

SHEARSBY VILLAGE HISTORY (PAST AND PRESENT)



FOREWORD

Shearsby has a long history. Its roots go deep into the past. The name (Shearsby) itself evokes the Danish invaders and settlers in these parts long before the Norman Conquest and the undulating ridge and furrow in the surrounding fields is a visible reminder of the husbandry which had been practised by the inhabitants in its former open and common fields from the days of its earliest settlement until the late 18th century, when enclosure brought into being the field pattern familiar today and so revolutionised centuries - old farming practices.

There still stand, too, ancient cottages of the 16th and 17th centuries; not dead relics of the past but adapted and used for 20th century living. Of these the most outstanding is undoubtedly the Yeoman's Cottage opposite the churchyard. It is a very fine example of a yeoman farmer's house of the late 16th or early 17th century which has been beautifully restored and at the same time suitably convened and fitted to provide modern amenities and services.



Yeoman's Cottage

The blending of the past and the present is a feature which strikes the visitor; for its modern housing development does not intrude so as to mar the historic character of the village; the new is grafted into the roots of the old. The numerous factors which have moulded and shaped Shearsby over the centuries into the community of today are here recalled in this booklet which has been prepared by the people of Shearsby under the editorship of Mr R. Southerton for the Shearsby Festival.

SHEARSBY Past and Present

One hundred years ago the village of Shearsby, nestling in the heart of the attractive countryside nine miles south of Leicester, was said to have "... 306 inhabitants and 1150 acres of fertile land, watered by two rivulets which unite on the west side of the village."

In the days before the Enclosure Acts there was but a deeply rutted, un-metalled roadway which passed through several pretty villages between Wigston and Husbands Bosworth and along which bumped and bounced the coaches and farm vehicles of the day. One such village is Shearsby, at whose Inns many a weary traveller must have stopped to quench his thirst.

Shearsby stands some 400 feet above sea level at the edge of the Welland Valley, on ground which may well have marked the sea shore in some long ago millennium when all the lowlands to the south were covered by the great Midland Sea in the Silurian age, 400 million years ago.

The name Shearsby tells us that it was part of the Danelaw and means that it was the village of the Swaef, who would have been some minor chief of the Danes. He must have settled here with his family during the Danish invasions and set up a small camp. Here he and his descendants remained undisturbed until the Norman Conquest, for reference to the Domesday Book tells us that Svesbi was still in existence then.



The Domesday Book

VIII. ELEMOSINAE REGIS.

"Uxor Quintini tenet de Rege II carucatas terrae in Svesbi, & alias duas in Sutton: In his habet I bordarios. Terra est II carucarum. Valuit XV solidos; modo III solidos."

VIII. The King' Eleemosynary Lands.

The wife of Quintin holds of the King two plough lands in Svesbi, and other two in Sutton, parcel of the king's eleemosynary lands, which in the reign of the Confessor had been valued at fifteen shillings, but was then worth only three shillings.

X. TERRA ALBERICICOMITIS IN GUTLACISTAN

"Normannus tenet. IIII carucatas terrae & dimidiam in Svevesbi. In dominico sunt II carucae; & IV villani cum II socmannis & III bordariis habent II carucas. Pratum IV quarentenarum longitudinis. Valuit XV solidos; modo XXXX solidos."

X. The Land of Earl Aubrey in Gutlacistan.

Norman held under earl Aubrey four plough lands and a half in Svevesby, which in the reign of the Confessor had been valued at fifteen shillings, and was then worth forty shillings. In the demesne were two ploughs; and four villans, with two socmen and three bordars, had two ploughs. There was a meadow, four furlongs long, and two broad.

XIII. TERRA HUGO DE GRANTEMAISNIL.

"Huardus tenet 1 carucatam terrae in Sevesbi de elemosina Regis, quas habet in vadimonio. Terra est dimidia carucae. Hanc habet ibi unus miles. Valuit, & valet, V solidos."

XIII. The Land of Hugo de Grantemaisnil.

Huard held one plough land in Sevesbi of the king's eleemosynary land, which he had in mortgage which had been worth five shillings in the reign of the Confessor, and continued of the same value. The land was equal to half a plough; and was in the occupation of a knight.

The Domesday Book of course is not the only record made all those centuries ago. Each age has made its own attempts at retarding life for posterity, but unfortunately many of these records, being kept in the great religious houses of the time, were lost and destroyed in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Monasteries. A few do exist and reference to the Hundred Rolls of Edward 1 tells us again some of the facts about the Shearsby of that time. The Hundred Rolls, as they were called, derives from the fact that the survey was conducted in the Hundreds, or as they are known today the Rural Districts in civil parishes, although the ecclesiastical parishes are still grouped in Hundreds. Shearsby is part of the Guthlaxton Hundred.

The Roll of Edward I mentions that the Knights Hospitallers of Jerusalem had one carucate* of land here; but of whose donation, or at about what time we have been unable to discover.



* A measure of land, as much as could be tilled by one plough in a year.

Other rolls tell us that there were two manors in Shearsby; and that in 1564 there were 18 families in Shearsby. Church records dating from 1658 show that Shearsby was then a chapelry with Knaptoft which lies some two miles to the south but the records tell us little of the life in the village other than the births, marriages and deaths.

For centuries before enclosure Shearsby had its great open and common fields which were three in number and known as Rowlow Field, Branthill Field and Thorpe Hill Field. The Enclosure Act of 1773 divided up the intermixed strips of the great fields into compact blocks of land; in this way we were given our present field pattern.

The present A50 (A5199), an ancient road, was turnpiked eight years before the enclosure by a special Act dealing with the road, passed in 1765. The new road skirted the villages. The Inn in Shearsby became a "local" and a "New Inn" was built on the main road, but has since become a farm.

In an Act passed in 1773, for dividing and inclosing the open and common fields and common pastures of Shearsby in the parish of Knaptoft in all about 48 yard-Lands, and containing 1050 acres, the Rev. Charles Stokes, Rector of Knaptoft, and entitled to two yard-Lands of 'glebe, part of the 48 yard Lands: to all the tithes of corn and grain, to all small tithes arising within the liberties of Shearsby and to certain moduses, compositions, or money payments, in lieu of the tithes arising within the said open and common fields: and George Turville, Esq., Richard Turville gent., Joseph Noble, John Seak, John Wyatt, Thomas Burrowes and others, were proprietors of the residue of the common fields.

An allotment was first made for the highways and to the rector, as compensation for his glebe: two fifteenths of the residue in lieu of tithes and all other payments, (surplice fees, Easter offerings and mortuaries excepted)..

This same George Turville instituted a Sunday school, paying the whole expense, in about 1770 which in 1790 had between 50 and 60 children.

By the return of Parliament in 1801 Shearsby contained 61 inhabited houses and three uninhabited, 61 families of which 121 males, 128 females, in all 249; of whom 54 were chiefly employed in agriculture and 127 in trade manufactures and handicrafts.

Down in the village, life went on much the same as before but with the enclosures and the upsurge of sheep farming many small businesses began springing up.

Shearsby became a thriving village, so much so that by 1881 the population was some 261 people, having its own school, nowadays used as the Village Hall, two fellmongers yards in which a number of local inhabitants found employment, a candle makers, seven farms and four public houses, one of which was also a local

spa of some repute. There was a local blacksmith, a baker and miller, a wheelwright and two shopkeepers.

Many of the villagers kept their own pigs and made their own bread from flour ground by the local mill which stood on the hill at the southern exit of the village, in the direction of Knaptoft, itself once a large village and whose church, now in ruins, is said to have been destroyed by Cromwell at the time of the battle of Naseby. The mill was built around a huge tree trunk which was eventually taken to Kibworth to be used in a building there.

Not far from Shearsby there lived around 1840 a couple called John Ball and his wife Jane, dreadful people who terrorised the district and killed and robbed people travelling along the main road. This husband and wife highwayman team buried their victims on either side of the road but eventually paid for their misdeeds by being hung in chains. They now lend their name to history, as two fox coverts here in the heart of the Fernie Hunt country are still referred to as the John Ball and the Jane Ball coverts.

The church itself is dealt with in some detail elsewhere in this book but it is interesting to look back in an old Vestry meeting minute book starting at 1802 which shows how the church and its wardens dealt with the village administration, housing the poor and in some instances being summoned to fetch them back from other parishes where they had wandered without visible means of support. The wardens had to sign the apprentice's book when a youngster from the village was articulated to a craftsman in Leicester.

Each year a rate was levied and in one instance a special tax was gathered to send a man off to join the Militia. Each year they would rent out two plots of land for grazing or tilling and these are still bid for today at the annual Parish Meeting. One of these Parish lands is called the Bullhooks and the minutes of the day tell the conditions on which it was let:

1815. The Bullhooks to be let till upon these conditions. The person that takes it is not to plough nor dig it and if mowed to lay two cart loads of muck upon it, and the person that takes it to pay the money down, and all expenses that come upon it.

1821. The person that takes it is not to plough nor dig it, and if mowed to lay two cart loads of dung upon it whether the hay is eat upon it or not and to quit at the expiration of that time without further notice."

The other parcel of land called the Gravel Pits, was given to the village at the time of the enclosure for fetching and carrying of stone to repair the turnpike. It was subsequently let under the following conditions:

7th April 1835.

At a vestry held this day it was agreed upon to let the Gravel Pit (for the benefit of the Parish) by ticket, it being divided into 9 allotments for that purpose. The following are the conditions: -The persons becoming, tenants to enter upon their

respective allotments immediately agreeing to pay the rent to the Surveyor of the Highways on or before the 1st Monday in September next or in default thereof the crop to be forfeited to the Parish. That no part of the soil or earth shall be taken away. That the ground shall not be dug or disturbed within 4 feet of the quick. To give up possession at Christmas next. That no livestock shall be turned in and that the large banks shall not be thrown down.

Other entries tell how four cottages in the Butterpot were sold off for £50:5s:0d and that the purchaser was allowed to pay half of that sum and an interest of 25 shillings each half year on the remainder.

Many an interesting story lies behind the innocent enough looking residences seen in Shearsby today. Quite a few of the cottages, whether modernised or not, are built of brick hand-made locally. These bricks are distinguished by their variations in size and shape and they seem to have stood the test of time very well.

The Parish Church of St. Mary Magdalene, mainly Early English, stands in a commanding position on a mound to the north side of the village. The centre of the village has a traditional village green but it was at one time the gardens of the old Rectory which stood at the western end of the rise.

At the centre of the village, in the square, are two former farmhouses, one of which known in old records as The Hall, housed the village slaughterhouse and butchery. It is now known as the White House. It has some of the nice old hand-made bricks with the date and maker's initials on them. Next to it stood a Tudor house which eventually fell into neglect and was demolished to make way for a modern building.

On the Bank overlooking the south-east corner of the green there still stands what was once the Old Crown Inn and its brew house, all long since converted into a group of cottages standing among a veritable bank of flowers and bushes.

The east side of the green is defined by the Stoneleigh buildings which once housed the fellmongers and other trades.

Above the Tudor House there was and still is the Chandlers Arms, which originally was not an Inn but a candle makers business, hence the name. Some 30 were employed in making the tallow candles of the time. The "Chandlers" is built of the local Shearsby brick.

There is some evidence that the New Inn up on the main road was built in 1765 at a time when the new road was made to by-pass the village. A former vicar of Mowsley, the Rev. J. H. Green, has made some records to that effect. Also the County Archivist's record shows that the New Inn was registered in the Quarter Sessions in 1768, the landlord being William Seal who was there until the 1790s. He was succeeded by one Thomas Robinson who stayed until 1816, but after this the landlords changed frequently. An old Shearsby resident (Mr. Higgs) says the licence was surrendered in 1910. He can remember the iron railings in front of the house being made by the blacksmith in Shearsby, who then lived in Church Farm which stands immediately below the church. The smithy itself has now disappeared.

Field View Cottage is one of the older houses in the village and stands in a very good position overlooking the green, facing the spot where the old Rectory used to be. It has been kept in very good repair. During the last century, it was the village Carrier's house and also a shop. The carrier had a stable where he kept his horse, and he carried parcels to Leicester and Harborough.

Up Mill Lane there are several old cottages which have been lovingly renovated in recent years. One of these, West View Cottage, was once occupied by a baker who made bread and allowed the villagers to use his oven for cooking their pies and cakes. Where the garages stand, used to be the Post Office. The baker was also the miller, and the Mill stood in a field on the opposite side of the lane.

The Old Crown Inn was described by former owner John West on in his Will in 1791 as "my cottage, tenement or dwelling house with the yard, garden and appurtenances thereunto", which together with "all my money, securities for money, stock of ale, liquors, household goods and wearing apparel"* he left to his wife Mary. He also bestowed £40 on his younger son John when 21 and £ 10 to his elder son Thomas and his married daughter Elizabeth for each year of their lives.

Mary died in 1815 and left the inn to Thomas, though it had appeared in his name since 1803. Elizabeth was willed her wearing apparel, but John was to get "... the bureau, bedstead, 1 long pillow, 1 strip! Wool-bed bolster, 2 pillows, 2 blankets, and pair of sheets, square dining table, 6 brown chairs, 1 pewter dish, 3 pewter plates and the 3-gallon pan".

The names of subsequent landlords appear spasmodically in the handwritten lists of the Licensed Victuallers and Innkeepers in the County of Leicester until the Leicester and Rutland Trade Directories take over in 1846, when the Inn passed to one Henry Morris who was also a cattle dealer. Other named owners are John Pallat in 1863, Thomas Wallis in 1870 and Thomas Eliot in 1877.

Rose Cottage was originally three small cottages which were alms houses, each with a pig sty, a plum tree and a piece of garden. One was occupied by the village cobbler, who had his little shop at the end and it is still there today.

There is very little thatch left in Shearsby, but two examples are worthy of special mention. One is the quaint old Cobblestones Cottage, overlooking the green, built of wattle and daub and so probably genuine XVIth century. This was the original cobbler's cottage, so at one time there would have been two cobblers in the village. Cobblestones was valued in 1711 at £23 and 2 shillings. Cobblestones has been re-thatched and luckily is now saved for the admiration of future generations.

The other noteworthy piece of thatch and undoubtedly the most outstanding house in Shearsby, indeed in this part of the country, is Yeoman's Cottage which stands opposite the church and about whose recent restoration many a story has been published.

Yeoman's Cottage.

This old farmhouse is in many ways one of the most fascinating in Leicestershire. Standing up to the road the symmetrical arrangement of the front of the house shows how the country builder, using traditional materials and methods, such as the jettying of the upper floors, designed and created a building of good proportions. It is most fortunate that the continued occupation up to recent years ensured the preservation in its original layout. A few alterations and additions have been made to make it a house to live in at the present time, but in other respects the house bears all the characteristics of a yeoman's farmhouse of the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

The outer walls are of substantial oak timber framing standing on stone foundations. Some of the beams came from previous buildings. There is a cruck timber showing on the side of the house. The panels between the framing were originally filled in with wattle and daub, of which some remain. The picturesque roof is thatched with Norfolk reed. At the rear of the house the area was cobbled in kidney shaped stones for the farmyard. In the corner is situated the original stone well. Also at the rear are the stables and barn, now converted to garage utility and garden room.

All the rooms inside have oak beamed ceilings. Two large rooms have the original open ingle-nook fireplaces with herringbone backs and recesses which were used to keep tinder and salt. The upper floor is reached from the dining room by a quaint twisting old oak stairway which then leads three ways. From the landing can be seen a small gallery and part of the raftered roof made from roughly hewn oak trees jointed and fastened with wooden pegs. There is another oak stairway at the far end of the house.

In the four attic rooms are a wealth of beams and rafters which represent the antiquity of the roof and truss construction, the workmanship of long dead craftsmen. Whether the floors of the bedrooms were built level is not known, but they all slope today; one bedroom sloping twelve inches in fifteen feet.

The diagonal struts on the projecting gable facing the church serve perhaps more a decorative rather than a structural purpose, but form a charming pattern. The top of this gable is over three feet out of perpendicular with the base of the house. On this gable is the date 1669 but the timber framing may well be earlier. Next to the date is inscribed Wyatt J, this being John Wyatt the yeoman farmer who lived there at that time and who is buried opposite where the family tombstone stands in the churchyard.

A Sun fire insurance plate can be seen fixed at the left of the date.

The School

Built in 1860 at a cost of £300, what is nowadays used as the Village Hall was once the Village School which after a chequered history was finally closed on 21st December 1937, by which time the number of pupils had dropped to only seven. But this was not the first time the school had been closed, as we shall see. Old records show that in the early part of this Century the school boasted both a headmistress and an assistant superintendent. There were some 30 pupils whose

ages ranged from four to 13 years. Children came not only from Shearsby but also from Knaptoft and other outlying areas.

It was the practice in those days to give a half-day holiday as a reward for 100% attendance-by all the children-for the previous month, and there are many references to such "rewards". Unfortunately there were also many periods when good attendance was spoiled not by truancy but by persistent illness or by bad weather. For example, the school had to be closed for four weeks in 1911 due to an epidemic of whooping cough. Again, for two months in 1914 for diphtheria; in 1916 for influenza, and in 1917 for chicken-pox.

The weather seemed regularly to have been worse 50 or 60 years ago than we are familiar with today. In the old records there are several references to the school being closed due to bad weather, including snowstorms. The winter of 1916/1917 must have been particularly severe, as there was bad weather all January and snow until March. It was even too cold for the usual May Day celebrations. This was just before the chicken-pox epidemic. The weather had been almost as bad during the early months of 1915 and 1916.

Those were wartime years, when the school-children clearly did their bit towards the war effort. The girls knitted for soldiers, and the boys and girls gave their pennies towards recreation huts for soldiers, supplied by the YMCA. They also undertook strange collections, like "56 lb of blackberries for the Army and Navy", for which they were paid 1 ½d/lb, and "4 cwt of horse chestnuts for munitions". Traditional November 5th bonfires were illegal, as the visiting police constable warned the children, and in July 1917 no school treat was given, as a token economy in food towards the war effort. Contributions were sent to a special fund to help Belgian people in dire necessity. During World War 1 the boys were allowed to leave school at the age of 12 so that they could work on the farms which were so desperately short of labour.

As a result of falling attendance, the school closed in 1924 and the children had to travel back and forth by bus to nearby Arnesby. A reorganization of County education was mooted in 1929 and part of the scheme would involve transferring all children over the age of 11 years to Wigston Magna. Shearsby School was to be re-opened for juniors, which was what many of the local residents had been agitating for, for many years. After many delays, not the least due to the liaison of suitable bus services, the new scheme was implemented and Shearsby School re-opened early in 1931.

Children grow up and the steady decline in the population of Shearsby seemed to continue. In 1932 there was an average attendance of 22 pupils, but not counting minor fluctuations the numbers dropped steadily until in May 1937 only eight remained. The school finally closed on 21st December 1937.

The Bath Hotel or Shearsby Spa.

A feature of Leicestershire is the number of medicinal springs in all parts of the county. Some are Holy wells; those at Ashby and Shearsby are dignified by Bath hotels. Just outside Shearsby itself, about 100 yards from the winding Bruntingthorpe road, there used to be a mineral spring called the Shearsby Spa,

renowned for its health-giving, medicinal and curative powers, particularly in scorbutic and rheumatic cases. The spring or well was some twelve yards in circumference and between five and six feet in depth. The water was said to have been saline, brackish and without any acidity. In fact one gallon of the water contained 185.75 grains of murate of soda, 96.00 sulphate of magnesia, 5.00 carbonate of lime, 12.08 atmospheric air, 5.00 carbonic acid gas and a portion of oxide of iron and sulphuretted hydrogen.

Accommodation was available to enable invalids to benefit from bathing in or drinking the water. There were two baths, one large communal one for the gentlemen and a smaller discreet one for the ladies. Visitors could be accommodated in the Bath Hotel for four shillings and eight pence a day. Baths were two and sixpence each, or a course of nine for one guinea. General Pearson, owner of the 1866 Derby winner Lord Lyon, sent a carriage and pair ten miles daily from Stoke Albany to Shearsby to get this spring water for his favourite horse, to cure him of rheumatism, which it did. Unfortunately the worst tasting Leicestershire water is not half so nasty as the Harrogate water so, on the principle of country medicine, not half so efficacious.

On the site of the spa there stands today a two-bay white house, being a public house appropriately named the Bath Hotel, a popular haven for Rugby enthusiasts and music lovers. Land at the rear of the Inn is used by members of the South Leicestershire Gun Club.

The Shearsby Charity

Village charities, usually put up by local benefactors, were quite common, though many are nowadays dormant except where tradition has been maintained or revived. The Shearsby charities of Ward and Scale date from the 18th Century, though this is by no means old, witness the Poor's Hand Charity of nearby Peatling Parva originating in 1665.

The following passage is extracted from a report made by the Commissioners of inquiry in Charities, published in 1837.

Scale's Charity

The benefaction table (presumably a Parish List of local benefactors) states that Simon Ward gave £30, the interest to be distributed in coals to the poor of Shearsby on St. Thomas's day for ever; and that John Scale gave the interest of £30 to be distributed in bread to the poor on Christmas day for ever.

£30 Scale's Charity, was upwards of 50 years ago (which dates the Charity to pre 1787) laid out by the parish officers in the purchase of three small tenements in Shearsby, under one roof, situated at the entrance of the village from the Leicester road, with a small garden in the rear.

These buildings are in a very bad state of repair, and up to St. Thomas's day 1836 were held by the parish at the annual rent of £1.10.0., the premises having been occupied by parish paupers. These persons have now had notice to give up possession, and the houses will in future be let to tenants at their fair annual value, which is estimated to be about £3 for the whole.

The £1.10.0. has been annually expended by the parochial officers in coals, which

have been regularly distributed on every St. Thomas's day by the churchwardens and overseers among the poor of the parish, a preference being given to the most aged and widows.

Ward's Charity

An entry in the Shearsby Parish memorandum book shows that Ward's charity was disposed of in the manner following, in the year 1832

£20 in the purchase of a house and carpenter's shop, situated in a lane leading to the Old Crown in Shearsby; £4.0.2d. for law expenses respecting the purchase; 9/- for journeys to Lutterworth; and the balance, £5.10.10d. was retained by the parish, at interest of five per cent.

The above premises (house and carpenter's shop) have likewise been held by the parish, who for them and the interest of the £5.10.10d. have paid the sum of £1.10.0. per annum, which has been expended in bread and distributed at Christmas by the churchwardens and overseers among the like class of poor who are admitted to the Coal Charity.

In future, the house and workshop will be let at their fair annual value, which is estimated to be about £1.10.0.

Population and Trades.

We have earlier commented on the steady decline in the population of Shearsby over the past 100 years and more. This table spells it out more clearly:

Year Population

1845 379
1871 299
1881 261
1891 225
1901 207
1911 180
1921 160
1931 172
1951 144

We can compare Shearsby with other villages in the area back in 1846:

Village Population Crofts Agricultural Retail Miscellaneous

Bruntingthorpe 423 25% 46.4% 14.3% 14.3%

Arnesby 505 25% 35% 15% 25%

Kilby 408 31% 26% 20% 23%

Shearsby 379 28% 31% 25% 16%

Peatling Magna 308 40% 20% 20% 20%

Peatling Parva 159 50% 15% 35%

In that same year of 1846 the population of 379 was made up in the following manner:

Building Woodwork Machinery Wool Trade Cartage

1 Bricklayer 1 Carpenter 1 Blacksmith 1 Framework-Knitter 2 Carriers
2 Fellmongers
3% 6% 3% 10% 6%

Retail Trades Vittelers Professional Agricultural Tailors
1 Tallow 1 Butcher 1 Schoolmaster 9 Farmers 2 Tailors
Chandler 1 Miller 1 Schoolmistress 1 Cow Keeper
1 Shop Keeper 2 Bakers 1 Boarding School
3 Publicans
1 Hotel Keeper
6% 19% 10% 31% 6%

By 1871 when the population had dropped to 299 there were among others one tallow chandler, one shopkeeper, one parson, one butcher, three victuallers, one schoolmistress, one corn miller, one grocer, one carpenter, three fellmongers, one tinner and fellmonger and one parish clerk.

The record books tell us that in 1863 (and doubtless long before then) the carrier William Smart plied to Leicester at 10 a.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Today, apart from the workers' morning bus and that for the schoolchildren, there are a couple of buses on Wednesdays and Saturdays. After more than 100 years, such is progress.

The Overseers and Constables Accounts.

In the year 1818 the village overseers or rate collectors were Job Walker and Thomas Weston. An extract of the account for 26th October 1818 reads as follows:

Hannah Jelley 6.0.
Fanny Marlour 4.0.
Fanny Beaumont 2.0.
Elizabeth Heighten 2.0.
Widdo Handle 4.0.
Hannah Packward 3.0.
Widdo Simoni 7.0.
Thos. Wells 0.0.
Richard Burbagc 4.0.
Elizabeth Cramp 2.0.
Ann Freer 3.0.
Thos. Waterfield 6.0.
Widdo Waterfield 3.6.
Mary Brooks 3.0.
George Dyson 1.0.
Sarah Gamble 2.0.
. Mary Snutch 2.0.
1 Hundred of Coals 1.3.

Accounts were also nicely kept by the village constable, from which the following is taken when in 1822 the constable was named Richard Messinger (the spelling is as it was then).

May 4 Pd the majestrats for oath 1.6
To my expences to Les 4.6
10 Pd for the militia mans warrant 1.0
10 To my expence to Blaby 4.6
17 Pd for sparrows 2.1 $\frac{1}{2}$
18 Pd for sparrows 1.6 $\frac{1}{2}$
19 Pd a woman on travel .3
22 Pd for sparrows 1.10
23 Pd. for sparrows 1.0
23 Pd for enrolling the militia man 2.0
23 Pd for militia man 1.0
To my expences for Do 4.6
28 Pd for sparrows 1.6 $\frac{1}{2}$
June 5 For sparrows 1.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ i
5 A woman with palsy .2
7 A man and wife and child with palsy .6
10 Pd for sparrows 1.1 $\frac{1}{2}$
17 Pd for sparrows .10 $\frac{1}{2}$
18 Pd for sparrows 2.0
22 Pd for sparrows 1.6 $\frac{1}{2}$
July 5 Pd for sparrows 1.7
Pd Thos. Bottrill for Cleaning Washpitt 2. 6
for the ipens (?) at the washpitt 5.0
12 The Clarkes Bill at Leicester 5. 6
My expences at meeting 4. 6
Pd a woman on travel .2
Aug. 13 Pd for sparrows 1.1
6 Pd the Clarkes Bill at Lutterworth 6.6
Expences at the meeting 4. 6
26 For taking J. Ward to Bosworth 2.6
Sep. 9 Pd the expences at Arnesby Jurie
for Willm. Findley 11.0
Sep. 17 The expences at Watton Statutes 4. 6
17 R. J. Woodford for iron to Copnor Bridge 1.8
Iron stay for same .10
Oct. 26 Pd for militia papers and list 2.3
11 Pd to a man and woman and children on travel .6
11 Pd expences to Blaby meeting 4.6
27 Pd for sparrows .8

Presumably there was a plague of sparrows for which one halfpenny per tail was paid to encourage their being kept down.

St. Mary Magdalene, Shearsby

Not many yards from the village square, standing on a hill overlooking the parish, stands the Church of St. Mary Magdalene.

An early English building comprising chancel, nave, south porch and tower Shearsby Church has been restored over the years. In 1789 the tower became unsafe and was rebuilt through the initiative of the Landowners, at a cost of £300. The reconstruction, however, was somewhat debased, being left incomplete a few feet above the parapet where it turned octagonal. Later, in 1856 at a cost of £700, the rest of the building was restored when it was also fitted with open seats. Fourteen years after, the walls were in danger of collapsing and were renewed, whilst the roof, being comparatively new, was shored up on timbers. Messrs. Tomlinson & Son of Leicester carried out the repairs, which took two years to complete.

Inside the Church the most interesting feature is the beautifully carved oak rood screen, with broad one-light divisions, which separates the nave and the chancel. It is thought that this screen may have been brought from Knaptoft Priory when it was destroyed by fire. Built into the structure of St. Mary Magdalene are sedilia for two priests. A stone figure of the patron saint formerly stood in one of them but was removed in 1856. Featured in the south wall is a trefoil-headed piscina and there is an aumbry in the north wall.

Within the tower there are four bells, the largest of which weighs 1400 lb. The smallest bell, weighing between 300 and 400 lb. has an interesting story attached to it. Tradition says that, this bell being the property of the Duke of Rutland, the sons of His Grace's tenants at Aylestone fetched it from the ruined Church of Knaptoft, intending to place it on their own steeple, but stopping with their cart to drink at Shearsby, the inhabitants of that hamlet (as parish to Knaptoft) claimed the bell and took possession of it.

The four bells are inscribed thus:

1. Tenor: I.H.S. NAZARENUS REX JUDEORUM, FIU DEI, MISERERE ME, 1620
2. As for the tenor, except that the date is 1625. This is the bell that came from Knaptoft.
3. Has on it the alphabet in Saxon characters.
4. Maria. (Unfortunately this bell is cracked).

In the past Shearsby was a Chapelry with Knaptoft and had its own vicarage, which stood on the green in the centre of the village. Today, however, we are linked with St. Peter's at Arnesby, the vicar looking after both parishes. As a Chapelry with Knaptoft it had the ancient right of sepulture or interment, a resident chaplain and administration of all the sacraments except the chrism. We should understand by chrism either extreme unction or baptism. The word chrism in its general sense means an oil or balsam, consecrated and used in the early Roman or Greek church for ordination, coronation, baptism or extreme unction. Of

these the first two were not likely to apply to Shearsby.

The church is approached by a long steep pathway, on either side of which many philosophies of life are displayed in the epitaphs on the gravestones. Just a few are Quoted here:

Hark from the tombs a dismal sound,
My ears attend the cry,
Ye living men come view the ground,
Where you must shortly lie,
Princess this clay must be your bed,
In spite of all your towers,
The tall, the wise, the Reverend head,
Must lie as low as ours.
1703

Here I must lie till trumpet sound,
And Christ doth for me call,
And when I rise -I hope to rise,
To die no more at all
1712

In memory of William Weston
who unfortunately was catch'd in the Wind-Mill
and expired the 8th of September 1782
in the 16th year of his age.

Stoop Down! my thoughts
That used to rise
Converse awhile with death
Think how a gasping mortal lies
And pants away his breath
His quivering lip hangs feebly down
His pulse is faint and few
Then speechless with a doleful groan
He bids the world adieu.
1803

A span is all that we can boast,
An inch or two of time,
Man is but vanity and dust,
In all his flower and prime.
1835.