

The "Hind's Head Hotel."

## History and Legends Continued.

The legends would not be quite complete without mentioning the Aldermaston witch, Maria Hale, buried under the Yew Tree in the Churchyard seventy years ago. A parishioner still lives who helped bury her and jumped on the piled stones on the top of the grave to keep her down and prevent her escaping. The villagers were terrified of crossing her. She mesmerised her daughter and son, who withered away and died.

The Brewery is an old landmark of Henry VII. "Ye Olde Malte House" is now converted into Flats. It was one of the Medieval, torturous to the poor men who worked there—the ceilings were so low their backs were bent double in carrying grain from one station to another—like the old Breweries all over England. Very few are in existence now. The old oak beams have been preserved inside and out, and clever alterations made by Colonel Phillips for living Flats and a spacious and lofty Dance Hall.

The same family have owned the Brewery for years and have modernized and greatly improved all buildings on the premises.

Some hundred years ago an Elm Tree was planted in the "Saw Yard" and a shed built round it. It is of tremendous girth and height, but the tree is made less dangerous to other buildings by lopping some of the branches. It is unique: its gnarled roots spread out to a great extent outside the shed in the yard, whence its moisture beside the leaves. Squire Burr, one hundred years ago, would not have it cut down.

Squire Burr, as a hobby, kept "pits" of snakes—hundreds—and always visited the school with a snake around his neck to show how harmless they were. His French cook, Madame Mathieu, cooked with a snake round her wrist. It was the age for "periwigs" and "breeches," and Squire Burr's staff of twenty-five were immaculate.

The Old Mill is mentioned in Domesday Book, 1066 (see page 2) as being sold by Earl Harold for 20 shillings and Fisheries for 5/- each. Since then, although the Mill is on the same site, it has been reconstructed and the Mill House remodernized and used now as an Hotel. Bathing and boating are also favourite pastimes on the River Kennet.

Grim's Dykes are of Celtic-British origin and boundaries or camp enclosures are found in many places. They were used as fortifications, as trenches are now, and are best traced on the map.

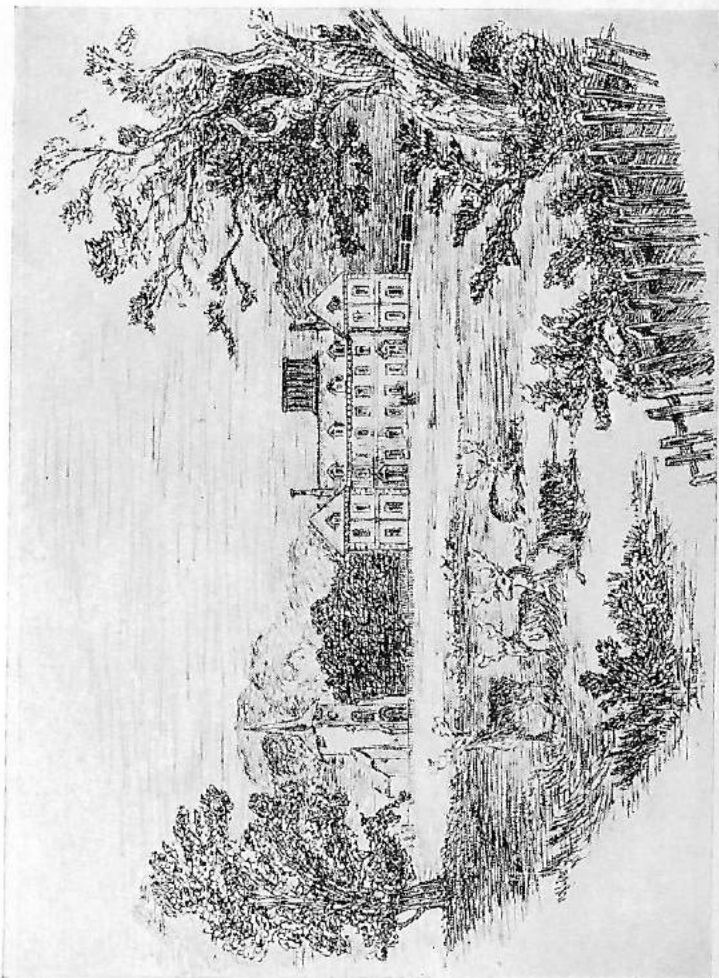
# Aldermaston Court



1944.



*Aldermaston Court.*



Aldermaston Manor, 1843 (before the Great Fire).

## FOREWORD.

To my Friends.

Many, from time to time, have asked me for pictures, books, photographs or notes on the history of Aldermaston, past and present. Its Church, Manor House and Village will all come under the cover of this booklet, compiled with the help of old magazines (written 48 years ago by Mr. Keyser), information and references from Victoria's County History, The King's England, Walter Money and others. I am indebted to all these and especially to some of the old folks of Aldermaston who can relate with such accuracy many happenings told them by their fathers and who remember so much of the dim past.

It is a fitting time to publish these few notes at the centenary of the great fire at the old Manor House, which many of their fathers helped to subdue with chains of buckets of water.

Also I am greatly indebted to Captain La Plant for his drawings of the Family Heraldry (printed on the cover of this booklet), and to Messrs. Gribble, Booth & Shepherd, of Basingstoke, for the loan of the blocks.

The late squire, Mr. Charles Keyser, died in 1929, greatly missed—he carried on the good work started by early Lords of the Manor, beautifying the lovely old Church and helping in every way, benevolent and generous to the Parish, and a great Freemason and Archaeologist.

Sir Felix Pole is the present Lord of the Manor.

This little booklet is dedicated to our many friends from U.S.A., who we hope will long remember their sojourn in the Village, as we shall remember them.

Mary Rose Newham.

Aldermaston Vicarage,  
May, 1944.

4<sup>th</sup> Edition:

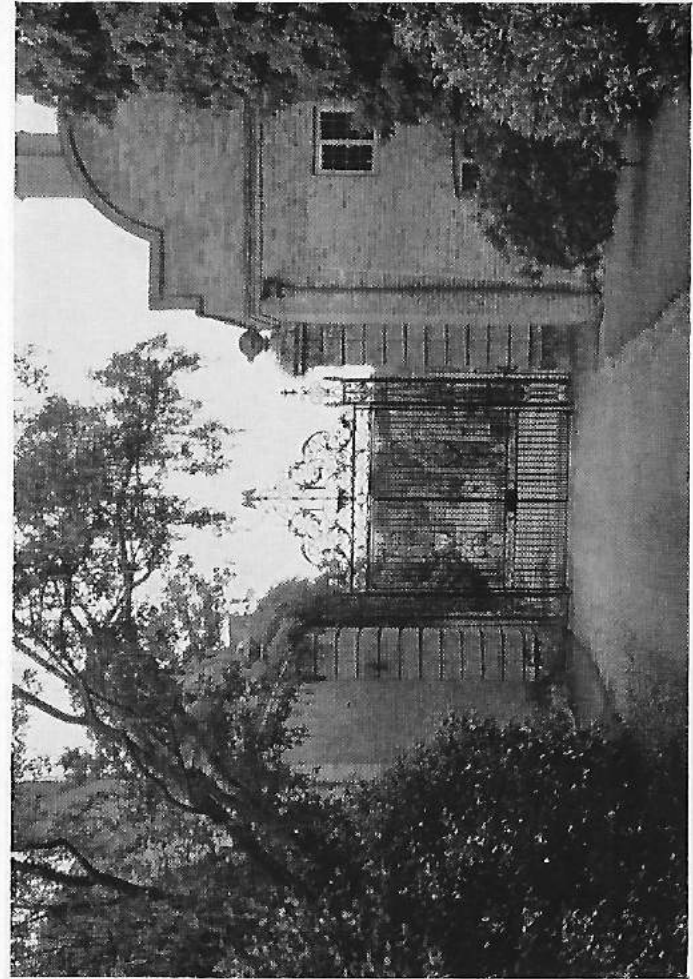
With Compliments  
Mary Rose Newham

NOTES ON THE HISTORY  
of the  
PARISH of ALDERMASTON.

The name of the Village, which is variously spelt in ancient documents, signifies the Alderman's Town and points out the antiquity and importance of the settlements, the Alderman in early times being an official holding a very high and dignified position in the country, probably corresponding with that of the Lord Lieutenant at the present day, so that we may well conjecture the many interesting and important events which occurred here in early times, of which unfortunately no record has come down to us.

We find it noted in the Domesday Survey, that great work which was carried out by order of William the Conqueror a few years after the Battle of Hastings, and as soon as the country was sufficiently settled to allow of such an exhaustive survey to be taken throughout the length and breadth of the land, that Heldremanstone was held by the King William, and that before that time it had formed part of the vast possessions of the Earl Harold, who claimed the throne after the death of Edward the Confessor, and who lost his cause and his life at the Battle of Hastings in the year 1066.

The account of Aldermaston, as rendered by the Commissioners appointed under the Domesday Survey, furnishes us with numerous quaint particulars as to the then principal points of interest in the Parish. After reciting the fact that "the King holds Heldremanstone in demesne," and that the "Earl Harold held it," it goes on to state the divisions and area of the Parish, and the number of villains, bordars, and serfs, as the villagers of that period were severally denominated, residing in it. There was a mill worth twenty shillings, probably occupying the site of the present one, and two fisheries, no doubt in the river Kennet, valued at five shillings. There was also a church, which may or may not have stood where our Parish Church is now, and one hundred and twenty-four acres of meadow and wood affording pannage (that is food and keep) for 30 hogs. In the time of King Edward the Confessor and afterwards it was worth twenty pounds and ten shillings, but at the time of the Survey the income from this and Hockfelle was only twenty-six pounds.



Aldermaston Court. The Two 17th Century Lodges.



Aldermaston Court. Part of the Main Drive.

During the remainder of the reign of William the Conqueror and throughout the whole of that of his son, William Rufus, the manor of Aldermaston remained in the possession of the Crown. There is no record or evidence of a large house in the Parish at that time, but it is probable that both these monarchs, who were much addicted to the pleasures of the chase, occasionally resided here, and hunted and shot in the large woods which then, as now, occupied all the higher ground away from the river. Henry I granted this manor with probably all the land in the Parish, the right of presenting to the church, etc., the fisheries and other extensive privileges, to one of his knights, Sir Robert Achard, or Archard, a Norman soldier of distinction, who from the description in the deed, appears to have held a situation of importance in the king's household. Several other royal manors were granted to this Sir Robert Achard at the same time, *viz.*, at Finchampstead, Sparsholt, Challow, and Colthorpe in the Parish of Thatcham, of which the principal, except this at Aldermaston, was Sparsholt, near Wantage.

We gather chiefly from the Court Rolls the names of several of the Achards as succeeding to the manorial rights at Aldermaston. The next possessor was William, who gave the church of Aldermaston to the Priory of Monk Sherborne, which continued to hold it with the whole of the titles, until its suppression in the reign of Henry V. It is traditionally reported that the owner of Aldermaston had to provide a palfrey to bring one of the monks over every Sunday to officiate in the church, and that a chamber existed in the belfry roof where the monk resided during the intervals between services.

Another William Achard is next mentioned, and then as his successor another Robert, to whom, in 1229, for some cause, of which we have no particulars, a confirmation of the original grant of this manor, etc., to the first Sir Robert was made by King Henry III. His son Peter died in 1278, leaving a son and heir, Robert, who was twenty-eight years old at the time of his father's death. He obtained a grant for a market and fair for Aldermaston in 1292, and numerous privileges in the various parishes in which he was interested himself. He very probably built the transept or chapel in Aldermaston Church.

At an inquisition taken after his death, is an account of Aldermaston, by which it appears that at that time it was a borough, as among the tenants were ten burgesses, besides

nineteen villains, all farming a certain amount of land, and fourteen "coliberts," a semi-servile class.

The last Sir Robert Achard died in 1353, and his son Peter succeeded to the estates. On his death, without issue, in 1361, an inquiry was instituted as to who was the successor to the manors, and it was found that they reverted to Thomas de la Mare, who had married the only daughter of the last Sir Robert Achard, that family having then become extinct in the male line.

Thomas de la Mare came from Nunney in the county of Somerset, and his marriage brought to him "the faire landes in Barkshire."

With the exception of the tower, the whole of Aldermaston Church was rebuilt or enlarged during the time when the Achards possessed the manor and estate, and it is to be regretted that we have no record as to how far they were responsible for the pious work carried out with regard to it.

There can be very little doubt that the de la Mares and their successors had their chief residence at Aldermaston, and the beautiful stacks of chimneys which form so interesting a feature of the modern mansion are relics of the large quadrangular building which they then occupied. The first Sir Thomas was a person of considerable importance. He filled the office of high sheriff of Berkshire in 1370, and died possessed of Aldermaston, Sparsholt, Coldrop, Finchampstead and Sulhamstead Bannister, in 1372. A second Sir Thomas was member for the county in the second, fifth, and sixth years of the reign of Richard II. Robert de la Mare, who married a lady of the family of Brocas of Beaurepaire, was knight of the shire in the first and fifth years of Henry V, while Sir Thomas, a knight of the Holy Sepulchre, was one of the members for the county in the twelfth year of Edward IV, and served the office of sheriff in the twenty-eighth year of Henry VI, the sixteenth and twenty-first years of Edward IV, and the fifth year of Henry VII.

John de la Mare, son and heir to Sir Thomas, died in the lifetime of his father, leaving an only daughter, Elisabeth, who was married to Sir George Forster, the son of Sir Humfrey Forster, of Harpsden, near Henley, in the county of Oxford.

This Sir George Forster, Forester, or Foster, as the name seems to have been variously spelt, was a personage of considerable importance. He was descended from a younger branch of the Forsters, of the County of Northumberland, which settled in the south of England, and obtained property in Somersetshire and elsewhere. Sir Humfrede, Humfrey, or Humphrey Forster, the father of Sir George, was a distinguished man, and according to Leland married one of the four daughters and co-heiresses of Sir Stephen Popham, of Faringdon Popham in Hampshire, "a Gentil man of very faire landes in Southamptonshire," a benefactor to St. Sepulchre's Church, London, and a collector of rare coins, it being especially recorded of him that he "left a great Treasor in straunge Coynes."

Sir George was knighted in 1501, on the occasion of the marriage of Prince Arthur, the eldest son of Henry VII, with Catharine of Aragon. He served the office of Sheriff of Berks and Oxon in the eighth year of Henry VIII, 1517, and was made a Knight of the Bath in 1525. He obtained with his wife, the Lady Elizabeth de la Mare, five of the lordships belonging to her family, the principal among these being the manor of Aldermaston. There can be no doubt that Sir George and his lady resided at Aldermaston, and that he took an active part in the affairs of the county. They are stated by Leland to have had twenty children, and this is the number of figures originally represented on the lower part of the monument in Aldermaston Church. As we learn from this monument, now placed between the nave and transept of the Parish Church, the Lady Elizabeth died on December 7, 1526, and there is evidence that the monument was set up in the lifetime of Sir George, as certain directions with regard to it are referred to in his will. The date of his death in the inscription round the upper edge of the tomb has never been filled in, but we know that he died in 1533, and that both he and his wife were buried in the south chapel or chantry of Aldermaston Church.

Sir George Forster was succeeded by his eldest son, Humphrey, who was one of the gentleman-in-waiting of Henry VIII, and accompanied that monarch to Boulogne in the year 1520. He was knighted the year after his father's death, and served the office of High Sheriff of the county in 1533, and again in 1546. It is stated by Fuller, the historian, that "he bore a great affection to protestants, even in the most dangerous times, and spoke to the quest in the behalf of Master Marbeck, that good confessor; yea, he confessed to

King Henry VIII that never anything went so much against his conscience, which under his Grace's authority he had done as his attending three poor men martyred at Windsor." This may be presumed to be in 1546 or 1547, when he was serving the office of High Sheriff of the county for the second time. Sir Humphrey married Elizabeth, daughter of Lord Sandy's K.G., of the Vyne, one of the most distinguished statesmen in the reigns of Henry VII and VIII, and it probably was due to his influence that Humphrey Forster first obtained his introduction to Court circles.

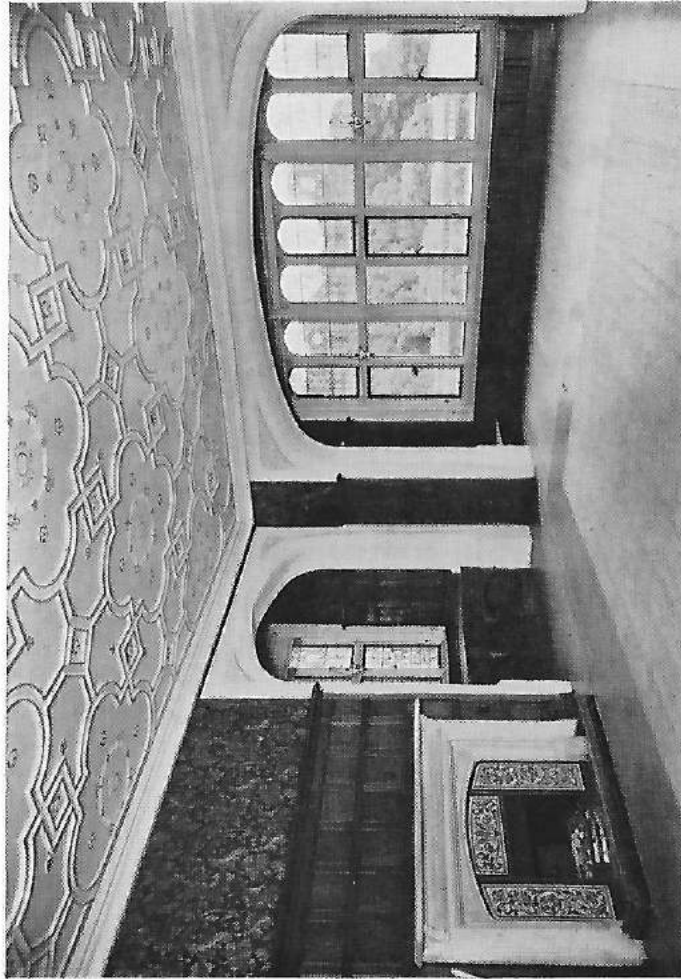
Sir Humphrey Forster himself obtained several grants from his royal master. He is reported to have entertained Henry VIII at his mansion at Aldermaston, of which the fine chimney stacks to the present house are probably the only relics. He also placed in the church the various coats of arms in old glass, recording the genealogy of his family. These were till recently in the east window, but clearly did not belong there, and have been repaired and placed in their present position in the large window on the north of the nave facing the south chapel.

Sir Humfrey appears to have been rather a violent and dangerous person when provoked, so far as we can gather from a document discovered by Miss Sharp, and set out in full in her history of Ufton Court. Some dispute had arisen between Sir Humfrey and the Parkyns family of Ufton in connection with certain rights which Sir Humfrey claimed in respect of the Manor of Padworth, but which the two brothers Francis and Richard Parkyns refused to acknowledge. The former was residing at Padworth, and it is related that Sir Humfrey, attended by his servants, and armed with "bowes and arrowes, swords, bucklers, and daggers and long javelyns and other wepons," forcibly entered the house between five and six in the morning, and finding the said Francis seated on a stool, proceeded to punch him with his fists, knock his head against the floor, and so grievously assault him, that had it not been for the intercession of his wife, Anne, he probably would have slain him. He then took him by force, and brought him to the house of his brother, Richard, at Ufton, where between six and seven o'clock the family and visitors were about to have breakfast. Sir Humfrey rushed into the room, addressing Richard Parkyns thus: "'Parkyns, I cannot be at rest for the and thy blud,' and with that took Richard by the ear, and by the here of the hed," in spite of his protestations



*Aldermaston Court. The Main Hall.*





*Aldermaston Court. The Dining Room.*

that he had done him no displeasure ; and on the interference of one, William More, he punched the said William and knocked him back against a table. He then proceeded to draw his sword and would have done further mischief had not Elizabeth, the wife of Richard, seized his arms and held him with piteous and lamentable crying until Sir Humfrey allowed one of his servants to take his sword. He then departed, making use of many abominable and terrible oaths, and driving Francis before him to Aldermaston, where he detained him till the following day. Complaint was at once made to Sir Thomas Englefield, High Abbot of Reading, and other justices of the peace, by Richard and Anne Parkyns, and the matter was duly brought up at the Quarter Sessions at Wokingham.

Sir Humfrey was succeeded in the estates by his son William. This William Forster entertained Queen Elizabeth on one of her journeys, perhaps quite at the commencement of her reign in 1558, as two coats-of-arms in old glass of the Queen and William Forster respectively, with that date inscribed on them, are now in a window on the main staircase at the Court. Amongst a series of similar documents is still preserved at the Bodleian Library at Oxford an original bill, amounting to a considerable sum, which was paid by the Queen to her steward and carpenter for certain alterations made in the bedroom occupied by her on the occasion of her visit to Aldermaston. William Forster served the office of High Sheriff in 1568, and in 1572 he was elected as one of the members for the county, and died on January 10th, 1574, while still holding his Parliamentary office. He was buried in the south Chapel of Aldermaston Church, where his fine brass still remains, showing in outline—for the actual metal has been removed—the figures of his wife and himself, five daughters, and six or seven sons, and with the plate still remaining with the inscription recording his death (the date of his wife's death has not been filled in), and three out of the four shields at the corners with the elaborate armorial bearings of these two distinguished families.

William Forster was succeeded by his son, Sir Humphrey Forster, knight, who was High Sheriff in 1579 and 1592, and Member for the County in 1592. In the ensuing Parliament he transferred his services to Reading, and became Member for that ancient borough in 1579. He is said to have entertained Queen Elizabeth at Aldermaston in 1601. He died in 1618, and was succeeded by Humphrey Forster, who was born

in 1595, and married Anne, daughter of Sir William Kingsmill, of Sydmonton, who presented him with sixteen children. He served the office of High Sheriff in 1619, and was created a baronet on May 20th, 1620. In 1636 he and his wife commenced the building of the noble mansion, which remained standing in its original state until partially destroyed by fire in 1843. The dedication stone, which formerly was placed over the principal entrance, is now preserved in the porch of the modern mansion, and runs thus :

HUMPHREY AND ANNE FORSTER.  
*We live and build with one mind, and  
dedicate both our lives and this house to  
God and to fortune.  
In the year of our Lord 1636.*

The expense of erecting this house seems to have been very heavy, as at this time Sir Humphrey appears to have parted with a considerable portion of the property, amongst other places the old family estate at Harpsden having been sold by him. During the stormy times of the Parliamentary War, Aldermaston came in for its share of the trouble incident to that terrible conflict. A story is told of the sudden arrival of a detachment of the Parliamentary force at the house, and of their finding Sir Humphrey and his guests at dinner. They appear to have made themselves more free than welcome, annexing some of the plate and other valuables before they took their departure. On the morning after the first battle of Newbury, September 20th, 1643, Prince Rupert at the head of the Royalist Cavalry, attacked the retiring Parliamentarians under Lord Essex in Padworth Lane, "the narrow lane near Sir Humphrey Forster's house," but was beaten off after a desperate encounter. The Earl of Manchester lay at Aldermaston House on October 17th, 1644, and under the command of the said earl and Waller, the Parliamentary troops were encamped in the Park on the 23rd and 24th of the same month, shortly before the second battle of Newbury. The party of the Royal forces, under the command of Colonel Gage, on their way from Oxford to relieve Basing House, then closely besieged, halted at Aldermaston on September 10th, 1644. "They wore orange tawney scarfs in order to pass for Parliamentarian soldiers; but, forgetting their stratagem, fell upon some of the latter, whom they found in this place, killed some and took others, by which their approach was discovered and notice sent to the besiegers at Basing." They, however, succeeded in relieving the Royalist garrison there.

The Aldermaston estate was seized by the Parliament, but was restored to Sir Humphrey Forster in 1650, probably through the influence of Cromwell, who through his mother, Elizabeth Steward, was related to Sir Humphrey, whose mother, as has been stated, was Mary, daughter of Sir Mark Steward. Sir Humphrey died in 1663, at the age of 68, and his wife, Anne, on October 12th, 1673. Both were buried in Aldermaston Church. His successor was his grandson, Sir Humphrey the second, and last baronet.

A Sir Humphrey married Judeth, eldest daughter and co-heir of Sir Humphrey Winche, Bart., of Hawnes, in the county of Bedford; and as we learn from the sepulchral monuments in the Church, they had at least three children, Humphrey, who died in 1682, aged nine; William, who died 1683, aged seven; and Rebecca, who died in 1676, aged two. Sir Humphrey was first elected as one of the knights of the Shire in 1679, and continued to represent Berkshire in the parliaments of 1685, 1689, 1695, 1698 and 1700. He seems to have retired after the parliament of 1700, but he still remained a prominent figure in the county, as in 1704 he filled the office of High Sheriff. He died in 1711, and as he left no descendants surviving him, the baronetcy became extinct, and the name of Forster, which had been honoured in the parish and neighbourhood for over 200 years no longer appears in the annals of Aldermaston, though the connection of this great family, with our quiet little village is still commemorated by the *Hind's Head*, the sign of our inn, and the crest of the armorial bearings of the Forster family, and by the name Forster's still applied to the principal farm on the Aldermaston estate.

After the death of Sir Humphrey Forster, the Aldermaston estate went to Elizabeth, the only child and heir of William Pert, Esq., and his wife, Elizabeth, the sister of the said Sir Humphrey. This Elizabeth married, first, William Forster of Barnborough Castle, Northumberland; and secondly, after his death in 1700, William, Lord Stawell, and Baron of Somerton, in Somersetshire, who, it is related, "possessing this seat in right of her, much resided here." There is a tradition that the body of the said Hon. William Stawell was brought over in a silver coffin, which now lies beneath the vestry. Lady Stawell died in 1748, and was buried close to her son, and the property then devolved on her only daughter, the Hon. Charlotte Stawell, who was married first to Major Hasell and afterwards, in 1752, to Ralph Congreve, Esq., of Congreve, in the County of Stafford.

Mr. Ralph Congreve does not appear to have taken any leading part in the affairs of the County. He died on December 6th, 1775, and was buried on the south side of the Chapel of Aldermaston Church under a sumptuous white marble monument, the slab with the brasses and inscription to the four infant daughters of Sir Humphrey and Ann Forster, which had been placed on a raised tomb against the south wall, having been moved to its present position to make way for it. He survived his wife, the Hon. Charlotte Congreve, who deceased on July 24th, and was buried on July 31st, 1762, and "whose affection as a wife, and whose sincerity as a friend deserve the most lasting remembrance." This lady, believing herself to be the sole representative of the families which for over 600 years had possessed the manor had in her lifetime settled the Aldermaston estates on herself and her husband and the survivor, so that, on her death without issue, they had become the absolute property of her husband. He in his turn settled them on his only sister, Anne, for her lifetime, and afterwards to his heir-at-law.

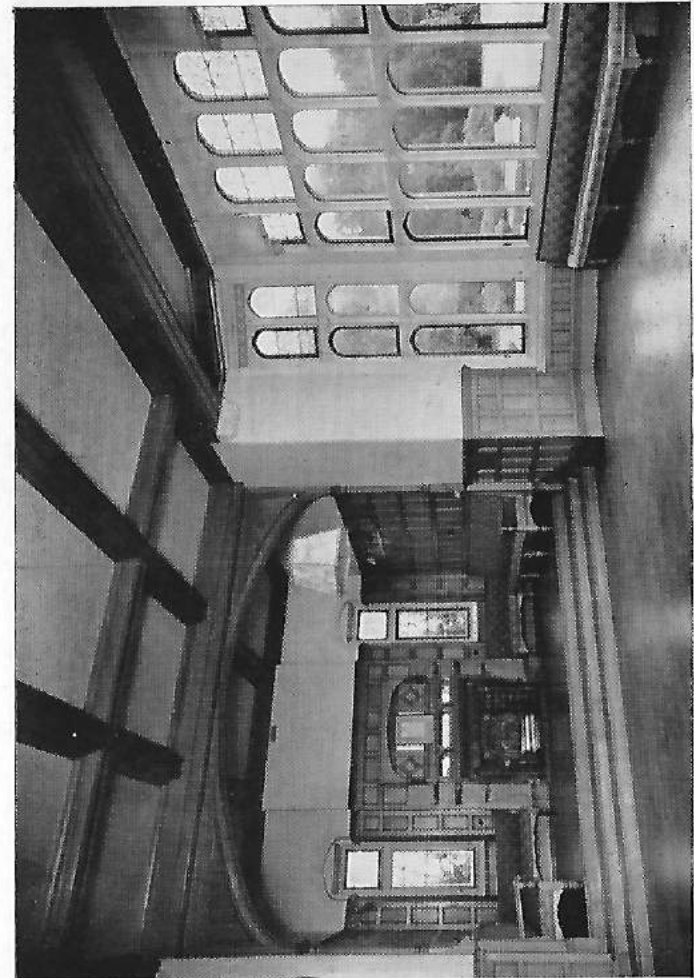
William Congreve, as the head of the Congreve family, was the heir-at-law of Ralph Congreve after the death of his sister, Ann Congreve, in 1780. A Congreve served the office of Sheriff of the County in 1808. He seems to have had an idea that a fortune was to be made in the fine timber which was such a distinctive feature of the estate and neighbourhood, and it is on record that between the years 1801 and 1838 he cut down, mostly for sale, timber to the value of £41,233 3s. 7d. Fortunately he had some consideration for posterity and most of the fine growing young oaks, chestnuts and other forest trees in the park and coverts were planted under his direction.

The commencement of the year 1843 was remembered by many of the older residents in the Parish and neighbourhood in connection with the disastrous fire, which in great measure destroyed the noble mansion erected by Sir Humphrey Forster in 1636.

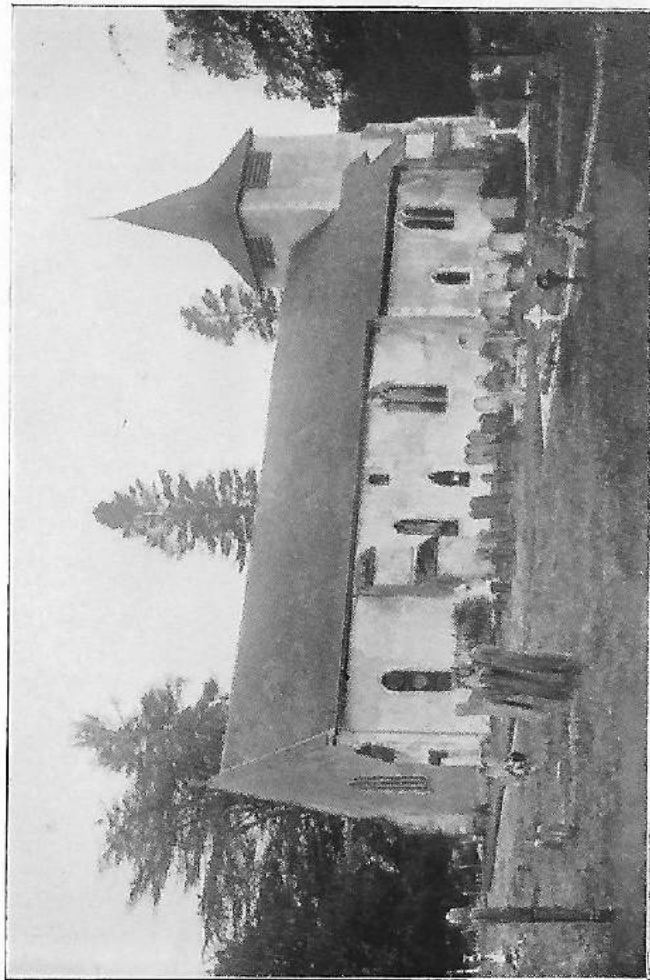
The following account of the destruction is given in *The Illustrated London News* for January 14th, 1843 :

"ALDERMASTON HOUSE.

Since we last addressed our readers this beautiful old mansion has been destroyed by fire and now lies crumbled into dismal ruin where it once stood fair in the comely beauty of its architecture, a landmark of praise and admiration for the



Aldermaston Court. Corner of the Billiards Room.



*Aldermaston Church—St. Mary the Virgin (11th Century).*

traveller, and an object of pride to the neighbourhood, not less than to its proprietor as one of 'the lords of the English soil.' We now give a reflex of the picturesque and ancient grandeur of what might, at a former period, have been well appropriated to the stolen glimpses of native scenery, which our readers get in the 'Nooks and Corners of Old England,' but which now assumes the character of a 'relic of the past.' Laid bare, and low, and waste, in the strife of elemental war, the beautiful domain is among our landscape treasures of the past, and we have now only to pay to its departed glory the natural tribute which history and topography cordially combine to bestow. As a matter of form, we must commence to interest our readers with the news detail which records the calamity, and which is thus reported in the local newspaper :

#### 'DESTRUCTION OF ALDERMASTON HOUSE BY FIRE.

Information was received in Reading at an early hour on Saturday morning that the ancient mansion of W. Congreve, Esq., was crumbling into ashes. It appears that between four and five o'clock a fire broke out near the drawing room, which happily was almost immediately discovered by the inmates of the house, though not until the flames had become so violent as to render their suppression, by them, a hopeless task. At about five o'clock the fire was seen by some labourers, near "Jack's Booth," and in a few minutes a great number of persons had reached the spot; messengers were dispatched without delay for the Parish engines and shortly after eight o'clock two had arrived from Reading. They were speedily brought to play on the burning timber, but we are sorry to say with little or no effect. Before the flames, however, had extended beyond the room on which they originated, most of the furniture and plate were, by great perseverance and exertion, removed from the other parts of the mansion, although it is feared some valuable property was still left to be consumed in the magnificent apartments to which it belonged. At seven o'clock the scene was one of the most terrific and imposing character ever witnessed in the neighbourhood, the whole building being apparently enveloped in one vast sheet of flame, which was distinctly seen at Newbury, and many miles around. At about this time the roof fell in with a tremendous crash, literally smothering the fire for a few minutes; and, at the moment our informant left, the beautiful stack of chimneys in the centre, so remarkable for their rich ornamental workmanship, was hourly expected to give way. By nine o'clock the flames were in some measure subdued by the

continual playing of the four engines at work on the spot ; but the leading rooms, the hall, and by far the greater part of the building had been totally destroyed. We understand also that the fire was discovered by a female domestic, in an attic over the ladies' drawing room, in which, it is supposed, the spark of a candle had ignited a portion of the furniture. The worthy and much respected proprietor of the mansion, W. Congreve, Esq., is, we are happy to hear, as well as can be expected after the awful calamity which has so suddenly disturbed the comfort and quietude of his advanced age.' "

In *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1843, Part I, page 194, we find the following additional account :—

" January 7th. The old mansion of Aldermaston, in Berkshire, the seat of W. Congreve, Esq., was materially injured by fire. It was the ancient mansion of the Forster's. Queen Elizabeth visited Sir Humphrey Forster there in 1601, and during the Civil War it is frequently mentioned as being successfully occupied by the generals of both armies. It was almost wholly rebuilt in 1636, but a large stack of brick chimneys, variously ornamented, remains from the more ancient mansion. This is still standing, and we are happy to add that the loss, on the whole, is not so great as was at first imagined. It is thought that two-thirds of the mansion may be readily restored to a habitable state. The lofty hall, which is surrounded by a spacious gallery, and the staircase, are uninjured. All beyond the staircase is destroyed, excepting the great dining room, which may possibly be repaired."

Mr. Congreve continued to reside in the uninjured wing of the house, and it was no doubt his intention to have repaired it, rebuilding those portions which had been ruined. He, however, died shortly afterwards and was buried March 25th, 1843, aged 66 years.

After his death, the estate got into Chancery, and in 1849 it was purchased by Mr. Daniel Higford Davall Burr, who erected the present mansion about 200 yards from the previous site. The fine block of chimneys, part of the staircase, and some of the old glass, have been preserved, and still adorn the new house erected under the supervision of Mr. Philip C. Hardwick, R.A. Mr. Higford Burr resided there till his death in 1885, and was buried in the Churchyard. He is still remembered as the genial and popular squire. After his death, his eldest son, Mr. Higford Higford, resided at the Court till 1893, when he sold the property to Mr. Charles Edward Keyser, of Stanmore, Middlesex, and Bushey, Herts.

## ADDENDA.

### The Church (ST. MARY THE VIRGIN).

The Doorway is Norman (11th century). Ornamentation of the left "chevron" on the right "spiral." The chevron design is after the style of a goat's knee. The design was adopted by the Military Knights of St. John of Jerusalem at the time of the Crusades.

On the S.W. buttress of the Tower is a "scratch dial" of early 14th century, used in those days, before clocks were introduced, to mark the times of the several services.

The N.W. wall of the Nave is the oldest (Norman) part of the Church.

The Pulpit is of the Elizabethan period.

The Registers are complete from the date Parliament ordered registers to be kept in 1558. 101 years ago and more, when burying the dead, people were obliged to wrap them in woollen shrouds to encourage the wool trade, and were fined £2 if this was not done.

The Prior of Sherborne was the first Rector in 1291.

Quit Rent of £500 was paid by William Forster, a lord of the manor, in 1567, when he obtained a lease of the Rectory, together with the right of presentation to the benefice. When the Manor came into the possession of the Congreves in 1752 the Rectory came permanently into the hands of the lords of the manor. The presentation has now been given over to the Bishop of Oxford.

The three sets of Sacramental Plate are dated 1576, 1634 and 1809. It was given by two Forster families and the Congreves respectively.

The fine large Alabaster Tomb in the South Chapel is that of Sir George and Lady Forster and their twenty children (16th century). Sir George was summoned to the "Field of the Cloth of Gold" by Henry VIII (*page 5*).

Fourteenth century glass, a very brilliant blue, is seen in the two Lancet windows on the North side of the Chancel.

A Zoo Window, dedicated to Mr. Higford Burr, is new and represents Adam naming the animals. Quite a time is spent by visitors looking for the different animals.

Two Frescoes can be seen on the South wall of the Lady Chapel, discovered when renovating (1898)—St. Christopher and St. Hubert.

The Tryptic over the Altar is by a Dutch painter, A van Orley, of the 15th century. Subject, "The Nativity."

Of the eight bells, the oldest is 1681. Mr. Keyser gave the eighth bell in 1896.

The whole Church was thoroughly restored by Mr. Keyser in 1898. Two beautiful windows by Mr. Newman, R.A., were added and a beautiful painting on the wall representing Solomon dedicating the Temple (with masonic designs underneath) at a very great expense.

In the Churchyard are numerous old headstones. One has a date 1683 and the following legend: "Stay loving friend, and think of me, As I am now so you must be."

### The Court.

The three magnificent and handsome wrought iron gates, very old and finely carved, stand at the entrance of the carriage drives. The upper one has just been taken away, the second one, called the Charity Gate, still stands, two large "Sedelia" each side, where Mr. Congreve's daughters sat and gave away gifts of food and alms to the poor every Sunday afternoon. The Eagle Gate stands at the main entrance and was won over a game of cards from Midgham Manor. Before the gates were erected at the *now* main entrance, a fine house, very likely the Dower House, stood there. When it was demolished two sides were left standing which were converted into the Tudor Lodges. One side used as the gardener's Lodge, the other side being attached to the Vicarage by a long covered passage, or hall, and used in those days as a school house for the Vicarage and the Court children.

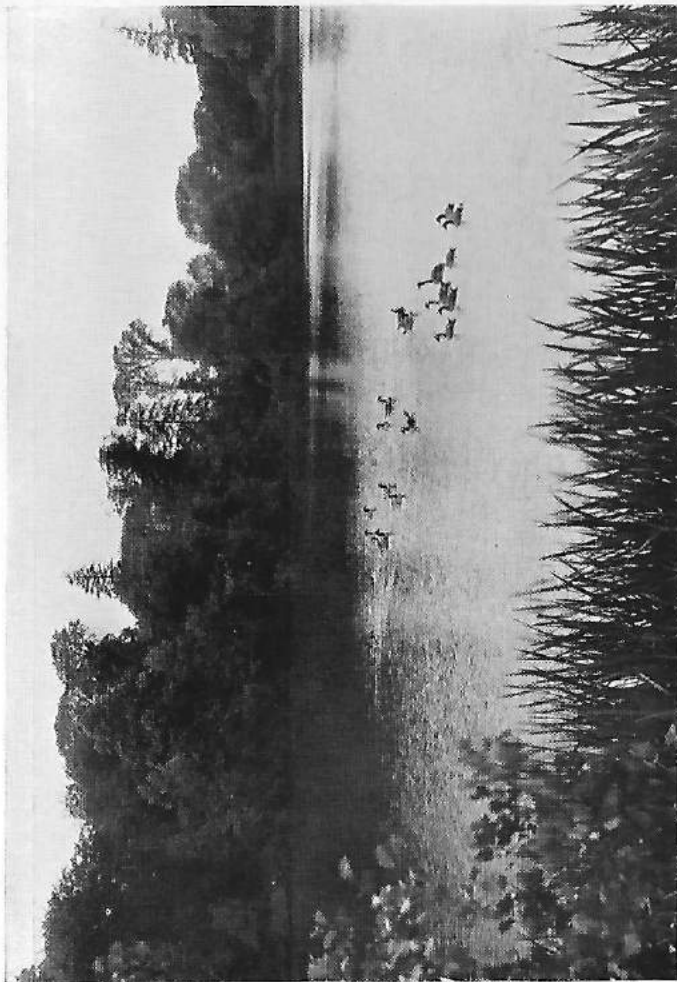
The staircase and gallery of fine old oak with numerous mythological and other figures, and a portion of the heraldic glass, the fine brick and ornamental chimneys, are relics of the old house existing prior to 1636 and probably earlier. They are well preserved in the new Manor House and greatly admired.

The Park. Many of the oaks especially are of great size and age, and said to be 2,000 years old. One bears the name of "Conqueror's Oak." Through the exigencies of the war the extensive park to the south has been destroyed. A traditional verse runs: "North, South, East, and West, one tree in the park is worth all the rest." This is understood by the old people to mean that a treasure or gold is hidden there.

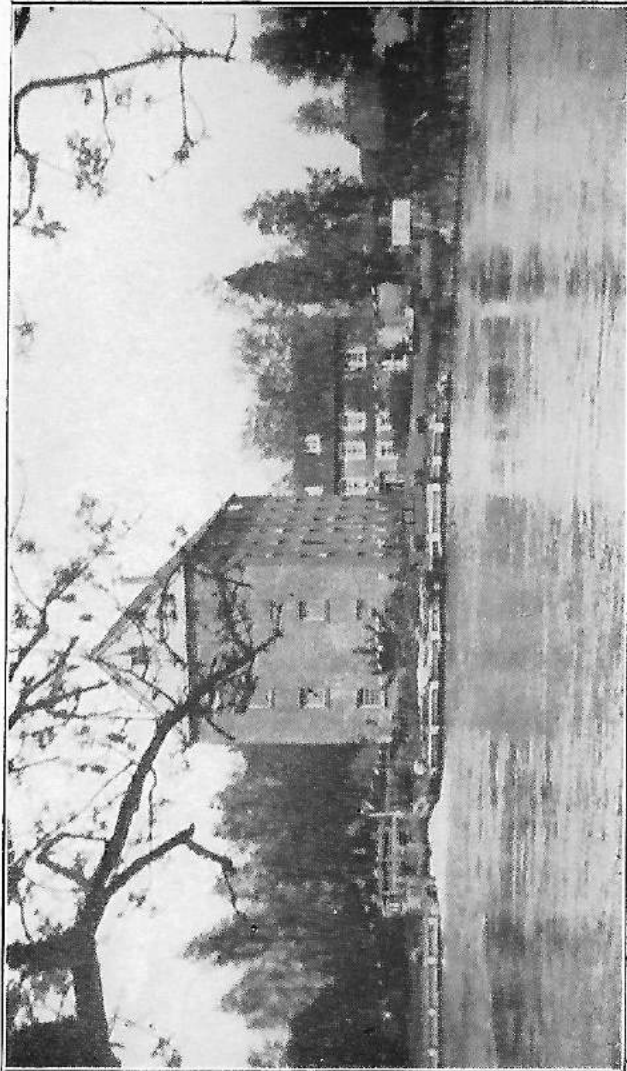
The underground cellars of the original Court are still intact and have a box hedge surrounding the steps leading into them.

The Main Drive (see illustration) and small bridge were constructed in 1896.

The Rock Garden, made by Mr. Keyser, is an exact copy of the one at Chelsea Exhibition in 1910. Rocks were brought from Chelsea.



"The Vicar's Walk." A Glimpse of the Lake.



The Old Mill on the River Kennet.

The Lake, an artificial one of 11 acres, made in Mr. Congreve's time, is a little over 100 years old. The great supply of fish was kept up by Mr. Keyser. It is a grand lake for skating and fishing in the season. There are other lakes in the park. The Decoy Pond was used a great deal by visitors as a bathing pool with diving board and cemented bottom, placed there by Mr. Keyser.

The "Ladies' Walk," about a mile long, is a beautiful walk through the woods and was made of masses of rhododendrons by Mr. Keyser.

About 200 deer were kept in the park, for the pleasures of the chase, since William the Conqueror's time.

The Pavilion in the park has gone, but was a very fine building in its day. Many County cricket matches were played there. At the Manor House a bowling green was kept up and County players periodically played there—also tennis.

The present Queen Elizabeth made a visit to the Court on April 3rd, 1942. Princess Royal followed later, and the King in 1944.

#### The Village.

The late Mr. Keyser bought the estate in 1893. An unspoiled village with the Church and Manor House, surrounded with magnificent cedars, ancient yews, great oaks and elm trees.

At the South end stood handsome wrought iron gates.

At the North end of the village the *Hind's Head* Hotel is a very famous and ancient old inn and often used as "Meets" for the Hunt, and was formerly a Posting Station for London.

The old brick prison stands immediately behind the hotel. Its dimensions are about 6 feet square and 8 feet high. It is now out of use. The last prisoner burnt himself to death, it is said.

A Roman well has lately been discovered in the grass triangle. It used to be surrounded by laurels and an iron fence, but the well is now enclosed by a low brick wall.

A May Pole stood in the triangle in olden times. The Pole was incorporated in a house close by in 1898. It took eight men to put the May Pole up, it was so high and large—from 80 to 90 feet, in three sections. Squire Higford Burr's monkey climbed it often and amused the children.

Very popular markets and fairs used to be held in the street; they were abolished 100 years ago.

Four Almshouses were built in 1706 by Rev. Robert Dixon for the use of widows.

The Parish Hall was built by Mr. Keyser in 1897.

Every three years there is what is known as a "Candle Auction" Sale of grass grown in Church Acre, when, at a meeting a pin is inserted into a tallow candle and bidding is made while the pin is in place. When the pin drops from the melting candle the sale is closed and is accorded to the last highest bidder. This is an ancient custom.

The Aldermaston or William pear is one of the finest pears in England. It was produced 150 years ago by a school-master living here, who was also a gardener, called John Stair.

Mr. Keyser presented to the Village a wonderful reservoir and water filter at the cost of £27,000. Before then wells were in use.

The Drinking Fountain was erected by Mr. Keyser in memory of Queen Victoria's Jubilee.

In the South-East corner of the Parish stands a large stone called the "Imp's Stone," a Roman milestone. The Roman road runs from here through the Parish, the stone being a boundary.

Red Hill, called "Red" because of the massacre of Parliamentary troops which occurred there. Three hundred soldiers perished and were buried together in pits in Padworth Churchyard.

Rag Hill, called after the Rag stone found there and used for building purposes.

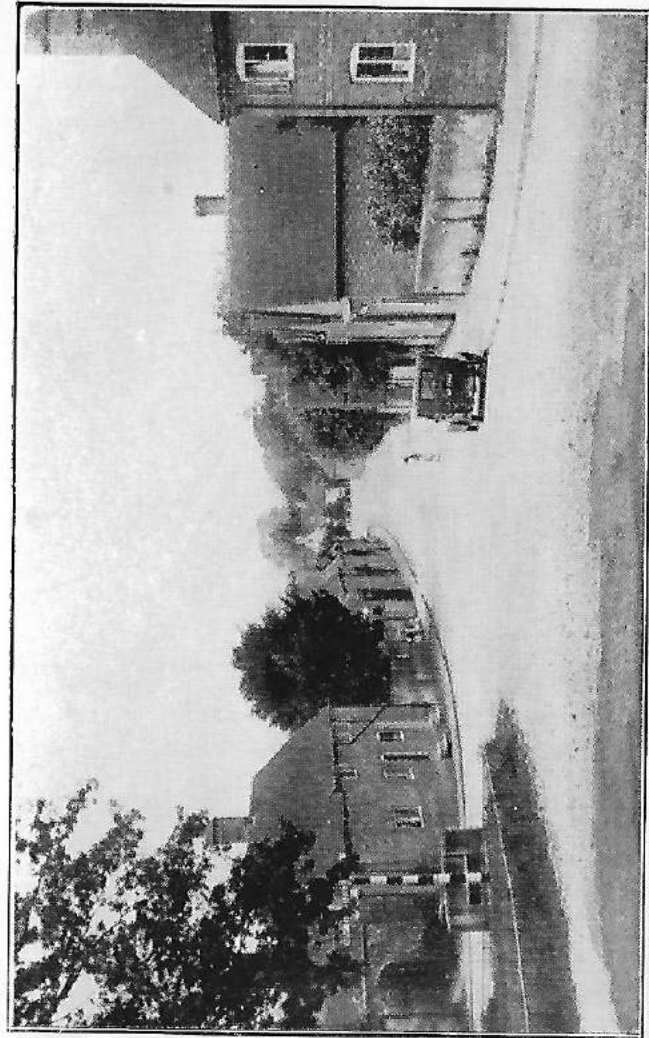
The Vicarage is part of the Park ; outside the upper garden iron gate is the " Vicar's Walk " beside the Lake to the Church. It is surrounded and hidden from view with fine old trees. The Cedar on the lawn is the centre of attraction for garden fetes and folk dance competitions. The masses of flowering shrubs, garden flowers and grass walks make a picturesque setting at any time. The underground vaults and cellars are spacious for beer and wine, and must have been very useful in olden times.

From the grapes of the vines on the cottage walls wine is made and also from peonys, rhubarb, cowslips, and many other herbs.

Till a few years ago quite a feudal system existed. The main street had no paths or side walks. Mr. Keyser desired to retain the old 17th century appearance. We now have them.

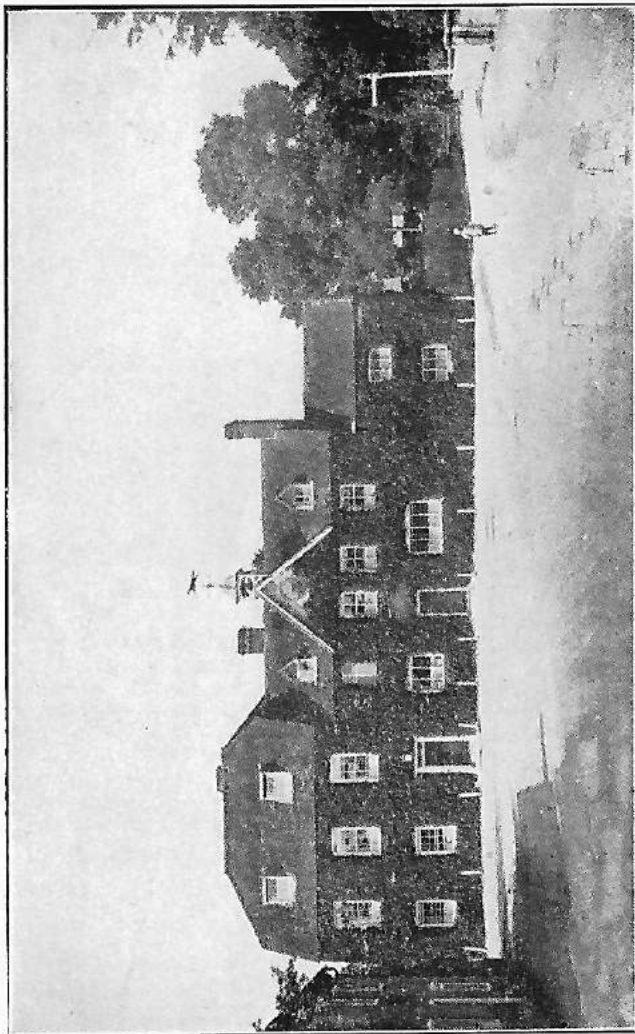
Visitors will notice all through the Village are to be found on the houses or between them grape vines and creepers, various trees and flowering shrubs to break the monotony of the brick work and so make Aldermaston, in the words of Keats :

" A thing of beauty and a joy for ever."



The Village Street.





The "Hind's Head Hotel."

## History and Legends Continued.

The legends would not be quite complete without mentioning the Aldermaston witch, Maria Hale, buried under the Yew Tree in the Churchyard seventy years ago. A parishioner still lives who helped bury her and jumped on the piled stones on the top of the grave to keep her down and prevent her escaping. The villagers were terrified of crossing her. She mesmerised her daughter and son, who withered away and died.

The Brewery is an old landmark of Henry VII. "Ye Olde Malte House" is now converted into Flats. It was one of the Medieval, torturous to the poor men who worked there—the ceilings were so low their backs were bent double in carrying grain from one station to another—like the old Breweries all over England. Very few are in existence now. The old oak beams have been preserved inside and out, and clever alterations made by Colonel Phillips for living Flats and a spacious and lofty Dance Hall.

The same family have owned the Brewery for years and have modernized and greatly improved all buildings on the premises.

Some hundred years ago an Elm Tree was planted in the "Saw Yard" and a shed built round it. It is of tremendous girth and height, but the tree is made less dangerous to other buildings by lopping some of the branches. It is unique: its gnarled roots spread out to a great extent outside the shed in the yard, whence its moisture beside the leaves. Squire Burr, one hundred years ago, would not have it cut down.

Squire Burr, as a hobby, kept "pits" of snakes—hundreds—and always visited the school with a snake around his neck to show how harmless they were. His French cook, Madame Mathieu, cooked with a snake round her wrist. It was the age for "periwigs" and "breeches," and Squire Burr's staff of twenty-five were immaculate.

The Old Mill is mentioned in Domesday Book, 1066 (see page 2) as being sold by Earl Harold for 20 shillings and Fisheries for 5/- each. Since then, although the Mill is on the same site, it has been reconstructed and the Mill House remodernized and used now as an Hotel. Bathing and boating are also favourite pastimes on the River Kennet.

Grim's Dykes are of Celtic-British origin and boundaries or camp enclosures are found in many places. They were used as fortifications, as trenches are now, and are best traced on the map.