

**Photographic
Memories
of
Stoke sub Hamdon**

~ S O M E R S E T ~

**Stoke sub Hamdon
Local History Group**

Design and Layout - Carol Parker

Cover Photograph – Norman Patch

Published by

Stoke sub Hamdon Local History Group 2003

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks to all those who gave assistance and contributed material for this book. They include: Maureen Affleck, Clive Banbury, Lynton Brailey, Lance & Monica Brice, Bridget Brimble, Mary Brimblecombe, Monica Brooks, Ruby Brooks, Ted Broom, Mary Brown, Eric Burgess, Joyce Bussell, Eileen Caines, Janet Caines, Mabel Caller, David Chant, Mike & Joy Chorley, Alan Court, Steve Dean, Dents Gloving Museum, John Dodge, Caz & Mike Doyle, Phyllis Drayton, Leila Drew, Nancy Dunford, Bonnie & Fred Forsyth, Peter Fowler, Gordon Geard, Rev. C. George, Cecil Gillman, John Glover, Ann Goad, Vera Goad, Mauvyn Greenham, John Grinter, Miriam Grinter, Olive Gummer, Humprey Hamlin, Myrtle Hann, Judith Hayward, Jane & Nicola Herbert, Moira Hulett, Queenie Holt, Godfrey Jones, Martin Jones, Prof. M. Jones, Dick Kelloway, Ina Law, Phyllis Martin, Ron Masters, Jenny Mather, Valerie Moore, Valerie Morris, Sunny Nelms, Audrey Newton, Janet O'Riordan, Mary Pippard, Edna Raison, Peter Raison, Catherine Rake, Sarah Robson, Dave Rockey, Kath Sharman, Southcombe Bros. Ltd., Lyndal Stagg, Stoke Sports and Recreation Trust, Margery & Don Tarr, Di Tayler, Brian Tilzey, Joe Trotman, Rodney Tucker, Sylvia Warry, Joe Waterman, Peter Waterman, Graham Weakley. Apologies to any person or organisation we may have missed out.

Any errors or omissions accepted.

Additional information will be gratefully received by the Local History Group.

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An Introduction to the village of Stoke sub Hamdon, Somerset

The ancient parish of Stoke-under-Ham lies 5 miles west of Yeovil. The oldest inhabited part of the village is the Iron Age encampment on Ham Hill, which overlooks the village. The Romans also settled on and around Ham Hill and the Roman Fosse way forms the northwest boundary of the parish. The Domesday Book records two distinct centres of population at East Stoke and West Stoke. As the parish church of St. Mary's is situated at East Stoke this could have been the original settlement but West Stoke from the 14th century became the centre of the village with a fortified manor house called the Castle with its own chapel of St. Nicholas.

The Manor of Stoke was held by William the Conqueror's half brother, Robert the Count of Mortain in 1086 and was inherited by the Beauchamp family and their successors, notably Gournay and Tiptoft who held it until 1421 when it passed to the Crown and thence to the Duchy of Cornwall in 1472. From then on the manor house and chapel fell into disrepair, the fact that Stoke had an absentee landlord from this time onwards had an effect on the development of the parish church and the character of the village. By the start of the 19th century the village was dominated by two factors, the rise of the gloving industry and the associated rise in nonconformity.

The main occupations of the area were quarrying, gloving and agriculture. The characteristic golden ham stone was not only used locally but was highly sought after for decoration of large buildings and churches in the south of England. Ham stone is still quarried today but on a much smaller scale. The making of gloves was first recorded in the village in the mid 17th century and gradually expanded over the decades reaching a peak in the 1930s, with eight gloving factories and a large cottage industry. Today the only surviving glove manufacturer is Southcombe Bros. Ltd., producing gloves from 1847 until the present day. The area was also well known for its fruit growing, apples for cider making being the predominant crop, nowadays blackcurrants occupy many hectares.

The main historic buildings of interest in the village are the Priory (National Trust) in North Street which was formerly a chantry instituted by the Beauchamp family in 1304. Providing a living for five priests who served the Beauchamp family chapel of St. Nicholas and the parish church. The 15th century Fleur de Lis Public House was originally built as a church meeting house. The Fives Court (at the back of the Fleur de Lis) built in the 18th century, where the game of fives was played hitting a leather-covered ball against the wall with the palm of the hand. The 16th century Gables looks like a small Elizabethan manor house, several influential members of the community have lived here in the past, including members of the Walter family. Dr. W.W. Walter created his own private museum, which was donated to Taunton Museum in 1901 and contained many local artefacts. He also helped excavate the ruins of the castle in 1889.

There are three churches in the village, the original Norman church of St. Mary's was probably founded around 1100AD and built of local ham stone, additions being added in the following centuries and several renovations in the 19th and 20th centuries. A striking feature is the Norman doorway with the stone tympanum, which was discovered in 1857. Made up of carvings of 3 birds resting in a tree, Sagittarius is bending his bow upon a lion with the Lamb of God above; its relevance is a mystery. There is also an original stone screen from St. Nicholas' Chapel (part of the castle buildings) now preserved in the Church. The Congregational Church in North Street was constructed through generous public support in 1866, the Southcombe family being very instrumental in organising and running the church until the 1920s. The original Methodist church in West Street was built circa 1813 but was pulled down around 1909 after a new building was constructed a short distance from the original site.

The local history group was formed in 1999, as part of the Millennium celebrations and are active in researching and preserving local history including transcribing the parish records and census returns.

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Village Views



Sheep grazing around the monument on Ham Hill c1955.



View of centre of village from Ham Hill c1890.
Note no clock on the tower of the Congregational Chapel and Fane's Farm is just above The Gables.
By kind permission of Somerset Studies Library.



Views of lower Ham Hill, upper North Street and High Street taken from Ham Hill c1890.
Note far left no housing at Langlands and far right Brocks Mount pre the 1930 fire.
By kind permission of Somerset Studies Library.



View of the Pound and Highway from Ham Hill c1890.
The Pound is mentioned in 1616 and in later Duchy of Cornwall Surveys. In the 19th century it seems to be the responsibility of the Waywarden, but fell out of use in the early 1900s.



View of West Street from Ham Hill c1890-94.
Note no houses on the south side of West Street from the Recreation Field onwards.
By kind permission of Somerset Studies Library.



View of Matts Lane glove factories and New Close Terrace, West Street c1959.



Stoke Cross looking along West Street early 1900s. Note the railings which were removed during WWII.



View as above but now showing the Doctors Surgery, Princes Close, Hamdon Close and Oak Tree House c2003.



Stoke Cross, showing the bakery of John Isaac Chant c1890.
Philip and Elizabeth Johnson lived here in 1679.



Stoke Cross, view of Osborne's grocery and drapery shop on the left, early 1900s.



View of the Spats Factory, the Old School House and Ham Hill, taken from the Plot c1890.



The High Street showing Central Garage and the Co-op c1919.



Clothiers Cottage, West Street, demolished in the 1930s to improve the road width.



View of Ham Hill and West Street, taken between 1908 and 1923. Note no monument.



Holy Tree Crossroads, the tree was planted in 1863 to commemorate the marriage of Edward, Prince of Wales to Princess Alexandra of Denmark. Said to have replaced an oak tree, which had been planted in 1837 to mark the accession of Queen Victoria.



View of Ham Hill and Donnings Lane, which runs down the south side of Hamdon Close, taken early 1900s from Shetcombe. Note the fair is being held in Shelves.



At the western boundary of the parish, Parrett (Shore's) Bridge crosses the River Parrett on the present A303 c1890. The bridge dates from medieval times. In the Duchy of Cornwall Survey 1616, the upkeep is shared between Stoke and South Petherton. It was badly damaged in 1645 during the Civil War.



Extensive ruins of Parrett (Shore's) Mill on the River Parrett c1890, burnt down pre 1889. Although it has close proximity to Petherton Bridge it is in the parish of Stoke sub Hamdon and mentioned as such in the Domesday book. In 1776 The Duchy of Cornwall were in dispute with the miller at Joylers for damming the river, causing flooding, thus putting Stoke (undershot) mill out of action. The Shore family of Stoke held it for much of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Duchy of Cornwall took control of it in 1889 after a disastrous fire which ruined the mill. It was never rebuilt.



Picture of the effigy of two children drowned in the River Parrett in the 16th Century c1890, now situated on the north side of Shore's Bridge.



Upper North Street c1890. Note cottages on the right were thatched.



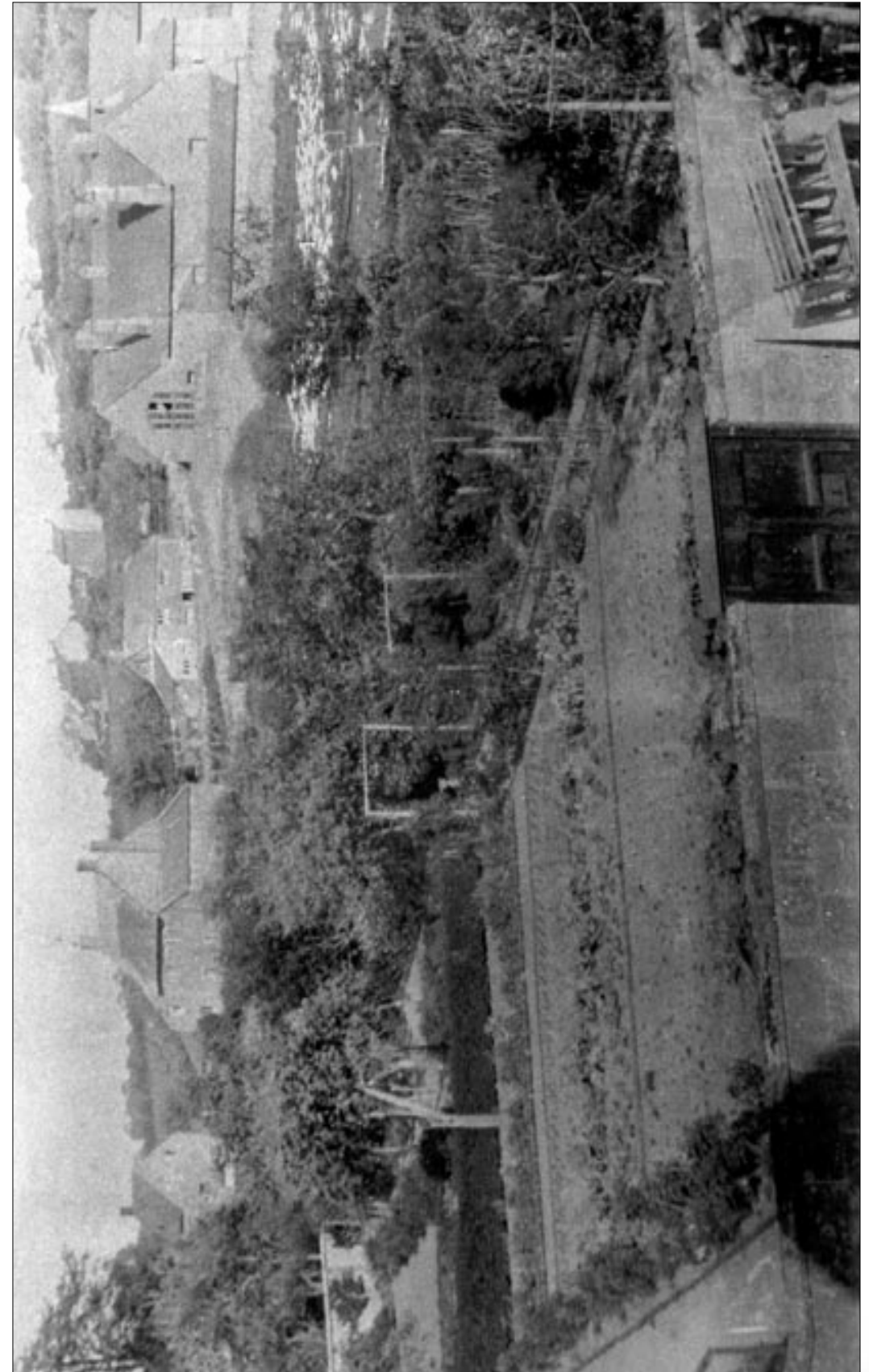
View of the newly built terrace in North Street, about 1903. Note the thatched roof of 46 North Street.



View of a large thatched 17th century house on the west side of North Street, demolished late 1800s. It was situated in the present yard of Lower North Street Farm c1890.



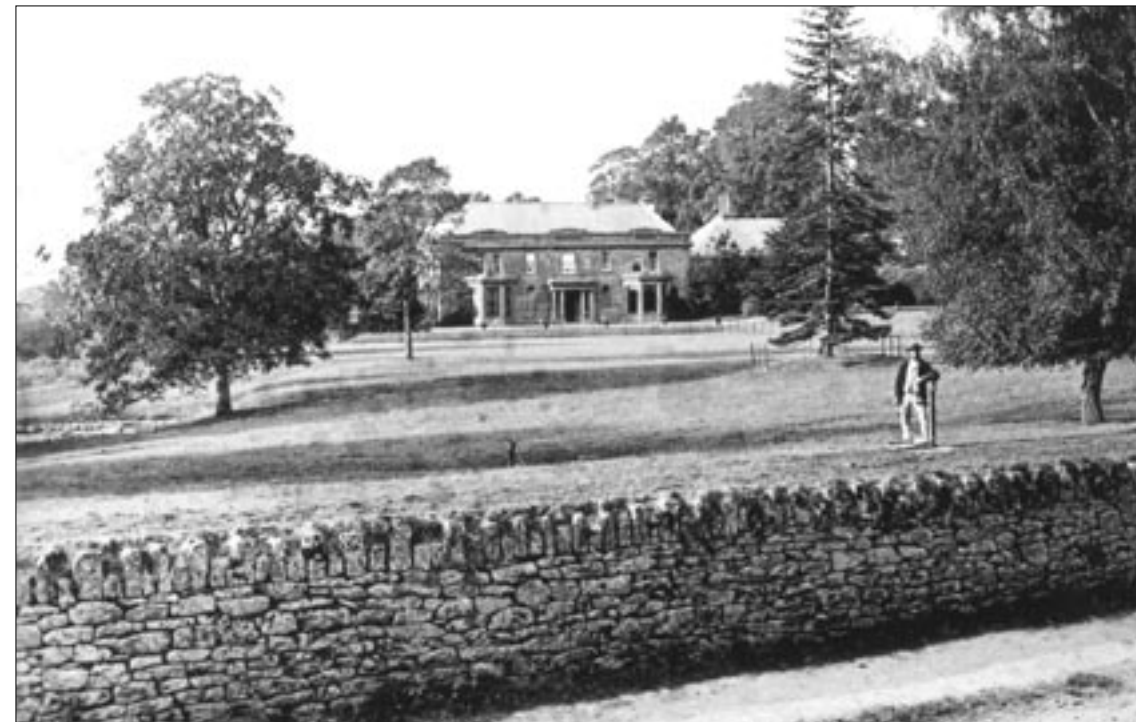
Castle Street looking east, early 1900s.



View taken from The Gables garden, looking east showing houses on the Highway and a large thatched house at Castle Cross, now demolished. Note leather skins drying far right, pre 1900.



View of the Pound end of Castle Street looking west, early 1900s.



View of East Stoke House and grounds, home of the Chaffey family for many generations c1890.



View of cottages at Highway pre a fire, which caused extensive damage, cottages have since been rebuilt c1890.



View of Stonehill and Ham Hill House, East Stoke taken from Ham Hill, prior to the building of the housing development at Stonehill in 1947.



The High Street, showing the Supply Store and barbers on the left c1890.



Conduit Cross taken from Ham Hill Road, note the stone archway on the right, now demolished. Pranketts, the house in the centre of the picture was built 1695. William Prankett the Waywarden lived there, the Turnpike Trust owned it in 1870. It has also served as a vicarage, a doctor's and a dental surgery c1905.



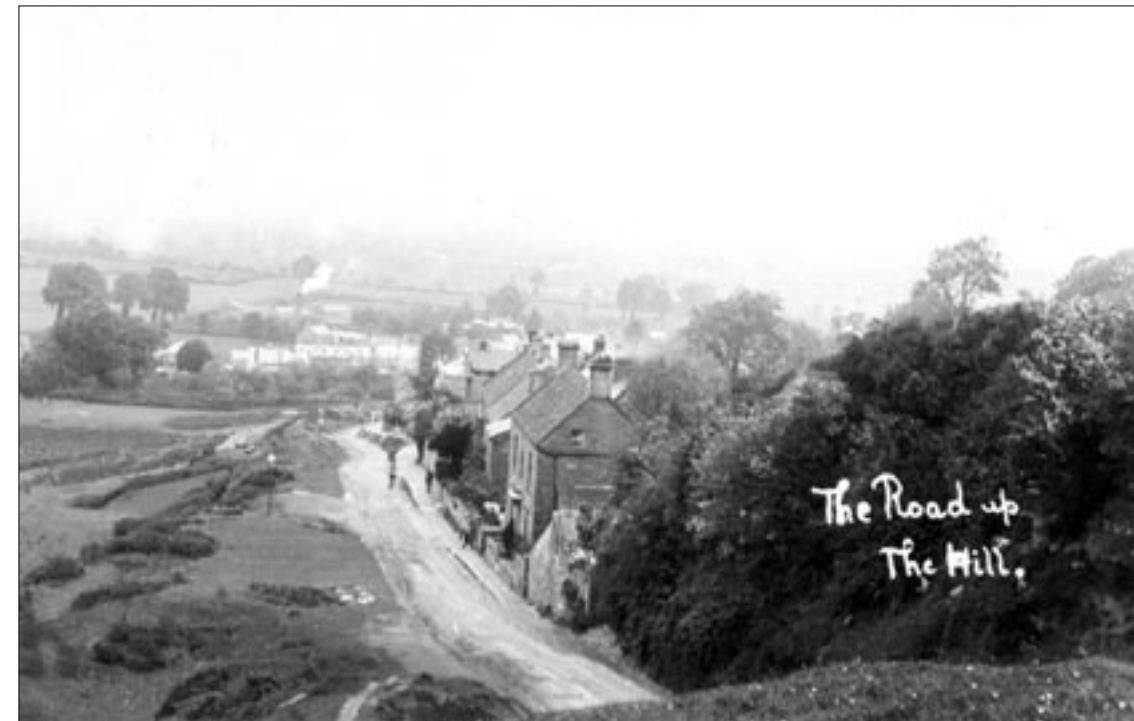
The High Street looking west. 10 High Street on the left is probably the house in 1717 called 'Knights', where the well known Presbyterian preacher Henry Parsons lived. In 1885 it was partially rebuilt by John G. Southcombe and used as a Post Office until the early 1900s. A story recalls, "Jimmy the Mail" too drunk to take the coach onto Ilminster, so 12 year old Henry Warry jumped up and did it for him. The building was also used as a glove factory and a bank over various years during the 1900s.



The High Street looking east, showing the Post Office on the far left and Jeffrey Bros. butchers shop on the far right c1910.



View from Shelves, showing the cottage now demolished, lived in by the Wall family, local goods carriers. Note New Cut in background c1890.



View from the top of Ham Hill Road, the grass cropped short by sheep.



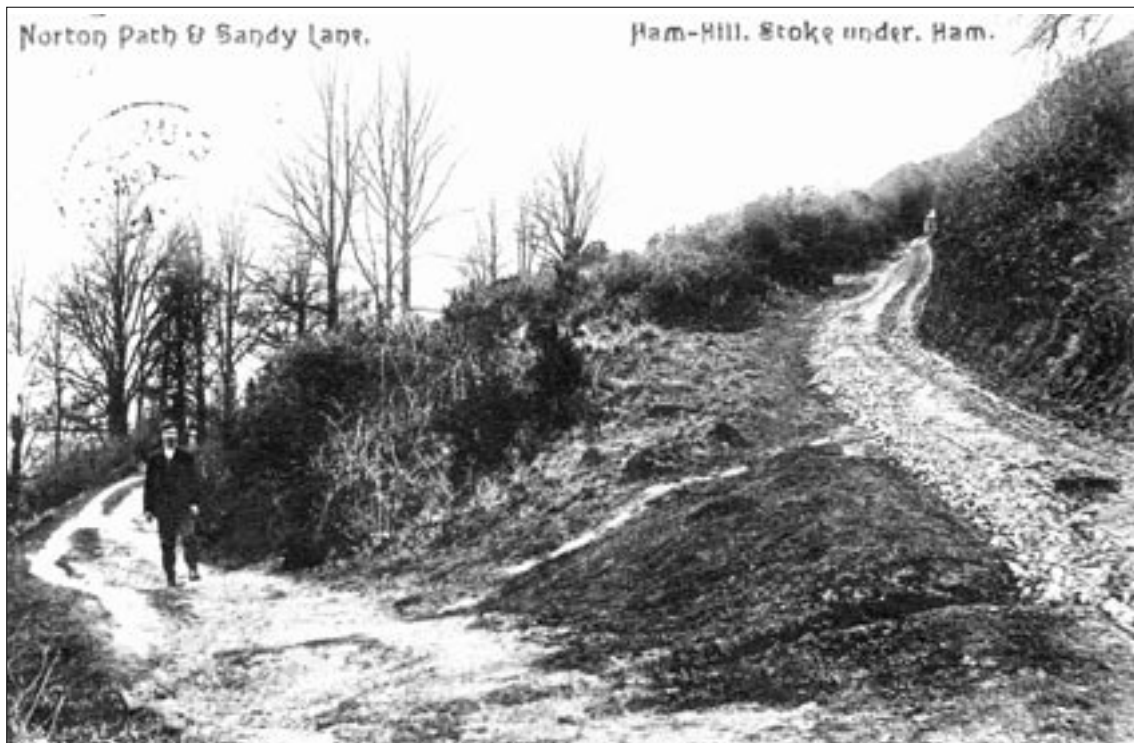
View of Ham Hill Road c1890, showing several more cottages than there are at present and the Masons Arms, which was demolished in the early 1960s.



A very interesting view of Ham Hill c1920s. The very short cropped grass shows up the Iron-age ramparts, the clear lines of the Roman amphitheatre (frying pan) and the excavations of the Roman camp.



View of The Prince of Wales Inn, Ham Hill showing in the back garden the old fair house of Stoke Fair, St. Marks Day 25th April. This was also a poor house and then a private residence, now demolished. Note fir trees in background c1890.



View of Norton Path and Sandy Lane, then a dirt track c1905.



Aerial view of Ham Hill 1989/90 showing The Prince of Wales Inn, quarry works and car parks.



The Conduit, High Street, c1890. The stone carving on the front states 'God be thanket, I, William Prankett in 1701, caused this water here to run.' However an area known as the Conduit was in existence by 1624, as stated in the parish records. What we have now dates from when the Working Men's Institute was built in 1883. In use until 1927.



The public water pump at East Stoke, sadly it disappeared in the 1990s.



The Tunwell - Town Well, a public water supply between North Street and Castle Street. The masonry looks 13th or 14th century. It was scheduled as an emergency water supply in WWII. Restored in 2000.