

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Memories of Old Stewkley - the second of three parts

These recollections of Stewkley old boy, the late E R Hedges of Alresford, Hampshire, were first related in a letter to the Archivist of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.

Part Two

Laurence Stonhill built up a good business. Angus Elmer was one of his early employees as a mechanic and he recalled that Laurence, like his father, was an expert with paint and varnish and was more interested in the bodywork of motor cars than in what was under the bonnet. The name Stonhill Garage has been retained by the various garage owners who have carried on the business since Laurence died in the 1960s.



Air Mechanic 1st Class Laurence Stonhill in WW1 RNAS uniform

Another former employee, John Faulkner, used to make the occasional tip-up Stewkley dung-cart at the back of his terraced cottage in Church Villas. He would trundle his wheels one at a time down the road to the premises of brothers Alfie and Teddy Dickens, old established wheelwrights, when they were going to have a tyre session. (*Dickens Brothers' wheelwright workshop was at today's 27 High Street North.*) He would trundle them back later and eventually the cart would be assembled and painted and ready for the owner to take away. However, his only access to the road was by way of a narrow path, so he would arrange for help to be available when he wanted to manhandle the cart over a low wall into the adjoining premises where there was suitable access to the road. If his helpers failed to turn up, or the cart was called for unexpectedly, he would have to cross the road to *The King's Head* where he would find volunteers (at the price of a pint each) from such regulars as Towser, Runner, Ashy and Suety Jack.



The site of the Dickens Brothers' wheelwright workshop at 27 High Street North



Church Villas, the terrace with the large gable end chimneys on the right, was the site of John Faulkner's dung-cart business. The Kings Head pub on the left was the source of his casual labour.

For several centuries Stewkley was fairly remote. It was not on a recognised route to anywhere and travellers from outside would make a detour to avoid the village if they could. This lack of regular communication with the outside world led to the development of a dialect that was peculiar to Stewkley and was noticed by the antiquarian, Frederick G Gurney, when he visited the village about the turn of the century. (*Gurney lived in Eggington and was a noted local archaeologist and historian, whose papers and research notes are lodged with Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.*) This dialect was well represented in the contributions made by Jack Mead, William Smith, Sidney Hedges and Robert Dimmock when Leeds University undertook a Survey of English Dialect in the 1950s. Stewkley was one of the six Buckinghamshire villages selected for the visitations of the university inquisitors.

Conversations with Jack Mead would produce such statements as **"E were so'in th'aidge ender be the bruk wee is thumb-bi stidda loadin them there wozzel."**

(*Stewkley's dialect linguists have been let loose on this and the best translation we have is: "He was in the hedge (at) the end by the brook with his ('thumpy') lady friend instead of loading those mangelwurzels." If anyone has a sure translation for 'thumb-di' or 'thumpy', the Grapevine would be thrilled to hear.*) The annotations in italics shown in parentheses have been added to E R Hedges' letter by the Grapevine's Heritage Editor to provide background information for our readers. Mr Hedges' letter will conclude with Part Three in the December Grapevine.