

cremation vessels in Kingston Blount in 1974. These were found in a pit by the side of Elizabeth Villa on the High Street when drains were being dug. An urn and a bowl were found, both have been dated to the period 25 A.D. to 75 A.D. The urn is dark reddish grey in colour with a black patch on it. It contained the cremated remains of a young adult probably male. It also contained two seeds, one of barley and one of wheat. The bowl is small with a bead rim, reddish brown in colour with some black patches. The cremated remains inside suggested it contained a small child. These cremations are thought to be evidence of 'Belgic' burial practice as there is also evidence from Watlington of a late spread of Belgic customs or people into the area.

The ancient parish of Aston Rowant included not only the two main villages of Aston and Kingston but also the hamlets of Copcourt, Chalford and Kingston Stert. There was



another hamlet of Kingston called Kingston Lilley or Linley, the name means 'clearing in the wood where flax is grown. This lost hamlet lay in the woodland above Kingston Hill, its precise location is unknown and for centuries it has been deserted. The earliest mention was in 1200 and in the 13th century it had it's own chapel, where the Prior of Wallingford had to sing Mass three times a week. In the 17th and 18th century there is reference to the hamlet of Penn, which was on the Copcourt Church Way leading northwards off Church Lane in Aston. Until 1895 Aston parish also included the whole of the parish of Stokenchurch with its hamlets.

Aston Rowant was named Estone in the Domesday Book (1086) and was owned by Miles Crispin. He also owned Kingston, which had two estates at that time. Kingston, which meant King's Tun or vill (village), derives from before the Norman Conquest when the King probably owned it. At the time of Domesday Kingston was called Chingestone and had nineteen tenants, whilst Aston had fifty. Copcourt and Chalford were then part of Aston manor. Chalford grew up on chalk land at a point where the Holbrook was fordable. Copcourt means 'the cottage under the hill' but was referred to in Domesday as the 'other cote'.

The Church of St Peter and St Paul is the oldest building in the parish. It dates from the 11th century but there may have been an earlier church on the site as Aston was probably a royal estate. It consisted of a nave with possibly a small chancel. The two small Romanesque windows suggest that an earlier Saxon place of worship had existed. The



The Green at Aston Rowant in the late 1920s



The entrance to The Aston Estate showing Oxford Lodge on the road to Postcombe

tower built in the 14th century had a spire, which was taken down in 1811. In the Middle Ages Aston was the larger of the two villages, it grew up around the stream and the main part of the village was centred on the church. There was probably a manor house in Aston by the 14th century as Thomas Crok had a chapel built then on his manor. By the 17th century Kingston was the bigger village but Aston had more of the substantial

houses including John Clerke's manor house. In 1738 there were twenty three houses and the public house, The Chequers, was opposite the church. At that time housing continued down Church Lane as far as The Lower Icknield Way. The earliest houses were predominantly of brick and flint with thatched roofs. The oldest house in the village is believed to be the last thatched cottage on the left down Church Lane (Number 20). Home Farmhouse was built at the end of the 18th century but it was built on the site of an earlier farmhouse. Some of the barns date back to the 16th century. The number of houses in the village declined and in the 1820s there were seventeen houses, the pub and four farms. Some rebuilding and some new properties were erected in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and the present village centres on the area around The Green. In the 18th century the village had some outlying properties on Aston Hill. There was a farmhouse at Uphill Farm and another public house, the Drum and Plough situated at the Warren on the Turnpike road from London.

Twentieth century development has taken place on the outskirts of the village. Detached houses were built along the main road from Watlington to Chinnor. This land originally belonging to The Aston Estate, became part of Aston Stud when the estate was sold in 1928. The stud owner had the first house, The Park Cottage, built along that road in the 1930s. He also had the end house, Tower Cottage, built for one of his workers. He had a water tank installed there together with a borehole to pump water to the stud. After the fire, which destroyed Aston House the land was developed and Aston Park properties were built. Plowden Park, off The Green, was built on the estate's bog garden and more recently houses have been built on the site of the old nurseries and Home Farm barns converted to housing.

Kingston was better situated on the highway than Aston as the main road ran through the middle of the village, so for centuries it has had the greater population. There were once two manor houses in Kingston; Moat Manor is possibly on the site of one of them. Kingston was built around a square with the main road on one side and the Stokenchurch to Sydenham road on another. It probably once had a large green but un-



The High Street Kingston Blount c. 1937

like Aston only a small area remains. The style of building in Kingston in the 16th and 17th



Brook Street in 1936



Junction of Kingston Stert Road and High Street c.1910

centuries was timber frame with tile or thatched roofs and some examples survive today. There were also some brick and flint cottages. In 1738 there were forty nine houses in Kingston, double the number in Aston. It is likely that the tradesmen and craftsmen had located their businesses here because there were more freehold properties. In Aston nearly all of the property was tied to the estate. In 1832 the house which is the old Post Office on the High Street was divided into three cottages and the other small cottages alongside had not been built. The Post Office had opened by 1851 and at this time there were several grocers, butchers and bakers listed in the census. There was also a winemercants and the carrier operated from his premises on the High Street.

In the 20th century five pairs of houses were built before the second war on Pleck Lane and after the war Icknield Close was developed. The houses on Old Croft Close were built in the 1960s. Baker's Piece flats were built about 1970 and the houses soon after.

Recently a small development in Brook Street and some barn conversions have been completed.

Kingston Stert, meaning tongue of land, was developed in the 17th century. It once had a public house 'The Barley Mow'. In 1738 it had seven houses, now it consists of a few houses and a substantial house called 'Kingston Villa'. In 1738 there were also seven houses in Chalford including a mill house. Both Chalford and Copcourt now consist of a few cottages and two farmhouses but only one farm at Copcourt is in Aston parish.



Aerial view of Kingston Blount , 1980s

Life in the villages has changed considerably over the centuries but particularly over the last one hundred and fifty years. In the 1800s the population was about a thousand. The agricultural depression of the 1870s took its toll, people moved away to the towns and the population dropped to about six hundred and forty in 1881. By 1950 the population had fallen to about five hundred, but today it is nearer to eight hundred as new development has brought more people to the villages. These days most of the property is in private hands whereas previously most of the property had belonged to the estate. This was particularly true in Aston but even in Kingston the Brown (later Clerke-Brown) family, who were lords of the manor, owned much of the land and cottages. Members of the Clerke-Brown family still live in Kingston House but Aston estate is entirely gone.

Most people now travel outside the villages to work; the proximity of the motorway makes this area particularly desirable for commuters. The main road to London has always been close by so the parish has had to provide for travellers passing through. In the 1800s most people were employed on the estates or were craftsmen or tradesmen serving the local community so the need to travel was not great. However in 1872 the railway came to the area, which widened people's horizons and London came within easy reach for a day trip. The railway closed in 1957 but there are plans to reopen it.

In the 1950s there were four shops in the villages, one in Aston and three in Kingston. They are now all gone; the last was the Post Office, which closed a few years ago. In the late 1800s there was the church in Aston as well as three chapels in Kingston.

Aston church still dominates the village but the rest are all now private houses. There were once two public houses in Aston and at least four in Kingston. Today the Lambert Arms in Aston is still open but awaiting modernisation and the Cherry Tree is the only survivor in Kingston.

The school, which opened in 1844 has had a continuous history since then and is one of the few things to have survived the test of time. The cricket club has a history dating back well into the 19th century and is still flourishing today. A new village hall was built in the early 1980s and is well used. More recently a new playground was built for the children on the playing fields. The Church Fete and May Fair are annual events. However this year in particular, being a celebration of the new Millennium, several events are planned including a weekend of activities for the villagers. All this goes to show that people still care about our villages and enjoy living here. The coming of the



The schoolchildren Maypole dancing at May Fair 1996

new Millennium has inspired us to write this book in celebration of two thousand years of history in the parish.