

THE HISTORY OF MINAL
2,500 Years of Parish History
As shown on www.minal.org.uk

In Memory of

Norman Spires
Who Passed Away in 2002

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INTRODUCTION

When I first prepared the Minal Community Web Site in 2000, I referred to *The Victoria History of Wiltshire*, (held in the Marlborough Library), of which the most recent edition was published in 1983, as the primary source for the history published on the site. I believe that it was also a source of inspiration for Norman Spires, who died in 2002, when he wrote *A Minal Chronicle* in 1990. This *History of Minal* is written in his memory. In his introduction he wrote:-

"I believe that Mildenhall is archaeologically and historically unique.

There must be many hundreds of parishes which can proudly point to one event of great significance occurring in past centuries, whilst towns, of course with their greater concentrations of population, can list many more.

This parish of Minal has a background which, although sometimes mundane in terms of greatness, has two thousand years and more of continuous recorded history.

Although an agricultural parish, there is clear and well maintained documentation of items relating to people, their occupations, the Church, the places within the parish and even to great centres of ancient archaeological interest, some as yet unexplored or explained.

"A Minal Chronicle" attempts to set out these happenings - and the proof which goes with them - in a logical and sequential way. Here are more than two thousand years of parish history."

Because this was a very personal history of Minal, it was written in the first person, so that throughout this history, the 'I' refers to Norman Spires.

Additional material was also provided by Mark Corney, Department of Archaeology, University of Bristol, on the history of Cunetio, and by Linzi Mathews (ne Standfield), who attended the school in Minal in its final years. She has provided a snap shot of the school life and of life in Minal in that period.

Throughout its life, Minal has gone through a gamut of variations in the way that its name was spelt and pronounced, and as a village has been found in records since the early 9th century. In the Domesday book, in 1086, its spelling was Mildenhalle, but over the years the various spellings and the years that they were recorded are:-

806	Mildanhald	1657	Milldinghall
1086	Mildenhalle	1663	Minhale
1241	Mildhale	1675	Middenhall
1301	Myldenhale	1694	Mildenall
1428	Mildenhale	1699	Middonhole
1482	Myldenhalle	1742	Mindinhole
1539	Midnall	1760	Minal
1560	Mildenghall	1780	Middenhall
1574	Mildenhale		

The village of Mildenhall although spelt this way, had been pronounced Minal by the local residents for centuries. During the long standing rectorship of Rev Courtman, who retired in 1978 at the age of 94, he changed the name of the church to Minal Church, and so one can see both spellings used in the village.

I feel that this *History of Minal* is a fitting tribute to Norman Spires. I hope that visitors to the site will enjoy reading it.



Maurice D Stanton

CHAPTER ONE

THE LOCATION, THE SCOPE AND THE GEOGRAPHY

Mildenhall, for that is its real geographical name, is found just to the east of Marlborough. The parish is about six and a half square miles in extent - about four thousand one hundred and sixty acres. The village of Mildenhall itself is not exactly in the centre of the parish, but measuring from the church tower, it is two and a half miles to the North-East corner at Whiteshard Bottom; one and a half miles to the eastern boundary at Stitchcombe; one and a half miles to its most southerly point in Savernake Forest and one mile to Poulton Bridge in the west. The parish is more or less in the shape of a crescent, with its point to the east.

The boundary to the south was with Bedwyn although that has been replaced with a newly named parish of Savernake. The eastward boundary with Ramsbury parish is very much as it was centuries ago. Both of these inter-parish boundaries are very old indeed and in places are marked with ditch and wall from Saxon times. The Northwest boundary with Ogbourne St. Mary is almost unchanged since Norman times.

In the Dark Ages, there were three centres. Bedwyn was the old cultural centre of the district as well as being at the heart of the Royal estates. Ramsbury was the ecclesiastical focus and has a bishopric dating to 909 AD. And the small town of Marleburg (Marlborough) was the commercial centre and main market. The parish of Mildenhall was roughly in the centre of these three, but when the Roman centre of Cunetio became deserted in about 450 AD, Mildenhall slowly declined and became less important as a geographical place, and instead developed as a large prosperous farming community and has remained so for many centuries.

Within the parish there are two other large hamlets or farming communities, those of Stitchcombe and Poulton. Both of these were important enough to feature in the Domesday Survey of 1086. No other place is so mentioned, except for Mildenhall itself. By the sixteenth century several large farm communities had been established and still exist to this day. The Marlborough Downs rise to 700 feet in the north, while the plateau of Savernake Forest to the south is about 600 feet. The great valley of the River Kennet divides these two features and is between two and three hundred feet lower at an average of 400 feet above sea level. In the soft chalk, the Kennet valley has been relentlessly cut down by the surface waters which originate in the west at Silbury Hill. The drainage eastward towards the Thames at Reading has steadily eroded the soft curving valley into its present shape.

As has already been stated, the proper name of the parish and the village is Mildenhall. The earliest record comes from Saxon times when it was Mildenhald, and the *Carlularium Saxonicum* gave this spelling. The Domesday Survey of 1086 gave the name as Mildenhalle but in 1282 the Charter Rolls called it Mildehale. By 1269 the Calender of Patent Rolls and also an Inquisition Post Mortem gave the name as Mildehall. Both Midnall and Mylenoll occur in the records of the sixteenth century. Middenhall was used in the *Intrerarium Angliae* of 1675 but the present full name also occurs about this time. These differences could well be incorrect interpretation of the name when spoken.

About 1760, it can be seen that a new form, that of Minal, was being used. It is very possible that the difficulty of dealing with the three syllables of Mil-den-hall was too much for the local folk who may never have seen the name written down, and who relied only on the pronunciation. They slurred the three syllables together to sound something like "Minori" which was easier to say, and this in turn, became as Minal. After all, the church is called "Minal Church", both the old and new Village Halls were and are referred to as Minal Village or Parish Hall and the farming community to the north-east of the village is Minal Woodlands.

As with many ancient parishes, local names abound. Cock-a-Troop, possibly a name associated with a signal station or look-out, names perhaps the oldest right-of-way in the parish, following as it does the Roman road south towards Winchester. Another piece of the Roman way has now acquired the name of Greenway. This passes a site known as Ethelred. Chopping Knife on the south side of the valley has a more recent history. It was where folk came to cut sticks for their peas. The strangely named hamlet of Werg was a community of nine dwellings on the River Kennet. One of the many pools on the river, as it wove its way through the water meadows was "Nicker Pool", where it is said the water spirits played. When the climatic conditions are right, the whirling wraiths can still be seen, so that the local name had good cause to be established.

There is only one other village in Britain called Mildenhall and that is in East Anglia, now the site of a vast United States airfield.

Stitchcombe was Stotecome in 1086, Stotecumb in 1217, Stutescombe by the thirteenth century and fourteen other variations since then. It is now a shadow of its former self but still the centre of a large farm. Poulton was Poltone (the farm by the pool) in 1086. There were eventually two farms there, Poulton Magna and Poulton Parva.

Other than the vast changes which have taken place in agricultural methods, the decline in farming and the greater cultivation of what had been grass down land, the parish is much the same in outline as it has been through a

millennium or more. The Domesday record gives the land under tax to be about two thousand, five hundred acres (or 21 hides) in extent. In 1086, the tax due was £12, but the visiting commissioner quickly raised this by 50% to £18.

There are other settlements within the parish which are each based on a farm and its immediate community. Perhaps the oldest of these is Woodlands, which has a mention in 1403. In the north, Mildenhall Warren indicates that the practice of keeping large warrens for the production of rabbits had its place in the parish.

In the east, Grove was a farming centre of excellence in the Victorian era. On a plateau on the south side of the Kennet valley is Forest Farm (now called Folly Farm). North-west of the village was a hamlet of Rabley, now only a pair of cottages.

There are two large farms in private ownership; in addition one which is part of the Crown estates and a further farm in Glebe ownership from the Diocese. Much of all the land south of the river is in Crown hands. There were three water-mills on the Kennet. Elcot to the west, near to the Marlborough town boundary and which no longer exists. Werg Mill was a combined corn and fulling mill on the south side of the river (and which many of us saw totally destroyed by fire only a few years ago). Durnsford Mill is downstream from the village and still is complete with its machinery, although not in use. On the smaller River Og at Poulton there was another water mill.

The parish has only one classified road, the C6 from Poulton to Stitchcombe in the east. There are many byways (former farm access roads) bridleways and footpaths which combine to make, firstly a network of such paths between adjoining parishes to Minal, and secondly the paths which are particularly those within the parish, leading to and connecting with the various centres, the church and the farms.

This a broad background to the parish of Mildenhall. What follows is an attempt to outline and define the events which together form a fuller history.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY TIMES AND THE ROMANS



Aerial View of Cunetio Site (Black Field)

I have often stood at the top of Church Lane and on other occasions in the gardens of The Glebe House, West Trees or Mildenhall House, looking south towards the Savernake Forest on the opposite side of the river valley. On a summer evening, when the sun is low in the west and shadows are long and firm, I never cease to marvel at the great marks of history etched, for ever it seems, on the hillside. These are the clear outlines of the Upper Cunetio site, spilling out over the edge of the hill. These are the indelible marks of the great wall and ditch defences of an Early English camp, an Iron Age site, later to become the site of the earliest Roman settlement in the parish.

We may not know very much about the people who first roamed and settled in and around Minal, but there are traces that they did so. In five places within the parish, there are officially identified relics of ancient man. In the far north-east, against the old boundary with the adjoining parish of Ogbourne, on Poulton Down, there is a round barrow. North-east of Rabley Wood there is a bowl barrow. Immediately south of this, in the middle of an area of farm cultivation, were traces of an early crop site. There is a fourth barrow in the village of Minal itself just north of the church - this being another bowl barrow. Lastly, away in the south-east of the parish, within the trees of Savernake Forest itself there are earth-works near Puthall Farm.

Anthropologists have suggested that when the Celtic tribes began to spread westward into Britain, they sought the higher ground towards the centre of the country, above the wetlands of the river valleys. They may well have followed the existing valleys which led into the more inhabitable areas, and then set about defending themselves against enemies - both human and predatory. Thus they came to a place where a plateau would provide a suitable area to

occupy and to make safe.

The plateau where Folly Farm now stands (formerly Forest Farm) was such a site and it is here that the tribal folk settled. They were almost certainly of the Belgae tribe. Aerial photographs show that there was considerable disturbance and activity in these early years. There was a wall and ditch defence ring which has made such a long-lasting mark on the immediate locality. There would have been a wooden palisade on the top of the wall. The dwellings were excavated in the ground with a shelter thatched with reeds supported on a central pole. The high ground with views over the valley made this a premium site.

There is an overlap at this point. When the Romans came to the Kennet valley they either defeated the tribes in battle or arrived to find that the ancients had fled, leaving the plateau site empty. In any case, the Romans did occupy the place and converted it to their own use. A well of Roman age was found and there is evidence of at least one house, with two rooms and a hypocaust - or under-floor heating.

The Romans arrived here in the Minal area in the Roman first century - about 50 AD. Although the Romans under Julius Caesar had arrived in Britain in 55 BC, it was about a hundred years later that a second force arrived. The main intention was to push the tribal people back towards the north-west, across the Severn and into Wales. To this end a large station was built at Cirencester (Corinium) and this needed to be linked by communication to the other points of the new Roman occupation. A road was constructed from Winchester (Diva) to provide such a link. At Minal, it crossed the other great road from London (Londinium) towards the west and Bath (Acqua Sulis). When one route crossed another there arose a meeting point, a resting place and a camp. This place was given the name of CUNETIO, a Latinised form of the name Kennet.

It was located to the south of the modern village, beyond the River Kennet, on Forest Hill, five hundred yards north-east of the Forest Farm plateau. A massive earthen bank and ditch enclosed an area of about 30 acres with an entrance defended by outworks on the east-side. This complex dates to the late Iron Age, circa 200BC-43AD. At the time of the Roman conquest, Forest Hill was probably a major regional centre and would have attracted the attention of the Roman forces operating in the area. Finds of early Roman material and the pattern of the local Roman road network show that the focus of activity soon moved from the hilltop to the valley floor, concentrating on the area of modern Black Field, close to where the Roman road from Winchester to Cirencester crosses the River Kennet.

Exactly why there were two sites is not clear. Perhaps the river itself was considered a good defence and the nearness to good water was of paramount importance. The existence of a Roman occupation in both places is beyond doubt. At the upper site, in 1804 a Roman pavement was found. It measured 27 feet in length and some 72 feet in width. Unfortunately this valuable find was destroyed shortly afterwards and only scanty notes exist on the subject. If only someone had been more thoughtful some one hundred and eighty years ago, Minal might have had a Roman relic, like Littlecote.

Although nothing remains on the surface today, air photography, geophysical survey and limited excavation have provided a broad picture of the town known to the Romano-Britons as Cunetio. (See top of Page 6). The aerial photographs at the lower Cunetio site have shown, beyond doubt that no less than three separate settlements were constructed. The first, or lowest, was contemporary with the first arrival in 50 AD. The Roman engineers set out a standard town layout with a main street and side roads leading off at right-angles. This first settlement has not been investigated but a survey has proved its existence.

Traces of Roman occupation cover an area of 45 acres and air photographs have revealed an irregular pattern of metalled streets, stone and timber buildings, and clusters of pits and ditches. In the centre of the site there stood a very large courtyard plan building with at least 24 rooms. The plan and shape of this building suggest that it was a *mansio* - an official guesthouse, stable and administrative centre. Although Cunetio never became one of the great cities of Roman Britain, it would have been an important local market centre and was undoubtedly the distribution centre for the pottery vessels produced in the kilns located in nearby Savernake Forest.

At least two phases of defence are known. The first, dated to the 2nd century AD, was of earth and timber, enclosed an area of 15 acres and had been demolished by the end of the 3rd century. Some time after AD360 a massive stone wall, over 16 feet wide at its base, was built. This had projecting towers and a south gate flanked by massive, monumental towers and enclosed an area of 18 acres. Such a massive construction strongly suggests that the late Roman administration had selected Cunetio to be a local military and administrative centre, only a very few of which are known in Roman Britain.

Later in the Roman occupation, it was necessary to build a defensive position on the same site. This stands out very clearly on photographs, as the two sites are misaligned by some ten degrees. The defensive works may have been necessary because of renewed activity of the tribal people in the vicinity.

Excavation on the site has been very limited but casual finds show that the site continued to be occupied until the very end of Roman rule in the 5th century AD. After the collapse of the Roman infrastructure the site declined in

importance and by the 8th century had been eclipsed by the Anglo-Saxon centre at nearby Ramsbury. During the medieval period the great Roman wall will probably have been used as a convenient quarry and gradually been destroyed as the stone was robbed for re-use.

In the third or fourth century, the Roman emperor Theodosius chose to build a vast fortress in the same place. This was duly constructed of Bath stone. Previous explorations had defined the layout of the walls of Cunetio but it was not until 1957 that the Wiltshire Archaeological Society mounted an annual series of excavations across the line of the main walls. These were proved to be eighteen feet thick at ground level. Bastions had been included in the original planning and these were also found. There are two main gateways - the west and south - and it discovered that the great west gate was in the form of a very fine barrel-vaulted arch. In this gateway, post holes were found, suggesting either a form of pedestrian control or that a portcullis type of gate was installed with the pointed ends of the apparatus fitting into holes set in the stone pavement. All this was revealed at the time of the excavations.

The surveys suggested that the fortress of Cunetio was some 310 metres long and 280 metres wide, enclosing an area of about 212 acres (18 hectares). This makes it, in the words of the Director of the Roman Research Trust - "a most significant discovery - unique in Britain."

Some of the former Roman roads leading to and from Cunetio are well defined to this day. The road from Cirencester comes in a straight line from the north (much of it now the A345 road from Stratton St Margaret) and seeming to end in Minal at the telephone box at the foot of Greenways. Roman materials were found recently, just south of this point.

Then came the River Kennet, which the Roman engineers would have had to ford. No trace of a bridge has been found. From the south bank of the river, the Roman road climbed up into the forest and there divided into the roads to Winchester and to Sarum.

The road from Londinium, through Silchester and on to Cunetio is not easy to trace today. There have always been winter and sunnier tracks along the river valley-side. In Minal itself, Chopping Knife would be most likely course. If the line of this lane is projected westward it follows a straight line along the London Road, George Lane in Marlborough, behind the College site, past Preshute Church, through Manton and on to Silbury Hill.

Within the parish there are other Roman traces which may answer the question "If the Romans settled in Cunetio, why did the village become sited on the north bank of the river, 400 yards away?" A large scale map will show that there is another Roman road which has been proved running from near to Church Farm (formerly Low Farm) south-east across Cock-a Troop Lane and climbing the valley side to Hill Barn where it resumes an easterly route (also to be found in Hens Wood). The alignment of this track is still discernible as a shallow valley at its upper end.

I am tempted to deduce that, in the early days of a Roman occupation, the road coming in from Corinium (the present Greenway) would have turned south-west to lower itself gently down to Church Farm. This track is still in existence and from an early Ordnance Survey map of 1801 is shown as a much more definite road than now. Then, fording the river at the farm - this being the narrowest part of the river valley bottom - the Romans would have taken another not-so-gentle climb to the top of the escarpment. Where a river is crossed, a meeting place and a settlement are likely to occur. The land here was a few feet higher than the wet valley bottom and the flood plain and, for the early Britons, the quarter mile separating them from the Romans at Cunetio would have been most welcome. Later, when the fourth century fortress was established, the Romans re-laid the local roads to meet the great gates in the walls.

A well, dating from the first Roman century was opened and explored in detail in 1957. It contained a filling of Roman materials indicating that the well was filled in when the stone walls were built in the fourth century. Sherds and other items dating to 50-100 AD were unearthed, making it quite certain that the well was filled at that time. These pottery sherds are to be seen at the Devizes Museum. This seems to prove two of the three Roman occupations of Cunetio.

So the Romans came and went. Now we can only imagine them moving along the straight roads in pursuance of their duties, crossing the Kennet and busying themselves in and around the great Theodosian fort. One thing is certain. The Romans and Cunetio did exist, firstly around Forest Farm and at Black Field. This is no myth. Very soon, we may see a complete archaeological exploration of the site and nearly two thousand years of history will be revealed.

The original stones above ground were robbed, perhaps for barns and dwellings. The site is now an arable field.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DARK AGES, THE NORMANS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF A CHURCH

This ponderous title covers two aspects of Minal life in early medieval times. It could be considered the time of dark deeds or tribal ambitions and of barbarous bands, or it could be taken as meaning that a curtain was drawn over the events of that period - for little was written or recorded about ordinary people of the time. It was as though there was a reversion to more primitive times. The great Roman roads, paved and cambered, which could have been the start of a great British network, were mostly allowed to decay - overgrown and neglected.

However it was during this period that the first known written reference to Mildenhall was made. In the Cartularium Saxonicum of 803 AD, the name of MILDENHALD was shown on a map. In the Wiltshire Archaeological Society's notes for 1932 it is recorded that a Saxon brooch has been discovered.

About the same time, in 804 AD the Abbot of Glastonbury secured and made available a piece of land 'to build a new church'. The full meaning of this statement can be taken to mean that, either a church was to be built there, or that a NEW church was to replace an earlier one. If there had been a place of worship on the site before this, being of wood, little would have remained. Certainly nothing is recorded of a former building.

There is a story, largely unfounded, that Saint Augustine, travelling from Kent towards Wessex to spread Christianity, passed through Minal in about 597 AD. There is no documented evidence of this, but in the stained glass of the east window there is a head entitled AUGUSTINUS, so perhaps the story had credence when the glass was put up in the 16th Century. The remaining glass, including this head is amongst the oldest in the County.

Now for a piece of detective work. The question is 'If there was a village settlement in Saxon times, where was it?' Looking at a map or plan of Mildenhall as it is today, it seems that that in medieval times the whole settlement was spread more widely around the church. Today Church Lane and the main street of the village are the only two roads, and it has been so for many centuries. There is something missing, for a village of those times would hardly have developed as a letter 'L' and failed to form the usual grouping around the church centre.

I have written in the earlier chapter that it is possible that the Roman road zig-zagged across the valley to make a crossing of the river, and that the piece of higher ground around the site of the church would have been the logical site of a Post-Roman or Romano-British settlement. Travellers would have met, settled and perhaps built dwelling and trading posts there, if only to avoid the inevitable problems that come from living in the wet lands. So, perhaps the first Mildenhall would have been at this place.

Modern technology, in the shape of aerial photography may help to solve this question. In a vertical photograph taken in 1981 there are clear ground markings to the west of Benefice Buildings, in what is now farm land. These take the form of dark lines in the crop and soil which might well be the layout of a street and dwellings of a medieval settlement. If this is such a site - and only a scientific survey can prove this - then a pattern will begin to emerge showing the original village being gathered around the church. Later a gradual migration northward up the slope to the 'winter road' line would have taken place.

Reference to a large scale Ordnance Survey map of Mildenhall village will show another significant feature. Immediately to the north and east of the church there is a three-sided earth work with sides of about 220 feet in length. Some of this still remains to be seen in a field. Again, this may be part of the medieval village site.

As has been said, there may have been a wooden church building more or less where the present church stands, but there are no traces of this now. The stonework of the lower courses in the tower shows definite Saxon patterns, especially in the form of corner stones between courses. The walls here are about four or five feet thick (1.23 metres). To add to this there is a flat buttress on the south-west angle which is original. The two middle chamber window openings are remarkable in that they have two lights or openings with square heads, caps and bases which indicate Saxon influence. These are a curious survival of an older type of window and indicate a very early influence on the stonework of the lower two courses. Possibly this was the sanctuary of the former church, which was to become the tower as we now know it

In seeking stone for the tower and the new building, it may be the case that the builders utilised some of the Bath stone still remaining above ground at Cunetio, the Roman fortress. It was only a quarter of a mile away and had been standing as a ruin for only some four hundred years.

Little or nothing is known of individual people at this time. The Dark Ages had come and were nearly gone. Shortly a French King was to invade and conquer Britain, and the era of the Normans was to commence.

The conquest of Britain by William of Normandy in 1066 was followed by a short period of adjustment. Estates were

given to French noblemen and a general change took place. The new King needed to know details of the country he had acquired, and in 1086 sent forth commissioners, scribes and escorts to most of England to record the extent of the lands, their value and potential level for taxation.

Based on Winchester, the Commissioners visited every place. Their findings were recorded and formed the "Domesday Book", the first example in the world of a nationwide catalogue.

The entry for Minal, written in Latin manuscript, translates as follows.

The Church itself holds MILDHALLE. Edward holds from it. Hugolin held it before. It was in the Abbot's hand before 1066; it paid tax for 10 hides. Land for 10 ploughs. Of this land 4 hides in Lordship; 2 ploughs there. 15 villagers and 5 smallholders with 4 ploughs. A mill which pays 30/-; meadow, 10 acres; pasture ½ league long and 3 furlongs wide. Woodland as much. The value was £12; now £18.

In addition to Mildenhall, surveys were also taken in Poulton and Stitchcombe. The three taken together cover the parish as we know it today and total 21 Hides (120 acres). Ploughs 17. Villagers 19 Smallholders 17. Mills 3, totalling £60. Value was £22.10s To be £28. 10s

Within the county of Wiltshire, the total ploughs in each settlement was 5 on average, and Mildenhall had twice that number. The population averaged 25 to each settlement, and again the parish had more than this. Mills are about average, but would vary according to the proximity of rivers.

In the first thirty-five years of the 12th century, Poulton was granted to the Abbey of Tewkesbury. In 1261, there was the first reference to the manor of Mildenhall. Isabella Basset was the lately deceased holder of the gift, the value of the manor being £25. In 1282, the de Moun family had the manor, (then valued at £20. 11s 5d) and it consisted of 360 acres of arable land, 242 acres of meadow, woods and fishing; four freemen's rents of 42/- and the cottagers also 42/-. By 1355, Bartholomew de Burghersh held Mildenhall as part of the manor of Aldbourne, holding for Knight's Service. It was worth £12 per annum.

In 1545, King Henry VIII required a 'benevolence' tax to be levied as his coffers were again empty. Five Mildenhall men are quoted as being charged - Hey, John Jones the Elder and the Younger of Woodlands, Plasted and Bryne. In 1576 Queen Elizabeth I levied her first tax and for this 12 men of the parish paid from 5/- to 11/8d as part of their tax. All these men are named in the church records.

Around 1100 AD, the nave of the church was begun in stone. The arches are clearly of Norman influence with symmetrical curves and round columns. The capitols in the north aisle are plain, but those on the south are decorated and presumably a little later in date. The west door to the tower was made later, perhaps when the nave was being completed. About this time the tower was raised to a third level and an Early English pattern of window was included. The chancel was not added until the 12th or 13th century, with a new pointed arch being cut through from the nave. There is a well hidden priest's door on the south side of the chancel. After this time, the church would have looked much as it does now in its plan. A period of about six hundred years was to follow before the first (and last) major alteration was to take place.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MIDDLE YEARS

After the Norman Conquest and following the great Domesday Survey of 1086 the whole country settled down to a life of greater prosperity, more settled conditions and the first signs of a system of government supported by a feudal legal system. From this time more documentary evidence became available, and still remains to this day as archival material of considerable value.

From these records it is now possible to piece together the earlier beginnings of this parish. In 1340 for instance the large estate of Poulton was in the hands of John de Poulton, the Bishop of Worcester (which is the first of two occasions that this ancient see is linked to Mildenhall). In 1165, the farming settlement to the east of the parish is named as Stotecombe, and this 'combe' is still maintained in the name of Combe Farm, now just yards outside the parish boundary.

In 1237 there is a reference to Elcot Mill, which, after 760 years is still given that exact name despite the fact that it was burned down some years ago. At the same time, in 1241, the village was confirmed in its proper name of Mildenhall. Twenty years later, John de Dunnesford was the owner of Durnsford Mill. Also at this time, the manor of Mildenhall passed to Roger de Moun who succeeded to the estate at the age of six years ! In 1279 John de la Mere is shown in the Assize Rolls as being the owner of Mere Farm, and was involved in further property purchase of a dwelling and 2 acres. Mere Farm is still a lonely farmstead to the east of the parish. 1282 mentions the strangely named hamlet on the south side of the Kennet valley called Cock-a Troop. It was then designated 'The hamlet of the crock maker', but some will still associate the name with a legendary signal station at the time of the Romans at nearby Cunetio. In 1294 the name of the first Rector of Mildenhall is given as John de Knovill and his is the first name entered on the Institutions board in the church, although given there as 1300.

Over the centuries, Minal has increased and decreased in its economic strength, although it was never amongst the most prosperous in comparison to other local villages. Its main economic activity has always been farming. Of interest there was a royal prison at Minal in 1265, and in 1272-73 James de Audeberg raised a gallows there. In the 15th and 16th centuries, courts were regularly held in Minal. At the end of the 18th century a house was rented by the parish to accommodate some of the poor.

In 1305, one Walter de la Hempstalle was selling a dwelling and an acre of land in Mildenhall for 20 marks, but the sale of another dwelling with an acre and two acres of woodland was settled for 'one sparrow-hawk'. This was in the time of Edward the Second. By 1327 Roger de Moun had given the manor to his son whose daughters had died without issue. John Merret now owned the manor. Thicketts Copse, now upgraded to Thicketts Wood, is on record in 1381, as is Sounde Bottom in 1384. A 'feet of fines' document shows Thomas Hungerford of Grove as being involved in land transaction in 1383, the first time this farmstead is mentioned.

In 1403 Woodlands was shown as Wodeland, either as the spelling of that time or perhaps as a place where wode was growing. This dye was used to colour wool, an important part of the local industry.

In 1540 an event of some magnitude occurred. The manor of Mildenhall was forfeited to the Crown (in fact to Edward Seymour, father of Jane Seymour the third wife of King Henry VIII). In 1553 the church had plate in the form of a chalice of 13 ounces. The records show that the church retained this and that 'nothing was given to the King'. In 1596 the first bells were cast (probably by John Wallis) and these remained in the tower for some two hundred years before being remade. It seems that at this time some of the farm and estate owners were becoming financially embarrassed, in 1579 Edward Essex owed one thousand marks and was 'missing' and by 1598 William Jones the Younger of Woodlands owed three thousand pounds and was also missing.

However, in 1560 there was an event of particular interest to historians of the future. The Bishop in Salisbury instructed all of the clergy in his Diocese to make entries of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials in a book with vellum pages, in which they were to be carefully inscribed 'for all time' and that the book was to be stored in the Parish chest. In Mildenhall this edict was carried out to the letter and all church records have been kept to the present day. Most of these registers are now kept in the County Record Office with only the current books being kept in the parish. I have had the first register in my hands and seen in the Gothic script the entry of the baptism of Edith Lovelock, the daughter of Robert. To me, seeing a Minal record of 430 years ago is a very precious thing.

At this period therefore we know who lived, married and died in the parish during the decade of 1560, at the time when the new Queen Elizabeth the First had been on the throne of England a matter of only two years. There were thirty families and a population of about 103.

The families living here at that time were:-

Baron	Bowshear	Bryne	Davie
Franklin	Gent	Gibbs	Heale
Kaye	Lovelock	Lurke	Jones
Pearce	Perkin	Plasted	Saverie
Smith	Webb	Wight	Wrenne
Coleman	Baker	Hall	Harris

with six other families who had no cause to be included in the church records during that decade.

The name most given to boys at that time was headed by John with William very close second. The girls name most used was Alice with Elizabeth coming next.

In 1609 the manor of Hungerford covered most of Mildenhall parish, with Littlecote the most likely manorial centre.

A list of the manorial tenants in the parish who paid to Hungerford was as follows :-

Philip and John Goodwin
Martha, William and Harold Jones of Woodlands
John, John and Thomas Hitchtoke
Agnes Hale
William and John Bower
William Heale
Thomas, Thomas and John Newby
William and John Stamner
Edward Playfleaur
Robert and John Gibbs
William, William and Edward Pearce.

The total paid in 1613 was £23 17s 4 ³/₄d.

In 1666 the Great Plague swept through England and few places escaped completely. Mildenhall seems to have been one such place. I have checked on the number of burials which took place from 1653 until 1670 (the seventeen years which cover most of the plague period) but there is no significant increase shown in the church register. However, there were twelve in 1670 and no burials at all in 1659. But there was one person at least who was of the opinion that the plague would come. It is on record - in the County newspaper - that the Churchwarden of the time had to go out and seek the Rector of Minal and bring him back from whence he had fled. He was taken before the Magistrates at Marlborough and charged with "leaving the parish with his family and therefore abandoning his flock to the perils of the plague". I have searched diligently for a report of the outcome of this matter, but without success. Perhaps the powers of the Bishop prevailed, for the Rector, Stephanus Constable went on to serve the parish until 1684.

It is interesting to note that the Churchwardens, Overseers of the Poor and Surveyors of Highways were nearly always the land owners - the farmers - of the parish. In 1691, William Lydeard of Poulton Parka and Stephen Hyde of Stitchcombe were Churchwardens and also acted as Surveyors of Highways for a further period of three years. Both have memorials in the church. Stephen Blandy of Grove Farm and Stephen Shanniors were Overseers of the Poor at the same time. Thus, as far back as the end of the seventeenth century the beginning of parish government had commenced - a task still perpetuated by the elected Parish Council.

A Glebe Terrier is a survey of the property of the Church. It may include a description of the Glebe, Tithe Fees and other relevant information. The prosperity or otherwise of a parish will be reflected in the Glebe or Church Benefice. From the proceeds, the Rector took his living, as a freehold. He had to provide for the poor of the parish and keep the properties, including the church itself, in a state of good repair. He could, if necessary inflict a parish 'rate' on all the parishioners. This was collected by the Churchwardens, the Overseer and the Survey appointed.

Such a Terrier was drawn up in 1684, when Stephanus Constable was the Rector.

2 acres parsonage
12 acres Dean Field
18 acres northward
3 acres westward
2 acres in woodland
50 acres
2 water meadows at Grove
50 tenements each with a half yard

A Terrier of 1677 gave the Benefice details as follows :-

" The Parsonage, 2 barns, 1 stable, 1 orchard and 2 gardens. Adjoining 2 acres and 5 small pieces totalling 50 acres. 4 pieces. Deans field 36 acres. Watermeadows of 2 acres. 40 acres arable in Common Fields."

In the time of Edward Pococke the Glebe Terrier was a little more detailed :-

" A particular of the Parish House and premises of the Rector of Mildenhall, in the hands of Richard Pococke, Patron and Rector. The dwelling house is a large building of brick and stone tiles, with four barns, stables, offices garden and farm yards contain about two acres. As the Rector can reside on the spot and the whole is in his occupation, the premises are kept in good order and substantial repair. There are likewise two old cottages belonging to the premises. In the churchyard are eighteen elm and ash trees. The Glebe lands lie in various parts of the parish. That nearest to the parsonage is five pieces of meadow land, some five acres. The next is that which was common land and has been appropriated by the Earl of Ailesbury who, after endeavouring to pass an act without the conference of the Rector, failed. On 18th March 1774, the Rector met the Earl. As a result the Rector found his acreage reduced from 77 to 61 (part of the Glebe called Dean Field; three enclosed fields, woods and two small coppices, totalling 40 acres). There are 15 acres of Glebe land in Poulton. The communion table is covered with green cloth with proper linen. Two small and one large plates exist for sacramental bread and two cups for wine, unmarked. There are four bells in the tower.'

The Rector could set whatever dues he considered fit and right. Everyone had to contribute in money or in kind. As there was a considerable store of agricultural goods, particularly at harvest time, there was a barn maintained especially for this. It was called the Benefice Barn or Buildings. Minal had such a set of Benefice Buildings near to the Glebe Farmhouse - and the Parsonage.

A list of tithes due to Edward Pococke in 1704.

2 pence for every Communicant yearly
Every cow and calf 8 pence
Milch cow 2 pence
Weaned calf 2½ pence
Dry cow 1½ pence
For a killed calf the left shoulder.
Eggs 2 for every hen.
3 for every cockerel.
Poulton Mill pays 10/- yearly.
Werg Mill pays 10/- yearly.
Durnsford and Stitchcombe Mills pay 6/8d each.

There was one engaging item in 1692, when Charles Finch, the 4th Earl of Winchilsea was married in the parish church to Sarah, daughter of Mr. Nourse of Woodlands. Erroneously, it was previously stated that she married the Earl of Winchester, whose title did not exist in 1692, the title having lapsed and assumed that if the Earl did lead the bride to the chancel steps, he also led her up the garden path! In actual fact, she married the Earl of Winchilsea, and the only garden path she would have walked would have been the paths on the Earl's estate.

CHAPTER FIVE

A WALK AROUND THE VILLAGE IN 1740

NOTE. The people referred to in this account really existed on that day, in that year. With hindsight it has been possible to enhance some of the situations, but each and every man, woman and child mentioned can be traced back through the church registers of Baptism, Marriage and Burial. This is as near accurate as it can be.

Today its the seventeenth day of September in the year 1750. Its a good, dry September morning as we expected it would be, for the summer has been a good one and the harvest well up to the best expectations.

Let me take you, my visitor, for a stroll around the village to meet some of the people who live here. Most of the families are connected with the farming industry in some way or another, for this is a very agricultural settlement.

That's the church of St John the Baptist, quite old and much used. The Rector is the Reverend Johannes Pococke, himself the son of Edward Pococke, the former incumbent who died about thirty years ago. He lives in the Rectory behind that tall brick wall with the iron gate set in it.

Good King George the Second is on the throne now, and there has been great excitement because Bonnie Prince Charlie tried to march on London and take the throne. He was beaten of course, the last battle being only four years ago.

Down there is Glebe Farm. The farmer is Isaac Whites and his wife Martha. He has been there for many years, and I expect that his son will carry on at the farm.

Lets go up towards the village street, up here. In the cottage over there Mary Alder lives. She and her husband Thomas have been there for thirty years and their three children are all grown up. That's Edward Appleford who came here from Marlborough to marry Triphene but although they've been married for eight years, there are no children.

There's a cluster of Applefords just here. Thomas and Mary, who was a Buckerfield from Ogbourne, live next door. They also have no children and I believe that Mary is very frail. Living there also is Martha Appleford, widow Appleford she is called, whose husband died nine years ago. She had four children, whose ages are from eighteen to nine. years. Times must be very hard for her, but like many other women she works on the farm. Oh yes! I nearly forgot. There's another Appleford family here, John and Mary. They have four young children but they tell me that little John is very poorly. They have already lost one little girl six years ago at the age of five. Their latest little one, Elisha, is just one month old.

Now here's the corner of the main street of Mildenhall going off to the right. Stephen and Elizabeth Blanchet live in that cottage. They have a ten year old boy and Mary aged seven. Over there is John Rawlings house. His wife died some twenty years ago and he has brought up the four children himself, including twin girls. He lives on his own now.

In that cottage Robert and Mary Seymour live. He is very ill and his wife has little Mary to look after too. Mary is only five. There's the Smiths' house. Thomas and Elizabeth have four children but two others - both little girls - died quite young.

I was talking to the Rector the other day - that's the Reverend Johannes Pococke of course -and he told me that over the past ten years the number of babies who have died was thirteen out of a total of eighty-five and that is over fourteen percent.

The Reekes family live over there, that's Joseph and Hannah with their two children John and Richard. They tell methat she is expecting a third child very soon. Old Mary Batchelor lives with them and she is very ill and not expectedto last much longer. John Hatt is a widower now, and he had nine children. The Plasted family live next door - Joseph and his new wife Mary.

Another widow lives there too, Sarah Hill. Her husband died twelve years ago and her children have now all left. Just off the street there's a little block of four cottages built with backs to the road. One of the families is the Lookers, Stephen and Rebecca, married some fifteen years ago now with their family of eight children, from fourteen to three months. One of their little girls died as a baby. Next door is another Looker family. Their son Thomas is engaged to be married to Elizabeth Cannings, a village girl, while Thomas's sister Mary has just married another Thomas and they have a baby of eighteen months. Old Thomas, once the village blacksmith lives with them but he is very frail now.

I told you about Elizabeth Cannings. She comes from a large family. The father is Stephen and he has been married to Mary for about twenty-six years. They had six children now aged twenty-four down to twelve. William, the

youngest, is a very poorly lad. The second daughter Mary married Thomas Seymour, another village man, about eight years ago.

"Hello Mary !". That's Mary Cook. They've three fine children. I hear that Elizabeth Britain, who also lives in that house, is going to marry John Crook of Ramsbury quite soon. Of course, to marry out of the village is unusual, but when it does happen it is usually to Marlborough, Ramsbury, Axford or Ogbourne.

Housing is a big problem in a village like this. Some of the farms have workers cottages but the population is rising rapidly and the housing does not keep up. I suppose it will always be like that. That is why the Sims family of Thomas and Joanna with their son Thomas, together with Tom's brother William and his wife and their four children, all livethere together.

You may have wondered about the names that children are given at their baptism. The Rector and I looked over the past fifty years in the Church register of Baptisms and counted up the names. Among the girls, Mary was the most popular, Sarah next and Elizabeth third. These three names accounted for sixty-three percent of all girl's names. The boys have John in first place, then Thomas and William in third place. These three made up fifty-seven percent of names given. In those fifty years 147 girls are baptised (nearly three a year). The boys were more numerous. Therewere 170 of them.

You were asking about the population of the parish. Its is about 330, but no one is quite certain because no count has ever taken place. In 1086 there were about 150 people in Mildenhalle, as it was called then, so the population has about doubled in the five hundred years since then. It does seem to me that, with larger families and more survivals amongst the infants, the population of Mildenhall must rise, because there's plenty of work on the farms and food is always needed.

CHAPTER SIX

THE DEVELOPING PARISH

In the period of the late 17th Century and most of the 18th Century the parish of Mildenhall showed every sign of becoming a centre of the Agricultural Revolution. There was a predominance of larger farmsteads, the evolution of land-owning farmers as opposed to small tenants and estate land-lords. Reading contemporary accounts in deeds, documents and reports makes for a greater concentration on agricultural matters.

However, an early event was not so connected. There was "a stir" in the parish. The Civil War of 1643 moved into the area and brushed past the village. Royalist troops under Hopton were pursuing the Parliamentarians and moved along the old road from Aldbourne to Marlborough. There were minor conflicts and one used cannon ball was found in that area. The troops would have come through Whiteshard Bottom, Red Lane and passed Rabley, to enter Marlborough by St. Martins and also by moving down the passages in the High Street. There is another report that some of Hopton's men went south to cross the River Kennet and thus surround the town. The battle moved on to Roundway Down near Devizes where the Parliamentary troops were routed. In answering the inevitable question, there is no proof that the East window of the church was broken by the Roundheads. But it certainly is missing.

In a river valley like that of the Kennet, the meanders of the stream create wide bands of flat floodplain. As far back as 1646 there have been mentions of the water-meadows and these were a feature of local farming methods until comparatively recently. Hatches were constructed to permit the water to run on to the field where, aided by the alluvial silt and the assured supply of ground water, three crops of hay could be expected in one season. Near to the site of Werg Mill the former hatches and tunnels can be seen, and in a quarter of a mile away towards Stitchcombe, is the outfall hatch which would have let the water run off at the appropriate time.

At this time, sheep farming was profitable for three reasons. The chalk grass lands, especially to the north on the Marlborough Downs, were ideal for the full exploitation of these animals. The self-fertilisation of the grass by the sheep themselves was an advantage, the fleece provided the raw material for cloth making and the meat formed a staple diet for the less affluent farm workers and their families. The wool side of the equation was represented by a cottage industry, where the womenfolk spun and wove the cloth. The finished cloth needed to be "fulled" or stretched in water and at least two of the parish mills were equipped to do this operation - Werg and Elcot.

As far back as 1215 the King owned a fulling mill near Marlborough and in 1237 orders were given to build a new one 'below the corn mill at Elcot'. This must have been Werg. In 1799 a clothier, Samuel Cook was set up in Marlborough to revive the old methods of hand weaving and preparation. The mill at Elcot was used. The revival was necessary to the locality because of new steam mills at Trowbridge and Bradford-on-Avon which were too competitive. However, by 1799 Cook was bankrupt.

In 1792, the Revd Charles Francis, the Minal Rector, was writing to Lord Ailesbury that "his women and children (of Minal) are now totally out of work and must pick stones from the fields to make the roads". These unemployed persons were a burden on the parish rate, or would starve.

A summary of the machinery in Elcot Mill just after Samuel Cook's occupation stated that there were four Harmer Patent shearing frames, a double riser, a 36" scribbling engine, 24 and 28 in carding engines, a slubbing billy and a pair of fulling stocks. It was capable of producing 8 to 10 broadcloths a week. It was returned to corn grinding after this time.

The decline in the wool industry was so serious that there was a requirement that all dead were to be buried in a woollen shroud. In 1792, an affidavit by John Tarrant of Stitchcombe, Miller, that "Thomas Neate, late of Stitchcombe was not put, wound up or buried in any shirt, shift, sheet or shroud made from or mingled with Flax, Silk, Hemp, Hair, Gold or Silver or other than sheep's wool only, also respecting the coffin liner".

In 1700 Poulton House was built. The architect was the same as for Ramsbury Manor, 5 miles away. It remains a perfect 'William and Mary' house at the centre of the Poulton Estate - originally two large farms, Poulton Major and Poulton Parva.

In 1731 the Manor of Minal was finally transferred to Lord Ailesbury, where much of that family's influence remains to this day. In 1736 one John Greenaway of Minal was fined £5 and 5/- rent for non-payment and a new lease was granted to Thomas Knight, Miller of Elcot Mill.

By 1787, the Revd Francis had been curate at Mildenhall for ten years and on the death of Richard Pocke the Rector, succeeded him in the living. He was also Rector of Collingbourne Ducis - a long horse-ride away. In retrospect, Charles Francis was the first of the last five Minal Rectors who, collectively, had such an impact on the parish. During his 34 years as Rector of the parish he was Mayor of Marlborough in 1802 and was made a Proctor

in Convocation of the Church, a forerunner of the Synod of today. In 1811 the office of Rural Dean was revived by the Bishop and the Rector of Minal was so appointed.

A distinguished soldier came to live at Poulton in 1790 in the person of Colonel J.B.M Baskerville. After a military career, mainly in Ireland, he retired to Mildenhall. He formed the Local Defence Volunteers against the possibility of a Napoleonic invasion; he was a Marlborough Justice, the Game Licence Clerk, a successful farmer. In 1806, together with the Rector, the Revd Charles Francis and Henry Woodman, the farmer of Stitchcombe, he took the parish into the Ramsbury Association of Proceedings for Misdemeanours. This was a voluntary body to protect law abiding people from crime - in fact an early form of police. He died in 1817 aged 85 and a large and impressive memorial was erected on the south wall of the Chancel in St John the Baptist church in Minal.

Another soldier, General Calcraft, Coldstream Guards died in 1818. Apart from the memorial tablet, the funeral hatchment can be seen on the north wall of the triforium.

The increase in population mainly employed in agricultural work meant more activity. In 1685, when a haymaker earned 6 pence per day, including his food, and a hedger received 3 pence per day in winter (or 10 pence plain rate without food) there was a noticeable increase in the number of accidents - as reported in the Salisbury Gazette. There were three drownings at mills on the Kennet, a farm worked kicked to death by a gelding, an accidental fatal shooting accident, an 8 year old being run over by a wagon and fatally injured, one suicide and one man dead from natural causes, found in a field.

Another aspect of life in seventeenth century is revealed by a short note written in the Burials Register in 1810. Referring to a family named Viveash who lived at the Werg Mill the Rector observed that the burial of Sarah at the age of 24 was the last of ten children, all of whom had died from Consumption at Werg.

To remind us of the severe aspects of law and order at the time, a sentence of death was passed on White, a Minal man, for stealing two sheep - but this was later commuted to a prison sentence. Such were the proceedings in the Courts and at Inquests.

However, the most notorious matter was to occur in 1798, when "Murder most Foul" was the charge against a Minal man. William Yeatle, was a widower, who had moved to Cirencester with his son and remarried. There was a period of jealousy and animosity to such an extent that Yeatall set off on foot with the boy, to take him back to his home village of Minal.

They were seen by several villagers who knew him. The next day he was seen returning - alone. He said that he had taken the lad to an uncle in Wanborough. A neighbour informed the Parish Overseer and an enquiry followed. When the body of a young child was found near Ramsbury in the River Kennet, the hunt for William Yeatle was on. A letter sent from Acton led the officer to seek out the man, and he was shortly charged with the crime of murder. He stood trial and was found guilty. His execution followed. It is of interest that this is a rare example of an individual local officer doing the detective work, a task undertaken nowadays by the constabulary.

It is about here that it becomes possible to trace some of the larger families. Although the records have made it possible to trace from 1560, no family from the 16th century endured until the 17th century. One was the Looker family.

Although there are no longer any Lookers in the parish, they are to be found in nearby townships. The first trace in Minal was in 1620 when William and Anne came to work in the parish and eventually had five children, whose baptisms are duly recorded in the Church registers. Before 1700 one of these children Thomas had grown up to marry Sarah and they were to have 8 children. By 1745 there were eighteen grand children and three great-grand children. In 1800 twelve children were alive in the parish. At one time there were four brothers of the Looker family, all with children. There were still two families noted in the census of 1881 as living at the Knap (which is still standing) when a remarkable total of eighteen people - including a lodger - were living in the two adjoining cottages.

One member of the Looker family became a churchwarden, another was the village blacksmith. Samuel Looker held Folly Farm, and his son, also Samuel, died in Shanghai. A memorial tablet in the church commemorates this.

Another family with very long ties to the parish are the Barnetts. Edward Barnett came to the village before 1788 and married a village girl. From this there followed a family line which has stretched continuously ever since. The last three generations are still living in the parish. The Barnetts have been the carpenters, wheelwrights and undertakers to the village, and in this connection the indentures of one apprentice have been located in the County Record Office. These are for William Hissey, a minor aged 13 who was apprenticed to Samuel Barnett of Mildenhall, Carpenter and Wheelwright. It is dated 1st May 1845 and gives an interesting insight into the seriousness which the Masters gave to the matter of apprenticeship. The lad was 'not to get married, play cards, dice or the tables, frequent taverns or playhouses. The master provided meat, drink, board and lodging. The apprentice found his apparel, clothing, mending, washing and medical attention'. John Barnett, born 1798, went on to become a Methodist minister and

during his lifetime wrote a book "Faithful until Death" (Gratton Marshall, London 1878). He tells of his early years as a boy in Mildenhall. He tells of his parents who were respected by their neighbours and the family had a good church upbringing. John tells of his father becoming a farm bailiff and living in a cottage belonging to the parson. He says of the parson "He was the great man, the little God of the place. Everybody bowed down to him and nobody ventured to incur his displeasure".

There was a second book concerned with Mildenhall. A man, John Mildenhall had been born at Marrison Hill in the parish of Ramsbury and came into "the manor" of Mildenhall to work as a farm labourer. In 1668 he had gone with Penn to the new Americas and helped to found Pennsylvania. At a later date, he wrote a journal (published by William Medenhall of Bath) in which he recorded his life, including his stay in Mildenhall. Now, every summer, visitors from the United States arrive in the village that John had written about in his book. Unfortunately as he was not born here, or married here and certainly did not die here, there is no record of him in the Registers. The spelling of the name has changed to Medenhall with usage.

During the restoration work in the church in 1981, a memorial stone was revealed behind panelling. This was an inscribed tablet referring to the Jones family of Woodlands dated 1642, a family who resided there for some 150 years. The stone is again covered by the panelling, so perhaps a record of its lettering is appropriate.

HEARE LYETH THE BODY OF WILLIAM JONS GENTELM WHOE DIED THE 8 OF NOVEMBER
1610 WHOSE LYFE WAS RELIGIOUS AND HONEST HIS DEATH GODLY AND CHARITABLE
SOE WITNESSED BY THE BEHOLDERS DESERVEDLY COMENDED BY THE PREACHER AT
HIS FUNERALL AND HEARE SI.F,FPETH WITH HIS FATHER THE BODY OF JOHN JONS
GENTEL HIS SON WHOES DAYES ALSO ENDED SHORTLIE AFTER BEING THE 28 OF
JANVARY THE SAME YEAR BOTH WHOES SOWLES BEING WITH THE UNDEVIDED TRINITIE
GLORIFIED AND CHARITABLY DEPARTED ACCORDING TO THEAR FAYTH PVBLISHED

AT THEAR DEPARTVRES TO BE SAVED ONLY
BY THE DEATH PASSION AND BLOD-SHEDDING
OF CHRIST JESVS RECEAVED THEIR
SALVATION WHIT.F.ST THE WORDLE DOTH
PERSECVT THEM

The late E.G.H.Kempson the Marlborough historian has commented that 'the same year' was of course 1611 by our reckoning but still 1610 according to the Old Style then in use.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY COMMUNITY

As the penultimate century of the millennium began, it was evident that, although many of the events which took place in the parish may now seem to be of minor importance as compared with those of the great saga of early history, nevertheless they all combine to make up a panorama of relative happenings which depict life in Mildenhall.

Europe was in turmoil. The people learned of the complicated pattern of Napoleonic conquest and battle. The parish Rector of the time was the Reverend Charles Francis and the extent of his own anxiety is evident from a paragraph written in his own hand in the Burial Register under the date of December 1807.

"By the Treaty of Tilsit, the perfidious French completed the overthrow of Prussia and the Downfall of the German Empire: compelled Great Britain to seize and bring away the Danish Navy and stores and obliged eventually The Royal House of Braganza to leave Portugal and under protection of a British Squadron, to set sail Nov 29th for the Brazils. Gracious Lord, how long?"

Perhaps the good Rector was pondering over the fact that, only six years before, he had seen to its conclusion the remaking of the bells in the church tower. Would they ring out for a great peace or as an alarm for people of Mildenhall in the case of invasion? He had already recorded the event in the parish Register

"September 4th 1801, the Five new bells recast at the expense of the Inhabitants from the four old ones, dated 1596 were finished and rang in the Tower for the first time. The following is the inscription on the Tenor Bell

NOS QVINGVE RENOVARVNT DE QVATTVOR QVAE OLIM ANNO DOMINI 1596 TINTINABVLA
INTER SACRA ECCLESIAE DE MILDENHALL INCOLAE SVMPTIBVS SVVS P.V. ANNO DOMINI
1801 ED VAISEY ET GVL YOUNG SACRO CUSTODIBVS

The lofts in the tower were likewise repaired. The under floor was lowered several feet and under ceiled, with an octagonal opening in the centre, from which is suspended a light of four sconces. The window over the Belfry door was considerably enlarged and new-glazed, and a new stair-case to the Loft added. The entrance to the Belfry from without was improved and the Tower repaired. The expense £231.12.6½ paid by a Church rate." The other bells were inscribed :

1. "James Wells Aldbourne Wilts Fecit 1801"

2. "The Rev Cha Francis Rector gave £10 towards these bells J.Wells fecit 1801AD

3 and 4 As No 1 bell

The older bells were probably by John Wallis. James Wells, Bell founder of Aldbourne was certainly the maker of the five new bells. A sixth bell was to be added in the Twentieth Century

The influence of the Rector in the Parish became very evident, especially during the next twenty-five years. Writing on the occasion of his preferment in 1788 the Reverend Charles Francis (who was Rector of Collingbourne Ducis and Mildenhall, also Chaplain to the Earl of Ailesbury) stated :

"All these preferment's were conferred unasked for, and I acknowledge with gratitude and truth that they were undeserved Bounties of God and kind patrons to their unworthy

Charles Francis

In 1796 the Rector of Collingbourne Ducis and Mildenhall was announced as Proctor for the Clergy of Wilts in the newly created Lower House of Convocation.

There is a record throughout the Church Registers of Confirmands presented by Mildenhall Parish at Triennial services, usually held in Marlborough at St. Peters Church.

In 1789	35	In 1792	45
In 1795	44	In 1798	31
In 1801	36	in 1804	37
In 1808	28		

In 1806 The Reverend Charles Francis preached a sermon on the Death of the Lord Bishop of Sarum, a sermon subsequently published.

In 1811 the Rector wrote :

"Towards the latter end of the year the Bishop revived in this Diocese of Salisbury the very ancient, but in this and many others Dioceses long disused, Office of Rural Dean, appointing (it should seem) twenty-two Deans for Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire and joining parts of Deaneries of Marlborough and Cricklade together, His Lordship coupled me with Mr. Woodrooffe, Vicar of Somerford Keynes. On December 19th I received my Commission as Rural Dean of Marlborough"

In 1811, the parish population had risen to 386.

Crime in the parish was general and of an agricultural nature. In 1817, Ann Dance and her daughter were sentenced to six months each at Marlborough Sessions for stealing three sacks of wheat from the farmer at Poulton, Mr. Halcombe. In 1824 one W.Lambdin was sentenced to death for stealing a sheep, the property of Mr. White of Minal. He was, however, reprieved. In 1832 a worker, Thomas Chivers was sentenced to 2 months at Devizes for leaving the service of his master, William Halcombe in Minal without permission. This was an offence if the servant had been engaged for the year.

The Baptismal Registers of the time indicate that the Rector was most particular to receive into the Church every child - a practice not found in every parish. In 1792, he recorded Stephen, the base-born son of Mary and a gardener of East Kennet. In 1895 Joseph, the base-born son of Sarah, single woman. The reputed father was a Private in the 5th Regiment of Dragoons. There was also an entry for 'Thomas, son of a woman calling herself Jane, taken in Labour at the turnpike, Marlborough Forest, and delivered at Werge'.

In 1816, there occurred an event of considerable importance to the Parish and its church. Twelve farmers together raised a sum of two thousand pounds (a not inconsiderable sum at that time) and devoted themselves to restoring the interior of the Church. All the pews were replaced with shoulder-high stalls, including 'family' boxes for individual families. These were in oak, carved and formed in the style of the period. The twin pulpits, the patron stalls, the frontal to the musicians gallery and the main doors all formed this great endeavour.

The farmers were :

Henry Woodman of Stitchcombe Farm
Edward Vaisey of Grove Farm.
Philip Watts of Axford
Thomas Cox of Minal
John Looker, Churchwarden
Samuel and William Oatley of Poulton
Joseph Hutchins of Folly Farm
Thomas and John White of Home Farm
William Young of Woodlands and
John Wentworth of Mere.

These names are inscribed on six shields under the gallery, and were previously high over the Chancel arch.

As a result of this action, the church of St John the Baptist, Minal is perhaps one of only three in the country which depict the architecture and furnishings of the Georgian period, unaltered by the Victorians.

The Revd Charles Francis died in 1822 and was replaced, as Rector, by the Revd George Buxton, who, in 1827 married Rose Shepherd of Marlborough. However two of the works, planned for the everlasting good of the Parish by the Revd Francis were completed only after his death. He gave a sum of £4,000 to build the school. The School, situated at the East end of the main village complex was completed in 1824. The Architect was Robert Abraham who chose a Byzantine style of architecture for the building. It had an octagonal centre building with two single storey wings. Its perpendicular style has often confused passers by, who mistake the building for Minal Church.

A new brick built three-arch bridge was completed in 1826 to carry Werg Lane over the River Kennet and thus provide a more substantial crossing than a wooden bridge which stood at that point previously. This again was attributed to Charles Francis, who could foresee the need for the very busy mill at Werg to have adequate access for miller's wagons as opposed to a ford.

In 1827 there is a very full record of a Right of Way dispute affecting the track from Bay Bridge on the Marlborough to Swindon turnpike road and a junction near to Poulton Farm. A Minal shopkeeper Looker, returning from Ogbourne drove his wagon along the track, as he had always done. The Poulton farmer, Mr. Halcombe, made his senior man

a Constable and served a citizen's arrest on Looker. At a hearing in March 1827, witnesses for the accused stated that for forty to sixty years the track had been an accepted Right of Way and had never before been blocked or passage denied. The Court found for Mr. Halcombe and a fine of £35 levied. Five years later, Mr. Halcombe obtained a 'stopping up' order on the track. But this was not the complete end of the story. In 1979, an Inspector of the Department of the Environment, sitting at a special meeting in the Minal Village Hall, heard a case for confirming the same track as a Bridleway. In 1982, the Report found that the Bridleway should be confirmed. Some civil procedures still take time.

In 1831, the Rector, Revd Buxton took a step that would have made him very popular. He refunded fifteen percent of all tithes to the villagers and farmers. This act might have followed a period when a series of riots and destruction of machinery took place in the parish, and when letters of threat were written by the labourers concerned.

In 1833 keen observers within the parish would have seen a team or teams of surveyors making a steady progress along the Kennet valley-side complete with instruments and measuring facilities. This was evidence of the beginning of a survey for the London to Bristol Railway.

The line was to enter the parish from the east near to Hens Wood to run south of Stitchcombe following the course of Chopping Knife Lane and to leave the parish to the west near to the present Savernake Hospital entrance. It would keep to the higher ground at a height of about 200 feet above sea-level. This gave rise to an interesting speculation as to where the railway station for Minal would have been.

In the event, Brunel was more attracted to the northerly route through the Vale of White Horse and Swindon. It is suggested that the wealthy land-owners in and around the Kennet valley wanted much greater prices for their land, and they were also not prepared to see the 'new' railway passing through.

Later, there was to a second survey to bring a line from Marlborough along the valley bottom, along Elcot Lane, Ghost Lane, and across the water-meadows to the north of Stitchcombe. This was a branch line to the proposed Didcot to Basingstoke Railway which was also not proceeded with. The surveys and plans still exist in the County Records Office.

In 1841 the first proper Census was taken throughout the land and the details applicable to Mildenhall are now available (the necessary one hundred years having passed). For the first time, a reliable and accurate population figure was given, and some idea of where people lived in relation to one another. All of the Minal village people were listed together but the route the Census enumerator took as he walked from house to house helps to locate the various families.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MINAL IN VICTORIAN TIMES

The new Queen's reign began in Minal with a gift to the parish church of £53 by the Churchwarden, Mr. Pockocke. With this money the South Aisle ceiling was circled, a new window with an iron frame put into the clerestory and new sconces provided.

The new Rector, George Buxton continued the good work expected of an Incumbent. He was appointed Rural Dean and was elected to the Diocesan Board of Education. Mr. Woodman, the farmer of Stitchcombe, was elected for the fourth time as Guardian of Minal, and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Guardians - a forerunner of the local government enjoyed today.

In 1843 the Tithes due to the Church were £780. An analysis of the land was :

Arable	2,332 acres
Meadow	818 acres
Woods	365 acres
Forest	291 acres
Homesteads	23 acres
Roads, rivers and waste	58 acres

The owners of that time were given as :

The Marquis of Ailesbury	22,648 acres
Arabella St Quentin	593 acres
Thomas Wylde	567 acres
Glebe lands	159 acres

The occupiers were

Earl of Ailesbury	259 acres
William Holcombe, Poulton Farm	676 acres
Edward Vaisey, Grove Farm	494 acres
Henry Hutchins, Folly Farm	210 acres
William Hale	64 acres
John Wentworth, Mere Farm	141 acres
Henry Woodman, Stitchcombe Farm	416 acres
John White, Home Farm	593 acres
Wm and Thomas Young, Woodlands	567 acres
John Tarrant, Church Farm	143 acres

The new school seemed to be thriving, for in 1850 there was an advertisement for the immediate appointment of a Master and Mistress (with no family). Values of servitude were clearly shown when William Butcher, 45 years a servant at Grove Farm was given £3 for long service. At the same farm, Stephen Wailing died, being Mr. Vaisey's servant for 58 years.

In 1858, Woodlands Farm was auctioned when Mr. Young quitted. The farm was shown as being 220 acres in extent with 16 cart-horses. The following year the wood was put up for sale, with over 400 prime trees being sold off. Four years later, in January a very serious fire damaged the farm, buildings, ricks, cottages and two barns. Two horses were killed. The fire was stated to have been caused from sparks from a steam-engine. A very strong wind fanned the flames which were seen as far away as Aldbourne and the damage was put down as three thousand pounds.

A sheep plague in 1865 caused 108 animals to be destroyed and buried five feet deep in lime. The men's clothing had to be burned together with the hurdles and implements. In 1866 there was a special church service and a day of fasting and humiliation following the continuance of sore plague among cattle.

Fires at farms and cottages were often serious enough to warrant their inclusion in the newspapers of the time. In Minal in 1866 two cottages, one the Post Office, were burned to the ground. The fire engine came from Marlborough together with the water cart. Fortunately most of the furniture was saved by neighbours, but there was a 'hurricane' blowing at the time.

The third Census of the parish was taken in 1861, showing that the population was now 466 (equally male and female) who lived in 96 dwellings. This was an increase of about 10% on the earlier census of 1851. There were 40

families living in the village itself.

As evidence of the increasing amount of agricultural work being carried out, there is proud note that, at Werg Mill, new mill stones and a freshly built water-wheel of nine feet had been installed in 1867.

The next Census, that of 1871, marked the rise of the population to its highest level ever (and this has still not been surpassed in 1991). The 501 people (244 male and 257 female) were to be found in 106 houses. A walk from the bottom of Church Lane through the village to Home Farm would have located families, as follows :

CHURCH LANE

Church Farm - Henry Tarrant
Low Farm - Charles Brown
William Gay
Benjamin Gregory
Ann Werrell
Charles Page
John Rawlings

VILLAGE STREET

William Smart
Thomas Sawyer
Edward Brown
Henry Mortimer
Jacob Smith
Edward Dowling
John Bright
Joseph Greenaway
William Vockins
John Barnett
William Smith
William Pike
Thomas Breadmore
Thomas Sawyer

VILLAGE STREET (Continued)

John Bird
Henry Pithouse
Elizabeth Waite
Joshua Warman
Mark Chilton
Thomas Taylor
George Bird
Henry Werrell
John Pontin
Charles Gregory
Joseph Breadmore
James Gregory
John Looker
Charlotte Tarrant
Elizabeth Hatter
Thomas Rushen
Stephen Davis
Charles Vockins
Thomas Viveash
John Sawyer
George Butcher
William Jones
William Barnett
Home Farm - George Mortimer

That Minal had its own constable is indicated in 1873, together with the village gallows but there is no other evidence of the existence of such a gruesome implement.

Life in the village was of a communal nature. People made their own entertainment and formed their own social gatherings. The bell-ringers were treated to a supper given by Mr. Samuel Looker at Folly Farm. There was "roast-beef, plum pudding, a pipe of tobacco, nut brown ale and a good song afterwards." Perhaps this event off-set the effect of a letter to the local paper asking for "better singing in the church." There was also a supper for the children and the night school pupils, when Mr. Butler, the farmer from Stitchcombe gave a lantern lecture on "The North Pole". 28 of the pupils who had attended for 40 hours during the winter were given a hot supper.

The shape of things to come in the realm of archaeological discovery came when the Rev Charles Soames lectured the villagers on a Roman pavement which had been discovered on the plateau at Folly Farm. Later in 1884, the collapse of ground in the same field laid bare the mouth of a well the sides of which were lined with Sarcen stone blocks. At 25 feet down the well passed into solid chalk. This was the first real evidence of a Roman settlement. Theremains of a villa and subsequently the site of Roman Cunetio were to follow later.

At one time, Minal had a Chapel of the Knight Templars called Salk. No sign of this exists, unless it was the site of two old cottages belonging to the Glebe which were always called 'The Vicarage'. They were burned down in 1866.

The boundary of the parish had remained very much as it was in Saxon times. In 1875 a Vestry meeting in Minal was told of the new boundary which was to divide it from North Savernake. A large acreage of Savernake Forest lies within the parish and, with a minor adjustment made in the twentieth century, still forms part of the southern boundary. The parish acreage was given as 4,025 in 1887.

In the 1870's Mildenhall was to see the possibility of having its one and only railway line - but no station of its own. The work of constructing the Swindon, Marlborough and Andover Railway began in 1875. The collapse of the ceremonial wheel-barrow used at the opening was surely an omen for the railway, which was to have considerable financial problems during its life-time.

The single line crossed the River Kennet near to Elcot Lane and moved in a curve and then through a cutting, under the Marlborough to Mildenhall road, over the lane to Rabley and under a third bridge used as a farm-track. The three bridges are dated 1881 and are still in evidence. The track-bed has been recently adopted as a leisure path between Marlborough and Ogbourne.

At its completion, six trains a day ran in each direction with two on Sundays. By 1958 this service was reduced to one. The line was closed in 1961. There was one accident on the line. In 1895, a four-coach train was derailed at Tanner's curve, just on the boundary with Ogbourne parish. Part of the train plunged down the embankment but, remarkably, there were no serious injuries to boys returning to their homes from Marlborough College.

This chapter of Victorian history must conclude with a sad but revealing episode which occurred in 1879. It reflects the social, agricultural and transport aspects of life in Minal at the time.

If, when driving or walking towards Marlborough from the village, half way up the hill and on a bank to the right-hand side, a small stone cross can be seen, inscribed A.H.O.WATTS 12 MAY 1879. This marks the place when an accident occurred.

Harry Watts (as he liked to be called) was fourteen years of age. He lived in Axford and worked for the farmer, Mr. Butler, at Stitchcombe. On this particular morning he accompanied the carter with a three-horse wagon loaded with sacked wheat. It was to go to the railway station at Marlborough. They returned to Stitchcombe with the empty wagon. By 1230 they again set out to Marlborough with wheat and were returning with the wagon loaded with coal. They shared a quart of ale at the Bear in Marlborough and there was a second stop at the Queen's Head when a second quart was shared between them. They then set off home.

Going down the steep hill, near to the Rectory, things began to go wrong. Harry was walking beside the horses when they took fright and bolted down the hill. It was said at the time that a gun shot might have scared them. Harry, struggling with the horses was drawn under the wheels of the wagon which then overturned. Harry was carried to the first house in Minal where, later that evening, he died.

At the inquest a verdict of "accidentally killed" was brought in and the jury members donated their fees to the distraught mother of Harry. The young 14 year old farmers boy doing a man's work, the dependence of horse-drawn traffic on often poor roads, the oft-present ale for refreshment - all are indicative of the conditions prevailing at the time. The little stone cross by the road-side reminds us.

The 1861 Census indicates the occupations of the people of the parish. It was recorded that there were:-

Agricultural Labourers	139
Basket Maker	1
Clerk	1
Carpenter	6
Cordwainer	1
Farmers	7
Gardener	1
General Labourer	3
Miller	3
Rector	1
School Master	1
Blacksmith	1
Servants	19
Shepherds	4
Shepherd Boy	2
Plough Boys	6
Carter	2
Farm Bailiff	1
Brickmaker	1
Paupers (Almspersons)	10

CHAPTER NINE

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL



In 1808 some 14 children attended a school kept by a poor woman in Mildenhall. The school had been closed by 1818 when the only provision for educating the poor was two Sunday schools and catechizing. In 1818, however, Charles Francis, the rector, gave land and in 1821 he bequeathed £4,000 for a school. Half the money was invested and half used to build a school and teacher's house, designed by Robert Abraham and completed in 1824. The building, in Perpendicular style, has a two-storeyed octagonal central block and a lantern roof. From alternate sides radiate single-storeyed wings, two of which were used as schoolrooms. The income from investment, £100 in 1858, was used to pay a master and a mistress and for the general expenses of the school. There were 28 pupils in 1833 and numbers rose to between 60 and 70 in the late 19th century. By 1873 the central area of the school had been divided into additional schoolrooms and in 1898 one of the original schoolrooms was enlarged. In 1906 the average attendance was 70 and numbers fluctuated between 50 and 75 until 1938 when they stood at 40. The school was closed in 1969.

Linzi Mathews, an ex-pupil, has contributed these memories of the school and some of her fellow pupils:-

It was a Church of England school and this meant we started each day with a short Bible session. We also had prayers each morning, each lunchtime and at the end of the school day. Every Monday morning, Reverend Courtman attended and led the assembly, and once a week we recited the 'Collect'. Each Good Friday the school attended a special church service and all the children were given a hot cross bun. We all walked to the church in a big group, being 'collected' on the way - as the Sowdens and I lived the closest to the church we were the last to be picked up!

Each Christmas the school did a nativity play/carol service for parents and villagers. We did three performances - one in the largest classroom, one in the village hall and one in Miss Price's flat, which was part of the school building. The last Christmas we were there, I got the (highly coveted!) part of Mary and Paul Tilling was Joseph. Miss Price eventually moved out of the school into a bungalow on a newly-built estate along the main road - Berry Close - in about 1967-ish.

In some respects the school was rather old-fashioned, but effective. For example, I when was taught to write 'joined up' I was actually taught copperplate (!!) and I was taught to read using a set of 1920's school books called 'The Radiant Way'.

School dinners were not available until I had been at school a couple of years - until then children just went home for lunch. The food was brought out in big heated containers from Marlborough (?) and dished up by the teachers. Initially, we didn't even have dining tables, so we ate at our desks using specially-provided placemats.



The School in 1967

We look rather a shabby lot, don't we! I think this is partly because there was no school uniform, but also because quite a few of us came from relatively poor backgrounds.

My family - the Standfields - lived at No.1 Church Lane (next door to Mr & Mrs Fishlock at No.2) from late 1959 to May 1968. My dad, Ken Standfield, worked for John Gale's father & Mr Ainsley. The Sowden family lived further down Church Lane and the Madgewicks at the very end.

The Rawlings family were Romanies who lived somewhere up a lane that goes off to the left before the lane to the school (there used to be a triangle of grass at the junction with a telephone box on it).

Stanley was about my age and a jolly boy. Gordon and Sheila were older and I didn't know them that well, although I remember Sheila seemed a kind girl and Gordon was very quiet but knew an incredible amount about animals and birds. When I was about 8, the school acquired a tape recorder and Miss Price made a recording of all the children "interviewing" Gordon, asking him questions about wildlife.

I remember on one occasion the Rawlings children were absent from school and Miss Price announced that they were at home because their grandmother had died. She went on to say that the grandmother was a "gypsy queen" and that Romanies from all over the country would be coming to the funeral to pay their respects. She was right - the village was absolutely packed with visitors and the cortege was huge.

The Miles family was large! There were 12 children in all and they lived further along the lane beyond the school. Alan and Philip were the closest to me in age.

I think Pamela Smith and Jackie Smith were cousins. Both families lived along the main road in Minal; Pamela's across the road from the shop but slightly further along, Jackie's further along again. The Furzeys lived in a house opposite the shop.

The other Jackie (possibly Carpenter - can't remember) lived with her parents in a house on the main road roughly opposite the pub. It had a long, overgrown garden that reached all the way down to Church Lane and 'finished' opposite our house. People tended to use it as a public footpath/short cut.

The Wood family lived in "Roamers" along the main road. Mr Wood was a postman; Mrs Wood and my mother were particular friends. My parents still exchange Christmas cards with Mr & Mrs Wood, who now live in Little Bedwin.

Paul Tilling's family lived the 'Ramsbury end' of the village. Where the lane to the school branches off, the main road curves round a bit and just beyond there is a turning off to the right. Somewhere along there is a bridge; Paul's house was just beyond the bridge - a sixties bungalow (dormer bungalow?) faced with Cotswold (?) stone.

CHAPTER TEN

MORE MODERN MINAL

As the parish moved into the twentieth century the many activities are either well recorded in various records and reports or are 'remembered' by the older members of the community - for this is now the time when we move into the realm of 'within living memory'.

The century began with a serious fire at a cottage in Werg, the small hamlet about three hundred metres to the south-east of the village. Here, in 1901, a cottage was 'impossible to save' when the fire engine arrived from Marlborough. Firemen concentrated their efforts on saving three others, while the occupants removed their furniture up to Cock-a Troop in farm wagons. There were only ever nine dwellings in Werg, so a considerable proportion of them were involved. A boy, one of the family in the burned cottage, came before the Petty Sessional Court in connection with his alleged part in the fire. In 1983 the same hamlet saw the destruction of the Mill by a fire which started in the kitchen and spread to the whole building, despite the efforts of five fire crews.

It appears that the local name for the village is still considered an oddity by those who live outside. It is reported that a gentleman arrived in the parish in 1903 and asked a local "Can you tell me if this is Mildenhall ?" "Naw" was the response. "Can you tell me the way to Mildenhall ?" "Never heard of sich a place". "Have you lived here long?" "Barn'd heere". "And what place is this then ?" "Aagh, this heere's Minal." Exit the gentleman.

There were several reports of Rights of Way being in dispute during the opening years of the century - Deans Lane, the path from Axford boundary to Thicketts Copse and the path from Poulton Bridge to Minal Church (over the new railway line) were all being reported to the Rural District Council. It is perhaps interesting to note that just as much concern is still being shown over the same rights of way in the closing decade of this century

In 1910 the ceremony of 'Beating the Bounds' was carried out on Easter Monday (and taking two days). This ensured that the younger members of the parish could remember the line of the boundary and, in turn, pass on this knowledge.

An excavation, in 1912, which took place in the rear garden of a cottage in Werg brought to light a skull.. The Surveyor's report indicated that a whole skeleton had been discovered. It was male and of great muscular strength, six feet in height. The cottage had the reputation of being haunted, and the locality is still known as 'Ghost Lane'.

It seems that certain factions in Minal were averse to the actions of Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. An effigy was made, hung on a pole for a week, mutilated and finally shot with a fouling piece, before being burned in the street.

As recently as 1941, the old Roman road - known as Greenway - was paved for the first time - the first time, that is, since the Romans built it originally in the first or second century.

In very recent years, Mildenhall has changed but little. There has been some modern building. The village acquired an army hut to serve as a village hall; this was replaced by a newer hall with a - remarkable Swiss roof, and in 1989 a third hall was built in its place. A small grouping of new houses came into being in the early 1980's in Church Lane, and a further group just north of the Post Office cross-roads. With these came an influx of new residents who have maintained the spirit of village community in Minal.

This ended a period of 122 years during which only three Rectors served. The Rectory was closed and the Benefice dissolved. The parish church was restored in 1980-81 after an appeal had been made, with Sir John Betjamen as its Patron together with Mr. John Piper. The parish church is still in regular use.

There are enough old cottages remaining to mark the years of the 17th and 18th centuries, enough farm houses to remind us of the great years of agricultural progress, the constant remainder of the wonders of Roman Cunetio still to come and the ever present defences of the Iron Age fort across the valley from the village.

The spirit of Mildenhall lives on.



Clockwise from bottom left –

The road through Minal in the 19th century, Sorley Stone - in memorium to CH Sorley, killed in WW1, Poulton Bridge in the mid 19th century, Hand Pump from Home Farm, 19th century Parish Bier.