

BENSON

A CENTURY OF CHANGE: 1900-2000

by

Janet Burt

&

Peter Clarke

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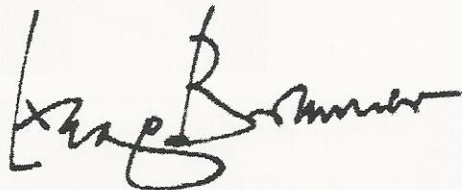
2004

I have known Benson since the Second World War, during which I lived as a small boy in Rotherfield Greys. I distinctly remember meeting then, with my father and mother, a Station Commander and believe I also met some Czechs who had escaped from their occupied country and were presumably serving in the Royal Air Force at Benson. Since then I have often visited the Station and the village, and I particularly enjoyed coming to open the Millennium lych-gate, made by craftsmen from the village.

Kate Tiller's *Benson – A Village Through its History* is indeed a fine work. It was one of more than 90 books about Oxfordshire communities which, according to the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies (one of the glories of the County), was published in the Millennium year.

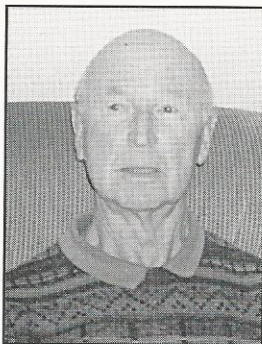
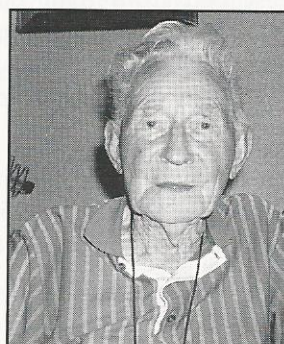
Benson – A Century of Change 1900-2000 is the first book I have come across that naturally flows from one of those Millennium publications. And it is fully justified, for the reason given in the Preface and because it is such a good read. It bears comparison with Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield* and his other evocative book written around personal testimony, *The View in Winter*.

It is also a reassuring witness to the vitality of village communities. Benson is not likely to have to face threats of the order of "an armoured thrust across the Thames by a German Panzer Division", but in these days of centralisation, local life and local autonomy need to be affirmed. This book serves that good purpose too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hugo Brunner', written in a cursive style.

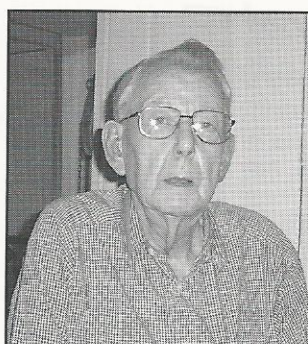
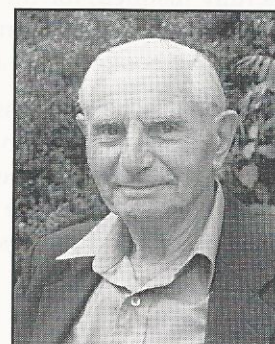
Foreword
by Hugo Brunner
Lord Lieutenant of
Oxfordshire

'OUR HEROES'



These are the 'heroes'
without whose recollections this would just
be a book of old photographs

Clockwise from top left:
*Ivy Barney (née Painting); Alice Beal (née Lane);
George Gurney; Ida Harkness (née Young);
Fred Lidyard; Barbara Perry (née Price); Fred Smith;
Isabel Taylor (née Coggins); Eva Vocking (née Beal);
Jack Wheeler*



Why on Earth, readers are entitled to ask, is it necessary to have this second book on Benson, so shortly after the 1999 publication of *Benson – A Village Through its History*? Certainly, that masterful local history edited by Kate Tiller is the envy of many similar communities around Oxfordshire, and indeed elsewhere. In particular, Alison Reid's Chapter 6, 'Twentieth-Century Benson' is an overview of the period we write about, to which both authors have been grateful to refer, time and again.

This book, however, was written in response to a frequently heard comment which ran more or less as follows: 'Yes, that first one was a great book (mind you, a bit academic, and I haven't read it all through yet!). But I was just a little disappointed. I'd been hoping to find lots of my childhood memories, and pictures of how the village looked in those days'. This, then, is an attempt to redress that need.

The two authors went about the task in different ways. Janet's research started on in-depth interviews with ten people, born and bred in Benson, and who subsequently lived here for many years. Their remarkable ability to recall events, which would otherwise have been lost forever, makes them the real 'heroes' of this book. That is why we refer to them as such opposite. This then led Janet on to other sources.

Peter, in contrast, was able to draw on a very happy childhood in the village during and just after the Second World War. What was not retained as a series of memories, he set out to research, particularly those events that occurred after he had left and before he returned in retirement. Fred Smith's unique photograph collection was the gold mine.

The one commonality for the authors, however, is the magnificent support we have both had from villagers – those who continue to live here, as well as those who have moved away. Acknowledgements appear elsewhere, but the simple fact is that the book, like its predecessor, simply could not have been possible without that help. This is a truly **community** effort, and we both thank you – one and all!

Preface



The 'scribblers' – Janet Burtt and Peter Clarke – select the photographs