



## **Grove Dovecotes**

**by Bill Fuller**

From what I have been able to establish Grove Parish has had at least two dovecotes. Considering that no “Manor House” existed in Grove the existence of dovecotes indicates that the two properties I shall mention had been more important than just farmsteads within the old village.

It is easy to understand the existence of a dovecote at Grove Farm House, Station Road, Grove. This was part of Grove Farm Estate and owned by the Grove family who probably gave their name to the village. The farmhouse, (which can be seen from the main A338) remains the largest single building in the village, having been rebuilt after a fire in 1684. The only evidence we have to a dovecote ever existing is the name given to one of the fields opposite the main building on what is now the grass verge of the modern A338 road.

For those of you not so familiar with the history of Grove, on the eastern side of the village, on what is now Mayfield Housing Estate was once Grove Farm Estate. Originally no through road, the Turnpike Road (A338), existed. The Estate had a main private driveway running north from Kings Grove Common to the main buildings. This was known as “The Drove” and is now the lay-by just south of the main farm buildings.

The last resident member of the Grove family was Francis III who died at the age of twenty four in December 1738. The ownership of the Estate passed out of the village to John Grove, a bachelor, of Stanwell, Middlesex. The Estate would remain tenanted until the twentieth Century.

In 1771 the Besselsleigh Turnpike Trust was created, of the two hundred and sixty-two trustees appointed by the first Act, John Grove’s name appears. At a time between 1771 and 1803, probably during the 1790’s, the Trustees obtained permission, (and undoubtedly at a financial benefit to John Grove), the right to build a road through the Estate. I suspect that it was at that time that the dovecote was removed to give clearance between the main house and the new through road. All we have left is the name on the Enclosure Map of 1803.

For our second dovecote we are more fortunate. Ted and Mrs Hammond who live at Brook Farm House kindly gave me permission to explore the dovecote which they have restored in the grounds of their garden. They also permitted me, often at very short notice, to take visitors to see it. Being aware that I needed to draw the interior for my forthcoming Part V they decided to give the interior a good clean up “In case a drawing gets into your book making our workshop look more like a junk store”. Having cleared the building, one can now see something of the splendour of the building.

The drawing below is taken from a photograph dated about 1910. The view has changed little only that the yew tree has grown along with the waterside trees. Since then the exterior of the dovecote has been repaired with a mock stone block finish, but still retaining the tiled roof, probably introduced at the time the main house was refaced and the thatch removed.

I am no expert in dovecotes, and though I have visited only a few, I have never found one so interesting, and possibly as old, as this timber framed dovecote. The base is brick with the upper floor built entirely of timber. The main structure is of large timbers which support the walls and roof, attached to these timbers are eighteen-inch dowels which support an inner framework of lightweight vertical and horizontal planks. No nails have been used. The boxes created by the dowels and planking were then individual plastered, resulting in about 650 boxes.

From a guess I would think that the present building was built during the 16th or 17th century. We do have a reference dated 1620, but can not be sure that this is the same dovecote.

It would appear that the property was held by the Brook family with tenants occupying the premises. "John Brook, Gent", held land in Grove in 1522. Presumably the same land passed to a descendant Robert Brook of Wantage who's eldest son Richard, Tanner of Wantage, held the land at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Richard died in 1620 when a description of the properties was included in his will:-

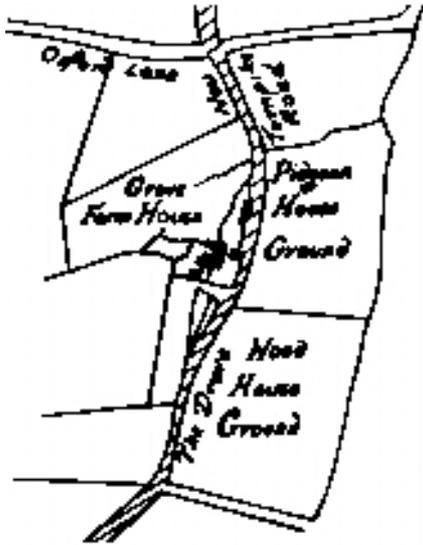
*"...RICHARD, my eldest son shall have all my Messuage, Cottages, Houses, Buildings, Barns, Stables, **Dove House** by whatever name situated in WANTAGE and GROVE .....  
...Oversears able to sell off land or houses if required to pay for childrens education.."*

During the sixteenth century the tenant was probably Leonard Pratt followed by his son Tristram Pratt who was a tenant under Robert Brooke. Unfortunately no reference is made to a dovecote in any of their wills. The tenure remained with the PRATT family until the death of Tristram's son, Christopher Pratt, then aged 25 years in 1617, probably unmarried and without heir. The record then becomes confused until 1758 when the farmstead appears to have been held by John Lambell, then of Grove, possibly late of Milton.

A Sun Insurance policy, taken out by John Lambell in 1758, gives some idea of the buildings and occupants, along with a better description of the dovecote:-

*"JOHN LAMBELL of the PARISH OF MILTON ....  
On his house only in the PARISH OF WANTAGE ....In the tenure of WILLIAM BROWN, labourer, Brick, Timber, Tiled, Part thatched. NOT EXCEEDING SIXTY POUNDS....,  
One house only in the tenure of RICHARD MASON, Part Tiled, Part thatched.  
NOT EXCEEDING ONE HUNDRED POUNPS...., His Barn and Stable only adjoining each other in the tenure of MASON, Timber and Thatched. NOT EXCEEDING NINETY POUNDS...., His Barn only in his area, back location near BROWNS house, Timber and Thatched. NOT EXCEEDING THIRTY POUNDS...., **And his Pidgin House only near the Barn aforesaid Timber and Thatched NOT EXCEEDING TWENTY POUNDS....TOTAL INSURANCE £300.**"*

No further references are made to the dovecote, but presumably since we have at least eighty percent of the original building surviving subsequent tenants retained the building and even if they did not use it for its original purpose, went to the trouble of removing the thatch, tiling it and refacing the exterior until such times as it became a workshop and general garden shed.



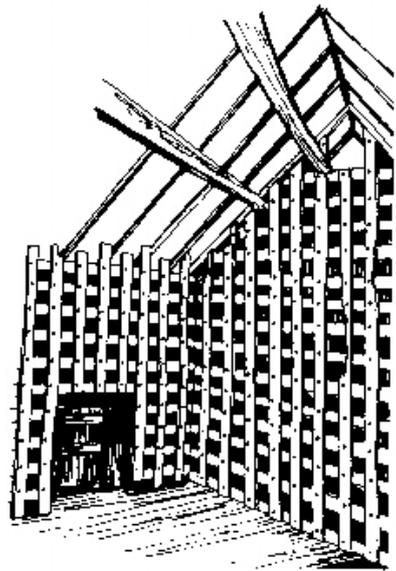
**Enclosure Map 1803**



**Brook Farm House 1910**



**Brook Farm Pigeon House**



**Timber interior of Brook Farm Pigeon House**

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