

CHENIES.

The little village of Chenies lies on a hillside overlooking the beautiful valley of the river Chess.

Its history is a long one. The name Chenies is thought to derive from Cheney; a family of that name were long the Lords of the Manor.

In 1526 John Russell married the heiress to the Cheney estate and became the village's most notable personality. The owner of a small Dorset estate and a gifted linguist he had the good fortune to be presented to Henry VII, who made him a gentleman usher - the first step to an earldom and the great Bedford fortune. Under Henry VIII John Russell became Lord High Admiral of England and he was Lord Privy Seal during the reigns of both Edward VI and Queen Mary. It is said that his portrait by Holbein shows a man who was cautious, prudent and thoughtful. Indeed, this would need to be so if one wished to die in ones bed, as did John Russell, in the stormy days of the Tudors.

John Russell loved the village. He enlarged the manor so that he could entertain Henry VIII and he expressed the wish to be buried in the village church. His widow arranged this and built the Chapel in which all the subsequent Earls and Dukes have been buried up to the present time.

At the same time that the manor was enlarged the village also grew and became considerably bigger than it is today, though there are still several timber-framed cottages dating from this period.

A later and quite different personality, whose memory is still treasured in the village was the Rev. Lord Wriothesley, ^{Russell} a younger son of the 6th. Duke of Bedford. He came to be Rector of Chenies in 1829, when he was 25 years old and stayed until his death in 1886. Although offered high office in the Church he refused to leave his village flock. In the days before the school was built he taught the village children to read and write in the Rectory kitchen and it is recorded that he refused to have a new carpet in his study as the men would not like to walk on it in their boots. The affection in which he was held is attested by the lovely illuminated address, with its charming watercolour scenes, which still hangs in the church. This address was presented to the Rector by the villagers to mark his 50 anniversary as their priest. On each side of the address may be seen the signatures of the doners- said to include the whole village. It is interesting that some of these names are still to be found either in the village or the surrounding area.

It was whilst Lord Wriothesley was Rector that the school was built. Enlarged and modernised it is still in use today. It was at this time too, that the Duke undertook the modernisation of the housing. Many of the old wood-framed cottages were replaced with the brick-built houses

which are still a feature of the village and, brought up to date, are considered desirable homes.

Life in the village must have continued with little change for many decades. The men worked on the estate farms and woodlands. Corn was ground at Dodds Mill and watercress was grown in spring water near the Chess. The larger houses in the area provided work for both men and women. The village blacksmith shoed horses and repaired farm machinery. Bread was baked locally and the necessities of life could be bought in the village shops. With mechanisation, however, came change. Young people were forced to seek employment in near-by towns. Buses and cars took people to market so the local shops closed, the last being the Post Office in

In 1954 the Duke of Bedford sold his Chenies estate in order to pay death duties, bringing to a close the Russell family's long tenure of the estate. However, the split between Woburn & Chenies is not complete, the family still show an interest in the affairs of the village and it is still in the Bedford Chapel in Chenies village Church that the Dukes are laid to rest among their ancestors. Many are the tales still told in the village of the kindness of members of the Russell family.

Outwardly Chenies has altered little since it became a model village in the days of the 9th. Duke, a pleasant place to visit, to walk in the lovely Chiltern countryside, or to visit the church or ancient Manor house of rosy Tudor brick topped with superb chimney stacks and set in beautiful gardens. Now owned by Lt. Col. & Mrs. ~~MacLeod~~-Matthew MacLeod-Matthews, the Manor is open to the public on Wednesday & Thursday afternoons during the summer.