

## HIGHNAM

Highnam today consists of Highnam, Linton, Over and Lassington. But Lassington was only joined to Highnam in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and I have already talked about Lassington, so today we are looking at the area covered by the Newent and Ross roads, the Green, Two Mile Lane, and Over.. In the past, as you will see, Over was the most important. Until Highnam church was built Highnam was in the parish of Churcham!

History is determined by geography. So why was this area settled in, centuries ago? The Severn, a powerful river, comes down from Worcester as far as Maisemore. There the river divides into two, with half going each side of Alney Island. This meant that from time immemorial, this was the lowest crossing point of the Severn, for simple boats and simple bridges. The lowest crossing from Wales to England. Certainly the Romans crossed there to get from their big military base in Glevum (Gloucester) to Caerleon, an even bigger military base near Chepstow. The town of Glevum needed timber for building, so the trees in Highnam were cut down. Originally the Forest of Dean stretched to Over. A tiny remnant of that Forest can be found in Highnam Woods.

A further factor for the settlement at Over was the Leadon river which reaches the Severn there. This too was navigable for small boats. Transport by river was more efficient than by road.

The Romans stayed for about 400 years. .

In 680 A.D. The Abbey of Gloucester was founded. The son of King Ethelmund gave 30 hides of land at Over to the secular priests. A hide is the size of a small farm! The land at Over was used as a vineyard by the Abbey.

During the rein of King Canute, Wolfin le Rue was Govenor of Gloucester, and also Lord of the Manor of Highnam and Churcham. In 1022, the secular priests were turned out of the Abbey and replaced by Benedictine monks. This so incensed Wolfin le Rue that, when he saw 7 priests walking down the road from Churcham, he slew them all! He then had to visit the Pope to get absolution. His punishment was that he should give all his estates of Highnam and Churcham to the Abbey for them to use for providing food from livestock and crops.. So that is how the whole of Highnam became linked with the Abbey for several hundred years. Remember - they already had Over.

By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, part of the Leadon had been diverted to create a mill race. Over the years this was used for turning several mill wheels, for grinding corn. They were great engineers.

1328 – 1337 A great Grange was built where Highnam Court now is. It consisted of a hall, a parlour, a great chamber and 2 porches. Also a chapel.

A little later 1343 – 1359 Abbot Staunton built a house on the hill at Over, first wooden then stone. The house was called The Vineyard.. It was reserved for the Abbot of the Abbey. In 1502 Queen Elizabeth, wife of Henry VII stayed there en route from Prinknash Abbey to Raglan.

These two houses, at Over and Highnam were to be reserved for monks if there was plague in Gloucester.

1530. Henry VIII. He dissolved the monastery in Gloucester but kept the cathedral and said it was now C.of E. He gave Highnam to the sitting tenant, John Arnold, but gave Over and the house there to the cathedral as a residence for the new Bishop. His residence was on the hill - the Vineyard.

One of these bishops was Bishop Hooper.

1540. A more substantial bridge was built at Over – stone with 8 arches . Wide enough for two carts to pass each other with V shaped bits on the side for pedestrians. At that time there were 39 able bodied men in Highnam. They would have lived in Over, and on the Green and Two Mile Lane, working on the land and the busy quayside at Over.

1643. The Roundheads and Cavaliers. Gloucester was a Roundhead stronghold. We all know how several thousand cavaliers were camped right here in Highnam. They thought they were safe here, but Colonel Massey attacked from the rear and after a battle the cavaliers were defeated. Up to 600 men were killed. A few escaped by running away up the Newent Road – see the memorial at Rudford. 150 officers and 1400 men were taken prisoner, and marched into Gloucester. However the existing Highnam Court was destroyed leading to the building of the current Highnam Court - about 1660.

Roads. Able bodied men were supposed to give 4-6 days a year to maintain the roads This was most inefficient way and the roads were very poor. The roads were then turn-piked and this was paid for by tolls. Road tolls ceased in 1879, so tradesmen could come out of Gloucester and the locals could go freely into Gloucester. The Severn flooded regularly so passengers were then ferried into Gloucester. The road at Over has been built up since then, but it still flooded, a few years ago, so deep no motor vehicles could get to Gloucester!

The canal to Worcester was started in 1780. Redundant in 1854 and closed in 1881. The canal basin has been restored and maybe the canal will reopen some time.

In 1824, William Guise owned Highnam. He paid a teacher to teach the 24 children, mostly from Highnam, but a few from Lassington, who had to pay. This was somewhere in Two Mile Lane.

In 1829 the new bridge designed by THOMAS TELFORD was built over the Severn at Over. You can see it today. It actually droops in the middle because of inadequate foundations, but it survived until the current bridge was built, and was used by tanks and other heavy vehicles as well as cars. The current bridge was erected in 1974.

1837, Thomas G-P. bought the estate of Highnam. The Court, the farms and land. He then built 50 cottages for tenants. On Two Mile Lane, the Green and Over.

1850 - He also built and paid for the church, the rectory, the house on the cricket pitch for the caretaker of the church, and the school. This had two classrooms and a 2 bedroom house for the teacher. The head teacher had some sort of toilet, but the children had earth closets outside. Loos for pupils came in 1954, when a water supply and septic plant were installed. Heating was a large stove in each room, which the teacher had to keep going. Children attended from the age of 5 to 12 at first. In 1850 there were 45 pupils, including 11 from Lassington who had to pay 4d a week. Thomas-G.P. paid for the Highnam children. Electric lighting did not come until 1950. 4 years later in the church. I am not expanding on Highnam church!

The church was commissioned by Thomas Gambier Parry. The surviving son by his first marriage was Hubert Parry, composer. Hubert was taught to play the piano and organ when he was a small boy, by the organist of Highnam church. After Oxford, he did work in the City for a while as his father demanded, but still followed his musical instincts and was knighted in 1898. He was Squire of Highnam after the death of his father, and it was he who had Highnam Parish Hall built in 1904,

1850. - new railway. ISIMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL was the engineer involved for the line down to South Wales.

1851 census. There were 194 persons in Highnam. That means Two Mile Lane and the Green. 12 at Highnam Court. And 117 in Over which included - a Toll keeper, a lock keeper, an inn keeper, a shop keeper, a boatman, a wheelwright, a carpenter, a blacksmith, a mason, a straw bonnet maker, a tailor and a dressmaker.

Plus – a boat tied up - the Leadon Bow . On the boat – The head, his wife, 9 children and 2 lodgers.

1879 Road tolls ceased.

### The 20<sup>th</sup> century.

1904 Over Hospital was built for infectious diseases such as typhoid, scarlet fever and dysentery. Later uses - was post op beds for Gloucester hospital, then for elderly care. Now demolished and residential.

1920, Mrs Gambier Parry was one of the founder members of Highnam W.I.

1930s The houses along the Newent Rd were built. Also the plan for the GARDEN VILLAGE of Highnam. The first step for this was the building of the dual carriage way by the shop and laying out Maidenhall. The individual plots were sectioned off and sold to individual buyers to build on whatever they chose within limits! About 20 had been built before the war stopped all building. After the war this Garden Village idea was scrapped.

1939-1945. The W.I. were busy bottling food. The land around the Court was used by the Navy and the Army for training men. Officers stayed at the Court – the rest were in tents or huts. Also P.O.W.s. In 1944 some U.S. Army engineers were camped in the field just below the church, for a few months, training for the D-day landings. One of the men recorded his stay here. A plane came down in the field just below Highnam Woods and the pilot and mate were killed. These were young RAF men training.

Mark Gambier Parry was the last of the Parrys at the Court. He was a reclusive bachelor. He saw no-one except his doctor and employed just a house keeper and handyman/ gardener. Everything there went into decline. The House was filled with valuable art works perhaps half a million pounds worth. On his death, these went to the Courtauld Institute in London, in lieu of inheritance tax.. Other buildings and land had been leased to a family not related to the Parrys. Tom Fenton inherited the Court. He was a nephew of Mark Gambier Parry and a great grandson of Thomas Gambier Parry and his second wife.

Tom was only in his early 20s when he found himself the owner of a very large residence which had a leaking roof and a derelict garden and a few fields immediately adjacent to the Court. None of these generated the income needed to set the property in order. After a few years, wisely he sold the Court and its problems and bought the old Rectory which he was able to restore and make into a good home. Tom also took upon himself the responsibilities he had as squire of Highnam. He initiated the restoration of the church. This was very important to him, as the church was very dirty and neglected. He also joined in many parish activities, such as The Players and cricket. Because of the work done on the church, in 1975, now a Grade 1 Listed building, the many visitors help the finances of the church. Tom is sadly missed.

The first P.O. was in one of the cottages on the main road on Highnam Green. We could buy stamps and collect pensions and child benefit there. And buy fresh garden produce! There was a

local baker in Two Mile Lane.

The new housing developments started against a lot of opposition. However, the increase in the number of school children meant a new school was needed. Today's children go to a modern school with good sports facilities and still a C.of E. school linked to the church. This meant the Old School was sold by the County Council and the residents of Highnam managed to get together the money to buy it - GOSH. It could be used for community events, but as important was the land that went with the old school. Later that land was used for the Gambier Parry Hall.

The teachers house, part of the Old School was used by Highnam's first G.P. The much needed modern surgery opened in 1993.

The current P.O and shop opened about 1960

The increase in the number of residents in Highnam meant there was not only a need for more facilities, but also the enthusiasm for doing something about it.

In 1997 we got the Cycle track. Opened by Jonathan Porritt  
Not only used by cyclists but also by walkers.

Roger Head bought Highnam Court which was in a very poor state and the gardens completely overgrown. It had been empty for some years. He was able to fully restore the Court and gardens, and it is now a Grade 1 Listed building.

The Business Park came, creating jobs. The golf course came. Football pitches, a well-equipped children's playground. The top field now has a football pitch..

Famous visitors to church,

John Betjeman described the church as 'most perfect Victorian church in the country.

Prince Charles because his favourite composer is Parry

Michael Portillo - on a railway journey.

And, of course we had songs of praise with Aled Jones in 2008.

What would Thomas Gambier Parry think of the changes to his church. He would have appreciated the electric lights and heating. And the brightness of his murals. And maybe the loos. But a woman vicar!!!