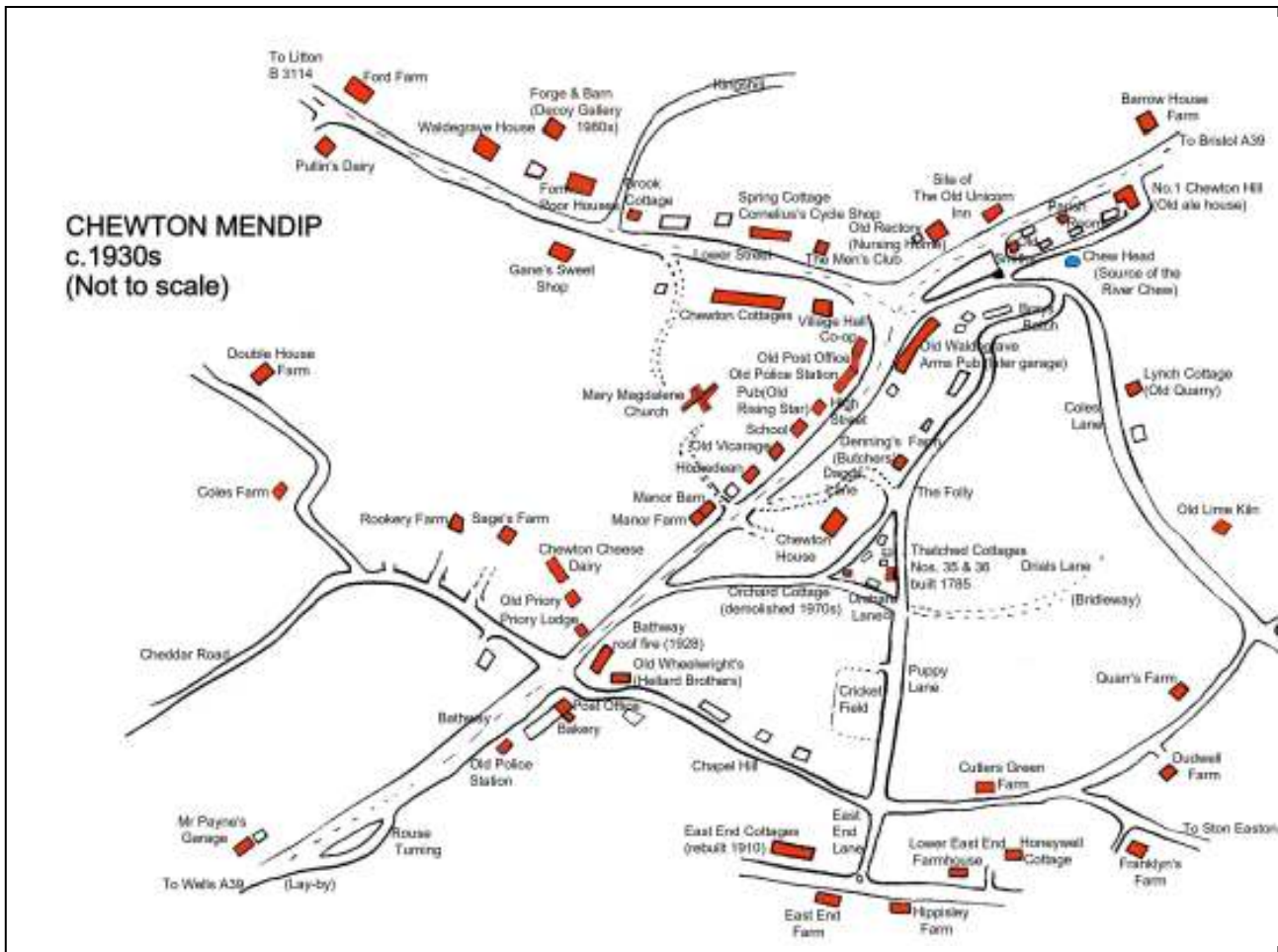


**Chewton Mendip, a typical Mendip village
with a little known claim to fame.**



Chewton Mendip, where the River Chew has its source, is somewhat bisected by the main A39 road, but still has some charming remains of the old village. The following is an account of the village taken from the memories of some of the old inhabitants, illustrated by pictures of the village as it is now.



The bridge and ford at the source of the River Chew, with the tower of the Parish Church of St. Mary Magdalene in the background.



The River Chew in Coles Lane, viewed from the opposite direction.

According to the 1881 Census the population of Chewton Mendip was approximately 200 in 63 households and was almost entirely self-sufficient. Employment was almost entirely within the village. As well as the farmers themselves, there were 44 agricultural labourers, a dairymaid, a shepherd and a stockman. Tor Hill was listed as uninhabited, while the Waldegrave Lead Mine appears to have still been in operation, although the Chewton Mines, which are actually nearer Priddy than Chewton Mendip, were finally abandoned only two years later..



The old school building viewed from the back in 2008, facing the grand new extension behind.

Those employed in services to the village included a schoolmaster with a pupil teacher and scholastic assistant for the village's 65 children listed as scholars; also 2 children who were taught by their older sister and 2 young boys of school age who the census states were employed by their father on his farm. There was an Innkeeper and a Licensed Victualler keeping the Miners' Arms and the Waldegrave Arms respectively, the latter also being a farmer.



The present day Waldegrave Arms (above left) was originally The Rising Sun, while the old Waldegrave Arms on the corner of the High Street and Coles Lane, firstly became a garage after its closure and is now a new residential development (above right).

Apart from the farmers who employed their own families, the other 8 large farms provided employment for 44 labourers and farm servants and a dairymaid, although only 35 persons were recorded as having this as their occupation. Also allied to agriculture were a shepherd, a gamekeeper and a woodman. The more affluent inhabitants, who employed between them 9 domestic servants, a washerwoman and two gardeners, included the Church of England Priest, (without Cure of Souls, M.A.). The elderly widows included 2 annuitants and one pauper living 'on the parish'.



The former Poor House in Lower Street.



The Old Smithy.

There were a substantial number of services provided in the village. These included a Post Office which was also a grocer's and drapers, as well as another draper, a tailor and 2 dressmakers. As well as a bakery there was one shop which was also a beer house and another premises licensed to sell beer. Trades were carried out by a blacksmith with his labourer, a carpenter, a shoemaker and a boot-maker and 5 masons. There was also an acting Sergeant of Police. The coach body maker was most probably employed by the Somerset and Dorset Railway, while the turnpike gate keeper must have looked after the toll gate on the Turnpike road which followed the route of the present-day A39.



The right-hand picture above shows the cottages in Bathway, including the Old Post Office and Bakery at the left-hand end. The Police Station stood to the right of this, but has now given way to a modern house.

Although the local mines were nearing closure, there were still 2 lead miners with 2 assistants and an engine driver who, as he was providing lodgings for the 2 lead miner's labourers was more likely employed at the mine than on the railway.

During the first half of the 20th century, although things had already begun to change, the village remained virtually self-sufficient throughout most of the following century, with various shops and businesses, an undertaker, and several pubs.

The Denning family owned a butcher's shop in The Folly In the early days there was a room at the top of the premises where they slaughtered the animals, but of course, with modern regulations this fell out of use. Later other members of the family also ran a butchery business from Ford Farm. In the early days meat was delivered to customers in Chewton and neighbouring villages by horse and trap or by means of a bicycle with a wicker basket on the front. Tom Denning kept a stable block next to the farm, where he kept his much-loved race horses.

The village still has a bakery and a dairy. There has been a bakery in Chewton Mendip since the mid 19th century, the bake house being originally located behind the Post Office in Bathway, once powered by coke, but having been converted to oil in the 1960s.



The Old Post Office in Bathway, which had a bakery behind it.



The Old Bakery in Chewton Cottages.

With the competition from the large supermarkets, the current bakery specialises in organic and wholemeal bread and rolls.



The Dairy opposite Ford Farm and the cottages alongside.

Unigate bought the village dairy in 2000, but it had existed for many years as Pullin's Dairy. According to Mrs. Edna Pullin, when the milk round came on the market in 1946, her husband Graham bought it, taking over a small round, delivering milk with an old car, with a new trailer behind it. When his two brothers returned from the war, the three brothers formed a company, called Pullin Brothers, eventually expanding to thirty-three floats delivering all over the area, through Wells, down to Bridgwater and up to Bristol. Milk was supplied from local farms, two

being on Lord Waldegrave's Estate. Milk was picked up twice a day in long, narrow, very heavy churns. The dairy had to meet modern specifications so it was all hygienic stainless steel and tested for such things as tuberculosis. The authorities came in regularly, often unannounced to check the dairy and also the floats going round.

The Co-operative Society shop was a general store next to the Old Post Office on the corner of the High Street, opposite the old Waldegrave Arms public house. In its heyday, it was frequented by people from the surrounding area as well as the village itself and was a typical old-fashioned shop, with heavy wooden counters, drawers and shelving, selling almost every imaginable item and running the inevitable Co-op savings club, enabling housewives to save for items they could not afford in one go.



This shop is where the Co-op once stood, with The Post Office to the left of it.



Thatched Cottages in The Folly.

Originally the shop was built by the people of Chewton Mendip. They each paid a certain amount of money in to join a co-operative, probably about a pound each, to have a shop in the village and then, after a number of years, as no villagers were willing to take the shop over, it was offered to the Radstock Co-op, which was the Co-op with which most people are familiar, whereas the Chewton shop was an independent concern. However, the Radstock Co-op showing no interest, the Pullin brothers were persuaded by their mother to buy the business and run it alongside the dairy, products being delivered by Alan F Jones and Company of Radstock. The shop did a good trade in general groceries and everyday wares. It did very well, and when the time came for the Pullins to give it up, a person that had worked there for three years decided she would take it on with her husband. They have run it for at least ten years, but now in 2008 they in turn are due to retire, probably leaving Chewton Mendip, as many other villages, without a shop.

Cheese-making has always been a rural industry and Chewton Cheese Dairy at Priory Farm was no exception, operating not only as a cheese producer, but also formerly from its premises at Dudwell, as a cheese school, until Cannington Farm Institute opened. The process in those days of hand milking was rather different from what one would expect nowadays! 'If you were milking out in the field on a wet day, the rain landed on the cow's back, the flank not being the clean end of the cow, and on a summer's day, the flies would annoy her, so she made use of her tail to move them on, in both cases adding extra natural ingredients, which resulted in maybe fifteen different flavours in a month, when the milk was made into cheese! Of course the milk was strained through a cloth, so all the solids were separated from it.'



Dudwell



Work in progress at Chewton Cheese Dairy

Next to the Cheese Dairy there used to be a grand mansion, purchased by Frances Countess Waldegrave in 1857. Until their move to Chewton House in 1942, The Priory continued to be the residence of the Waldegrave family who are still connected with Chewton Mendip, but in the past were the typical village 'squires'. The last Lord Waldegrave to permanently live in the village, until both he and his wife died in 1995, was held in great respect by the villagers, in whom he always took a great interest. Although he was seriously injured at the beginning of the Second World War, this did not prevent him from struggling around the village with two sticks to collect his paper from the shop every morning and visit businesses such as the dairy to see what new developments had taken place. Both Lord and Lady Waldegrave supported functions such as village fetes. Lady Mary and their daughter Lady Susan Hussey, who is a Woman of the Bed Chamber to the Queen and Godmother to Prince William, frequently helped decorate the church, where Lady Susan's four sisters were all married.

Mrs Edna Pullin says that 'before the war The Priory gardens were beautiful and there were underground tunnels there. By the early 1950s everything was being pulled down and they were selling everything up, including beautiful doors and mahogany wood. Americans had been housed there during the war when the family moved out and afterwards it was left to deteriorate. Bees had come and, as nobody had stopped them, there was honey running all down the outside, so that was the end of The Priory. You wouldn't even know it had been there now.'



Uphill's Garage at Nedge and one of the old family graves in the churchyard.

Another business which should not be left out is the garage. There is still a business run by the Uphill family, who over the years have seen the change from horse-drawn ploughs, through steam engines to modern day vehicles. The business has been passed through eight generations of the Uphill family in Chewton, the earliest member of the family being recorded as a blacksmith in 1765.

Before everyone had the freedom of travelling by car, the Village Hall, built in 1928, was the centre of entertainment. In the winter a man called Freddy Faye, who lived at Burnham, put on a variety show for a week, with his wife who played the piano and his daughter who danced. There was also the Knotto Theatre Company, which came every winter for two weeks with a dramatic play, a different drama every night, with no repeats. They played to a full hall every night.



The Village Hall.



Chewton Men's Club.

There were annual cricket club dances and a farmer's ball, with a band hired to provide the music and excellent catering done by local ladies. The Men's Club was also a centre for leisure activities.

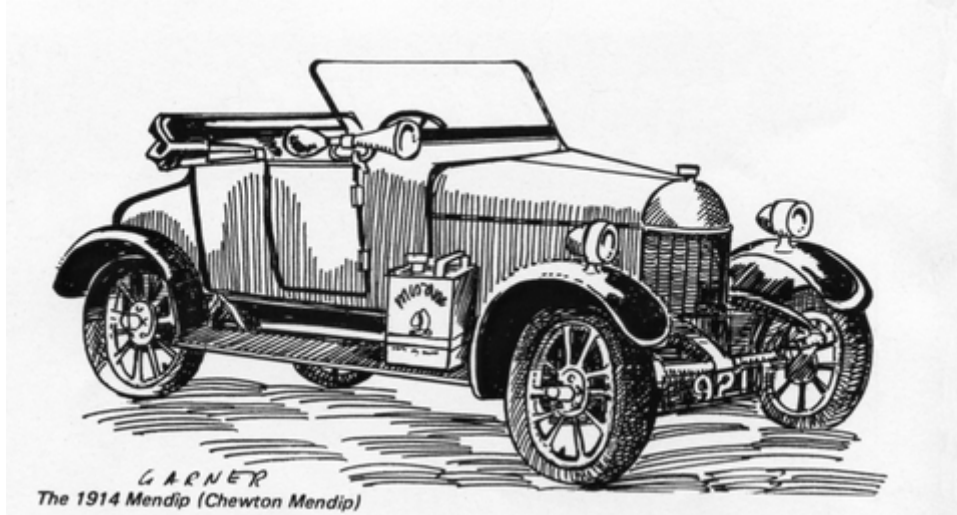
Other historic buildings in the village which should be mentioned are Thimble Cottage in The Folly, built in 1713 and the old lime kiln in Coles Lane which flourished for many years. Now it is only a ruin and difficult to find underneath the foliage.



But what about this little known 'claim to fame'?

THE MENDIP MOTOR CAR

Chewton Mendip's most important claim to fame must surely be the Mendip Motor Car, which was unique in being built entirely in the company's workshops at a time when other cars were being assembled from bought-in parts, made by other firms.



Cutler's Green Iron Works was founded in the early 1800s, when lead and zinc mining were still active in the area, at the time supplying the British Army with swords. A hundred years later mining was in decline, but the company was still flourishing, with its own foundry and forge, repairing farm machinery and casting drain covers and road signs.

At the beginning of the 20th Century the company was controlled by C.W. Harris and trading under the name of The Mendip Motor and Engineering Works. Harris built a few steam road vehicles and then progressed to petrol driven ones. In 1913 he built an 11 horse-power, 4-cylinder engine, complete with clutch and 3-speed gear box and the following year a car to put it in. He named his new car the Mendip.

For interested motoring experts, it was a handsome 2-seater, with a fabric let-down hood, semi-elliptical springs over steel wheels and shaft and worm drive. It sold at £157.10s., considerably cheaper than the 1915 Morris car, even though that was produced with cut-price mechanical parts imported from the USA.

Sadly the outbreak of war in 1914 resulted in the company being sold to W.H. Bateman Hope, who moved production to a larger premises in Bristol where he employed redundant munitions workers. Some cars were built from pre-war stock, but the closure of the Belgian factories which by this time had been building the engines, meant another engine supplier had to be found, causing a resulting increase in both engine size and price. By Bateman Hope's death in 1921, the price had almost doubled Harris's original amount and the operation then ceased as a result of the recession.

The former works manager, G.R. Thatcher formed a company producing Mendip cars at Melksham, but this was short-lived. In all between 300 and 400 Mendip cars were produced, but sadly only one incomplete model still survives.

Acknowledgements: Somerset Studies Library, Jan Truman, Edna Pullin, Ruth Freen and others connected with Chewton Mendip.