

Steeple Aston in 1801 (continued)

Earlier this year a sheet of paper in the Oxfordshire Record Office – folded and covered on three sides with spidery writing – was identified by SAVA as Steeple Aston’s long-lost census return for 1801, in a copy made by the Rector, the Rev. James Armetriding. It’s a pretty basic document, naming just 68 heads of households, with columns of figures to indicate how many families lived there, how many of them were engaged in agriculture, how many in trade or handicraft, how many in neither, how many were male, and how many female. No addresses are given, but we know where some of the more prominent villagers lived, such as the Wings at Westfield Farm (now Randolphins), Mr Jepson the schoolmaster, the Rector himself and Jacob Watson, farmer (near the shop corner). By plotting their positions it soon becomes clear that the 1801 census follows a logical sequence round the village, starting in Fenway and ending at Hill House, off Sixty-Foot, with a couple of outliers tacked on the end – “Mrs Burt” – Ann Burtt, widowed since 1792, landlady at the King’s Arms (now Hopcroft’s Holt), and “Moss” – William Moss, the miller at Cuttle Mill. It’s not easy to tell exactly where Fir Lane and Cow Lane fit into the sequence, but much of the rest is more straightforward. This sample, for instance, seems to fit the western part of Southside from Grange Cottage to Hill House:

Mr Prentice	1	-	3	2	3	2	<i>Isaac Prentice, tallow-chandler – Grange Cottage</i>
Mr George	1	-	-	2	1	1	<i>John George ex-blacksmith, aged 85 – Radley Cottage</i>
Mr Palmer	1	1	-	2	1	1	<i>William Palmer, sawyer (old house on site of Palmer/Tamarisk?)</i>
Gibbs	1	1	-	4	3	2	<i>Thomas Gibbs, labourer (cottage by Tchure?)</i>
Mr Creek	1	-	-	2	1	1	<i>Retired farmer? Brunstone?</i>
Wm Elmore	1	2	-	6	5	3	<i>William, farm worker (farm cottage at Southfields?)</i>
Mr French	2	1	-	5	2	3	<i>Farmer, Southfields Farm?</i>
Mr Harris	2	-	2	4	3	3	<i>William Harris, shopkeeper Appleton House?</i>
Mr Cross	1	4	-	5	7	2	<i>John Cross and sons, farm workers, cottage opp. Red Lion?</i>
Mr Burgess	1	-	-	4	3	3	<i>John probably a cow leech (village vet) - ?Red Lion Corner</i>
Wm Stevens	1	-	1	6	3	4	<i>William – landlord Chequers Inn (now Red Lion)</i>
Mr Dashwood	1	-	-	8	4	4	<i>George Dashwood – Hill House (gentry)</i>

The notes on the right are partly based on firm evidence, partly guesswork – so if you know better, please share your thoughts with SAVA. The Prentices held Grange Cottage at least from the 1766 Enclosure to 1851, as later censuses make clear. John George’s deeds for Radley Cottage survive. Thomas Creek was the earliest in a list of farmers William Wing could remember occupying Southfields Farm (Brookes, History, p156) – but we are in an even earlier era here, and a Land Tax return for 1791 shows a Mr French owning and occupying almost as much land as Jacob Watson. The Crosses, originally from Fritwell, were farm workers of some standing, as the respectful “Mr” indicates. William Stevens, victualler, and member of the widespread carpentry family, bought what is now the Red Lion in 1800, as the deeds of that building show (more on this in a future article). Burgess was almost certainly the village vet, or cow-leech, like later members of his family – he had been licensee (but not owner) of the Chequers Inn before Stevens, so he probably lived close by, perhaps in Red Lion Corner House. Brookes tells us (p 157) that Hill House was acquired by Sir John Dashwood in 1797, and that his daughter Elizabeth later brought it to her husband, Admiral Lechmere – which is all a bit vague. It now seems clear it was bought, or at least occupied, by Sir John’s younger brother George, who died in June 1801, just three months after the census was taken. Some village Rate Books, starting in September 1801, show the rate-payer as “Mrs Dashwood”, and indicate that the house had been passed on to her sister-in-law Elizabeth Lechmere by October 1802. A more detailed version of the 1801 census will appear later on the SAVA website.

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