WITCHFORD
AND ITS EVERYDAY LIFE

INCLUDING PHOTOGRAPHS FROM 1892-1993
BY W.T. MASKELL
WITCHFORD
AND ITS EVERYDAY LIFE

BY W.T. MASKELL
SEPTEMBER 1993
Welcome! Welcome to our fair!
Innocence and mirth be there!
Teachers, children, parents, all,
Charity must be your call:
Here we ply no common trade;
For our Church we ask your aid;
O! we must not ask in vain.
Rich and poor in happy strain,
Do but help us as you may,

Blessings will attend this day,
And our thanks shall be to you,
(Sealously we'll give them too)
Aided by your liberal hand,
Again our Church shall firmly stand
Restored—best blessing to our land.
INTRODUCTION

WITCHFORD IS LOCATED THREE MILES WEST OF ELY ON THE A142. IN AD 607 ST. AUGUSTINE BUILT A SMALL CHURCH 'WHERE THE WYCHE ELM GROWS BY THE FORD' AND CALLED IT ST. ANDREW'S AFTER HIS CHURCH IN ROME. AN RAF AERODROME WAS ESTABLISHED AT WITCHFORD DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR. THE LANDING GROUND WAS ON THE PLATEAU EAST OF THE VILLAGE, IN ELY.


Witchford is a small and rather narrow parish near the centre of the Isle of Ely. The town stands on a pleasant hill at 3 miles west of Ely, and the road between the two places crosses some of the highest ground in the Isle (about 80 ft. above sea-level). Commanding fine views over the southern extremity of the fens to the Suffolk hills, beyond Newmarket, Witchford is one of the smaller villages in the county but was formerly of greater importance. The Domesday Book refers to the two hundreds of Ely which meet at Witchford, and the name 'Witchford Hundred' is found from 1128 north.

Witchford is still the name of one of the rural districts, and the village is one of the few in Ely Rural District which have increased in population since 1931. Witchford, Littleport, Mepal, and Wilburton have increased, Stretham, Sutton, and Birdham remained stationary, and Coveney, Downham, Haddenham, and Wentworth decreased. The soil and subsoil are both clay, so that there is more permanent pasture around Witchford than in the lowlands, but as at Downham there are some orchards, which take advantage of the south-easterly slopes. The village straggles along the main road from Ely to Chatteris and Slieves.

It contains no buildings of special architectural interest, though Ivy House (73 Main Street on the left of the church) and the farm at the east end of the village date from the 17th century.

The general appearance is neat even if of no special distinction, but a hundred years ago Witchford 'in point of fitting would bear comparison with the worst place in any part of the kingdom', with an open drain all along the main street and on the northern side of the village. Aby Road runs southwards across Grunty Fen to the Ely-Cambridge road near Stretham. A.R.A.

Aerodrome was established at Witchford during the Second World War. The landing ground was on the plateau east of the village, in Ely, part of the buildings, on the north side of the village, have been converted into a youth hostel. An exchange of territory with Ely under Act of Ely Review Order, 1933, resulted in a net gain of Witchford to 162 acres and 3 persons.

The proportion of land dealt with by inclusion awards in Witchford was 1,607 acres, or about 50 per cent of the total area of the parish, a proportion distinctly higher than anywhere else on the Isle except Stretham, Thorney, and Wentworth, and Witcham. There were two Witchford awards.

The first, made in 1813 under an Act of Parliament of 1806, divided 460 acres amongst 18 proprietors, the chief beneficiaries being Thomas Moxon (76 acres), Charles Cross Senior (33 acres), John Crockley (52 acres in his own right and 32 acres less under the Dean and Chapter of Ely), Clement Hitch (42 acres), Edward Cropley (38 acres), and Clare College (28 acres). Most of these families and institutions figure prominently in the second award of 1840, which divided 626 acres amongst 30 proprietors. This time Clare College received the largest allotment (110 acres), followed by Ely (95 acres in his own right and 74 with Luke Dench as devisee under the will of Clement Hitch) and Christ Church, Pemberton (76 acres). Also taking large shares were the Dean and Chapter, Lord Saltley (33 acres), and Bishop of Ely (17 acres).

Thurston, the last saxon abbey of Ely (d. 1072), was a native of Ely, and James Bentham, father of James Bentham, the historian of Ely, was vicar of Witchford at the time of his son's birth (1708).

Manors

An area of 300 acres in Witchford and Ely wold was amongst the endowments of Ethelwold and Abbot Brithnoth when they revived Ely monastic after the Danish invasions. This estate was worth £8 when received, £12 in 1066, and £10 in 1135. The valuation was £13 10s 3d. in 1142. The deviation caused by Hereward's exploits it was rated at 3 hides or 7 ploughlands. The demesne was rated at 2 hides and consisted of 2 or possibly 3 ploughlands. There were 5 sokemen with 1 hide who could not depart from the land, 17 villeins each with 7 acres, 8 cotters, and 8 serfs. There was meadow for 7 ploughs and pasture for all the cattle of the villein. Witchford had always formed part of the demesne of the church of Ely. Its population and hideage as recorded in 1086 exceeded those of some places in the Isle of Ely of greater importance. None of the manors in the immediate neighbourhood of Ely, except Stretham, Birdham, Thorney, and Wentworth, and Witcham, were amongst the two Witchford awards.
THE VALUATION OF THE TAXA 710 (£51 16s. 6d.) IS MUCH HIGHER THAN ANY SUBSEQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED, AND HIGHER THAN THAT OF THE MONASTIC PROPERTY IN ELY ITSELF. PERHAPS THE COMPILERS OF THE TAXA INCLUDED IN WITCHFORD THAT TRACT OF LAND WEST OF ELY, WHICH INCLUDES EMERY BARN AND KETEN'S MANORS. IN 1324-5 THE CONVENT'S RECEIPTS FROM WITCHFORD AMOUNTED TO £24 11s. 6d. ONLY, AND ITS EXPENDITURE TO £24 19s. 10d. THERE WAS THEN A VALUABLE MILL, FARMED AT £4 6s. 11d., AND THE PROFITS OF THE COURT LEASE CAME TO £3 2s. 9d. THERE WAS A THRIVING TRADE IN WOOL AND FELLS; 108 FELLS WERE SOLD TO JOHN DE WHATEFELD AND 53 TO BERNARD DE BRAEDEFELD, TWO EAST ANGLIAN MERCHANTS WHO FREQUENTLY OCCUR IN ELY ROLLS AT THIS TIME. THE DEMESNE WAS OF 4 CARUCATES. VARIOUS SMALL GIFTS OF PROPERTY IN WITCHFORD WERE MADE TO THE PRIOR AND CONVENT DURING THE 14TH CENTURY, BUT THE MANOR Seldom BROUGHT IN MUCH MORE THAN £1 A YEAR IN THE 15TH CENTURY AND THE VALUATION OF 1527-9 (£19 1s. 10d.) RANKED WITCHFORD AS ONE OF THE LESS VALUABLE OF THE MONASTIC MANORS. ANOTHER VALUATION OF 1541, HOWEVER, RECORDS NET PROFITS OF £36 6s. 4d. EXCLUDING THE RECTORY, IN THE SAME YEAR THE MANOR, WHEREOF THE RENTS OF ASSIZE WERE APPROPRIATED TO THE CUSTODIENS CAPITULI WAS FORMALLY TRANSFERRED TO THE NEWLY CONSTITUTED DEAN AND CHAPTER OF ELY. THIS GRANT WAS CONFIRMED IN 1587.

IN 1650 THE MANOR WAS SEQUESTRATED TO WILLIAM UNDERWOOD AND TO HENRY WHISTON OF LONDON. IT WAS THEN VALUED AT £141 9s. 4d. A YEAR GROSS AND THE RENTS WERE PAID £243 6s. 10d. FOR IT IN A TRACT MADE IN 1649 THE MANOR WAS SAID TO COMPREHEND 245 ACRES HELD IN DEMESNE VALUE AT £18 5s. AND 224 ACRES OF RENTED LAND VALUED AT £283 8s. 8d. THE MEADOW LAND, WHICH WAS RENTED, AMOUNTED TO 100 ACRES. IT HAD BEEN LEFT TO THE DEAN AND CHAPTER FOR 72 YEARLY AND BY THE SEQUESTRATORS FOR £100. RENTS OF ASSIZE WERE VALUED AT £132 3s. 9d. AND TIMBER AT £21 3s. 4d. A GOOD DEAL OF PRIVATE ENCLOSURE HAD BY THIS TIME BEEN CARRIED OUT. VARIOUS CLOSES ARE MENTIONED IN THE DEED OF SALE OF 1650. SUCH ARE DEAN'S, ARCHDEACON'S (NORTH OF GRUNITY FEN), MR. BOY'S CLOSE NOW BELONGING TO ARCHDEACON WIGMORE, A CLOSE OCCUPIED BY GEORGE CONEY IN ALDERTHORPE AND WEST FEN, DR. COLLINS'S, DR. CANNON'S, DR. TANNER'S, DR. CRESSER'S, DR. KNIGHT'S, DR. PERKINS'S, DR. DAVIES'S, DR. ASHTON'S, MR. ROGERS'S OR BEELBE'S CLOSE, THISTLE CLOSE, DR. GOODRIDGE'S, AND MR. BUCKERIDGE'S.

THE NAMES SUGGEST CONSIDERABLE INVESTMENT BY CATHEDRAL DIGNITARIES AND THEIR FAMILIES IN UP-TO-DATE PROPERTY IN WITCHFORD DURING THE PREVIOUS CENTURY. THE DEAN AND CHAPTER, AS LORDS OF THE MANOR, HAD RECEIVED 40 ACRES IN ALDERFORD IN THE VERMUYDEN DRAINING OF THE FENS. AT THE RESTORATION THE MANOR WAS RETURNED TO THE DEAN AND CHAPTER, BUT WITH THEIR SUCCESSORS THE CHURCH COMMISSIONERS, HAVE CONTINUED TO BE LORDS.

IN THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY THE TENANT WAS SIR ROGER JENYS, WHO IN 1725 TRANSMITTED THE TENURE TO HIS SON, WILLIAM JENYS, WHO PAID RENT £31 10s. A YEAR TOGETHER WITH A BRAWN VALUED AT £1 6s. 8d. HE WAS REQUIRED TO MEET THE EXPENSES OF AN ANNUAL COURT DINNER GIVEN TO THE DEAN AND CHAPTER AND THEIR OFFICIALS.

WOLD, WHICH IN BETHAM'S TIME SURVIVED ONLY AS 'SOME ARABLE AND PASTURE LANDS NEAR WITCHFORD', AND IS NOW COMPLETELY LOST. WAS OF SOME IMPORTANCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES. IN 1299 WILLIAM BEREWYK DE TODEHAM AND HIS DAUGHTER ALICE, ELLA RELICOF SIMON DE INSULA AND JOHN AND AGATHA (LE DESPENCER) HIS SON AND GRANDDAUGHTER WERE ACCUSED OF EJECTING THOMAS DE TANGAM AND AMICE DE INSULA IN HIS MANOR FROM PROPERTY IN WOLD AND HADDENHAM, WHICH WAS SETTLED BY SIMON DE INSULA ON AMICE ON HER MARRIAGE TO JOHN DEEN. THE PLAINTIFFS DESCRIBED WOLD AS A 'MANOR', BUT THE PLACE NAME IS NOT USED IN DOCUMENTS WHICH THE SUIT WAS SUBMITTED IN EVIDENCE. THE SUIT WAS DECIDED IN FAVOUR OF THE PLAINTIFFS, AND IN 1302-3 WILLIAM DE TODEHAM AND HIS COPARCENERS HELD A KNIGHT'S FEE IN WOLD, SUTTON, AND CHATTERIES OF THE BISHOP OF ELY FOR 40s. IN 1346 THIS FEE WAS SHARED BETWEEN WILLIAM DE RUSTON, THE PRIOR OF ELY, AND JOHN DE DEEN, THE PRIOR ALONE WAS IN POSSESSION IN 1428. WOLD WAS STILL A SEPARATE ESTATE IN 1649, WHEN IT COMPRISED 120 ACRES (41 IN PASTURE). ABOUT 1750 THE TENANT WAS HENRY STEVENS AT £2 YEARLY.

CHURCH

BETWEEN 1219 AND 1224 BISHOP DE FONTIBUS GRANTED THE CHURCH TO THE PRIOR AND CONVENT AND ORDAINED A VICARAGE OF 5 MARKS VALUE. POPE HONORIUS III CONFIRMING THE GRANT IN THE LATTER YEAR. THE VICARAGE WAS NOT ACTUALLY INSTITUTED UNTIL AFTER 1291, WHEN THE CHURCH, DESCRIBED SIMPLY AS AN ECCLESIA, WAS WORTH £10. EARLIER VALUATIONS HAD BEEN £10 13s. 4d. IN 1217 AND £10 IN 1254. IN 1535 THE VICARAGE WAS RATED AT £9 16s. 9d., THE RECTORY, WHICH WAS APPROPRIATED TO THE HOSTELLER,

THE CHURCH OF St. ANDREW CONSISTS OF CHANCEL, NAVE, NORTH PORCH, AND WEST TOWER. THE MATERIAL IS RUBBLE AND BRICK WITH STONE DRESSINGS, AND THE ROOFS ARE TILED.


NONCONFORMITY

THERE WERE NO PAPISTS OR DISSERTERS IN WITCHFORD IN 1676. A PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1846 AND ONE FOR WESLEYAN METHODISTS IN 1849. THE WESLEYAN CHAPEL CEASED TO BE USED ABOUT 1889; THE PRIMITIVE METHODIST CHAPEL BEFORE THE END OF THE CENTURY (THIS WAS LOCATED NEAR NEEDHAM'S FARM). A BAPTIST CHAPEL WAS FOUND IN 1871; THE EXISTING BUILDING WAS ERECTED FOUR YEARS LATER ON LAND PRESENTED BY JAMES CROPLEY.

SCHOOLS

IN 1789 THERE WAS A SMALL DAME SCHOOL IN WITCHFORD. THE OLDER BOYS WENT TO ELY FOR THEIR SCHOOLING, IF THEY RECEIVED ANY. BY THE TIME THE NATIONAL SOCIETY MADE THEIR INQUIRY (1846-7) WITCHFORD HAD GROWN SOME WHAT, AND ONE OF THE BRICK-HOUSE-ROOFED VILLAGES IN THE ISLE. ABOUT 100 CHILDREN, IN A POPULATION OF 561, WERE SAID TO BE ATTENDING SCHOOL BOTH WEEKDAYS AND SUNDAYS. THE COST OF RUNNING THE SCHOOL AMOUNTED TO £30, OF WHICH THE MASTER RECEIVED £20 A YEAR IN SALARY. IN 1851 THE NUMBERS ATTENDING WERE STATED TO BE 74 ON WEEKDAYS AND 100 ON SUNDAYS, BUT THE EXISTING ROOM COULD PROPERLY CONTAIN ONLY ABOUT HALF THAT NUMBER. THE PARENTS WERE CHARGED 1d. A WEEK FOR EACH CHILD, OR 1s. A QUARTER. FARMERS WERE CHARGED EXTRA. THE SCHOOL SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED IN HIRE-PAYMENTS, BUT IN 1851 A SITE FOR A NEW BUILDING WAS GIVEN BY CHRISTOPHER PEMBERTON, OF CAMBRIDGE, ONE OF THE LOCAL LANDOWNERS; THE NATIONAL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTED £30 TOWARDS THE BUILDING COSTS AND THE DEAN AND CHAPTER OF ELY, LORDS OF THE MANOR, £15. THE TOTAL COST OF £34 WAS IN 1851. IT IS STRIKING THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE TO USE A CONVERTED COTTAGE AS MASTER'S HOUSE. THE ADDITION OF AN INFANT'S CLASSROOM IN 1869 BROUGHT THE ACCOMMODATION UP TO 129. THE FOLLOWING YEAR A NEW MASTER'S HOUSE WAS BUILT (FIRST THE POST OFFICE AND SCHOOL HOUSE NOW THE PLAYGROUP) AT A COST OF OVER £100. THE NATIONAL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTED £12 15s. 6d. AS THE RECOGNIZED ACCOMMODATION WAS REDUCED TO 100 (61 MIXED, 45 INFANTS). THE AVERAGE ATTENDANCE HAS NEVER IN RECENT TIMES BEEN AS MUCH AS THE LOWER FIGURE; IT WAS 53 IN 1899, 69 IN 1919, AND 61 IN 1938. WENTWORTH SCHOOL WAS
CLOSED IN 1922 AND THE CHILDREN TRANSFERRED TO WITCHFORD. SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR THE SCHOOL HAS BEEN 'DECAPITATED' BY THE REMOVAL OF THE OLDER CHILDREN TO ELY, BUT BY 1951 THE NUMBERS HAD Risen TO 73.

FACT FILE

THERE WERE THIRTEEN BOMBS INCLUDING TWO PARACHUTE MINES DROPPED BY THE LUFTWAFFE. (LUFT, AIR, WAFFE, WEAPON.)

SOME OF YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED A LARGE STONE SITTING AT THE TOP OF THE HILL ON THE CORNER OF BEDWELL HEY LANE JUNCTION, IN 1902 WHEN THE FOUNDATIONS WERE DUG FOR THE TWO DWELLINGS NEXT TO IT THEY CAME ACROSS A HARD VOLCANIC ROCK, THEY WRAPPED CHAINS AROUND IT AND PULLED IT OUT WITH A NUMBER OF HORSES, AND LEFT IT THERE IT REMAINS TODAY.

WITCHFORD CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL PUPILS ROSE FOR A PICTURE. MR. COLES, HIS TWO SISTERS ARE SECOND ON THE THIRD ROW AND MR. COLES WIFE IS FIRST ON THE THIRD ROW.

THE FIRST POST OFFICE IN WITCHFORD WAS IN THE SAME BUILDING WHERE THE PLAYGROUP (83 MAIN STREET) IS NOW WHICH WAS BUILT IN 1870 AT THE COST OF £204. IT WAS ALSO THE SCHOOL HOUSE THEN. THE POSTMASTER WAS THOMAS COLE WHO MOVED HIS BUSINESS DOWN THE ROAD TO THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR - BUT ONE ON THE LEFT TO THE CHURCH (No. 71 MAIN STREET) IT WERE BUILT FOR HIM IN 1889 AND RESTORED IN ABOUT 1989. THE BUSINESS STAYED THERE UNTIL 1970, WHEN IT MOVED INTO A SHOP (BUILT IN 1935) AT 114 MAIN STREET WHERE IT REMAINS TODAY.
THE COMMON LAND IN COMMON ROAD ONCE HAD A POND, BUT WHEN THE COLLEGE WAS BEING ESTABLISHED IN 1951 IT WAS FILLED UP WITH EXCESS EARTH FROM THE SCHOOL.

HISTORY ON THE NAME; DOMESDAY BOOK HAS WICFORD WITH CE*CHE.
THE RAMSEY CHARTULARY HAS WICFORD; AND THE FORMS WICFORDA, WICFORDA OCCUR IN INQUISITIO COMITATUS CANTABRIGIENSIS.
OR IT MAY MEAN "FORD NEAR THE WYTH-ELM"; THIS IS SIMILAR TO ASHFORD, OAKFORD, AND THORNFORD.

ST. ANDREWS HALL WAS BUILT IN 1903 BY DONATIONS FROM THE VILLagers. THE VILLAGE ANIMAL POUND WAS SITUATED THERE BEFORE THE HALL WAS BUILT.

ON THE SITE OF 165 MAIN STREET WAS A THATCHED COTTAGE WHICH HAD THE BEDROOM CEILING HELD UP BY A FREE STANDING WARDROBE.

IN THE FIELD TO THE WEST OF WITCHFORD HOUSE IS WHERE THE VILLAGE CRICKET TEAM ONCE PLAYED. MRS BAXTER REMEMBERS TAKING ICE-CREAM TO SELL ON A BIKE TO THE SPECTATORS FROM HER SHOP WHICH STOOD IN THE MIDDLE ROW OF COTTAGES OPPOSITE THE POST OFFICE (NOW DEMOLISHED). THE SHOP WAS RUN BY HER PARENTS FROM 1923 - 37. HER FATHER WAS ALSO A CHAUFFEUR FOR MISS BELDAM, A LOCAL COBBLER, AND A LOCAL BARBER.
THE OLD PAVILION WAS AN EX-ARMY HUT FROM WEST FEN ROAD, ELY.

ON THE SITE OF 145 MAIN STREET WAS A CLUB HOUSE WHICH WAS USED BY THE WOMENS INSTITUTE, THE BRITISH LEGION, AND A MEETING PLACE FOR OTHER SOCIETIES.

NUMBER 168 MAIN STREET (CORNER OF MARRYAY LANE) WAS THE VILLAGE POLICE HOUSE.

THE DWELLING ON THE FAR LEFT WAS ONCE A BUTCHERS SHOP RUN BY THE COLE FAMILY. THE BUSINESS WAS IN THE BOTTOM LEFT ROOM. IT OPENED IN ABOUT 1900 AND CLOSED UP IN ABOUT 1925-6. THE PIGS WERE KILLED AND CHOPPED-UP IN THE BACK YARD, AND THEN SOLD ON THE PREMISES.

THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN AT GRUNTY FEN BRIDGE LOOKING SOUTH-WEST TOWARDS HADDENHAM. THE FIELD ON THE RIGHT WAS THE VILLAGE RECREATION GROUND. THE FIELD JUST ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DRAIN RUNNING FROM WEST TO EAST WAS THE OLD ALLOTMENTS WITH GRUNTY FEN ROAD AND POOLS ROAD BORDERING IT. THESE WERE BOTH DISCONTINUED IN ABOUT 1940.
The Village Baptist Chapel was built in 1875. The donor of the land was James Cropley.

The Shoulder of Mutton Public House, which is still in use today, was built in the latter part of the last century.

The post office in about 1989 also had a plant shop.

This picture was taken in about 1928 and looking east showing 104 Main Street on the left, and Clare House in the background. Notice the house in front of Witchford House, which is now demolished. The man in the wheelchair outside the house on the left is Flanders Washington.
When the Fenmen rose in revolt against William the Conqueror, Thurstan, an Abbot of Ely, opened the gates to help the Fens. For that the Abbey was fined £100 and its estates, including Witchford, where Thurstan was born, were forfeit for several years. He, however, the last Saxon to be Abbot, still retained his office. Nearly seven centuries later, with Ely still holding the Manor, Soane Jenyns was paying an annual rent of £38 10s. 0d. Plus a bacon valued at £1 6s. 8d. and the costs of the yearly dinner given to the Dean and Chapter of Ely.

Moving on in time, and up to about 60 years ago, Witchford was one of the largest horse-trading centres in the county. Then, the animals used to come off the night market at Ely and be walked along the three miles of road—three inches in dust, or mud, according to the season—and next day paraded round the village for viewing. After that, The Hackney and Light Van Animals were traded in the larger plaster and timber stables at the west end of Witchford, whilst the farm animals—a good Shire Horse would fetch about £70—were haggled over in the yards of the Gables and Ivy House.

This last, dating back to the 17th century, with heavy oak timbering, brick flooring and one brick and two wooden stairways, is the oldest house in the village. Apart from this there is Alderford and the Gables which, back in 1904 or 1905, was badly burned. Then, because there was no telephone, the Ely Fire—Brigade were called by telegraph.

Fifty years after that, on 20 April 1956, though the brigades were quickly enough on the spot, some two cattle sheds and about 36 tons of hay, straw, chaff, loose hay, nitrate chalk and beet pulp still went up in an inferno of smoke and flame. A couple or three suffered some burns, whilst another was pinned to the Earth by a fallen 11,000 volt overhead cable. But he, amazingly enough, though he lapsed unconscious several times, survived and recovered. The fire, itself seems to have started with the burning of dead grass and rubble at the back of the youth hostel. A Nissen—hutted place that was an R.A.F. Hospital during the War, it was situated to the north side of the village, now with the By-Pass running through. Though the fire passed the youth hostel, by deterioration through damp has not; and so it has been closed down. After 30 years during which time over 100,000 visitors from Britain and, indeed, all over the world have stayed there.
THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, BUILT IN 1851 AT A COST OF £164 - THE SECONDARY SCHOOL BUILT IN 1951 AT A COST OF £95,000 - IT IS A SUCCESSOR TO THE THREE DAME SCHOOLS OF THE 18th CENTURY AND THE ONE ROOM WHICH, AS A SUNDAY SCHOOL, ACCOMMODATED BETWEEN 70 AND 100 CHILDREN.

CONSIDERABLY ENLARGED AND MODERNISED, THE SCHOOL HAS RECENTLY BEEN NAMED AFTER MR. HANWORTH E. RACKHAM, VICAR HERE FOR 40 YEARS UNTIL HE DIED IN 1864. IN ADDITION TO THAT COMMEMORATION, HE HAS A PLAQUE ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE CHANCEL OF THE PARISH CHURCH AND A STAINED GLASS WINDOW DEDICATED EASTER DAY 1900, WITH ITS LONG, LOW, MOSSY ROOFS, STUBBY 13th CENTURY TOWER - 20 INCHES OUT OF TRUE, BUT TRESSSED WALLS, AND VERY BROAD NORTH PORCH, ST. ANDREW OR ST. NICHOLAS'S, AS THE CHURCH NOTES SAY, HAS A SQUASHED DOWN LOCK WHICH IS STRANGELY ATTRACTIVE.

SHOWN HERE ARE THE STABLES IN WHICH THE HACKNEY PONIES WERE KEPT, THEY ARE SITUATED IN WITCHFORD HOUSE YARD.

COINAGE IN SMALL CHANGE

DURING THE 16th AND 17th CENTURIES ENGLAND'S COINAGE WAS GOLD AND SILVER. FOR SMALL CHANGE THE LOCAL TRADER WAS AT LOSS TO ACCOMMODATE HIS CUSTOMERS. THEY WERE FORCED TO PROVIDE THEIR OWN SMALL CHANGE, (FARTHINGS, HALFPENNIES ETC.) TRADESMEN ALL OVER THE COUNTRY WERE GIVING OUT SMALL COPPERS IN THEIR CHANGE. THESE COINS ARE AN INCREASING SOURCE OF LOCAL HISTORY. THERE IS ONLY ONE TYPE OF WITCHFORD TOKEN KNOWN, AND THAT IS OF JOHN GAYER WHO WAS A FISHERMONGER. HERE IS A DRAWING OF THE COIN BELOW;

PICTURED HERE IS A FUNERAL BIER USED DURING THE LAST CENTURY IN WITCHFORD.
PICTURED HERE IS THE BLACKSMITHS SHOP (HILLCREST / 39 MAIN STREET YARD) WHICH WAS BUILT IN 1850. ALSO BUILT AT THIS TIME WAS THE WHEELRIGHTS SHOP TO THE LEFT OF THE PICTURE. THE WHEELRIGHTS SHOP EVENTUALLY CLOSED AND LATER WAS TURNED INTO A WEAVING SHOP CALLED 'FEN WEAVE'.

THE FIRST PERSON TO OWN A CAR IN THE VILLAGE WAS (1920) ALF THOMSON WHO LIVED IN MANOR FARM. THEN IT WAS WILLIAM F. WARD WHO LIVED IN NEEDHAMS FARM, AND THEN IT WAS JESSIE GILES WHO LIVED AT ALDERFORTH FARM.

JUST OUTSIDE THE FARRIER'S SHOP OPPOSITE THE ALLOTMENTS WAS A PETROL PUMP WHICH WAS PUT THERE IN ABOUT 1927, AND TAKEN AWAY IN ABOUT 1985. IT WAS RUN BY FRANK ALLENS MOTHER.

JUST OUTSIDE WEST END FARM WAS ANOTHER PETROL PUMP WHICH WAS PUT THERE IN ABOUT 1934, AND WAS PULLED UP IN ABOUT 1939, IT WAS RUN BY WILLIAM FREDRICK WARD.

AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR THERE WAS A CINEMA IN ONE OF THE NISSAN HUTS, BUT IT WASN'T VERY SUCCESSFUL.

HOSPITAL SUNDAY PARADES WERE ON THE SECOND SUNDAY IN JUNE.

HERE IS A PICTURE OF A COMMUNAL BATH CHAIR. IT WAS BOUGHT BY REV. RACKHAM FOR A RELATIVE. AFTER HIS DEATH IT WAS TURNED OVER TO THE PARISHIONERS OF THE VILLAGE FOR THEIR USE. THE CHAIR WAS KEPT IN A STABLE AT WITCHFORD HOUSE BY MISS BELDAM. ONCE A YEAR IT WAS CLEANED, SCRUBBED AND THE ARMS GIVEN A FRESH COAT OF PAINT BY LOCAL PAINTER HARRY COLE.

THERE WAS ONCE A STRAWBERRY FIELD / FARM OPPOSITE F-C BODYWORKS WHICH OPENED IN ABOUT 1970, AND CLOSED IN ABOUT 1985. IT WAS FIRST OWNED BY MRS MORBY.

THERE WAS ONCE AN UNDERTAKING BUSINESS IN THE VILLAGE WHICH WAS RUN BY THE ALLENS.

THE VILLAGE HAD AN ANNUAL FAIR WHICH HAD COCONUT SHYS, SHOOTING GALLERY ETC. IT WAS HELD ON THE GRASS FIELD NOW OCCUPIED BY MIDWAY GARAGE.

IN 1989 WHEN THE BY-PASS WAS BEING ESTABLISHED A TUNNEL HAD BEEN DISCOVERED. IT COULD HAVE COME FROM ELY CATHEDRAL TO WITCHFORD CHURCH. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN USED BY A PRIEST TO ESCAPE FROM NON BELIEVERS OF THE CHURCH.
PICTURED HERE IS WITCHFORD VILLAGE COLLEGE WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1951 FROM AN OFFICERS MESS.

This map dates back to 1610. In those days there wasn't really a correct way of spelling 'Witchford'. Here is a list of other ways it was spelt: Wytchford, Wicceford, Wichford, Wicheford, Wichforde, and Wicheforda.

This is a map of Witchford in about 1600, notice the map was drawn at the wrong angle.

This map dates back to 1768. It doesn't show Grunty Fen drain as it had not been dug out at that time.
This map dates back to 1820. Notice the windmill south-west of the village.

This map dates back to 1847. The Cambridge to Ely railway line is to the right of the picture.

This map of Witchford in 1946 shows a cross roads at Common Road, and the inn shown could be the Shoulder of Mutton public house.

This map dates back to 1878. Notice there is no new road / Six Row Lane.
This map is of the present day Witchford showing the new by-pass which was constructed in December 1989.

The population of Witchford in:

- 1801: 294
- 1811: 346
- 1821: 401
- 1831: 461
- 1841: 561
- 1851: 620
- 1861: 559
- 1871: 594
- 1881: 442
- 1891: 452
- 1901: 378
- 1911: 402
- 1921: 421
- 1931: 449

This picture was taken inside St. Andrew's Church looking at the east window.

This picture shows Frank Allen's shop sign where he and his wife sold sewing equipment. It closed down about nine years ago.
HERE IS A PICTURE OF THE GABLES IN ABOUT 1990. THE SMALL BUILDING IN Front OF THE HOUSE WAS ONCE A GENERAL STORES AND ALSO A BARBERS SHOP WHICH CLOSED DOWN IN 1935. IT WAS OWNED BY A HUNCH-BACKED MAN. THE GABLES DATES BACK TO THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY.

THESE PICTURES BELOW SHOWS GEORGE VI AND QUEEN ELIZABETH (THE QUEEN MOTHER) AND PRINCESS ELIZABETH (THE QUEEN) WHEN THEY VISITED THE AERO DOME AT LANCASTER WAY IN 1943-44. BEFORE THEY CAME THE ARMY WASHED THE ROADS WITH PETROL.

LOOKING EAST TOWARDS ELY AND GRUNTY PEN CORNER, THIS IS A PICTURE OF THE OLD POST OFFICE WHICH WAS BUILT IN 1889 FOR THOMAS COLE THE POST MASTER WHO STANDS ON THE RIGHT OF THIS GROUP. ON THE LEFT OF THE GROUP IS BRAND RICHARDSON A ROAD SWEEPER AND LOCAL PREACHER, ALTHOUGH HE ONCE WALKED TO BRANDON CREEK TO TAKE A SERVICE. THE BOY IS UNKNOWN.

NEW BUILDINGS NOW REPLACE THE OLD COTTAGES, BARNs AND ORCHARD BEYOND THE POST OFFICE. IT CLOSED DOWN IN ABOUT 1970. THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN BY TOM BOLTON (WHO HAD A SHOP ON FORE HILL, ELY) IN ABOUT 1905. IT WAS BUILT BY EBENEZER ALLEN

THE PICTURE HERE TAKEN BY TOM BOLTON IN ABOUT 1905 IS SHOWING THREE PUBLIC HOUSES. IN THE BACKGROUND NEXT TO THE TALL TREE IS THE SHOULDER OF MUTTON WHICH IS STILL IN USE TODAY. TO THE LEFT OF ST. ANDREWS HALL IS THE THREE HORSE SHOES WHICH CLOSED DOWN ABOUT 1946 AND WAS DEMOLISHED IN THE EARLY 1970s. JUST SHOWING ON THE EXTREME RIGHT EDGE OF THE PICTURE IS THE BOOT AND SLIPPER WHICH CLOSED DOWN IN ABOUT 1924, THE BUILDING STILL STANDS TODAY. ON THE SITE OF THE PRESENT ST. ANDREWS HALL WAS AN ANIMAL POUND WHICH WAS DEMOLISHED IN 1902, THESE TWO PUBS OBVIOUSLY SOLD BEER "BY THE POUND"!
SITED ON THE PRESENT DAY 'WARD WAY', THIS PHOTO SHOWS A GENERAL STORES TO THE LEFT, AND TO THE RIGHT THE 'HAMMER & ANVIL' PUBLIC HOUSE. THE COLE FAMILY IS ALSO PICTURED, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT; MISS COLE, MRS COLE, WILLIAM HENRY COLE AND TOM COLE WHO INVENTED THE FIRST IRON-BACK PLOUGH AND HIS FARRIERS SHOP WAS IN A YARD BEHIND THESE BUILDINGS. THIS WAS TAKEN IN 1896.

HERE IS A LIST OF OLD FARMS ALONG MAIN STREET; 16 MAIN STREET (STILL IN USE) OR ALDERFORTH FARM.

MANOR FARM OPPOSITE GRUNTY FEN CORNER (STILL IN USE), WHICH WAS BUILT IN 1607, AND RENOVATED BY EBENEZER ALLEN IN 1897.
IVY HOUSE 73 MAIN STREET ON THE LEFT OF CHURCH (NOT IN USE AS A FARM).

ROSSENDALE FARM OPPOSITE P-C BODYWORKS (ONLY PARTLY IN USE AS FARM)

FARM WHERE CHURCH VIEW NOW IS (NOW DEMOLISHED).

THE GABLES OPPOSITE THE CHURCH (NOT IN USE AS A FARM).

WITCHFORD HOUSE (BARNs OFTEN IN USE).

CLARE: FARM (NOW CLARE HOUSE, NOT IN USE AS A FARM).

104 MAIN STREET ON THE LEFT OF BRIERY FIELDS (NOT IN USE AS A FARM).

122 MAIN STREET ON RIGHT OF BAPTIST CHAPEL BUILT IN 1820 (NOT IN USE AS A FARM).

THERE WAS ALSO ONE OPPOSITE ON THE SITE OF 149 MAIN STREET KNOWN AS 'THE WHITE HOUSE' (NOW DEMOLISHED).

ONE ON THE SITE OF GRANTA CLOSE / MARROWAY LANE CORNER (NOW DEMOLISHED).

ONE ON SITE OF 161 MAIN STREET (NOW DEMOLISHED).

WEST END FARM OPPOSITE MARROWAY CORNER (STILL IN USE).

NEEDHAMS FARM NOW RENOVATED AS A RESTAURANT.
HERE IS A LIST OF PONDS IN THE VILLAGE:
— ONE AT THE TOP OF MILLS LANE OPPOSITE THE POST OFFICE.
— ONE NEXT TO THE BLACKSMITHS / FARRIERS SHOP, NOW OCCUPIED
  BY 'MINOR REPAIRS'.
— ONE OUTSIDE NEEDHAMS FARM.
— ONE AT SANDPIT LANE / BROAD WAY (THIS WAS A SPRING) CALLED
  GREEN SAND WATER (THE LANE WAS CALLED THIS BECAUSE
  SAND HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM THERE TO SURFACE THE ROADS
  IN ABOUT 1910 WHICH WAS WHEN THE ENTRANCE TO BROAD
  WAY WAS BUILT).
— ONE AT THE COMMON, COMMON ROAD WHICH WAS FILLED UP IN 1951.

HERE IS A LIST OF WATER PUMPS IN THE VILLAGE:
— GRUNTY PEN CORNER. (ONLY FIT FOR CATTLE AND HORSES)
— SHOULDER OF MUTTON CORNER.
— COMMON LAND, COMMON ROAD.
— NEEDHAMS FARM.
— POND AT SANDPIT LANE.

THIS PRIVATE PUMP IS SITUATED ON THE
CORNER OF MANOR COURT ROAD.

HERE IS A LIST OF BLACKSMITHS WHICH WERE IN THE VILLAGE:
— ONE IN THE HAMMER & ANVIL BACK YARD (NOW WARD WAY).
— ONE BETWEEN 37 AND 39 MAIN STREET THEN IT MOVED BETWEEN
  55 AND 57 MAIN STREET.
— AND ONE WHERE GRANTA CLOSE IS (NOW DEMOLISHED).
THIS PHOTO DATES BACK TO 1892. THE BUILDING ON THE BALLET WAS THEN USED AS A SMALL SHOP. THE GROCERY STORE WAS CLOSED DOWN IN CIRCA 1964. THIS BUILDING IS NOW DEMOLISHED.

THE PEOPLE IN THE PHOTO ARE:

- Jo Ann Allen
- Selden Allen
- beetle Allen
- Newton Allen
- Charlie Allen
- Emily Allen
- Emma Allen
- Allen, Junior
- Charlie Allen
- Mildred Allen
- Emma Allen
- Allen, Junior
- Emma Allen
- Allen

THE PICTURE LOOKING EAST TOWARDS GRUNTY FEN CORNER IS SHOWING THE OLD POST OFFICE WHICH IS ON THE RIGHT. THE HOUSE ON THE LEFT WITH THE TREE BEHIND IT IS MANOR FARM. THE THREE CHILDREN ARE UNKNOWN. THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN IN ABOUT 1937.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

F. ALLEN
M. BAXTER
K. BONE
B.&D. BRADSHAW
M. COLLINS
J. CONE
B. COOPER
B.&G. FAIRCHILD
T. FIELDING
A. GREY
R. HALLMARK
E. JOHNSON
ELY MUSEUM
A. RICHARDSON
W. SEYMOUR
J. WARD
THE WITCHFORDIAN
J. WRIGHT