



OFFWELL VILLAGE

K. GAREY.

OFFWELL VILLAGE

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Dedicated to Bill Wright, Rector of this Parish for 16 years

and

to the late Josslyn Ramsden who laid the foundations for this Book

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1. AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In writing this book I must give due credit to the late Lt. Col. Josslyn Ramsden C.M.G., D.S.O. of Offwell House. He died in 1952 aged 76 years of age. The Colonel wrote a history of Offwell and Widworthy but it was never published. His history was started during the last war at a time of personal and family misfortune. His son was a prisoner of the Japanese and to take his mind off that nagging anxiety concentrated on the research for his book. The result was a most thorough and comprehensive history of the two parishes.

He also transcribed the parish registers for the period 1551-1840. This in itself was an immense task - calling for a prodigious amount of typing and concentration.

In his preface he said that he hoped that it may be a base for many additions in the years to come. My flippant approach to history clashes with his serious style. Not only that but we see things differently. His description of the building of the Honiton Railway tunnel is a case in point. His was the eye of an engineer and geologist. I see a hole in the ground and wonder

about the men who built it and what they had for dinner.

I have given the matter a lot of thought and have decided to start afresh with a history of Offwell only and I trust that Widworthy will not take umbrage. This then is a combined effort by the Colonel and me - or you could say that this is his history rewritten. I am sure that he would not object to that. I might add that because of printing costs and other considerations there has had to be some severe pruning of material.

As a tribute to the Colonel any profits from the sale of this book will go to the various organisations in the Village including, of course, St. Mary's Church. But don't get too excited at the prospect of a bonanza, it is most unlikely but as they say it is the thought that counts.

2. OFFWELL, PAST AND PRESENT

Offwell, in Domesday, Offewille, has been supposed to signify Offa's Well. This parish which borders upon the county of Dorset is about two miles in length and a little less in breadth.

Its situation is rather high. A rivulet rises in the parish which falls into another near Puddle-bridge and the waters join the Coly at Colyton.

The soil which is rather cold is more favourable to pasturage than corn. It is an enclosed Parish-the enclosures being hedges, well wooded. The most flourishing trees are Oak and Ash and here there is a coppice wood of about 100 acres.

The inhabitants of the Parish amount to about 300. Paupers in constant pay about twenty. Labourer, Freeholders 6. The other occupiers of estates are at rack rent.

The inhabitants are for the most part healthy, robust and long lived. They hold their revel in September.

Offwell hasn't changed much since this was written by John Bradford Copleston about two hundred years ago. Dalwood is now in Devon. No paupers of course, as a charge on the Parish (possibly a few on social security, same difference I suppose). And the revel is no longer held in September. It is a fair description. May I add three other items of in Offwell's favour. The village lies just below the top of the hill facing south. It is protected from the worst of the north wind and basks in the sunshine - when it isn't raining. The bluebells in Colwell Wood in spring. This is such a beautiful sight that it must surely outbid Wordsworth's anaemic daffs. Finally the view from Honiton Hill, ever changing, breathtaking. There you be then. Not for nothing are we set so high.

3. SAXONS AND NORMANS AND ALL THEY FOREIGNERS

Offwell has been spared a lot of pillaging and such like down the years. We were ignored and it is my considered opinion that the various invaders just couldn't find us. We were tucked away nicely below the brow of the hill quietly minding our own business. One chap that did find us however was Offa, the Saxon. He made his settlement near the Five Bells Inn and at the junction of two busy roads, later a wooden church would have been built and all adjacent to a spring of fresh water.

With the coming of the Normans England was doled out to Duke William's followers. To prevent any of them getting above themselves and so challenging his supremacy the parcels of land were spread about a bit. One might be given a couple of manors in Surrey and one in Dorset. The receipt of these lands carried also the responsibility to pay the King's taxes. In order that William might know how much his followers should pay, he arranged for clerks to go staggering around the country burdened with heavy books to record the value of each estate and the taxes paid by it in the previous reign under Edward the Confessor. (T.R.E.). The overlord would grant the estate to a tenant in chief who would in turn let the land to his followers. They would be responsible for the payment of the taxes and any other contributions that their immediate overlord demanded. Offwell was given to Baldwin as tenant in chief. The distribution of local estates as given in Domesday are as follows:-

	Estate	Yearly Value	Acres
Baldwin	Smallicombe	5/-	89
	Colwell	20/-	1020
	Offwell	13/-	245
	North Wilmington or Cleave	7/6	182

These lands were distributed as follows:

Roger	Smallicombe
Roger	Colwell
Morin	North Wilmington
Raginald	Offwell

Morin also received Stedcombe, near Axmouth. In most cases these resident tenants became known by the names of their Manors, so we get Raginald de Offwell.

At least three clerks were employed in writing out the Exeter Book of the Domesday report, spelling was a trifle haphazard. Roger of Colwell was in fact spelt Rogre but it would be safe to assume that Roger and Rogre were the same person.

The history of Offwell, North Wilmington and Colwell Manors is summarised as follows.

Morin of North Wilmington (Cleave) and Stedcombe; was succeeded in the ownership of the former by Robert de Ver (Veer) and Robert de Poeric who held their grant from Robert of Normandy, son of Henry II. Stephen de Offwell had by that date become owner of Poeric's share, which included rights over North Wilmington. This accounts for the inclusion in Offwell Parish of the north side of Wilmington Village, and the adjacent lands.

In 1281 the male line of the do Offwell family failed, leaving two heiresses:

Genevefa married W. de Parc of Colwell

Juliana Married John de Orway.

1341 W. de Parc and his wife sold Colwell to Thomas do Courtenay.

1346 The third share in Offwell belonging to do Veer, passed to Moelles, Gilbert and

- Norbyry and thence to Lord Bray.
- 1566 In 1566 the Manor was in the possession of H. Gilbert, G. Fourd, Erindale and Compton. This Fourd was probably an ancestor of the family of Ford who were prominent in Offwell in the 18th century.
- 1600 About 1600 William Collins, who had probably made money in the woollen trade in Exeter, purchased Colwell from the Franklin family, who had bought it from the Earl of Huntingdon. Courtenay's share of Offwell had passed into the possession of Lord Dinham, whose share in Colwell passed through the families of Peverell and Hungerford, to the Earl of Huntingdon. Orway's share of Offwell had been dispersed by sale, some part passing to the Raddon family.
- Collins also held the advowsons of Offwell and Cotleigh. Male heirs failing to the Collins family, the properties passed through a daughter to the Southcote family from Kilmington, and thence by sale to the Marwood family.
- Male heirs again failing, it again passed through a daughter to the Fortescues.
- This Fortescue heiress (who inherited most unusually in her own right) left it to her nephew on condition that he changed his name to Marwood Elton. He had to apply to parliament to do this. The Marwood Eltons sold it to Mr Loud just before the last war.
- 1769 The West Colwell part of the property was purchased by the Copleston family about 1769, who had held Smallicombe for many generations. They also purchased the advowson of Offwell which had become the property of the Fulfords of Fulford.

Ending this chapter on the Norman Invasion (and I apologise for being side-tracked about the fate of the various properties down the years) spare a thought for the dispossessed Saxons - Godwin, Almer, Borgaret, Etmer, Adelwold and the rest of them. I know that they had done to them what they did to the poor old Britons. I don't think they deserved the treatment that they received under the Normans. They sank to being merely villeins, deprived of freedoms that were not restored for many a year. They suffered under the Normans. How they suffered. Trevelyan, in his history said "... the great King had done them wrongs such as Irishmen never forgave to England in later and more sophisticated times." At least they survived. The English survived.

4. ROADS

The Romans had a passion for building roads. Give a Roman a shovel and he wouldn't do what you or I would do, lean on it and muse upon the beauty of the Otter Valley, but go absolutely berserk (they couldn't actually because this particular word had not yet been invented) and beat the daylights out of along straight stretch of countryside. By the time he had signed his timesheet at 5 o'clock (17.00 hours) there, disappearing into the distance, was the road. Don't forget there were thousands of these squaddies at it.

It is little wonder, therefore, that by the time the Roman Legions departed we were in possession of stone-built elevated causeways stretching from sea to sea. The roads were mostly on the higher ground, avoiding the forested valleys and marshlands. The A35 which only just clips the northern edge of our parish, is a good example of Roman road building, following the higher ground all the way to Axminster.

In time, with the Romans gone and the succeeding invasions of Angles and Saxons the roads became neglected. These later immigrants pinched the stones to make themselves rockeries

and things like that. Roads deteriorated and many disappeared. From Saxon times until the Stuarts our roads were no more than pack horse tracks.

Things only improved when the turnpikes were introduced. These trusts were set up to provide monies to build and improve the roads. The Turnpike Trusts came to Devon around 1750. The Copper Castle, Honiton, for instance dates from 1754. Each Tollhouse had a painted board to show the charges for every type of traffic.

There was a Turnpike at the junction of Featherbed Lane, the Honiton-Axminster Road (A35) and Northgate Lane at White Cross.

It is interesting to note that Northgate Lane is a continuation of Featherbed Lane (this being the road to Colyton) and formed part of the Ridgeway (from the old English 'hrycg' - I put that in to see if you could pronounce it). This is an ancient track following ridges across the country, providing dry routes well above the marshy valleys. The Romans, as you will recall, followed this same practice only they couldn't pronounce 'hrycg' let alone spell it.

You might think that you would be diddled if you travelled from Honiton to Axminster. Having paid your toll at the Copper Castle and grunted and groaned all the way up Honiton Hill you are confronted with another turnpike. Don't panic. The ticket issued to you at the Copper Castle 'cleared' you at White Cross. Normally no toll could be collected within four or five miles of the previous toll gate. Some traffic was exempt - Clergymen, people going to church, the mail, soldiers on the march and people going to vote in elections. It would followed therefore that if you were a padre in the army, marching with a sack of mail heading for the polling booth and then to church you would be entitled to a season ticket at least...

I did measure the gates at the Copper Castle, playing last-across with my tape measure, just to prove how narrow the road must have been in the eighteenth century. They are each 10'8" wide making the road 21'4". Even in metres (6m 502.4 mm) it doesn't make it any narrower and it doesn't prove anything so I don't think I shall mention it.

There was another tollgate on turning off the A35 into Offwell at 'Belle View' in Mount Pleasant. The house has recently changed hands and is likely to revert to its former name of 'Linch'.

It stands at an angle to the road with an outbuilding opposite. Together they straddle the road. The outbuilding is not the original. I suppose that it was placed at this particular spot to cover the traffic avoiding the White Cross Toll.

Col. Ramsden has given a very interesting note regarding the prehistoric trade routes. Now being prehistoric this was some time ago.

Trade routes and trade connections grew up within Britain and even extended to Ireland and the continent. Trackways grew up linking centres of civilisation.

It was in these days that a trade route was formed bringing gold from the Wicklow Hills in Ireland. To avoid the long and dangerous sea passage around Lands End they chose to sail

from Waterford to Barnstaple and thence overland to ports on the English Channel. Only it wasn't called the English Channel then. At that time both the Exe and the Axe were used. One of these trackways crossed Devon via South Molton, Tiverton, Cullompton and Honiton ending up on the Axe estuary at Colyton. South east of Honiton it passes as a 'Ridgeway' used in winter across the highland at Sutton Thorne and as a 'Hollow Way' for summer traffic along the Offwell Brook where it is now marked by lanes and public roads.

Col. Ramsden mentions a long flat topped mound some 100 yards west of West Colwell farm that seems to have been a stockaded post situated at the crossing of these two routes with water for the pack animals nearby.

This brings us to the subject of Ley Lines. At this point I pause to give you an opportunity either to go red in the face with apoplexy or go all goggle eyed with awe and wonderment. You just can't slip into neutral on a subject like this. Personally I couldn't care less but I think that it is my duty to stir things up if only to stop you going to sleep.

I'll keep it as short as possible. Here goes. Take Stonehenge as a starting point. This was erected, so they say, in order to watch the movements of the sun and moon. The stones have been positioned very carefully so that it can be used as an observatory. In addition to this it would appear to be linked with other ancient sites in one vast pattern. Straight lines running across the landscape linking churches (many of which were built on pre-Christian sites), Beacon Points, Ancient Castles, Mounds, Cairns, Ponds, Holy Wells etc.

These Ley Lines were originally reconnoitred by Colmen or Dolmen, prehistoric surveyors carrying two surveying rods. (The Cerne Abbas giant is said by some to represent a Colman with his rods.) One might ask with a flash of the obvious, Why is Colwell so named? West Colwell and Colwell Barton are both on the Track. I can see that you are laughing fit to bust. I've got you rolling in the aisles. (Nave, actually - see the chapter on St. Mary's.)

To bring you to your senses I list a Ley or Line of ancient landmarks for travellers along a trade route for lead from the Mendips to the sheltered port of Exmouth.

Maesbury Camp - Croscombe Church - North Wooton Church - Punter's Ball - Dundon Camp - Hermitage - Mulchelney Abbey - Midelney - Hambridge Church - Old Way Gate - Donyat Church - Combe St. Nicholas Church - Weston Chapel - Stockland Church - Stockland Great Camp - Hayne Farm Ford - Offwell Church - Fir Trees on Farway Hill - Sidbury Castle - Bulverton Hill - Passaford on the River Otter- East Budleigh Church - Shortwood Common - Littleham Church

From Hayne Farm Ford, there was probably a branch track via Widworthy Castle and Southleigh Church to Branscombe Camp.

It's no good looking at me. I had nothing to do with it. If you want my opinion, which you obviously don't, but you are getting it anyway. I think that Ley Lines, if they exist (I am very circumspect you see) could not have been drawn up to provide trackways. These straight lines are the shortest way on paper to show the way from A to B but you cannot ignore the terrain. For most of the journey you wouldn't be able to see the landmarks. Remember that

we are talking about the Bronze Age. Forests were forests in those days. Mile upon mile of it. These were Tulgey woods where things did gyre and gimble and all that sort of thing. Today most of these forests have been cleared and yet you can't even see Offwell Church from Hayne Farm ford. Come to think of it you can only recognise Stockland Hill because of the T.V. mast and that at night when it is lit up like a Christmas Tree. As I say Landmarks and straight lines had nothing to do with it.

5. THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY

Now we come to the Church. Who better to describe it and to pronounce on it than an old reprobate and agnostic like me. The Church - the centre of village life for hundreds of years. The Standing Stones of history. Nothing in Offwell compares with it. The Primary School, only 150 years old, is an infant. Old houses in the village have their memories but the Church is the heart vibrating with the pulse of the people who have lived here.

Looking back over the years it has seen its ornaments vandalised, its beliefs questioned and new ones imposed. People have abandoned it from reasons of earnest dissent down to others who didn't like the way the rector put his hat on. It sounds trite and corny I know but I speak as I find. The stones speak to me and I find history here. Call me a sentimental slob and you would be right. Anyway let us go in but do doff your hat...

The Church was built about AD 1200 of local flintstone and Beer limestone. It was then a simple structure consisting of the Nave and the Chancel. The Chancel is at the east end of the Church and the word is from the Latin meaning 'to enclose by a lattice' - that part screened off from the main body of the Church containing the choir, the clergy and of course the Altar. This retained the mystery of the mass by not celebrating it in open view but behind the Screen. This followed the custom of the Jewish Temple where there was an inner Sanctuary.

The Nave is the main body of the Church with aisles either side. Where there is only one aisle as in St. Mary's it was usually built on the North side because of the custom of using the South side for burials. When we say that the bride goes down the Aisle we almost always mean that she goes down the Nave.

The Nave was also used for lay purposes such as Courts of Justice, Parish meetings and for storing goods belonging to the parishioners. The congregation in this early Church would look with wonder towards the Chancel with its hidden ceremonies and Latin chants. At the painted murals of cheerful scenes of Purgatory and Damnation. Dozing on his feet, for there were no pews, he urged his ancient mother to 'go to the wall' where there were seats.

The separation of the Nave and Chancel held until the time of the Reformation. The Reformation was a Jolly Hockey Sticks event. Starting with John Wycliffe through Martin Luther to John Knox. Two hundred years of protest against the Roman Church. Images connected with the Papal rule were destroyed or defaced. It was probably then that the wooden rood screen was destroyed. (Col. Ramsden mentions - this was just post war - the remains of an iron hook suggesting that it acted as a support for a Rood [Crucifix]. There is no sign of it now but there is a mark in the centre of the arch.)

Anyway if it wasn't destroyed then it received attention from the Parliamentary forces during the civil war.

Around about 1450 the Tower and then the North Aisle about 1500. There was originally a door in the northern wall of the Aisle. Traces of this can be seen from the outside. The wind must have whistled through this door sweeping hymn sheets, church door notices, the odd frail parishioner all before it and out through the opposite door. The next structural addition was the Porch which was rebuilt in the early 19th century. Finally the Vestry was built about 1828.

The Vestry was provided by Bishop Copleston. His brother, John Gaius Copleston, the Rector, closely supervised its building. He was rather fond of the adjacent yew tree. Alarmed that the digging of the foundations would disturb its roots made the nearer wall shorter than the other. His affection for the yew was expressed in a longish poem entitled 'The decayed but Reviving Churchyard Yew' (this was the age of Byron, Shelley and Keats all three only recently falling victims to fever, drowning and T.B. in that order. Their influence must have inspired many to take up the pen and tread a dainty iambic meter). J. G. Copleston's poem does not, perhaps, appeal to the modern ear but is full of information relating to the Church, the Village and the Copleston family. The engraving is an illustration from the poem. This is a view from the south showing the Yew and the Vestry. The artist must have been up a ladder when he did this for as you know the ground drops away somewhat sharpish-like on this side of the Church. Today there is no sign of the gate at the edge of the precipice. It has been suggested that when The Barton was built about 1810 the ground was excavated to provide a flat lawn. There is an indication from the nature of the stone walling in the lane that a path ran from here to the south side of the church. Let's go inside again, it has started to rain.

In 1853 the Singers' Gallery at the western end of the northern aisle was removed. (If you are out of touch with your norths and wests then, facing the altar, the west would be over your left shoulder. And as you don't know your left from your right this might prove difficult.) The Gallery was erected in 1754 by John Ford. It was only in existence therefore for about 100 years. The front panels of the Gallery are preserved and are now kept below the east window of the aisle. Oh dear ...still lost? We know where the west wall is (see the beginning of this paragraph) the east wall is opposite.. no?.. look for the Mothers' Union banner, just there.

The carving is said to be Flemish work of the late 15th century. You may well ask where was it during the two hundred years up to 1754. It's no good asking me because I don't know. The panel has a scene of Christ going to Calvary in the centre and on either side figures of Peter, Paul, John and Christ holding a sphere.

In August 1852 the Rector the Rev. John Gay Copleston suggested re-pewing the church and removing the Singers' Gallery. At first the parishioners refused their consent but finally agreed on his undertaking to bear the expense and that each farm should have its own seat and each pew be fitted with a door.

The old pews had been installed about 1798 about 50 years before. Not long enough to require replacing but that is my opinion. The old pews were probably higher and panels from the old pews were incorporated into the new. My own contribution on this subject is that I find them most uncomfortable especially around the nether regions. A plot, I was going to

say an unholy plot (but that cannot be right) to get you off your butt and down on to your knees - just to relieve the pressure you understand.

The faculty to remove the Singers' Gallery and the re-arrangement of the pews was dated 1st August 1853.

The population of the parish then numbered around 390. The number of seats to be provided was 224 -

Organ loft	7
22 seats in the nave, 4 each	88
15 seats in North Aisle, 5 each	75
Chancel	14
5 seats, North Aisle (children 8 each)	40
Total	224

I think that it was a pity that the Singers' Gallery was removed. It couldn't have been doing much harm tucked away up there in the corner. I have read that the Victorians were in the habit of 'tidying up' architecturally speaking and left the world a poorer place. Then who are we to criticise with our concrete boxes and vertical slums?

You cannot now see the sealed up entrance to the Gallery from inside of the tower. Church records show various items of expenditure for musical instruments. In 1783 a bass viol was bought. That was a stringed instrument, a sort of fiddle. In 1823 a clarinet was mended and a flute purchased.

The pulpit was erected in 1724 at the cost of £36. A 'two dicker' pulpit it is surmounted by the figure of an angel with a trumpet. It is thought that at one time there was a sounding board above it. The stone work of a much earlier pulpit is concealed beneath it. Apostles are depicted on the panels. In the 1784 parish accounts there is an item relating to the setting up the apostles at the cost of £6.6.0. This may relate to these panels.

The font is of early sixteenth century design and has an attractive wooden cover of late 17th century work. Fonts were not normally installed in early churches, baptisms being carried out in the open air at the nearest spring or stream. In consequence the entrance to the graveyard was generally on the side nearest such water.

The broken bowl in one corner of the porch, on the right as you enter, could have been the original font as it appears to be of very early workmanship.

I see that it has stopped raining, we could have another look at the outside of the Church.

Just above the entrance to the Porch is a sundial erected in 1820. I am sorry but it's raining again - in we go.

Up to about the 17th century babies were baptised by being immersed naked into the water. This must have been a toughening up exercise to prepare them for all the afflictions waiting for them. The thing to do of course would be to arrange to be born in the summer. King

Ethelred on being dunked into the font protested in the only way that he knew - "He did in the water what he ought not to have done". The old font in the Porch is a wee bit small for sub-aqua infants and may just be a stoop for holy water. I think that we should settle for that.

As we have been on our feet for some time it may be a good idea to have a sit down. Looking up you will notice that the ceilings are semi-circular barrel ceilings divided into panels by oak beams.

I don't want to worry you but you are sure to notice that the Chancel Arch isn't exactly upright.

"In 1946 the abutments of the Chancel Arch were measured for inclination (to find out how much it leans). The North abutment (lateral or side to side support) was measured from a nail 10 feet above the floor of the North Aisle and was found to lean towards the North 2" in 10 feet or at an angle of 57 minutes. (A minute, as you know, is a sixtieth part of a degree - so you could say that it is about one degree out of true.) The South abutment was measured on the buttress outside the Church and was found to lean South 3.8 inches in 10 feet or at an angle of one degree 50 minutes." Col. Ramsden wrote this about 40 years ago. I have only added an interpretation of some of the words. I am assured that there has been no further inclination since that date. I don't want to worry you but my inclination is that we should move, just in case.

I like the small colourful window in the south wall of the Chancel. From its widely spread splay it could have been a 'Squint' giving a view of the altar from outside the Church. It contains fragments of ancient stained glass.

The Screen, acting as a door to the Bell Tower was originally part of a Chancel Screen in St. Mary Major Church in Exeter. Around about fifteen years ago when plans were made to demolish that Church part of the Screen was moved to Offwell with the aid of grants. (The other part was taken to St Mary's Steppes. In any event the Screen ended up with St. Mary in one way or the other.)

Over the years the Screen has been ruined by coats and coats of varnish and linseed oil. Fortunately since coming to Offwell the medieval painting has been restored. With the removal of the grime the rich colours are now revealed. The four panels at the base once depicted saints, unfortunately only those on the right are now visible. The Cornice depicts a row of brightly coloured Angels. It is a very attractive door.

The door of course leads us to the Bell Tower. Our bell Ringers are rather elevated. They don't do their ringing at ground level but one floor up. As we go up the stairs I recall that Col. Ramsden noticed that the outline of the old doorway to the Singers' gallery could be seen. I have tried to find it but have had no luck. The wall has had several layers of white wash and emulsion since his day and you can't now see the join.

In the reign of Edward VI (that is about the middle of the 16th century) Off well Church had only four bells. The 2nd and 5th tills are of pre-reformation date.

Parish churches at that time would have had at least two bells with the older one being inscribed with the name of the patron saint of the church - this would be our 5th bell. There were evidently three ancient bells, two that we can account for and the other one must have been re-cast in 1853 thus producing the 4th bell. The 6th bell is a fairly recent addition being donated by Capt. Welch-Thornton. He had shown great interest in the bell ringing and wanted to join the ringers. Sorry, but we've no room, there are only five bells they said. Right said he, we'll get another bell.

Up to 1822 the Ringers always celebrated with a ding dong every year on Guy Fawkes night but from that year they agreed to ring in the New Year instead.

Our bell ringers are enthusiastically following the ancient art of pealing bells which has been carried to perfection in England. Offwell ringers have certainly been very active over the years frequently being mentioned in early Parish records. Ringing for Coronation days, for victory against the French etc. They are still at it. Listen to the bells on a fine summer evening. The sun is sinking in the west. Bells across the meadow and all that sort of thing. So delightful, so English. I love the sound of bells. Unfortunately where we are in the village we are almost out of range ... especially if we shut the windows and sit in the back room ... I am only jolting, of course.

Coming out of the Ringers Platform on the stairs wind upward getting narrower and narrower letting in light between the steps and fearful draughts through the tiny windows. I puff away ever upwards my size nines groping for the next step - my hands seeking something solid to grasp. Not only am I puffing I am now huffing. That last English king put it most succinctly and I am talking about King Richard III, "I am not built for sportive tricks". Anyway here we are at the top. You get a splendid view of the village up here.

I would like to say a word of appreciation for the gift of the Victory Flag Post by Col. Ramsden. He must have been too modest to do this himself. In his history he mentions it in passing. It is a very robust structure standing strong and secure at the top of the tower. A fitting monument to him.

Now we have to go down those dreadful stairs. Do go carefully. I would suggest that you go down backwards.

We have more or less finished our guided tour but there are one or two scraps of information that might be of interest to you. (Actually they should have been slotted into the script at the appropriate place but being a bit of an idiot and an incompetent they got overlooked and if you think that I am going to re-type dozens of pages you have another think coming ...)

Take the Arms of the Monarch. You see them in a lot of churches. The earliest Arms in Devon are those of Elizabeth I at Cheriton Bishop. The Arms of Charles II are quite common in the West Country. At one time the Royal Arms had to be displayed as well as texts. Texts were boldly painted on to the walls. Georgian texts are coloured red and employ Roman style lettering; earlier Elizabethan texts are in black. One has to assume that the artists over the years didn't stand back and say 'Oh, I rather think that red would be a nice colour for a change'.

An entry in the church records ‘Lamp black for writing the sentences and the King’s Arms’ (1737). During re-decorating in September 1950 traces of a text and decorative painting were found under the distemper above the Chancel Arch on the side facing the Nave. The only letters that could be deciphered were ‘For’ in black. At the same time traces of an earlier Royal Arms were found above the present Royal Arms. These must have been of early Georgian date as the ‘G’ of G.R. was plainly seen.

Apart from the wooden screen across the Chancel Arch, there was also one across the North Aisle enclosing a private chapel for the Collins family of Colwell with a panel led arch opening into the Chancel. This is, as you will recall, where there is a memorial stone to the Collins family who are buried in the vault underneath. (Currently underneath the organ.)

Dean Jerimiah Milles was Precentor (member of the clergy in general control of musical arrangement, ranking next to the Dean) of Exeter Cathedral from 1747-1784. He made notes of many Devon Parish Churches. Regarding Offwell Church he said: “*It has five bells. On the woodwork of the Screen is carved this coat armour. (Heraldic insignia). Gules 4 Lozenges Ermin.* (these must have related to John Dynham, the patron who presented John More to the Rectory (1488). ‘*In the Chancel are monuments of the Southet family.*’ It is thought that the Screen and the Monuments were removed some time after 1820. One of the Southcott monuments is now in the north Aisle.)

“*Mayne sold this Manner (sic) and the inhabitants enfranchised their land!*” (there was a family of Maine in the village about 1691).

Mr W. Northam told Col. Ramsden in November 1950 that he helped to dig the trench across the Nave during the installation of the existing heating system about the year 1898 and found many skeletons. They must have belonged to a much earlier date before the seats were allocated in 1658.

I like St. Mary’s for it is properly proportioned. Not too much gilt and bare of ostentation yet not bare of beauty. Not too many memorials on the walls to sadden the heart. Not too much stained glass to dazzle the eye and enough plain glass to let in the Light. Would that it were possible to see it with the Singers’ Gallery and the screen intact. Even better, to be able to meet those masons and carpenters and common labourers who built this church. To them, maybe just another job of work. But wouldn’t it be nice to shake them by the hand to thank them and say ‘Well done’.

Isn’t it funny, we dote with pride upon Great Uncle John’s old cabinet (circa 1790, badly restored, four dubious legs and a faked drawer), probably Victorian, would fetch about £500 at auction - if you were very lucky - but give very little thought to this heirloom that has been in the Offwell Family for generations.

That’s about it then. Before we venture outside may I remind you that the Lord loves a cheerful giver. You look fairly happy and wouldn’t it be nice for Him to hear a gentle tinkle of coins into the box as you go out. Thank You.

Until the Lych Gate and path from the Eastern side of the Church were made early in the 19th century, access to the South Porch was by a path and steps, as shown in the sketch from 'The Church-yard Yew'. They say that entrance to sacred places from the south or sunny side is a custom dating back to pre-historic time and that entrance porches were nearly always on the south side of Churches.

The practice of putting up notices in the Church Porch is of great antiquity. The grave yard was a meeting place and public notices were given out there, at first by a 'Crier' and later in writing - Church door notices. Martin Luther, you will recall, nailed 95 propositions (against the sale of Indulgencies) to the Wittenburg Church door. That was a heck of a lot of banging and it was heard all over Europe: But it didn't do the Church door much good.

From time to time excess soil has to be removed otherwise the Church itself would get buried thereby being translated to a very Low Church. In 'The Churchyard Yew' the Rev. J. G. Copleston mentions a removal of soil. First the poetic bit and then his footnote.

The mould, which time long gath'ring round the Church
Had heap'd unseemly o'er their father's bones;
And lowering, but not levelling, transferr'd
The hallow'd earth that clos'd around each wall,
To peaceful rest upon thy half-bar'd roots.
Hence sprung new vigour, and thy grateful trunk
Evinc'd vitality restor'd. - I joy
To see the tribute not bestow'd in vain (etc. etc.)

What he is saying is that the soil removed from the graveyard and placed around the roots of his favourite Yew tree acted as a jolly good compost. I like copying these old verses because it's about the only time that I get to use me colons and semi-colons. But why in the heck can't he write restored instead of restor'd there are about half a dozen of them in those lines of poetry.

Now to the footnote. "The Archdeacon having ordered the soil accumulated near the church to be removed, and the surface on the north side to be generally lowered, the displaced earth was deposited round the then fast decaying, but since fast reviving Yew-tree. The parishioners were invited to see the graves of their respective friends identified, and formed again in due order. This was carefully attended to by all concerned, in the year 1825."

This brings us to Yew Trees in general. For myself I cannot get worked up about them. The planting of Yews in graveyards is a relic of a very early pagan custom. They were a symbol of grief. Their planting was encouraged in the middle ages for the production of bowstaves. English yew bows however were not highly valued being priced at 2/- against 6/8d for foreign bowstaves imported from Venice, Spain and the Hanseatic Towns. These were made from specially grown trees about 6 to 8 inches in diameter and planted closely together to promote long straight trunks without any lower branches. English yew trunks were too crooked and knotty for bow making. The wood is hard and close grained and splits readily. Churchyards were not then enclosed and cattle wandered about all over the place. Knowing that the yew is very poisonous the farmers made sure that their stock kept out of the

Churchyard.

Male yews are much more poisonous to cattle and horses than the female yew. Not many people know that.

At one time branches of yew trees were carried in the procession on Palm Sunday to symbolise palm branches.

The large yew south east of the Chancel was probably planted about 1650 and the one north east of the Chancel in 1808. According to the Rev. J. G. Copleston - "This young tree was brought, in the year 1808, from its solitude in the pleasure grounds now belonging to the Bishop of Llandaff to the spot, from whence, it is most probable, the seed it sprung from had been originally conveyed by some tenant of the woods."

There is a third large yew against the garden of Offwell Barton Farm House now known as The Burton (south of the Tower). Col. Ramsden did some calculations in 1947 on the rate of growth of yew trees based on the formula of one foot increase in the diameter every 65 years. The ages of the first two trees seemed to tally but the third yew, being a double tree didn't. It is thought however, that this tree must have been planted about the time that the Offwell Burton Farm House was built, that would be around 1804.

We have our share of memorials in the church, mostly Victorian and generous with praise for the departed. Later tablets are more modest. The church door you will notice is a memorial to John Welch-Thornton with the inscription on a small plate. Beneath the arch which separates the chancel from the aisle is a stone slab set in the floor. (You will have to my word for it because the organ is set squarely on top of it...) It is a memorial to the Collyns family. The Collyns family purchased Colwell from the Franklins in 1600. Col. Ramsden believed that the Franklins emigrated to America about the year 1700 and the famous American Benjamin Franklin - who invented the lightning conductor and helped the Declaration of Independence - was a descendant. In the Widworthy parish registers no less than five members the Franklin family bore the name of Benjamin between the years 1618 and 1682.

Nearby on the north wall is a memorial to Joanna Southcott. When I first saw it years ago I thought that it referred to *the* Joanna Southcott, the visionary and prophetess. That Joanna was born in 1750, a daughter of a farmer in Gittisham. To my receptive mind, I don't scoff at prophecies - the bible is full of them - her prophecies were so shadowy be almost invisible. She did however attract a large following in her day. Reminds me of a joke, Fortune teller to her "Would you rather I didn't tell you about your fatal accident?" I really must stop telling jokes in church. Come to think of it He must have a sense of humour. Yes, He must have, with all our clowning about and insane behaviour...

Further along the north wall we have the Royal Coat of Arms painted by Bernard Barton who lives in the village. To the left of the Arms is the text of the Lord's Prayer and on the right The Creed. Below is a bronze plaque to the Memory of those who died in the First World War. (The decorative iron gates to the entrance to the churchyard were also to their memory.) Alongside is the memorial to the dead of the Second World War. This oak tablet incorporates six pieces of carved oak from Jacobean altar rails originally part of Bramley Church in

Hampshire. It was made by the late W.H.Farmer, Churchwarden and village carpenter and donated by the late Capt. J. N. Welch-Thornton.

Stone tablets on church walls give me an uncomfortable feeling. Perhaps it is a cold reminder of my own mortality. I shuffle along the walls and read of death in all its disguises. This one so young, so loved. This one so brave, so tragic. Always the fond remembrance. That stone cold certainty of the life to come. 'Gone to seek her reward' - that can be taken either way... 'Gone to his rest'. What after a lifetime of crippled idleness or from a bed of interminable pain and despair? Surely they will say to the Gatekeeper "Let me in to do some honest rewarding work and to Hell with resting".

Having circumnavigated the four walls and stumbled through the porch out into the sunshine and comparative warmth of the graveyard I decided that death was not for me but for other people.

The children are in the playground ringing with laughter and shrill shrieks of fun playing 'Ring a ring of roses and we all fall down' and I go home for my tea.

6. THE MAN WHO SERVED HIS KING

Thomas Jones M.A., B.D. Rector of Offwell 1632 -1642

The Rev. Jones was reputed to be a man of good learning and a very good preacher. He kept a large and hospitable house and was very charitable to the poor. He was very zealous and industrious in the service of the king. He was taken into custody at Tiverton for preaching an anti-parliamentary sermon. The House of Commons, no less, had ordered his arrest on 23rd January 1640-41.

In the following year he was seized with one of the prince's servants at Taunton and detained for some weeks in the castle as a 'malignant' - the term then given to royalists. He was again taken prisoner and robbed of £80 when attempting to rejoin the Royalist Army in Cornwall. He was released on the defeat of the Parliamentary forces. (One wonder, he was doing with that amount of money about his person - a large sum for those days. He was obviously employed by the Royalists on some service of importance. Certainly it is known that on one occasion he was sent from Devizes to Oxford to obtain a supply of horses.) On his release and return to Offwell he gave public thanks for his deliverance and was in consequence taken into custody again! After an escape from that confinement he was summoned to appear at the Sessions for neglecting the Parliamentary fasts and for superstitiously observing Good Friday. He received only rebukes and threats on this occasion.

From all this it is very apparent that Thomas Jones held very strong views, a dedicated and courageous man. He was well known to the Parliamentary faction and they did not hesitate to obtain retribution. His Parsonage was plundered seven times. A fine organ which stood in the hall was broken to pieces by a party of cavalry from the garrison at Lyme Regis. Later when the Earl of Essex' army marched into the west a party from it ransacked his house carrying away and destroying his very choice and valuable collection of books.

Parish records indicate that he continued to live in Offwell after 1642 (the date he ceased as

Rector) for he signed the Register on the occasion of the death of his daughter, Marie who died on 24th November 1644. His family life was tragic. His first wife Susanna died and his second wife Frances died in childbirth following the birth of a daughter, Mary who only lived for six days. Three of his children were sent away to Ireland for safety and two to London. At one time his persecutors threatened to carry off his aged father (86 years old) as a prisoner.

It would seem that his passionate Royalist opinions rubbed off on to his parishioners. Not only did he continue to live in Offwell for a number of years - probably until the spring of 1646 when the Royalists lost control of this part of the country but his flock gave his successor short shrift. This was Robert Dacie (or Dacy) put in as Rector by the County Committee and a Parliamentary man. The villagers accused him of raping the miller's wife. This is in itself a peculiar form of accusation. I would have thought that the miller's wife would have accused him! Anyway, he was acquitted but it must have given Robert Dacie some sleepless nights for this was a capital offence. One must remember that there was great bitterness at the time and people did not scruple to bring the most outrageous charges on the flimsiest pretexts.

The persecuted Rev. Thomas Jones left England for Rotterdam where he died some time before the Restoration (1660).

7.THE OLD PARSONAGE AND THE ORIGINAL RECTORY

Two sources appear to give us valuable information about these two buildings and yet appear to contradict each other. (I did say earlier on that confusion surrounds them.) The basic facts appear to be that the Old Parsonage, one mile north east of the church was sacked and burned down in the Civil War. Since the Civil War there was a Rectory House adjacent to the Church.

1) In the Glebe Terrier compiled by the Rev. J. B. Copleston in 1789 he lists a) The Parsonage House with Barn, Cow Linhay etc. purchased from the Rev. Mr Mitchell and annexed for ever to the said Rectory as a Parsonage House, in consideration where of a Faculty was applied for, and obtained for taking down the two houses formerly belonging to the same. (In other words the Rev. bought two houses and the land from the Rev. Mitchell and built the Rectory.) b) On the ground called the Parsonage Ground a Barn and Cow linhay and Orchards etc. all adjacent to Parsonage Lane (which is the lane from the main road (A35) down to Cleave Farm) and refers to the Parsonage burned down in the Civil War.

2) The Rev. J. G. Copleston wrote a poem called 'The Churchyard Yew' and in his notes to that poem written in 1832 said. - *The original Rectory House stood at the distance of above a mile to the north east of the church, where, not many years since "a few torn shrubs the place disclosed". At present a barn only marks the site. The Vicarage stood opposite the churchyard, eastward, near the beech mentioned in the sixth line of the poem. This was a very mean dwelling. Labourers now living were born in it. The old Rectory was a very respectable habitation of the kind, as might be inferred from the account given in a subsequent note, of the plunderings it underwent during Cromwell's Rebellion.*

Both these Glebe Houses now taken down, were standing about 50 years ago, when the

present Rectory House was annexed to the living, together with two acres of land, by my father, then the incumbent and patron. It had been occupied by the Rev. Robert Rous, Rector of Offwell, for many years before his death in 1741, for the sake of residing near the church.'

At first glance it would seem that the Rev. J. G. Copleston is saying that both these glebe houses now taken down, were standing about 50 years ago when the present Rectory was annexed to the living. Unfortunately he only mentions one house - the Vicarage - and implies that the Parsonage (burned down in the Civil War) was one of them. Very confusing. He is comparing the mean and rather humble Rectory (near the church) with the more splendid habitation burnt down in the Civil War. This Rectory (near the church) was the old Rectory occupied by the Rev. Robert Rous and not the original Rectory otherwise known as the Parsonage. The Rev. J. B. Copleston pulled this old Rectory down and built his new Rectory on the site and this later became known as the Old Rectory as we know it today and the new Rectory occupied by our own vicar, has nothing to do with any of this, for which, I am sure, he is eternally grateful.

8. THE COPLESTONS OF OFFWELL

Coplestons have been Rectors of Offwell without a break from 1773 to 1954 a very remarkable achievement and their imprint is everywhere.

John Bradford Copleston was the first of the family to have held the living, (his sister Anne had married John Vye the previous Rector who held the office for a short time before becoming the Rural Dean of Honiton). He was a Prebendary of Exeter as was his grandfather. His father, Edward Copleston was the Rector at Tedburn St Mary. One could say that the church was in his blood. John Bradford Copleston's descendants continued the good work supplying the Church of England with three Bishops, eight priests and a diocesan layreader.

Among his female descendants one was a missionary, four married priests and two of their children became priests. They could hardly say that the world owed them a Living

Edward Copleston, the eldest son of John Bradford Copleston, was a very remarkable man. He became a Fellow of Oriel at the age of 19 and a Tutor of the College at 21. At 24 he became Rector of Offwell. In 1804 he handed the family living over to his younger brother John Gains Copleston aged 24. He became Provost of Oriel in 1814 and Dean of Chester in 1826. He resigned both of these appointments on being made Bishop of Llandaff and Dean of St- Paul's. He was an excellent administrator both professionally and in his private affairs. On January 1st 1821 he wrote in his diary - 'On the 1st January in the year 1800, I found myself possessed after all demands, of £21. Upon making a similar estimate this day, after an interval of twenty-one years, I reckon my whole property (including furniture, plate, books, wine, pictures, etc.) at not less than £20,000. Yet I trust that there has been no sordid saving; and I am sure there has been a great deal of useless and injudicious expenditure.'

This was a man of considerable energy - he thought nothing of walking from Oxford to Offwell. (The Coplestons still are enthusiastic walkers.) He built (well not him all on his own, you understand but come to think of it with all that energy nothing about the Bishop would surprise me) as I say he built Offwell House, the Vestry, the stone cover and pump for the Well, the School, the Tower, the Rectory, the old Rectory that is, the two Lodges to Offwell

house and probably much else besides. In the words of the song about the English garden - if I've left any out I trust that you will pardon. One writer said "that he must be responsible for the group of cottages in the village with rustic porches". This sounds like an accusation and I don't know why he should be blamed for this, in those days everything was rustic, almost tediously so. All this building must have cost a pretty penny. The Rectory alone which was built in the Elizabethan style in 1845 cost £1800.

The Bishop's Tower, of which more anon, drew quite snide remarks such as the letter to the editor of the Sunday Times dated 17/3/1935.

"...Talking about Follies, Bishop Copleston who was Rector of this parish, where his descendants still live, also had a diocese in Wales and built the Tower in order that he might be able to view his See from afar."

You can actually see the sea from the top of the Town but that is nothing to do with it. This quip was doing the rounds long before 1935 and was, I think, a bit unkind. The Bishop's intention was to supply work and water for the village.

He died on 14th October 1849 aged 73 and is buried in Llandaff Cathedral.

John Gaius Copleston, the second son of John Bradford Copleston was Rector of Offwell from 1804 until 1841. He married 1 Harriet Townsend of Honiton and had twelve children (this making up for his elder brother, the Bishop, who never married).

I am very much Indebted to him in that his poem 'The Churchyard Yew' is full of information about Offwell. A pocket history written 150 years ago full of interesting tidbits.

He tells of the tragic loss of his younger brother - "Lieutenant James William Copleston, R.A. aged 22, third son of the Rev. John Bradford Copleston, having come home on leave from Gibraltar to England, sailed again for that station, November 1812 in the 'Brunswick' transport, and was never afterwards heard of by his friends. The vessel was supposed to have been not sea-worthy, and to have floundered."

He goes on to tell us - "The following coincidence of facts connected with Offwell Church is memorable and in domestic annals interesting. On Sunday, 9th November 1829, the Rev. John Bradford Copleston, Vicar of St Thomas the Apostle, formerly Rector of this Parish, and still patron, read the morning service here, and his grandson, the Rev. John Gay Copleston, Vicar of Kingsey, Bucks, preached. In the afternoon of the same day, his second son, the Rector of this Parish, read the prayers, and his eldest son, once also the Rector, then Bishop of Llandaff, preached. Thus three generations, and three successive Rectors, partook in the duty of the Church on the same day."

Frederick Elford Copleston was the last of a long line of Copleston Rectors of Offwell Church. His ministry ended in 1954 and he died in Exmouth in 1959.

The Coplestons have spread far and wide - and that is just the Offwell Coplestons. Other branches of the family Coplestones and Copplestones have branched out also. One is apt to

miss-spell Copleston but if you remember that the Offwell Coplestons have one P and one E you are quite safe. Frederick Elford Copleston tried to complicate matters by marrying a very distant relative who was a Coplestone with two E's probably a second cousin several times removed.

Muriel Reson, who lives in London is a very enthusiastic Copleston family researcher. She bounds uphill and down dale like a sheepdog rounding up stray Coplestons bringing them back to the shedding ring and proceeds to place them into their appropriate slot in the family tree. My thanks to her for all the help that she has given me.

9. OFFWELL HOUSE ESTATE

Col. Ramsden recorded extracts from the title deeds relating to this property. They are rather detailed and too lengthy to include here. I offer an extract from the extracts of the more interesting items. Offwell House itself doesn't come into the story until later, around 1837.

The earliest Title Deed is dated 31st March 1649 when T. Collyn granted a lease to a Mr Wish for 99 years for £30 for tenement and dwelling house plus 30 acres of land and 15 acres in Offwell Wastes. This property stood on the site of the present Old Rectory. It was pulled down by Dr E. Copleston when he built the Old Rectory for his brother, the Rev. J. G. Copleston, Rector of Offwell 1804-1841. The same parcel (House plus 30 acres plus 15 acres) passed through the following hands over a period of about 100 years.

12.1.1682	T. Southcot to Anne Collyns (quarter part of the same holding now in occupation of Philip Wish)
9.7.1686	Anne Collyns to T. Southcot for her daughter Dorothy. (The land is now described as The Mead Plot, Three Brooms, Two Oades (? Hoods) and Scrubbet.)
10.7.1686	Assignment Anne Collyns to Dorothy Collyns.
30.12.1726	Declaration by Michael Hayman and Anne Hayman. Anne Hayman was apparently a niece of Anne Collyns.
10.1.1726	Sale by M. and A. Hayman to Rev. Robert Rous, Rector of Offwell. Consideration £575.
14.1.1745	Sale by J. and T. Rous (sons of Rev. Robert Rous) to Bridget Ford
29.9.1773	Sale by Rev. J. Michel to Rev. J. B. Copleston for £350. (This was for Vie House only)
15.3.1782	Sale of land by Rev. J. Michel to Emanuel Dommett.
Hill Close	8 acres
Hoods	41½ acres
The Brooms	8 acres
Bowborn	5 acres (This is more commonly known as Boobarn)
Little Meadow	½ acre
Scrubbits	15 acres

As you can see this is not all that exciting so if you don't mind I'll revert to a narrative style.

Reference is made to a house then the property of Mr W. Farmer described as Smithy and Post Office. It was erected by R. Raddon and may be, 'the Little porcion which Raddon hath'

recorded in his description of Offwell Manor by Sir William Pole in his 'Description of Devonshire'.

Emanuel Letten appears in the documents for some reason or other. A very full and interesting account of the Offwell House Estate by a man who had known it all his life. This declaration was dated 2.5.1874. He believed that he was born on 1.1.1805. From the age of nine years until he was 27 he worked for the Rev. J. G. Copleston at the Old Rectory when he went away for 5 years, returning in 1837 to work for the Misses Copleston at Offwell House. The two ponds were built before 1832 and they commenced building Offwell House in 1837. The Offwell House, Gardens and Grounds were formed from: Little Penways, Great Penways, Round Penways, Long Penways. These properties were bought by Dr E. Copleston from J. Upham.

The Lower Lodge is on the site of a Cottage mentioned in a Deed dated 12.1.1754 then sold by Edward Phipp of Offwell, husbandman (farmer) to Edward Upham of Offwell, sergemaker for £6.10.0. Emanuel Letten relates that he went to school in this cottage. It was finally sold to Dr E. Copleston on 6.1.1836. I assume that it was demolished to be replaced by the Lower Lodge.

10. SHUFFLED OFF THIS MORTAL GOIL

A Play in Two Acts

Act 1

The scene is the Breakfast Room in the Rectory. The time - as near enough to 1810 as makes no odds. The Rector, John Gaius Copleston is reading his *Times*. He frequently peers over the top of the newspaper and over the top of his spectacles throwing nervous glances up and down the lane outside. His wife, Harriet, conscious of his highly agitated behaviour, is thinking 'Oh heck, here we go again' and waits patiently for the daily outburst.

Rector: I see that Wellington is doing very well.
Wife: (surprised) Yes dear would you like some more coffee?
Rector: No thank you. There he's back again.
Wife: Who? Wellington dear?
Rector: No, that scallywag Hooper. That's the third time that he has gone past this window. Ah! He's away down the hill now thank goodness. (pause) I don't think that it can go on for much longer.
Wife: (bewildered) What's that dear?
Rector: The War. Wellington has the measure of them you know. (long pause) It's his nose that is so disconcerting, especially at meal times.
Wife: They do say that his troops call him names, Old Beaky, I think.
Rector: No, not him. I'm talking about Hooper.
Wife: Ah yes. I have spoken to his mother about it.
Rector: And what did she say?
Wife: Well, she had tried bread poultices, that apparently only made it worse. It went all reddish blue and puffy. I suggested Comfrey.
Rector: Here comes old Raddon for his morning constitutional. Why do they always stare through the window? He should do something about that leg of his. A change of bandages would help. It is absolutely disgusting. Do you think that

your Comfrey would do him any good?
 Wife: I doubt it. Anyway you wouldn't get me within a mile of that leg.
 Rector: There's young William Bagwell. Good gracious he's actually pressing his nose against the window pane. Here, off with you! (folds up his *Times* and throws it at the window) Is Hooper's nose contagious? (pause) I don't think that it can go on for much longer you know.
 Wife: You said that before dear.
 Rector: No, not the War. This daily parade up and down outside our window. We are entitled to some privacy. (Starts to sob into his napkin, shoulders shaking with anguish and, as if in torment, gets up from the table, without even saying grace, knocking over his chair and blindly groping for the door mutters 'something must be done, etc.')

Wife: Oh dear. (Rings for the maid and bursts into tears).

Act 2

The Rector stands centre stage an important official looking document in his hand and he wears a happy smile. He reads from the document.

Rector: In the beginning of this year the road contiguous to the Parsonage turned through the waste commonly known as the Goil, agreeably to an order of two magistrates for so doing. By this alteration the public were much accommodated, the steep part of the hill being considerably eased, and the Parish are saved the expense of weiring such part of the said Goil as is converted into a road. The Parsonage house was at the same time enlarged towards the road.

The Rector acknowledges the cheers from the audience and exits left, smiling broadly.

Today if you go down the hill beside the church you will notice that the road turns away from the front of the old Rectory for some little way and then bends back to its original course.

The water course of the Goil was replaced by a stone culvert which runs close to the west front of the existing house. During the heavy rains of 1946 the water burst up from the culvert and through the carriageway.

11. IN MEMORIAM - 'WILL, A SOLDJOUR DIED 2nd NOVEMBER 1644'

This is an entry in the Parish Register. Poor Will, nobody knows anything about him, just a name. He probably followed his master to the war-not having much choice in the matter. Oh he'd heard all the old rhetoric from his guv'nor. "Will" he had said, "you and I are King's Men (or Parliamentary Men, according to which side he was on) and we must fight for what we believe in. We can't let those ranting, psalm singing Roundheads (or those fancy la de da Cavaliers) despoil and ravage our beloved England etc." Then followed a call to Will's chivalry, honour, bravery, sportsmanship, manhood, spirit of adventure and all those other absolutely splendid manly virtues which are neatly listed in any Thesaurus.

At the end of this pep talk young Will couldn't wait to get at those so-and-so Cavaliers (or

Roundheads). There was no stopping him. It didn't matter that he couldn't understand what some of the words meant. His heart told him what his brain could not. He had pocketed the counterfeit coinage of patriotism and felt richer than all his tribe.

Anyway he marched off to war. He would remember later that that was the best part of the war. Well that was the easy bit. On a cold November day poor Will was laid to rest. His memorial - Will, A soldjour, died 2nd November 1644.

I wish we knew more about him. There is probably a nice portrait of his gov'nor decorating some parlour somewhere, but of Will we know nothing. Thinking about all this and those names of the war dead on a board, neatly lettered, neatly remembered and neatly buried. Not enough surely? Just names?

On 10th November 1946 a Remembrance Service was held in memory of three young men of Offwell who died in the war just ended (and to recall the names of the two men who died in the First World War). A memorial tablet was unveiled by Lt. Gen. E. A. Osborne C.B., D.S.O. The tablet was from a design by H. J. Yates and carved by W. H. Farmer. The Flag flew for the first time from the Victory Flagstaff on the Church tower. Seen close-to this flagstaff is a massive piece of construction. It was built by W. H. Farmer also and donated by Col. J. Ramsden C.M.G., D.S.O.

Here then I commend to you three men. I am sorry that their stories are so short but nearly fifty years have passed and even now memories fade. Providing they do not pass into history leaving just their names, as poor Will has done "A Soldjour" and nothing more then their epitaph will indeed be written in stone.

Lest we forget. 1939 - 19-15, Lest we forget

Three men from the Village never came back from the last War. One for each of the three services. We will remember them.

Charles Henry Baugh. Before he was called up Charles worked for the Devon County Council. He was posted to North Africa in 1942. (By a strange twist of fate Roy Richards from the village met him when Charles was on guard duty in Benghazi Docks. They had a chat and passed on the *Pullman's Weekly*.) Charles was killed crossing a mine field aged 32. He left his wife Mary, who still lives in the village, and two children Jean and David.

Stanley Gerald North. He was a quarryman before joining the Royal Navy in January 1940. He became an Able Bodied Seaman one year later. He was serving in the Destroyer *Janus* when he was killed during the attack against the port of Tarranto in southern Italy in January 1944, aged 24. His brother Leslie North still lives in Honiton.

Lorne Currie. He started his service career in the Royal Navy at 16 years of age later resigning his commission to settle in Kenya. He joined the RAF at the outbreak of the War and later volunteered for Bomber Command. It was while he was under training that he tragically walked into the spinning propeller of his Wellington Bomber and was killed. He left a widow and two children.

12. THE LEGEND OF THE DRUMMER STONE

This story is our very own. A story handed down over the years anti spiced with a sprinkling of imagination along the way. It is a story riddled with inconsistencies. Legends, I suppose are like that. Designed to be told by firelight. To be drawn to your chair edge by a good story. Truth takes a back seat. As I say, this is our very own legend and I promise not to harm it in any way.

You have probably heard or read stories that have made you sit up and declare, 'I don't believe it, it's against nature to do a thing like that' etc. Something is wrong. It doesn't gel. I'll set down the story as given to J. R. W. Coxhead by Commander R. Copleston R.N. in 1950. The Commander said that this story had been handed down through his family (*Legends of Devon*, by J. R. W. Coxhead. 1954)

After you have read the story I want you to answer one or two questions. If you are sitting comfortably I will begin.

Drummer's Stone

The pretty little village of Offwell, in East Devon, occupies a very pleasant situation at the head of a coombe running down into the lovely valley of the Offwell Brook.

By the village school a road leads northwards to a cross-ways on the main highway between Honiton and Axminster. This cross-roads, which is a well known stopping place for buses, is now known as Drummer's Stone but at one time was called Cotleigh Cross.

Many people waiting for a bus have probably wondered how the place received such a quaint name. Others, with enquiring minds, may have looked round for the stone and been unable to find it.

The Stone was situated about fifty yards to the north of the cross-ways, by the side of the road leading to the village of Cotleigh. It had been there since very ancient times and was a Parish Boundary Stone.

The legend of the Drummer's Stone is a sad one. The story goes back two hundred and fifty years to the close of the reign of William III.

During the month of July, in the year 1701, a drummer boy, whose ship had paid off at Plymouth, was trudging wearily towards his home. He had probably been at sea for quite a long spell and a large sum of money - possibly as much as three year's pay - was stitched into the belt round his waist. The lad had a companion, an unscrupulous shipmate, who was watching for an opportunity to get the money.

When they reached Cotleigh Cross, the drummer boy was feeling exhausted after walking so many miles. Seeing the great boundary mark by the wayside a short distance down the Cotleigh turning, he decided to sit down on the stone and rest awhile.

This was the opportunity the evil ruffian had been awaiting. The tired youth was an easy

victim to strangle.

After he had murdered the lad, the sailor took the belt containing the money and quickly disappeared. The next day the poor lad was found dead by the stone.

Ever since the tragedy the cross-way near the site of the boundary mark has been called 'Drummer's Stone'.

In the Offwell Parish Register the drummer's burial is recorded as follows: 'Unknown youth. July 11th 1701'.

The stone is no longer to be seen. About thirty years ago it was broken up by a gardener, ignorant of the fact that it was a Parish Boundary mark, in order to obtain material with which to make a rockery.

Col. Ramsden gives the following information regarding the Drummer Stone.

In 1701 the accounts of the Overseer of the Poor of Offwell Parish record under the expenses of John Wills, the Overseer, the following item of expense - 'For an horse and man to fetch stones for the Bounds of the Parish and for setting them up. £0.2.0.'

Among these stones, of which two are marked on the 6" Ordnance Map at the eastern end of Wilmington were -

1. The Drummer Stone

This lay about 50 yards north of B.M.653.2 at the Crossroads of the Cotleigh-Offwell road and the main Axminster-Honiton road, nearly half a mile north of Offwell Church.

It was unfortunately broken up about 1930 by a person who knew nothing of its importance and history.

According to local legend it marked the spot where a drummer was murdered during the Peninsular War.

Note -

1) A Drummer was murdered (not a Drummer Boy).

2) The boundary of the Parish has had many changes over the years. It seems strange however that the Boundary Stone should have been set 50 yards down the road to Cotleigh. I have been told by people who should know that it was at the cross roads. It is interesting but the Ordnance Survey Map of 1959 shows a Boundary Line, defaced and undefined, crossing the Cotleigh Road 50 yards north of the crossroads. I give up!

Turning to the Coxhead's version.

1) A Drummer Boy? Whose ship had paid off at Plymouth. Had a fortune around his waist. Walked from Plymouth! Why didn't he catch the bus? He could afford it. How did he get out

of the navy after just three years? Once in you were in for life. How did he keep his fortune secret from his thieving shipmates? Three years pay from the Navy didn't amount to a fortune ...

The two youngsters probably took two days to walk from Plymouth. At the end of the second day they would both be tired. The strangler and the strangled. Messy but possible.

2) A Drummer? Time expired or returning home as a wounded discharge from the army? The Drummer sounded the Advance, Retreat etc., during the battle. He could easily have acquired a small fortune on his campaigns. Looting the dead and wounded on a battlefield, sacking towns, etc. Steer clear of him if you intend to do him harm. He is a dangerous animal!

3) A Drummer, in other words, a commercial traveller. The word is no longer used here but is still used in the U.S.A.

Here is a Pedlar at the end of a successful day. His pockets a jingling with coin. A target for any foot-pad. He is my choice as the victim.

4) Why should two weary youngsters turn and travel 50 yards down the Cotleigh Road just to sit on the boundary stone? They would surely just flop out onto the bank at the cross-road.

5) Why strangle his victim? A whack on the head and tipped into the pond. (Old maps show a pond on the north west corner of the cuss-road.)

6) When did it happen? This is a puzzle. I would accept the 1701 version. If the stone was set up around the time of the incident the naming of the stone would naturally refer to the murder. If the murder occurred before 1701 the spot would be well known as the site of the murder and again attached to the naming of the stone.

It is unlikely therefore that the murder occurred later than 1701. (If you can't follow my reasoning I don't blame you!) One final item - it doesn't follow that the entry in the Parish Register refers to the Victim. That a youth died in the same year as the setting up of the stone could be coincidental. You will recall that Coxhead said that the stone 'had been there since very ancient times'. If this is so then we are indeed up the paddle without a creek.

The Drummer Stone

He had just returned from Flanders. A lifetime of soldiering behind him. A time expired Drummer. A pack slung across his shoulder containing all that he had. A few gold trinkets and coins - loot and pickings from the battlefields. Enough to give him a new beginning. Home to Colyton. Plans in his head for a more restful and tranquil life. No more drumbeats. Drumming the advance, the rally, the charge and the retreat...No more ...He had seen the death of too many men answering his rat-a-tat-tats ...too many.

Damnation, he'd drunk far too much at that last ale house. But it's a long road from Exeter especially with a musket ball grinding away in yer leg. Bragged a bit too. Well with a bunch of wide eyed youngsters what d'yer expect? Even scared himself with the stories he'd told!

B'god t'was good to taste English ale again! Didn't like the look of those two strangers against the wall...Should be home within the hour ...I wonder how Martha ...curses! I've missed the turn off down Featherbed Lane. This must be the lane to Cotleigh. If I turn right here I can join the Colyton Road...dark as pitch...what's that noise? AAAGGGHHH!!

Local legend has it that a soldier was murdered at this spot ... a stone was erected here ... the Drummer Stone.

13. THE POOR INFIRM, WEAK AND DESPISED

The new Poor Law was introduced in 1834. It proposed to set up workhouses supervised by Boards of Guardians responsible for a group of parishes known as a union. The union workhouse was a harsh place. Charles Dickens' descriptions are heart-rending. The diet was of the meanest, the discipline the harshest. Families broken up. Old Darby and old Joan separated in the evening of their lives. (Mind you, some might have been glad at the separation.) A workhouse was a bleak place designed to deter all but the most desperate from seeking assistance. Designed as a warning to the scrounger and the work shy. Designed to teach people the Victorian values of hard work and discipline. (Victoria didn't come to the throne until 1837 but you know what I mean.)

The Poor Houses, which the union workhouses were designed to replace, were maintained by a rate on the parish and had served the community well for generations. People born in Offwell worked all their lives in the village, married, brought up their families, became old and infirm. In the Poor House at least they were with their own Offwell folk. They could pass the time of day with old friends and in their evening hours sit in the sun and dream ...if it didn't rain of course.

The new workhouses became, as one historian has remarked, irrelevant to the problem of poverty. It did not seek to relieve the poor, it rejected them.

This was a world where seven year old children were expected to work from 5.30 am until 9.30 pm - an 83 hour week - with an hour for dinner, where the overseer would use kicks and blows to keep the children going whenever they faltered through tiredness.

But cheer up and dry your eyes, relief was in sight. In 1833 a factory act was passed with a view to improve working conditions. Children between the ages of nine and thirteen could only work eight hours a day. I know that there were no factories in Offwell. I merely use these facts to demonstrate society's attitude to the poor. The treatment of children in this manner was accepted. In the village parents would have sent their daughters to learn lace making. They started young, about four or five years of age because it was thought that only thus could they acquire the necessary dexterity. In wretched conditions and in poor light they bent over their cushions for long hours to supplement the family income. All this was the norm. Looking back from this place in history to those days one might be excused for asking why such well intentioned people as say, David Livingstone chose to go to Africa to convert the heathen when he might have stayed at home and preached to the mill owners and the drunken labourers. Come to think of it if I had the choice of preaching to a regiment of wide eyed Matabele or to a bunch of Glasgow inebriates outside the pub on a Saturday night I wouldn't hesitate. I would polish up my Swahili or whatever the language is and head for the

Limpopo. However, we digress, back to the Poor House.

You might be interested in the kind of people who received assistance from the parish. This is an extract from the Poor Book dated 18/4/1693 and headed ‘An account of the persons to be relieved out of the Poor Book for the year ensuing’.

The amounts for the most part are in shillings and pence and payable monthly. I have tried to track down the date of death of each individual just to show how long they were ‘on the parish’ and have put these dates alongside their names. Some, surprisingly, were not entered in the Register which seems to indicate either that the person didn’t die, were old soldiers who only faded away, moved out of the parish, which was most unlikely or it was just slap dash recording. I think that it must be the latter, otherwise it would seem to illustrate what the Lord said... “The poor always ye have with you”.

Thomas Hunt aged and infirm both fur himself and for	6.00
Jonne Stile an idiot (11/8/1709)	4.00
Thomas Smith aged and infirm	6.00
Joane Nicholl, her husband being gone for a soldior	4.00
Ann Batt a lunatick. (8/2/1705)	8.00
Anne Roberts aged and infirm (7/3/1696)	2.08
Mary Vildey aged and infirm	2.08
John Rodden aged and infirm	6.00
Joyce Hawkins infirme (3/1/1709)	2.00
It is also agreed that Susan Birch, widow, shall have out of the Poor Book in regard to her great expense during the sickness and for the burial of her husband	£1.0.00

A Parish Meeting was held 2/11/1838 at the Five Bells Inn (where else?) to consent to the sale of the Poor House. This apparently comprised ‘two dwelling houses on a piece of waste ground near the churchyard and acted as a Poor House from time before memory’.

With the new Poor Law Act (which, if you have been paying attention, was in 1834) Parish Poor Houses were discontinued. The actual site of these houses isn’t precisely recorded. However, the Tithe Map of 1842 shows three cottages on the piece of ground now included in the churchyard, facing St. Mary’s Hall. Mrs. Northam is shown as the occupier, the Northams were landlords of the Five Bells Inn until comparative recent times. We know that the inn was on that site and it is reasonable to suppose the Poor Houses were alongside the Inn.

Coming back to the Parish Meeting a vote was taken and recorded as follows:

Name	For the Dissolution	Against the Dissolution
	Number of Votes as Owner	Number of votes as Ratepayers
Rev.J.G.Copleston	6	2
John Seagram	-	1

Wm.Ashford (Overseer)	-		1	
Thos.Bishop	-		1	
	6	+	5	
Total			11	Nil.

Signed. J.G.Copleston, Chairman.

One might be tempted to say ‘why bother’ but I suppose it made it all nice and legal.

14. FARMS ADD THE AGRICULTURAL SCENE

In June 1919 the Widworthy Court Estate was sold. Eighteen farms were included in the sale, two of which were Colwell Barton and West Colwell. Full details of these farms are given and are very interesting.

Agriculture had already started to decline in the last quarter of the 19th century. Farm Labourers were attracted by the better paid jobs in the towns or in the colonies where men, accustomed to hard work, sought a better return for their labour. The Great War saw a further decline and with the advent of machinery and modern methods put the kibosh on it completely. Farm Labourers today are a rare breed. Death of villages followed, schools closed and retired people like me plead guilty to rural trespassing. Here therefore are descriptions of farms and farm buildings as they were before the onset of this so called enlightened age.

Colwell Barton

The house is constructed of stone with a thatched roof. A double entrance hall with cupboards under the stairs. A Drawing Room with register grate. Dining Room with grate and cupboards, a large Kitchen with open hearth, Herald Range and a set of cupboards. A Dairy and a Washhouse with copper furnace.

There was a Pump and Well of water at the approach to the Washhouse. Two staircases lead to live Bedrooms. There was a walled Garden to the house on the south side.

The Farm Premises Consisted of - Stone built tiled roof Trap House, with a two divisioned Nag Stable and Loft with an approach from the main road. A stone built, tiled roof Cart Horse Stable with four Stalls and a Loft.

A stone built tiled roof Cow House for ten cows with a Bulls’ House fitted with Cribs, Mangers and Forebay and a Hay House at the end with a tallet Loft extending throughout.

Tiled Cow or Bullock Stalls to the thirteen with a Mangold House adjoining with a Loft.

A large Barn with a thatched Roof and a slate roof Pound House with a Cider Press and Apple Mill. A corrugated roof Round House on wheels, a two division Granary, fitted with corn bins with a tiled and thatched roof, a cellar and two small Poultry Houses. Also adjoining the road was a Piggery with a small yard. At the entrance to the Barton was a Wagon House with a thatched roof.

The Farm contained 207 acres.

West Colwell Farm

This was a smaller Farm comprising 114 Acres. The Farmhouse was stone built with a thatched roof and contained Front Entrance, Parlour with grate, a Kitchen with open hearth and ornamental fire-back dated 1819, with cupboards, a Back Kitchen with open hearth and baking oven and a small Breakfast Room with a fire-place.

A tiled lean-to Backhouse extended through the rear of the house with a cement and brick floor. The water supply was brought by pipes from the spring on the Farm to an iron water trough. There was a Dairy with a tiled floor, a Washhouse with a boiler and a Wood House. There were four Bedrooms and a Servant's Room.

The only other farms that are working these days are Offwell Barton in the centre of the village, Dullamore in Offwell Bottom and Eastleigh at the top of Fern Lane. Knowing my luck I am bound to have missed one or two. Come to think of it I needn't mention Eastleigh because it is just outside the Parish boundary. Hard luck! I am told however, on very good authority, that the Boundaries of the Parish will shortly be altered. If Eastleigh is then placed inside Offwell Parish I shall appear a proper Charlie. I play safe therefore and have mentioned it.

Roodloft or Tower Farm

This farm was purchased by the Bishop who later, around about 1843, built the Tower.

Tower Farm or Roodloft has been called Red loft and even Rude Laugh (but that may be a leg pull!) it was however still called Roodloft in the 1920s. It has a splendid position some 700ft. up and facing south. A wind pump served it to pump water to the property, being adjacent to the main Honiton-Axminster road provided the nearby Windmill Garage with its name. The Farmhouse renovated, altered and added to by the Bishop goes back to the 16th century.

The Tower is built of greystone and has a look-out Turret. It has a central spiral staircase with a room on each floor. On the occasion of my visit the building was unsafe and it was not possible to climb to the top. An angelic child, daughter of the then owners, declared that she had been right to the top. Unbelief clouded my countenance. I stared at the sealed door searching for a way upwards, finding none, I took a turn around the infant prodigy, searching for angel's wings. Finding none I was on the point of saying 'You little fibber' and more besides, when she must have noticed my disbelief for she chirped up 'I went up with my Daddy on a Fire Engine ladder'. Collapse of stout party, as they used to say.

15. JOG ON, JOG ON THE FOOTPATH WAY

Offwell is very fortunate in having a number of public Rights of Way and bridleways. These have been preserved despite opposition, objections and in some cases, obstruction. I suppose that if you had a footpath crossing your land you would start thinking about an Englishman's home is his castle etc. and that you shouldn't have to put up with all these people backing and forthing across your land, leaving gates open and generally disturbing the even tenor of your ways. One can understand the tensions and frustrations.

I am neutral in all this. I don't walk unless I have to. I admit that I have been dragged away during a post prandial nap. Had I been fully awake I would never have succumbed. "Come on Uncle, it's a beautiful afternoon, the sun is shining and we are going to see the bluebells". 'Oh heck' I thought 'not those bloody bluebells again'. I smile (purely for public consumption you understand) but think dark thoughts. But back to the footpaths.

The Parish Council's records over the years have shown a liberal sprinkling, pepper and salted in fact, with 'footpaths, bridges, styles, gates, repaired, painted, built etc. etc.'. You must agree that all this effort is not to be sneezed at- At meeting after meeting there has been genuine concern about maintaining these public rights of way.

This brings me to Footpath No. 13. What's all this about I hear you say. I will tell you.

About twenty years ago the footpaths and bridleways in the Parish were surveyed under the National Parks and access to the Countryside Act 1949. Each path was numbered. A list showing the paths' numbers and descriptions was prepared and is as listed in the appendix. Footpath No. 13 was described as follows -"A Footpath starting at the unclassified County Road 150 yards cast south east of the Club House of the Golf Course and proceeds north eastwards curving northwards through Barnsleigh Wood turning south eastwards through Pen Field across its junction with Footpath 17, passes to the southern end of the southern Fish Pond along the south eastern edge of Offwell Woods through an Orchard to join the Unclassified County Road opposite the Rectory in Offwell."

An objection was made to the inclusion of Footpath No. 13 and a Hearing was held. The objection was upheld. The Parish Council took it to Appeal and lost.

The Footpath is clearly marked on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1906. Now it wasn't sufficient to prove the existence of the footpath but prove that it was a Public Right of Way. That is a Path open to and shared by the people. A Footpath regularly used by the Public during a period of twenty years or longer unimpeded by the Owners or Occupiers of the land over which the path runs.

The Parish Council maintained that the path had existed from time immemorial. There had never been any indication from the Owners that they regarded the path to be private. Gates had never been locked. At one point a stile had been provided.

Six witnesses spoke for the Parish Council stating that they had used the Path frequently and had never been stopped by gates or the owners of the land.

The Path crosses over five properties and objections were raised by two owners or occupiers Both had allegedly been told by the previous occupiers that the Path was a public Right of Way.

Six witnesses spoke for the Objectors. They declared that there had been a notice board attached to a tree warning that it was private and that trespassers would be prosecuted. That there was a padlocked iron gate and a paling gate which was unusable. The path had become

overgrown and in some places showed no sign of use.

There you have it. The Parish Council lost.

Boating in mind the number of witnesses on each side one can say that it was a case of Six of one and half a dozen of the other. I have been dying to get that little witticism in and I do apologise most sincerely.

There is a sad post-script to add to this chapter. Mr. W. H. Farmer, church warden and Village Carpenter, collapsed and died during the Footpath dispute. He was a well loved member of the community. Being a Parish Councillor he was very much involved in the discordant and unhappy proceedings. His concern and obvious anxiety to see that right prevailed probably caused his death.

A list of Public Rights of Way currently in use is given in the appendix.

16. THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY

The railway passes through the northern part of Offwell Parish and was completed as an extension of the London and South-western Railway from Yeovil to Exeter and was opened on 19/7/1860.

Col. Ramsden, who was very interested in the geological aspect of such things, made a very thorough study of tire subject and I couldn't do better than to quote him verbatim.

“Although the Honiton Tunnel lies just outside the parish this seems a suitable place to preserve some record of a difficult piece of engineering, as the writer has had unusual opportunities of studying it, both in connection with its protection during the recent war, and wish its geology as a potential source of water supply for the neighbourhood.

Its eastern entrance is in Spilcombe Copse at a height of 432 feet above Ordnance Datum in the sandy clay of the Lower Cretaceous series, but it quickly passes into the red clay marl of the Triassic system, with its western portal at 460 feet OD. The sand bed immediately above the eastern entrance is a quicksand very full of water, which is said to have caused great difficulties in driving the tunnel. A few feet higher there is a layer of blue clay about 8 feet thick, with above it about 23 feet of very wet yellow sand. This is the source of very strong springs which now supply the Dairy Works at Seaton Junction, by a pipe line laid along the permanent way.

Before the tunnel was started, eight test pits were sunk to explore the strata, and to become ventilation shafts for the completed tunnel. Their positions can still be seen on the surface (1946), and are indicated on the attached map and section. Of these the second from the west entrance, was lined with brickwork as a ventilation shaft, but presumably owing to the difficulties with water and quicksand, was never carried through the roof of the tunnel.

The parish register records the deaths of several young men, who worked on the construction of the railway, and Pulman in the 4th. edition of his 'Book of the Axe' records that during the construction of the railway about 1856, he saw many blackened oak logs taken from the

marsh at Combe Water.

The Southern Railway has allowed the writer to examine and condense the section drawing of the tunnel made at the time of its construction.

Notes on the geology of the tunnel are given in Transactions of Devonshire Association Vol.17 page 240 and in Vol.18 page 180 and in the memoir of the Geological Survey for sheet 326 Sidmouth page 52.

The Southern Railway state that the consultant engineer for the line was J. E. Errington and the engineer of the works was W.Brassey.”

17. DISASTER APPEAL

In this age of satellite communications we have instant pictures of disasters from all over the world, famine in Africa, floods in India and agony beyond measure. Our minds get a battering from all these pictures of suffering humanity. Our hearts respond and we send money and blankets and knitted vests until the next horror comes at us in our sitting-rooms. Surely our simple minds aren't designed to absorb so much agony. Do we become just a little less caring, a little less compassionate with each successive blow to the heart? Who can say.

At least in the 17th century life in the village was simple and uncomplicated. If there were disasters in far away places we never heard about them. Appeals for help were received from other villages and towns of course and the parish would respond. One such appeal came from Piddletrenthide and is recorded in the parish records. Intrigued, I sent a letter to their parish clerk.

I am writing a history of our village and I was intrigued by the following item which appears in the parish register for the year 1657.

“Collected in the parish of Offwell the last day of February 1657 for and towards the relief of Pidell Trent Head in the County of Dorset the sum of Three Shillings and Sixpence.

Humphrey Bradford	Minister
Zachary Chappell	Churchwarden
William Browne	Overseer
William Wish	
Richard Raddon	Assistant”

Being naturally curious, I have been wondering what that cry for help was all about all those years ago.

In my Walter Mitty world of 'investigative journalism' I could say that I smell a story here. In reality I may be wasting your time and being a confounded nuisance into the bargain. If, however, you could pass on my idle enquiry to your local historian I would be very much obliged. Yours etc.

Within a very short space of time I received the following reply:

With reference to your enquiry concerning the collection in the parish of Offwell on the

last day of February 1657, I am able to satisfy your natural curiosity. To quote. 'Another historical fact of interest, is that concerning a disastrous fire on 2nd May 1654, in which twenty two houses were destroyed. The old village, then situate west and south of the church, was completely devastated and it is stated that the damage was estimated at nearly £2000. According to the municipal records of Dorchester, the sum of £5 was sent to Piddletrenthide for the immediate relief of sufferers from the fire and ten days later a further sum of £18.19.2d. was subscribed. Other parishes also interested themselves in the plight of the villagers. The parish register of Burbage (Wilts) includes an entry heading: "Collected in our parish for the parish of Pydel Trent Head in the County of Dorset towards recovery of loss by fire there by the churchwardens the some of nine shillings and three half pence on the seventh day of March being the Lords Day, 1657"

Records of the Abbotts (Som) state that 6s.5d. was also sent from that place. From the far distant Southwick in Hampshire, although apparently not until four years later, the sum of 19s.4d. was subscribed through the parish church there, as shown by an entry in the register reading:

'Collected in the pish church of Southwick on thirteenth of June, 1658 towards the reliefe of the inhabitants of the pish of Piddletterrent Heade in the Countie of Dorsetsheere, which had great losses by fire the some of nineteene shillings and four pence'

May I thank the parishioners of Offwell for their generosity in responding to this *cri de coeur*, and best wishes in the compilation of the history of your village.

Yours etc.

18. FOR THE RAIN IT RAINETH EVERY DAY

Meteorologists, especially amateur ones, are a very dedicated lot. Just imagine dredging yourself up the garden path on a cold and rain soaked February morning. Wet and cold you grasp the rain gauge, careful not to spill any of the precious liquid. You find that 2.058" of rain has fallen over the last twenty four hours. The excitement is intense. Your heart beats faster. Tears, or is it rain? stream down your face. All reality is blotted out. You don't even notice that 3.172" of rain water is lapping over the tops of your shoes. Now that is enthusiasm and dedication.

To my knowledge three Offwell residents have kept detailed weather records over the years - Mr and Mrs W. Hall of 'Wyreholme' (from 1965 up to the present day) and Mr A. H. Robson, late of 'Stonewick' (for the years 1970 to 1978).

Their local weather statistics are quite detailed; but sorry to say that they cannot be given in full in this book.

Weather is an unnecessary evil. On some days we could quite easily do without it. You know and I know that on some days we get no weather at all. Yet those people on the box had promised hell and high water and proved it by juggling with their symbols and confirmed by photographs taken out in space. In the last war it was an offence to 'Spread alarm and despondency'. These people would have been shot at dawn for a week.

But back to our own weather record keepers. They have done a splendid job over the years

and assure you that they are in no way related to those perfidious weathermen.

19. OFFWELL DOWN THE YEARS

With the Churchwardens Accounts, Accounts of the Overseers of the Poor, Minutes of Vestry Meetings, Parish Meetings and Parish Council Meetings we have a record of the happenings of the village from 1692 up to the present day. Here are a few extracts.

- 1694 Ringers 5th November 11/-, for beer when the King came home. Many sick soldiers from France also Hollanders and Spaniard.
- 1697 Stretching out Dorothy Lugg 2/- Tolling bell 2/-, Window Tax, repairing Culmstock Bridge 3/3. Militia talc 2/6. Making badges for Paupers.
- 1701 Boundary stones set up. Communion Table 11/-. Ringing Coronation Day 6/-. (I think that this item should be in 1702 [Queen Anne])
- 1709 Casting bell. (There were two bells casting this year, the tenor and the D bell.)
- 1710 Dog whipping. (This was to keep dogs out of the church.)
- 1724 Church house thatched. New pulpit £36. New north door. Liquor and cakes at parish meeting
- 174-1 Paid Emanuel Dommett for placing Greystone 16/-
- 1795 Certificates for hair powder tax. Church whitewashed.
- 1815 The roof on the south aisle renewed. Waterloo Thanksgiving.
- 1820 Sundial erected. (This is over the South Porch door.)
- 1845 Vote of thanks to the bishop for building the school.
- 1894 The first statutory Parish meeting was held on 4th December.
- 1900 Estimates accepted for new bridge near Old Offwell Mill (£2.2.4d.)
- 1915 Reference was made to the 'great national crisis through which we are passing in the Great War'. A recruiting Committee formed.
- 1918 The assistant Overseer complained about 'hard times are setting in' and asked for an increase of £4. His salary raised to £14 p.a.
- 1935 Parish Council established on 30th August.
- 1938 Air Raid Precaution Committee set up jointly with Cotleigh and Widworthy. The R.D.C. was asked if they would build six houses in the village.

- 1943 Post war plans were discussed. Planned a proper water supply and proper drainage, six council houses for Offwell. (There is a gap in the records between 1935 and 1943.)
- 1950 Some form of activity in conjunction with The Festival Of Britain would be arranged.
- 1955 Complaints about storm water, litter and unpleasant smells arising from a sewer at Mount Pleasant Village Pump to be repaired.
- 1957 Village pump water found to be contaminated and the pump ordered to be disconnected. Work on the new sewer commenced.
- 1962 The travelling library commenced in May of this year.
- 1965 There was flood damage in July the drains being unable to cope.
- 1974 The bus shelter (opposite the Windmill Garage) demolished by a passing lorry. An oak scat erected at Drummerstone.
- 1980 Continuous opposition to the proposed Sutton Tip.
- 1982 Sutton Tip now operating
- 1986 Nature Hut erected in Offwell Woods for the use of schools. Complaints again about the car dump. Complaints about low flying aircraft. Drains still incapable of coping with the rainwater. Offwell again won The Best Kept village Competition.

In the Parish Accounts for the year 1699 there is a fascinating item. -

‘Doctor Norman for Beer for curing John Civil £1.10.8.’

Now that was a vast amount of beer. A few years before they only paid out ‘11/- for beer for the ringers when the King came home’.

Here was John Civil breathlessly rattling at Death’s Door with tire hood Doctor Norman staggering cheerfully around the sick room applying a leech here and one there and this wee one just for luck. What with the poultices, the blood letting and the endless flagons of ale interspersed with the occasional ‘Health to His Majesty’ poor John Civil must have found it very difficult to concentrate on The Life To Come.

Drunk or sober, whatever the Doctor did to John Civil he did at least cure him. He lived for another twenty years. He died aged seventy. A long life for those days.

Now you are going to spoil it all by saying that the entry should read ‘Doctor Norman from Beer’. Have it your own way. I still prefer my own inebriated version.

There is another entry which is interesting- "1705 Driving away rebel from Belfry Door."

This couldn't be a stray squaddy left over from Monmouth's Rebellion twenty years earlier surely? I can't trace any rebellion going on at the time. Marlborough was over on the continent violently sorting out the Spanish Succession. Queen Anne was safely on the throne, probably in the middle of one of her innumerable confinements. Even the peasants weren't revolting.

One rebel all on his own. What did he hope to achieve? The answer may be found in the word 'rebel'. There is a link between it and 'revel' - 'tumult, disturbance or noisy mirth'. It was probably just a local drunk being rebellious in other words being insubordinate defying lawful authority, difficult to treat, unmanageable, refractory. (O.E.D.). On the other hand gentle reader (as they say in Victorian novels and I don't want to miss a trick) this rebel was banging away at the belfry door and the belfry contained the stored village arms pikes, swords, pitch forks, pick axe handles, number two woods etc. etc. Is that the reason why he was at the belfry door? You will note that he was not at the North door or at the South door or even at the door of The Five Bells Inn (which surely would be the target for any gin soaked reveller).

This brings us to ask what was this chap doing at the Belfry Door? He was either a drunk or a Rebel with a cause. Being a romantic I am setting for a one man rebellion. One last glorious tilt at all the injustice in this world. There goes our rebel with me a close second being pursued by the avenging ghost of Judge Jeffreys, he being surprisingly light on his feet for someone who had been dead for six years.

20. THE 1939-45 WAR

In the village School MOM there is a simple framed message:

Evacuees

The Church School of St Mary's Offwell put on record their happy experience during the years of war 1939 -1945 throughout which period no less than 121 children (75 boys and 46 girls) from London and Kent became members of this School -

Victory Place School, Lambeth

Lollard Street School, Kennington

Dartford Wilmington and Hextable Kent

contributed the main body of boys and girls, who during their stay endeared themselves to the inhabitants of Offwell, and they, taking a full share of village life, became as one with its own children. In All things are we enriched.

Mrs P. E. Williams, Headmistress

Mr W. H. Fisher

Mr H. W. Harris

Mr Folwell

Mr C. W. Segal - London Masters

Rev F. E. Copleston, Chairman and Billeting Officer.

An Oasis of Happiness Amid the Wilderness of War.

Evacuated children arrived here primarily in 1939 and then again in 1944. To most of the children the countryside was a revelation. From the confining world of terraced houses they found a green world of grass, trees and fresh air. Wonderland! "Can I walk on the grass lady?"

Of the children that were billeted hereabouts, two children Evan Good and Brenda Tolley (nee Sharland), here give their experiences.

Brenda's Story

I stayed with Mr and Mrs Stanley and my brother Tony stayed next door with Mr and Mrs Farmer. David Farmer, one of the sons still lives in the same corner house and is married to the secretary of Offwell School. We were always treated very well and had good fresh food from the back garden. Pigs were kept at the top over which grew a large Oak tree. Apples were made into cider and we had home made jams and cream as part of our daily menu. Cakes were baked in the black leaded range. We had baths in front of the fire with water from the pump. I think that the farm opposite belonged to Mr Wilmington but I may be wrong but not about the bull with the ring through its nose that got loose!

On looking back I can only think of it as a happy time and will always be grateful to the families that took us into their homes.

Evan's Story

I stayed with the Rev. and Mrs Joyce Copleston who were very kind to me. I had been evacuated from Wilmington School, near Dartford in Kent and by way of coincidence landed up in Wilmington School in Devon, my friend attended Offwell School. I was ten years old at the time and had never been to the seaside. It was a pleasant surprise when we were taken on a trip to Seaton by Vic (our name for Rev. Copleston). Later we had trips out to Budleigh Salterton, Lyme Regis and Sidmouth. We were expected to go to Church on Sundays of course and we had the job of pumping the organ in Widworthy Church which was pumped by means of a lever worked by your feet. The Offwell Church organ was pumped by hand. I remember buying packets of Woodbines for 5 1/2 d. from the Village shop opposite the Church. American soldiers came through Wilmington one day in their tanks and just before the invasion of Europe they were in a tented camp up past Wilmington School on the left. My friend and I often went with the vicar on his visits to parishioners in the village and we were always accepted with kindness. I feel that I should say a big thank you to all the foster parents on behalf of myself and all the other evacuees. It meant hard work for them and all for 9/- per week, not exactly a fortune. God bless them.

The Home Guard

During the war a platoon of about 40 men was provided by the village for the 19th Battalion Home Guard of the Devonshire Regiment. The Offwell Platoon was part of C company based in Honiton and was chiefly concerned with the protection of the railway. A few scattered

bombs were dropped locally but caused no casualties or damage.

On a personal note, our unit was stationed at Heathfield Camp for most of 1942. Hardly recognisable now, the parade ground strewn with cars where once we spent so many happy hours banging our boots into the tarmac with youthful abandon. When we weren't drilling we route marched and for all I know marched through Offwell, and that is my excuse for this post script. I saw American troops arrive in Honiton in the autumn and shortly afterwards I got posted overseas. Only recently married, I thought that the world was very unfair but at least I did come, back three and a half years later.

21.OFFWELL SCHOOL

Offwell School was built by Bishop Copleston in 1840 and is one of the oldest schools in the West Country. It is said that its design was based on a Chantry in the village of Trent, a few miles north west of Sherborne. The Chantry is still there adjacent to the Church but bears little resemblance to the school. (A Chantry, by the way, is a Chapel set aside for priests to sing masses for the souls of the departed.)

Offwell School is a Church School. The Education Act of 1944 relieved the Church of all financial responsibility for maintaining and running the School. The incumbent is however still responsible for seeing that the Church's teaching is carefully given. It is made up of the original Bishop's building, St. Mary's Hall and a school room at the back for the Infants. The original building is quite small with a large fireplace, now covered in. There is a small stained glass badge of Oriel College, Oxford where Bishop Edward Copleston was a Fellow and later provost. St. Mary's hall was built in 1928 and is leased to the Education Authority. It is here that assembly is held. In 1958 the ground behind the Hall was purchased and a school room for the infants erected.

There was once a School Bell but this was stolen some years ago and the little bell tower is empty.

The number of children attending school has varied over the years. About a hundred years ago it was between 30 and 40. Many more than this were on the Register however. Absentees were quite common and illness took its toll. The older boys and girls frequently helping in the hay fields or 'beating the bushes to keep the pheasants back'. In 1901 Mr Bishop, the School Attendance Officer "rounded up absentees". Children enrolled and left at any time it seemed without regard for the beginning and end of term. Elder girls left to join the Lace Makers School. Altogether there was a lot of coming and going.

The teaching staff in the latter half of the 19th century also came and went in rapid succession and one gets the impression that they were of poor quality. The Rector, of course, gave lessons, mostly religious instruction and the ladies of the Copleston household helped with singing lessons and sewing. In spite of their assistance the School Inspector declared that 'the standard of education was pretty poor'. In 1896 the report was very critical, '...no grant is payable as he was unable to report that the school was well taught within the meaning of the Act.'

Children were frequently punished for 'rude behaviour and wilful disobedience.' In 1905

James-- was sent home for repeated acts of insubordination culminating in stone throwing'. It doesn't say whether the teacher joined in the stone throwing but it must have been a dodgy five minutes for her.

The summer holiday lasted for three weeks and was then called Harvest Holiday. Good Friday was a holiday but there was only half day for Easter Monday. They had a day off in June for the Widworthy club, an annual Fete. The School went on a Treat to Seaton in July.

I would suggest that you skip this paragraph. It is not very pleasant full of germs and nasties like that - you might catch something. Please yourself, you have been warned. Here goes. Illness in the form of sores, chilblains, fever, flu, colds, ring worm, chicken pox, measles, and creepy crawly things that went to your head - and I didn't want to mention the last one but it sort of popped out. Watch out! there it goes, heck I missed it. You may have met some of these illnesses but with respect to your genteel upbringing not the last one. Chilblains are not so common these days. But they were nasty especially broken ones. They itched as well. Everything itched. A child couldn't possibly concentrate on his seven times table. He sat sorting out whether to scratch his head, fingers, toes, under the arms and other indelicate places. I suppose these days the child would enlist the help of the computer which would list the priorities, amount of itch, time that it would take, would teacher notice, even more important would my girl friend Betty notice?

There was an influenza epidemic in 1901. Every house in the village being visited by the disease. In 1902 mumps and measles prevailed and the school was closed for a fortnight. In 1910 the visiting doctor suggested that the girls should hang their hats on alternative pegs to prevent them over lapping. Edith should be kept at home until her head was in a clean condition - several parents had been complaining. In 1915 the dentist visited the school. Eleven children were examined and of them seven had teeth extracted. I ought to remind you that in those days dentists required little encouragement - if you had a sore throat, ear ache, acne, heartburn they would yank out your molars as a sure and certain remedy.

Frank - returned to school after a fortnight's illness but seeing a large sore on his head he was sent home. In February 1919 only two children attended school - this was the terrible 'flu epidemic.

With all this trafficking in germs there was the poor teacher in the middle of it all. The coughing, itching and sneezing. I would like to know how they survived. Come to think of it that may explain all that coming and going - they were carried out feet first the stretcher bearers muttering 'ere be another one Harry, I didn't think that she would last the winter - not with that chronic cough'.

Celebrations down the years record happiness and some sorrow. On 27th February 1872 there was a 'treat' for the children as a Thanksgiving for the Prince of Wales recovery from a recent illness. In 1901 they had a half day's holiday 'to commemorate the return from South Africa of Charles Copleston, the son of the Rector, who for eighteen months had been serving his King and Country as an Imperial Yeoman and whose return today has given much pleasure to the children and was celebrated by the whole Parish.' In 1902, at the end of the Boer War the children paraded through the Village singing and cheering and ringing the

School Bell.

On 15th January 1915 two Belgian children were admitted. (At the outbreak of War in 1914 following the invasion of Belgium, a large number of refugees flooded into this country.) What eventually happened to the two children isn't recorded.

In 1916 the Headmistress heard that her brother had been killed in action.

When the armistice was announced in November 1918 the children were taken to Church for a short Thanksgiving.

On Empire Day, 14th May 1927, the children decorated the school with small flags, were given a short address and sang God Save The King. Coronation Day, 12th May 1937 was celebrated by holding a Sports Day with a splendid tea when each child was given a Coronation Mug.

On 2nd September 1939, the day before the outbreak of the second world war, evacuees in the shape of two teachers and 18 children arrived at the school. Originally the two 'schools' operated a shift system but later merged. In an air raid practice the school was cleared in 1.25 minutes.

The school's first Nativity Play took place on 17th Dec. 1950 in the church and is now a well established event.

May Day in 1953 was held in traditional style. A May Queen was crowned and the children danced around the May Pole. The girls wore white frocks with red, white and blue sashes and the boys wore white shirts, running shorts and red, white and blue bow ties.

Today Offwell School is an efficiently run school and a happy school. There are hints that such small schools might be closed and I have a feeling that these hints and rumours will give way to hard headed and balance sheeted decisions. If it is ever closed the heart will go out of the village. You can protest. You can hold protest meetings. You can demonstrate. It will all be like ringing our school bell ...you can ring it until the cows come home. The toll will not be heard.

But Still Within The Little Children's Eyes

In September 1975 the children compiled their own description of the School complete with their drawings and charts. Simple in style you will find it to be a little gem.

Offwell School

In Offwell School there are three classrooms. The infants class a lower junior and a top junior class. We have two playgrounds. In the Top Juniors there is a swimming pool. Which is about 80 cm deep. There is a wooden fence around it. In the middle classes playgrounds there is a huge tree. It is a Canadian Red Oak. It was planted in the early parts of the 1930s. The infants don't have a playground. But there is a lawn instead. In the top classes playground there is a bird table. Behind the classroom is the girls toilet and to the right of the classroom is the boys toilets. Next to the middle class is a shed where we keep the sports equipment.

Every Thursday night Brownies are held in the hall. And every October youth club starts until Youth club is on Tuesday until half past nine. (Peta 3.9.75)

The Dinner Delivery Lady

The Dinner Lady brings the food for us to eat. The Dinner Lady brings the dinners out from Honiton School. They cook the dinners in Honiton School. The dinner lady brings the dinners in a big grey van. The dinner lady brings the dinners in tins. She brings the dinners on a trolley up to the hall. (Susan Sept. 4th 1975)

The School Bell

The school bell rings when it is time to come into the school. It rings at dinner time. This School was built in 1840. The windows in this classroom are very old. There used to be a bell on the school tower. The rope hung down from the roof. When some workmen came they left the ladder outside and in the night some youngsters and climbed the ladder and stole the bell. (Anthony 3.9.75)

The Village Pump

The village pump is very old. It is just out side the School railings. There is a chain along the road to stop the cows getting in and eating the flowers that are in the trof. And also destry the pump. The people who lived in the village long a-go had to fetch their water in buckets, because they had no taps in their house. (Michael 3.9.75)

Deep Sea Fishermen

The man brought some skippers clothes. He said some men get killed because some people fall over board and get drowned. He told us to make some fish and that would help him. He gave some cards to some people who wanted to collect some money for the Deep Sea Fishermen. (Susan 3.9.75)

The Poppy Lady

We get a Poppy Lady who comes to our school. Any child can buy a poppy. The Poppy Lady will give you a poppy. She brings the poppies in a box with a piece of string round the poppy lady's neck. She brings a tin that she puts the money into. It has got a slot in the top of the tin and that is where the poppy lady puts the money. The money goes for the solids what where hurt in the war. (Susan 3.9.75)

Class Work

In the class we do a lot of work. We do a lot of writing and reading. We do sewing a lot and knitting. We do drawing. We watch TV at school and we listen to the radio. We play with the musical Instruments. Some time we grow seeds. We pick flowers and take them for a competition. (Andy 3.9.75)

The Canadian Red Oak, The Nut Tree, Garden and Lawn

The Canadian Red Oak was planted in early 1930s which makes it about 40 to 45 years old. The playground is a tarmac one but when the tree was planted the playground had not yet been covered in tarmac. In Autumn the leaves are still green but getting browner all the time. When they are completely brown they fall off and make a crunchy noise 11' you stop on them. The nut tree was planted by Carol Blackmore when she went to this school. It was

planted in 1957. It gives nuts every year. In the garden there is a fir tree and some flowers. The lawn is sloping downhill. There is a small hedge in the middle of the lawn. In the smallest part of the lawn there is a water tray tub for the infants to play with. Mr Hubberd who lives next door looks after the lawn and cuts it. (Hazel 3.9.75)

Offwell Sports

We used the Offwell Playing Field for our Sports every year. The teams are Drake and Raleigh. We do the races in ages. The first race we do is a running race for the little children who do not yet come to school. Then we start the sports. We do running races, sack races, bean bag races and all sorts of races. Mrs Farmer doe's the marking and adding up the score. One of the teachers starts off the races. Mr Jones and some other people have the cards at the end of the races with 1st 2nd and 3rd on. Then we give the card to Mrs Farmer. A photographer came and takes photographs of us and the winners. The ice-cream man comes too. The ice-cream man stays in the field right through the sports. Before sports we take forms to the playing field for the parents to sit on. In 1972 and 1973 Raleigh won. In 1974 it was a draw and in 1975 Drake won. (Geraldine Sept. 1975)

The Swimming Pool

We have a swimming pool. It has a fence all the way round it. We have had the swimming pool for four years. We sometimes swim twice in a day. It is not very deep but one of the little children could drown so some of the big children go in the pool at the same time. There is a rail all the way round the pool so that if a girl or a boy can catch it if they keep going under the water. We mostly go swimming in the summer but never in the winter. (Andrew Sept. 1975)

Harvest Festival

Every year when it is Harvest Festival some of the children decorate the church of St Mary with vetgablras that the children bring and also some children bring flowers too. We put the vetgatable in the windows, flowers in the doorway. In the afternoon Offwell School have a Harvest service. Mrs Marsh and Mrs Steel teach some of us to play the recorder. In the night some people go to the Harvest Festival Supper. (Judith Sept. 1975)

The Blind Appeal Lady

The blind appeal lady brings things to show us for blind people to use. She showed us a ball for the blind people. She had a little game with the ball. She brought a wooden thing that you could put a knife through the slot and it would cut the bread for the blind. Then the lady brought a clock, and you have to put the scarf on so that the scarf covers your eyes. Then some one has to hide something. And the one who has got the scarf over their eyes finds it. (Susan 3.9.75)

May Day

At Offwell School there is a Maypole it is kept in the top class room. On May the 2nd 1975 there was a Maypole Festival held in the School Hall. The girls wore a white blouse with skirts and plimsoles with a halo with flowers and streamers hanging down from their head. The boys wore a bow tic and a white shirt with trousers. Louise Squire and I made up a dance. The girl stood still and the boy danced round and round. We named the dance 'The Ribbon Twist'. There were other dances like the Gypsies Tent, the Spiders Web and the

Barbers Pole. I Liked the Spiders web best. There was lots of people at the festival. There was trays of drinks and biscuits. (Tina. 5.9.75)

The School Dentist

The Dentist comes once every year to check our teeth and to see if we need anything done to them. All the children line up at the door. The lady call us in one by one. If we have something wrong with our teeth they ask Mrs. Farmer to type a letter out to our parents. (Judith)

Greystone

The Greystone is used as a bus seat where people sit waiting to catch the Axminster bus. The Greystone is near Offwell Village and it is on the edge of Wilmington village. The legend of the Greystone is, it rolled down a hill and went in the White Heart and had a drink and then rolled backup again at midnight, That was over 80 years ago. A man called Mr Hutchinson told the story about the Greystone and every day when the road is tar macked the stone sinks. There is only two feet above the earth and also it sinks because people sit on it. (Kevin)

Offwell Graveyard

In Offwell graveyard one of the oldest graves belongs to a young Spanish girl who died when she was 13 or 14 years old. There is a grave under one of the trees belonging to a child. There is more than a hundred graves. When someone dies the rest of the family goes to the funeral. If the family has enough money they can buy a gravestone. There is about one acre of land for the graves. There is all different styles of gravestones. There are arched stones, wooden crosses and stone crosses. Some are like books with writing on. There is one big grave that stands above the ground. A family was burned in it. All around it is moss and grass. Sometimes Mr Hubbard cuts the grass in the graveyard

Offwell Rectory

Rev. and Mrs Wright and there family live in the Offwell Rectory. Mr Wright is the rector of Offwell, Widworthy and Cotleigh. The rectory is oppisite the playing fields. On one side of the house is a huge glass window. Inside the window the staircase ascends to the bedrooms. All around the house is a large garden. Behind the house is a caravan in which Mrs Wrights auntie lives. Outside the rectory is a sigh with a finger pointing towards the rectory. It says Offwell Rectory. There is a little hole in the hedge to put in the daily newspapers. In 1961 the rectory was built of Beerstones. (Judith, Hazel and Peta)

The Old Rectory.

The old rectory is a very old house, it was built of Beer Stone. The Old Rectory is very big house and owned by Cap. Welch-Thornton and his wife. Cap. Welch-Thornton has recently died. As well as a big house there is a large garden. Mrs Welch-Thornton employs two men who come to cut the lawn and dig the garden. At the side of the house there is a vegetable garden. At the back of the house there is a yard and some sheds. Above the sheds on a lawn some chicken are kept. On the other side of the Rectory is a lawn with flowers and trees growing around the edge. The house used to be used as a Rectory and was built by Dr G. Copleston. The rector of Offwell and Widworthy used to live there. But after a while a rectory was built at Widworthy. In Offwell now there is a new rectory built. It was built in 1960. So now the old rectory is not used for rectors to live in. (Tina and Diana)

These little stories are, I think, most delightful. They deserve a round of applause for a splendid effort and our thanks for allowing us to share a laugh or two.

22. OFFA'S WELL AND OFFWELL PARISH PUMP

The well (Offa's Well from which the Village takes its name) is close to the crossroads where the road from Cotleigh to West Colwell crosses the Honiton to Colyton Road. Both these roads were important trackways even in pre-historic times and the well a convenient watering place for travellers and their animals.

Originally, during the damper climate which prevailed from about 500 BC it was probably a surface spring. As the water table fell in drier times the convenience of its position and the growth of the village resulted in its being deepened and lined as a well. In 1830 The Very Rev. Edward Copleston, Bishop of Llandaff erected a gothic stone canopy with a hand pump. The Rev. J. G. Copleston then Rector of Offwell, said in 1832 in his poem 'The Churchyard Yew'

'A gothic stone pump, for the use of the Village, which before its erection had no unfailing supply of water. It bears the following inscription

Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again.
AD MDCCCXXX'.

(Note that the actual date carved on the stonework is AD MCCCCCIII.. Probably a mistake by the stone cutter, after all, with all those MD's and CCC's let alone the XXX's it's enough to confuse anyone.)

I have read this inscription several times, the bit about 'no unfailing' and have tussled with this double negative of an obfuscation and I think it means that before the pump was erected the village had an irregular supply of water. I think.

Around about 1950 extensive repairs were carried out on the pump and were very thorough. The stonework covering the pump and well was taken down. The wellhead was re-inforced and broken stone work and missing parts were renewed with Beer or Portland Stone using bronze or copper dowels. A manhole cover was provided for access to the well. The well was then measured and found to be 28 feet deep and contained 10 feet of Water.

The well was included in the sale of the Copleston Estate but a letter of protest was sent to the Trustees of the Estate pointing out that the well was public property and the well was withdrawn from the sale.

In 1957 a sample of the well water was sent away for analysis and was found to be contaminated, probably from nearby septic tanks, certainly unfit for drinking purposes. The Ministry of Health ordered the working parts to be disconnected.

Sadly we are back to the unfailing supply of water (or should it be no unfailing) and we will be thirsting again (or won't, as the case may be). In any event, it pumps no more. Water no

longer gurgles forth. The streaming water stopped. Effluent smothers and chokes its life away and man on his midden has done it again. You might say that it's two thousand years down the drain.

Today, cascades of flowers fill the trough.

23. THE COPPLESTONE CROSS

“Crocker, Cruwys and Coplestone
When the Conqueror came were all at home”

So runs the jingle around the base of the Coplestone Cross. You would think that a piece of granite with an inscription would be a simple thing to write about. Nothing so straightforward. Firstly, take the name Coplestone - it has three different versions at least. Coplestone, Copleston (the Offwell Version) and Coplestone. Secondly there are doubts as to whether it is or was a cross. We haven't gone beyond the chapter heading and already we are all confused.

I hesitate to add further fuel to the argument to cause more smoke and fog but the historian W. G. Hoskins doubted whether the Coplestones were around at the time of the conquest. (He was talking about the old County families, not your ancestors or mine. Ours were certainly around when Duke William landed and if they were at home they were safely tucked up in bed which was the place to be on a cold October morning with a battle in the offing.) He says that the first recording of a Coplestone was in Henry II's time. “They may be older than this but a pre-conquest pedigree is far from established”. The Crocker and the Cruwys were also sent packing.

His theory is rather blunted, I think, when he adds that “the Coplestones took their name from the 10th century boundary stone” the Anglo-Saxon name Copelanstan means ‘stone at the head of the land’. They had a few years to do this before 1066 and in consequence I give them the benefit of the doubt. Thirty all.

When the Bishop built the School House he erected at the corner of the playground a granite copy of the Coplestone Cross. The original still stands today in the village of Coplestone four miles west of Crediton. This cross is mentioned in a Deed of Gift by King Eadgar to his Thane Aelfhaer in AD 974. It stands at the point where three Parishes meet. The King otherwise spelled Edgar was named ‘The Peaceable’ yet he was a man of unbridled passions when once aroused: he snatched Wilfreda from her convent by force, and later killed Athelwalda the husband of Elfrida, because he stood in the way of his desires ... During his reign wolves were largely destroyed in England. There was one wolf that they seem to have overlooked.

The copy of the cross was probably made in Exeter, taken by sea to Axmouth and then by road over Sutton Thorne Hill. Unfortunately as it was going down the hill the wagon over-ran and killed the wheel horse.

24. ‘...AND HE BEFORE HIS COTTAGE DOOR’

If you live near the centre of the village, near the Church, and the shop and the school you are

apt to forget the fact that Offwell starts at the top of the hill at Mount Pleasant and doesn't fizzle out until you reach the bottom, and that is a long walk especially coming back up. This is ignoring the road beyond Mount Pleasant leading down to the Old Parsonage.

It is a very straggly Village and is most unfair to those whose job it is to set it all down and describe it. Most unfair.

I suppose 1939 could be taken as a turning point in the history of the village. Apart from being fifty years ago, and that is a nice round figure to start with, it is also a half a century which has a splendid ring to it. Up to that time things had remained as they had always been - there was still a Copleston as Rector and not much building had taken place. A map of 1840 is very similar to that of 1939. It is the post war years that have turned things topsyturvy and the Village has bungalowed out letting in retired creatures like me into the community.

So 1939 it is. The cottages were all thatched of course and built of flint stone and or cob. Mrs Edith Bastin ran the Post Office opposite the present day Village Shop. William Farmer the Village Carpenter. John Henry Bond the Shoe repairer who lived with his two sisters. He was always reading and very knowledgeable. Miss Bessie Litten had a general shop (next to John Bond). Her stock was all over the place, no order at all. But she would dive in amongst the various heaps and come up with what you wanted. In between the cottages were the allotments.

At the Five Bells William Northam no longer pulled pints. It hadn't been an inn since 1931. It is said that he married a Methodist and was persuaded to give up the business. Going back past the Church you would have noticed that Offwell Burton Farm wasn't there. This was built after the war. There was the Lower Lodge standing guard for Offwell House.

The other businesses in the Village were represented by Farmers, Small Holdings, Cow Keepers and Poultry Farmers and up on the main road was Archibald G. Stanley who ran the 'Motor Spirit Service Station, Honition Hill' now the Windmill Garage.

Not far from the Windmill Garage going towards Axminster at the junction with Featherbed Lane stands 'Ban's Close'. Its bottle ends under the eaves offering a welcome to the smugglers. It stands on the pack horse trail from Axmouth to Colyton.

Turning back down Fern Lane and just before you reach Copleston's Cross is Yew Tree Cottage with Oak Cottage next to the school. The latter was built around 1700. Its rafters and perkins can be seen to be made of unsawn timber.

Going down the hill, passing the Church and the Old Rectory by the lane known as the Goyle you pass Offwell Cottage on your right. This was built around 1600 of flint stone and was originally thatched. The thatched roof was destroyed by fire in 1964 and the roof is now tiled. During the last war the Church Plate was hidden under the floor boards of an out-building. There was a bit of a panic when the owner couldn't remember where he had hidden the Plate!

Further down the hill is The Orchard, an attractive Cottage which was originally a stable with a 'bed sitter' above. It was converted in 1948 to its present form and was originally thatched.

Lower down the hill is a delightful collection of 300 year old cottages comprising the hamlet of 'Offwell Lower Village'.

Thatch Cottage was built in 1650 of stone, brick and a little cob and of course still thatched ... Originally it had no windows at the back having been built into the slope of the ground. Rookery Cottage is one of a semi-detached pair, built of stone with a slate roof. The adjoining cottage 'Gwynfryn' was occupied for many years by Mrs Williams, a previous Head Mistress of Offwell School.

Further down beyond West Colwell and turning right at Colwell Barton is Colwell Barton Cottage, believed to have been built in the 16th century. Originally this was two cottages, built of stone and cob. As two cottages they were included in the sale of a portion of the Widworthy Estate in 1937 and sold for £550. They were described as "a pair of stone built thatched and asbestos roofed cottages with gardens, one containing; living room, three bedrooms and the other - living room and two bedrooms. Joint wash house with copper, outside lavatories. Well water." The cottages were separated by a passage with the front doors to the left and right. (The passage is now the hall of the present day cottage.) The right hand Cottage has a unique bread oven, recognisable from the outside as a bulge to the right of the front door.

This part of Offwell (right at the bottom of the hill) is known as Offwell Bottom - no disrespect intended just that it is at the bottom. Originally there was a village called Colwell hereabouts.

From where the brook crosses Mill Lane up the hill past Hooper's there were at least six cottages with a mill down by the brook and a further half a dozen cottages scattered up through the fields and past what is now Slowpool House.

Further up Mill Lane and just round the corner is Bagwell's Cottage. (The Bagwells first appear in the Parish Register in the year 1681.) This cottage stands on the Parish boundary with the boundary running through the dining room, which, to say the least, is very untidy. The cottage is built on the slope of the hill, has three springs and its own gravity fed water. My visit to the cottage was enlivened by the fearsome sight of hundreds of domestic geese all bent on goosey mayhem. They came at me from all directions. I was scared. I'd never had a close encounter with these creatures before and I have gone off them ever since. Fortunately, at my departure, my host fended them off with consummate bravery and I made my escape and shot off down the hill.

Talking about boundaries, years ago, if you were a vagrant or a tramp or a landless person or all three you would find that the Parish Overseer would chase you away just in case you became ill or destitute and became charge-able to the Parish Poor Rate. You would have been taken before a Magistrate who would make out an Order to have you returned to your own village. A curious case occurred near Farwood, where a pauper died in a house standing at the junction of the Parishes of Northleigh, Farway and Southleigh. As the Parish boundaries met under the room in which he died, it was decided that the Parish in which his head lay, when he died, should be the one chargeable for his funeral.

Opposite Bagwell's Cottage just on the bend is Hooper's Farm. There is very little left of the original farmhouse - a flagstone floor and pieces of the old wall now part of the garden. The well, still in use, beautifully constructed below ground in local stone, has never been known to run dry. The barn and cowshed of the old farm formed the basis of what is now Hooper's Cottage and the original thick walls can still be seen. The Hooper family first appears in the Parish Records around the beginning of the 17th century. The farm passed into the hands of a Mr Kibby at a time when agriculture was in a very depressed state. During the 1920s and 1930s things were so bad that some farms were deserted by their tenants and in some cases burned down - possibly to obtain the insurance money. Poor Mr Kibby was so depressed that he hanged himself in his own kitchen.

Now we are faced with the long, long walk up the hill to the top of the Village up on the main road. You can walk if you like but blow you Jack, I'm going by car. Watch out for a perfectly splendid Rubbish Dump on your left. It creeps relentlessly over the little valley and in time it will, like the Duke of York, go marching up the hill to contest the ground that the Bluebells hold. We have some very good Dumps around here. I am excluding my garden, of course, that at present, is a very nasty Dump. Could it be Dump Seeds being blown about from that Queen of Dumps, Sutton Tip? Offwell really is in the Dumps and I am not apologising for a joke like that, well, on second thoughts I think I should.

At the top of Ramsden Lane, on your left, is The Lench. It was at one time a Toll House. The small window looks out from a little wedge-shaped room, from which possibly the Toll Keeper collected his money. The Lench has had a variety of names down the years. The earliest Deed which is dated 1805, says '...heretofore called the Lench and now called Mount Pleasant'. After Mount Pleasant it was called Belle Vue. This name lasted from just before the last war until quite recently. In the meantime the area itself had become known as Mount Pleasant. The property with several acres of land has been occupied at various times by butchers, a cowkeeper, market gardener and a poultry farmer.

The modern bungalows haven't much of a tale to tell of course but there is always the exception. When you passed 'Sunny Garden' in Fern Lane did you notice the cross under the gable? It was incorporated there by the first owners who were spiritualists and a well loved couple. Services were held in the bungalow fairly regularly. People who have lived there since have remarked about the serenity of the place.

'Westwood', although a modern bungalow has part of a barn - beams and brickwork - built into the building. The barn stood in the grounds of the old Five Bells Farm.

25. THE OFFWELL FEOFFEE CHARITY

It is not a very good start having a word like Feoffee popping up - it merely means a person to whom freehold estate in land is conveyed. It sounds something like that tongue twisting football result - Forfar five, Fife four. This particular Charity was established in 1867 by the Rev. J. G. Copleston, Rector of Offwell, for the relief of the poor of the Parish.

There is a board in the Tower of the church setting out the origins of the Charity.

Charities belonging to the Parish of Offwell Devon

1st

A field of four acres called Parish Close near Gray Stone in the said Parish; the income of which is to be given at the discretion of the Feoffees to the most deserving poor labourers not receiving Parish Relief.

This field was bought AD 1725 for 60£ of which sum

Dorothy Southcott bequeathed 20£

Henry Southcott bequeathed 20£

A charity called Raddon's
money was applied in part 10£

The Parish raised by the Poor's Rate 10£

2 dly 60£

A field of about four acres called School Close situate in the said Parish near Honiton Hill bought AD 1824 with the timber thereon for 99£ part of a sum of money given by Emanuel Dommet of Offwell, amounting to 120£ are vested by him in Feoffees. The income from the land to be applied to the education of the poor. The remainder of the sum now secured by note of hand from the Revd. J. G. Copleston to be expended if the Feoffees hereafter think fit in building a School room or house for the residence of the Schoolmaster or Mistress: the interest if not wanted for the current expenses of the School to accumulate for the purpose of such building.

3 dly.

A cottage for the present use of the Charity School, situate in the village of Offwell, also given by the said Emanuel Dommet

As you can see, the income of the Charity originally derived from a field called Greystone, adjoining the main Honiton-Axminster Road and adjacent to Widworthy Court. It has in fact a fair choice of names. Greystone, Graystone, Graystone Close or Parish Close and for all I know there may be a few more. Its size has been variously given as four acres, three and a half acres but I take great delight in telling you that it was three acres, three roods and no perches. In this age of the metre and such foreign rubbish I can say that the area is three and three quarters of an acre.

In 1947 Greystone Field was exchanged for the field which had been in use as the Village Playing Field for some years (and still is). It was then the property of the Rev. J. H. Copleston.

The Playing Field Committee subsequently paid a rent of £8 per annum (I nearly said 8£) to the Charity for the use of the field.

In 1964 the Playing Field Committee wished to take advantage of a Grant to improve the amenities but could not do so unless they owned the field or held it on a long lease.

Negotiations for the purchase of the field took a few years and the sale was finally completed in 1968. It was sold for £800 clear of all legal charges. The money was transferred into shares and it is the interest from this investment that is distributed.

As is mentioned in another chapter, at the end of the last war the people of this village

collected about £100 as a token of thanks to the men and women returning from the Forces. These Ex-Service men and women decided to donate this money towards the purchase of the Sports Field. I can hear you mumbling that £100 wasn't much. Consider that it did represent about twenty times the average wage and then relate that to today's average wage. You will agree that it was indeed a generous gesture.

26. EXTRA-RURAL ACTIVITIES

Offwell Women's Institute

One can say that Offwell W.I. commenced in February 1953 when it separated from Widworthy. The Organisation, as you may or may not know, is for country women whose aim is the 'improvement and Development of Rural Life'. On their very busy path towards this they give a lot of support to Charity, Cancer Research, Sue Ryder Foundation, local hospitals, St Loyes College, The Arthritis and Rheumatism Council, The National Children's home and so on. The W.I. went through a bad patch and because of a lack of support they thought that they might have had to close down. Their present membership is around a healthy 40 and going strong.

In 1966 they compiled a Jubilee Scrap Book - a sort of a history of the Village. On hearing this I naturally got quite excited (thinking that this might be a rich vein of information for me to tap. I would have joined the W.I. if it meant that I could get me grubby, grasping hands on this nugget of a document). But alas it has been lost. I was disappointed. This must compare with Thomas Carlyle's pain and grief when he heard that his manuscript of the first volume of his 'French Revolution' had been accidentally burnt. "Oh dear", he said in his quaint Scottish accent, "Tut, Tut" and even "Botheration". I probably said the same sort of thing. We historians are quite unflappable you know.

In 1973, 'Plant a Tree Year', the W.I. planted two trees in the Playing Field, an oak and a red hawthorn. The Oak died most discourteously and had to be replaced. The W.I. lives on.

Offwell Cricket Club

The Club's written records go all the way back to 1938. The first recorded meeting was held in the Windmill Tea Rooms with eight members present. It was reported that the Club had no cash balance leftover from the previous year. With eight members and no money that is what I would call enthusiasm. However by way of raffles and whist drives the club built up a bank balance of £7.14.9d. The war then intervened.

The Club re-started after the war with a meeting held on 19th June 1946. The post war years were filled with frantic fund raising activities in the shape of whist drives and raffles. All this flogging of tickets brought complaints from other organisations in the village to the effect that everyone was competing against each other for customers. Offwell was knee deep in discarded raffle tickets with bleary eyed whist players wending their way home at ten o'clock at night muttering to each other, 'You should have trumped his ten of diamonds... It was obvious that she hadn't any trumps ...you could've put your deuce on his king and saved the ace' etc.

In 1949 the Club's colours were changed from red and blue to green and gold. The cap being plain dark green with a gold badge. Around about this time David Farmer was appointed

Hon. mole-catcher. The 1957 season was disastrous - cattle had strayed on to the playing square during the winter months. Home matches were not possible until the August. Evening matches had to be cancelled because so many of the players had to work late. Fourteen matches were cancelled out of the 22 arranged and two were cancelled because of rain. Just six matches were played and the club won three and lost three.

All down the years one subject above all others kept cropping up - cropping is the operative word. Grass cutting. Discussions about whether to buy a new mower or hire one, who would do it and when and how. An interminable debating but so essential. If only someone could produce a grass that only requires cutting say once in a season he would have sportsmen and gardeners flocking to his door and as a frustrated and neurotic gardener I bags first in the queue.

To end this chapter here is one for the record book.

On the 13th August 1972 Offwell played Upottery. It was a friendly game and the two captains agreed to field 12 players a side. It must have been Upottery's off-day or maybe they wanted to get home early to watch the telly because R. Land skittled them out all on his own. His bowling analysis was 13.2 overs, 7 maidens, 22 runs 11 wickets.

Offwell Football Club

The club held its inaugural meeting on the 5th May 1948 when they applied for membership of the Ottery and District League. In the 1951/2 season they finished eleventh in the Petty Street League. The club disbanded in February 1959 but reformed on the 4th May 1962 with 15 registered players. In the 1963/4 season they won the club's first ever trophy having come top of the Junior 2E League and winning promotion. A reserve side was formed in 1969/70. The club has gone from strength to strength and in recent years both teams have won promotions and cups and have been runners-up on many occasions. The teams are well supported by the village, this I can confirm personally from over the garden hedge. Drifting with the fumes of horse oil, and liniments comes cries of 'Come on Offwell - stet stuck in' klaxons sounding and players nagging each other like stink. The ball sometimes steaming through the hedge at a rate of knots. Once it landed at my feet. The temptation was too great. I punted it back. Alas too many years had passed since I had played football and I made a right cock-up of it. It landed bang-smack into the hawthorn bush and hung transfixed like some exotic fruit fully ripe and ready to fall but you knew in your heart of hearts that it was going to do no such thing, it was there to stay. Being naturally crafty and full of guile I beat a hasty retreat up the garden and was all innocence when someone called out 'Have you seen our ball mister?' I am getting old (well, to be perfectly frank, I am bloody old) but I have a feeling that football was a much quieter game in my youth. But then with the club's fortieth birthday still fresh in their memories plus the fact that they are again clamouring for promotion they deserve a few decibels of quadraphonic sound. Altogether now... 'Come on Offwell!'

Offwell Playing Field Committee

A public meeting was held on 15th April 1948 to set up a committee to be responsible for the care and upkeep of the playing field handed over by the Offwell Feoffees. In addition it would promote and carry out any work that would be in the interest of the health and social

welfare of the village. The committee then comprised (and still does) representatives of the various activities in the village i.e. the sports clubs, the village school, the W.I., the Offwell Feoffees etc. Over the years the committee has worked wondrously well to this end. In the early years fund raising reached a crescendo. I have never heard of so many varieties of whist drives - Poultry drive, Snowball, Partners, Pork, Meat, Christmas, Weekly, Butler, Grand, Annual. In addition there were Skittle competitions (then held at the White Hart, Wilmington.) Fetes, children's parties and even a Motor Grass track meeting, (this was in conjunction with Broadhembury).

It was in 1949 that the building of a pavilion was first mooted. It eventually cost around £1,000 and was officially opened in June 1975. Originally it was planned to be erected to the left of the main entrance to the sports field. Swings and a see-saw were purchased to create a children's corner behind the pavilion. The Committee's minutes for 26th August 1949 said 'The swing was to be erected on the playing field and the legs embedded firmly in concrete.' Personally I think that this was a bit harsh. I know that children can be a problem but lumps of concrete around their ankles, although a jolly good idea for some tearaways, might produce some mild criticism from the NSPCC and probably the RSPCA as well.

The president, Mrs P. Williams retired after 36 years service on the Committee on 25th February 1981. She had been the Headmistress of the village school. A well loved member of the community.

The Village Hall, first considered by the Committee in 1975 was opened quite recently and is proving to be a splendid asset to the village.

27. FINISHED

Well nearly finished. I would much prefer to go on and record every last syllable of recorded time, as the Bard nearly said. The trouble is that just lately I keep meeting people who say 'How's the book coming along?' 'Have you finished it yet?' 'Their querulous eyebrows raised. I mutter comforting noises and try to disappear from view. I can't stay in hiding for ever. I am developing a nervous twitch and quite unable to walk down the road without my two white coated attendants in support.

Now I must admit that I have enjoyed myself over the last few years, an ego trip if you like but I must call it a day. Well there is comfort in that I suppose. No more heart-stopping discoveries that I have put the carbons into the typewriter back to front To realise that paragraph smells of Satanic Verses and will I be burnt in effigy? No such luck I hear you say. Writing is a hazardous business.

I will return your photographs and documents very soon and I am so sorry that I have held on to them for so long. Many, many thanks. And thanks for your help. I may not have mentioned your name or your cottage or your family who have lived in Offwell since the year dot. That just proves what a rotten historian I am. Anyway, if I had the time I would have got round to it eventually.

You, who have seen invaders come and invaders go have stood your ground and seen them off. This last invasion, of which alas I am a part, is the saddest of them all. Stealing cottages

at prices beyond the reach of your young couples. And what is a village if it has no children? The school will close. The Village Shop will close. And Offwell becomes a bungalowized suburbia. Your rough Devon brogue (wherein you murder pronouns) and yet delight the ear, replaced by 'I say chaps' with a bit of 'Aw aw' and flat deadened vowels. Desecration. This is the worst invasion of all. It could be the death of Offwell. But look to your school and your village Shop. When they have gone that will be the end. The End.

I am so sorry to finish on such a sad note. Oh! but I do wish that I had known you in happier times. When the world was green. Supping ale at the Five Bells inn and walk through Offwell Woods. Rough times they may have been 'but oh, arrh, twere proper job.'

28. APPENDIX

A. RECTORS OF OFFWELL

- 1263 Michael De Arcediakene
 1270 Aleured.
 Osbert Gyffard
 1281 Robert De Clyve
 1309 Robert De Offwelle
 1321 Hugh Lady De Setone
 1354 Richard De Lilleshulle
 1410 John Kykke
 1433 John Hereward
 1488 John More
 1503 John Keymer
 1505 William Hawker
 1529 John Stone
 1545 John Gylls
 1571 Thomas Raddon - Rector of Musbury,1564 and Offwell,1571(both until his Death). Buried at Offwell on 18th July 1597.
 1597 John Tanner of Dorset. Exeter College, Oxford 1588. B.A. 1591 M.A. 1595. Rector of Offwell 1597, until his death. Buried at Offwell on 15th May 1632.
 1632 Thomas Jones of Oxford. New College, 1615. Trinity College. B.A. 1619. M.A. 1622. B.D.1631. Rector of Offwell 1632 until he was ejected during the Commonwealth. Fled to Holland after his house was plundered and died at Rotterdam before the Restoration
 1647 Robert Dacie (or Dacy) Rector of Buckland Brewer, 1630 until his death. Rector of Offwell about 1647 to 1650. Buried at Buckland Brewer on 24th June 1671.
 1650 Humphry Bradford. Exeter College, Oxford 1619. Rector of Nymet Rowand 1625. Rector of Offwell 1650 until his death. Rural Dean at Honiton 1661. Died on 12th September 1667. Buried at Offwell.
 1667 John Rost. Exeter College, Oxford 1657. B.A. 1660. M.A. 1663. Vicar of Winsham 1667 to 1675. Rector of Offwell 1668 and Gittisham 1651(both until his death). Rural Dean at Honiton 1674,1697 and 1705. Died on 30th April 1713. Buried at Ottery St. Mary. Married Elizabeth daughter of Nathaniel Taylor of Cassington.
 1713 Robert Roux. Son of Robert Rous of Exeter and great-grandson of Francis Rous (Provost of Eton and Speaker of the House of Commons in 1653). Exeter College,

- Oxford 1690. Pembroke College B.A. 1693. Fellow of Exeter College, 1695 to 1715. M.A. 1696. B.D. 1707. Rector of Offwell 1713 until his death on 8th March 1742. Buried at Offwell.
- 1742 Anthony Fulford, son of Francis Fulford of Toller Fratrum, Dorset. Born on 28th October 1714. Baptised at Toller Fratrum. Balliol College, Oxford, 1731. B.A. 1736. M.A. 1741. Rector of Offwell 1742 until his death. Rural Dean of Honiton 1742-44. Vicar of Toller Porcorum, 1748 until his death. Buried Toller Porcorum on 10th September 1754.
- 1755 William Daddo son of William Daddo of St. Neot's, Cornwall. Balliol College, Oxford 1733. B.A. 1738. M.A. 1740. Vicar of St. Stephen's, Saltash, 1740 to 1744. Vicar of Broadclyst 1744 to 1753. Vicar of St. Stephen's, Saltash, Feb-June 1753. Vicar of Dunsford 1753 until his death. Rector of Offwell 1755-10 1764. Rural Dean at Honiton 1755. Headmaster of Blundell's School 1743. Died at St. Thomas's, Exeter on 5th August 1765 aged 58. Burial at Tiverton.
- 1764 Francis Fulford, eighth son of Francis Fulford, of Fulford and Nephew of his predecessor, Anthony Fulford. Baptised at Dunsford on 19th October 1738. Christchurch, Oxford 1755. Balliol College B.C.L. 1764. Vicar of Toiler Porcorum 1764 to 1767. Rector of Offwell 1764 and Vicar of Dunsford 1767 (both until his death). Rural Dean at Honiton 1765. Will proved 24th December 1772. P.C.C. (441 Taverner).
- 1772 John Vye, son of Nathan Vye of Ifracombe. Balliol College, Oxford 1757. Vicar of Ilfracombe 1770 to 1771. Rector of Offwell 1772 to 1773. Rural Dean at Honiton 1773. Curate at Holy Trinity, Exeter 1773 to 1785. Married Anne, daughter of Revd. Edward Copleston (Rector of Tedburn St. Mary) and sister of John Bradford Copleston.
- 1773 John Bradford Copleston, third son of Revd. Edward Copleston (Rector of Tedburn St. Mary 1731 to 1767). Born at Tedburn St. Mary on 8th July 1749. Merton College, Oxford 1767 B.A. 1771. Rector of Offwell 1773 to 1800. Rural Dean at Honiton 1775-1776. Vicar of St. Thomas's Exeter 1800 until his death. Preb. Exeter 1824 Died at Exeter on 8th April 1831. Buried at Offwell. Married at Newton St. Cyres on 15th November 1773 Margaret daughter of Revd Nicholas Gay (Vicar of Newton St. Cyres, 1728 -1775).
- 1800 Edward Copleston, eldest son of his predecessor. Born at Offwell on 2nd February 1776. Baptised at Offwell. Corpus Christi College Oxford 1791. B.A. 1795. M.A. 1797. B.D. 1808. D.D. 1815. Fellow of Oriel College 1795 -1814. Provost 1814 -28. Professor of Poetry 1802-12. Vicar of St. Mary's Oxford 1800. Rector of Offwell 1800 to 1804. Preb. St. Paul's 1812. Preb. Rochester Jan. 1815. Dean of Chester 1826 to 1828. Bishop of Llandaff 1828. Dean of St. Paul's 1828 until his death on 14th October 1849 at Hardwick, near Chepstow. Buried in Llandaff Cathedral.
- 1804 John Gaius Copleston, second son of Revd. John Bradford Copleston. Born at Offwell on 5th March 1778. Baptised at Offwell. Pembroke College, Oxford 1795. Corpus Christi College B.A. 1799. M.A. 1802. Rector of Offwell 1804 and Vicar of Upottery 1814 (both until his death on 20th July 1841). Buried at Offwell. Rural Dean at Honiton 1805. J.P. for Devon. Married Harriet, daughter of James Townsend of Honiton.
- 1841 John Gay Copleston, eldest son of his predecessor. Born at Offwell on 16th March 1802. Baptised at Offwell. Oriel College, Oxford. 1820 B.A. 1824. M.A. 1827. Deacon

1825. Priest 1826. Rector of Kingsey, Bucks. 1827 to 1833. Rector of Lamyat 1833 to 1841. Rector of Offwell 1841 to 1880. Rural Dean at Honiton 1842-44, 1860-65, and 1873 - 76. Died at Offwell House on 4th June 1894. Buried at Offwell. Married (1) at Basildon, Berks on 28th February 1832, Catherine, daughter of Edmund Thomas Waters of Tyvree, Glam. Married (2) Maria, daughter of George Lovell of Stockbridge, Hants.
- 1880 John Henry Copleston, only son of his predecessor. Born at Lamyat on 28th April 1841. Baptised at Lamyat. Educated at Winchester. Corpus Christi College, Oxford 1859. B.A. 1862. M.A. 1869. Played cricket for Oxford 1860 and 1861 and later for Devon. Deacon 1864. Priest 1867. Rector of West Buckland 1871 to 1880. Rector of Offwell 1881 until his death. Rural Dean at Honiton 1895 to 1907. Died at Offwell on 22nd November 1918. Buried at Offwell. Married (1) at Kirkby Overblow, Yorks. on 7th September 1865 Edith Emma, daughter of Revd. Preb. Jonathan James Toogood. Married (2) at Darlington on 22nd April 1908 Margaret, daughter of Henry Champernowne of Dartington Hall.
- 1919 John Henry Herbert Copleston eldest son of his predecessor. Born at Kirkby Overblow on 5th July 1865. Educated at Malvern. Corpus Christi College, Oxford 1884. B.A. 1888. M.A. 1893. Deacon 1903. Priest 1905. Played cricket for Devon. Assistant Master at Brighton College 1888 -94. Headmaster Pencarwick, Exmouth 1894 - 1907. Rector of Dowlish Wake 1911 to 1916. Rector of Widworthy 1916 and Offwell 1919 (both until 1935). Married (1) at Kilmington on 3rd August 1898 Elizabeth, younger daughter of Charles Boucher of Kilmington. Married (2) at St. James', Piccadilly on 24th April 1923 Gertrude Theodore, daughter of Revd. William Blundell Besley, V.C.
- 1935 Frederick Elford Copleston. Educated Oriel College, Oxford. B.A. 1920. M.A. 1924. Priest 1922. Curate of Littleham with Exmouth 1921 to 1927. Vicar of Sandon 1927 to 1935. Rector of Offwell with Widworthy from 1935.
- 1954 Nathaniel Frederick Partridge. Educated at Ely Theological College 1922. Priest 1925. Sheffield College of St. Oswald 1923 to 1927. Sheffield Cathedral Church 1927 to 1929. Curate of Ridgeway 1929 to 194-1. Vicar of Tresmere with Treneglos and Tremaine 1944 to 1948. Burrington 19-18 to 1950. Rector of Shobrooke 1950 to 1954. Offwell with Widworthy from 1954.
- 1969 Leslie Frederick Houchin. Educated Kings College London and Warminster. Priest 1956 Guildford. Curate of Merrow 1955-1955. Vicar of Cove with South Hawley 1958-63. Rector of Clayhiden from 1963. Rural Dean Cullompton from 1966.
- 1969 William Euston Wright. Lincoln Theological College 1952. Priest 1954. Curate of Petrockstowe with Peters Marland 1953-56. Rector of Farway with Northleigh and Southleigh 1956-69. Offwell With Widworthy from 1969. Rural Dean of Honiton 1965-68.
- 1986 Nigel Timothy Schofield. Lincoln Theological College. Priest 1984. Curate Cheshunt 1985-86. Team Vicar with Colyton Team Ministry Colyford, Southleigh, Musbury, Offwell, Widworthy, Northleigh and Farway.

B. 1785 -1801 A COUNTRYMAN'S DIARY

So great a drought prevailed this year that little or no rain fell from the latter end of February till the beginning of August. Scarce any hay made at the usual season, farmers in general being obliged to rely on the late crops of grass for winter's provision for their cattle. Great

quantities of hay made the latter end of October and some even so late as the middle of November in this and the neighbouring parishes. Crops of corn also thin but this in some measure compensated by heavy kerning. Barley however rose from 2/3d per bushel in the summer to nearly 5/- in the month of November. Oats upwards of 3/-. This year is also remarkable for a heavy fall of snow as early as the 26th October. A more general scarcity of apples never known in the county a circumstance that partly accounts for the extraordinary price of Barley.

1789

August the 16th. His Majesty George the third passed through this parish in an excursion to the west after a recovery from a dangerous illness.

1791

In the beginning of the month of June this year the weather was remarkably hot and sultry about the 18th, it changed suddenly to a still more extraordinary degree of cold. Kidney beans and greens of potatoes were in many places destroyed by the severity of the frost. The effects of the frost were however unaccountably partial. There were several instances of two continuous gardens in one of which the above named vegetables were either killed or injured and in the adjoining one wholly unhurt. Particular branches of the same apple trees in aspects directly opposite were at the same time observed to be scorched and blighted, while other parts of the trees remained vigorous and luxuriant as before. The weather continued unusually cold though without frost after the 24th for several weeks. We found fires expedient and comfortable many evenings in July even to the middle of the month

1792

The summer of this year was uncommonly wet and gloomy. The months of June and July were rainy and foggy the sun generally obscured and scarcely visible at any one time for six hours successively. The first fortnight of August was tolerably serene but from that period to the middle of October (when this memorandum was inserted) the rains were heavy and almost incessant. Much corn of every sort was of course materially injured and especially the later crops of Barley and Oats a great proportion of which in this Parish and the neighbourhood sustained irreparable damage.

1795

The crops of the last harvest being thin and scanty, grain of all sorts rose this year to an enormous price. Wheat sold at 13/- per bushel, Barley at 7/-, Oats at 5/-, so that it became necessary to relieve the poor by subscriptions and voluntary subscriptions, which were generally made and very liberally supported. The poor of this Parish had by this means a constant supply of Wheat at 8/- per bushel and of Barley at 4/6d. The Wheat of the present year being also light and unproductive, its price is not likely to be much reduced without large importation. Of Barley, Apples, Oats and Potatoes however the crops have been remarkably fine and luxuriant.

1799

The summer of this year was remarkable for continued and excessive rains. Scarce a day proved dry and fair during the whole months of July and August, and on the 16th of the latter month there was such a flood as had hardly been remembered at any season. A large quantity

of Hay was in consequence carried off by the over flowing of rivers; and still more that was uncut injured by mud and sand. No Wheat or other grain cut in this parish till September; on the eighth of which month the rain again set in and continued with scarce a days intermission till the middle of November; at which time there were many acres of Barley and Oats uncut in this parish and in some neighbouring parishes even a good deal of wheat was standing. Grain of every description was of course much injured. The price of tolerable Wheat was 14/per bushel, Barley 7/6d and Oats 5/-, Potatoes 8/6d per bag.

1801

This year a general failure of crops for two successive years caused Wheat to advance in price to £1.1.0. per bushel, Barley to 14/-, Oats to 6/- and potatoes to 13/- and 14/- per bag. In consequence alarming riots and tumultuous assemblies prevailed in various parts of the Kingdom but were suppressed without much bloodshed.

C. THE GREAT WAR 1914 -1918

Men of Offwell who served in the Armed Forces

Richard Anstis		Worcester Regt.
Frederick Broom		R-F.A.
Thomas Broom		R.A.S.C.
Arthur Buckingham		RE
Charles Burford		RN.
Herbert Burford		RN.
Sidney Burford		RN.
Walter Burford		R.N.
Thomas Connett		Devon Regt.
Charles Copleston		Devon Regt.
Reginald Copleston		R.N.
William Davey		Devon Regt.
Victor Evans		Devon Rcg.
William Farmer		9th Lancers.
Percy Hitchcock		Devon Regt.
Fred Hooper	Killed in action.	Devon Regt.
William Jerrard		R.A.M.C.
Frederick King		R.A.S.C.
James Letten		Guards.
Ernest Manvil		Devon Regt.
Harold Manvil		West Kent Regt.
Thomas North		Devon Regt.
William Patch		R.A.S.C.
Frank Pilton	Killed in Action	Devon Regt.
Francis Pinney		Devon Regt.
Frederick Raddon		Devon Regt.
Albert Richards		East Surrey Regt.
Luke Richards		R.A.S.C.
Harry Small		R.N.
John Stamp		Royal Veterinary Corps.
Archibald Stanley		R.A.S.C.

Donald Stanley	9th Lancers.
William Stanley	Devon Regt.
Ernest Williams	9th Lancers.
William Wood	Devon Regt.

D. THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939 -1945

Men and Women of Offwell who served in the Armed Forces

Derek Ackland		Royal Air Force
Denzil Ackland		Royal Army Service Corps
Charles Baugh	Killed in Action	Green Howards
Frederick Blackmore		Royal Air Force
Eric Blake		Royal Marines
Bruce Bowditch		Royal Navy
William Bright		Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
Desmond Broom		Royal Air Force
Nelson Bussel		Wiltshire Regiment
Frederick Cann		Royal Artillery
Leslie Channon		
William Chick		
Albert Chick		
Donald Currie		Royal Navy
Lome Currie	Killed on Service	Royal Air Force
Albert Dicks		Royal Marines
Martin Drew		Guards
John Edmunds		Royal Navy
Peter Evans		Royal Army Ordnance Corps
Ronald Evans		Royal Army Ordnance Corps
Winifred Godfrey		Woman's Auxiliary Air Force
Joan Godfrey		Woman's Auxiliary Air Force
Louisa Godfrey		Woman's Auxiliary Air Force
William Godfrey		Royal Navy
Raymond Griffin		Military Police
William Hubbard		Royal Marines
Herbert Manvil		Royal Fusiliers
Richard Michell		Royal Air Force
Gerald North	Killed in Action	Royal Navy
Leslie North		Royal Marines
Caryl Ramsden		Royal Artillery
Anne Ramsden		Woman's Auxiliary Air Force
Joyce Reeder		Woman's Royal Naval Service
Michael Richards		Royal Observer Corps
Roy Richards		Royal Air Force
Robert Richards		Royal Air Force
Maurice Richards		Guards
Sidney Salter		Royal Artillery
Loma Smythe		Woman's Royal Naval Service .
Frank Stanley		Royal Armoured Corps

Wolseley Stanley
Ronald Tidball

Royal Marines
Royal Air Force

E. DOMESDAY BOOK - OFFWELL PARISH

Baldwin has a manor called HESMALACOMA which Godwin held T.R.E. [T.R.E. is a form of shorthand meaning - held at the time of Edward the Confessor's death] and it paid; gold for one hide. This one plough can till. Roger holds it of Baldwin.

There Roger has - 1 Plough, 1 Serf, 3 acres of meadow, 6 acres of pasture. Worth 5 shillings a year and was worth the same when he received it.

(Note. Smallicombe, in Northleigh Parish on the west bank of Offwell Brook)

Baldwin has a manor called COLEWILLA which Almer held T.R.E. and it paid gold for 11½ hides. These 8 ploughs can till. Rogro holds it of Baldwin. Thereof Rogro has in demesne ½ hide and 1 plough, and the villeins 1 hide and 112 ploughs. There Rogro has 6 villeins, 2 bordars, 2 serfs, 5 beasts, 8 swine, 57 sheep, 20 goats, 80 acres of woodland, 300 acres of pasture. Worth 20 shillings a year; when he received it it was worth 10 shillings.

(Note. This must have been the present Colwell Barton)

Baldwin has a manor called OFFAWILLA which Borgaret held T.R.E. and it paid gold for one Virgate. This 2 ploughs can till. Raginald holds it of Baldwin. Thereof Raginald has in demesne -½ virgate and one plough and the villeins ½ virgate and two ploughs. There Raginald has 6 villeins, 2 bordars, 10 beasts, Woodland 5 furlongs in length by 20 perches in breadth, 80 acres of pasture. Worth 13 shillings a year. When he received it it was worth 12 pence.

Baldwin has a manor called Wilemitona which Etmer held T.R.E. and it paid geld for 1 virgate. This two ploughs can till. Morin holds it of Baldwin. Thereof Morin has in demesne ½ virgate and one plough and the villeins ½ virgate and ½ plough. There Morin has 2 villeins, 2 bordars, 1 serf, 3 sheep, 15 acres of woodland and 7 acres of meadow. Worth 7½ shillings. When he received it it was worth 5 shillings.

Note. This must be North Wilmington and Cleave in Offwell. (Rotten luck for those villeins having just half a plough ...)

Baldwin has a manor called Collabera which Adelwold held T.R.E. and paid geld for 3 virgates. These two ploughs can till. There Morin who holds it of Baldwin has nothing in demesne. Worth 3 shillings a year.

Note. This appears to be the land just south of Railway Cottages half a mile north of Wilmington but in Offwell.

Land Measures used in Domesday Book

Acre An area 220 yards long by 22 yards wide
Furlong An area 220 yards long by 220 yards wide (Now known as a measure of length - eighth of a mile)

League	12 of the above furlongs
Virgate	64 Acres
Firling	16 Acres
Plough or Ploughland	60 Acres (ignore my remarks about half a plough)
Hide	256 acres or 4 Virgates or 16 Firlings. Otherwise sufficient land to support one free family and dependents, varying from 60 to 120 Acres according to the locality.

F. PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY IN THE PARISH OF OFFWELL

Footpath No. 8 from Village Lane to Northleigh.

From the Unclassified Road, Village Lane, by Colwell and proceeds south eastwards for a distance of 80 yards along a Private Accommodation Road (not repairable by the inhabitants at large) turning southwards by Dullimoor to a footbridge over the Offwell Brook on the Offwell/Northleigh Parish boundary where it continues as Footpath No. 19.

Footpath No. 11 from County Road 367 to County Road 63.

From the County Road 362 at the north eastern corner of Bloomey Down and proceeds south westwards along the south eastern boundary to join county Road 63, 250 yards north of Poltimore Gate.

Footpath No. 16 from the end of the unclassified County Road to the Honiton Borough Boundary

From tile end of the unclassified County Road near the northwest corner of Colwell Wood and proceeds southwestwards across two fields to join the Unclassified County Road on the Offwell Parish/jHoniton Borough boundary.

Bridleway No. 17 from the end of the Unclassified County Road to the bridge over the brook-.

From the end of the Unclassified County Road and the junction with Path No. 16 at the north west corner of Colwell Wood and proceeds eastwards turning Southwards along a Private Accommodation Road (not repairable by the inhabitants at large) through The Husk past its junction with Path No. 13, now deleted, to a bridge over the brook at the end of the Unclassified County Road 200 yards west of West Colwell.

Footpath No. 19 from the Unclassified County Road 200 yards south of the Rectory and proceeds southwards turning south eastwards along the Eastern boundary of Kenhill Copse to join the Unclassified County Road 170 yards west north west of Colwell Barton.

Footpath No. 22 from the Ford to Bloomey Down.

From the Ford on the Unclassified County Road 100 yards west of West Colwell and proceeds west south westwards over Aplin's Common and along a private Accommodation Road (not repairable by the inhabitants at large) to join County Road 362300[?] yards south east of Bloomey Down.

Footpath No. 23 from the unclassified Road to Footpath No. 22.

From the Unclassified County Road on the corner south of Hooper's Farm and proceeds north eastwards passing to the south west of Slowpool Farm on to join Footpath No. 22 on

Aplin's Common.

Footpath No. 26 from Mill Lane to Northleigh.

From the Unclassified County Road, Mill Lane, south of Hooper's Farm and proceeds south eastwards over rough land to the Offwell/Northleigh Parish Boundary 50 yards north east of Bagwell's Cottage and continues as Footpath No. 22.

Footpath No. 27 from Poltimore Gate to the Road east of Bloomey Down.

From the County Road by Poltimore Gate and proceeds in a north easterly direction across three fields, passing to the west of Glanville Farm and joining the County Road opposite the junction with Footpath No. 22, 300 yards south east of Bloomey Down.

Footpath No. 28 from The Mead to Bridleway No. 17.

From the Road by The Mead (O.S.380) and proceeds in a south westerly direction across O.S.380 along the north western boundary of O.S.378 across O.S.377 and along the boundary of O.S.374/375 to join Bridleway No. 17 west of Colwell.

G. COLWELL MILL

This Mill stood on the banks of the Offwell Brook and was in constant use until it was burnt down about 1890. It was fed by the Offwell Brook and seems to have had a storage pond. When Bishop Copleston constructed the Offwell Ponds around about 1830 the Miller found that he could obtain longer hours of grinding by raising the sluice gates of these ponds which formed a considerable reserve of water for his mill. At first this was done with the generous permission of the Bishop, but the miller, a tenant of Sir E. Marwood Elton of Widworthy Court, gradually presumed on this permission and claimed the right to raise the hatches of these ponds when he liked. Difficulties arose which nearly ended in a law suit. Mr Coleridge, later the Lord Chief Justice, examined the case and decided that the miller had no grounds for complaint.

It is possible that the bye pass leat which took the water from Colwell Woods past the ponds was made to remove the miller's grievance that water from the brook was delayed in the ponds but more probably to prevent the ponds being filled with gravel, brought down by heavy rains.

H. FIELD NAMES

Col. Ramsden listed the field names from the local Tithe Register (dated around 1840) and from estate lists. They are phonetic spellings of names given verbally to the surveyor to enable him to compile the register. In some cases there were two versions of the same name.

I have had a go at interpreting some of the names. I am reluctant to admit that I can be as wrong as the next man and that my guess is as good as yours. Your mission, should you accept, is to have a bash at the others. Call it your holiday task. You will have noticed that I have done the easy ones and they are mostly wrong anyway. And the best of luck. A final tip from old clever clogs ... if you are living in a field called Four Acres and its size is nowhere near that size you will probably find that it is called after a Mr Fouracres. A family of Fouracres pops up in the Parish Records at the end of the 16th century. Are your sighs the same size as my sighs?

Tennis Land: Late Middle English, tenetz - from Tenir, hold or take, in the game presumed to be the service call to the opponent. Could one assume that this bit of land was up for grabs and somebody took it?

Elvins: from the Cornish, Elvan - hard rock

Lidefield:

Abbot's Wood:

Scurr's or Scruce:

Whitefield Door:

Dews Park (Jewspark): There was a Sir Roger le Jewe in the neighbourhood in the reign of King Edward II time. But that king is not mentioned in polite society and I apologise.

Cuckoo Acre:

Palegate. Pail: pointed stake - a fence around an enclosure

Brimland: Border or margin or raised border.

Culver: A wood pigeon.

Melley: Site of the village bee hives? (Mell, Latin for honey.)

Langlands	Phursees	Skennell
Culleybeer	Bowling Green	Phoenix
Shell	Sharket (or Shorket)	Malthouse
Busland	Red Lath Oak	Rooks Bar
Lennard's	Shoemaker's How	Hinkley
Grubland	Pulpit	Gull's
Wetlands	Chinland	Foreknee
Clapper	Colley Slade	Holdbare
Windwhistle	Offington	Clanwell

I. OFFWELL CHURCH 1658 PLAN

J. OFFWELL CHURCH 1658 SEATING PLAN

K. OFFWELL CHURCH 1854 SEATING PLAN

L. EXTENSION OF THE CHURCHYARD 1886 AND IN 1922

M. BOOKS CONSULTED

English Social History (2nd edition 1946)	G. M. Trevelyan
History of England (3rd Edition, 1947)	G. M. Trevelyan
Devon and Its People (1959)	W. G. Hoskins
Smuggling Days in Devon (1956)	J. R. W. Coxhead
Legends of Devon	J. R. W. Coxhead
Honiton and the Vale of the Otter (1949)	J. R. W. Coxhead
Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (1966)	C. T. Onions
English Place Names and their Origins (1971)	G. J. Copley
Local History, Objective and Pursuit (1973)	H. P. R. Finburg and V.H.T. Skipp
Devon and Exeter in the Civil War (1971)	Eugene A. Andriette
Devon Tollhouses (1976)	John Kanefsky

History on your Doorstep (1982)	J. R. Ravensdale
The Peoples England (1981)	Alan Eveira
The Coaching Age (1976)	David Mountfield
Rural Life in Victorian England (1977)	G. E. Mungay
Toilers of the Field (1892)	Richard Jefferies
Church, Monastery, Cathedral (1977)	Herbert Whone
Earth Magic (1976)	Francis Hitching
Looking at Churches (1976)	David Bowen
The Churches of Devon (1968)	J. M. Slader
Copleston of Offwell, Devon Assn (1931)	W. H. Wilkin
Devon's Traditional Buildings (1978)	Devon C C
The Churchyard Yew (1832)	John Gaius Copleston

N. ODDS AND ENDS

The Devil's Chapel

'Wherever God erects a house of prayer
the Devil always builds a chapel there
and twill be found on examination
the latter has the largest congregation.'

Daniel Defoe

Daniel Defoe was the chap who admired the view from the top of Honiton Hill. I haven't the nerve to say that it contains bad grammar - I have enough of my own - but you can if you like.

An Epitaph

John Gay, the poet, playwright and essayist was cousin to Margaret Gay (who married John Bradford Copleston) and is buried in Westminster Abbey. On his monument is inscribed the following epitaph written by himself.

'Life is a jest, and all things show it;
I thought so once, and now I know it'

Gardening Hint

You will hear the countryman say that he always plants his potatoes, his parsley or whatever on Good Friday - carrying on a country tradition. Good Friday and Christmas Day were the only holidays that the farm worker had in those good old days. He spent his Good Friday feverishly planting everything within reach. Good husbandry had nothing to do with it.

New Year's Day

When I first embarked on this book I was ignorant of the fact that the New Year hasn't always started on 1st January. (I should have twigged when I saw that the earlier entries in the Parish Register were arranged in years starting in March.) In classical Rome, where all things were neat and tidy, the year did start on 1st January. In the Middle Ages other dates were chosen for the beginning of the year, Christmas Day, for instance. The Feast of the Annunciation (Lady Day, 25th March) was later adopted and became the legal mode of reckoning. In 1751 the calendar was reformed and 1st January became New Year's Day. On this change-over we substituted the Gregorian Calendar for the Julian bringing us in line with

most European countries. There was, however, a discrepancy of eleven days, consequently the days between 2nd Sept. and 14th September 1752 were omitted. This annoyed the ignorant peasants who shouted out “Give us back our eleven days”., Peasants have always been revolting for one reason or another so no one took any notice.

Planting Garden Peas - Offwell Style

My good friend and neighbour gave me an ancient tip to stop mice pinching newly sown peas. Just sprinkle fine sand along the furrows. When mice start digging down for the peas the sand gets into their cars and they don't like it - it irritates something awful.

Not being a countryman I laughed lit to bust. I visualised mice running around in circles banging their heads with their front paw trying to dislodge the sand.

Gaol Break

Among Col. Ramsden's papers is a newspaper cutting relating to his theory that Benjamin Franklin's ancestors may have come from Widworthy. Tucked away in the corner of the page is an item which is, as the Australians say, a beaut.

A 32 year-old convict, John ... gave the deputy sheriff a 'hot tip' of an escape plot at the County Gaol. While the officer went to investigate, the convict slipped out of the door and disappeared.

The Man with the Scythe

The scene is Offwell Churchyard. Sam (aged eighty plus) at the annual tidying up of the Churchyard, was wielding a great scythe with dexterity.

Rector: “There are not many about who can do that Sam”

Sam: “There be plenty, but them all underneath us”

Sam has since joined the other grass cutters, bless him.

Gossip

...And she says to me and so I says to her but don't let it go any further and I didn't think she was like that etc. etc.

The origin of the word gossip is very interesting. In the old days it was the practice for the female God Parents, Godsib that is God relative to be present. During the long hours of waiting they naturally did an interminable amount of jawbanging - hence the verb 'to gossip'.

Burial Customs

“Noe person ... whatsoever shall be buried in any shirt, shift or sheete made of or mingled with Flax, Silk, Hempe, Gold or Silver or other than what be made of Wooll onely - upon forfeiture of the summe of Five Pounds” This was an Act of 1678.

This law wasn't repealed until 1815. The law was avoided by the very poor who couldn't afford a woollen outfit anyway. The rich paid the fine rather than see their relatives buried in wool. Relatives or executors had to produce a certificate to the effect that the law had been

observed. It is nice to know that if you had died of the plague you were excused.

A Rate Rebate ...

Memorated that whereas the house belonging to the estate of William Surriddg was formerly a publick Inn but now is not such, we whose names are subscribed do consent that he shall be abated three farthings a month upon the gross rate and that such abatement shall continue until such time as it shall be a publick inne againe and no longer.

John Rost, Rector, Cha. Southcott, Henry Collying, Thos. Upham, Richard Turner, James Raddon, Nicolas Telling, Will Surrage.

Cure for cuts - Offwell Style

Collect leaves from a Madonna Lily and dry them. Store them in brandy in an air-tight jar. Wrap the leaves over the wound and bandage.

Cure for Baldness - Offwell Style

Take some goose grease add some ivy leaves (Hedera or Headera Heliz). Heat gently in a frying pan and continue frying for a spell. Strain the mixture through a sieve and pour the clear fat over your head. You should let it cool first-There is one snag - it pongs.

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