

Text on the Original Board:

The small but well-populated parish of Simpson was mentioned in the Domesday Survey in 1086 as Sevinestone or Siwinestone, meaning Signwine's tun or farm. It was farmed communally by English peasants who owed allegiance to their new French lord of the manor, the Bishop of Coutances. The three large arable fields around the village were divided among the inhabitants. Each had several portions or strips of land scattered around the parish. These were ploughed, creating long ridges divided by furrows that can still be seen in some parks right across Milton Keynes.

From the medieval period, the church was the centre of village life. The nave was used as a local village hall and the churchyard as a place for feasting and dancing on specific days during the year. The early church underwent extensive rebuilding in the 14th century and little of the original structure survives, except the piers supporting the central tower. Further changes since then can be seen around the building by blocked windows, old roof lines and the remains of the demolished vestry. Set in the wall of the transepts are two small, glazed recesses, called 'lepe squints', from where unfortunate lepers could watch church services. The north transept was also used as the parish school, prior to the establishment of the School Boards in 1876.

Most of the houses in the village would have been timber-framed with thatched roofs but many have now gone. Some of the remaining ones, such as the cottages opposite the Village Hall, were rebuilt in the 18th or 19th centuries to incorporate parts of much earlier buildings.

The manor of Simpson was held by the de Grey family from 1254 until it was bought by Thomas Pigott in about 1510. He set up a charity for the poor in 1573 for benevolent work in the village. In the 16th century, the manor house follows the line of the medieval trackway, and its kitchen garden was situated on the medieval moated site (shown on the 1781 map below and still visible as earthworks in the park).

The manor passed to the Hatch family and then to the Waldens. Thomas Walden's only daughter and heir, Susanna, brought it into the Hanmer family when she married John Hanmer in 1717. Their son Sir Walden Hanmer lived in Broughton with his large family for much of the time that he was Lord of the Manor of Simpson, with his mother remaining in the manor house after his father died and tenant farmer managing the estate for him.

In 1783, Sir Thomas Hanmer inherited the house, farm and meadows towards Fenny Stratford. He occasionally lived at Simpson but, after 23 years, sold the estate to Charles Pinfold of neighbouring Walton. Pinfold very soon demolished the manor house and leased the farm to William Siphthorp. By 1860, Siphthorp's son had bought the estate for himself.

A village celebrity between 1807 and 1871 was the reckless, fox-hunting Rector "Tally-Ho Hanmer", Sir Thomas Hanmer's nephew. He wangled money out of his friends to pay his debts and even spent time in Aylesbury jail. In spite of this, he was charitable to the poor and preached an excellent sermon. By the time he died, the half-timbered Rectory had become "ruinous, dirty and verminous" and had to be demolished. Replaced in the Victorian period, the Rectory ceased to belong to the church in the late 1950s, since then it has housed a school, provided temporary accommodation for the Open University (in the early 1970s), and been a care home. The care home closed in 2017.

During the early part of the 19th Century, Simpson was in appearance one of the most wretched of many miserable villages in the country. As it was in the flood plain of the River Ouzel the village had always been prone to flooding and every winter the main street was under three feet of water.

When the Grand Junction Canal (now the Grand Union Canal) was constructed through the west of the village between 1793 and 1805, to make trade between London and the industrial Midlands quicker and cheaper, the drainage problem became even worse. Also, the life and appearance of the village was radically changed by the new road pattern of the parish. For example, Booby's Lane, alongside The Plough Inn, was closed and a tunnel had to be built under the canal at the end of Mount Pleasant to allow access to and from the farms in the west of the parish and to Old Bletchley.

By the 1850s Charles Warren was so fed up with the mud and water outside his new Victorian house that he paid to have the road raised three and a half feet to relieve the situation. Charles built Simpson House on the site of an ancient farmhouse and its impressive garden, now forming part of Warren Bank housing development, once stretched from the road to the canal and contained pools and grottos constructed of molten debris from glass furnaces. They were inset with conch shells and epitomised the Victorian taste for the gaudy and bizarre.

By about 1860 the canal had encouraged the establishment of local brick-making, tile-making and lime-burning industries. Coal could be easily brought by narrow boat to fire the furnaces and the products could be easily transported away. The Simpson and Fenny Stratford Yards supplied bricks for new houses in Bletchley, Wolverton and New Bradwell. These thriving local industries, along with the construction of some new houses helped to convert Simpson back into a pleasant village.

In the early 1970s, the construction of the new city of Milton Keynes once again brought significant changes to the parish. The canal which cut through the village was itself crossed by the A5 trunk road, but development had sought to retain the integrity of the old village. Flooding has largely been controlled by the construction of the balancing lake at Caldecotte. Parts of the fields, which were once strip farmed by the peasant and then enveloped by the Enclosure Act of 1771, are now grazed but are accessible to the people as parkland for recreational use.

