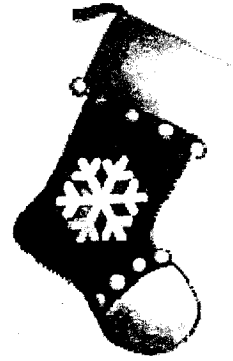



 The logo for 'Sava' is written in a stylized, lowercase serif font. The letters are connected at the top by a thin, curved line that arches over the 'a'.

STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE ARCHIVE TRUST



Wish you were here!

The stories behind the Frith and Packer collections of photographs

Many villages in Oxfordshire and beyond have a rich photographic record extending back 50 years, 70 years or even 100 years. In part, this is due to the work of two men – Francis Frith and Frank Packer. The humble picture postcard, however, also deserves a lot of the credit.

Francis Frith was born in 1822, a few years before the world's first photograph was taken. He became a very successful businessman and was able to retire in 1856, age 34. He started to travel, embarking on several long trips to Egypt. As a founder member, in 1853, of the Liverpool Photographic Society, it was natural that he took along cameras and crates of glass plates to record the places he visited.

In those days, long before the Kodak Box Brownie opened up photography to everyone, taking pictures involved mixing up a light-sensitive emulsion on location, coating a glass plate with the mixture and exposing this in the camera before it could dry. The whole process required patience and dedication.

Francis Frith returned to England and set up a new business taking photographs of interesting places in Britain and selling them to visitors. This was at a time when increased prosperity and the new railways were creating the tourist industry. Many people wanted an inexpensive souvenir of their day out or week away. A photograph of their destination, which was almost impossible for them to take themselves, proved to be very popular. In the mid-1880s, Frith had his picture cards in a couple of thousand shops around the country. It was not long before people started posting these cards to friends and relations, often with the message 'Wish you were here!'

Francis Frith died in 1898, but his family continued the firm – Francis Frith & Co. – and one of their photographers visited Steeple Aston in the mid-1950s to take a series of photographs.

The business closed in the late 1960s, but was relaunched in 1976 as The Francis Frith Collection, a commercial company that sells prints of the original photographs in a variety of sizes and finishes. The collection is now online at www.francisfrith.com where you can see and buy seven different views of Steeple Aston.

Frank Packer, on the other hand, was a local photographer who visited Steeple Aston a number of times. Packer was born in 1876 and set up The Imperial Photographic Studio in Chipping Norton around 1907.

As well as to shooting studio portraits and school photographs he travelled around Oxfordshire and the surrounding counties. Driving a motorbike and sidecar, often with his son Basil onboard, he captured views of all the villages they visited. Many of the images were published as postcards. Original cards can still be found on auction sites and in sales catalogues.

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Frank died in 1967, but Basil continued running the studio until 1984. After Frank's death over 11,000 photographic negatives, many of them on glass plates, were found packed in cardboard boxes all over his Chipping Norton home. They were bought by the Oxfordshire Museums Service in 1984. 'The Packer Collection', as it is known, also includes the work of Percy Simms, a rival photographer whose studio was taken over by the Packers.

For over 20 years The Packer Collection could only be viewed on microfiche at the Oxfordshire Museum or Central Library. However, in 2006 the photographs were placed online at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk (enter 'packer' in the search box on the home page of the site and follow the links for the Packer Collection). 144 images of Steeple Aston can be viewed.

Steeple Aston Village Archive also collects photographs of the village. If you have any photographs of village views, life or people that you would like to be included in the archive, please contact Martin Lipson (martin@lipson1.fsnet.co.uk). Your photographs can be copied and returned if you wish.

SAVA Photo CD No.1 – 101 photographs from the SAVA archive – includes some of the photographs from the Packer Collection (with permission of the Oxfordshire Archives). You can buy this CD online at the SAVA website www.steepleastonarchive.org.uk (follow the 'Shop' link on the left of the home page).

Steeple Aston Village Archive



A view down Paine Street (now Paines Hill) looking north, date unknown but between 1910 and 1930; from the Packer Collection, reproduced with permission.