

Introduction

While an enormous amount has been written about Iron Age and Roman Silchester, the story of the evolution of the parish over succeeding millennia has been comparatively neglected.

Various editions of the admirable guide to *St Mary the Virgin Silchester* have included intriguing historical details, often in footnotes. Other records, descriptions and articles, some unpublished, have also helped to acquaint us with events and personalities within our parish over the centuries. This book is an attempt to draw together information available from all these sources to chart the story of Silchester from its ancient origins to the present day.

The Silchester Story is divided into four parts.

In *The Here and Now* we describe the parish as it is at the start of the third decade of the 21st century. We also briefly summarise earlier histories of Silchester and devote a page to Florence A Davidson, an amateur historian whose extensive researches into north Hampshire's past were undertaken just over one hundred years ago.

Our narrative in *Silchester Over the Centuries* takes us from the prehistoric origins of our local landscape into the profound changes which occurred as the years unfolded. We have deliberately kept the sections on the Iron Age and the Romans brief as we cannot improve on the many published works covering these eras. Obviously as we drew nearer the 20th century more material became available and, in some instances, we were given information by those with first-hand knowledge. We were also fortunate to have the benefit of a memoir written by Michael Knight about life in the village in the first half of the 20th century.

Within this section we have devoted separate pages to Silchester's 18th century clockmaker Thomas Dicker; amateur archaeologist Lt Col Karslake; architect Norman Evill; and the father and son after whom Whistler's Lane is named. Additionally, in 2.18 we give brief details of three talented individuals who enjoyed a close association with the parish in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Next, in *The Past Around the Parish*, we describe Silchester's best-known landmarks and their individual histories. We have discovered some fascinating details concerning familiar buildings, making their stories well worth preserving.

Finally, we look at *The Past in Private Houses*. The story of Silchester is essentially the story of the people who have lived here. It has been a privilege to receive information about a number of residences and the colourful individuals who occupied them over the years. We have told the stories of these people in the context of their dwellings, although this has inevitably created a lengthy chapter on The Old House which was the Rectory for over 200 years.

It is important, at the outset, to express our appreciation for all the generous assistance we have received in preparing *The Silchester Story*. Quite simply, without the contributions of all those mentioned in the *Acknowledgments* section, this book could not have been written.

We must stress that *The Silchester Story* is not an academic study and we do not claim that it constitutes the definitive history of the parish. We have drawn heavily on the work of others in an attempt to bring together a

coherent manner in one attractive volume. Of necessity we have been selective and may have omitted details if what we held was sketchy. By contrast, we make no apologies that in a few places some elements of duplication may be found where the same facts relate to more than one section of the book.

In several places we refer to a sum of money. Where it might be helpful to appreciate the relative value of the amounts quoted, we have provided the 2023 equivalent using the Bank of England inflation calculator. These amounts are shown in square brackets using italics preceded with the abbreviation *approx.* Thus £100 in 1900, which is equivalent to about £9,710 in 2023, and would be shown thus: £100 [*approx. £9,710*].

From time to time it has been necessary to refer to the local authority. Prior to the local government changes in 1974 Silchester was part of Basingstoke District Council (BDC). Thereafter it was part of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (B&DBC). To save space and tedious repetition we have throughout used only the appropriate abbreviations.

The Silchester Story. We have balanced them with the text, ever mindful of the constraints of space and the limits of our budget.

All the information in this book is presented in good faith. We have passed on without embellishment what we have learnt from individuals or gleaned from other written accounts. However, while we have attempted to write a narrative which is factually correct, we cannot guarantee that we have not perpetuated the odd inaccuracy which may have been present in material to which we have referred. If so, this was not intentional, and we ask our readers to accept and understand that we had neither the time nor resources to double check every fact or reference.

Finally, we are acutely conscious that, hidden in archives or locked away in private houses, there may be a wealth of material relevant to the history of the parish waiting to be discovered. We will therefore be delighted if, after reading this book, another team is inspired to undertake further research, continue our work and perhaps, one day, publish *The Silchester Story, Volume II*.

Stephen Bibby

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Silchester – March 2023



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