

THE BOOK OF BISHOPS TAWTON

Sarah Amery, Judy Luxford and Linda Sanders

Bishops Tawton, a village nestling beneath Codden Hill and alongside the River Taw, has a varied and intriguing history ranging from a possible Bishop's Palace to a unique listed 'three seater' toilet.

This book does not attempt to offer a definitive history of Bishops Tawton, but is a fascinating collection of living memories, photographs, historical facts, local folklore and family stories. Bishops Tawton is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as consisting of "80 villagers and 11 smallholders who have 100 ploughs." Until the mid twentieth century, like many other country parishes, it was a thriving and largely self-sufficient community despite being only 2 miles from the centre of Barnstaple. It continues to evolve and change in the twenty-first century.

This book offers a walk through the past, and presents a fascinating miscellany of photographs, facts, anecdotes and priceless memories of the past before they disappear forever.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

In 2011, a group of Bishops Tawton ladies undertook to find out about the history of the parish. This started off as a small oral history project but due to the willingness and generosity of so many people it led to a fascinating collection of histories, photographs and memories. In 2012 an exhibition of the collection was held with over 600 people visiting. There were many subsequent requests to preserve and share the material in a book. Three of the group accepted the challenge!

Judy Luxford moved to Bishops Tawton in 2000 and worked for the NHS as a Speech and Language Therapist.

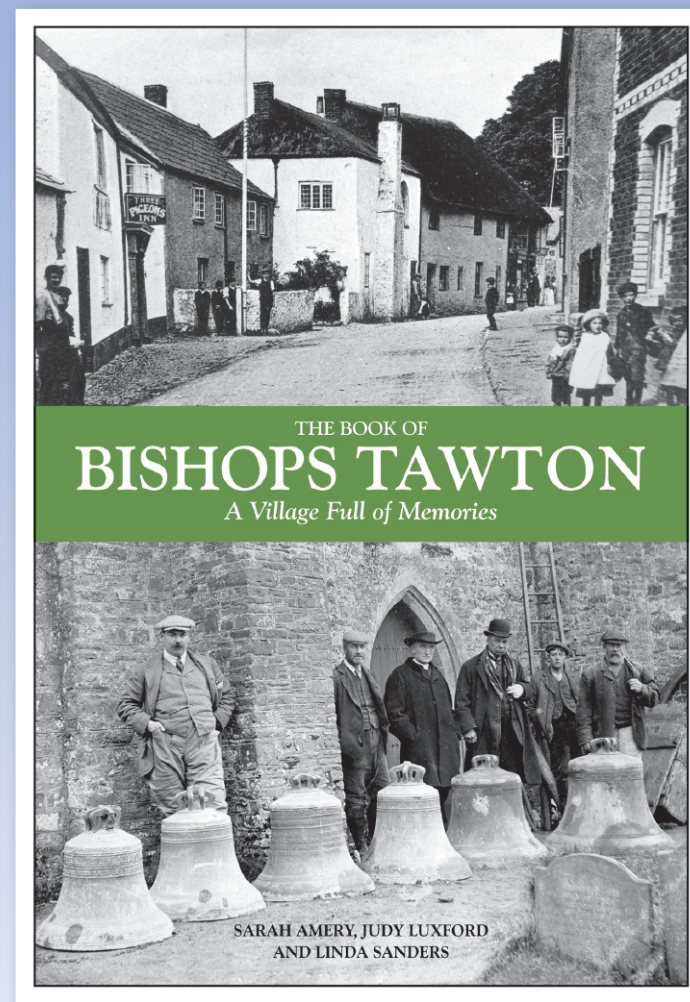
Sarah Amery was brought up locally in Newport and moved into the village in 1998 teaching at Bishops Tawton Primary School for thirteen years.

Linda Sanders is a North Devon farmer's daughter who moved into Bishops Tawton in 1984 and worked locally as a nurse and teacher.

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Frederick Dennis
with Dick Copp on
a Fordson tractor
in 1949

Albert Lock
when
stationed
in London.



Example of a double-page spread.

through his own publishing company in London. By 1872 his methods had spread through Britain and to the far outcrops of the British Empire. In 1960 it was recognised by the English Education Department and by 1891 two and a half million children were receiving instruction in the soil. Many other countries also adopted it.

Hemer Church

Hemer church sits within the parish of Bishops Tawton.

The North Devon Journal of 9 August 1888 records, "The site of the place of worship has been admirably chosen. From Hall its grassy downs look down through the avenue, upon the tower which still eventually contains two bells. The church itself lies embosomed in the delightfully wooded valley between the 'Taw' and the commanding eminence upon which Hall stands."

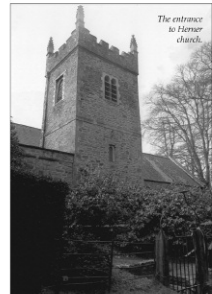
Hemer church has some of the carvings taken from an earlier medieval chapel that was attached to Hall. The need for another church in the parish was justified at the time because the hamlets around and about Hall were considered to be so far distant from the ancient church of Saint John the Baptist that



LITTLE HILL CHAPEL, HEMER. © BEAUFORD ARTS.



The entrance to Hemer church.



This is the cottage where Alfie Stevens' family lived, in Cuckoo Lane, Little Hill. It was pulled down several years ago. In 1941, Alf on his mother, Bessie's knee, Wilfred and his father Charlie Stevens. The Chapel was a little further along the road on the left.

people were unable to attend church. It is called a chapel of ease.

It opened on 2 August 1888

Richard Chichester's diary records, "Rev. W. G. Monson and W. Burnstaple took them round the garden, we then walked to Hemer and assisted Roxie's marriage with the new church. I walked down by the railway to call on H. Bakers and General J. Chichester, back to lunch at 1.32 present. New church opened, service at 3.1 read 1st lesson. Pater Noster preached. Large congregation. Capital tea at school, 4.30. Fine.

There was a chapel at Hemer at Little Hill Cuckoo Lane. This was demolished in the late '70s or early '80s. Alfie Stevens remembers attending Sunday School here, he said there were about 20 children there each week and it ran from three o'clock in the afternoon. Tom Hartwell was a Sunday School teacher and his daughter played the organ.

Chapter 7 Health, Welfare and Community

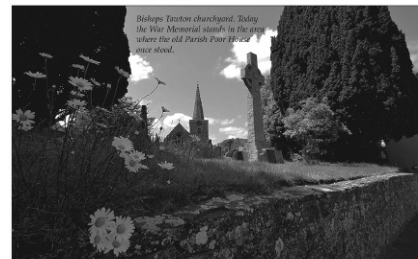
"You could sit on anyone's doorstep and you would be welcome"

Joan Ford.

Burnstaple, always promoted and held a good sense of community. Historically, long before the inception of the Welfare State, this was very important in supporting the good health and welfare of parishioners. The ability to have regular work to be able to pay for limited medical attention and to have access to nourishing food was everything. For those less fortunate, the kindness of friends and neighbours and relief through local organisations, may have been the only way for people to cope in times of illness and unemployment.

Some Historical Facts:

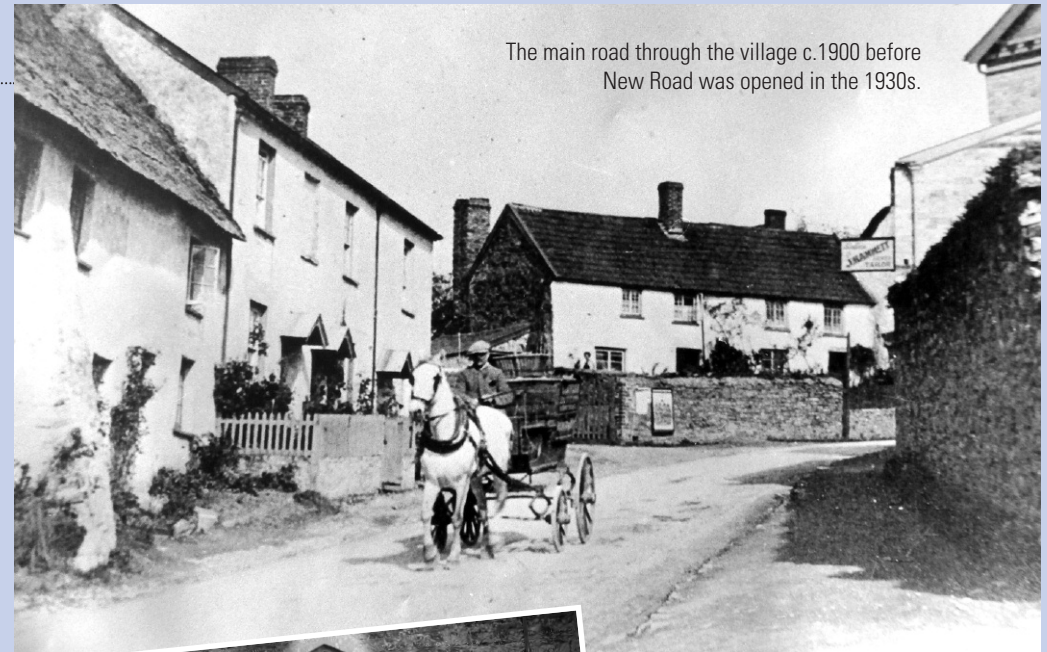
Bishops Tawton, like other villages, had its own Poor House at one time for vagrants and the destitute.



Bishops Tawton churchyard. Today the War Memorial stands in the area where the old Parish Poor House once stood.

This was situated in the churchyard, alongside the road and had been built in 1630. The arched entrance to the churchyard we see today is a Victorian addition, the original entrance being down on the corner near the cottages. Money had been donated for the poor by wealthy local benefactors between 1602 and 1660 amounting to £29.11s. For those without money, work or a home, provision would have been through the Parish Poor House. This had been built with some of the charity money. It eventually ceased to be used following the new English Poor Laws being passed in the 1830s when larger workhouses were subsequently built in the nearest towns.

From the 1850s, Bishops Tawton people unfortunately enough to find themselves needing to be admitted to a workhouse would have been sent to Burnstaple. After the creation of the National Health Service in 1948, the old town workhouse in Alexandra Road eventually became an NHS hospital and subsequently has been rebuilt as flats though the original workhouse chapel and pattern of the original entrance arch survives.



The main road through the village c.1900 before New Road was opened in the 1930s.



Bell ringers at Bishops Tawton 2014.
Back row: Colin Dudley, Alan Watts, Robin Runnalls, Sarah Amery, Andrew Snell, Richard Amery. Front row: Alfie Stevens, Richard Tossel, Michael Beer (captain), Michael Snell.



A very old photo of a Victorian picnic on the side of Codden Hill.