

## SOPLEY 1958

A CHURCH, a pub and an old mill by the stream. Sopley has all three. And although modern towns have sprung up in the not-too-far distance, the beauty and charm of this old world village remain unspoilt.

The church of St. Michael and All Angels has been described as one of the most beautiful churches in the Vale of Avon, a church whose history is veiled in the mists of antiquity. It is known far and wide and the parishioners can be justly proud of possessing it.

Like so many other churches dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels, it is situated on a hill, although it is scarcely more than a mound and some authorities consider it to be artificial and possibly the site of a pagan temple. But there are few country churches in the county that can offer as much general interest or impart as great an impression.

### ISLAND STONE.

The walls are of ironstone rubble, probably obtained from Hengistbury Head, with dressings of Isle of Wight stone. The original nave was probably very small, occupying space between the present tower and transept arches, and having a small chancel within the lines of the east end of the present nave.

In the 13th century, the church was greatly enlarged, a new chancel, equal in width to the nave, being built east of the old chancel and large transepts were thrown out north and south. Late in the 14th century the nave was completely rebuilt with tower over the west bay, and at the east end of the nave larger arches were built opening into the transepts.

There are many interesting features about the church. In the upper part of the East Window is the Berkley Arms. Sir Maurice Berkley is reputed to have killed the Bisterne dragon which did so much mischief in the neighbourhood in the 1400's.

The entrance to the rood loft, still remains, together with the stone corbals which carried the loft. The pulpit strap-work carving is of the 17th century and there are a number of linen-fold panels in the clergy seats and desks and also surrounding the clergy vestry, which probably formed part of the screen.

Three 13th century slabs of Purbeck marble are in the church, two with figures under trefoiled canopies. They are believed to date from 1270 and to represent co-founders of the mediaeval church.

### COMMANDED ARMY.

In the churchyard is the tomb of Lord Keane, who commanded the army which marched to Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1839. He died at Burton Lodge, now Whitehayes, on 26th August, 1844.

General Sir George Willis is also buried at Sopley. His ancestors lived at Sopley Park and two of them were Vicars of Sopley, one for 57 years and the other for 20 years.

Services at the church are now conducted by Canon C. D. Kirkham, Rural Dean of Christchurch, and Vicar of Sopley and Burton. Many of the older residents of Sopley remember with affection the late Mr. and Mrs. John Kemp-Welch, of Sopley Park. Mr. Kemp-Welch was known in the village as "the lovable old Squire".

Several villagers will recall the happy occasion when Mr. and Mrs. Kemp-Welch celebrated their golden wedding.

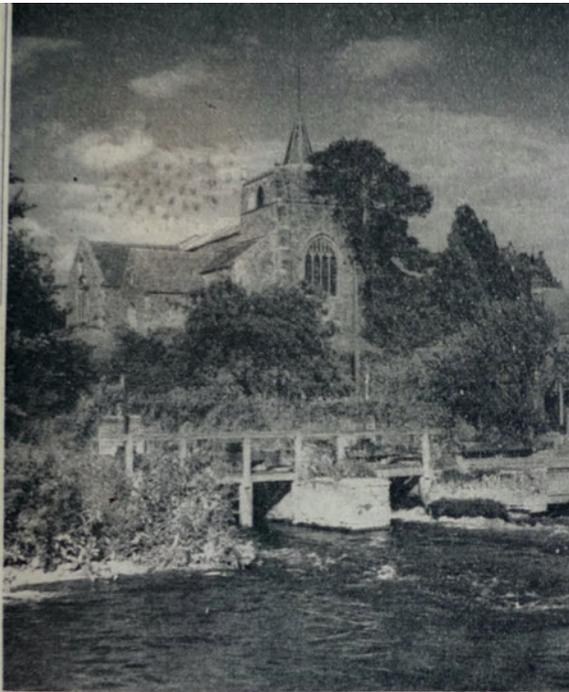
The day was heralded by a peal on the church bells and messages of greetings poured in. Among the first gifts to reach them was a gold paper knife from the indoor and outdoor staff of Sopley Park.

The "great event" came in the evening when all the villagers were entertained to supper in the Assembly Hall—an ancient barn which had been converted by Mr. Kemp-Welch into a modern club or village centre. Those present were mainly tenants and numbered 150. Among them was Mr. Eli Butler who, at 92, was the oldest inhabitant. He was the village shoemaker in his day, and Mr. Kemp-Welch, in a reminiscent speech, mentioned that the old man made him his first catapult, with which he killed the family cat.

## ASSEMBLY HALL.

The golden wedding also marked the opening of the Assembly hall, the preliminary ceremony of opening being performed by Mrs. Kemp-Welch. Her husband said he had long been anxious about the provision of some place where the village folk could meet.

The present-day tendency, he said, was for people in the country to flock into the towns for excitement and he thought to counter that by offering reasonable accommodation in their midst for the holding of dances, bridge tournaments, billiards and so on. The old British School in the village did not answer the purpose, so he had turned his thoughts to the old barn.



The beauty of Sopley was captured by C.T. cameraman Allen White in this charming study of the ancient church on the banks of the River Avon.

A Sopley Social Club was eventually formed at the Assembly Hall and taking over the position of treasurer in 1937 was Mrs. J. Harrison, of Meadow View. The committee decided to hold social events and during the war, when the R.A.F. and the United States forces came to Sopley, the club was in full swing. "We only had a radiogram, but sometimes it was so crowded that they couldn't even dance," said Mrs. Harrison. Through their efforts, the committee were able to contribute over £400 to various charities and for two years they sent a Christmas gift of 10/- to every serving member of the club. The club, however, is no longer active, although there are still funds in the bank. "The young folk we had, got married and left the village and there were several years when no children were born," continued Mrs. Harrison. "So rather than keeping the club open and running our events at a loss we decided to keep the money in the bank until there was a need for the club."

There are now about 30 children in the village so when they are old enough they have a hall, a piano, and funds to re-start activities.

Chairman of the club is Mr. William Freeman and secretary, Mr. Tom Curtis.

The blacksmith's shop at Sopley is still to be seen, but the anvil and bellows are no longer used, for the village "Smithy", Mr. Jack Harrison, retired about three years ago. He had been in the business for over 50 years and he took it over at the age of 15 when his father died. An employee of Mr. Harrison's for 40 years was Mr. Sidney Hill, of Hurn. Mr. Harrison says he has been kicked by horses dozens of times but "only once put to sleep". He has seen Arab horses kick the roof with their hooves and on some occasions it was necessary to "put the horses on their back and tie their feet—but that is not allowed today," he added.

Mr. Harrison has several trophies he won with his own ponies at the Burley show. In 1920 he won two cups, a medal and £13 —"big money in those days".

One of the oldest residents of Sopley is Mr. Francis George Freeman, aged 84. He was born at Ripley but moved to Sopley as a child and worked in the gardens at Sopley Park for 62 years. He started work at the age of 12 as "odd boy" for 2/- a week at Priest House. His father, Mr. Francis John Freeman, was the village postman for 22 years.

"My father started from Winkton Post Office at six o'clock in the morning and delivered up through Sopley, Avon, Ripley, Shirley and part of Bransgore. He walked all the way—about 14 to 15 miles—and arrived back at Winkton at 10 a.m.," recalled Mr. Freeman.

His mother operated Sopley Post Office when it was adjoining the old wheelwright's shop.

The wheelwright at that time, said Mr. Freeman, was Mr. Richard Corbin, who used to saw all the timber by hand. Mr. Fred Vincent then took over and he was followed by his son, Charles, who had the business up to about six years ago.

## FLOUR MILL.

Mr. Freeman also recalled the days of the old flour mill near the river, for his father worked there before he was a postman.

One occasion which he remembers well is the fire at the carpenter's shop on a Good Friday about 60 years ago. "It was during the night, but all the villagers turned out and made a chain of buckets from the brook until firemen arrived from Christchurch. The shop was burnt out and a horse in an adjoining stable was burnt to death."

One of the village postmen until his retirement recently was Mr. A. J. Harrison, who started as a telegraph boy at Sopley Post Office in 1911.

Holder of the Imperial Service medal, he used to get up at four in the morning, cycle to Christchurch and then return on his cycle with the post for Sopley and the surrounding villages. "Now," he says, "I am enjoying my extra few minutes in bed."

Another villager who remembers the days of the old flour mill is Mr. W. Watson, the estate carpenter. He lived at the mill for 25 years and his grandfather, Mr. William Tuck, worked there for over 60 years. To find details of the history of Sopley church I visited the Misses M. E. and M. R. Dacombe of Gosfield Cottage, Winkton. They are treasurer and secretary respectively of the Parochial Church Council, and their father Mr. J.M. J. Dacombe, was a former secretary of the P.C.C. and a churchwarden. The Dacombe family have taken a great interest in the history of St. Michael's and All Angels', and Mr. Dacombe compiled authentic details which date back to the 13th century.

## FARMING.

Farming has been the main industry of Sopley for centuries and for many years the surrounding land has been farmed by the Farwell family.

Mr. William James Farwell tenants Sopley Farm. He has three brothers farming at Burton, Hinton and Avon, and two cousins at Ripley and Bisterne.

Helped by his son, Gordon aged 20, and his 23-year-old daughter, Pamela, who looks after the 700 to 1,000 head of poultry, Mr Farwell took over Sopley Farm in 1931. He started with 250 acres but in 1946 took over the nearby farm of Mr. Hubert Kemp-Welch, and now has a total of 410 acres. He has a herd of about 85 "grading up pedigree shorthorn" milking cows and about 200 young stock in addition to 130 pigs and poultry. The main crops are corn, potatoes and food for the stock. During the war, the Ministry took over 150 acres of his land for use as an American fighter base for about three years. This was operational for about ten weeks about the time of D-Day, and when the land was eventually handed back Mr. Farwell had to clear about 7,000 tons of gravel before the land could be cultivated.

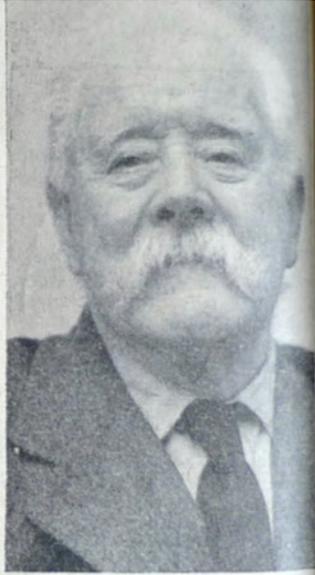
Sopley Farm has one of the best barns in the area. Its walls are 20 inches thick, it is a two-story building and is capable of storing 2,000 sacks of corn.

A member of the South Avon and Stour Agricultural Society Mr. Farwell is also on the District Committee of the Agricultural Executive and a member of the Council and Cattle Committee of the New Forest Show. He was a sergeant in the Home Guard during the war, and was mentioned in dispatches for meritorious service. His daughter is a former secretary of the Brockenhurst Young Farmers' Association. His home is at "Harpway called because of Harpway Lane which runs alongside. The lane, says Mr. Farwell is reputed to have got its name from a battle in the vicinity many years ago. "It is said that the Danes, fought in the battle, came up the lane playing their harps," added Mr. Farwell.

One of the well-known personalities in the village is Mr. Andrew Lane, of School Flats. Aged 69, he is the former landlord of the Woolpack Inn, and now verger at the church and an assistant verger at the Priory Church. Mr. Lane was born in Christchurch, but moved to Sopley when he married the daughter of Mrs. Louisa Reeks, who was at that time landlady of the Woolpack.

The village "local," the Woolpack, is the only public house actually in Sopley, and the front of the building is believed to be about 250 years old. Present landlord is Mr. R. G. White, who came from Bournemouth. Mrs. White's grandfather was a former landlord of the inn.

## FIRST SHOP.



The grand old man of Sopley. Aged 93, Mr. Charles Button is one of the oldest villagers.

The first shop in Sopley was opened by the mother of 93 year old Mr. Charles Button, who is now living at Brooklyn Old People's Home, Christchurch. Mr. Button's mother lived until she was 100 and his wife died four years ago at the age of 93. Born at Sopley, his mother's family lived there for many years. He served his apprenticeship in the grocery trade in Sussex and then spent 17 years in London before returning to Sopley to take over Priest House which he and his wife ran as a guest house. Priest House, he says is reputed to have belonged to the Catholics before they built a church at Christchurch. Mr. Button has two sons, one living in Sopley and the other in Tasmania. The first and only garage in Sopley was developed from a cycle shop started 30 years ago by Mr. A. J. Harrison. He retired two years ago and the garage is now run by Mr. R. J. Emerton, who comes from Boscombe. Sopley Women's Institute is an active body and they meet once a month in the Assembly Hall. It was formed about six years ago, the president is Mrs. V. Price, and secretary, Miss H. Watson. The village still has only one store and this is combined with the Post Office, run by Mr. and Mrs. W. Stuart.

## PREPARATORY SCHOOL.

The beautiful old mansion at Sopley Park, which was the former home of the Kemp-Welch family, is now a preparatory boarding school for boys.

Its grounds make one of the most beautiful settings for any school in the country, for, spaced by well-tended lawns, many fine specimens of oak, beech, macraforbia and other trees grow around the mellow central building.

The Kemp-Welch family is now represented in the village by Mr. Hubert Kemp-Welch. He was brought up at Sopley Park but now lives at at nearby "Homestead." In the old days everybody looked up to the Squire, who understood his people. Today there are not many parishes in England with a Squire of that sort, but Sopley is one of the few exceptions. It is a happy, contented village with a Squire who holds the affection of his people.