

BENSON**N**

A Village Through its History

Edited by

Kate Tiller

Published on behalf of

The Bensington Society

by

Pie Powder Press

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This project began for me when I tutored two series of evening classes for Oxford University Department for Continuing Education in Benson Parish Hall. As a local resident and a professional local historian I had long thought this part of southern Oxfordshire a potentially rich area for local research. Writing and editing this book has amply borne that out. I am especially grateful to Peter Clarke, who at every stage from the organisation of those early evening classes, to initiating the idea of a book, to developing and supporting the project through the Bensington Society, has been a mainstay of the project. My thanks go to him, to Janet Burtt and to the Society.

My fellow contributors have been:

CHRISTINE HOLMES, a New Zealander, now English local historian, who has distilled her recent research on Saxon and medieval Benson, for which she was awarded the degree of Master of Studies in English Local History with distinction by Oxford University.

PROFESSOR DAVID LOADES, distinguished national historian of 16th-century England and one time resident of Benson.

ALISON REID, who has brought together her great local knowledge of Benson with her talents in teaching and researching history in an excellent account of 20th-century Benson.

CATHERINE MURRAY, who as a professional architectural historian and conservationist, living in one of Benson's 18th-century houses, has skilfully linked surviving buildings to patterns of village history.

I am immensely grateful to all of them for the considerable work they have put into this volume, for the fascinating material they have produced, and for responding so constructively to my editorial suggestions. All of us have in turn debts of gratitude to the many people who have contributed information, ideas or advice, and these are acknowledged at the end of individual chapters.

I hope the resulting book will serve both as a record and interpretation of Benson's past and an illumination of its present, and wish the Bensington Society well in its aim to keep recording and publishing Benson's local history.

Kate Tiller, Oxford and Rokemarsh, August 1999

Preface

From the Editor

The turn of the millennium is a good time to pause and understand why Benson has thrived as a community since well before words were first put on parchment. With this book we believe we have a fine history which will serve as a reference for villagers of the present and future. It could not have been published without the help of many in the village and elsewhere, whose help the Bensington Society wishes to acknowledge.

Foreword

*From the Bensington
Society*

The Chairman back in 1994 attended a series of talks on the history of Benson given by the Editor. It was clear that here was an opportunity to record our history in a scholarly yet readable book. The Committee was delighted when Dr Kate Tiller accepted the challenge. Subsequently, support by the chapter authors, some local and well known in Benson, some from much further afield, was essential. We are proud of their work.

Without financial support nothing was going to be possible. Our gratitude goes to individuals and village organisations who gave their help: Mr & Mrs Delens, Dr & Mrs Bosley, Miss Audrey Jones, Mrs Ketley, The Parochial Church Council, The Evergreen Club by holding a series of raffles, Benson Bellringers and Benson Swimming Club.

It became clear in discussion with our local publishers - Pie Powder Press, that more cash would be necessary and the magnificent anonymous promise of a donation to cover the remainder of costs enabled the publication plans to proceed. Subsequently a grant of £1,000 from the Greening Lamborn Trust, together with a promise of an interest free loan, if required, has enabled us to go for a worthwhile print run. Practical proof of the village's support is reflected in the list of subscribers appearing at the end of this Book.

As we go to press, news has just arrived of further support in the form of a Millennium Grant from South Oxfordshire District Council.

Without the support of the villagers of Benson, as well as friends from our surrounding communities, nothing would have been possible. Our thanks to you all.

Peter Clarke, Chairman, Bensington Society, April 1999

In 1996 the idea of publishing a history to mark the end of the millennium was proposed through the pages of the *Benson Bulletin*, the community magazine of the village and parish. Three years later that book is completed and reflects not just one thousand years of local history, but clues stretching back in the case of written records to the 6th century AD and in the archaeological record to the palæolithic and the tenth millennium BC.

Certain constants, amongst them the river, routeways, geology and soils, and links and relationships with other places, recur in varying forms again and again. From being a site of early settlement and cultivation, Benson developed to be a royal vill of major importance and the centre of a far flung surrounding estate in the late Saxon period. Thereafter it was a working agricultural community, with absentee lords and a common field system of unusual complexity, extending to neighbouring villages and tied to its earlier status as an

Chapter 1 Introduction

Kate Tiller

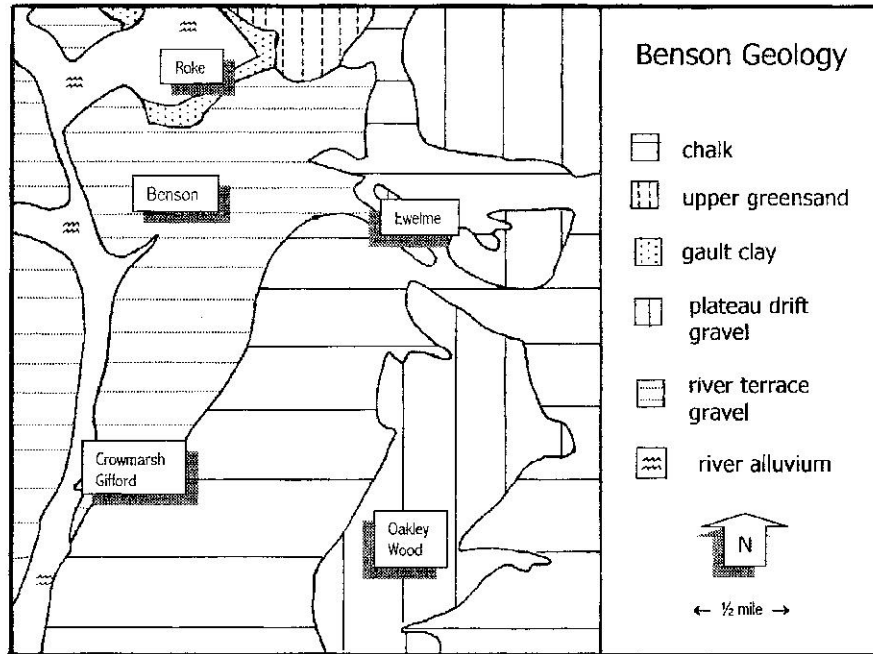


Fig 1.1: The geology of Benson