



Vale and Downland Museum – Local History Series

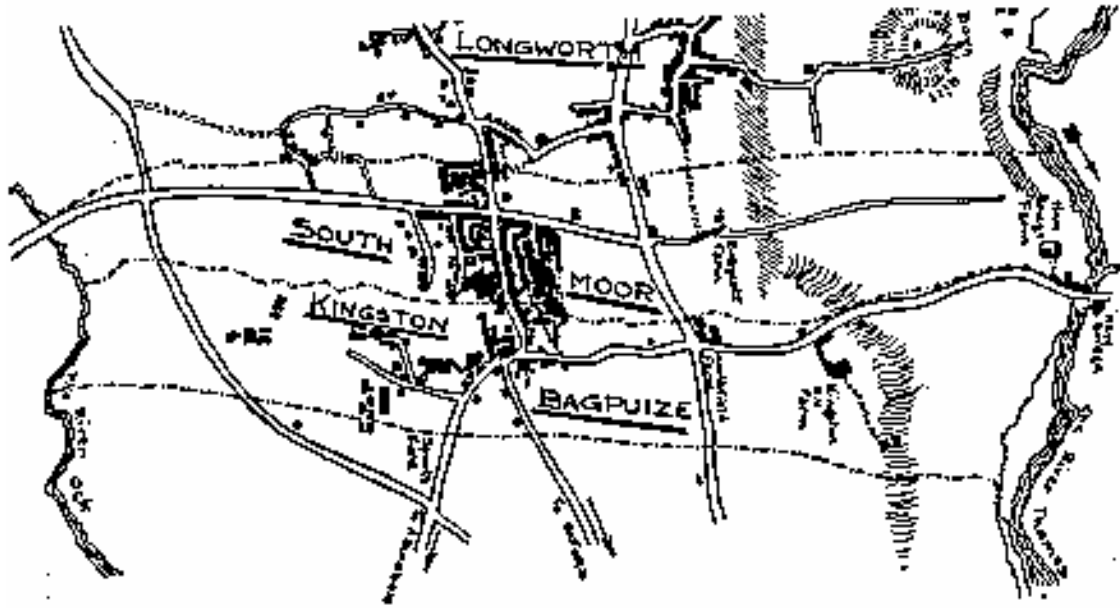
Kingston Bagpuize-with-Southmoor

by Ron Carmichael

On 1 April 1971 the two villages of Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor merged into one civil parish. In the previous months there had been much controversy, not over the amalgamation itself, as it was generally agreed that in-filling and new housing had effectively linked the two ancient rivals. The arguments were over the name of the new parish. Kingston insisted in keeping its unique and venerable name: it was a 'King's town' on the borders of Wessex and Mercia in Alfred's time, 'Bagpuize' came from the 'de Bachepuise' family who held the manor until 1299. Southmoor inhabitants were no less vociferous, though their case was weakened by the fact that the official name of their parish was Draycott Moor. The Domesday reference is to Draicote and the first mention of Southmoor is in the dissolution documents, where Southmoor and Draycott appear to be synonymous. Southmoor predominates except in official documents where Draycott was used until 1971. The agreed compromise 'Kingston Bagpuize-with-Southmoor' pleased nobody and who can blame them? The name is hardly ever heard these days and the cynical comments of Southmoor diehards in 1971, who prophesied that their name would disappear, are justified. The signposts even leave off 'Bagpuize' these days. A 'King's town' once more!

The extent of the rivalry between the villages may have been exaggerated, but there is no doubt that they were different, Kingston was church and Southmoor was chapel. Kingston had for centuries been the resident manor of aristocratic Lords, whilst Southmoor since Saxon times had been owned by absentee landlords, first Abingdon Abbey, then St John's College. If some of the Kingston people thought they were better than their Southmoor neighbours, they in turn considered themselves more independent and more democratic. During the 1920's and 1930's the secret ballot was not a theoretical luxury in Parliamentary elections in Kingston: to vote other than Liberal might cost a job, or a cottage, or both.

Like other parishes in the Saxon Ock Hundred, Kingston and Draycott were similar in size and shape, long and narrow, head on Thames and feet on Ock, each with fair shares of river, moor, forest, good and poor soil. As tenants of the Abbey, Southmoor took little part against the Conquest, but Kingston people suffered badly: their resident Lord, Thurkill, and several of his Kingston men were killed at Hastings. The Domesday entries for the Kingston manors show a reduction in value since the Conquest, whilst the value for Draycott remained the same during those twenty years.



During the Middle Ages Kingston had many different Lords, including the de Bachepuises, de Kingstons, de Folkerans, Longuevilles, Ferrers, Copes and Lattons. During the early C15th New Bridge was built by the monks at Eynsham on the site of an older bridge. Why it survives today, as the oldest bridge over the Thames, when later bridges have not, is because the monkish architects did not have the knowledge of mechanics possessed by the later architects of less strong bridges. There was a wharf and a hamlet at New Bridge, and Kingston, with its bridge and road junctions was less of a backwater than Southmoor, whose residents no doubt had their lives punctuated by the good and bad fortunes of their lords at Abingdon Abbey. Abingdon had a relatively peaceful dissolution and the deeds of transfer to Sir John Lathum on 18 November 1544 are still in the Muniments of St John's College, with subsequent transfers to Dionysus Toppes and then to Lady Joan White, foundress of St John's.

Berkshire was mainly for the King, but during much of the Civil War the two villages were in no-man's-land. In May 1644, Parliamentary troops occupied the villages and their commander the Earl of Essex was repulsed when he tried to get over New Bridge. Five days later a larger force crossed the river west of the Bridge in boats, and Cromwell arrived in the district stopping supplies from reaching Oxford and trying, unsuccessfully, to capture Faringdon.

In 1651 Thomas Latton of Kingston transferred the estate to his son, aged six, no doubt trying to safeguard his life. Thomas's later life is uncertain. Anthony Wood's diary for 1678 (1) says 'Thomes Latton hath severall years since conveyed his estate away at Kingston. He afterwards changed his religion to that of a Roman and lived in London. Upon the breaking out of the plot of 1678, he came to Oxon for refuge, and here at Rewley House with his wife hath ever since lived'. A later entry relates how the Mayor of Oxford tendered the oath of allegiance (as a Protestant) to Thomas Latton, who refused, and that 'he went back to London and died there aged 60'.

His son, John Latton the fourth, was no Catholic, and he married the daughter of a Parliamentary general, Sir Robert Pye. John probably found life as a Royalist in north Berkshire unpleasant, and he sold his Kingston estates and went to live at Esher. In 1649

St John's college had accepted from Mr John Ferrard, their tenant at Draycott, £100 in rents for 1644-1647 because 'it was apparent that tenants throughout the long continuance of the unhappy civil war would be disabled their full corn rent' (2). Had John Latton been as equally benevolent to his Kingston tenants?



The old church at Kinston Bagpuize,
demolished in 1799

There was much building in Kingston in the C18th and many of the older buildings at present in the village were built then. Most authorities give the date of the present Kingston House as about 1720. John Blandy the first, who bought Kingston House from his own daughter who had inherited it from her mother Elizabeth Fettiplace, left money in his will (1736) to endow a new school for 16 local boys. The old part-Saxon church was rebuilt by John Blandy the second in 1799. Mary Blandy of Henley, his cousin, had been a frequent visitor to Kingston House. But she was hanged in Oxford in 1752 for poisoning her father because he disapproved of her lover, and was the last woman in Oxford to be so despatched.

John Roque's map of 1761 shows many cottage buildings in Kingston Park, missing from later maps, showing the extent of demolitions during the enclosures. There were several Inclosure Acts for Kingston, the latest in 1807; in Southmoor the enclosures were delayed by St John's until 1844, and the great open fields can still be seen. The life of the Southmoor villagers was still, to some extent, governed by the old laws of the manor and the Court Rolls, still held at St John's, include one for 1789 which says 'no court was held for lack of homage'.

During the C19th the population of the combined parishes, which had increased from about 200 in 1086 to 401 in 1801, rose to 639 in 1851, and then fell to 409 by the end of the century. The agricultural depression and depopulation were to some extent relieved by the arrival of the Old Berks Hunt in 1863, and from then until the 1930's the Hunt was the mainstay and centre of life in the village. Besides bringing wealth and colour to the people of Kingston, the meet attracted famous and cosmopolitan people from afar, as the Old Berks was a fashionable hunt in royal and aristocratic circles. A famous Huntsman, Fred

Holland, was blinded by the branch of a tree in a hunting accident with the Old Berks in 1932.

Like many other ruling families in north Berkshire, the Blandys never recovered from the Great War and ceased to live at Kingston. The estate was owned from 1917 by Mr Strauss (a London merchant and Liberal MP), who unfortunately went bankrupt and had to sell up in 1936. The whole estate was sold in lots by auction, and many of the present families came to Kingston then. The House was bought by Lord Ebury who three years later sold it to Miss Raphael, whose niece Lady Tweedsmuir is the present owner. In contrast, St John's College is still Lord of the Manor of Southmoor as well as being a landowner.

The Second World War had a great, though different, effect on the two villages. From the start, hundreds of troops were stationed at Kingston and the RAF station was built. Later, hutted camps were built at Kingston but especially in Southmoor, on Draycott Wood, and inhabited by thousands of American troops who departed on D-Day in 1944, and were replaced later by foreign refugees and displaced persons from Europe. The huts were then occupied by Irish labourers building the atomic establishment at Harwell and finally demolished to make way for permanent housing.

After the amalgamation in 1971 the parish built a new village hall from the funds raised from the village millennium celebrations in 1970 and successfully campaigned for a by-pass. The huge increase in house building brought a corresponding increase in population, which is currently about 1800 and likely to reach 2000 by the end of the century, unless the villagers can oppose the continuing ruination of their village - Kingston Bagpuize-with-Southmoor!

References.

1. The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary of Oxford, 1632-95.
2. The History of St John's College, Oxford, 1598 - 1810.
3. Village Millennium, W R Carmichael, Bocardo Press, Oxford, 1971.

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