

A Brief History

For most of their history the villages of Cumnor and Wootton were in an agricultural area. Wootton, probably founded by Saxon farmers, was given over to farming during the feudal period and was in the possession of Abingdon Abbey. At the time of the Domesday Book (1086) there were no more than about 20 men and their families.

After the severe outbreaks of plague (Black Death) in the fourteenth century and thereafter it became more economical to lease land to individual farmers. This process continued after the dissolution of Abingdon Abbey in 1538 and the granting of the manor of Wootton and Boarhill to the Hyde family. The standard of living of the yeoman farmers rose steadily and they were sufficiently prosperous to leave possessions and money in their wills. They were self-supporting, grew their own food, brewed ale, made flax and used wool for clothes. They drew water from wells in the village and there was a smithy near the village green. There was no mill, however, and corn had to be ground at South Hinksey or elsewhere. Although nearly all illiterate, the farmers played a leading part in the village as churchwardens, constable, manorial court jury and as witnesses to wills and inventories. They had close links to the church, then the chapel of St. Peter.

In the early eighteenth century the Hydes sold most of their estates and the most prosperous farmers bought holdings and became freeholders, notably the Mayos and Richards, with some also sold to "outsiders". One branch of the Richards lived at the farmhouse known as Wootton House opposite Bond's Farm (opposite the modern school). There were many Williams and Thomases among the Richards. Tommy's Farm, near Manor Farm, was perhaps called after one to distinguish it from William further up the village.

At the end of the eighteenth century at the time of the Act of Enclosure the only resident freeholders were the Stones and Richards. From this time the Richards became split between Wootton and Cumnor or moved elsewhere and their importance as freehold farmers eventually decreased.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw a gradual dispersal as new opportunities and occupations became available.

More detailed historical information about Cumnor and Wootton can be found on-line in:

Cumnor Parish Record

British History on-line

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Wootton and Dry Sandford – History

Gabrielle Lambrick's booklet "The Church of St. Peter, Wootton" is available in the British Library.