

## **A Brief History of Flax Bourton**

It is not precisely known how long there has been a settlement in this place at the head of the Yeo-Kenn valley but its present name is of Anglo-Saxon origin and indicates a time span of at least 1300 years. Baurton (burh ton) a settlement protected by a 'fence' when other settlements locally were not. Then, also, the valley 'floor' was much lower than it is now. The prefix 'Flax' was added because of its mediaeval ownership by the Abbey of Flaxley in Gloucestershire.

The oldest building by far is the church which retains features of its Saxon origins and suggests that at that time the settlement had some importance. The Norman conquest changed all that, as other parts of the building indicate.

Of the next 600 years little is known of the village except that it was a small, mainly agricultural community with a population of about 40 before the Black Death of 1348. At various times there has also been some lead mining on the hill. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century stone began to be used when domestic buildings were replaced and the Angel Inn and Church Farm date from then. Castle Farm, the Mill and Priory Farm are almost certainly rebuilds of earlier establishments and incorporate remnants of them. In the 18th Century two local landowners built properties in the village, the 'Court' (now Bourton House) and the 'Castle' (by name only).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the population, largely of labouring folk, had reached 200 and fluctuated around that figure for the next 130 years. In 1831 the village had an inn, a brewery, slaughter house and butchers shop, a carpenters shop, tannery and two forges besides its farms and mill.

Even in 1960 there was a grocers, post office and general store, two inns and five working farms. By then, also, much of the village's 590 acres were owned by the Gibbs family who had originally acquired their wealth through dealing in fertilizer. However in the 1960s the 20<sup>th</sup> Century caught up with time and domestic development took off. The Meads swallowed up village 'green space' and made the council retirement homes look insignificant. In 1980 the village boundary was moved and Farleigh Hospital (the old Workhouse) was annexed from Long Ashton and the subsequent development has further swelled the village population.

But, for a thousand years St. Michael's Church has stood in the heart of the community and 'oh! What stories it could tell'.