Introduction

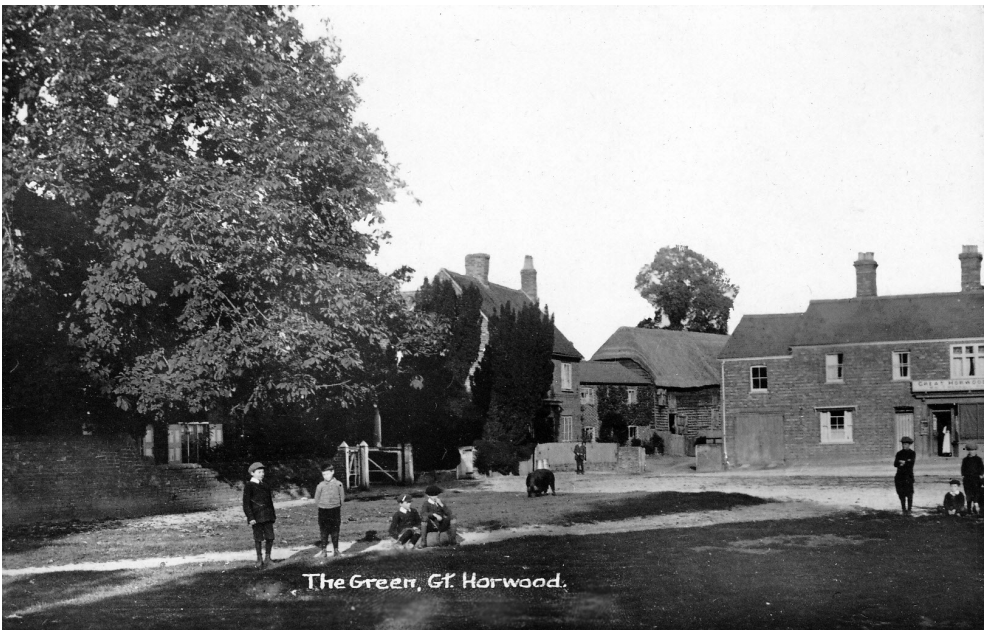
Rod Moulding

On this sunny summer evening a lone figure makes his slow way home across The Green. Muddied and weary from a day spent cultivating his crops, he carries his tools over his shoulder. Pausing for a moment, he wipes his brow with his shirtsleeve and wishes he had time for a pint of beer at the Crown before going home to his wife and children. You may ask – when was this? It could have been any time in the last two hundred years or more, for all that has changed in that time is that The Green is populated by motorcars rather than livestock, and tarmac has replaced mud and stones. Around The Green the same handsome late Georgian brick houses look down upon the tree; the tower of St James can still be seen to the west; the Crown still dispenses beer and good cheer; children still play on the grass; the village still centres itself on The Green.

Yes, not a lot has changed in parts of Great Horwood, at least superficially. This continuity from an earlier age – not necessarily a better age or one that we would wish to return to – is an important factor in the character of the village. As we shall see, the nature of the village, both in terms of physical appearance and of social make-up, has been shaped by the events of the past.

The Green in quieter times.

From The Green we can see the effects of many of these events. Here and there we can spot thatched and half-timbered buldings among and beyond the Georgian brick; these are some of the remnants of the Great Horwood that existed before a great fire destroyed sixty houses in 1781. If we look carefully we can see one or two more modern buildings, just a few of the houses that have changed the face of some parts of the village in the years immediately before and after World War II. We can see but a single shop, now selling kitchens, since the shops and other trades that once gave life to the village have sadly gone.



Life was more leisurely then; a pig roams The Green, probably early 20th century.

There are two influences on the village that we cannot see from The Green. From here we cannot see the post-war housing that has been built on the site of the buildings of the wartime airfield called RAF Little Horwood (but which was mostly in Great Horwood), which has led to a large expansion in population (although not to a lessening of Great Horwood's village-y feel). Another influence on the village is not visible, for the simple reason that it does not exist and never has. This is the 'big house' that so dominated many English villages with its resident gentry or even aristocracy, and had an accompanying effect on village landholdings and social structures. There has never been a 'big house' in Great Horwood, and the local social structure has for many centuries been remarkably open. We shall see that this can plausibly be traced back as far as 1320, thanks to Great Horwood's astonishing richness of medieval records.

Meanwhile, The Green continues to adapt. A young oak tree now grows on The Green, to be in time a worthy successor to the ancient oak that a 19th century chronicler recorded as having room for six men to stand upright

The Green today, by Monica Jones.

inside. Donated by a generous villager, a handsome village sign proclaims our identity and village pride; seats (also donated) line the grass. The tarmac is more practical, although less picturesque, than mud and stones (The Green was never all grassed), let alone the noxious pond that existed there until the 1860s. Like The Green, Great Horwood continues to take the best of the past and to blend it with present-day realities, without losing the character that is so important to the village.

This modest volume is a portrait of Great Horwood through the ages. Like all portraits, some will see it as a better likeness than others. We hope that in it we have depicted some of the character of Great Horwood through its long and fascinating history, the vibrant and friendly life of today's village, and the links that bind together ancient times and our own.

As a community project involving numerous volunteers, the creation of this book has been a complex process. Many of those involved have spent most of their spare time in 2011 and 2012 to help bring the project to

The Great Horwood village sign, by Chris Horwood (Dorset).

fruition. The authors and the editor have endeavoured to include information and comments from a wide variety of sources, to seek out pictures and stories that will be familiar to some but new to many, and to write about all of this with an eye to Great Horwood's most interesting asset – its people. If we have provided a little entertainment as well, so much the better.