobs in the armed forces. I went into both the army and air force recruiting offices in Edinburgh, he also went into the navy office, we swapped notes and I joined the R.A.F. in August, signing-on for eight years. Initial training took me to Padgate, Hornchurch, Digby and Wittering, before completing it at No. 3 Flying Training School at R.A.F. Feltwell in Norfolk, leaving in February 1951. After gaining my "wings" I was posted to 201 Advanced Flying School at Swinderby and 230 Operational Conversion Unit at Scampton, both in Lincolnshire, for advanced training, and qualified on heavy bombers, which was then the Lincoln – a later variant of the famous Lancaster. I left Scampton as a fully qualified bomber pilot with a crew of six, hoping, at last, to do a real job.

Within my crew, who were all N.C.O.s, there were two navigators/bomb aimers and two air gunners who had served in wartime, as well as a flight engineer and an air radio operator who were young National Service airmen. We were posted to Watton, in the battle training ground of Norfolk, but stayed for just three days. The unit there flew much-modified Lincolns bristling with secret radio gear and the civil service boffins who manned them were flown up and down the Iron Curtain, listening to Russian and East German signals. The boffins were all fairly senior rank, and expected to be flown by Officer Pilots. No place for me. Air Ministry politics were also at work and Bomber Command, just about to re-equip with Canberras, had decreed that they also were to be crewed by Officer Pilots. The peacetime R.A.F. was being born, so what was to be done with a Sgt. Pilot? As a crew we were given a number of temporary postings, none lasting more than a week, until October 1951 when the remnants of the crew were sent on yet another fourteen-day attachment to No. 2 Ferry Pool, Aston Down. You may imagine my thoughts as I got off the railcar at Chalford Station in the dark and looked for an airfield. I was even more surprised when the station transport driver said it was only five minutes away!

When I reported for duty on 30th October, I was a strange fish. All the other pilots and engineers I met were ex-wartime, tour-served on bombers, fighters,

and coastal planes and vastly experienced. However, not withstanding my callow state, I was soon given a flight check in a Lancaster and for the two weeks of my posting was set to work, with my flight engineer, ferrying Lincolns. At the end of the fourteen days Squadron Leader Lamplough – a very sympathetic C.O. – asked how I had enjoyed my stay. He responded to my enthusiasm by suggesting that perhaps, as I had not broken anything or got myself lost, he might try to arrange a permanent posting as a ferry pilot. In ways that I never understood this was done and so that was how I spent the remaining 6 ½ years of my service.

At the end of the war the Air Transport Auxiliary, which had delivered planes to the front line bases, often in the hands of female pilots, was gradually closed down. "*Before the end of the war in Europe flying training had ceased and grass was growing between the huts at Thame. The Invasion Pool of Aston Down had gone, and black crows perched on the motionless airscrews of the abandoned Lancasters which lined the boundaries of that silent airfield*".[10] This was not quite true, because 20 M.U. (Maintenance Unit) was still active in Minchinhampton, and in 1946 two home ferry pools were created to fulfil the mainland delivery function; No. 1 Ferry Pool at Hawarden and No. 2 Ferry Pool at Aston Down, with an Overseas Ferry Pool at Benson. All these were under Maintenance Command of the R.A.F. until February 1953, when No. 2 became 187 Squadron of Transport Command. As such, and then the only home ferry station, their pilots flew more types of aircraft in a single year than any other R.A.F. base anywhere in the world.

John at Aston Down

During my first few months at Aston Down I gradually built up experience flying those aircraft I already knew well from training. By January 1952 I had been introduced to the Oxford, and then the Anson and started to learn the role of the taxi pilot. This was an important job, both operationally and as an intensive training aid. It was important for a ferry pilot to find his way around the country by visual reference only. The map was your only navigation aid – we had no radio aids or facilities to let you down through cloud, and you stayed in ground contact at all times. Learning in the taxi had the advantage that there would probably be an experienced pilot passenger who would quickly point out the error of your ways.

[10] "Brief Glory" by E.C. Cheesman, 1946

As the months went by I continued to add new types to my Log Book; initially they were the simpler ones – Tiger Moth, Chipmunk, Auster, Procter – then in May 1952 I made my first visit to 1689 Flight, Ferry Pilot Training Unit, our next-door neighbours on the airfield. Here one of the first pilots I met was Sgt. Jock Farmer, another stroke of good fortune as he had been my instructor on Harvards just over a year previously. We were quickly airborne "*so that he could see how much I had forgotten*". Fortunately this was not too much as the next day he had me flying in the rear seat of the Harvard, being shown the curved approach and landing for my next aircraft type – a Spitfire XVI. This was, to me, the pinnacle of flying to that date. A great deal has been written about the Spitfire so I can add no more except to say it is all true.

The next year was a time of consolidation, gaining experience and adding new types as required, until in March 1953 I was assessed as ready for conversion to jets. This was again carried out by 1689 Flight, on the Meteor 7, by a real character, Master Pilot "Nicky" Niezrecki. During my time ferrying jets I would fly various types of Meteor, Vampires and Venoms. In August 1954 there was a flurry of excitement amongst the pilots as we learned that we were nominated as the Ferry Unit responsible for delivering the Hunter, which was soon to be accepted for service in the R.A.F. Three of our pilots were sent to the Day Flight Leader School at West Raynham, who along with Boscombe Down had the only Hunter in R.A.F. hands. There they were shown the ropes and each had two flights. They then went to Hawker's factory at Dunsfold and collected the first three Hunters for delivery to No. 5 M.U. at Kemble. Three more of our pilots, of whom I was very pleased to be one, went to Kemble, where the know-how was passed from the first three and off we went. Magic! I'm a bit ashamed to admit it but for the next few weeks, until the Air Ministry justifiably put a stop to it, Aston Down and the surrounding countryside was subjected to a regular succession of sonic booms! From then, until the end in 1957 we six, plus two more in later years, ferried the output of all three Hunter production factories at Dunsfold, Bitteswell and Squires Gate, Blackpool to the various M.U.s, and then, when they had been prepared for service, to the newly forming squadrons. An amusing glimpse of the military mind is shown by the choice of the first two M.U.s to handle Hunters. The first was, as mentioned, Kemble and the second was Kinloss in Morayshire!

This story is typical of the progression for a ferry pilot, gaining experience and qualifying on additional types as the job and his ability dictated. The ideal ferry pilot would be able to fly any type required, but with many of the older aircraft becoming ever more rare this was seldom achieved. Although never flying an aircraft to its full military capabilities, the pilot had to have a different range of skills. The motto on the new squadron crest that we acquired when we became 187 Sqn. Transport Command was "*Versatile*" which I think was a fair description. During my time at Aston down I would attend a six-monthly

competency course, firstly at 1689 Flight, and latterly at R.A.F. Benson. All of the conversion to new types was done in house. In the early years this would involve a dual flight with a pilot who knew the aircraft well, and on single-seaters it would be a talk through with the pilots' notes. In later years, as you picked up your delivery chit, it would be, "*Here's a new one for you. Pick up the pilots' notes and read them on the Anson*".

The life of a ferry pilot would revolve around the home base. In the morning we would check the weather and as we trooped into the ops. room we would be given chits for the aircraft we would deliver that day. The operations staff, from the movements notified by Maintenance Command on the previous afternoon, would have worked out the programme. Juggling who would fly what to where and what else he could do was akin to the black arts and was an intricate skill much admired. When we were all ready with maps, pilots' notes, parachutes etc. we would find out which Anson we were on and pile aboard. As many as five Ansons could be setting out on a busy morning and during the day we might connect again, somewhere in the country, with one or more of them.

An Anson in R.A.F. Markings - the flying taxi

The job we did had a number of stages. Firstly there was picking up aircraft from factories to deliver to M.U.s where they would be brought up to operational standard. In due course these would be delivered onwards to the operational squadrons. We collected well-used aircraft that were approaching the need for a major overhaul, which would be carried out by the M.U.s, and they would probably be modified to the latest standards. All the M.U.s had a staff of test pilots who would fly the planes when the work was done and clear

them fit for delivery. In spring we had a spate of jobs taking aircraft to various stations around the country in readiness for the Air Training Corps Summer Camps. In the earliest days they were Tiger Moths, but later Chipmunks, and in autumn we would pick them up again and return them. Perhaps the saddest movements of all were when time-expired aircraft were notified "*fit for one flight only*" to be delivered for breaking up by the M.U.

Within the station we had a "patch" on the east of the main 'A' site, where the perimeter track makes a bend to the south of the control tower. Our headquarters was the typical wartime wooden hut, with the operations and planning rooms in the centre, crew rooms to the side and the C.O.'s office and administration on the end. The latter was looked after with quiet efficiency and good grace, despite the unseemly banter by Maggie (now Smith). In the centre, between the ops. room and the crew room was the most important man in the unit – Harry Messenger – who, from his little cubby hole, would dispense tea on request non-stop between eight and five, as well as managing to keep the hut tidy. Behind was one of our two squadron hangars, and the important parachute section serving all units at Aston Down, and aircraft in transit were parked on the grass immediately in front of the hut. Heating was by turtle stoves, and you can imagine the conditions in mid winter!

On becoming part of Transport Command

As already mentioned, civilians were employed on the Squadron, as they were on all units at Aston Down; in this period the civilian staff on 20 M.U. probably outnumbered the R.A.F. personnel. Our ground crew were all civilians, and at any one time the strength of the unit was about forty. We used all three runways for flying, but by the later half of the 1950s these were in

pretty poor condition. The living accommodation consisted of huts and messes, to the north of the main gate, on the site now bisected by the Cirencester road and on the corner was the post office and shop. There were no married quarters at all, for either officers or N.C.O.s, and living out was the norm. Near the gymnasium on Gypsy Lane, to the rear of the barrack huts there were some eight or nine caravans owned by married personnel; one of these was my home when I first married. Later, like many of my contemporaries we were in an "Air Ministry Hiring" – a flat or house rented by the authorities for you. Landlords were keen to have service couples, as everything was checked on your arrival and departure (known as marching in and marching out) so there was no risk of expensive damage. However, in the post-war years of housing shortage hirings were as far away as Leonard Stanley and people had to rely on cars, as even then the bus services did not take working hours of pilots into account!

My time in the R.A.F came to an end in 1957, as coincidentally did the presence of a ferry unit at Aston Down. The decision was made to base all mainland and overseas operations at R.A.F. Benson, and the unit disappeared from the Cotswolds in August of that year. Having married a local girl, my future was assured in this part of the world, far from Scotland, and I look back on my years "on top of the hill" with great affection.

Accommodation Huts north of the Cirencester Road

Life as an R.A.F. Ferry Pilot at Aston Down 1951 - 1957
Log of Aircraft flown by John Muir

Manufacturer	Type	Engine
Avro	Anson 12, 19, 20,21	Armstrong Siddley Cheetah
Taylorcraft	Auster 5,6,9	Lycoming 0-290 De Haviland Gypsy Major
Boulton Paul	Balliol T2	Rolls Royce Merlin 35
English Electric	Canberra B1	
De Haviland	Chipmunk T10	De Haviland Gypsy Major
De Haviland	Devon C2	De Haviland Gypsy Queen
North American	Harvard 2B	Pratt & Whitney Wasp R1340
Handley Page	Hastings C2	Bristol Hercules 106
Hawker	Hunter F1, F4, F6	Rolls Royce Avon 113/115/203
Hawker	Hunter F2, F5	Armstrong Siddley Sapphire 101
Avro	Lancaster GR3	Rolls Royce Merlin 28 (Packard)
Avro	Lincoln B2	Rolls Royce Merlin 66 (Packard)
Gloster	Meteor F4, T7, F8, PR9 NF11, 12, 13,14	Rolls Royce Derwent 8/9
Airspeed	Oxford T2	Armstrong Siddley Cheetah 10
Percival	Pembroke C1	Alvis Leonides 127
Percival	Prentice T1	De Haviland Gypsy Queen 32
Percival	Proctor C4	De Haviland Gypsy Queen
Percival	Provost	Alvis Leonides
Supermarine	Spitfire F16, PR19, F21, F22	Rolls Royce Merlin 266 Rolls Royce Griffon 65
Hawker	Tempest F6	Napier Sabre 2B
De Haviland	Tiger Moth	De Haviland Gypsy Major
Vickers	Varsity T1	Bristol Hercules
Vickers	Wellington	Bristol Hercules 16

On the Internet

For those who have computers with access to the Internet, there is a web site that might be of interest about Minchinhampton:
www.british-history.ac.uk
Go to “Browse by Place” and click on Gloucestershire.
There you will find “A History of the County of Gloucestershire Vol XI - Bisley and Longtree Hundreds”. Minchinhampton is on Page 4

THE TRAP HOUSE
Diana Wall

February 2004 saw the culmination of a long-standing Parish Council project – the ownership of a town centre property which could provide in a single building many of the local authority services needed by the electorate. The building purchased was "The Trap House" in West End - the name reflecting the original purpose of the building, to house a small coach or trap. However, during the course of its life it has performed many functions, although externally it is little altered from the small building erected c.1820.

The 1830 survey of Minchinhampton lists this part of the town as "House, (with a rateable value of 17s. 6d), yard and buildings", (a further 17s. 6d.), and a garden, in the ownership of a Mr. Chalk who owned several houses in the town, but occupied by a Samuel Tainty and someone named Parsons. It was quite common at this time to sub-let properties, and it is most likely that Mr. Parsons was some kind of tradesman, who required the use of the yard. If you stand with your back to the Trap House, looking west you can pick out the roofline of one of the demolished buildings that stood on the opposite side of the open space.

The walls flanking the large entrance gates were much higher than now, and the majority of research at present leads to the suspicion that the Trap House and yard were associated with "Greylands" in the High Street. As the property was not residential there are no clues to its history in the Census records, but it is known that for a time the firm of James Simmonds (on the opposite side of West End) occupied the yard and used the Trap House as a Chapel of Rest. In 1938 the whole of the property was conveyed by a George Alfred Benjamin to "The Worlds Stores Limited" of London, and comprised two properties on the High Street, a walled garden, which some older residents may remember, the yard with stone outbuilding (Trap House), and steps down to the cellar where the reception/office area now stands. By 1965 the property had passed to "Keymarkets" and some people may remember the frontage being featured in the John Mills film "Dulcima", based on an H.E. Bates novel.

Recent owners include Mr. Trevor Picken, who instigated most of the conversion work seen today, and used the property as a music room. Several years later Mr. Nick Atkins moved his hairdressing salon from the High Street to the Trap House, now a Listed Building, where it remained until the purchase by the Parish Council – to utilise and maintain for the generations to come.