

A Change Of Name

Cottisford was founded in Saxon times on the ford or hardway over the little Crowell brook which flows into the Great Ouse and eventually reaches the sea at King's Lynn. J.C. Blomfield in his local history thinks that the name means "Cottage Ford" from a cottage guarding the crossing. But it has since been discovered that in the earliest charters the village is called "Wolfheysford" and "Urlesford". Wolfhey was evidently the saxon founder of the original village on the western side of the Crowell around the Church. It was not until after the Domesday Survey of 1086 that the village threw out a "Cote" or colony on the eastern side of the stream, and in the Manorial Rolls of Edward I householders from this end of the village are described as "De Cote" or "De Cotesford". It is easy to see how the simpler name came to be applied to the whole village.

The French Connection

In 1066 William the Conqueror gave the manors of Cottisford and Charlton-On-Otmoor to the Norman Baron Hugh de Grantmesnil, as a reward for valiant services at the Battle of Hastings. Cottisford next passed to Hugh's daughter Adeline, who gave it to the Norman Abbey of Bec.

Bec was then the centre in northern Europe of the great Cluniac Revival, and gave this country two of its greatest Archbishops, Lanfranc and St. Anselm. For three centuries the Abbots of Bec were Lords of the Manor of Cottisford, which they generally administered through the Priors of their daughter Priory of Ogbourne in Wiltshire, though they also kept a bailiff in the village.

Bec built the present Church of St. Mary, Cottisford, in place of the ancient Saxon building. It was a noble erection indeed for so small a place, and included a bell tower until the restoration of 1861.

It was consecrated, nearly half way through the thirteenth century, by Grossetete, the great scholar Bishop of Lincoln, in whose diocese it then lay.

When the Hundred Years' War with France aroused national feeling Cottisford became increasingly restive under French administration, and great was the rejoicing when the English victories led to freedom from the foreigner, and Cottisford became a Royal Manor under the kings of

England. This was the origin of the Cottisford Feast, celebrating the victory of Crecy on August 26th 1346. Right up to the First World War of 1914 the Feast was kept at the weekend following August 26th. Older inhabitants can still recall the "swing rounds" to the music of melodeons in the great Coach House at "The Fox", Juniper; the stalls of sweets and fancy goods; and the traditional fare of hams; plum tarts and home made wines.

The Oldest House

Cottisford's greatest tenant under the Bec administration was a Sir Roger de Cotesford who did a number of very successful property deals after the Black Death of 1349 when there were so many vacancies. He bought the Manor of Tusmore, and obtained permission to pull down the village, left without inhabitant by the plague, and enclose Tusmore Park. He also acquired estates at Bletchingdon and Little Haseley. He was three times High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, in 1363, 1365 and 1369. In Cottisford he built the present Manor Farm House, which claims to be the oldest house in the county. Walls 2½ feet thick still bear witness to Sir Roger's thoroughness to-day.

The Connection with Eton College

In 1442 King Henry VI, who inherited Cottisford from his father, used it to endow his newly established College at Eton. Eton College were lords of Cottisford for four and a half centuries, until they sold the land and farms at various times at the end of the last century, and gave the advowson (the right to appoint the rector) to the Bishop of Oxford in 1924. Their long ownership is still seen in the name "College Farm".

Eton were very good landlords. For instance, an interesting deed dated 1458 records granting of freedom to a Cottisford serf by "William Westbury, Provost of the Royal College of the Blessed Mary at Eton". It reads: "Know ye that we for our reverence for God, and for the faithful and approved service paid to us, have manumitted Richard Ford, alais Goldsoll, a born servant of our lord of Cottisford, in the county of Oxford, from all yoke and service of villeinage".

In 1469 Eton leased Cottisford to the Samewell family, and one of them, John Samewell, who died about 1500, is commemorated by a fine brass on the south wall of Cottisford Church, depicting John, his wife and their thirteen children.