

### **The Vestry Meeting and Overseers of the Poor**

The parish had to look after its own poor, orphaned, aged and disabled inhabitants; to repair its roads and church fabric; and to a certain extent, maintain law and order. Officers to carry out the administrative affairs of the parish were chosen from the ratepayers of the community. The most important of these were the Churchwardens, who were responsible to the Bishop or Archdeacon of the diocese for the maintenance and repair of the church, as well as other duties concerned with the smooth running of the church services, the upkeep of the churchyard and conduct of the parishioners. In Mersham, according to the surviving Vestry Minutes dating from 1783, one Churchwarden was appointed by the Rector and the other chosen by the parishioners. They were able to levy a Church Rate or Sess on all parishioners to finance their work, and their accounts and the proposal to make a rate had to be submitted to the Vestry Meeting; an open meeting of parishioners, but in practice, usually restricted to ratepayers. In July 1798, six parishioners signed the book, but there were sometimes up to a dozen signatories and, exceptionally, 19 in November 1820. The minutes were usually restricted to a formal resolution to approve the sess, but other matters were occasionally recorded.

The Churchwardens were also nominated by law as Overseers of the Poor, but they usually acted in a supervisory capacity and two other householders would be appointed to collect the Poor Rate and distribute it in various ways to the needy. Their duties were not enviable since parishioners were not always willing or able to pay their rates and administering relief meant not only dealing personally with those in need, but also attending Petty and Quarter Sessions; seeing that the workhouse and almshouses were thatched and repaired when necessary; making sure that fathers of illegitimate children paid maintenance, etc. Overseers also had to be competent book-keepers. If those appointed were not prepared to hold the office, they could be fined and some chose this means of escaping such onerous duties. Mersham was lucky in that one man, John Epps, the village blacksmith, was willing to do the job from 1782 to 1807 for which he was paid a few pounds a year plus expenses.

To be eligible for relief, applicants had to prove their right of settlement in the parish. A settlement could be gained by birth in the parish; by payment of rates or holding a parish office; by working under contract in a parish for one year or more; by being apprentice to a master in the parish or; for women, by marriage to a man with settlement rights. Disputes often arose between parishes as to where a pauper rightfully belonged and a legal decision from the local Justices of the Peace was sometimes needed. They issued Removal Orders to authorise a pauper and his family to be sent back to the place of their last legal settlement at the expense of that parish. Many of these are preserved in the Kent History and Library Centre (KHLC) in Maidstone.

Often the move was only to or from a neighbouring parish such as Aldington or Smeeth, or other parishes in the Ashford area, but it could sometimes be further afield. For example, Martha Banbury "a singlewoman, being with child" was sent from Easington in Warwickshire back to Mersham. It was obviously to the Overseers' advantage to remove anyone who was likely to become a charge on the parish, especially a pregnant woman without support, since the child would gain a legal settlement in whichever parish it was born. Thus a removal order was obtained by Smeeth for Mary Fisher "a singlewoman being great with child" to be conveyed from Smeeth and delivered to the Churchwardens and Overseers of Mersham who were ordered "to provide for her as an inhabitant of your parish".

From 1793 to 1815, Britain was at war for 22 years with only two short breaks. Wheat was needed for the army, importation became more difficult and several bad harvests aggravated the shortages. Farmers brought more land into cultivation, employed more labourers and received higher prices for their wheat but they were also paying more in taxes, tithes and rent. Although labourers' wages rose considerably during the war, commodity prices also rose and their standard of living may not have improved. The price of wheat rose from 69s. to £1 19s. a quarter between 1799 and 1801 and was again very high between 1808 and 1813. The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 brought more problems; wheat prices fell after three good harvests and financially hard-pressed farmers reduced arable acreages, wages and the number of men employed. Instead of the once common practice of labourers being hired by the year, the employment of day labourers became widespread, as they could be laid off at short notice, especially during bad weather. The population had been rising steadily since the mid-18th century. Now that the war was over, labour was plentiful and discharged servicemen increased the number of men under-employed or unable to find work at all. This was especially the case in the rural parts of southern England where there was little or no industrial work.

The amount spent on the poor in Mersham rose considerably during the Napoleonic wars. The amount disbursed for the year commencing April 1821 was double that spent in the year starting in April 1801 and over five times the 1791 figure. Rising prices must have been partly responsible for this, but it seems likely that the increased population and underemployment were also much to blame.

The Poor Rate or Sess was usually fixed twice a year. Preceding the Overseers accounts are lists of ratepayers, the rental value of their property, tithes due, and the sum to be paid according to the current rate per pound agreed by the Vestry Meeting. Property in the parish was divided between many owners and lessees. In 1812, for instance, there were 93 entries in the list of ratepayers. However, over 45% of the total amount raised in this year was from the five largest landowners: Sir Edward Knatchbull, Mr. Edward Back, Mr. Stephen Greenhill, Mr. Edward Hughes and Mr. Thomas Piddlesden. Just over a quarter of the ratepayers in 1812 were living in cottages valued at £4 a year or less. Sometimes they did not have enough money to pay their sess and were themselves in receipt of parish relief. From 1775 to 1798 the annual sess was not more than 3s 6d. in the pound and often less. It was not to fall this low again until after the new Poor Law was passed in 1834. In the intervening years it fluctuated between 4s. and 9s 6d, the peak being between 1817 and 1819.

It is difficult to estimate from local sources alone how many of Mersham's inhabitants needed relief. In Hasted's History, published in 1798, about 58 are recorded as being constantly relieved and 65 casually; in total this would amount to about 22% of the population in 1801. In the year April 1812 to March 1813, 75 different names appear in the poor book. This is 12% of the population in 1811. However, this figure does not include the dependents of those named or those living for various periods in the workhouse, unless they also received other forms of relief.

Receipts for malt and wheat delivered to the workhouse show that this was established prior to 1733. They were signed by George Blechynden who must also have owned the property since a receipt also survives for its rental signed by him. The workhouse may have been established in the previous decade since in 1723 Sir Edward Knatchbull (the 4th

Baronet) introduced a bill subsequently passed in the House of Commons, known as Knatchbull's Act, whereby parishes were authorised to establish a workhouse without having to obtain a special Act of Parliament. Since Sir Edward lived in Mersham it seems likely that he might have encouraged the parish officers to start a workhouse soon after this time. Finn states that Mr. & Mrs. John Leeds were Master and Mistress of the Workhouse for many years and that it stood in Kingsford Street. He goes on to say that it was "some years after converted into a more respectable edifice. It underwent a thorough renovation. It is now converted into a farm homestead and the occupant is a Mr. Long." There is a possibility, though no firm evidence, that the building is now Longthorne Farm, which is listed as dating from the 16th century or earlier.

No separate records survive for the workhouse, but from payments made to Mrs. Leeds, it appears that in 1812/13 between 16 and 19 paupers were accommodated. These were the highest figures mentioned from 1774 up to that year, but the numbers rose to 27 in 1814, after which time the entries in the poor book no longer give the number housed. Mrs. Leeds charged the parish 3/- a head per week to keep the inmates in 1816. A few receipts which have survived also include the cost of purchasing worsted at 3d per ounce and hobnails at 4d per hundred, probably to give the work weaving, knitting or mending boots. They may have been paid for this since other entries mention payment of 5d a day for "works".

The Mersham Poor Rate and Account Books, five thick volumes dating from 1764 to 1838, are housed in the KHLC. They contain hundreds of brief entries which give an insight into the hardships suffered by many of our predecessors in the village and the ways in which the Overseers tried to relieve them. Outpaupers were helped in a number of ways. Some were given pay of a few shillings a week. Many entries mention one-off payments to those "in need", including some to a character named Black Ned. Sometimes rent of a cottage was paid or a leaking roof thatched. Large bills submitted by Mr. Luxford, the shopkeeper, probably cover goods had by the poor as well as supplies for the workhouse. There are entries for funeral expenses, doctors' bills, new clothing and shoes, or having old shoes clipped and nailed. New mothers received financial help for a month while lying in and some received a load of wood or half a chaldron of coal in winter. At various times the parish paid for bushels of wheat, sacks of beans, pieces of meat and in one case a pennyworth of beer for old Master Dandy and a bottle of wine costing 3/6d for Dame Wicks, presumably for medicinal purposes.

A number of receipts for goods the Overseers ordered for the poor have survived, some only on small scraps of paper. In 1734, 2s 9d. bought 11 lbs of cheese; 12 lbs of beef could be had for 2s 6d; 3 lbs of butter cost 1s 1d. and a half pound of soap 2 1/4 d. Other goods purchased at the shop included salt, pepper, thread, vinegar, candles, starch and 'blue' for washing, milk, oatmeal, mackerel, yeast, ginger, nutmeg, currants, treacle, tobacco, calico and worsted. In 1710, £1 3s 0d. bought a suit of clothing; a pair of leather breeches for Michael Norrington cost 2s 6d. and a pair of stockings 2s 0d. In 1711 Mr. Ottaway was paid 2s 8d. for making 8 shirts for parish children and John Cheesman made a boy's suit for 3s 0d.; a pair of shoes for Will Edwards also cost 3s 0d. A century later a shag duffle coat cost 16s 0d.; a waistcoat 4s 6d.; a hat 2s 9d. and a bonnet and stays 2s 6d.

Several Doctors' bills survive, the earliest, dated 1717, is for a pint of specific gargarism and quieting doses for Goodman Vale, the doctor also had to pay him a visit and his bill

totalled £1 6s 5d. In 1811 the list of medicines included a specific bolus, cathartic powders, pacific pills, tonic elixir, anodyne pills, sedative plasters, a diaphoretic mix and febrifuge mixture. Also in this year Richard Prior spent 124 days in the Kent & Canterbury Hospital at a cost of 10d. per day, "the charge for all paupers coming from non-subscribing parishes". Eventually the parish paid the Hospital an annual subscription of £3 3s 6d.

Pauper children were boarded out with other villagers who were paid a fixed sum per week; their clothes and shoe repairs were also paid for by the parish. The Overseers could arrange for children who were a long-term charge on the parish to be apprenticed. Several indentures dating from the 18th century show children of about 14 being apprenticed to masters in other villages until they were 21. In 1730, Elizabeth Squire was apprenticed to Adam Morrell of Tenterden, a mantua maker. The Parish paid £12 and the Master agreed to pay the apprentice 6d quarterly and give her "sufficient meat, drink, apparel, lodging, washing and other things necessary and fit for an apprentice".

Overseers also tried to get maintenance for illegitimate children from their fathers. There are numerous copies of Filiation Orders at KHLC; the mother named the father of the child under oath before the JPs who stipulated a weekly payment for maintenance. Getting an order made out was easy enough, but it was probably difficult to enforce it, especially where the father was himself poor or had absconded. However, payments of this kind are shown in the poor book receipts, for example, in 1812 John Parks paid £3 10s for Mary Franks' child.

Sometimes vagrants became a charge on the parish. For instance, in 1770 a travelling woman seems to have had a baby while in Mersham as two entries appear for her lying in at John Stone's barn. There are many mentions of others passing through the parish who are given a few pence to help them on their way. These often included soldiers and sailors, sometimes injured, presumably discharged from service. One shilling was given to a company of wounded seamen with a pass and also to two soldiers wives and a poor woman with 5 children. Entries of this sort are frequent during the period of the Napoleonic Wars. Travellers usually had an official paper or pass which was their authorisation to travel back to their own parish of settlement. Parishes such as Mersham, situated on one of the main roads from the coast to London, must have had more than their fair share of such travellers.

An analysis of several years' accounts shows that a high proportion of the receipts were spent on official expenses; usually about 13% but up to 25% in some years. The Overseer was paid a small sum annually for "serving the office", £2 2s in 1794/95; £3 3s in 1817/18 rising to £15 by 1825/26. There are numerous entries for attending sittings, payments for warrants, examinations and orders. Expenses were also claimed for journeys connected with removing families from parishes where they had no right of settlement back to Mersham. For example, in 1812/13 the Overseer travelled to Womenswold, Tenterden, Westwell and twice to Sittingbourne. The county rate, or gaol money, was levied by JPs to cover the costs of administering justice and maintaining the gaols. A new county gaol and a sessions house were built at Canterbury in 1808 and the cost must have fallen heavily on the rates. Militia expenses were also considerable. In two years alone, 1812/13 and 1813/14, five payments each of £35 14s were paid. Militia men were chosen by ballot; those who did not wish to be recruited could pay for a substitute if they had the money. Finn mentions that Thomas Bayley died "at the age of 20 with over exertion in order to obtain sufficient money to

pay for a substitute to serve in the old militia in 1807". Sometimes the parish paid when a family could not afford to do so. In years where expenses were particularly heavy, the parish sometimes had to borrow money, either by an advance on the rates from a wealthy ratepayer such as Mr. Hughes or from Mr. Jemmett, a local banker.

Able-bodied paupers were sometimes provided with employment at the ratepayers' expense. In 1821 several men and boys were paid a few pence a perch for digging land and planting potatoes. In June 1824: "At a lawful Vestry held in the Vestry room, it was agreed by the persons then present that any person having a just claim shall be allowed a proportionate quantity of stone to be dug and broke at the expence of the Parish (for public roads only) at such times when they are out of employ, such persons taking them away at their own expence, also at such time only as shall do no injury to the roads, such proportion or road as is made not to be laid of less thickness than six cord to a ...; the quantity to be dug yearly not to exceed 500 cord. (A cord was 27 solid feet of stone.)

The size of the poor rate bill nationally led to attempts to reduce it by cutting the amount of relief given. This and the effects of unemployment, a bad harvest and a bitter winter in 1829 led to unrest amongst agricultural labourers and craftsmen in Kent and other parts of Southern England from 1830 to 1832. These 'Swing Riots' included acts of machine breaking, particularly threshing machines, which reduced the amount of labour needed during the winter months; arson, and threatening letters. The nearest incidents to Mersham took place on Romney Marsh. On 16th November 1830 in Ruckinge there was a wages riot when Romney labourers who, having marched from Ham Street, were prevented by police from carrying out their intention of continuing to Bilsington, Mersham and Ashford, recruiting supporters on the way. (Ref. 12)

This unrest may well have prompted members of the Vestry to agree in the same month to ease the unemployment situation by apportioning a number of labourers to each farmer in the parish "according to the number of acres of arable and pasture land in each occupation". The rest of the meeting was postponed until the following Saturday at the Farriers Arms when a committee was to decide on a plan, however, they eventually agreed that it was unnecessary to go into particulars, but made a recommendation "to sound who had not employed men, according to a regular quota that they would take it into consideration and give voluntary aid in lieu of allotment."

In 1834 a new Poor Law was passed which grouped parishes into Unions which built new workhouses. Mersham was part of the East Ashford Union and the local workhouse was at Willesbrough (the old hospital). The able-bodied poor were much less likely to get relief unless they went into the workhouse and the sick, aged and orphans were also sent there. However, the parish Overseers were still active for a few years after the Act was passed and in March 1839: "It was resolved that the sum of £30 be forthwith raised by the Churchwardens and Overseers as a fund or contribution for defraying the expenses of the emigration of poor persons having settlements in the parish, and being willing to emigrate to be paid out of the rates raised and to be raised for the relief of the poor in this parish, and to be applied under such rules, order and regulation as the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales shall in that behalf direct. And the said Churchwardens and Overseers were directed by the said meeting to raise such sum of £30 accordingly. " A further sum of £33 was raised later the same year, however, no record survives of any families who may have applied to emigrate.

Although cottage rents were sometimes paid for those who could not afford them, the Overseers also owned some properties in the parish. One of these was 'The Cottage' in Kingsford Street which may have been acquired in 1829 when it was "agreed by the parties present to take the land and premises now in the occupation of Thomas Gilbert at the price it was previously purchased for of ... Rayner by his late father viz. £140, the expence of conveyance of which was jointly to be paid for between the parties ... and to have possession of the said estate at Lady Day next, or if not quitted at that time, Mr. Gilbert to pay a fair rent for the same from that period and to leave the property in a proper state of repair". The apportionments of 1840 show that this cottage was still owned by the Overseers and leased by William Gilbert. The other properties were constructed at the expense of the Parish. The Vestry Minutes of November 1802 state that it was "agreed to build a house with 2 dwellings on the wasteland near a certain place called Broad Oak for the use of the Parish of Mersham according to a plan and estimate given in by Messrs Clarke and Vincer which estimate is not to exceed £160. Mr. Jn Epps to advance the money at lawful interest which money we intend paying by instalments of forty pounds per year." The minute was signed by Edward Hughes and John Clark, Churchwardens, and John Epps and Thos. Jeffery, Overseers. These cottages stood at the junction of Spring Hill and Laws Lane and were known variously as the Almshouses, Amos Houses or Poorhouses. The field behind them was called Almshouse Meadow. An Almshouse existed before this, as in 1771 the Overseer paid several bills for thatching it, but there is no indication whether it was on the same site or not.

In July 1816, the Barracks and Stores at Brabourne Lees were sold by auction. On July 29th the Mersham Vestry held a special meeting "to take into consideration the propriety of buying some Barracks to be converted into cottages for the use of the said Parish. It was unanimously agreed to purchase some for that purpose if it can be done to advantage". "The Barracks" as they were always known, were sited at the Forstal and were occupied as three cottages until pulled down in about 1969.

### **The Church**

The names of the Rectors of Mersham since 1369 appeared in the first volume of the Parish Magazine in 1894; they had been verified with those in the Diocesan Registers preserved in the Library at Lambeth Palace.

Rev. John Cooke was Rector from 1677 to his death in his 81st year in August 1726. He was also Rector of St. George the Martyr and St. Mary Magdalen, Canterbury, and was one of the Six Preachers of the Cathedral. According to the memorial tablet on the south wall of the Chancel in Mersham Church erected by his third wife Hester, he had 17 children; 8 with his first wife, 5 with his second and 4 with his third. He was succeeded by Rev. Henry Archer, D.D. who was also Vicar of Faversham and died in 1743.

The next Rector, appointed in 1744, was the Rev. John Chapman, D.D. He had been Tutor at King's College, Cambridge and Rector of Aldington-with-Smeeth since 1739. His other posts, held simultaneously, were Archdeacon of Sudbury and Domestic Chaplain to Archbishop Potter. Subsequent to the Archbishop's death, he was appointed to the Treasurership of Chichester Cathedral. In those days extra income was frequently sought from nominal posts in areas often quite distant from a clergyman's parish. The Rev. Chapman seems to have suffered considerable embarrassment when he attempted to get himself appointed to yet another sinecure while executor of Archbishop Potter's will. He was eventually tried for abusing his trusteeship in the Chancery Court and although he won the case, the judgement

was reversed in the House of Lords. Dr. Chapman was a very learned man and wrote works critical of the Jesuits and anti-trinitarians. He educated William Cole, a local boy, who later himself became Rector of Mersham. Joseph Price, Vicar of Brabourne at the time, wrote of Cole in his diary that he was "Always in a brood. His old books so much in his head that he understands everything by them." (Ref. 13)

After Dr. Chapman's death in 1784, aged 80, Rev. Thomas Drake, D.D. became Rector for two years after which he moved on to Huntingdonshire and was succeeded by Rev. Henry Radcliffe, Domestic Chaplain to Archbishop Moore and Prebendary of Canterbury Cathedral, who stayed in Mersham for three years before moving to Ickham.

William Cole, D.D., a native of Mersham, became Rector in 1789. He was also a Fellow of King's College Cambridge, Prebendary of Westminster and Vicar of Shoreham. One of his printed sermons is bound into a book kept at KHLC. (Ref.14) It was given in Mersham Church on the day appointed for general thanksgiving in 1802. Dr. Cole tried to reconcile his listeners to the idea that all calamities and evils are sent by God "in mercy and love, to correct the vices and strengthen the virtue of mankind". He pointed out that the events of the war "furnish useful and instructive lessons to Kings and Princes" as well as to the middle and lower classes, using the events of the French Revolution as his example. He expressed the hope "that such awful means of instruction" would never be necessary again. Britain and France should lay aside "all petty rivalships" and "unite with zeal and cordiality in extending the boundaries of science and the happiness of mankind". Unfortunately, his hopes were in vain since war was resumed in 1803. Dr. Cole died in 1806, aged 53 years; his memorial tablet is over the pulpit in Mersham Church.

Rev. Richard Lawrence, D.D. then became Rector. He was also Regius Professor of Hebrew and Bampton Lecturer at Oxford and Canon of Christ Church. He became a bishop in 1822. Finn remarks that Dr. Lawrence "made great improvements about the premises such as sinking a fish pond and planting shrubs", presumably at Glebe House, which was then the Rectory. He believed him to be "rather fond of the pastime of angling as a great many of the Revd. Prelates were. They were sons of Zebedee's children. Some have become Fishers of Men." Finn also reports that "his loss was not much regretted by the Parish".

Dr. John Lonsdale was Rector for only five years being presented to a Fellowship at Eton in 1827. He was followed by Rev. Frederick Lockwood, M.A. Finn mentions that he was nephew to Archbishop Sutton and "a true zealous Christian ... venerated by the whole of his flock ... one of the good Samaritans. He searched out the distressed, he passed not by the afflicted but administered the healing antidote". On the back cover of the Churchwardens' rate and account book, the following is recorded:

"In the months of November and December 1829 5 yew trees were planted in the Churchyard by the Revd. Frederick Vernon Lockwood, a man whose piety and zeal in the cause of his Divine Master, whose affectionate regard for the welfare of his Flock, whose active benevolence and invariable kindness to every individual of his parish has endeared him to us all; and while we feel grateful to providence for bestowing on us so excellent a guide and example, so great a consolation in the hour of difficulty and distress; we offer this humble tribute to his worth and record this event not to keep alive in our own minds the remembrance of his kindness, for to us he will ever be the object of our warmest gratitude and affection, but to hand down to future generations, who may admire their verdure and be refreshed by their

shade, the excellent character of him who planted them. Thos. Rayner and Thomas Piddlesden Churchwardens. NB The 2 yews opposite the south porch were of 18 years growth when planted."

Three of the yew trees still survive. Rev. Lockwood left Mersham in 1840 on being presented with the Living of Minster. Rev. George Norwood, M.A. was then Rector for the next 36 years until his death in 1876 at the age of 95.

These Reverend gentlemen were assisted by Curates; Finn mentions two; the Rev. R. Faulkner and Rev. Dr. Hanking, and says that "many curates were employed during the Rectorship of Dr. Cole who was much in London". Others from 1813 to 1883 are named in the Parish Magazine of 1894 as Robert Goodrich; J.V. Button; D. Twopenny; G.Thornton; R.I. Morris; J.P. Curnming; L.W. Lewis; H.B. Biron; C.E. Plater and H. Beech. It is in and around the Church that one can best imagine the past residents of Mersham since most would have come here each Sunday and many hundreds must be buried in the Churchyard. The interior of the Church was altered in 1878 when the box pews, tripledecker pulpit and musicians gallery were removed. This pulpit may have been the one for which John Boys paid a carpenter £4. 4s. Od. in 1715; the receipt has outlived the pulpit and is amongst the parish records. A few years earlier in 1706, Robert Nickoll charged £5 7s. 6d. "for whitewashing and coullouring ye body of ye church".

Finn describes the musicians and singers as giving great encouragement to the younger people of the parish, who, he implies, would not have been so anxious to attend services otherwise since the Rector at that time was advanced in years and his doctrine old-fashioned. It seems that in Finn's day there were several Societies of Psalm Singers in the neighbourhood who met weekly to select psalms and hymns for the following Sunday and singers from neighbouring churches banded together to strengthen each other's choirs. James Clark, the grocer, played a Bass Viol which had been given to his uncle, John Clark, by the Knatchbull family. He was also principal conductor of the choir. His brother Robert played the bassoon. There was also a clarinet, which was purchased in 1788. John Clark "was also a leading man in the Society of Psalm Singers and played a pitch pipe. He was also one of the bell-ringers, both church and handbells. The ringers celebrated certain days "and the flaming bowl at Christmas was not neglected. Gifts and "fines", perhaps for non-attendance at ringing sessions, were used to purchase "ale sop and grog". Annual payments to the ringers appear in the Churchwardens' accounts. Thomas Hardy captures the atmosphere of those days in his book 'Under the Greenwood Tree' when he describes the choir with their horn lanterns fortified with hot ale tramping in the snow round the parish of Mellstock and the musicians in their gallery from where they had an excellent view of the congregation and could note "the habits of the nave to its remotest peculiarity", such as the farmer's wife who counted her money and reckoned her week's marketing expenses during the first lesson. By 1835, an organ must have been installed since James Prebble was paid £3 for repairing it.

Funds to cover maintenance of the church fabric and other expenses were raised by an annual sess of 3d or 4d in the pound on rateable value. The account book for the years 1775 to 1838 has survived and lists annual expenses such as 6d for a pint of oil for the bells and 16s for a set of bell ropes and visitation expenses when the Churchwardens attended at Ashford or Canterbury to be sworn in. A visit to Mersham by the Ordinary must have taken place in 1817 since a receipt survives for food and cooking including

sums for beer, tobacco, wine, punch and spirits. There are payments to the sidesmen and sexton and, from 1824, £5 annually to James Finn for educating the poor children of the Parish and also expenses relating to confirmation; in 1826, 34 girls and 31 boys were confirmed.

Payments of 1s or 1s 2d for prayers of thanksgiving occur regularly, usually for the King or Queen, but during the course of the Napoleonic wars prayers included Nelson's victory in 1798/1799, Lord Wellington's in 1813 and for the victory at Vittoria in 1814. There are many bills paid to tradesmen, some mention specific work such as a bricklayer's bill for £5 3s 3 1/2d in the 1778/79 accounts for work and materials "of all sorts for repairing ye Church after ye High Wind". There was also another large bricklayer's bill the following year for £8 9s 8d and a boy was paid 3d "for picking up tyles in the Churchyard". In 1809 Jesse Spicer was paid 10s "for taking down and putting up the vane".

The Churchwardens were also responsible for paying for vermin to be exterminated; in Mersham, it seems sparrows were the main victims. Catching sparrows and collecting their eggs must have been the main occupation of boys during the summer. In one year alone, payments were made for 90 dozen eggs, 121 dozen young and 54 dozen old sparrows. Eggs were 2d and sparrows 4d per dozen. There are two entries for 6 thrushes and in 1803, 2s 6d was paid for 5 polecats (no longer found in this part of the country) and 6d for two stoats.

There is no record of the number of non-conformists amongst the parish records but Finn mentions two families of Quakers, one of whom, the Goddens, were much respected "although at this time there then existed a great division between the several religious creeds, such as Quakers, Jews and Methodists. Its doctrines used to be scouted at by the protestant clergy endeavouring to incite persons to molest them". There was obviously a good number of Methodists in the area since in 1846 a chapel was built near the Good Intent. By 1851 it had an attendance of 100 at morning service, 80 in the evening and 55 at Sunday School. (Ref.16)

### **Schools in Mersham**

There has been a school in Mersham for at least four centuries. Records of licences to teach from the Canterbury Diocese show that William Hardyar was licensed on 1st May 1581, his supporters being John Whiting, Clerk of Mersham; Richard Knatchbull of Mersham, gent; and Paul Johnson of Fordwich. The diary of a New Romney school master, Thomas Miller, records that one of his protegees, Avery Cheston, began teaching school at Mersham on October 5th 1741." (Ref.17)

One school was endowed by Dame Jane Knatchbull, who, according to the charity board on the south wall of Mersham Church, in her will dated 1698, bequeathed part of her estate "to the uses intents and purposes hereafter mentioned (that is to say) the yearly sum of Ten Pounds to a Schoolmaster to teach poor children of the Parish of Mersham to read English, write and cast accounts and the residue of the rents issues and profits shall pay employ and dispose of yearly for ever to and amongst such of the poor people of the said parish of Mersham as he and his heirs shall think fit."

James Finn (1756 - 1839) with his wife Mary (nee Sheaffe, 1762-1834) was Parish Clerk and Schoolmaster in Mersham for 20 years. They lived for some time in the old Church House by the churchyard gate. Mr. Finn taught the boys arithmetic and ciphering in the Vestry Room adjoining the Church. Mrs. Finn's school for the "instruction of young females" was in a room in the Church House, but they had a gallery in the boys' school "for their further improvement in the way of writing for those whose parents were able to give them greater scope of erudition at stated times". The Finns were unfortunately "ejected" from the Church House by the tenant of Court Lodge Farm. (This incident is described in the Survey.) Their new home was in Lower Mersham which was very inconvenient since James had to travel each day up to the Church often through floods. Mrs. Finn taught the girls in their new house and they were no longer able to share any extra instruction with the boys. After James' death, his son, William Johnson Finn (1803-1857) took over his duties as Parish Clerk and Schoolmaster.

The boys school remained in the Vestry or Schoolroom until the National School was founded by the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Established Church. The small stone building, which still exists on the corner of Bower Road and Church Road, appears on the 1840 Tithe map on land belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral and leased by Sir Edward Knatchbull. There was, however, more than one School. The 1841 Census names four teachers, William Browning, Sarah Nicholls, William Finn and Mary Ann Tournay and a local Directory mentions that Ann Tournay teaches Infants and William and Elizabeth Finn teach the Charity School.

There is a document kept at KHLC (P248/25/10) which seems to be a copy of answers to a questionnaire describing the village schools. It is undated and unsigned, but was probably written by the Rector after 1834, since it refers to the new Poor Law of that year and before 1876, when building commenced on the present school. The writer is likely to have been the Revd. George Norwood who was Rector from 1840 to 1876.

Six schools are listed: one was a Sunday School at the Church supported by the Clergyman and the Misses Hughes of New House. The Master was paid £10 a year and about 40 girls and 35 boys were taught by 10 voluntary teachers; ladies, farmers' daughters, a tradesman and tradesmen's daughters. There was also a Boys' and Girls' Free Daily School in separate rooms under one roof; this was probably the National School. The boys were supported by a subscription of £10 from Sir Edward Knatchbull, £5 from the Parish and £5 from the Rector. The master, appointed by Sir Edward, was paid £20 a year and taught about 30 boys who were admitted by the Clergyman at 7, usually leaving at 10 or 11 years of age, or often earlier. The girls, about 35 of them, were supported by payment from the individuals who placed them, entering at 7 and leaving when they were 12 to 15 years old. The mistress was paid £17 a year and the school was controlled by Lady Visitors who took turns to inspect it.

A small infant school had been recently started in the Mistress's house and supported by whoever placed the scholars. The Mistress appointed by the Clergyman was paid £10 a year. There were only 11 children; they entered as soon as they could speak and remained until they were 7 years old. A Middle School for 35 to 40 boys was held in a School Room and supported by the parents; a small Middle School for 12 girls was held in the Mistress's house.

Instruction was based on religious principles. The Bible was read in all the schools, except the infants, and great pains were taken "that each verse be rendered intelligible and a familiar exposition given". The books used for reading in the free Daily Schools were The Bible, Peep of Day, Line upon Line 1st and 2nd series, My Station and its Duties, Little Mary Grown Older, the Saviour's Miracle Parables and Sermon on the Mount published by the SPCK and Mrs. Trimmers 1 and 2 Lessons. Reading was learned by spelling from cards and then reading Mrs. Trimmer's 1 and 2 Lessons. The two first classes in these schools learned to write with books, pens, slates, etc. provided by the Master, who also taught the girls during the boys' playtime. Arithmetic was taught to the boys "to any level the period of tuition will allow. At present none are advanced further than the Rule of Three". In the boys' Middle School mensuration and book-keeping were also taught. The Rector ran a Lending Library "open to all upon application on Saturday evenings between the hours of 6 and 7".

Prizes were given for good conduct and regular attendance according to the number of marks gained during the year. Order was strictly enforced and talking lost the offender some of his marks. "Any grosser moral offences vitiate part or the whole of the marks received". If the children were regularly late they lost their marks and consequently their rewards at the end of the year. The Misses Hughes of New House are mentioned in the Finn Survey as great contributors to the schools. "A repast or feast was frequently the object of their solicitude for the encouragement of the juvenile branches whose conduct might entitle them to favours. Tea, cakes, fruit and tickets of reward were given to each and caused no small gratification to observe the eager applicant and the distributor equally happy and I have no doubt when many years are past away that the remembrance of these good people will be retained in the memories of these young people when these benefactresses are disembodied in the dust."

The Revd. Norwood, if he it was who answered the questionnaire, made some general comments that are quite illuminating on the need for children to work from an early age and the effect of the new Poor Law: "I cannot quite say that all the children of the parish learn to read and receive due religious instruction. There will always be some fluctuating residents from time to time, newcomers who are very ignorant and a few, although very few, constant residents who take their children away from the weekly schools to work at so early an age that little advance is made and I find that these same children are also generally negligent of the Sunday School arising perhaps from a conscious deficiency and a dislike to be placed at the bottom. Still I hope the proportion of such cannot be set higher than 2 in 10."

"As long as the parents find it necessary to employ their children in manual labour in order to gain subsistence for themselves and children at the very early age they have done since the introduction of the new Poor Law, so long will and must be a deficiency in the education and moral training of the labouring classes in an agricultural parish. It is little that most parents will do in these respects at home and indeed it is impossible they can when their children are out from home at 7 a.m. and return at 6 p.m. (with exception of meal times) too much fatigued for any mental application if so inclined. Our means are I hope and believe adequate, but from the cause above mentioned they are paralyzed as far as regards the male population of the class I speak of."

### **Roads and Footpaths**

"The road, through the village southward, is the high and most frequented one from Ashford to the lower part of the Weald, by the four vents at Broadoak, and thence to Bilsington-cross; during the whole of which the soil is a deep stiff clay. A miserable wet and dreary country, and

the roads execrably bad." (Ref.18) This is Hasted's description of the route south from Mersham Heath through the village in the late 18th century. It is easy to imagine how, after heavy winter rains and flooding, the unpaved roads in the area would soon have been a sea of mud churned up by horses' hooves and cartwheels. Writing about Kent at the end of the 18th century, John Boys related that:

"...in winter, even carts are excluded; and it is extremely dangerous, and frequently impracticable, in that season to ride on horseback along the main roads; in consequence of which narrow paths, called horse tracks are paved with stones, or formed with seabeach on one side of the roads, just wide enough to ride upon but even this convenience is not general." Ref. 19)

Locally these paved paths were known as causeways. When the roads were passable, traffic may have included farm carts, packmen and peddlers, carriers, sheep being driven up from the Romney Marsh to market in Ashford and, on the main road, mail coaches and travellers bound to and from the Continent.

Until 1555 owners and tenants of nearby land were responsible for maintaining the highways, a duty enforced through the manorial courts. After this date, a highway act made each parish responsible for its own roads through the provision of statute labour. Owners of land and horses had to provide for four, and later six days annually "one wain or cart furnished after the custom of the country... and also two able men with the same". Other inhabitants had to contribute four, and later six days' labour or send a substitute in their stead. This work was supervised by a Surveyor or Waywarden; a parishioner nominated annually at first by the parish but after 1691 chosen by two Justices of the Peace from a list of suitable inhabitants. In addition to looking at the roads three times a year and reporting on their condition to the nearest JP, a Surveyor's duties included:

"looking out for vehicles with more than the statutory number of horses, attending at the highways sessions in the neighbouring town with due attention to the 'charge' delivered thereat, the fixing of days whereon the statute labour was to be performed and the supervising of his fellow parishioners in their unpleasant task. He had to report to the nearest Justice all defaulters, and to collect all commutations and compositions. (Ref.20)

The system was unlikely to have worked well given the probable reluctance of villagers to perform their statutory labour and of the Surveyor to organise and supervise the work. However, until 1835, JPs could 'present' a parish at the Quarter Sessions or Assizes if their roads had been neglected. Eventually, statute labour was replaced by the assessment of annual rates with which the Surveyor paid for labour and materials.

The Mersham Vestry Minutes show that 10 surveyors were appointed each year, five for the Upper Side and five for the Lower. However, only two were approved by the Magistrates and in 1795 they were allowed one and a half guineas each for serving the office. Surveyor's accounts survive from 1695 to 1723 and from 1789 to 1844. The earlier book also gives an annual list of inhabitants who were liable by law to do duty on the roads with the length of time each should work. The first assessment for a highway rate seems to date from 1704 and is recorded as "An Assessment made by and with the consent of the parishioners for and towards the making and ... (*unreadable*) the causeway and paving ye same leading from Broad Oak to Stonegreen being ... with other ways and bridges after the rate of sixpence in

the pound on all lands as follows for ye Surveyors". The highest ratepayers were Thomas Knatchbull at £2 and Thomas Boys at £1. The next rate was for 3d and another of 2d in the pound in 1709 and thereafter in 1711, 1712, 1719, 1721 and 1722.

"The accounts of Isaac Ottaway and Henry Francklyn Surveyors of the Parish of Mersham for ye year 1712" were as follows:

	& s d
Paid Robert Nickols for paveing 91 yards of causeway a 3d a yard	1 2 9
Paid Robert Nickols for raising ye causeway	9 6
Paid John Fryse for paveing 162 yards of causeway at 3d per yard	2 8 2
Pad to John Fryse for 5 days mending causeway	7 6
Paid Isaac Ottaway Carpenter as by bill	7 0
Paid Henry Francklyn for one hundred and fifty loads stones	2 10 0
Paid Stephen Fagg for a load of broom	5 0
Paid Mr. Nethersole for warrants and swearing	5 0
For writing this account and the inhabitants names and entering them in this book	1 0

In subsequent years, such items appear as:

Paid to Robert Nichols for paving of a pinnock*	3 4
for 100 of bush fagots and carring and plasing of them	7 6
Paid George Small ye carpenter for laying a Bridge and two postes and railles for a helptree ( <i>handrail</i> ) laid in ye footway leading from ye fright to Stone Cross and for mending ye bridge going over the River near John Woodlands house	7 6
Item paid Edward Broomby for mending a great hole in ye highway leading to Blibie Wood	15 0
Item for 12 days work for team and waggon working in the highways carrying of stones and sand	3 0 0

\*A pinnock was a small bridge over a ditch, a brick or wooden drain under a road or across a gateway.

The quarrying and transportation of stones was a major expense and appears frequently in the book dating from 1789; payments are made for digging amounts such as 240 cord of stones at a cost of £12. 0. 0 and also for breaking them into smaller pieces. Mr. Tookey was paid 15s for the quarry in 1789. In 1798 5 cord of stones were even removed from the churchyard for which someone was paid 5s. A cord was primarily a measurement of wood but in Kent was also used for stone; the Oxford English Dictionary says one cord equals 27 solid feet of stone. There is no indication of how much road could be paved with a cord, although a memorandum made in 1815 notes that the paving of the causeway across Burgate Field took forty cords of stone. There is also a note about the measurements of the roads in that year. There were 8 miles 3 furlongs and 2 rods of hard stone road, 4 miles 2 furlongs and 1 rod of soft clay road and 1 mile 1 furlong and 17 rods of turnpike road in the parish.

Further references to the state of roads and footpaths can be found in the Presentments of Mersham Manor Court Leet housed in Canterbury Cathedral Archives. This was a vestige of the days when manorial courts regulated matters relating to its lands and it is unlikely that in the 18th and 19th century it had much power to remedy any defects. However there are a

number of entries which illustrate the negligence of local landowners and indeed also of the Surveyors:

1714 We present John Mantell gent. for not holding up a sufficient bridge and helptree in ye footway leading from his house (*Stone Green*) to Mersham Church to be done in a month hence 2s 6d.

1721 We present the Surveyors for not repairing the causeway between Stone Green and Wm Hughes Farm to be done in two months time on paine of five shillings.

1725 We present the Surveyors for not laying sufficient step stones in the footway leading from Mr. John Boys Gate on the Forstal to Mr. John Woodlands Bridge.

1725 We present the said Surveyors for not spreading of stone that lye in lumps in ye road leading from Richard Francis to Mersham Bridge.

1729 We present Mrs. Katherine Sheapheard for want of an indraught of the water out of the Kings Highways to be done in two months or pay the sum of forty shillings.

1737 We present James Clarke for not making a good sufficient ditch against his timber yard all the length of the same.

1738 We present Henry Dunk of Smeeth for not putting up two helptrees to his two bridges (*the next part of the presentment is crossed through but legible*) and also for not taking better care of an unruly Bull which has often affrighted and made offers to push at some people in passing the footway from Bockhanger wood to Thos. Hancocks aforesaid and upon penalty of ten shillings if not taken care of upon this first notice given by the Borsholder.

1743 We present a Quarry Hole in the High Way in Mersham belonging to Thos. Barker to be filled and levelled to be done within three months under penalty of five pounds.

1752 We present a pond not fenced in belonging to Mr. Richard Watts and Mrs. Nicolas Ladd in Kingsford St. to be done in a months time on penalty of paying twenty shillings each.

1752 Thomas Stone to fence the ditch he made across the road in the lane leading to Hatch from the Thorne.

1752 We present John Marshall for not scouring his ditch from Thos. Hammonds garden to his Horsepond and fine him forty shillings unless the said ditch be scoured within six weeks from this day.

1821 The jury upon their oath present that the footbridge upon the manor lands near the Mill and the footbridge leading from the Forestall into the lands of Mr. Thomas Wyrnan and both bridges leading over the River Stour are very much out of repair and ought to be immediately amended.

In February 1793, the Mersham Surveyors "met the officer of Sevington Parish in order to divide the road that has been usually repaired between the Parishes of Mersham and

Sevington commencing at the Bars in the Quarry Field in the occupation of Mr. Harrison to the gate in a field called Hugh Wells in the occupation of Thomas Hogben, the whole length being 155 rods". The Vestry Minutes record "that a post should be set at the end of the 77 1/2 rods and that Mersham should take that part next the turnpike road to repair and Sevington the other.

The Act relating to the Faversham, Hythe and Canterbury Turnpike Trust was passed in 1762. The old coach road which had run through Bockhanger Wood and close to the house at Mersham le Hatch then along the Ridgeway at Smeeth and Braboume Lees to Sellindge was diverted and instead crossed Mersham Heath along the line marked by the present A20. The parish still had an obligation to maintain the part of the turnpike running through the parish, which was usually converted to a money payment. In 1790, an entry in the accounts records that the Surveyor "Paid Mr. Tritton the turnpike money £6.0.0".

### **Law and order**

Before the Police Force existed, a Petty Constable or Borsholder would be nominated by the Court Leet or Vestry and appointed by local J.P.s. He had powers of arrest and would detain the offender until he or she was brought before the magistrates. Among other responsibilities were those of supervising the parish stocks and whipping-post. Although he does not indicate whether they were still in use in his day, Finn says that the stocks were placed at the end of the barn leading to the Church.

No separate Constable's accounts survive for Mersham but the office is mentioned several times in the Overseers accounts. For instance, in 1799 there are two entries one for £11. 0s. 4d paid to Mr. Dane "for serving the Office of Constable" and £4.18s. 8d. to Mr. Firminger "a bill as Constable". In 1801 the Overseer paid a "Constables bill for apprehending Benjamin Tull" and the next year 5s 4 1/2d was recorded as "expense for Borsholder and self going to Lenham for Wm Higgins". There are also payments for a summons in 1770 and in 1798 a 'mittimus' (a warrant ordering the keeper of a prison to hold the person named pending trial). In this case it was for George Foreman and the next entry is for "Expence of Vincer and self takeing and carrying George to Gaol 17s 10 1/2d". In 1850 a note in the Vestry Minutes mentions that Mr. Stephen Brett was to be appointed constable for the Parish of Mersham at £4 per annum.

In March 1799, the Overseer paid the "gaol money" to the Constable. This sum of £5 16s 6d was Mersham's contribution to the County Rate which covered the expenses of running the prisons and all the other costs involved in administering justice in the County. Justice was meted out by magistrates at Quarter Sessions, which for East Kent were held at the Old Castle in Canterbury until 1808 when a new sessions house and county goal were built. Petty sessions were held at Ashford when J.P.s dealt with removal and filiation orders and misdemeanours such as 'trespass in search of game' or 'using engines to destroy game'; grinding corn on Sundays; stealing various items such as wood, potatoes, turnips and clover; assault; drunkenness and misconduct in the workhouse. The signatures of many local magistrates are to be found in the Poor Rate books; in the late 18th and early 19th century they included, among others, Sir Edward Knatchbull, Nicholas Toke, Moyle Breton, George Sayer, Thomas Knight and John Sawbridge.

Finn describes how Sir Edward Knatchbull had occasion to judge one of his own employees when William Braize, his whipper-in, robbed the poultry yard at Hatch and

took the birds to be dressed and served up at the Red Lion on the Ridgeway at Smeeth. He should have been transported for seven years but his master mitigated the sentence to six months imprisonment in the house of correction.

It seems unlikely that any villager appointed as Constable would have dared to take action against local smugglers. It would surely have been more than his life was worth to meddle in their affairs. There was a resident Exciseman in the village, at least in the 1760s and 70s, but no evidence as to whether his presence had a deterrent effect on that illicit trade. Finn discusses, with much moralising, how James and William Ransley, sons of James Byham Ransley, who had moved to Kingsford Street from Ruckinge in 1792, were convicted and hung at Penenden Heath in 1800. He could himself remember having seen smugglers transporting their tubs travelling along the road from Bilsington to Mersham and on another occasion sheltering from the rain in the Church porch. Another Ransley, George, lived at the Bourne Tap near Aldington Frith and was leader of the 'The Blues'. His smuggling days ended when he and other members of his gang were arrested in 1826. Although the death penalty was imposed, their sentence was commuted to transportation. Anyone interested in smuggling in this area should read the fascinating book by John Douch, 'Smuggling - 'the wicked trade'. (Ref.1)

A Street Driver was also appointed by the parish and was responsible for rounding up stray animals. In May 1789 the Vestry resolved to elect a Street Driver and pay him 8d "for every lot of stock that he shall drive into the common pound and if that should not prove satisfactory to the said Street Driver that the parishioners shall hereafter make him such allowance as they shall think proper". There must also have been a hog pound, since in 1812 George Prebble was paid to repair it, however, there is no indication where the pounds were situated.

### **Leisure**

It might be thought that there was little time for leisure in the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, at least for common folk, but up to the early 1800s there were as many as 44 holidays during the year, although most of these were soon to be abolished, leaving only four by 1834; Christmas Day; Good Friday; May Day and 1st November, as official holidays. Other high days and holidays probably survived locally where the tradition was strong and farmers sympathetic. For example, Shrove Tuesday had been the occasion for rustic free-for-all football matches; Easter was not only a religious occasion but a reason for general festivities and the May Day traditions, with young folk making garlands to process around the village, are likely to have continued. Guy Fawkes Day was enthusiastically celebrated much as it is now with bonfires, burning of Guys, eating and drinking. Christmas, New Year and Twelfth night would have been well marked by family celebrations and perhaps by a mumming play, wassailing and carolling.

In medieval times Church Ales were held at Whitsuntide when feasting and drinking was encouraged to raise funds for the parish. Although in more puritan times these celebrations had been suppressed, they may have lived on in reduced form as parish feasts. Hasted records that a fair was held in Mersham on the Friday in Whitsun-week "for pedlary and toys" and this may have been the culmination of a week of celebration involving eating, drinking, sports and dancing. (Ref. 21) Igglesden mentions that "just on the right of Kingsford Street as you walk towards the village is a field where the fair was held in olden times".(Ref. 22) There were other fairs in the neighbourhood to which Mersham

folk probably walked or hitched a ride. At Hinxhill one was held the day after Mersham's and the one at Bilsington on July 5<sup>th</sup>, which was midsummer day before the old-style calendar was changed. There were two fairs at Sellindge on May 21st and October 11th for horses, cattle and pedlary and at Ashford four, May 17th, September 9th, October 24th and an annual wool fair on August 2nd. Stock markets were also held in Ashford on the first and third Tuesday of every month and a weekly corn market on Saturdays. At the time Hasted was writing 4000 soldiers were billeted in barracks at Ashford and must have livened up the town no end, making it a magnet to those in the district who had the least excuse to leave their business.

Other occasions for feasting were connected with the farming year, for example, after the hay and corn harvests. These probably persisted while many labourers were still involved in long hours of hard work, even though they may not have officially been recognised as holidays. There were probably other special days and anniversaries which were celebrated. For instance, Finn mentions the Grand Jubilee of George III when Sir Edward Knatchbull provided "an entertainment to all the people of his parish and nothing spared in the comforts .... of the Festival which (*tookplace*) in the year 1809".

Eighteenth century sports and pastimes included, according to one contemporary writer, "Foot ball, Wrestling, Cudgels, Ninepins, Shovelboard, Cricket, Stow-ball, Ringing of Bells, Quoits, pitching the Bar, Bull and Bear baiting, throwing at Cocks, and lying at alehouses". (Ref. 23) Finn mentions various 'past times' when: "the young ladies of the neighbourhood used to practise the art of running for a prize viz. such an article as such at that period named a smock, an appellation rather vulgar in these days. These females were sometimes encouraged in their speed by some very coarse expressions, etc. But many of these games have passed away and ladies are become more refined in their manners. The amusements are somewhat renewed in regard to cricket, trap, and men using their agility have now become the ruling passion of the time."

Girls running for the prize of a shift or smock was common in village sports in the 18th century. 'Trap' was presumably the game of bat and trap which was played on a pitch between 17 and 21 yards long with the object of bowling a ball to knock down the flap of the trap which the batsman tries to prevent, while, at the same time, aiming to hit the ball through the goal posts.

Finn does not specifically mention goal running, which was a popular rural sport in this area of Kent, dating from at least the end of the 17th century, and which was presumably played in his day. Thirty-a-side was a normal team size for formal matches but for a friendly, any number could compete. A base line was marked out at one end of the field and a flag for each side set up on it some distance apart. At the opposite end of the field two turning posts were stuck in parallel to the base line. A man from each team ran to the turning post and back to the flag, the object being to touch an opponent who had started to run before you on the back, but someone coming from behind would also try to touch you. Runners were told when to start by a 'putter-out' who would judge the best moment. So the two teams ran parallel to each other waiting for a chance to dash across and touch an opponent without themselves being caught. When a player achieved a touch or 'stroke', the game was stopped and the runners started again from their flags. The game was completed when one side won a certain number of strokes.(Ref. 24) Some of Mersham's oldest Inhabitants could still remember the game when I spoke to them about it. Mr. Wally Nye recalled being told that once a year on a Bank Holiday a match was played with no boundaries; the game was started

in the morning and by afternoon all the players had disappeared over the horizon. Normally a village team was based at the local pub and that was where the victory was celebrated after the game.

Sports and entertainments would not only have been reserved for holidays. Sunday was considered a day for recreation until puritanism reasserted itself in the 19th century and anything but attendance at Church or Sunday School was frowned on. Men would probably gather at the Farrier's Arms on long summer evenings to relax after their day's work. Perhaps they played quoits, skittles or ninepins in the yard in front of the pub. Cudgelling, backsword and singlestick were forms of duelling which might have taken place, providing an opportunity for gambling. A law to prohibit sports involving the baiting of animals such as bulls and bears, and cockfighting, was not passed until 1835 and Mersham men may well have attended such events, if not in the village itself, then possibly in Ashford on market days.

Over-indulgence in liquor or beer was obviously a problem for some. Finn mentions several husbands who took a little too much alcohol. Only The Farrier's Arms is mentioned and there is no evidence in the early censuses to indicate that there was another pub at the top of the village, although the Royal Oak is mentioned in the Vestry Minutes of 1854 when the meeting was adjourned to that establishment. Thirsts in Upper Mersham may have been quenched by an ale house of some description. James Stone owned "an orchard containing apples and cherries" which was "converted into a pleasure and tea gardens at the time of the Brabourne Barracks were erected". Perhaps he also served something stronger than tea. The Farrier's obviously did well out of the army, since Finn mentions it as being "much frequented by the soldiers at the time being away from their Barracks".

Other places for relaxation and a gossip seem to have been the workshops of village tradesmen. Finn describes how Mr. Lewis, the shoemaker, had a small shop where "after the labours of the day were over were discussed the eventful tidings gleaned from the news - which then abounded with battles at sea and land. The fear and apprehension of the intended invasion upon our coast, the cutting of the Canal and the building of the Towers and forks, these intelligences furnished the mind of the untutored villager and his spare hours glided away as quick as if they had been in a noisy city. Thus the shop of St. Crispin yielded some amusement without corrupting the mind or endangering the morals and it engendered sympathy to those who might have to mourn the loss of a friend or brother. The waiting for a shoe repairing or at the Blacksmith for your horse - or the Tailor for your coat does not linger on your time. The barber also gives you some dry jokes but then it would not be safe to make a great laugh."

The forge of Mr. Haycock, a blacksmith on the Hatch Road, also provided some congenial surroundings: "The sound of the anvil was a cheering melody on a cold snowy day or night. The puffing of the bellows a pleasant employment. The sing song and the long tales made the time pass glibly even the animal was animated. Thus all seem to share its comforts. The sons were very clever in their business, one particular was very ingenious composing the pence and twopenny copper pieces into boxes."

At home, precious leisure time must also have been spent in the garden growing vegetables to supplement what might otherwise have been a meagre bill of fare. The tithe map shows that in Kingsford Street, where Kingsford Close, Glebe Cottage,

Littleholm, Woodcote now stand and behind and a little way beyond The Cottage on land belonging to the Rector, Rev. Norwood, there were 19 allotments, called cottage gardens on the tithe apportionments, which were presumably made available to residents of The Street and others who had very small gardens.

Mr. Potten, a tailor and barber, who lived in The Street owned a small meadow near Bower Farm where he kept a cow and a few sheep and spent his leisure hours according to Finn. Others, such as Mr. Lewis and his wife kept a garden "well stocked with fruit trees and serviceable esculents" as well as a pig and some bees. Finn says Mrs. Lewis, who looked after the bees, was also skilled in distilling herbs for medicinal purposes. Ornamental plants were not forgotten; and Finn mentions the Bretts, who lived at Kingsford Hall, as having a neat garden planted with hollyhocks, sunflowers, stocks and wallflowers as well as a "neat and tasty summerhouse at the corner of the garden composed of quick (*hawthorn*) in ornamental designs".

Parts 3 & 4 contain 'The Finn Survey of Mersham's Inhabitants'