

A Century of Change - Memories recorded about 100 years ago reveal a very different way of life. Killing a pig to provide meat for the winter was a regular feature, and this, together with wild rabbit, was the mainstay of many cottagers. Heating fuel came from dead branches off trees and tops of fallen ones. Road tarring was unknown, and many roads were a sea of mud during the winter months. Large quantities of flints were picked off the fields and placed in piles by the side of roads or tracks for road making. Flint knapping was a common sight.

The changes in farming were largely due to the introduction of the combine harvester. Threshing gangs have disappeared together with the thatched ricks of corn which were such an interesting feature on the farms. The selection of crops was different then - swedes, mangel-wurzels, and large acreages of oats. Wages were very low, but the workers took a pride in their work, especially the carters with their well cared for horses and polished harnesses.

Emmer Green didn't become part of Berkshire until 1911. Caversham Park decided to remain in Oxfordshire in the hope of preserving the countryside, but as development progressed it spilled into Oxfordshire resulting in some unusual anomalies. One side of Spinney Close was in Oxford, the other in Berkshire, and this meant two sets of refuse collections, depending on which side of the road you lived! The Berkshire boundary was finally extended in 1977.

The extract from the 1877 Ordnance Survey shows the row of cottages along the old Peppard Road incorporating Blenheim House, those in the School Lane area, and the houses facing the park in Kidmore End Road. The dairy farm and a few cottages near the White Horse have gone, but Grove Cottages near Highdown School also survive. Surley Row, and other old buildings which can still be seen today, including the church hall, and the two public houses have been covered elsewhere. Although there was some development in the 1930s, such as Brooklyn Drive, and Courtenay Drive, the most dramatic changes came after the Second World War. The main council estate was built of such quality and design that it was used as an example for others. Haddock the builders were responsible for development beyond Courtenay Drive during the early 1950s, and many of the people who moved there came from other parts of Reading to bring up families. They either had jobs in the town, where some ran influential businesses, or commuted to London. A few original occupants still live there today. Before the shopping precinct was built Caversham was the nearest main centre. Mobile shops were a boon, however. A van based in Grove Road toured with groceries; Jennings, the butcher came round with meat; and the Co-op called on a Monday to take orders which were delivered the following Friday. Subsequent infilling with small estates, or individual houses continued as properties with large grounds were sold, or a change of use for the land was permitted (including the controversial use of 'Green Belt' land).

Latterly people have come to realise how precious the nearby countryside is and any attempt to infiltrate what is left is actively resisted. For ten years people campaigned against development in the Hemdean Valley. Although the outcome wasn't the desired one, the actions perhaps encouraged the developers to be more considerate, and progression of the building has been carefully monitored. A bonus might be that it was instrumental in the setting up of the **Emmer Green Residents' Association**, which is still active some fifteen years later. An important achievement of theirs has been to establish a postcode area which has clearly defined the limits of Emmer Green.

Reading's first Local Nature Reserve was set up in 1991 on woodland adjoining the northeastern boundary of Emmer Green. Parts of Clayfield Copse are deemed ancient woodland, and it abuts Blackhouse Wood whose habitat is even more diverse. The **Friends of Clayfield**

Copse was established in 1989 to help manage and maintain both woods. Recently the **Berkshire Woodcarvers** have created a sculpture trail through the copse using wood from a cedar toppled in a storm in 1991.

The hope is that we can appreciate what we have in Emmer Green, and trust the peace and tranquility of the South Oxfordshire countryside nearby can be preserved.

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HARVEST TIME - MR LAURENCE HUNT AT THE WHEEL