

**STOKE ALBANY**

**STOKE ALBANY**

**PORTRAIT  
OF A  
COUNTRY  
VILLAGE**

**1996**

I



**STOKE ALBANY 1996**

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## INTRODUCTION and Acknowledgements

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This book was inspired by the Parish Appraisals Conference held by the Northamptonshire Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE), and appraisals published by other parishes as part of ACRE's Parish 2000 project.

With ACRE's welcome help, a Steering Committee was formed in 1994 under the chairmanship of the then Rector, Canon Frank Scuffham. It drew up a detailed questionnaire, which was distributed to 106 households in the village. At the same time, people were encouraged to make written (and verbal) contributions, and submit photographs and drawings.

The result is, we believe, a fascinating picture of a small rural Northamptonshire community of some 270 souls, developing from its origins in Saxon times to the close-knit, thriving village it is today in 1996.

Many people have carried out hundreds of hours of research in books, archives, old documents and public record offices, and we have tried to ensure that the information in this book is as accurate as possible. However, we ask for your forbearance if you discover an occasional error in a name, a place or a date!

Our heartfelt thanks go to all those volunteers who devoted so much time and effort into research and writing:

Mark Conway	Fiona Harding	Jill Harris
Peter Hill	Peggy Hume	Derek Morland
Sheila Mellalieu	Christine Prince	Paul Welch
Rosemary Welch	Christine Wells	John Wallace

Anne Strudwicke spent countless hours keying the questionnaire results into the computer, and Rachel Turner analysed them. Thank you both. And we must not forget all those old 'Stoke-oes' who so readily

contributed their memories, and their photographs.

**Village Appraisal Steering Committee:**

Gordon Hedley  
Stephen Harding  
Christine Prince  
Peggy Hume

Like most villages, it is virtually impossible to say when this one first became a community. However, there was a settlement here in late Saxon times called Stoc (the word 'stoc' means a religious place or a secondary settlement). Stoc was at the lower end of the present village, near the building now called the Old House (see chapter 3).

The majority of Saxons were farmers and therefore needed modern implements such as ploughshares and other tools. Iron ore was smelted in Rockingham Forest by the Saxons; quantities of slag, and the remains left by charcoal burners, have been found from time to time. So the settlement of Stoc grew and prospered, defences were erected, and Stoc became a palisaded village.

Where did the name 'Stoke Albany' come from?

There were many places called Stoc in those days and, some time after the arrival of the Normans in 1066, most Stocs had an addition to make them more easily recognisable. These names, too, changed over the years with different spellings by clerks in different documents. Thus in 1175 we were 'Stokis', and the following year 'Stokes'. In 1274 (as a result of land being granted to William de Albini) we became 'Stok Daubeny'; some other names recorded are Stok Aubeny (1301), Stoke Awbany (1622), Stoake Albane (1626), Stoke Olbenny (1657) and, finally, Stoke Albany.

In the time of the Saxons this area was dominated by the Bovi tribe, whose local stronghold was at Rockingham. A track led from there to Harborough, passing through Cottingeham, Carlintone (East Carlton), Wilberstone, Stoc, Bramtone, Dinglei and Buggedone (Little Bowden). The freehold of Stoc was held by a man called Oswulf, whose land was rated at 60 shillings.

The Saxons in general, although farmers living off the land, were a

warlike people. The Bovi were a particularly warlike tribe, so presumably they put up a hard fight after the Norman invasion in 1066. Their lands were confiscated by William the Conqueror; Oswulf lost Stoc, which passed into possession of the King.

### **The Domesday Book and King John**

Stoc was among the extensive possessions which William the Conqueror granted to one of his knights, Robert de Todeni. By 1086 the village had become the 'hundred of Stoc' (a hundred was an administrative area within a county), and the Domesday Book records: 'Robert de Todeni holds 3 hides in Stoc. There is land for 6 ploughs. In demesne are 2 (ploughs) and 3 slaves and 9 villeins and 2 bordars with 1 sokeman, having 3 ploughs. There is a mill rendering 12d. There is woodland 5 furlongs in length and 3 furlongs in breadth. Oswulf held it freely.' A further record shows that the rateable value had changed from 'Lxs to xLs' (60 shillings to 40 shillings).

The de Todeni family did not establish a main residence in Stoc. They developed Rockingham, and it is thought that Robert's grandson William built the first Belvoir Castle. However, the second William in the family adopted the name 'de Albini' and, in Henry II's reign, a grant of land was made to the de Albini family. From that time the lordship assumed this name, and the village got its second name.

At the beginning of the 13th century William de Albini built the first manor house, which was near the old Saxon settlement. He paid 40 shillings to the exchequer for the land and, in 1201, with King John's permission, William enclosed land known as the 'Lund at Estokes' (yet another spelling!). On several occasions King John stayed at the manor and accompanied William on hunting expeditions into the Royal Forest.

Indeed, John's last journey south started from near here. He packed his baggage train and started off from Rockingham in a south easterly direction, although his best route would have been south to avoid the

marsh which extended from the Wash down into north-eastern Northamptonshire. Was he expecting trouble on the more obvious road? Anyway, this very unpopular king became stuck in the marsh. All his jewels went down into it, together with some of his horses and men.

Before he left, King John bestowed another favour on his friend William de Albini. The upland of the parish of 'Stoche' lay well within the boundaries of the Royal Forest of Rockingham, and John gave his permission for the family to hunt hares and foxes in the forest. A hunting lodge was erected in Stoke Park - by all accounts a strong, solid building which served the subsequent owners well for many years, until it was dismantled and the stone used for repairs to Rockingham Castle after the Civil War.

William was a popular name in the de Albini family. During the reign of Edward I, the then William decided that he didn't like living at the bottom of the hill, and began the construction of a new house at the top of the hill. Detailed information about this new manor house is given in chapter 3, but the question remains; why the move? If he wanted more room, why not extend the existing house down the hill by adding another wing?

It has been suggested that the plague was to blame - that it wiped out the working population that still lived in the old Saxon settlement nearby. Yet history does not support this theory. The worst year of the Black Death was 1348, but that was long after de Albini had moved up the hill.

It may be that the reason for the move was less dramatic and more practical. The lower area was wetter in those days, and the Welland probably overflowed during periods of high rainfall. The presence of clay would make drainage a problem, and a move to higher ground would have had a strong appeal. Excess water would then become an advantage; the fishponds could be extended, further damming would add more ponds, and there would be enough water in the by-pass stream to drive the mill at the bottom of the hill. And maybe there was another,

more domestic, benefit -lack of good drainage in the lower area must have made sewage disposal something of a problem!

### **Middle Ages and the Tudor period**

The history of Stoke Albany is inextricably tied to the fortunes of the various families that owned the lordship, and the de Albini estates eventually passed into the hands of Lady Isabella - her nine lordships included that of Stoke Albany. Lady Isabella had married Robert de Roos, whose family came from Roos in Holderness. Apart from one or two breaks, the de Roos family kept the manor until the extinction of the male line on the death of Edward Lord Roos early in the 16th century.

One such break came during the Wars of the Roses. Thomas Lord Roos picked the wrong side - the Lancastrians - and paid the penalty by being imprisoned and beheaded in 1461. His estates were sequestered, and Stoke Albany was granted to Sir William Hastings in 1465.

In turn, Hastings (now Lord Hastings and Chamberlain to the Royal Household) was arrested, tried and executed in 1482; Stoke Albany then passed to the Crown and, during the reign of Henry VII, the manor was given back to the de Roos family.

In 1554, during the reign of Queen Mary, Stoke Albany was sold to Sir Edward Griffin. Then, in 1613, Thomas Griffin rented the manor to Henry Newdygate of Ashstead in Surrey. Thomas, knighted by James I, then leased land around Stoke Dawbeney to Richard Badley and Thomas Anstall. During 1627, in the reign of Charles I, the Griffins sold further land at Stoke to Daniel Ward.

### **Rockingham and the Civil War**

In 1638 the Griffin family, who still owned much of Stoke Albany, sold the manor to Sir Lewis Watson of Rockingham. In spite of the sale the Griffins continued to live at the old manor house for some time, and their descendants were still living in Stoke Albany until the 1880s.

Sir Lewis Watson, a staunch Royalist, became the first Lord Rockingham. Sir Lewis's loyalty to the King caused his star to rise rapidly. In 1634 he became High Sheriff of Northamptonshire; he greatly increased the size of his estates, and his fortunes were at their height when the Civil War broke out in 1640. Although a staunch Royalist, his wife's family were Parliamentarians - so Sir Lewis decided to hedge his bets by supporting the King in Rockingham, but sending all his valuable jewellery and plate to his wife's family at Belvoir Castle.

Stoke Albany appears to have escaped the Civil War relatively unscathed, although Lord Grey marched his army eastward through Market Harborough and Stoke on his way to besiege Rockingham Castle. Poor Sir Lewis! Rockingham Castle fell to the Parliament, Lewis was arrested by the King's men for not putting up a strong defence and, in the meantime, Belvoir was taken by the Royalist forces.

Sir Lewis Watson had lost everything. It is believed that he was initially imprisoned in the farmhouse along Desborough Road before being taken on to captivity in Belvoir Castle. Although the story had a happier ending when Charles I granted him a pardon, the Parliamentary forces smashed down the keep of Rockingham Castle and demolished its fortifications at the end of the War. Sir Lewis spent the rest of his life trying to make good the damage, and it was on his orders that the hunting lodge at Stoke, built by William de Albini, was demolished for its stone. He died, a much saddened man, in 1652.

One effect that the Civil War had on the inhabitants of Stoke Albany was a drastic increase in taxation to pay for it. In 1642/43 the parish paid £3.8.3d in tax; the next year it increased to £15.8.0d, by the following year it had gone up again to £23.4.9d, and it reached a peak of £33.17.5d in 1645/46. When the War ended the tax fell to £10.8.10d - still much higher than before the War, and doubtless having a severe effect on the inhabitants' standard of living.

Members of the Watson family under various names and titles - Watson, Lord Rockingham, Baron Sondes and so on - owned the manor house

and much of the land around Stoke Albany for another two hundred years. However, when the last male heir Richard Watson died in 1852 and left his estates to his eldest daughter, Mary Georgiana, the manor house and grounds at Stoke Albany were sold to a farmer called James Blockley. Much of the land still remained in the ownership of the Watson family, and is owned by the Rockingham estate today.

One other family might be mentioned - the Le Fevre-Bowd family, who made their way to Stoke Albany from the Low Countries during the religious persecution of the Huguenots in the 16th century. They must have been able to bring some of their wealth with them, because they either owned or rented land in the village. They built a windmill and set up a hat-making factory, the windmill most likely being built on the higher ground to the south of the village. Perhaps there was a connection between the Le Fevre-Bowds and Great Bowden - a Le Fevre-Bowd of Great Bowden has a plaque in the church.

Several field names recorded at that time seem to have a connection with the Le Fevre-Bowd family. The Bowd is possibly where they lived; Mill Close, perhaps the site of the windmill and hat factory; and Rush Lands, where rushes were grown for hat making.

#### **In living memory...**

In more recent years, between the two World Wars and afterwards, other local families have played extensive - if perhaps less spectacular! - roles in the life of Stoke Albany.

Take the Ingrams, for example. For many years early risers would have seen Horace Ingram walking up Bakehouse Lane at 4a.m. with his candle, on his way to light up the ovens in his bakehouse. On Sundays, large tins of Yorkshire pudding batter were left with Horace by villagers on their way to church, which he cooked for collection on their return. It is said that Horace knew everyone's tin, and never made a mistake. A large pudding cost 3d for cooking, and a small one cost 2d.

As well as running the bakehouse, Horace also had the first charabanc and the first taxi service in the village.

Albert Ingram was the undertaker. He carried out his duties, as required by his trade, from his house-cum-workshop at the corner of Middle Lane and Ashley Road; coffins were made in the room below the Billiard Room. And Albert had another string to his bow - he was the local bookie's runner, cycling round the village to collect bets and phoning them through from the call box in Ashley Road.

Another local character was Harry Robinson, known as 'Cocky'. Cocky was a shepherd, who lived at 6 Middle Lane (generally known in those days as Cocky Lane). He could often be seen shearing sheep in his yard, and if someone wanted a cheap haircut, Cocky would oblige!

#### **Famous men ...**

Stoke does not have many famous sons, but two men who were very well known and influential in their time are worthy of mention.

**Johannes (John) de Roos** was a great favourite of King Edward III, who called him the 'Bon Compagnon'. His brother William had been Lord High Admiral to Edward II; John became Steward of the King's Household, and was one of the twelve guardians to the young king. He was appointed Admiral of the Fleet under his brother William, and died at Stoke Albany in 1337.

Although very influential in high circles, John was so poor when he died that the king donated 200 marks towards the cost of his burial. You can read about what subsequently happened to the Bon Compagnon's memorial in chapter 4.

**Lord Denman**, Lord Chief Justice of England for 18 years and a highly respected man of his time, was buried in St Botolph's churchyard in 1854. There is a memorial to him on the south wall of the chancel in the church.

The land around Stoke Albany is alive and well - alive in a way which gladdens the heart of a true countryman and would, surely, please those who were here before us. The people who worked in Rockingham Forest, who cared for the deer which ran where Stoke Albany House now stands, who created the Manor's fishponds, who farmed the land and coppiced the woods. All these would surely enjoy the real countryside around us for, alongside the cuddly bunnies beloved of townsfolk, run the stoats and weasels, the badgers and foxes. We, too, have the robin and the cheeky sparrow - but also, the ever-present magpies and rooks, the swift kestrel and the spectacular sparrowhawk.

All these creatures, and many, many others, help to maintain a balance of sorts in the countryside around Stoke Albany. Admittedly, sometimes man has to intervene to correct an over abundance of some species - but it starts with the creatures themselves, and most of the time they get it right.

The fields, woods and hedgerows around Stoke Albany support a wide variety of flora and fauna - appreciated and loved by most, and cared for in numerous ways and by many people, both in groups and individually. From the Parish Council to the Tree Warden, from the Woodland and Wildlife Trusts to all those who feed the birds which visit their gardens during the winter months, the people of Stoke care about the countryside around them - the countryside for which they are the present custodians.

**Flora....**

The land in and around the village is blessed with an abundance of trees, both deciduous and evergreen. The evergreens, such as the Yews in the churchyard, provide a constant and lovely background. The deciduous trees - the majestic Horsechestnuts which grow beside the Desborough Road, for instance, and provide such a glorious canopy of green for most



The man born Thomas Denman in Derbyshire had a distinguished career first as a barrister (when he acted for the defence at the Luddite trial in 1817), then as MP for Wareham and Nottingham, Attorney-General under King William IV, Freeman of the City of London, and finally Lord Chief Justice. He was knighted in 1830 and, in 1834, he became Baron Denman of Dovedale. He retired due to ill-health at the age of 70, spent his remaining years at Stony Middleton in Derbyshire, but died at Stoke on 22nd September 1854.

This is the only reference to Stoke Albany in the biographical dictionary entry relating to Lord Denman, and one might wonder why this highly respected and important man of his time was not buried in London or, perhaps, in his native Derbyshire. The answer may lie in the fact that, according to the 1851 census, his son - the Hon. Thomas Denman - lived at Stoke House; presumably his father died here whilst on a family visit.

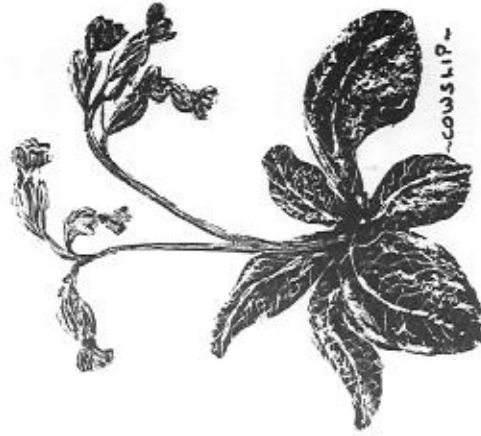
of the year, have a different kind of beauty when their bare branches are silhouetted against winter skies. Sycamore, Birch, Beech, Ash, Oak and various willows are among the many species to be found in the area.

The usual hedgerow trees such as Elder, Hawthorn, Birch and Blackthorn abound, many with Ivy, Honeysuckle, Dog-roses and Bramble twined around them. These provide both food and shelter for the many small animals, birds and insects which colonise the banks and verges beneath the hedges.

There are two magnificent Weeping Ash trees in the village, both in the gardens of private houses. The eldest of these is at least 350 years old. A beautiful (and very old) Mulberry Tree in the grounds of the Manor can be seen from the Ashley Road.

The species of wild flowers, herbs and fungi which can be found in the area have probably been here for centuries. Certainly, those which grow in Stoke Wood, an ancient woodland, have been here for a very long time. Many were doubtless used to treat common ailments of both man and beast in years gone by. They would also have been gathered and turned into wines and cordials, jellies and preserves by the diligent housewife of yesteryear.

The Elder, apart from supposedly keeping evil at bay, was used to make both Elderflower and Elderberry wine. Primroses and Coltsfoot were also used for wine-making. Rosehips were gathered as recently as the second World War to produce the syrup so rich in the vitamin C for which it is famous. Blackberry vinegar is still made by one of the oldest inhabitants of the village and used to treat coughs, colds and sore throats.



The watercress, which still grows wild in the stream which runs down through the fishponds meadows, was probably also used for some medicinal purpose - if only as a rich source of iron and vitamins. The springtime beauty of Primroses, Violets and Bluebells is followed by the Speedwell, Queen Anne's Lace, Herb Robert, Honeysuckle and Vetches, the Ragged Robin and the Meadowsweet, among countless other wild flowers which create an ever-changing patchwork of colour.

In the autumn, as well as the nuts and berries which hang from the trees, there are still wild mushrooms to be found - if you know where to look!

### ... and Fauna

Many species of birds are present in the village. Among the more interesting may be numbered the Barn Owl, Coal Tit, Goldfinch, Goldcrest, Heron, Kestrel, Kingfisher, Lapwing, Little Owl, Long-tailed Tit, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Snipe, Sparrowhawk, Treecreeper, Tawny Owl, Grey and Pied Wagtail and Greater and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. If you are very lucky, you may catch a glimpse of a passing Buzzard. There have been noticeably more Song Thrushes around over the last two or three years. This is very encouraging as their numbers have fallen so alarmingly in recent times. House Martins, Swallows and Swifts arrive early each summer but here, sadly, the numbers have declined and are still falling.



The amphibian and reptilian population includes the Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth Newt and the Grass Snake. These are all plentiful if you know where to look.

A large number of butterflies and moths can be seen in a good year including the Common Blue, Gate Keeper, Meadow Brown, Peacock, Red Admiral and Ringlet (butterflies), and the Drinker, Elephant Hawk, Large Emerald and the Oak Eggar (moths).



A more complete list is given at the end of the chapter - 'Stoke Wood appendix'.

The swift flight of dragonflies can make them difficult to identify, but there is no mistaking the spectacular Emperor with his metallic blue body and wingspan of over four inches. The Emperor and both Brown and Southern Aeshna can be seen in the area, and the abandoned - and ugly - nymph cases from which these glittering insects emerge can be seen on the stems of reeds during the months of July and August.

The majority of mammals which live in the countryside and gardens of Stoke Albany will have been seen by the villagers at one time or another. Bank Voles, Field Voles, Hedgehogs, Moles and the Common Shrew visit our gardens. Bats also (mostly Pipistrel), Badgers, Deer - both Fallow and Muntjac - Foxes, Hares, Rats, Squirrels, Stoats and Weasels may be seen in and around the fields, woods and hedgerows.

Our rarest mammal, is, of course, the Dormouse - closely followed by the Pygmy Shrew. Both of these enjoy the perfect habitat provided by Stoke Wood.

### Stoke Wood

Stoke Wood is an ancient semi-natural broad-leaved wood. Falling just outside the ancient Rockingham Forest - Bowd Wood formed the boundary - it thus escaped the 'management' of the Forest, which would have allowed cattle and other animals to graze the flora when pasture was short. It is one of the few woods in Northamptonshire which has been continually coppiced, so encouraging the existence of a rich ground flora including a number of locally rare species.

The twenty six acres of woodland, declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1954, was purchased in 1982 with help from the Countryside Commission and the World Wildlife Fund and is managed by the Woodland Trust and the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust. Management principally involves the coppicing of small areas of woodland, in which

trees and shrubs are cut virtually to ground level to encourage new growth. This is harvested some years later. The practice is carried out in rotation and creates a patchwork of different habitats, thus adding to the richness of flora and fauna.

The coppiced timber - hazel, ash, and occasionally oak, is used mainly for firewood, though some ash may be used for 'bodging' or chair-making. Cords (or piles) of firewood are sometimes left in the wood, having been colonised by insects such as the Spotted Longhorn Beetle.

The richness of the woodland's flora can be seen from the list of flowering herbs in the Appendix. It includes - among over one hundred other species - the Bird's Nest Orchid, Broad-leaved Helleborine, Common Spotted Orchid, Early Purple Orchid, Greater Butterfly Orchid and the Twayblade Orchid.

As one would expect, the wood is rich in bird life. This year the Nuthatch, Sparrowhawk, Greater Spotted Woodpecker and the Tawny Owl have all nested, in addition to countless other more common species.



The wood provides a habitat for Badger, Fox, Stoat and Weasel and many other creatures. Two herds of Fallow Deer live in the wood, a total of approximately twenty four deer. Muntjac are also present, at a ratio of one per two and a half acres. The deer can cause problems as they frequently eat the young growth from coppiced trees. The boles are covered with branches in an attempt to prevent this, but still the growth is frequently destroyed. There are some interesting small mammals, including the Common and Pygmy Shrew, Natterer's Bat and the Brown Long Eared Bat.

### The famous Stoke Wood Dormice

One of the rarest species in the wood is the Dormouse, which thrives because of the coppice management. Dormice are rare because they

have very specific requirements. They do not store food like the squirrel but need a constant supply of flowers, fruit, insects and nuts during the time they are awake, i.e., April to October. As they live at low densities (only a few per hectare) they need a large wood, or an even larger area of continuous hedgerow linking smaller woods, to survive. Today, most Dormice live in ancient woodland such as Stoke Wood, which is over 20 hectares in size. A wood such as this has usually existed since at least AD 1600.

Famous for their ability to sleep for five to six months in the winter and, occasionally, at other times if weather conditions are poor, these tiny creatures are rarely seen. Measuring only 7cm from the head to the base of the bushy tail, and weighing only 15gm, the bright golden brown animal spends most of its life up in the trees. The dormouse lives for approximately four years and produces one, or occasionally two, litters a year. The babies are born blind, pink and helpless, but soon develop grey fur. Their eyes open when they are about eighteen days old and they remain with their mother for six to eight weeks, considerably longer than most mammals of this size.



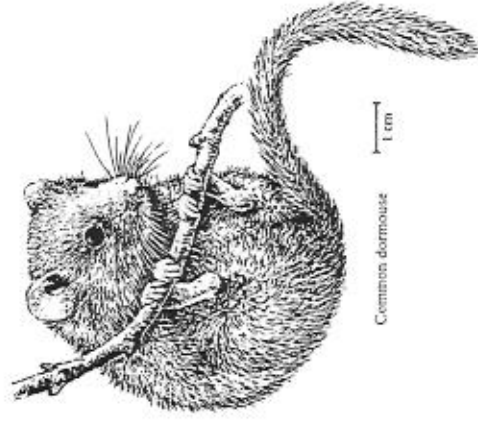
The ball-shaped nest is woven from honeysuckle, and the outside covered with leaves. Hazel nuts form a vital part of the dormouse's diet in the autumn, providing nutritious food for the long hibernation ahead. The Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) is also known as the Hazel Dormouse for this reason - and to distinguish it from the Edible Dormouse. In addition to hazel nuts, the animal eats flowers, pollen, fruit (such as blackberries) and insects. As can be seen, a wide variety of flowering and fruiting plants is essential - hence the importance of coppicing.

The Northamptonshire Dormouse Group was set up in 1993 to monitor the Dormouse population in Stoke Wood. This study has now been extended to a number of other woodland sites throughout the County.

Some three hundred Dormouse boxes have been attached to trees in the wood and are checked once a month. The boxes are similar to bird boxes but the entrance hole is on the back, facing the trunk. Spacer bars above and below the hole ensure that there is room for the Dormouse to climb up the tree and enter the box. Boxes left vacant by Dormice are not wasted; they are used by Woodmice, Shrews, small birds and bats. Voles, Hornets and Bumble Bees have also used the boxes in Stoke Wood.

Mike Miley, the warden of Stoke Wood, has records packed with information on species of flora and fauna, the air and ground temperatures throughout the year and, of course, every possible detail relating to Dormice. The work undertaken by Mike on behalf of the Dormouse Group, which is affiliated to the Wildlife Trust, won an award of £5,000 presented by the Anglian Water Authority in 1993.

The peace and beauty of this ancient woodland, combining a sense of timeless tranquillity with the richness of its flora and fauna, make it a very special place - a place which we must all cherish, now and in the future.



APPENDIX  
SPECIES LIST - STOKE WOOD  
September 1995

FLOWERING HERBS

Agrimony	Dandelion	Nipplewort
Barren Strawberry	Dog Violet	Primrose
Betony	Early Purple Orchid	Ragged Robin
Bird's Nest Orchid	Enchanter's	Red Campion
Bittersweet	Nightsbade	Red Clover
Bitter Vetch	Field Forget-Me-Not	Ribwort Plantain
Black Bryony	Field Mint	Rosebay Willow Herb
Black Knapweed	Fleabane	Sanicle
Bluebell	Germander Speedwell	Saxifrage
Bog Stitchwort	Goldilocks Buttercup	Self Heal
Bristly Ox Tongue	Greater Birds Foot	Silverweed
Broad-leaved	Trefoil	Square-stalked St.
Everlasting Pea	Greater Burnet	John's Wort
Broad-leaved	Greater Butterfly	Stinging Nettle
Helleborine	Orchid	Teasel
Broad-leaved Willow	Greater Plantain	Three-nerved
Herb	Greater Stitchwort	Sandwort
Brooklime	Great Willow Herb	Thyme-leaved
Bugle	Ground Ivy	Speedwell
Bush Vetch	Gypsywort	Traveller's Joy
Celandine	Hedge Woundwort	Tufted Vetch
Cinquefoil	Herb Paris	Twayblade Orchid
Cleavers	Herb Robert	Upright Hedge
Clustered Dock	Hoary Ragwort	Parsley
Common Burdock	Hogweed	Water Figwort
Common Centaury	Honeysuckle	Water Mint
Common Dog's Mercury	Jack-by-the-Hedge	Water Starwort
Common Field	Lady's Smock	Wavy Bittercress
Speedwell	Marsh Bedstraw	White Bryony
Common Figwort	Marsh Marigold	White Dead-Nettle
Common Sorrel	Marsh Thistle	Mild Angelica
Common Spotted	Marsh Valerian	Wild Arum
Orchid	Meadow Buttercup	Wood Anemone
Common Vetch	Meadow Vetchling	Wood Avens
Cow Parsley	Mouse-eared Chickweed	Wood Dock

Cowslip  
Creeping Buttercup  
Creeping Jenny  
Creeping Thistle  
Daisy

Musk Mallow  
Nettle-leaved  
Bellflower

Wood Forget-me-Not  
Wood Sorrel  
Wood Speedwell  
Yellow Archangel  
Zig-Zag Clover

In addition to this  
list over 10 species  
of moss recorded  
plus 20 of lichen

TREES AND SHRUBS

TREES

Ash  
Aspen  
Beech  
Birch

Crab Apple  
Crack Willow  
Field Maple  
Goat Willow

Grey Willow  
Norway Spruce  
Oak  
Sycamore  
Wych Elm

SHRUBS

Blackberry  
Blackthorn  
Buckthorn  
Common Hawthorn  
Dewberry

Dog Rose  
Dogwood  
Elder  
Field Rose  
Guelder Rose

Hazel  
Holly  
Ivy  
Midland Hawthorn  
Spindle  
Wild Privet

GRASSES

Annual Meadowgrass  
Bush Grass  
Cocksfoot  
Common Reed  
Creeping Bent  
False Oat Grass  
Giant Fescue

Hairy Brome  
Marsh Foxtail  
Meadow Foxtail  
Perennial Ryegrass  
Reed Canary Grass  
Rough Meadow Grass  
Smooth Meadow Grass

Sweet Vernal Grass  
Tufted Hair Grass  
Mood Barley  
Wood False Brome  
Wood Meadow Grass  
Wood Melick  
Wood Millet  
Yorkshire Fog

**HORSETAILS**

Greater Horsetail

**FERNS**

Broad Buckler

Male Fern

Bracken

**SEDGES**

Glaucous Sedge

Hairy Sedge

Remote Sedge

False Fox Sedge

Thin Spiked Wood Sedge

Wood Sedge

**RUSHES**

Jointed Rush

Compact Rush

Soft Rush

Hard Rush

Toad Rush

Great Wood Rush

**MAMMALS**

Badger

Bank Vole

Brown Hare

Brown Long-eared Bat

Brown Rat

Common Shrew

Dormouse

Fallow Deer

Field Vole

Fox

Grey Squirrel

Hedgehog

Mink

Mole

Muntjac Deer

Natterer's Bat

Pygmy Shrew

Rabbit

Roe Deer

Sika Deer

Stoat

Weasel

Wood Mouse

**SOME OF THE MORE COMMON FUNGI**

Amethyst Deceiver

Birch Bracket

Blushing Bracket

Bonnet Myeena

Candle Snuff

Common Yellow

Russula

Coral Spot Fungus

Dryads Saddle

Eye Lash Fungus

Fairy Clubs

Shaggy Parasol

Sulphur Tuft

Tawny Funnel Cap

The Deceiver

Tripe Fungus

Trooping Crumble Cap

Weeping Widow

White Coral Fungus

Winter Fungus

Witches Butter

Wood Puffball

Glistening Ink Cap

Green Wood Cap

Grey Coral Fungus

Hairy Stereum

Honey Fungus

Jelly Tongue

King Alfred's Cakes

Many Zoned Polypore

Morrel

Russet Shank

**BUTTERFLIES**

Brimstone

Comma

Common Blue

Essex Skipper

Green-Veined White

Gatekeeper

Holly Blue

Large Skipper

Large White

Meadow Brown

Orange Tip

Painted Lady

Peacock

Purple Hairstreak

Red Admiral

Ringlet

Small Copper

Small Skipper

Small Tortoiseshell

Small White

Speckled Wood

Wall Brown

Common Toad

Common Frog

Grass Snake

**REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS**

**SOME OF THE INVERTEBRATES**

(This is just a dip into the hundreds of species which occur at Stoke Wood)

Centipedes

Millipedes

Mites

Slugs

Snails

Spiders

Woodlice

Over 200 species of fungi have been recorded at Stoke Wood - these are just a few of them

BIRDS

Blackbird \*  
 Blackcap \*  
 Black-headed Gull 0  
 Blue Tit \*\*  
 Brambling  
 Bullfinch \*  
 Buzzard 0  
 Carrion Crow  
 Chaffinch \*  
 Chiff Chaff \*  
 Coal Tit \*\*  
 Collared Dove  
 Common Gull 0  
 Cormorant 0  
 Cuckoo  
 Curlew 0  
 Dunnock \*  
 Fieldfare  
 Garden Warbler \*  
 Goldcrest \*  
 Goldfinch  
 Golden Plover 0  
 Grasshopper Warbler  
 Greater Black-backed Gull 0  
 Greater Spotted Woodpecker \*

Great Tit \*\*  
 Greenfinch  
 Green Woodpecker  
 Heron 0  
 Herring Gull 0  
 Hobby  
 House Martin 0  
 Jackdaw \*  
 Jay \*  
 Kestrel  
 Lapwing  
 Lesser Black-backed Gull 0  
 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker  
 Linnet  
 Long-tailed Tit \*  
 Magpie \*  
 Mallard 0  
 Marsh Tit \*\*  
 Meadow Pipit 0  
 Mistle Thrush  
 Moorhen  
 Nuthatch \*\*  
 Partridge E  
 Pheasant \*

Pied Wagtail  
 Red-legged Partridge E  
 Redpoll  
 Redwing  
 Reed Bunting  
 Robin \*  
 Rook \*  
 Sand Martin 0  
 Skylark OE  
 Song Thrush \*  
 Sparrowhawk \*  
 Spotted Flycatcher  
 Stock Dove  
 Swallow 0  
 Swift 0  
 Tawny Owl \* (in box)  
 Treecreeper  
 Tree Sparrow (1979)  
 Turtle Dove  
 Whitethroat \*  
 Willow Tit \*  
 Willow Warbler \*  
 Woodcock  
 Wood Pigeon \*  
 Wren \*\*  
 Yellowhammer  
 Yellow Wagtail 0

\* Breeding birds known  
 \*\* Breeding birds in dormouse boxes

E Birds along the edge of the wood  
 Total of 76 species  
 30 of which are breeding - other species have no doubt bred - but no positive evidence found

SOME LARGER INSECTS

Bumble Bees  
 Cardinal Beetle  
 Eyed Long-Horn Beetle  
 Hawthorn Shield Bug  
 Hazel-Leaf Roller  
 Weevil  
 Hoverflies  
 Meadow Plant Bug  
 Nut Weevil  
 Oak Bush Cricket  
 Spotted Long-Horn Beetle  
 Tortoise Beetle  
 Wasps  
 Wasp Beetle

SOME MOTHS

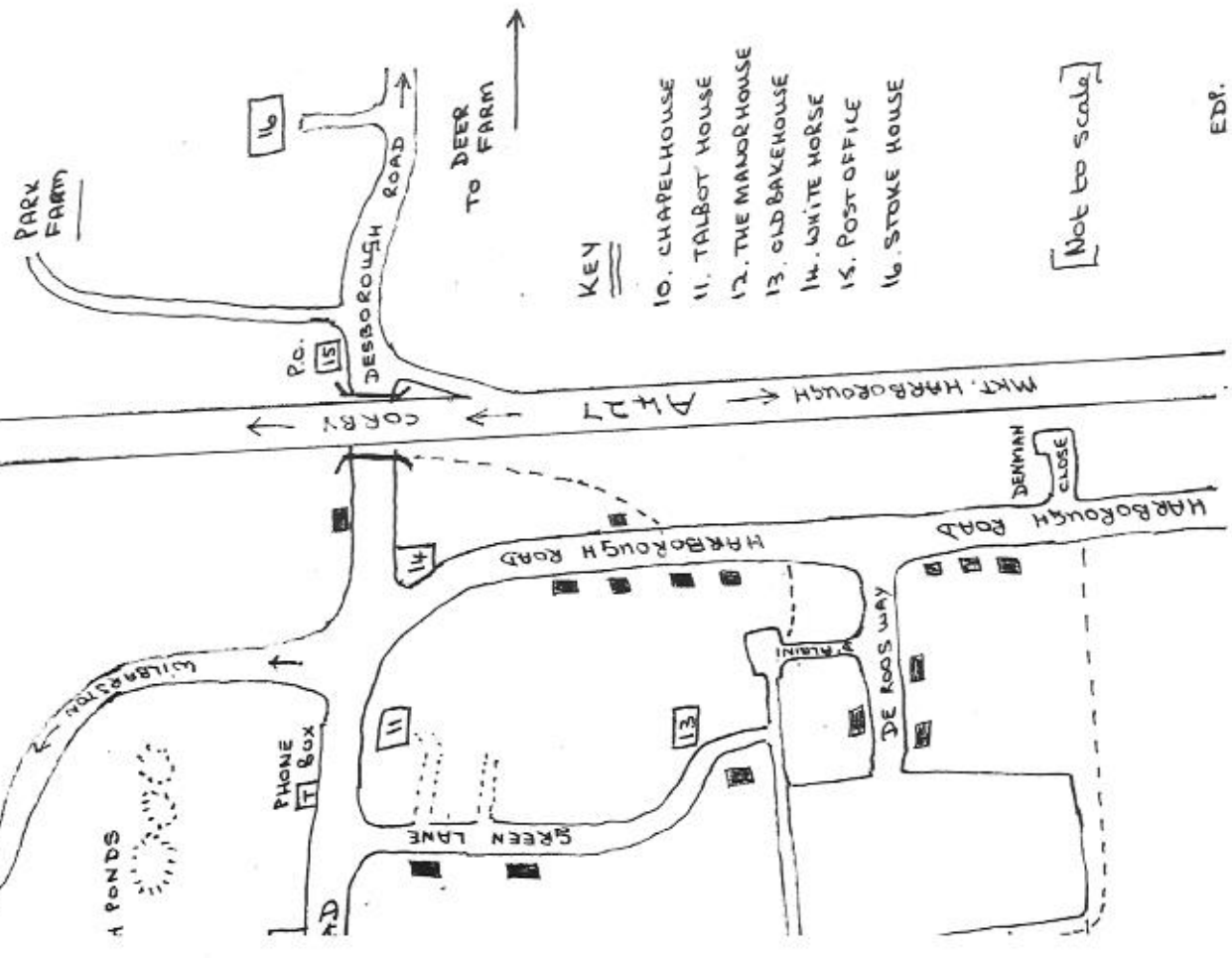
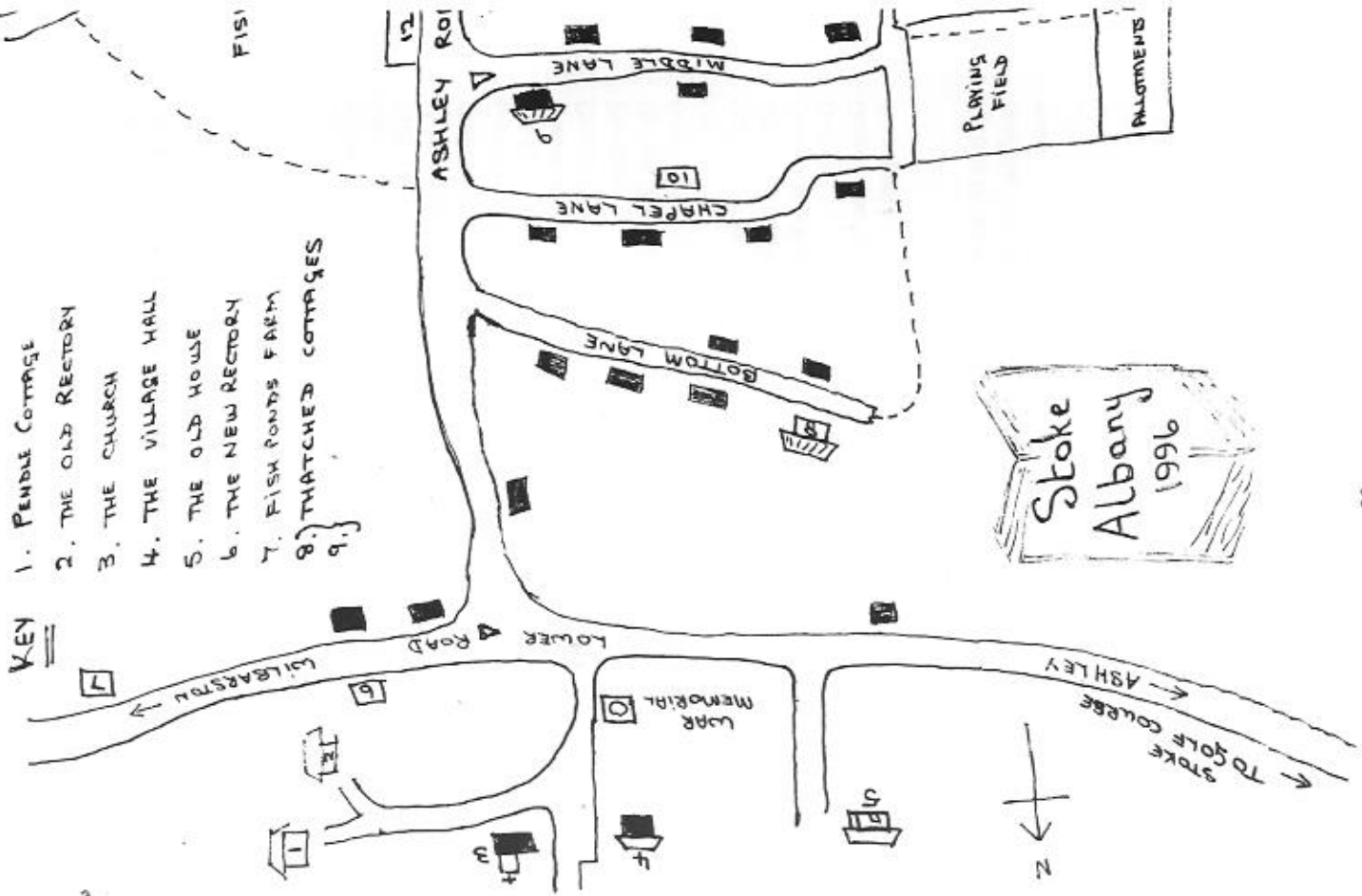
Angle Shades  
 Buff Ermine  
 Clouded Border  
 Common Carpet  
 Copper Underwing  
 Elephant Hawk Moth  
 Green Oak Roller  
 Lesser Cream Wave  
 Mottled Umber  
 Orange Underwing  
 Puss Moth  
 Silver Brown Carpet  
 Silver 'Y'  
 The Clay  
 The Drinker  
 Vapourer

GALLS (NOT INCLUDING CAUSERS)

Artichoke Gall \*\*\*  
 Cherry Gall \*\*\*  
 Common Spangle Gall \*\*\*  
 Currant Gall \*\*\*  
 Knopper Gall \*\*\*  
 Lighthouse Gall \*\*  
 Marble Gall \*\*\*  
 Oak Apple Gall \*\*\*  
 Pea Gall \*  
 Robin's Pincushion \*  
 Silk Button Gall \*\*\*  
 Smooth Spangle Gall \*\*\*  
 Sputnik Gall \*  
 \*\* On Ground Ivy  
 \*\*\* On Oak

\* On Rosa species

- KEY**
1. PENDLE COTTAGE
  2. THE OLD RECTORY
  3. THE CHURCH
  4. THE VILLAGE HALL
  5. THE OLD HOUSE
  6. THE NEW RECTORY
  7. FISH PONDS FARM
  8. THATCHED COTTAGES
  - 9.



- KEY**
10. CHAPEL HOUSE
  11. TALBOT HOUSE
  12. THE MANOR HOUSE
  13. OLD BAKEHOUSE
  14. WHITE HORSE
  15. POST OFFICE
  16. STOKES HOUSE

[Not to scale]

If you take a walk around Stoke Albany, you will quickly be impressed with its unusual layout and the great variety of its buildings - different styles, different ages, and of very different historical periods.

Some historians claim that the village was originally laid out shortly after the Norman conquest. Whether or not this is the case, even today it is quite unusual in its overall design. All its narrow lanes lead off the same side of the main Desborough to Ashley road, and all are cul-de-sacs.

### **Bottom Green**

Start your journey on the Green at the bottom end of the village, and face the church (described in chapter 4). To your right is what appears to be a typical Victorian house; this is, however, only partly true. The house was originally much older, and certainly much smaller, than the one we see today. Built as a agricultural worker's dwelling, it has been substantially altered and extended by private owners over the years.

Opposite this, on a much grander scale, the Old Rectory is a large residence built in 1858 by the then Rector for his own use. Everything about this house tells you that nothing was spared in its construction. It was in fact much larger when built than is visible today. Its gateway leads, via a sweeping drive, to the main entrance with its wide doorway; to the left of this is the old stable block. Large windows look out on three sides over a substantial garden. Solid, and with proud proportions, the house owes much of its design to the values of the Victorian way of life.

Now look across to the Old House which stands to the left of the church and Village Hall. This is the oldest dwelling in Stoke Albany and, it is believed, one of the oldest 'hall' houses in Northamptonshire. This Grade II listed building is a stone house of true character and of beautiful proportions, with the oldest part dating back to the 13th century. The



*The Old House*

original arched doorways are today inside the house, and are intact. The hall would almost certainly have had a central fire, and a stone spiral staircase leads to a first floor solar. In about 1300 a wire tracery window was added to this room, which is still visible.

Major remodelling was carried out in 1619 and two further rooms, at right angles to the original house, were added. The stone mullioned, leaded windows are of this period, as are the chimneys. A large studded oak door completes the overall picture.

The land surrounding the house contains some extremely old trees, and there is an equally old yew hedge immediately next to the house. It is possible that this hedge protected a herb garden, common at that time both for culinary and medical purposes. The more formal gardens were, it is believed, laid out by Miss Ethel Thesiger. Behind the house lies an old Ha-Ha and a pond.

Further to the west, across the Ashley Road, stands a newly-built stone house in the traditional style. The owner took considerable care that the design remained in keeping with the conservation image of the village, and won an architectural award for his dedication.

### Lower Road

Now turn your back on the church, walk south, and turn left into Lower Road. On the right you can see another house which was originally farm workers' cottages. Again this has been altered and extended over the years. It is believed that the central core of the house dates back to the 1600s or 1700s, and was of 'cruck roof' construction. The stucco extension was added to the front in about 1910, and a kitchen block added in the 1970's. The large three-storied stone barn on the land of this property is likely to be of early 19th century origin. It is also likely that, although it now has a slate roof, it was originally thatched.

Walking on up Lower Road, on the right stands another farm worker's cottage of rather larger proportions than usual, with a date-stone of 1684. On the gable end wall there is evidence of an original opening and cellar opening, both of which are now blocked up. It would appear that this house was tenanted by a farm foreman or manager - hence the unusually large accommodation!

On the left, the present Rectory stands as a monument to 1960s design and building. This brick-built house, with its metal window frames and french windows, is very practical but looks somewhat out of place among the older and more traditional stone buildings that surround it.

Still following Lower Road, we come to the last of the buildings in Stoke - Fish Pond Farm. Built in 1995, and taking its name from the medieval fish ponds which it overlooks, this brick built property is a working three-day event training centre.

Retracing your steps back to the Ashley Road, and turning left, you see a stone barn dating back to 1682. The house behind it on the top of the

hill was originally a stone three-sided barn or stock shelter belonging to the adjoining farm. Over the years it too has been much altered and enlarged into the present house.

### **Bottom Lane**

On the corner of Bottom Lane, the first of the 'old lanes', stands a cottage which, although built in stone, has had a brick extension added. Originally it would have had no garden, and was once definitely thatched. A photograph of the thatched cottage exists, which would suggest that the thatch was removed during this century.

The lane has a mixture of very old and relatively new houses. One of Stoke's few remaining thatched cottages can be seen on the right. This listed building, a small squat house of pleasing proportions, dates back to the 1650s. It was at one time an estate house, but for which estate is not known. At the top of the lane is a group of cottages which were part of a working farm within living memory. Today, like so many others, they are all private houses. On the left, two large houses were built in the 1980s on the old farm land.



*The Thatched Cottage, Bottom Lane*

### **Chapel Lane**

The second of the old lanes contains an interesting mix of ages and styles of buildings. Walking up from the Ashley Road, the first building on the right once housed a workshop where the village cooper worked, even in this century. It, along with the large house which stands slightly back and dates to around the early 19th century, belonged to a trading family for many years. Half way up the lane, on the left hand side, stands a chapel which has recently been converted into an interesting residential property (see chapter 4).



*Calendar Cottage in the old days*

Moving further up the lane, again on the left, is Calendar Cottage - the remnants of a very old house which was probably first built as a farm worker's cottage. In the 1980s it had an extension added to the rear, making it today quite a large property. Opposite Calendar Cottage stands another house which has over the years been extended and altered; the original part dates back to the mid 1600s. Stone mullioned windows and a recently-discovered inglenook support this dating. Research into this property is ongoing; hopefully, further finds will give a more detailed picture.

At the top, gable-end on to Chapel Lane, stands what was once a farmhouse - Brockenhurst, a Grade II listed house with a date-stone of 1735. It is likely that the original house dates from an earlier period, and that the date-stone can be attributed to a renovation. Judging by the design of the stone, which includes a heart, perhaps it was put in place at the time of the owner's wedding! Abutting the gable wall of Brockenhurst are two stone cottages. These were almost certainly workers' cottages, because they shared well rights with the farm.

During the 1950s the farmhouse and other properties in the lane were bought by a Mrs Sherrard, known as the 'Lady of the Lane'. She came from the New Forest and, in keeping with her origins, named the properties after towns in that area.

### **Middle Lane**

On the right, as we walk up the third of the old lanes, stands a large stone cottage which was recently thatched to bring it back to its original state. This too has been given an award, this time by Kettering Borough Council for the best conservation improvement. The property was once

two houses but, like many others, it has been knocked into one.

Opposite the thatched house is a pair of large stone houses, the first of which extends round the corner into Ashley Road. Until very recently the building on the Ashley Road was the village billiard rooms. However, this part of the earlier house has been separated and is now another dwelling.

Moving up Middle Lane, there is a mixture of the mellow old and the glaringly new. The architectural styles are extremely diverse, and do not always live happily with one another.

### **The Manor House**

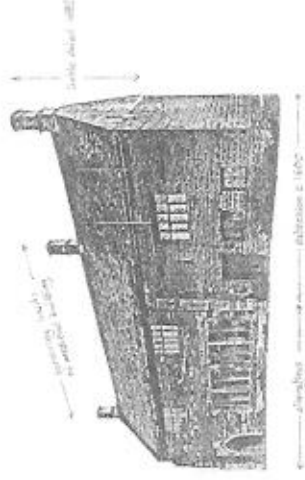


The Manor House stands overlooking its own fields on the left hand side of the Ashley Road as you walk up the hill. Like many similar properties, the present house has been altered and extended many times during its long history; the date-stone of 1682 on the gable end wall belies the true age of the building.

There is evidence to suggest that the De Roos family built a manor on this site in 1300, although little remains of the earliest period today. The arched doorway on the left hand side of the front elevation is in the style of the original period, but was rebuilt somewhere between the late 1400s and very early 1500s.

Undoubtedly some of the original stone was used during the rebuilding.

During the Wars of the Roses (1455 to 1485), De Roos was attainted by Edward IV and his property confiscated to the Crown. Edward bestowed the holding on William Lord Hastings, who plundered the lesser properties - including Stoke - to maintain his larger estates elsewhere. By the time Henry VII took the throne and restored the manor to the De Roos family, the buildings were in very poor repair. This undoubtedly explains the rebuilding, much of which can be seen today in the oldest part of the house. This is the section between two buttresses on the front elevation, to the right of the arched doorway.



The doorway has two shields above (one being the De Roos coat of arms), and would appear to have been rebuilt in the original position. This is evidenced by the alignment of the coursed stonework through the adjacent buttresses and the slightly angular joints of the arch. This entrance led straight into the large hall of the house, lit by four sets of arched stone mullioned windows - probably glazed and containing some stained glass.

Once the rebuilding was finished, the hall would have been an impressive room reflecting the wealth of the owner; large beams, a decorative ceiling and a large fireplace (since removed) would complete the picture. A staircase led to two first floor rooms, both of which had smaller fireplaces situated in the gable end walls.

These rooms were divided by a timber framed partition. One was definitely used as a bedroom or solar, and the other may well have been another reception area. The fireplace in the west room still survives, and is an excellent example of a stone bracketed hood fireplace of the type used from about 1300 to 1600. The first floor rooms were open to the roof ridge and, as now roof was stone slated.

The house remained in the family until 1555 when it was sold to Sir Edward Griffin of Dingley, whose family later made extensive additions to the property in the 1600s. A new entrance was created; this doorway and its attendant windows are of a completely different design, the arched tops being replaced by flat wooden lintels. This entrance led into a large kitchen, the original service wing having been demolished. Above the kitchen a bedroom was added, and above this again two further garret rooms were created in the roof space, giving much larger accommodation for both family and servants. Today the kitchen forms part of the main house, and a new kitchen has been added at the rear.

The surrounding farm buildings are of various dates from 1684 onwards.

### **Green Lane**

This is the last of the old lanes and is built around, and leads from, Top Green. The name has been changed within living memory from Bakers Lane to Green Lane, by the vote of the lane's residents.

Here we see small cottages of 18th and 19th century origin, built of local Northants stone. These were most certainly 'one-up and one-down' farm workers' cottages. Over recent years, however, they have been transformed into single dwellings.

Dotted in among the cottages are three modern houses, one of which stands on the site of a row of similar cottages originally built gable-on to the Green. What was originally a farm house stands back on the right hand side which, with its attendant outbuildings, partly dates back to the 17th century. The present house has been rendered, but the thatch line

can be seen on the gable end wall.

Reaching the top of the lane, what was the old village bakehouse stands on the left hand side. This acted as a focal point for the village especially on Sundays, when local residents used to take their Sunday roasts and Yorkshire puddings up to the bakehouse to be cooked.



*The Old Bakehouse*

Unfortunately, when the ovens were removed to convert the property to an ordinary residence, the stonework at that end collapsed! It was replaced with brick, making an odd mix of old and new styles and building materials. It is very likely that this house was also thatched, but it has been re-roofed in slate.

Continuing along the footpath we see a modern bungalow on the left, and another two stone cottages which have been converted to a single dwelling. Walking further along the footpath brings us into:

### **D'Albini Close and De Roos Way**

Four modern bungalows on the right hand side were built in the 1960s for retired people by the local authority. Today the occupants are of mixed ages.

Leaving D'Albini Close, continue into De Roos Way. Its houses were built in the 1950s by the local authority - substantial brick houses, many of which are now owner-occupied and altered to give each its own individuality. Unfortunately, with the advent of new building in Middle Lane, the view across the valley enjoyed by the residents has been almost totally obscured. They do however enjoy the benefit of a green field site at the end of the road. The names chosen for both roads are a reminder of the original owners of the manor.

We proceed from here on to the Harborborough Road, and turn right.

### **Harborborough Road**

This road is lined on one side with houses built between 1922 and the 1950's by the local authority. Today, many are privately owned.

Towards the end of Harborborough Road, nearing the main A427, we see on the left the newest additions to the village - six new houses built by a Housing Association in conjunction with Stoke Albany Parish Council, and opened in 1995. Constructed in red brick, and formed in a horseshoe cul-de-sac, they will in time blend well into the village.

Turning back and walking down to the corner of the Ashley Road, we find Talbot House. Today this is a private house, but was (until the 1950s) a public house which also accommodated a butchers shop until the 1930s. It is possible to see the remnants of both these trades in the current building, although substantial alterations have been carried out. It is believed that there was also a slaughter-house in the butcher's end, and that the cattle were kept across the green on the site of the present bungalow prior to slaughtering.

Opposite the Talbot stands the White Horse, the village 'local', with a date-stone of 1706 on the gable end facing the Desborough Road. This is now a Grade II listed building. Popular today with both the village and visitors, it has seen many changes - mainly internal - in its long life.

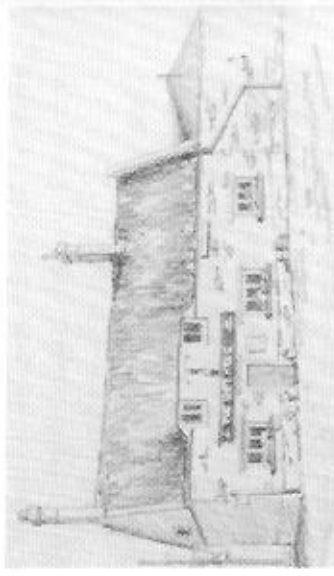
### **Desborough Road**

In the Desborough Road most of the buildings are of stone. Many are quite old but unfortunately, apart from the first property on the left which is date-stoned 1655, none bear date-stones. The house dating back to 1655 was reputed to be an estate house, and it was the gardener's house for the Hall at one time. Interspersed are newer properties, some of stone and some of brick. For many years the village Post Office and shop was accommodated in the house where the post box is situated today. However, after a short closure the Post Office moved further along the Desborough Road into a Victorian house.

Standing back on the right, behind two stone barns and an old stone cottage no longer in use, stands an old farm house. This is believed to date back in part to 1740. No longer a working farm, its external features remained much the same until 1840 when the house was extended and the barns were built. The roof line suggests that the original house was thatched; today it is slated.

### **Park Farm**

The present farm house stands at the end of a very long drive leading off to the left of the Desborough Road, and was built about 1850. It is constructed of stone and surrounded by barns, stables, and a labourer's

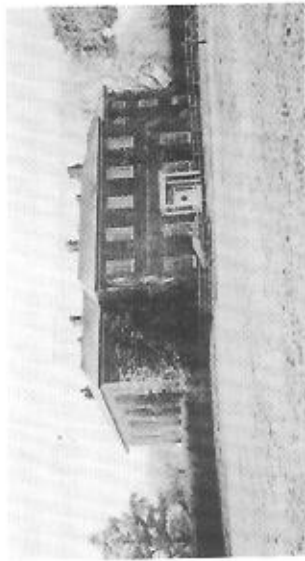


*The White Horse*

cottage. The house itself is typical of its time; large and solid, it sits comfortably in the surrounding countryside.

There is evidence to suggest that there has been a building of some sort on this site since the 1200s. At that time the owner of the manor was given the right to enclose part of Stoke Wood as a deer park, and a hunting lodge was built here for the use of King John when he was in residence at Rockingham Castle. Tradition has it that there has been a building of varying sorts on the site ever since. Today it is very much a working farm, and is still part of Rockingham Castle's estate.

### Stoke Albany House



This large and imposing brick house, built in 1837, has had various owners in its history. The main house looks out across the fields off the Desborough Road and, although built at

the beginning of the Victorian era, its design owes more to the Regency style. Square paned windows and a large, beautifully proportioned doorway greet guests driving up the gravelled drive. The well-proportioned stable block, with its clock and arched entrance, complete the buildings on this estate.

About half a mile further along the Desborough Road, beyond Bowd Wood on the left, and looking over the old airfield, there is a relatively new farm house and working farm. Alongside it stands the old farm house, and a large stone barn which has been converted into a dwelling.

Finally on the Desborough Road, a working Deer Farm sits off to the right. This building was completed in 1994.

### What does the future hold?

Under the present legislation, Stoke Albany is a conservation village, designated as a 'restricted infill village' under Kettering Borough Council's Local Plan. This means that, in theory, it is protected from any large-scale housing development; currently there are some seven outstanding requests for planning permissions within the present village envelope.

Yet time must inevitably bring changes - after all, that is how the village came to be what it is today. In the years to come, will the village boundaries remain where they are now? Will Stoke Albany remain under Kettering Borough Council as the local planning authority? We must hope that, whatever happens, the need for providing houses for the children of local families who want to live and raise their own children here will be met - and met in such a way that the essential character of Stoke Albany will endure.

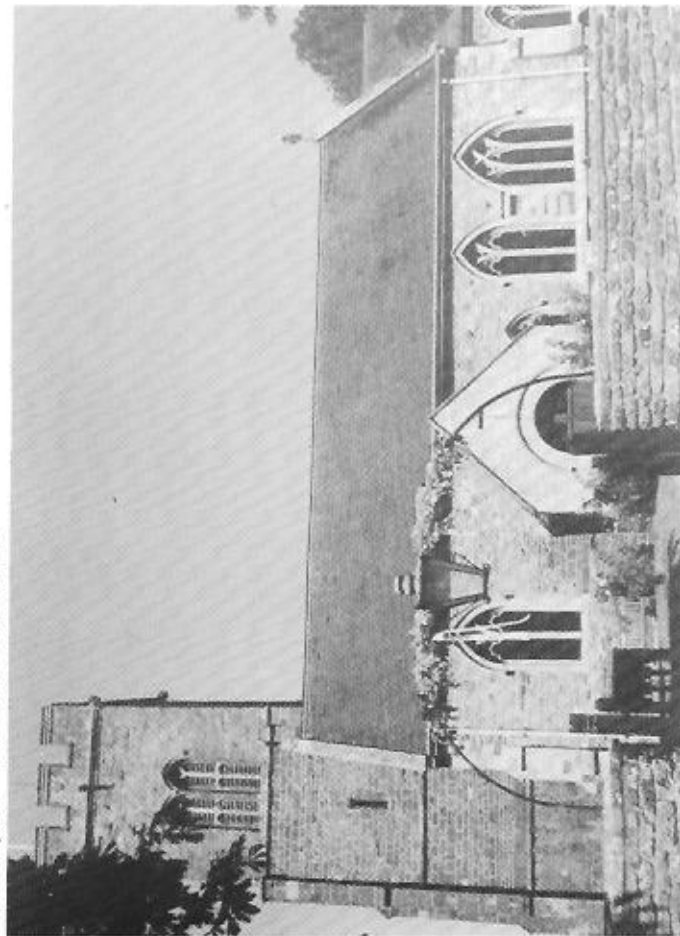
### WHAT THE SURVEY SAID

**Q:** What kind of housing do you think the village needs?

	Total	%
No housing is needed	68	33
Housing for young people	69	33
Large family housing	4	2
Housing for the elderly	30	14
Housing for local people	56	27
Housing for low income families	29	14
No opinion	33	16

Number of people who answered the question: 209.

The parish church, dedicated to St Botolph (whose feast day is on 17th June), is in an idyllic setting by the lower village green. It is partly surrounded by chestnut trees, with the former school and the oldest house in the village to the west. The parish register dates from 1575 - among the earliest in the area.



Sadly, like many rural churches, St Botolph's has to be kept locked when not in use. However, a sign by the gate tells visitors that keys are available from houses around the Green, and getting hold of a key and taking a look around is well worth while.

Architecturally, the church is mainly of the Early English style (1189-1280) and has an embattled west tower, south porch, clerestoried nave, chancel, and north and south aisles. As you approach the south porch, you can see a sundial above it and some pre-20th century graffiti on the porch walls - nothing new under the sun! Inside the porch is an old

plaque over the main door asking men to scrape their shoes and women to take off their pattens before entering.

But before you go inside, take a stroll around the outside of the church and the churchyard. On the walls of the church are a number of medieval corbels or 'label stops', with stone faces representing different members of society wearing a variety of headgear. But on the western side of the church, close to the tower, you will see a 'younger' addition - the bespectacled face of a recent Rector, Canon Frank Scuffham! Note also the delightful priest's doorway on the south wall of the chancel, with its pointed arch and heads of a king and queen.

In the churchyard lies one of Stoke Albany's more famous sons, Chief Justice Denman - there is also a memorial plaque to him inside the church. He was a great reformer, and played a leading part in the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century.

Now go into the church itself. The nave is unusual in that its clerestory has windows on one side only. In the south aisle there is a large 15th century east window with very fine moulding, and there are fine stone heads on the wide chancel arch and on the mouldings of the arcades. The small north aisle still has its original medieval roof, and there are two 19th century memorials (one of which has been removed from the wall).

The font near the main door in the south aisle is inscribed 'Marke Marshall, Churchwarden, 1681'. Close by is a wooden stand; at one end it is inscribed '1633', and at the other is a head with foliate hair and shoulders. This may be a depiction of the 'Green Man' - a figure which has been carved in churches, in masonry and on wooden furnishings, since the Middle Ages.

The chancel was restored in 1872 at a cost of £2000, and the altar itself and the screen on the wall behind it are modern and very striking. Beneath the altar steps is an early 16th century monument to Catherine Hawes and, in the north wall, is a low arch which until 1790 housed an ornate 15th century monument depicting Johannes de Ros (or de Roos).

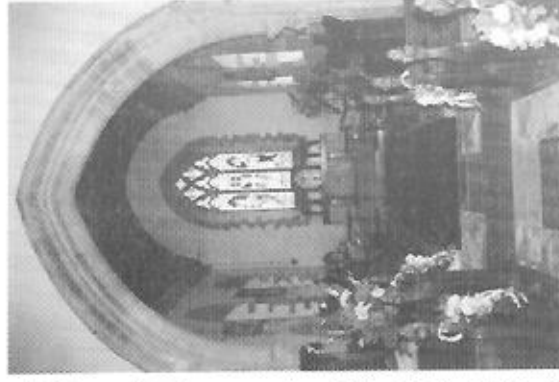
Johannes, who at one time was Steward of the King's Household for King Edward III, died in the village in 1377. His family were lords of the manor from 1285 until the death of Edmund, Lord Ros early in the 16th century.

The monument showed Johannes as a recumbent figure dressed in armour, with his hands and feet clasped in prayer and his feet resting on a dog - a common form of funerary design in the Middle Ages. The monument was removed in 1790 because the minister of the day felt that it looked 'black and hideous' - but it is said that the real reason was a constant complaint by a clergyman's wife, who felt unsettled by its presence whenever she was in church! The only remaining clue to the monument's presence is the de Ros family coat of arms (three water bougets), which can be seen at the top of the arch. The same coat of arms is also on the outside of the tower, below the battlementing.

In the south chancel wall is a 13th century triple sedilia and a piscina, with an ambry in the north wall.

In the tower are six bells; five were recast in 1796, the sixth being cast and hung in 1888. For many years after the recasting it was said that, before the job had been carried out, the village had been strongly divided as to whether all or some of the five bells should be recast. Members of the 'all' faction are said to have surreptitiously entered the belfry and caused the (perfectly sound) tenor bell to drop from its frame to the floor below, where it lay unharmed from the fall. They tried to do damage again a little later, this time with a sledge hammer. Vandalism is not new!

Today, the people of Stoke Albany - regularly joined by parishioners from nearby Wilbarston - still worship in St Botolph's church, get



married there, have their children baptised at its 17th century font, and are finally laid to rest in its churchyard. Yet today's churchgoers might well look back with envy at the £2000 cost of restoring the chancel in 1872; repairs to the church roof in 1996 cost them around £20,000....

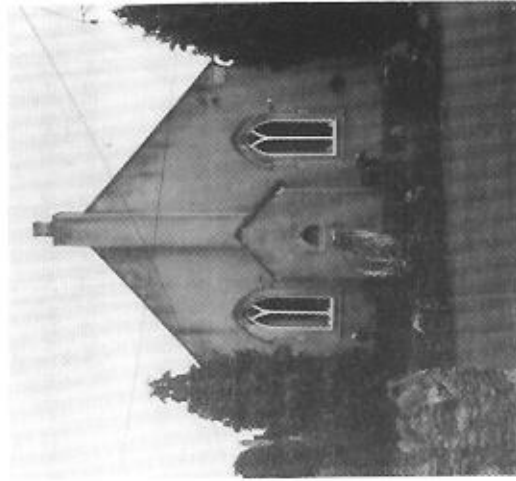
### The Chapel

St Botolph's has not always been the sole place of worship in the village. The Post Office Directory for Stoke Albany in 1869 says, 'Here is a Sunday School and Wesleyan Chapel'.

The history of the Wesleyans in Stoke Albany is not well documented, and there do not appear to be any surviving members of the congregation in the village. However, it is known that meetings used to be held in Chapel House, at the top of Chapel Lane; Chapel House has since been demolished, although parts of the foundations can still be seen.

In 1903 a new Wesleyan chapel was built, also in Chapel Lane. Tradition has it that an old lady who lived in a cottage on the site of the new chapel gifted her cottage to the village when she died, and the villagers gave further sums so that the chapel could be built.

However, the Wesleyan movement died down in Stoke Albany and, in 1953, the Wesleyan Trustees rented the chapel to the village for use as a village hall. The chapel was sold when the old School House became the village hall, and was converted into a private house by the present owner after he purchased it in 1978. It is now 'Old Chapel House' and, although the old 'back room' and tea room have been



*The Chapel today*

altered for private use, a sensitive conversion has left the large chapel meeting room effectively unchanged.

### WHAT THE SURVEY SAID

**Q:** Do you attend a place of worship:-

	Total	%
Often	45	21
Occasionally	103	49
Never	64	30

Number of people who answered the question: 212

**Q:** Is the parish church important to you:-

	Total	%
For Sunday worship	79	39
For baptisms, weddings, funerals	125	63
As an historic building	145	72
Because every village should have one	106	53
Other	8	4

Number of people who answered the question: 200

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### Geology

For millions of years Stoke Albany and the area around it was, like much of the British Isles, covered by ancient seas. The upper rock formations were laid down during the Jurassic Period, between 135 and 180 million years ago.

The predominant geological structure of the area is Oolitic - alternating layers of limestone and clays containing marine fossils. These clays with marine fossils generally date from about 170-180 million years ago. It is probable that the area was dry land during the Lower Cretaceous period, but was once again inundated by the chalk sea (70-100 million years ago) and during the Tertiary period some 2 to 70 million years ago.

During the Great Ice Age, the Scandinavian Ice Sheet extended well below the whole of Northamptonshire but, during the last glaciation, the ice sheet extended much further north. As a result, although the land was largely frozen, grasses, sedges, dwarf birches and arctic willows survived, and provided food for arctic animals. The mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer, musk ox, arctic fox and lemming would have roamed in search of food.

As the climate became warmer, there was a dramatic change of scenery. Firethorn and water chestnut abounded, and these were followed by great oak forests. Large mammals such as the straight-tusked elephant, hippopotamus and rhinoceros walked the land, accompanied by deer and beaver. Indeed, the Welland Valley became warm enough to support a type of mollusc now found only in the Nile Valley in Egypt!

Today, the elephants and hippopotami have (fortunately, perhaps!) disappeared, and Stoke Albany is located in the equable climate and productive farmland of the Welland Valley.

## Archaeology

Stoke Albany itself is unfortunately not rich in archaeological finds but, in this general area, there is evidence of occupation by several different races. One of these was the Celts, who arrived here around 1,500 years ago. The Celts knew how to smelt iron, the ore for which was mined locally. They also made decorative ironwork as well as pottery, ornaments and carvings. A grave of a Celtic noblewoman has been unearthed in Desborough and, alongside the skeleton, was a bronze mirror. Its reverse side has been described as 'workmanship of extraordinary delicacy and inventiveness by a Celtic artist-craftsman of the highest class.'

The Celts built hill-top forts, and one of these was at Rockingham. This was later taken over and strengthened by the Romans, who also cleared much of the land for crops; it is likely that the forest was cleared up to the northern boundary of Stoke Albany at this time. It is very unlikely that there was a Roman settlement here - Stoke Albany was too far from road and river, and there were Roman settlements at Medbourne and Drayton.

After the Romans came the Angles and Saxons, who roamed the area looking for likely sites to colonise. Here they found ponds and water courses, land already cleared for crops, timber on the doorstep, plenty of water, and a forest full of animals to hunt for food. So here they settled - and the story of 'Stoc' and its subsequent history can be found in Chapter 1.

## Watermills, fishponds - and a deer park

Although there are no records of any significant prehistoric or Roman 'finds', there are some interesting archaeological features in and around Stoke Albany.

Towards the North East of the village there is an active stream. Up to the early 19th century this stream operated two watermills - one near the

present A427 road to Wilbarston, and the other on the northern side of Lower Road.

It has been suggested that a site further east on the Lower Road, adjoining the Wilbarston parish boundary, might also have been a watermill; others think it might have been what are sometimes called the Wilbarston fishponds.

The stream in medieval times was contained by a high dam across its valley, and beyond this dam is a series of fishponds. The dam today has been breached, but the fishpond complex is still clearly visible - and is a very fine example of their type. The elements of the earthworks are recorded as a scheduled monument by English Heritage and the Department of the Environment.



The ponds lie just below the Manor House, and were undoubtedly owned by the Manor. There is a record showing that William d'Aubigny or d'Albini, who held the manor of Stoke Albany in the early 13th century, was granted a licence to take ten small pike and ten small bream from the fishpond at Rothwell to stock his own fishpond at Stoke.

The fish would have provided a valuable source of fresh food in winter, when the main alternative would have been salted meat. The water complex could also have been used for the disposal of household waste from the Manor into the valley below, which would help to boost fish production.

However, as time passed and it became easier to obtain sea fish (which were more palatable and, therefore, more popular), the ponds had ceased to be in use by about the 17th century. Yet this is not quite the end of the story of Stoke Albany's fishponds, because Mr and Mrs Wallace - who now live in the appropriately-named Fish Ponds Farm on



*The restored fishpond*

Lower Road - have carried out a restoration project on one of the ponds. This re-created pond has now become a place of great beauty and a haven for wildlife; golden carp in the water (with trout to follow), and regular visits by herons, kingfishers, mallards, moorhens, snipe and other birds.

In the area around Stoke Albany House, off the Desborough Road, can

be found traces of another major feature of medieval Stoke - its deer park. In 1200 AD William d'Albini - the same man who stocked his fishponds with pike and bream - also obtained a licence to enclose 'his park in Estokes, named the Lund, with all liberties belonging to it...' for the keeping of deer.

The park was enclosed by a bank and an integral ditch, and was still marked on a map of Northamptonshire dated 1576. Parts of both these features can still be identified, although on the south-eastern side of the park the construction of a World War II airfield obliterated some of these traces. Perhaps the airfield itself will, in some distant future generation, become a site worthy of investigation by the archaeologists....

## A VILLAGE AT WAR

## Chapter 6

To the people of Stoke Albany - as to village folk throughout England - war did not, perhaps bring the same degree of trauma and deprivation as it did to those who lived in towns and cities. There cannot be quite the same shortage of food when vegetables, chickens and even pigs can be grown and reared in gardens - or when berries, wild watercress and mushrooms can be gathered from the surrounding countryside. No German bombers destroyed homes and possessions here, or sent loved ones to eternity as they slept.

The village was lucky. Yet that did not stop the men who were not employed in reserved occupations going off to fight for freedom, or doing their best to protect their country by serving in the Home Guard. Whilst they fought, their women worked and waited and - like women everywhere in time of war - persevered and prayed for a safe home-coming of their menfolk, and the return of peace to the country and their village.

A number of men from Stoke Albany worked at Stewart and Lloyds, the steel company in Corby. Obviously a prime target for German bombers, the steel works changed production schedules in order to minimise the risk - burning off waste gases during the day. Despite this, some German bombs did find their target. Fortunately, little damage was inflicted and the production of steel, vital to the war effort, was virtually unaffected.

One Luftwaffe pilot, unable to find his target, jettisoned his bombs before returning home. These landed in a field off Ashley Road, shattering windows in Bottom Lane.

One particularly strange raid involved the dropping of flares which, falling very slowly, lit up not only Desborough Airfield but the whole area, including Stoke Albany. Those who witnessed it waited in trepidation for some massive attack. Thankfully, it did not happen!

Desborough Airfield, used by the 84th Operational Training Unit from

September 1943 to June 1945 (commanded by Group Captain Lowe), was built to Class A standard by Tarmac in 1943. Built on level ground, 469 feet above mean sea level to the East and South East of Bowd Lane Wood, it had three runways. The East/West strip was 6,000 feet long, the inner marker beacon being sited near the Eastern approach. The strip which ran from North to South was shorter, being some 4,200 feet. A wireless navigation station was situated near the northern approach, and the all-important control tower was near the centre strip, which ran from the North West to the South East. This was also 4,200 feet in length.

Wellington bomber crews were trained here before being posted to operational squadrons, and inevitably there were some accidents. On one occasion, a sudden engine failure forced the crew to bale out over the village. They landed safely in a field.

Commonwealth airmen were also based locally whilst they underwent training. These included Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians.

In November 1945 the resident Unit was changed; 1381 (T)CU, flying Dakotas and commanded by Group Captain Tester, took over. The station closed in November 1946.

### **One Man's War...**

This is the story of just one villager - Maurice Hume, L.D.V./Home Guard 1939-1942, Royal Artillery 1942-1947.

Employment in a reserved occupation - and his tender age! - meant that Maurice did not receive his call-up papers when war was declared. However, anxious to do his bit for King and Country, Maurice joined the L.D.V. (Local Defence Volunteers, the forerunner of the Home Guard). Those involved took their duties very seriously - but, very unfairly, they became figures of fun. So much so that the L.D.V were referred to as the 'Look, Duck and Vanish Brigade'!



*Maurice in the Artillery - front row left*

In 1939 the L.D.V. had no weapons. Undaunted, they armed themselves with farm tools, much as their ancestors had done centuries before. Some even made dummy rifles out of pieces of wood; the elite had shotguns.

As the L.D.V. became a national organisation, a new name was sought and the Home Guard was born - but they still did not have any rifles. The Wilbarston and Stoke Albany Unit met each Sunday morning, and a parade was held in Albert Ingram's billiard room. Up to twenty volunteers would attend at any one time and learn how to slope arms, present arms, and salute an officer.

Eventually the Home Guard were issued with Lee-Enfield rifles - but no ammunition. Some time later a clip of five rounds was issued, together with strict instructions that this must not be used... Rifles were used for drill parades. Rifle practice, when it did take place, was restricted to taking careful aim - and then shouting 'BANG'!

The Unit was commanded by Lieutenant Collins from Stoke Albany House, and the Sergeant was George Jacobs from Wilbarston. Neither were thought to have been in the regular army.

Guard Duty rotas involved nightly vigils at the Observer Corps HQ at East Carlton, and combined operations with other Home Guard units and regular army units (mainly Transport Command) took place as far afield as Wellingborough.

Early in 1942 Maurice received his call-up papers. He was to join the 5th Northamptonshire Infantry Regiment. These papers were withdrawn, however when it was realised that Maurice was in a reserved occupation - but his best mate had been called up and this, together with a few jibes, prompted Maurice to give up his trade and volunteer for the army. His friend Bill Payne had requested an army posting. The War Office had other ideas; Bill, a poor sailor, joined the Navy, and Maurice went into the Royal Artillery.

His initial training began at Devizes on 28th May 1942. This was followed fairly rapidly by embarkation on the Capetown Castle, equipment being loaded on to another ship in the convoy, and a voyage to the Far East. Unfortunately the Transport Captain's orders were somewhat different. When they got to Gibraltar, he took off for the Middle East, together with all the equipment. En route to the fateful battles soon to be fought at Imphal and Kohima in Burma, battles that stopped the Japanese advance into India, the Royal Artillery - and Maurice - plodded on, collecting whatever pieces of kit they could find, and improvising heavily.

After Kohima, retreat turned into advance. The army was supplied largely by air, Dakotas dropping supplies by parachute or pushing them through the open doors of the planes at tree-top height. Many rivers had to be crossed; the Irrawady proved a major obstacle, with Japanese shells raining down as vehicles and men crossed the river on pontoons.

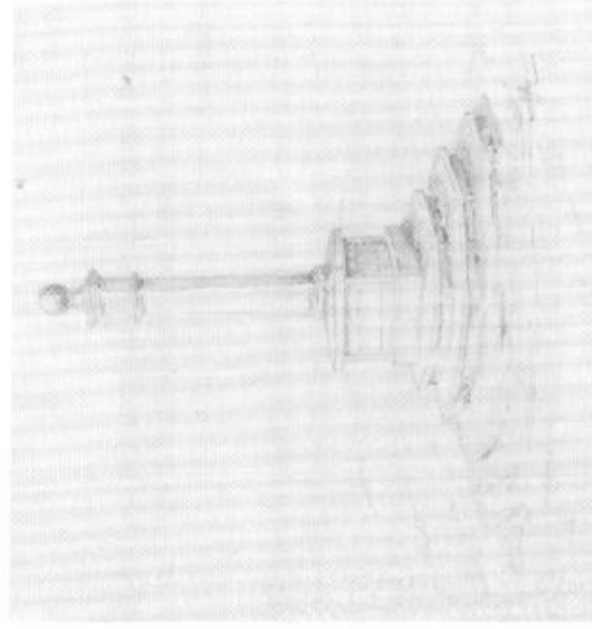
War - or at least, Maurice's war - did have its lighter moments. One day,

whilst filling fuel tanks from five-gallon jerry cans, he noticed an odd smell. Dipping a cautious finger into the liquid, he sniffed, then tasted. It was rum - thick, dark, beautiful Navy rum! Maurice now had a problem. To share or not to share? After careful consideration, his co-driver was informed - and only his co-driver. With luck, and some water, the rum would last them a long time. It did. It lasted a year!

### Stoke Albany's War Memorial

"In grateful memory of those who fell in the Great War 1914-1919".

The Memorial, adjacent to St. Botolph's Church, lists the names of those who gave their lives in both World Wars. However, there is no additional inscription referring to the Second World War, the three names being listed on an oblong insertion with no dates given.



## 1914-1918

Private S.E. Watts	1915
Second Lieutenant R.G.H. Copeman	1916
Private H.S. Frisby	1917
Sergeant M. Dennison	1918
Private G. Wilden	1918
Private J. Wilden	1918
Private H. Clarke	1918
Lance-Corporal J.W.S. Robinson	1919

Those killed in the Second World War are also recorded on the memorial, although the main commemoration still refers only to the Great War of 1914-1919.

## 1939 - 1945

Frederick Harding  
William Payne  
Hugh Nesbitt

are recorded, and this is in line with the numbers seen on many such sad reminders - that about three men were killed in the First war for every one in the Second.

What is somewhat unusual on the Stoke Albany memorial is that more were killed after 1917 (five out of a total of eight) than up to that date. More commonly the toll is greater in 1916 and 1917, when the Kitchener Volunteers were involved in the horrendous battles of those times.

In 1918, with troops available from the collapsed Russian and Italian fronts, the Germans launched their most massive attack of the war - the Kaiserschlacht. In March 1918 the first Stormtroopers rose out of the morning mist amid clouds of poison gas, and smashed against the British and Dominion troops with flame-throwers and machine pistols. For four months the British armies retreated until their 'backs were to the wall'.

The French armies had mutinied in 1917, and sought largely to defend Paris. The Americans were in small numbers and refused to integrate their forces with those of their Allies.

The resistance of the British Armies was such that the massive German onslaught ground to a halt through casualties inflicted, and it was largely the counter-attack by the British that drove back the Germans into their own homeland and smashed their armies.

In the early part of the Second World War, with the Americans still neutral, and the French Army defeated and its country conquered, it was Britain that defied the domination of the Germans.

However large or small a part their owners might have played, all the names on the memorial are ones to honour.

In common with virtually all inland settlements, Stoke Albany attracted its first residents because of the area's ability to sustain life through agriculture. And, whilst some non-agricultural businesses have been established in the village in recent years, Stoke is still surrounded by farmland; still the basically agricultural area that it has been for thousands of years.

The early primitive hunter-gathering tribes would have found a wealth of food in the form of wild animals and plants in the ancient forest of Rockingham, and a plentiful supply of water from two rivers and underground springs that never dried up. Then, over the centuries, as the transition from hunting and gathering to sowing and reaping gained momentum, more mouths could be fed. More children would thrive to maturity, and so there would be more people to work the land and protect the settlement.

Even so, the instinct to hunt - first for food and then for sport - has never quite disappeared. From Roman times through the Middle Ages and beyond, Rockingham Forest was an active hunting centre. Today, in what remains of the forest, Stoke Albany still enjoys an important place in the calendar of the Woodland Pychley Hunt.

In Roman times, agriculture was well organised. The Romans grew vast quantities of wheat in the Welland Valley and exported it back to Rome, where it was in great demand. The Saxons who followed them were much less sophisticated, and farming became more localised. But the arrival of the Normans under William the Conqueror brought back a strong central governance, and a much more sophisticated and coordinated approach to farming and trade. Indeed, it could be said that the Normans were largely responsible for our way of life today.

Developments in farming methods and machinery (many imported from continental Europe by the Normans), including more productive animal

breeds and crops which produced higher yields, led to a significant increase in agricultural output. This in turn led to surpluses, which allowed inter-community trade to grow.

Trade required transport - vehicles, on roads with resting-places where people and horses could be fed and watered - and so came the horse traders, blacksmiths, wheelwrights and inn-keepers. Trade disputes called for lawyers, the growing local population had to be fed more efficiently with bread and properly butchered meat, and people had to be clothed and shod.

So, by the 13th century, the population of the village had grown to almost 100. Trades established in the parish were listed as wheelwright, miller, woodman, shepherd, publican, hedger and ditcher, stonemason, cobbler, baker and butcher. Agriculture continued to dominate the village in terms of employment for the next four hundred years. Yet local trades grew in importance and sophistication; what had been a totally self-sufficient settlement gradually started to become part of a much wider community, based on the main commercial centre of Market Harborough.

In 1751 Stoke's population peaked at 470 souls. Trades recorded in the census of that year included two cobblers, a thatcher (or 'thacker'), two bakers, a butcher, and three publicans - farming must have been thirsty work in those days!

However, the centuries-old development of Stoke's agricultural and trading economy was rudely interrupted by the Industrial Revolution, which began in the 18th century and spread like wildfire. Here, in the new industrial centres, were opportunities for wealth creation on a scale previously undreamed of; opportunities to generate money other than by tilling the land, and for relatively well-paid employment in large numbers. Fortunately it brought with it the first steps towards farming automation and mechanical efficiency - fortunate for the farmer, because his more enterprising labourers were moving to the new industrial centres in droves.

By 1860 the population of Stoke Albany had fallen to less than 300, a drop of almost 200 in just over 100 years. With the new focus on manufacturing industry and commerce, and without resources such as Corby's iron ore or a commercially important position such as Market Harborough, what did the village have to offer?

Today, with the development of the motor car and a change in people's perception of lifestyle, Stoke Albany has become a relatively unspoilt, peaceful and picturesque place to live. Perhaps it is ironic that those 'modern machines' which threatened to kill off the village are, today, what helps to maintain it - particularly the motor car, which allows people to work in the manufacturing and commercial centres whilst enjoying the quality of village life as well.

### **Farming today - alive and well**

Some of the local businesses which have been established here in recent years would have been totally incomprehensible to Stoke's earlier inhabitants. Yet the village is still, in essence, an agricultural community today - even though less than 20 of its 270 inhabitants now derive their living directly from the land.

The reduction in numbers employed is not, as any farmer will tell you, a true reflection of levels of productivity. In 1966, for example, 40 acres of wheat would have taken a team of five men two or three days to harvest and transport into storage. Today, the same area can be harvested by just one man in a single day with a combine harvester. Crop yields per acre have also increased over the same period, from around one tonne per acre to more than three tonnes for some crops. Livestock farming also needs fewer people; a 50-acre farm in the 1950s might support four families, while the farmer of the 1990s can do almost everything himself on a farm four or five times that size.

Today there are nine farming concerns in the Stoke Albany area. Some are based within the village but with land mostly outside the parish; others live outside it but farm mostly within. Nine may sound a large

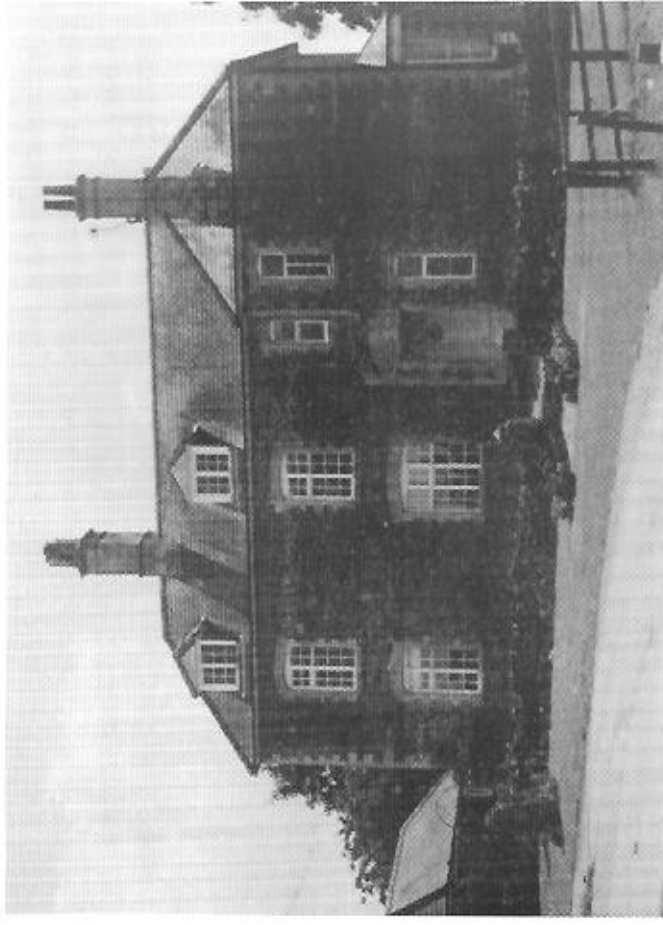
number, but within living memory there were at least six more. There were farms at the top of Green Lane (the Ingrams), and Middle Lane (the Brookers); the Wilfords had Lower Lodge Farm, the Strudwicks farmed in Chapel Lane, Ernest 'Budgie' Almond farmed at the top end of Bottom Lane, and the Jacksons at the Lodge.

The largest single landowner in Stoke Albany is Rockingham Estate, with upwards of 800 acres - some 700 of these are farmed by tenants. Ray Dalton, Rockingham Estate's Farm Manager, recalls the 'quiet revolution' he has seen in farming in this area. "Thirty years ago, the whole of the Welland Valley was grassland given over to the rearing and fattening of prime Irish bullocks," he says. "In 1974 the Estate farmed 800 acres with nine men. We now have five times that acreage, and although we're now an arable rather than a livestock operation, we farm it more efficiently with just five of us.

"I would have to concede that farming is now 80% about business and 20% about farming - but it is, thankfully, still a way of life and not just a job."

**Park Farm** is tenanted from Rockingham Estates by the Champions - Peter, Monica, and their son John. On its 380 acres lie woods that are still part of the ancient Rockingham Forest, and the house dates back to the Civil War; Sir Lewis Watson was detained there before being taken to Belvoir (see chapter 1).

In the 1920s, Park Farm was run by a Captain Fitzroy, whose brother was Speaker of the House of Commons. Before the Champions took over, Mr Fred Lees farmed Park Farm as a beef farm. The Champions first went into dairy farming; however, EC directives aimed at reducing the size of the 'milk lake' in the 1980s prompted them to switch to today's arable operation. From time to time, part of the farm is sub-let for the rearing of ostriches - birds with wonderful legs and lots of meat, if only you can catch them....



Park Farm's fields, like most of those in the parish, are known by names whose origins disappear back into the mists of time; names such as Cabbage Close, Pear Tree, Cocksfoot and Hardings.

Interestingly, there is still a Harding family in the village with an agricultural connection. **Stephen Harding** does not describe himself as a farmer, but he and his wife Fiona do endure several weeks of sleepless nights during the lambing season! Stephen's grandfather also farmed in Stoke Albany, walking his cattle to market in Market Harborough as recently as the 1930s.

**Paul Ingram** farms 55 acres of land as a one-man operation, producing milk and some beef cattle. His late father, Eric, also used to walk his cattle to market. Eric is thought to have been the proud owner of the village's first tractor - a 'Grey Fergie'.

**Springfield Farm** is run by the Peach family, Jean and Charles. They live in Wilbarston, but their 240 acres are mostly in the parish of Stoke Albany. Springfield is a mixed farm with about 100 acres of arable, and 130-140 acres of grassland for suckler cows, beef cattle and sheep.

Charles' father Robert, who still lives near the farmhouse in Wilbarston, first came here as manager of a 57-acre beef farm in 1947. At that time he had one full-time and two part-time employees. The farm supported all of them plus the owner, a Leicester gentleman called Herbert Arthur Buckler.

Robert acquired the farm from Mr Buckler, and bought his first cow from Fred Lees at Park Farm. By the late 1960s the farm had a herd of 90 milking cows, and the business was going from strength to strength - until the advent of the A427 bypass road in 1974, which split the land in two. Without bridges or tunnels the dairy operation was effectively doomed, and the Peach family reverted back to beef rearing and arable.

**Graham and Susan Mason** farm around 400 acres (mixed arable and livestock) from their farmhouse on the Desborough Road. Graham's father, a plant operator at the Corby steelworks before the second World War, bought 100 acres in 1944. At the end of the War he rented a further 150 acres of grassland, and expanded his dairy herd. The farm would have employed at least four men; one was Eddie Zimmer, a German ex-PoW who settled here after the War and worked for the Masons for many years. He still lives in the village today.

In November 1980 the Masons bought a further 110 adjoining acres, but only two months later Graham's father was tragically killed in a car accident and Graham took over the farm. Today he has a suckler herd of between 50 and 70 cows, and 300 breeding ewes.

**Tim and Jane Tugwell** are new additions to Stoke Albany's agricultural community. Tim, a local man, first started farming in Wales but, when 124 acres in Stoke came on the market, he bought it. The land adjoined

Tim's father's 250 acres in the neighbouring parish of Ashley, and both are now being farmed as a single unit with 290 acres of arable, 80 acres of grazing, a suckler herd and 200 ewes.

**The Brodies** have farmed in Stoke for 35 years but, in the last two years, they have converted the majority of their land to the provision of leisure facilities rather than food production - hence **Stoke Albany Golf Club**, with its fast-growing membership and attractive 18-hole course.

**Cliff and Vicki Tomlin** breed English Red Deer at the Deer Farm, Stoke Albany Road on land purchased in 1990.



### Local retailers

Although not himself a farmer, **Eric Goode** and his family are surely seen as part of the village's agricultural community. Eric and his son John deliver the local 'pinta' in Stoke Albany, as well as many of the surrounding villages.

Eric began his career as the local milkman following an offer from Mr Ernest Almond in 1949 to take on the milk round for parts of Stoke and Wilbarston. Eric, who worked for John Mowlems the builders at the time, 'somehow found the money'. His round expanded, and he added other products such as eggs, fruit juices, butter, yoghurt and cream. "It was hard work, but much more enjoyable than I'd experienced in industry," Eric says. "We used to make up fires for some of the old folk, or change light bulbs, or even wait with the missus while the husband went to fetch the midwife!"

These days, the supermarkets pose a real threat to the Goodes' milk round - ten years ago, 90 per cent of our milk was delivered by the milkman; today, that figure has fallen to around 45 per cent.

The same problem applies to the **village shop and Post Office**. After many years of having a combined shop and Post Office in Stoke Albany - run in recent years first by Mrs Marge Bellamy, and latterly by Mrs Janet Freer - the shop finally closed on 22nd June 1996. Fortunately, at the time of writing, the Post Office counter is still open in the mornings; if that were to close, villagers would have to go to Wilbarston for their pensions, stamps and so on.

### Other businesses in Stoke Albany

Although a walk or a drive around the village might give the impression that farming is virtually the only business here, this is certainly not the case.

We still have some traditional village industries - Neville Wells the carpenter and cabinet-maker, George Crossley the builder, Eric Prince the plumber, and Trevor Tann, whose

fleet of bulk tipper trucks operates all over the country. Yet there are other people living and working in Stoke Albany, running businesses that would have been unheard of a hundred years ago. The Hollingsworths, who design and instal broadcast equipment for radio stations, working in an old barn at Park Farm. Jane Thelwall (now Jane Wallace), running an equestrian training school in Bottom Lane. The Austins, with their home-based press relations and writing agency, Julie Smith who runs Albany Hair & Beauty Training Centre and Salon from a converted building in Stoke Albany Road.



*The Wallaces' training school*

And we must not forget Alfred and Anna Vinton, the owners of Stoke Albany House - possibly the village's largest single employers, with a staff of two gardeners, nanny, housekeeper, two grooms, and a part-time 'daily'. Although the Vintons work in London, they also breed horses - hunters and eventers - on some of the 400 acres that belong to the house.

Although Stoke Albany may not be the same thriving community that it was when its population reached 470 in the 18th century, it is still a place with much to offer. Its people's qualities - their willingness to get involved, accept newcomers, and 'pull together' - might well be envied by other cities, towns and villages in Great Britain.

### WHAT THE SURVEY SAID

#### Q: Are you at present

	Total	%
Employed	96	44
Self-employed	41	19
Unemployed	1	0
In a government training scheme	0	0
In full-time education	25	11
Wholly retired	35	16
Un-waged housewife/husband	14	6
Permanently sick/disabled	2	1
Other	6	3

Number of people who answered the question: 220

#### Q: If you earn a wage, what is your main occupation?

	Total	%
Agriculture, Forestry or Fishing	16	12
Mining, Quarrying	0	0
Manufacturing	28	21
Construction	13	10
Distribution/Hotels/Catering/Repairs	10	7
Transport and Communications	5	4
Education	4	3
Other services	58	43

Number of people who answered the question: 131

**Q: Where is your main place of work or study?**

	Total	%
At home	32	18
Elsewhere in the parish	8	5
Outside parish, but within 10 miles	81	46
Within 11-30 miles	33	19
Over 30 miles	21	12

Number of people who answered the question: 175

**FOOTPATHS**

**Chapter 8**

Parish footpaths form an open door for everyone to enjoy the local countryside around Stoke Albany. By 'footpath' we don't mean the pavement which runs alongside the roadway, but the public rights of way which are mostly across country. Each footpath has a reference number, and you can identify them from the map on page 71.

Other useful local maps for exploring the footpaths in and around Stoke Albany include Ordnance Survey Landranger map no.141 'Kettering and Corby' (scale 1:50000); and Ordnance Survey Pathfinder nos.937 'Market Harborough' and 938 'Corby', scale 1:25000.

There are 12.04 km (7.48 miles) of public footpath and 0.82 km (0.51 miles) of bridleway in the parish of Stoke Albany, which gives a total of 12.86 km (7.99 miles). This is around the average for the county of Northamptonshire, where 260 parishes share a total of 3000 km (1900 miles) - an average of 11.74 km (7.3 miles) per parish.

Some paths have been linked together to form 'long-distance' footpaths. A well-known example is the Jurassic Way, which runs from Banbury to Stamford and passes through our parish - HA7 and HA18 on the map.

Many footpaths were formed hundreds of years ago. By studying footpath maps, a pattern can emerge which gives a good insight into the journeys which were made when villages were often self-supporting, working communities - and many people had to do their travelling on foot.

The footpaths and bridleways would have been the main highways for people who wanted to get from Point A to Point B by the shortest possible route, often regardless of the terrain. For example, there is a footpath (HA1) which links the villages of Stoke Albany and Wilbarston, and another (HA15) which links Stoke Albany with Ashley. Footpath HA18 links the churches of Stoke Albany and Wilbarston, and footpath

HA12 - near the Harborough Road - passes the site of 'The George', an old alehouse!

Today, the interesting thing about a footpath is often what the traveller can see as he or she walks along it. Some of the sights are described in more detail elsewhere in this book, but examples in the Stoke Albany area are:

HA19 - The Manor House, overlooking the site of 13th century fishponds. 'William's Ponds' were stocked with fish from Rothwell, from where such grants were controlled in the Middle Ages. Access to this path at the village end is gained by climbing one of the few remaining stone slab stiles in the parish.

HA13 - A walk across the recently formed Golf Club and its lakes.

HA2, HA6 and HA20 - The World War II airfield, with its associated buildings.

HA8 - This takes you past Stoke Albany House, set in parkland with a lake. This footpath, leading off the Desborough Road, was for some of its distance planned originally as the main drive to the House, and was once lined with elm trees. The old gatehouse stands at its entrance.

HA15 - In the field at the back of the church is a good example of 'ridge and furrow'. This was an old farming method, set up by ploughing heavy soils to drain the land - making 'openings' and 'finishes' in the same respective places until a distinctive ridge and furrow pattern was formed. It also increased the grazing area of a field.

HA18 - Part of the Jurassic Way. Above the path are the earthwork remains of an old water-milling system (see chapter 5). Pause for a moment on one of the oldest bridges (Clapper Bridge) and you can clearly see Wilbarston church clock - which actually faces Stoke Albany!

All the neighbouring towns and villages - Desborough, Brampton Ash,

Ashley, East Carlton and Pipewell - can be reached by public footpaths across country, with minimal road contact. However, footpaths HA7 and HA10 were severed and diverted during the construction of the A427 bypass road, and HA2 has also been cut. There are steep steps in both places.

No footpaths pass through woodland within the parish, and the majority involve climbing stiles. There is one path, established in 1995, for which no reference has yet been allocated by the county. This starts from the junction of HA12 and HA10, passing the playing field, and going to the top of Bottom Lane in the village.

All parish paths should be marked by a directional fingerpost; there is some waymarking in the parish, but a map will be useful. The County Council appoints a special Footpath Officer to co-ordinate maintenance and deal with any problems. The Council will also clear paths and put in new posts and gates, making many footpaths suitable for disabled people. However, it is often a lengthy process because the Council has a considerable backlog of work.

It is important that our footpaths are preserved for future generations, and maintained and used correctly from the point of view of walker and landowner alike. So, while warmly welcoming you to Stoke Albany and wishing you 'happy walking', may we respectfully finish this chapter with a Country Code checklist?

Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work

Guard against all risk of fire

Fasten all gates

Keep dogs under close control

Always keep to public footpaths across farmland

Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls

Leave livestock, crops and machinery alone

Take your litter home

Help to keep all water clean

Protect wildlife, plants and trees

Take special care on country roads  
Make no unnecessary noise.

### WHAT THE SURVEY SAID

**Q:** Can you usually follow the footpaths and bridleways in the parish without much difficulty?

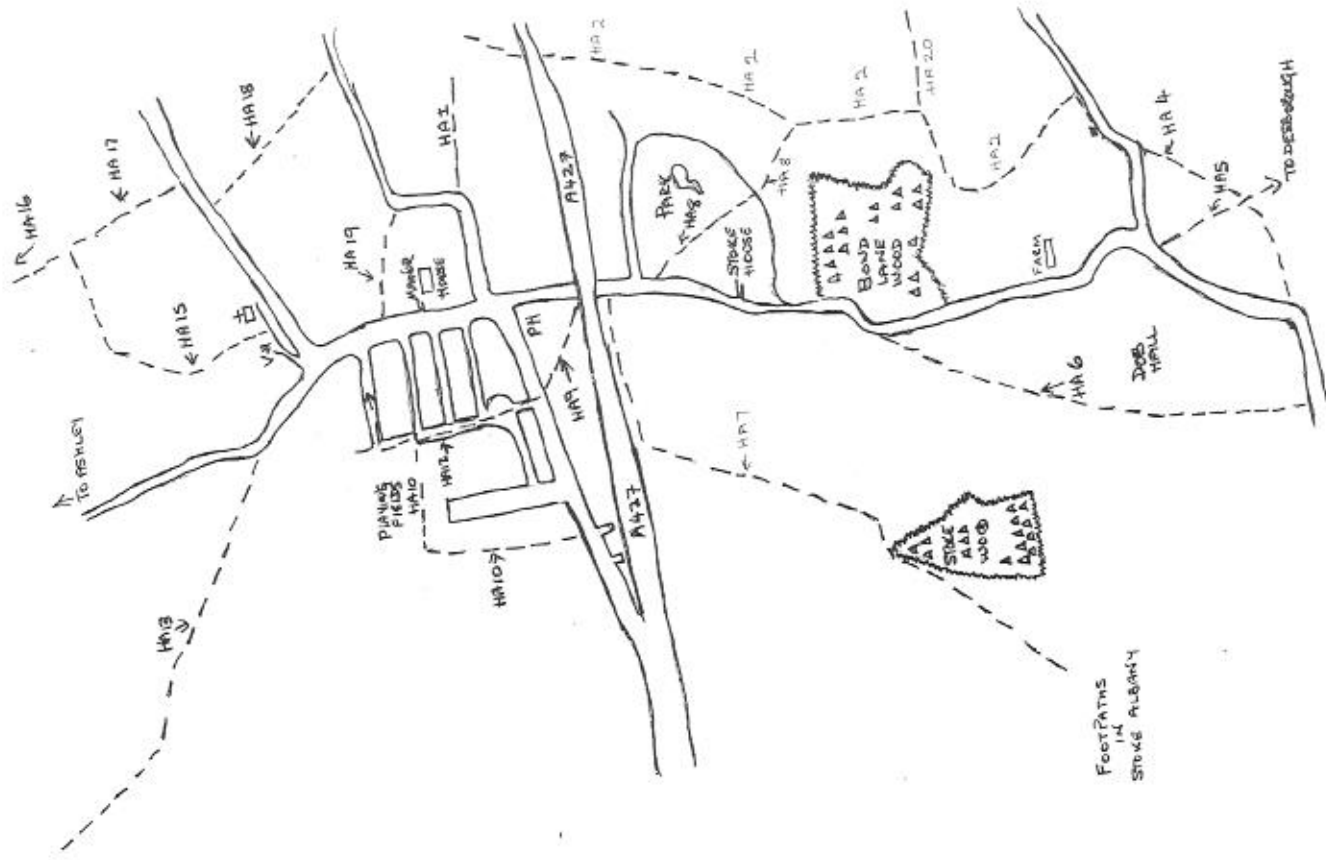
	Total	%
Yes	139	65
No	38	18
Don't know	37	17

Number of people who answered the question: 214

**Q:** Would you like to see maps of public footpaths and bridleways put up in the village?

	Total	%
Yes	170	79
No	46	21

Number of people who answered the question: 216



Like many small rural villages, Stoke Albany has a surprisingly wide range of active organisations. This is greatly helped by having a Village Hall as a meeting place, and Stoke's Hall is well suited to small group meetings as well as public functions.

The Village Hall used to be the village school and School House, which was closed in 1966. In the early 1980s the building underwent a complete refurbishment, which allowed a modern kitchen, vestibule and toilets to be built. The Hall is run by a voluntary committee consisting of elected members from the community, and representatives from every organisation using the Hall.



Keeping the Village Hall maintained in good order, which the committee has done to good effect over the past twenty years, needs a regular income. One of the main ways of raising this money in the last eleven years has been the village's annual show every February -

'Stoke Entertains'. In this amateur variety show, ably produced by Mrs Vera Parish, a cast of some 40 inhabitants of Stoke Albany entertains audiences for four nights.

Stoke Entertains is a very popular event, and tickets are a sell-out on most nights. Although it is a lot of hard work for Mrs Parish and her band of helpers, it has helped the Village Hall to acquire a moveable stage, with permanent curtains and stage lighting. And apart from its financial benefits, Stoke Entertains also creates a good community spirit from all the village - unusual for this day and age!

One of the oldest organisations using the Hall is the **Brownies**. This group of 30 girls aged 7-10 years has, for about the last 20 years, been run by Mrs E. Adcock who lives in Desborough.

The Brownies meet every Tuesday night, and are so popular that there is a waiting list. They hold Coffee Evenings where girls can gain badges for entertainment and hosting, and they go off on a Pack Holiday once a year. They also sing every year for the Over 60s club, and help at various village events.

When local girls reach the upper age limit for the Brownies, they can move up to the recently-revived **1st Stoke Albany and Wilbarston Guide Company**.

This company was first formed in the 1980s by Mrs L. Clayton, and was well supported. The girls took part in many activities, including two visits to the Guide Association's 'Our Chalet' World Centre in Switzerland for two-week holidays. When Mrs Clayton had to give up due to pressure of work, the company was taken over by Mrs L. Makin. In 1995, Mrs S. Peak became the present Guide Guider, assisted by Michelle Wells. There are now 13 girls in the company, divided into three patrols, and they meet every Thursday night in the Village Hall at 7.00 pm. When Mrs Peak receives her Camping Certificate, the girls hope to partake in week-long camps; they have visited the Frontier Camp at Irthingborough, where they canoed, and hope to return there

soon for rafting and orienteering. Like the Brownies, the Guides help at village events in both Stoke and Wilbarston.

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, the Village Hall resounds with children's laughter from the **Busy Bees**. This pre-school learning group has been going for over twenty years, and is currently run by Mrs C. Woodcock and Mrs A. Fielder. Both ladies are fully qualified with Diplomas of PreSchool Learning Practice, and they have two regular helpers, both of whom are in training for their Diplomas.

The group is registered for 20 children and, at the time of going to press, the books are full. The Busy Bees take children from the age of two years nine months to school age, and the group has close ties with the local primary school at Wilbarston. Children come from all the local villages, and are encouraged to learn through play. They hold two concerts a year - one at Christmas and one in the summer term - and they have a Christmas party to finish off the winter term.



WI Meeting - 1930's style

The Stoke Albany and Wilbarston **Women's Institute** meets in the Village Hall every third Wednesday in the month. Membership is around 30, and the President currently is Mrs F.Morgan from Wilbarston.

During 1995 the W.I. had a wide variety of visiting speakers at their meetings, ranging from a round-the-world yachtswoman to an expert on butterflies! There were two outings - one to Cedar Nurseries at Holcot, where the members were able to tour the gardens, and one to Toilethorpe Hall, the outdoor Shakespearean theatre at Stamford. Members also took part in the County Skittles competition, entered the W.I. competition at the East of England Show, held a MacMillan Coffee Morning, and enjoyed their annual dance in January. The Stoke and Wilbarston W.I. is certainly not just 'Jam and Jerusalem'!

Every Tuesday night the Village Hall also provides a venue for the **Whist Drive** group, when a few keen adults meet to play Whist - and, of course, to have a good natter! This group is not confined to village people; folk come from Desborough and the surrounding villages. They are mainly older people, and the Whist Drive provides them with a good evening's entertainment.

The **Parish Council** also meets at the Village Hall, on the first Wednesday in every month. These meetings are also open to the public. Democratically elected, the Council comprises five councillors and a parish clerk, and represents villagers on important civic matters such as planning and building applications and traffic calming measures.

Another Council in Stoke Albany is the **Parochial Church Council**, the 'PCC'. This is one of the very few organisations that does not use the Village Hall for its meetings; it usually meets every two months or so, and uses members' houses or, occasionally, the church.

The PCC is the annually elected body which represents members of the Church of England in Stoke. It has seven elected and one co-opted member (the local lay Reader), and meetings are normally chaired by the Rector. As with all PCCs, raising money to pay the church's way is one

of its priorities and, to do this, Stoke Albany PCC promotes an annual Country Fair (held on August Bank Holiday Monday). This has expanded in size and popularity over the past ten years to such an extent that, in 1995, the Fair brought in over £5000 on one day! The Country Fair involves a great deal of organisation and hard work by a dedicated group of people, but the results are very worth while.

Now to another church organisation which does meet in the Village Hall - the **Sunday School**. It meets every other Sunday, generally at 10.15 am; children can start at the age of four, and there is no upper age limit. The School has grown steadily in recent years, and currently has about 30 children on its roll.

Teaching is divided into two groups. The younger group, from four to nine years old, is taught by a rota of four mothers; the older group, which calls itself 'The Revelations', has three mothers to help. The Sunday School always comes into the church for the last 15 minutes or so when there is a Family Communion service.

Last, but not least, is the **Bellringers** - an organisation which has an enthusiastic group of members from the villages of Stoke Albany and Wilbarston. Needless to say, the Bellringers do not meet in the Village Hall; practices are held on Wednesdays from 7.30 pm to 9.00 pm (usually in Wilbarston church) under the Tower Captain, Nick Churchman. Bells are rung every Sunday before the service in one of the two villages. Although Stoke's bells can still be rung, they are now in need of some restoration work - another call on Stoke church's hard-pressed financial resources!

This was not an easy chapter to write! First, in a small rural community with only 231 people on its Electoral Roll, it might well provoke the wry question, "what services?". And secondly, quite a few of the activities which might be classed as services - shops, Post Office, pubs, and so on - have already been covered in previous chapters. But here are some of the various services enjoyed (or mourned!) by Stoke Albany....

## TRANSPORT

### Trains

Like many small villages, Stoke Albany has no railway station. Indeed, the trains never came here; the nearest stations in the old days were at Ashley and Desborough. Desborough was on the main line, and was also popular because there was a bus service from the village to that town. Both of these stations are now closed, so intending rail travellers must first get to Market Harborough or Kettering.

### Bus services

In the 1930s the bus was a popular means of getting into Kettering and Market Harborough on market days; by the 1940s buses went to Market Harborough, Desborough, Corby and Stamford every day, and to Kettering on Fridays and Saturdays. Today, like so many small villages, we are not served quite so well - but it is still possible to take a bus each day into Corby or Market Harborough.

Prior to the 1930s a local inhabitant, Harold Ingram (also the local baker), used to run private hire service with a 14-seater bus - which the villagers called the 'patchback' - a Vulcan coach, and a taxi. Sadly these disappeared after 1945, and we no longer have a locally-based bus hire or taxi service.

### **Community Care Scheme**

In 1986 the local Womens Institute in Stoke Albany and Wilbarston set up a scheme to allow those without transport to attend doctors' surgeries and keep hospital appointments. The scheme's running costs are financed jointly by W.I. fundraising and by donations from users, and each village has a contact person who has a list of volunteer car drivers.

This Community Care scheme has certainly proved beneficial over the past ten years, and is used on average at least once a week.

### **DOMESTIC SERVICES**

#### **Electricity**

This came to the village only in the 1930s, much later than in most towns. Street lighting came even later; the Parish Council minutes dated 5th December 1949, referring to street lighting, record: "The lights in the village were turned on on November 21st. There are still two more to be fitted."

#### **Mains water and drainage**

Stoke Albany did not get a mains water supply until after 1950. Before that people used wells, and spring-fed taps which were positioned at the roadside near the White Horse and in Green Lane, Chapel Lane, Middle Lane and outside the Village Hall.

At one point, the lack of mains water actually affected building in Stoke Albany. Parish Council minutes for May 1949 refer to letters written by the then Rural District Council, confirming that no council house building could begin without mains water. In that case, Stoke wanted to know, how had Wilbarston achieved council houses with only well water?



*A pre-1950 water tap*

We have not been able to discover exactly when mains drainage came to the village. However, it seems that the present pumping station off the Lower Road was constructed somewhere around 1958.

#### **Gas**

Mains gas supplies were brought to the village in 1990.

#### **Refuse collection**

The ubiquitous 'wheely-bins' are emptied every Friday, but Stoke Albany does have one claim to refuse collecting fame; it was the first village in the Welland Valley to be equipped with recycling bins for glass and cans. Located in the Village Hall car park, they were supplied by Kettering Borough Council in 1993 following pressure from the Parish Council over rural areas' needs for recycling facilities.

The Borough Council are currently investigating the possibility of individual household refuse recycling.

#### **MEDICAL**

There are no medical services based in the village and, as far as we can discover, never have been. Today, people needing a doctor go to Desborough or Rothwell (68%), Corby (17%) or Market Harborough (15%). For more serious problems and emergencies, Harborough Hospital has a casualty department which is open during the daytime, and there is a well-equipped General Hospital at Kettering.

#### **LAW AND ORDER**

Stoke does not appear ever to have had a resident police presence; there was once a police house in nearby Wilbarston, but that was closed and sold off some years ago. The village is now served from the Police Station in Desborough.

Fortunately Stoke Albany is a fairly law-abiding place, although there is a certain amount of petty crime occasionally, carried out by people from other areas. However, the village has a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, with a Village Co-ordinator and a contact in each street. Information about any suspicious activity is passed among the contacts, and the police often ask for help in watching out for particular people or vehicles.

## OTHER SERVICES

Some of the services that follow have been mentioned in other chapters, but here are a some additional facts and figures.

### Post Office

The earliest records we have show that a Post Office in Stoke Albany was being run by Harriet Deacon in 1854. In 1903 the Post Office was run by George Watts, and it was held by members of the same family - including Mrs Marge Bellamy, who was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1985 for her services - until it closed temporarily in 1990. It was then taken on by Mrs Janet Freer in 1993, and currently opens each weekday from 9.00 am to 12.00 noon.



*Mrs Bellamy and the old Post Office*

### Public Houses

In 1885 the village had three public houses, two of which have now closed. **The White Hart** was situated in Harborough Road; its last landlords when it closed were the Spencers. It became a private house for a while, but has since disappeared. **The Talbot** in Ashley Road closed in 1956, and is now a private residence.

The one pub still open is **The White Horse**, at the junction of the Harborough and Desborough roads. Under the ownership of Chris and Fran Stubbs it has become a very active, thriving business, serving good food as well as traditional liquid hospitality.

## R.I.P....

There is one trade which would have been seen as an essential rural village service in the old days, but which has now disappeared completely from Stoke - the village blacksmith.

Stoke Albany has had at least one blacksmith from very early times. As late as 1891 the Census shows Josiah Deacon working as a blacksmith, with his sons Benjamin, Robert and Augustus following in his trade. That trade must have been thriving, because Harry Barlow was also shown to be working as a carpenter, wheelwright and blacksmith - as were eleven other men in the village. However, the last blacksmith's forge in Stoke Albany had closed before 1914, and the last in Wilbarston closed some time between 1918 and 1940.

## WHAT THE SURVEY SAID

**Q:** What are your views on the standard of the following environmental services in your village?

(1 = Good, 2 = Reasonable, 3 = Poor, 4 = No opinion)

	1	2	3	4	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Mains water supply	128	62	29	9	4	10	5	47	27	27
Mains gas supply	108	61	14	8	5	4	10	5	11	5
Mains electricity supply	126	61	64	31	8	4	11	5	37	18
Refuse collection	139	66	52	25	9	4	33	19	31	15
Street lighting	37	18	82	40	67	31	17	7	31	15
Road care/street cleaning	31	15	96	47	63	56	28	38	19	9
Winter weather service	31	15	76	38	56	28	38	19	95	47
Telephone service	95	47	76	37	20	10	12	6		

**Q:** Would you use a waste paper collection point if one were available in the village?

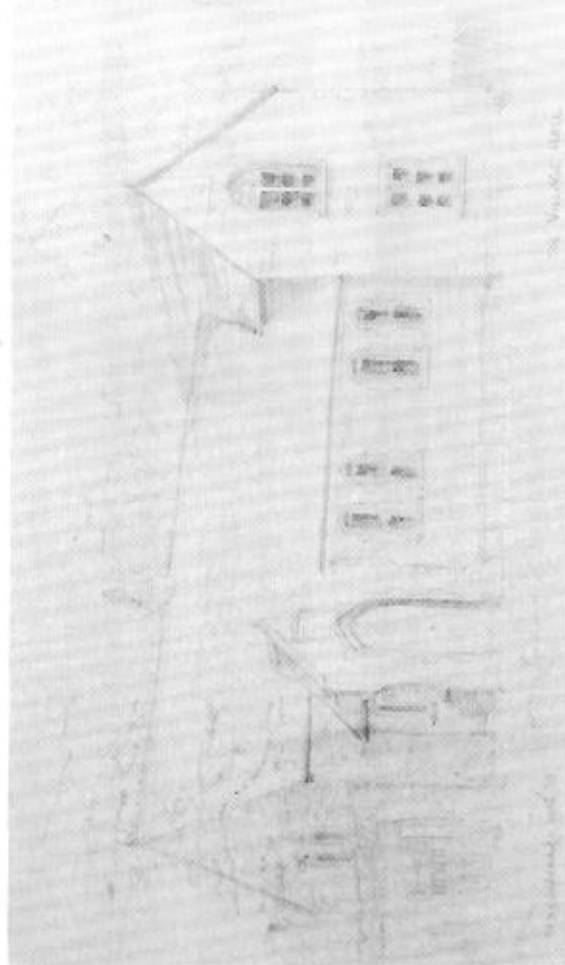
	Total	%
Often	95	44
Occasionally	83	38
Never	38	18

## SCHOOLS

### Chapter 11

Until the nineteenth century, the only facility for the education of young people in Stoke Albany village was a Sunday School. This contained about 30 children, and was supported by voluntary contributions. It appears that the poorer people could have their children educated at Wilbarston on something called 'Dr Bell's Plan', also supported by voluntary contributions; in an extract from the Education Returns of 1833, the boys of Stoke Albany are shown as attending the National School at Wilbarston.

Stoke Albany School was founded in 1871 by Mrs Laetitia Blanche Pearson, and built on farmland which had once been part of the Old House near the church. Mrs Pearson built the school in memory of her father, Richard Buckley Humfrey of Stoke House, and its aim was to secure church teaching for sixty boys and girls.



*The School - now the Village Hall*

The first headmistress was Miss Fanny Franklin, and she was later assisted by Annie Harding. The class subjects at that time were English and Needlework for the girls, and English and Geography for the boys. In 1890 further subjects were added; Geography for the girls, and Drawing for the boys. Also, from 1895, all the children were taught 'Marching Drill'. There was only one large room, and a curtain was used to divide the infants from the older ones.

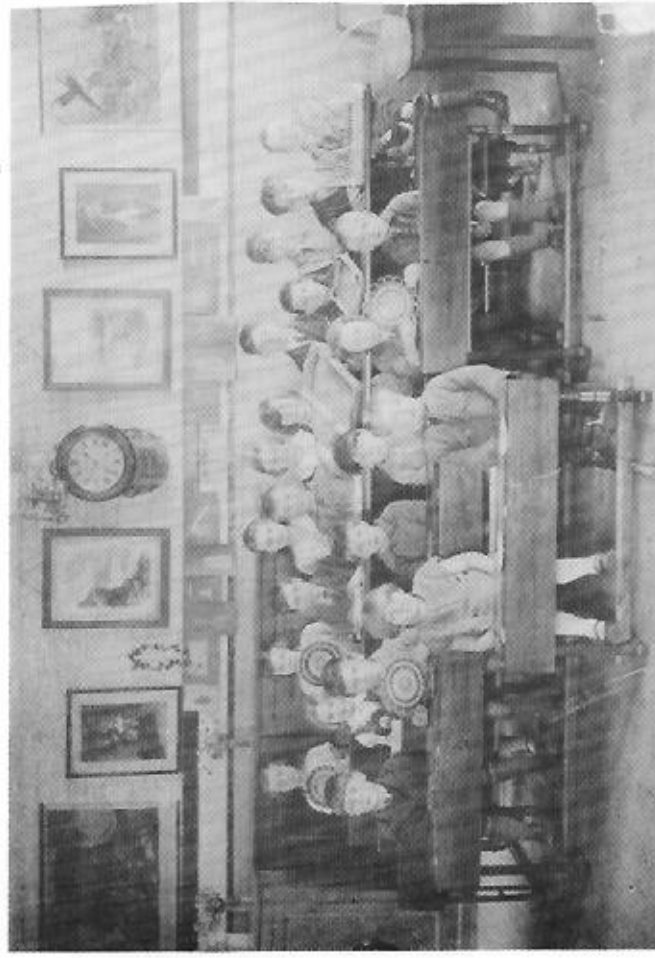
The school's log book from 1876 to 1945 makes interesting reading, especially some of the causes of absence among the pupils! Here are a few extracts:

- 1896 1st December: Average for the week - 35, which is smaller than usual. Cause - many children away with Scarletina.
- 1902 21st October: There were 14 children away today. Some had gone to Harborough Fair and others were picking potatoes.
- 1911 20th October: Attendance poor due to three with Scarlet Fever, one with Ringworm, three with Colds, one with Jaundice and one with ear-ache.
- 1927 10th March: Eric Ingram was withdrawn from school during playtime this afternoon to take some cattle home.
- 1932 17th June: Peggy Watts arrived at 10 o'clock this morning having missed the bus, thus losing her mark.
- 1942 7th September: School re-opened with 36 on Roll. 29 natives and 7 immigrants.
- 1945 12th February: The children were taught in the School House this morning because the School was full of smoke. School was closed in the afternoon.

A brief look at the school's Punishment Books may also bring a few blushes to the cheeks of some local folk!

- 1907 October 10th: Sidney Watts. 'Disobedience'. One stripe.

- 1930 10th April: Stanley Wilford. 'Throwing stones'. One stripe on hand.
- 1950 2nd May: Brian Freer. 'Returning home without permission'. Two stripes on hand.
- 1958 15th September: (The last entry in the book) N. Brooks. 'Persistent Disobedience'. One stripe.



*A picture of the pupils taken some time between 1923 and 1930, when Miss Winifred Wickens was Headmistress. Miss Wickens is not in it because she did not like having her picture taken!*

Stoke Albany School closed on 20th July 1966, and a service of commemoration and thanksgiving to mark its closure was held in Stoke Church on 4th September in that year. But it is still giving good service to the village, because the old school building and house are now used as Stoke Albany Village Hall.

What was life like at Stoke Albany School? Neville Brooks was there from 1953 to 1959. Here are some of his memories.

"My first memory of school is when we received a five shilling piece to commemorate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. Our teacher was Mrs Marion Mobbs. She lived in the house adjoining the school with her husband, who was a chemist.

"The school was heated by a large coke stove situated near the middle of the back wall. Older pupils were asked in turn to keep the coke scuttle topped up from the large heap in the right hand corner of the playground (now the Village Hall car park).

"At morning break we got a free bottle of milk - a third of a pint - and in the winter they would be stood on top of the stove in crates to warm up for the break. A large map of the world, on the wall, showed all the Commonwealth countries coloured in pink - a vast empire then, almost a third of the world.

"We used all-in-one desks, and kept our books etc. in compartments under the lids. The desks had flat seats and back supports which were rather uncomfortable, and inkwells in the top right-hand side; these were topped up by the ink monitor with a metal teapot. Once, we acted out the Mad Hatter's Tea Party from Alice in Wonderland. At the point where he pours tea over the Dormouse's head to wake him up, I, as the Mad Hatter, used as a 'prop' a metal teapot that the previous ink monitor had not emptied. We then had a 'blue-necked Dormouse', who was not amused...

"School dinners were very good, and looked forward to. A Mr Gerry Clark used to deliver them in metal canisters transported on the back seat and floor of a big black taxi. The meals were prepared at Havelock Street School in Desborough, and cost us five shillings (25p) a week.

"TV was new and not in many homes, but sometimes in the summer we were allowed to watch the cricket in Mrs Mobbs' front room, which is now the Village Hall kitchen.



*Mrs Mobbs is standing left. Neville is second from right in the back row.*

"Mrs Mobbs was very strict when she needed to be. If anyone ever swore in school she would take them to the sink, make them put out their tongue, and rub a bar of carbollic soap on it - a very nasty taste. 'Go wash your mouth out with soap and water' was definitely put into practice, and remembered!

"Being a native of the village myself - my family took up residence in the 1930s - my two elder brothers David and Roger, and my sister Jennifer, also attended the school. After graduating as a teacher, Jennifer's first year was at Stoke school with Mrs Mobbs, so my sister became my teacher and I had to call her 'Miss Brooks' in class."

Today, Stoke Albany no longer has its own school. Infants and juniors attend schools in the neighbouring villages of Wilbarston, Cottingham and Maidwell; seniors go to Montsaye at Rothwell, Bishop Stopford at Kettering, Kettering Girls' School (Southfield), Corby CTC and Stamford.

We were curious to know how today's Stoke pupils view their schools compared with Neville Brooks' memories about his, so we asked some of them. And although it does not, perhaps, have a place in this chapter, we took the opportunity of asking them what they think about the village in which they live when they are not at school. The contrast between the comments of the two generations proved quite interesting - and we wondered how these youngsters might respond to the same questions in 40 years' time....

"I like my school, which is Wilbarston. I like it because we don't have to go very early in the morning and we don't come back very late. It is a happy school. I think Stoke Albany is a very nice village because it has lots of fields to play in. I would like to see less traffic in the future." (Hannah Welch, age 7).

"I used to go to Wilbarston School, but now I go to Bishop Stopford. I like Bishop Stopford because it is very up to date and the students are friendly. I enjoy the lessons and I like most of the teachers. It is very modern and has lots of computers. I like Stoke Albany and enjoy the playing field, but I think dogs should be banned. I like Stoke Albany the way it is, apart from the traffic, and there should be a stricter speed limit through the village. I also enjoy the Country Fair and the Feast, and I love acting in Stoke Entertains." (Andrew Welch, age 13).

"I have lived in Stoke Albany most of my life. I went to Wilbarston Primary, and after that I went to Southfield School for Girls in Kettering and I am enjoying my studies there. I enjoy living in Stoke Albany but there is not much for our age group to do. I think there could be more facilities at the park such as a tennis court and adventure play area, as I know people in the village will use these." (Julie Hulett, age 14).

"I was born at Stoke Albany and after leaving Wilbarston Primary School I am now enjoying my studies at Montsaye School in Rothwell. I like village life and spend a lot of time on the playing field, which is a great asset to the village. I would like to see more facilities such as, perhaps, a tennis court and an adventure play area which would benefit all ages." (Robert Blott, age 13).

"I go to Bishop Stopford School in Kettering. I enjoy going there as most of the teachers and the pupils are friendly. At the moment I don't really like living in Stoke Albany as there is nothing for children of my age to do. I think our playing fields need improving with more things for children." (Selina Pridmore, age 13).

"I go to Wilbarston School, which I enjoy. When I go to Stoke playing fields there is nothing for the girls to do because the boys have got football and the girls have just got the swings. It would be nice if there were some things for the older girls, like netball posts, so that it is like Wilbarston playing fields". (Olivia Pridmore, age 8).

As part of the Village Appraisal, detailed questionnaires were distributed to 106 households in Stoke Albany. Our grateful thanks are due to all those people who took so much trouble to complete them.

Some of the information gleaned from the returned forms has already been included in previous chapters. To complete the picture, here are some facts and figures about the people in the village, and how they feel about some of the issues which affect them.

**Q: What age group do you belong to?**

	Total	%
11-16	17	8
17-21	10	4
22-39	51	23
40-59	93	41
60-64	22	10
65-74	17	8
75 and over	15	7

Number who answered the question: 225

By far the largest single group of males and females are those aged between 40 and 59. This may suggest that the average age of Stoke Albany's population will rise further as this group's children move away from the village.

**Q: How long have you lived in the village?**

	Total	%
Less than a year	21	10
1-5 years	42	19
6-15 years	63	29
16-25 years	33	15
26-50 years	37	17
51 years and more	22	10

Number who answered the question: 218

More than half of the respondents have lived in the village for 15 years or less, and ten per cent for less than a year. This indicates a steady flow of 'incomers' over the past few years. One might guess that this pattern would have been very different if the survey had been done in 1896 instead of 1996!

**Q: What could be done to make the local countryside better?**

- 1 = Very important
- 2 = Worth doing
- 3 = Not necessary
- 4 = Don't know

(Figures are percentages of respondents)

	Code: 1	2	3	4
Remove litter	70	27	2	1
Keep roadside verges mown	34	47	17	1
Let roadside verges grow	27	27	40	6
Stop vehicle damage to roads	58	29	10	2
Signpost paths and bridleways	42	51	6	1
Repair gates, styles etc.	42	53	5	0
Close some footpaths, bridleways	2	1	87	10
Open more footpaths, bridleways	18	30	40	12

The high response rates in the 'Very important' category show that Stoke people are actively concerned about their environment, and particularly about the cleanliness of their streets - 97 per cent felt that litter removal is either very important or worth doing. Nearly the same number felt equally strongly about keeping gates and styles in good repair, and properly signposting local footpaths and bridleways. The village has appointed wardens for local tree-planting and footpath preservation.

**Q: Does the village suffer from any of the following?**

	Total	%
Traffic noise	50	35
Farm animals in gardens	7	5
Farm animals on the roads	8	6
Hunting	43	30
Low flying aircraft	103	72
Motor cycle scrambling	8	6
Motor racing	19	13

Number who answered the questions: 143

Traffic, and traffic noise in particular, is seen as a problem by over half the respondents. The major traffic flow, particularly by heavy goods vehicles, is through the Desborough Road; this will be helped by the forthcoming introduction of a 10-ton weight limit. However, by far the greatest problem is felt to be the noise caused by low-flying aircraft. For reasons best known to the RAF, the Welland Valley seems to be a favourite practice area for Tornados and Harriers!

**Q: Would you like to see overhead wires replaced by underground cables?**

	Total	%
Yes	162	81
No	37	19

Number who answered the question: 199

A somewhat unsightly collection of wires strung between poles is common in small villages throughout the area, and clearly a lot of people in Stoke Albany feel that something should be done about it.

**STOKE ALBANY 1996**

