

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this book is to provide a detailed 'factual and visual' picture of Wichenford and the people who live here in the year 2000. However, Wichenford is steeped in history and we have endeavored both to contrast 'today' with 'yesterday' and to capture something of the past. We have been fortunate to be able to include, and so to preserve, old maps, early 19th C drawings and copies of old documents which have not previously been published.

Wichenford in the year 2000AD is an active village consisting of over 200 households in the parish of Kenswick and Wichenford. The village name has been spelt in a number of different ways over the past few centuries; these include Wyceneford (11th C), Wychynford (14th C), Wychenford (16th C), Winchenford, Whichingford Wichenford (17th C) and Wickingford, Wickenford (18th C). The name itself may be derived from the ford of the 'Wiccians' (O.E. Hwicceana-ford) who were the inhabitants of Worcester in Saxon times. This was possibly the first ford in the Hwiccian territory reached by travellers from the territory of the Magasaetan known today as Herefordshire.

Alternatively, the village takes its name from a 'ford by a Wych Elm'. The ford was used to cross Fitcher brook where it flows between the Parish Church and Wichenford Court. Having been used for more than a thousand years, the ford finally gave way to the needs of mechanised transport and the brook now passes under Venn Lane between the Court and the church.

We know that a farming community has existed at Wichenford for more than a thousand years because records of holdings are recorded in the Domesday survey. This is not surprising, as the land is remarkably fertile being based on an alluvial, heavy clay deposit (technically this is Keuper Marl) between the rivers Severn and Teme. Wichenford clay is very fine and of a silt-like consistency, which is difficult to work especially in wet weather but when conditions are

right can be very productive. From Saxon records, we know that some forty names of fields in use at the end of the first millennium have remained unchanged through the centuries and are in current use today. However, the village name itself was known at that time as Wiceneford and Verm Lane has been corrupted with the passage of time to Venn Lane.

It is an unusual village in several respects. Not only does it give a superficial impression of being a modern village which belies its antiquity, but also there is only a small population, even though the village extends over a distance of more than three miles with the main development along three roads arranged as a letter H. Older maps, which identify individual buildings, clearly show how scattered the community was, with one or two small hamlets such as those at King's Green and Rosses Lane included within the village. It is not surprising therefore, that the village does not have, nor has ever had, a clearly defined centre. This is particularly true today as there are no shops and no school and although the church and the village hall are situated on Venn Lane near the geographical centre of the village, they lie in a fairly isolated area with only the Old Vicarage close by. Even the village pub, which is situated at the corner of Venn Lane and the Martley road, exists in splendid isolation.

The principal buildings in the village are the church and Wichenford Court. The church of St Laurence is of considerable antiquity dating from the mid 13th C. Wichenford Court is also an ancient building, parts of which date back to Elizabethan times; there is also evidence of an earlier medieval mansion.

However, a visitor to Wichenford is most likely to see the 17th C tithe barn as this has to be negotiated when driving along Venn Lane. The building, which belongs to the Court, was originally constructed of timber and wattle but the wattle has, during more recent times, been largely replaced by brick and by woven timber panels. Many visitors come to Wichenford expressly to see the 17th C dovecote which also stands in the grounds of the Court but now belongs to the National Trust.

The antiquity of the village is reflected in the fact that a surprising number of buildings in Wichenford are Grade II listed. Excluding the church and the Court, the list includes 14 farmhouses, 5 houses, 10 barns and farm outbuildings, 3 dovecotes, 1 bakehouse and 1 forge. Almost all of these buildings are at least 16th C and many are considerably earlier with some dating from the 14th or even 13th C. In keeping with these dates and in keeping with the turbulent history of the area, many of these farms were originally moated; with few exceptions little