

HEREFORDSHIRE

The Village of

E A R D I S L A N D

OVER a hundred years ago - in - 1851 - Lascelles Directory of Herefordshire describes our village thus: "Eardisland or Eardsland, a small pleasant village distant five miles West from Leominster, the river Arrow running through, over which is a neat stone bridge, giving a pleasing effect to the village." The same description serves to-day, and lovers of black-and-white villages consider Eardisland one of the prettiest in England.

Less than a hundred years ago there were more houses, including an Inn ('The Crown'), East of the village on the road to Leominster, but these have fallen into decay and of some no trace is left. West of the river, on the road to Kington, there are new houses, including nineteen Council houses built of brick and occupied this year, 1955. The Kington to Leominster Railway runs through part of the Parish, and the Roman road, Watling Street, forms the Parish boundary on the East side. * For a map of the Parish please turn to page 71.

On the Southside of the road near the bridge stands the Court House Farm (Mr. B. Lowe), and behind this is an ancient mound surrounded by a moat and crowned with trees. On an old map of the Court House Farm this mound is named 'The Fortress', and it is thought to have been the site of a Saxon habitation or stronghold, and to have been surmounted by a palisade. About thirty years ago, when the moat was drained and cleared of mud several 'mud-oyster' shells, measuring about six inches by one-and-a-half inches, were found. To the North, in the field known as 'Monks' Court', is a small secondary mound. Both mounds are scheduled as ancient monuments, as are several houses in the village.

In the centre of the village the early Eighteenth Century Pigeon house in the garden of the old Manor House is a feature; another good Pigeonhouse is to be found at Burton Court.

The bridge over the Arrow was built in 1800 by John Gethin of Kingsland. The roads at that time and for many years afterwards were narrow and rough, and the bridge must have been quite adequate for the horse-drawn vehicles of the time. However, as motor traffic developed, and especially when lorries and buses came into general use, the bridge over the river and the adjoining one over the Mill stream made something of a bottle neck. The screaming of brakes as cars met on the bridge was often heard, and sometimes there were collisions. There was much talk of widening the bridge; some were for and some against this, those against saying that a new bridge would spoil the beauty

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View from the Bridge.
Before 1890.



Same View: about 1900.



1955

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By the River.
Before 1900.



Cardisland Bridge.
Before 1945.



By the River.
1955.

of the village.

Finally, one Summer evening a convoy of heavy Artillery, consisting mainly of 15 mm. guns and their carriages and manned by Americans, came through. The bridge was only a very few inches wider than the vehicles, and these often had to back and start again before they hit the centre of the road and got over. It took more than an hour for the convoy to get through, and when it had passed the bridge was in a very battered condition, with coping stones off, stones loose, and much scratched and shaken. In 1945 it was widened by the County Surveyor, Mr. *Quincy*, who made an excellent job of it by using the old stones for facing and coping.

It is said that the name of the river Arrow (AARWY) means 'overflowing', and it certainly lives up to its name with fairly frequent floodings, many of a minor character, but there have been several big ones causing the flooding of houses and roads and cutting the village off. Of these, 1888, 1929 and 1947 were the most outstanding.

The January number of the Leominster Deanery Magazine contains a description of the Lawn Tennis Ball, held at Eardisland on Dec. 27th, 1888. "The dance, attended by upwards of 60 members and friends, was a very pleasant and successful one, and everything went 'merry as a marriage bell' until nearly 3 in the morning, when a warning message was brought to the stewards that unless the company quickly dispersed there would be great difficulty in getting away. Owing to heavy rain, a very high flood had risen - not an uncommon occurrence in Eardisland - and the roads from the Schoolroom were almost impassable. Very soon it was found that the carriages and cabs could not be driven through the flooded roadway, so an omnibus which had brought a party from Leominster was kindly allowed to be put in requisition, and the visitors were thus conveyed in different parties to their conveyances in the village. No harm was experienced except in some cases of wet shoes, but there was plenty of merriment at the time and has been since in talking over the unlocked-for dilemma which will make the Lawn Tennis Ball of 1888 long memorable."

During the 1929 flood, when many houses were flooded, trout which had been put in the year before to stock the river were scooped up in a bucket on the adjoining fields. A gauge at Riversdale showed a rise of six feet above security level, and the big flood in March 1947 (when the same gauge showed five feet seven and a half inches above Summer level), followed very heavy rain and gales and was accentuated by the quick meltings of a late fall of snow on the hills. All the houses along the river bank, with the exception of Riversdale, were inundated, as well as others in the low-lying parts of the village. A maid at Arrow Bank complained bitterly of having found a trout in the kitchen sink. The gale blew down a number of trees, including one across the road to Pembridge which, combined with the flood water, blocked that road for several days. Another crashed onto the transformer in Broom Lane, and part of the village was without electricity and telephone for ten days. The people whose homes had been flooded received gifts of food, cleaning materials, coconut matting and blankets from Australia;

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Pigeon Cote and Reading Room. Village Blacksmith in foreground:
about 1900.



Unveiling of Flagpole and Coronation Seats
Sept. 1953. By courtesy of
Herbert Jones.

these were distributed by the W.V.S.

After the 1914-18 War the Lugg Drainage Board was set up with the alleged object of providing work for ex-Service men, to clear the river of obstructions and allow the water to run down more quickly. Some think this has been effective in decreasing the amount of flooding, but owing to the level of the land it cannot be wholly so. The rate charged on some properties for this service is considerable.

Near the Court House Farm, on the South side of the road, stands the War Memorial Cross, designed by Capt. A.B.W. Greenhough, M.C., of the Staick House. The cost was £208, and the amount was raised locally by subscription. The Cross was dedicated on Sunday March 14th 1920 by the Vicar, the Revd. P.A.H. Birley, and a sermon was preached by the Revd. F.W. Worsey, a former Vicar of Eardisland, at a service in the Church beforehand. The land on which the Cross stands was given by Mr. Henry Gittens of the Court House, and was conveyed to the Parish Council in June 1920. In 1931 a sum was raised and invested by the Parish Council to provide a permanent income for the upkeep of the Cross.

To celebrate the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II two seats were placed, one on either side of the Memorial, and a flagstaff was erected.

Just past the Memorial Cross, on the North side of the road, stands the old Smithy and the adjoining little red brick building which Mr. Morris, who was the village blacksmith for many years - and a very skilled one - used as a shop for his bicycles, etc. Mr. Morris was followed as blacksmith by Mr. Rooke, who carried on the trade until 1930 when he gave up and the Smithy fell into disuse. The red brick building was used during the late War by the Home Guard as their Headquarters, and is now being used by the British Red Cross as a First Aid Loans Depot. In 1944 Mrs. Clowes of Burton Court took a lease of the Smithy from the owners, the John Levick Trust, and converted it into a useful room with the idea of its being used as a Women's Institute room. It was also used by the Men's Club from 1946 until the Club closed down in 1949. It is now rented by Eardisland Women's Institute.

There were originally three mills in the Parish: one at Glan Arrow, one at Lower Burton, and one situated in the centre of the village. The latter was the last to be used and was grinding corn up to 1950. The mill was also used during the War years as a store for grain and cattle cake. Now the grinding machinery has been removed to make more room, and the building is used solely for storing grain, etc. by the tenants, Foster Bros. of Leominster. Most farmers now have their own electrically-driven Hammer mills.

The Grid system was introduced into the village in May 1931 by the Shropshire, Worcestershire & Staffordshire Electric Power Co., and since nationalisation is run by the Midlands Electricity Board. So far all the outlying hamlets, farms and cottages are without electricity.

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Flood, 1947.



Flood, June, 1955.



Flood, 1947.

During the last twenty years or so the character of the Village has somewhat changed. With the death of Mrs. Clowes in 1949 came the closing of Burton Court and the loss of an almost feudal influence in the village. The estate was broken up, and all the farms were bought by the tenant farmers. The walled kitchen garden and the gardener's cottage, together with ten acres of land, were sold separately and are at present run commercially as a Market Garden.

Several cottages in the village, formerly occupied by families employed on the land, have been sold and modernised and turned into 'residences' which are occupied either by retired people or by those who get their living further afield. In this way old cottages, which might otherwise have fallen into decay, have been saved for the village, and the much-needed Council houses have taken the place of some of the old cottages and provided accommodation for young families previously crowded in with their 'in-laws'. Thus in the long run we may check the drift to the towns, and at the same time reap the benefits of a more varied cross-section of society.