

Leisure & Amenities

Entertainment

In Victorian times working hours for the labourers were long, often twelve hours a day with only Sunday off, if you were lucky. However they were still able to enjoy some forms of entertainment. There were treats and fetes as there are today. The choir would hold it's annual event on the same day as the Sunday school treat. This was held at Kingston House, where one of the barns would be fitted out for the children's tea. The choir would have a game of cricket. Afterwards a supper, provided by the vicar, would be eaten in the workingmen's reading room and there would be some singing and speech making to follow. In 1889 there were twenty five men and boys in the choir and they also went on excursions to London, no doubt going by train.

In 1879 the Aston Rowant branch of the Girl's Friendly Society was formed. This national society, supported by the Queen, had been set up in 1873. Its aim was to do useful work in influencing that portion of society from which domestic servants were drawn. The local branch had one hundred members and their annual festival was held at Aston Park where tea was provided. Aston Park also played host to the annual Temperance fetes. There were coal clubs and sick clubs, into which people paid small sums of money, which they could draw on in times of hardship and they held their annual club feast at the Lambert Arms. The feast started with a procession to church and after the service a dinner. The band of the Royal Bucks Militia was sometimes in attendance.

In 1857 the gentry held their annual ball at the Lambert Arms The assembly room was said to be elegantly decorated and the dancing, which started at 9 pm, went on until dawn accompanied by the Watlington Quadrille Band. Other entertainment evenings were organised for the parish, such as the one held in January 1879, when despite the severe weather, there was still a crowded audience to hear the local gentry entertain and sing songs.

In 1879, the villages formed a glee party as a local branch of the Glee Union. A glee is a composition of several voices in harmony. The singers held their first entertainment in Aston Rowant school room with the help of a few ladies and gentlemen from a distance. They sang the glee 'Loreley' amongst others and there was also some piano playing. The opening of the tea and coffee room in Kingston gave them another opportunity to entertain and they also performed in Chinnor.

For those who were lucky enough to be able to travel further afield for entertainment, Thame could offer some interesting attractions. In 1857, Clarke's American circus arrived in August; there were two performances daily with one hundred men and horses. At the end of September in the same year the 'Lion Slayer' came for two days along with five hundred living species of zoological novelties. Every year at least one circus visited. At the Easter fair in 1879 Wombwells Royal National Menagerie came. There were lions

and other exotic species including wolves, tigers, leopards, bears and hyenas all with an American lion tamer. Admission was 1s, and 6d for those under ten years of age.

The horticultural and agricultural societies held their annual show at Thame in September, just as today. It was on Mr Seymour's Orchard Ground, which could be accessed from the High Street. The gentry from our parish seemed to be more likely to attend the Watlington show, which was also held in September, this show was established in 1840. All the usual vegetable and livestock classes were held but they also had classes for the best servants! The local people also went to Stokenchurch fair, which was held in July. The schoolchildren were given a holiday too, so that they could attend.

Cricket

We cannot yet determine when cricket was first played in the parish, but it seems to be well established by the middle of the 19th century. Initially Aston and Kingston were separate clubs but sometimes they would play as a combined team. On the 12th July 1859, Wycombe Marsh juniors played Kingston juniors; this suggests cricket had been flourishing for some time to have an established youth side. As so many of the local men worked for the lords of the manor there was great rivalry between them and they would meet to play cricket, such as the game in 1870 between Mr Brown's men and Mr Taylor's men. Two innings were played in the game, Mr Brown's men were all out in both innings, scoring a total of 92 runs, whilst Mr Taylor's men were all out for 58 in the first innings but won with the loss of only two wickets in the second. Sometimes the farm workers of different villages would play each other, as illustrated by the match in 1861 between Mr Hill's men of Kingston and Mr Guy's men of Chearsley. This match was played as a single wicket match; these seem to have been quite popular. The scores were very low, Mr Hill's men got 25 in the first innings and Mr Guy's, 4 in the first and 9 in the second. Of course the pitches were not well tended like they are today and often they just played in a meadow.

It is not known where the Kingston and Aston grounds were but cricket was played both in the grounds of Kingston House and Aston House. In 1870, a match between Kingston and Ickford was played in a meadow belonging to Mr Fletcher, a local farmer. After that game both parties and their friends retired to The Red Lion, where a supper was provided. There were usually games each season between the married men and the single men of the parish and in 1880 there was a game between the married and the singles of the Aston farms. This game was played on the part of The Moors, which Thomas Taylor had lent for the use of the cricket club. This may have been the field on the Aston side of the present cricket club, which is where the club played prior to its current site. During this game luncheon was provided under an old oak.

There was obviously rivalry also between the Aston and Kingston clubs and they would play against each other. In 1880 they played in Thomas Taylor's Park and the Kingston team were victorious. The players sat down afterwards to an excellent supper provided by R.Harding in the Temperance Club. After supper there was some singing but obviously no alcohol could be served. I imagine today's players wouldn't be too happy with this arrangement. Games were played against most of the local teams including Lewknor, Northend, Chinnor, Ickford, Chearsley, Kingsey, Stokenchurch, West Wycombe and Wycombe Marsh. Travelling to these games must have been quite a problem for the team, but members of the Hatton family, who were the village carriers, usually played, so maybe their cart was brought into action. In 1881, Aston Rowant Cricket Club played St James's Cricket Club, West Wycombe away at Plomer Hill and at home in Aston Park on the day of the Temperance fete. On this occasion there were two teams, the second team played Kingsey. These teams were probably a combined Aston and Kingston team. It is difficult to say when just one club called Aston Rowant Cricket Club was established but

the centenary was celebrated in 1981 on the anniversary of this game. An advert in the Thame Gazette for this period gives us an idea where cricket kit could be purchased. Mears and Son at the Post Office in the Market Square at Thame 'Calls attention to secretaries of clubs and all cricketers that they have a superior stock of bats, balls, stumps, leg guards, belts etc'. It seems unlikely though that many of the team would be able to afford kit of their own. In the 1880s, if clubs wanted to put their results in the Thame Gazette they had to pay 1s 6d for each entry, which was quite a lot of money.

ASTON ROWANT.			
CRICKET.—On the 2nd inst., an interesting game was played in the New Park, Aston Rowant, between eleven men employed on the estate of T. Taylor, Esq., and eleven in the employ of A. H. C. Brown, Esq., which, to the surprise of some, terminated in an easy victory for the former. Score:—			
MR. BROWN'S MEN.			
<i>First Innings.</i>		<i>Second Innings.</i>	
G. Goodson, b Holt	5	c Ditton	7
Tidmarsh, b ditto	19	c Stopps	5
Broadway, b ditto	2	b Holt	4
J. Britnell, b Jackson	0	c Jackson	3
G. Loader, c J. Loveday	5	c Ditton	4
G. Brown, b Jackson	0	b Holt	0
Meeks, c Fleet	3	b Stopps	4
G. Britnell, b J. Britnell	5	b Holt	2
T. Croxford, b Holt	1	b ditto	5
J. Barnett, b ditto	11	b Stopps	0
W. Church, b ditto	1	c Jackson	0
Byes	3	Byes	3
	55		37
MR. TAYLOR'S MEN.			
<i>First Innings.</i>		<i>Second Innings.</i>	
Stopps, b Tidmarsh	4	not out	20
Holt, b Broadway	7	c Tidmarsh	17
Jackson, b Tidmarsh	3		
J. Britnell, b ditto	2	b ditto	0
Hackwell, c Barnett	0	not out	2
Hester, b Tidmarsh	12		
Anstiss, b Broadway	13	c Loader	0
Fleet, b ditto	6		
Loveday, c G. Brown	2		
Dover, c J. Croxford	4		
Ditton, not out	0		
Byes	5		
	58		39

Thame Gazette 19th July 1870

CHINNOR.			
CRICKET.—CHINNOR v. ASTON ROWANT.—The return match between the juvenile clubs of the above places, was played on Monday, July 18, on ground belonging to Mr. Hatton, kindly lent for the occasion, resulting in the former again coming off victorious. Subjoined is the score:—			
CHINNOR.			
<i>First Innings.</i>			
J. Batten, c Fleet	28		
G. Hopkins, c Anstiss	3		
M. Swains, b ditto	6		
G. Jones, c Fleet	2		
F. Bryant, run out	0		
J. Upton, b Fleet	12		
T. Swains, c Holt	2		
F. Hill, b Fleet	12		
G. Crook, l-b-w	4		
J. Bryant, not out	8		
J. Biggs, b Anstiss	2		
Byes	12		
	93		
ASTON ROWANT.			
<i>First Innings.</i>		<i>Second Innings.</i>	
G. Anstiss, hit wicket	8	b Upton	17
H. Fleet, b Upton	3	c Batten	2
G. Stopps, b Batten	15	b Upton	5
G. Hester, c Upton	1	run out	0
J. Ditton, run out	0	l-b-w	2
G. Surman, b Upton	0	b Upton	1
H. Holt, c ditto	0	c M. Swains	4
T. Upton, c Bryant	0	b Upton	2
H. Anstiss, not out	7	b ditto	0
M. Sewell, c Jones	2	c Batten	4
G. Stopps, b Batten	8	not out	1
Byes	4	Byes	1
	48		39
At the end of the game, both clubs partook of the good things provided by host Seymour, at the Chairmakers' Arms, Chinnor, and a very pleasant evening was spent:			

Thame Gazette 9th August 1870

The Clerke-Brown family have long associations with the cricket club. Games were played in the grounds of their home, Kingston House and John Clerke-Brown would coach on the lawns. Members of the family have been president of the club since the earliest records available. In the 1920s John Clerke-Brown was both president of the club and captain of the team. His son Arthur succeeded him as president and also played for Aston. Since his death his daughter Angela has taken on the role. Colonel Arthur Clerke-Brown also played for Stokenchurch, as his father had been lord of the manor there as well as Kingston. Mrs Henry Clerke-Brown opened the new Stokenchurch pavilion in 1910. There was always rivalry between the teams and the Colonel told the story of how his Grandfather, Henry, once got up a team to play them. The team was called Aston but also included Kingston and the squire provided lunch. His cook, Mrs Meeks, suggested a nice rabbit pie for lunch but the squire replied 'the people of Stokenchurch eat my rabbits all year round so we can't give them rabbit, we'll give them a bit of beef'.

Before the First World War cricket was played in Kingston Park and later it was in the field on the Aston side of the present site, which was called 'The Moors'. Cricket was also played on Major Sir Edward Cadogan's ground at Warren Farm. He was an M.P. and he came to Aston Rowant in the 1930s. He was president of the Playing Fields Association in the East End of London and he used it as a holiday camp for deprived boys. He put in a swimming pool, tennis courts and a cricket pitch. The present cricket ground is leased to the club by the Clerke-Brown family.



*The opening of Stokenchurch cricket pavilion in 1910 by Mrs H. Clerke-Brown .
Stokenchurch v F.W.Fane Esquire XI. John Clerke-Brown played for Mr Fane's men*

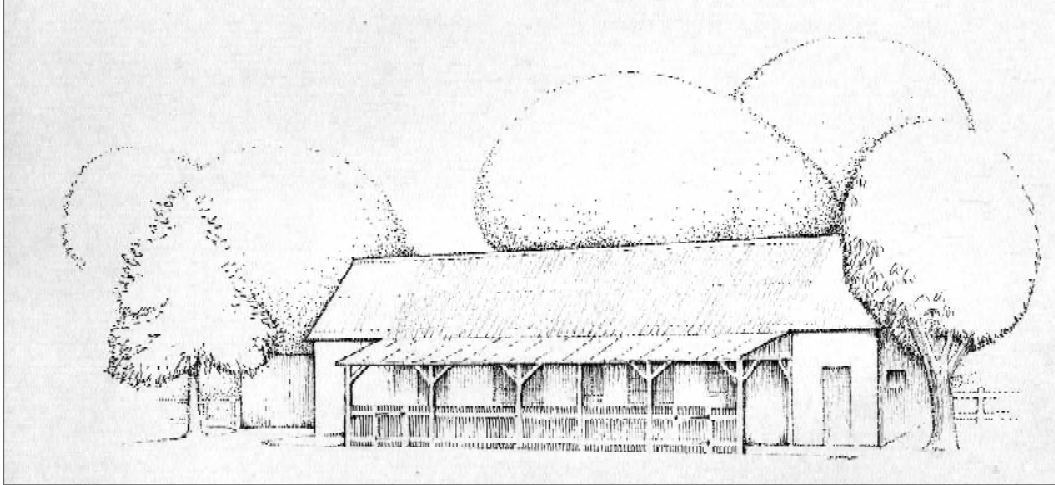


ARCC at Stokenchurch late 40s. John Clerke-Brown in centre



ARCC at Aston in the early 50s. Arthur Clerke-Brown on left

Probably during the Second World War there was no cricket played, certainly there were no meetings of the committee, as in 1946, the minutes of the 1939 meeting were read. By then members of the Lambourne family were mainstays of the club. They were vice captain, secretary, treasurer and committee members. Even back in 1881 there was a Lambourne in the team, as there is now. After the war the club borrowed a mower from Sir Edward Cadogan and a heavy roller from Hayes Dashwood at Aston House. They had to apply for a petrol ration for the mower. The pavilion was originally a shepherd's hut



Top sketch shows original pavilion with veranda. Picture to left shows original pavilion under construction.. Picture to right shows

and after the war two home guard huts were put together, the facilities were very basic. The first pavilion was built in the 1950s and a wonderful veranda was put on the front a few years later. Unfortunately it was made of wood and it rotted away. An extension was put on in 1977. As far back as the 1920s ladies were making the cricket teas, just as today. However at a meeting in 1949 it was suggested that ladies be allowed to join the club so that they could help with the teas because the burden fell on just two or three. These were the Lambourne ladies. In those days they had to apply for food rations to the Food Office.

After the war the cricket club, along with the W.I., was the focal point of village life and various fund raising events were held, some with the aid of the W.I. In 1947, there was a fete and in the evening a dance at the Lambert Arms. A good profit was made, so the next year the subs were reduced from 7s 6d to 5s for men and from 4s to 2s 6d for boys under 18 years. In 1949 a dance was held in the long gallery at Aston House and a fete was held on the recreation ground, which was on the site of the present cricket club. Water for the teas came from the estate water cart and was boiled up in a big cauldron over a wood fire. Toilets were non-existent. The fete was an annual event but in 1950 a gymkhana was organised in aid of the cricket club. This was held in the grounds of Kingston House and was a great success. Regular dances were held and in 1950 it cost £2 for a 'Houses' coach to take a party to Chinnor for a dance. The annual dinner dance is still a club event and in 1956 it was held at the Lambert Arms, when forty six dinners cost £19 11s plus 10% service charge.

The cricket club is one of the few village institutions to have stood the test of time. It is still a flourishing club with two teams fielded Saturday & Sunday and a very strong colts section. The ground today is one of the best in Oxfordshire, as evidenced by the fact that the club has hosted two county matches in recent years. One was Oxfordshire versus Somerset in 1994 and the other Oxfordshire versus Lancashire in 1996.

Football

Football seems to have become popular much later than cricket but by the 1920s Aston



Tea ladies Doris & Gladys Lambourne in 40s Chairman Eric Lambourne & President

Rowant had a team which played in the Princes Risborough and District League. The team was mostly made up of locals and again the Lambourne brothers played a major part. In 1928 the team won the Division Two title. The football pitch was in the field at the back of the school behind The Green. Charles Sale had an army hut erected to be used as a dressing room. It was panelled inside and was also used for other social events such as whist drives. Before the Second World War football was played in the field opposite The Red Lion in the field known as Lion Meadow. Later it was played on the recreation ground. There is no longer a local football team; most boys going to



*Aston Rowant football team 1923.
Back row (left to right).
Leonard Munday,
Douglas Lambourne,
Duncan Stewart, Ted
Walters, Cyril Gibson,
Frank Stewart, Bill
Seymour, W. Gomm.
Front row. Rowland
Lambourne, George
Hathaway, Lionel
Lambourne, Albert
Turner, & Sam Walters*

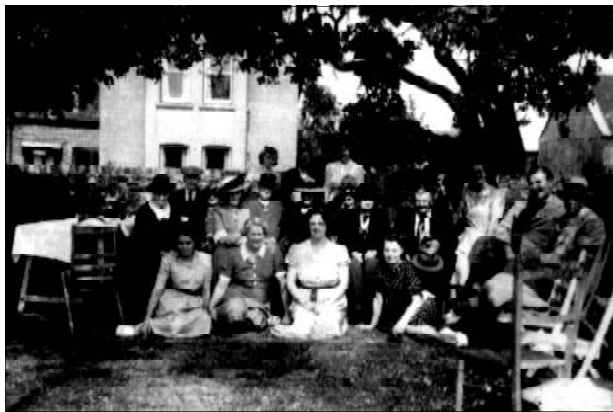
Chinnor to play.

The Womens Institute

The Aston Rowant with Crowell W.I. was formed in 1921, they met in the hall of the old infants school in Kingston Blount. One of the founder members was Mrs Henry Clerke-

Brown who was President. The hall was rented from the Clerke-Browns at 5s per week and the W.I. was responsible for its maintenance so they sub-let it to finance it. The W.I. closed during the war but reopened in 1946 with Mrs John Clerke-Brown as President. That year there was an inaugural meeting for the area held in the long gallery at Aston House with a dance in the evening. Post war the refreshments were made by pooling rations to make the cakes and local chickens provided the eggs. Tea and coal were rationed too, so everyone contributed. There were twenty five to thirty members and they helped put on village fetes with the cricket club. They also put on pantomimes and ran a flower show. The W.I. was wound up in 1999 but the group still meet without the formalities of officers. Like many institutions today it suffered from lack of volunteers to fill the posts as people lead such hectic lives now.

In the 1970s, Aston Rowant had a Drama Group. The group performed a series of plays, some of which were to raise money for the Kingston Blount village hall fund. Over the years the parish has celebrated royal events. The school children were given days off to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden and Diamond Jubilees. For the Coronation in 1911 Mr Brown said he would engage the services of the Stokenchurch band and offered the use of his grounds for the festivities. Colonel Ballard, who lived at The Grove offered £5 towards the tea. At the Coronation in 1937, there was a football match, church service, and tea at Aston House, sports, dancing and fireworks. For the 1953 Coronation a committee was set up to organise events and a parish collection of not less than 3d per household was suggested. People dressed up and there was a parade. In 1977 the Queen's Silver Jubilee was marked by a series of events held in a marquee



Aston Rowant CORONATION DAY Programme

- 11 a.m. Football Match on the Recreation Ground.
- 2 p.m. Planting of a Tree on the Recreation Ground.
- 2.50 p.m. Service in the Parish Church.
- 3 p.m. Sports for Children.
- 4.30 p.m. Tea in the Long Gallery of Aston House.
- 5.50 p.m. Sports and Competitions for Adults.
- 6.30 p.m. Dancing in the Long Gallery. Wireless reception of Speeches by H.M. The King and others.
- 9 p.m. Fireworks on the Recreation Ground.

N.B. The Sports will be held in the Park of Aston Rowant House, by kind permission of E. Hayes Dethwood, Esq. Entrance at the Woodway Corner.

F. H. GOR & CO. LTD., TRINITY

*Above. 12th May 1937 The Coronation of George VI
Top left. Senior citizens party given by the W.I. at Chiltern Cottage, Kingston Blount in 1950.
Bottom left. 1953 Coronation parade outside the Red Lion*

at Aston school. There was a children's party and a teenage disco, a dance, film show,

'old time' concert and senior citizens dinner. There was also an exhibition in the church. These days the church fete is held annually on the village green in Aston, this raises funds for the church. There is also a large May Fair event on bank holiday Monday each year, held on the playing fields in Kingston Blount, which raises money for charity. In Victorian times a steeplechase event was held at Princes Risborough, no doubt local people went there. Today we have the 'Point to Point' racing, which is held several times each year on the land owned by the Clerke-Brown family. The South Oxfordshire hunt still meets locally as it has probably done for generations and there is also shooting in the area. The lord of the manor would have had shooting rights on his land and in the 19th century much of the petty crime reported in the press dealt with poachers. In 1889 John Gambell, who farmed at Woodway, leased from Thomas Taylor the shooting rights for the whole of Aston Home Farm Estate and the Shrubberies of Aston House. He paid 9d per acre and for this he agreed to supply Aston House with no fewer than four rabbits each week, when in season and other game when Mrs Taylor sent him a written request. If he or his friends killed a large number of rabbits a fair proportion were to be sent to the house. The guests of Thomas Taylor still had the rights to shoot ground game and other



*Richard Wright and actor Gerald James
May Fayre 1985. May Queen & King
Victoria Hughes & Sam Matthews.*



*Aston school children performing on Aston
Green at the church fete in 1985.*

game in the company of John Gambell.

Amenities

The village shops have already been discussed but there were other amenities in the past, which are lost today. At the beginning of the 20th century there was a doctor's surgery. In 1907 the doctor was Henry Mathews from Watlington, he held surgeries on Wednesday and Saturday. Soon Dr King Edwards, who came on Mondays and Fridays, replaced him. He held his surgery in Wakelin Cottage. In the 1940s the chemist at Watlington would deliver prescriptions to the villages. The nearest dentist was in Thame. In 1870, two dentists from Oxford came on Tuesdays to Thame; Mr Wedgwood came to Sheldons the Chemist in the High Street and Mr Eskell came to Cheshires. In an advert in the local paper Mr Eskell promised to do extractions and fit artificial teeth 'equal to nature' without pain. A whole set cost £5 to 80 guineas, so they were probably too expensive for most people.

A local feature, which still exists today, is the allotments. The Kingston allotments were given by John Brown in exchange for the right to cut wood on his land on Kingston Hill

called 'Hillwerke'. He had bought the land in 1864 from the trustees of the poor. There were also once allotments in Aston behind The Green.

It has already been mentioned that towards the end of the 19th century Henry Clerke-Brown provided a men's reading room and tea and coffee lounge. The men could play games and read the newspaper, probably the Thame Gazette, which at the time was Oxfordshire's largest 1d newspaper. Even at that price it was probably too expensive for most of the labourers. The old infants school was used as a meeting room for the W.I. but a new hall was needed. In the 1940s a village hall fund was set up to raise money to build one. By 1946, £720 had been raised, however by 1952, the practical difficulties of finding a site and raising enough money were realised and Mr Clerke-Brown offered the old school for conversion to a village hall. The offer was accepted and many functions were held there. The youth club was now in existence and probably met there, as did the brownies and cubs as well as the playgroup when it was formed. The need for a bigger hall became evident and in 1978, Pleck meadow was purchased for playing fields. The old recreation ground had been on the site of the present cricket club. Tennis courts and a football pitch were there as well. A new village hall was built, which opened in 1981. Recently an excellent new play area has been added for the children.

There was a tea and coffee room at The Red Lion in Kingston until the 1920s and after this in the 1930s a tea lounge was opened in Aston. This was run by Bollen and Emmett and was situated opposite Beacon Cottage on Aston Hill, which was by now a guest-house. It probably catered for walkers on the old Ridgeway route. The area is now well known for the Aston Rowant Nature Reserve, which attracts many visitors each year. Some of them also come to see the Red Kites, which were reintroduced locally some years ago and make a spectacular sight when flying over our villages.



The Hunt on the Green in 1959



Beacon Cottage '30s. Groom Mr Janaway