

## Stanton, A very brief history

**Stanton** - which means 'a homestead on stony ground' dates back to pre-Roman times, at the junction of the old roman roads of Peddars Way and, what is referred to as 'Roman Road No 330 which probably ran from Colchester to Bildeston, once stood a Roman Villa known as 'Stanton Chare' and to this day Chare Road runs past this site.

There is evidence that this site has been settled continuously since this time and possibly before.

The Manor of Stanton was for many years in the ownership of the Abbots of Bury St Edmunds, and in later years with the Capel-Lofft family. White's Dictionary of Suffolk of 1844 describes 'the two villages of Stanton - Stanton All Saint's and Stanton St John', and indeed for many years Stanton was two villages. However, today we are one village with two churches, albeit that St John's is now roofless and only used for services once a year. It is in the care of the Historic Churches Fund.

The Dictionary goes on to describe the 'small hamlet of Upthorpe 1.5 miles south east of the village and several scattered farms.

It is interesting to note that at this time, again according to the dictionary, Stanton comprised:

3,254 acres of fertile land 1,029 inhabitants - it is now about 2,600

3 Beer house - now 1

3 Bakers - now just one bakers shop but no bakery

3 Blacksmiths - now none

4 Boot and shoe makers - now none

3 Bricklayers - now?

2 Carpenters and joiners - now?

4 Corn Millers - now none

1 Game keeper - Mr Thomas Sturgeon

1 Collar and harness maker - Susan Clarke

The Lord of the Manor was R.E. Lofft Esq. Parish Clerk was Mr Thomas Baker.

Stanton has not faired to badly over the centuries it is still a thriving Village with a Post Office, Village Shop, Hairdressers, Ironmongers, Pub, Chip Shop, Large Nursery with Cafe, Nursery and Primary Schools, and a Vet's Practise. We even still have farming activities all around us.

Stanton Long Ago

Long before Beveridge and the Welfare State were thought of, good works were kindly performed on behalf of the poor, and Stanton had its fair share of kindly Samaritans - and possibly its share of poor and

needy!

A list of donations and benefactions appear in the 1844 Supplement to the Suffolk Traveller, which we've met before in an earlier article.

The first donation mentioned, is one of ten pounds given by a certain William Firmage way back in 1599, which was used to purchase land in Rattlesden. The yearly rent amounted, presumably in 1844, to the princely sum of one pound eleven shilling (£1.55 -Ed) and was used to purchase coals. In her will, Catherine Tricker, directed that twenty pounds should be used to buy land. She brought benefit to the poor, and no doubt to herself, when she departed this veil of tears in 1605, the rent of the land being distributed every St Thomas' Day in money and bread thereafter. The poverty-stricken not only received goodies, bestowed by the better-off, they were sometimes provided with a roof over their heads. A dwelling house bought by parishioners in 1799, and a cottage and a small piece of land, which belonged to one Phillis Clarke, were occupied by poor people rent-free. The Enclosure Acts provided the Stanton Poor in 1800 with 42 acres of land held in trust, and by 1844 the rent amounted to ninety pounds a year, which went a long way to help the unfortunates combat the rigours of winter by providing firewood and the like. The churches were also given a helping hand. Two parcels of land, one about 7 acres called Chilsaw Croft, and the other called Thorns of about 5 acres, whose combined rent helped toward repair and maintenance of both churches to the tune of twenty pounds a year, were given by donors who can no longer be traced.

A wooden plaque in the porch of the church lists most of these donations. There is mention of 1 acre of land at Rattlesden with the note that the donor cannot be traced. (this plaque dates from 1840). Could this be the same piece of land mentioned in the Traveller? If so, the donor was surely William Firmage.

And now to the mystery of the moving coffins! This happened in the latter half of the 18th century. A family vault opened - at which church it isn't clear - and several leaden coffins, already in residence, were found moved from their beirs, 'to the great astonishment of many of the inhabitants of the village'. They were naturally replaced and the vault carefully sealed. Sometime afterwards, however, the same thing occurred. The wayward coffins were again replaced, but the villagers must have really got the wind-up when the coffins took the floor for a third time and danced a lively jig. One coffin, obviously more nimble than its fellows, had managed to reach the fourth step leading to the vault. The services of eight good men and true were needed to raise it. Expert opinion maintained the weird happenings were caused by water flooding the vault, although on the three occasions it was opened no trace of water could be found. This is the obvious solution, of course, but -- is there another explanation? -- could it have been caused by -- something else?! One wonders. Yes, one really wonders!

Amongst the landowners in Stanton's past was Capel Lofft who inherited the Manor from his uncle, Edward Capell. This was in 1781, and at the same time Stanton had 'inherited' one of its most colourful characters! Like his uncle, he was a literary man, and it was mainly due to his help and encouragement that the Honington poet Robert Bloomfield published his famous poem of the Suffolk countryside 'The Farmer's Boy' in 1798. He also practised law, but found it was as a firebrand and rebel that that he seems to have come into his own. For one thing, he was a fierce opponent of our war with America, and much later he became a great admirer of Napoleon, at the time when that gentleman was the archenemy of England. In fact Napoleon seems to have considered our Mr Lofft one of his best friends in the country! The 'Powers that Be' were not amused, and after the final downfall of the French, Capel Lofft seems to have thought it better to travel abroad awhile, and, in fact, he died on foreign soil in 1824.

He had also come to grief earlier in his own county. The facts were these. On the night of 3rd October, 1799, Sarah Lloyd, a 22 year old servant girl, let her 'abandoned seducer' into her mistress's house, and became apparently 'the instrument in his hand of crimes of robbery and house-burning. She stole 40 shillings (2 pounds - Ed) and suffered the ultimate penalty of those harsh times- death by hanging. Capel Lofft fought strenuously for a reprieve, but failed, and on the morning of 23rd April, 1800, she was trundled along in a cart to the place of execution in Bury. It was raining and Capel Lofft, being a perfect gentleman, performed the last service he could for her. He walked beside the cart and held his umbrella

over her! He stayed by her side right up to the minute of her execution. Authority took a dim view of his fight on her behalf, and he was struck off the roll of the law! The poor girl's tombstone can still be seen in St Mary's churchyard in Bury, and it makes interesting reading.

Stanton remained in the hands of the Lofft family until the beginning of this century. In 1804, Capell Lofft sold the next turn of the rectories for £1800 to Mr George Bidwell of Thetford, who became Rector in 1811 on the death of the previous Incumbent, Dr Hamilton, who was a grandson of one of the Dukes of Hamilton. An interesting fact is that the Rev. Bidwell and his successor, the Rev. Henry Dudding, held the living between them for a period of 106 years, which is surely almost a record. Plaques commemorating them are in the chancel of All Saints church. Both Stanton churches were under one Rector from the 14th century until 1876, when the last regular service was held in St John's. It was in temporary use in 1906 when the tower of All Saints fell.

For news of the 'Welfare State' in Stanton long ago, and the curious and eerie tale of the moving coffins, you must wait until next time!

*From 'The Stanton Courier' Issue No 8 June 1969, sadly this is probably the only surviving edition of this excellent village magazine – unless you know differently!*