

ABBOTSTONE: A DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE

By ISABEL SANDERSON

EDITORIAL NOTE

This article and that by Frances Collins and J. Oliver on the village of Lomer, which follows (pp. 67-76), describe and discuss two of over 90 known deserted medieval villages in Hampshire, exclusive of those destroyed to make the New Forest. Lists, descriptions and general discussion of such villages and of the changing economic and political forces thought to lie behind the widespread shrinking and desertion of villages throughout late medieval western Europe, will be found in recent works by Allison¹ and by Beresford and Hurst.²

THE ancient parish of Abbotstone (Grid Reference SU 5635) lies on rising ground on the eastern side of the Candover valley, some two miles from the town of New Alresford and due north of the village of Itchen Stoke, with which parish it was joined as long ago as 1589.³ No map shows all the boundaries of this ancient parish but from the Tithe Map of 1838 for Itchen Stoke with the Rectory of Abbotstone they can be located.⁴ This map was prepared after the parish had been surveyed and gives the names, boundaries and acreages of all the fields. Dwellings, farm buildings and roads are also marked and in the accompanying Tithe Apportionment the names of land-owners and occupiers are given, together with valuable particulars of the fields once belonging to the old Rectory of Abbotstone and separately, those of Itchen Stoke. It is clear from this that the boundary between the two parishes before they were consolidated was near or along the Candover stream. Eastwards the ground rises steadily from the valley to reach 450 feet O.D. on Abbotstone Down, some two miles distant, the parish extending beyond the Down to include Abbotstone Coppice (fig. 25).

The northern limit of the parish is marked by the Grange Park and Spy Bush Plantation, while to the south are Fobdown and Coombe Farms in the parish of Old Alresford.

The most conspicuous feature of the parish today is the lack of settlement: indeed, the 1:25,000 map of the Ordnance Survey shows only Abbotstone Farm with its stables and barns and a few scattered cottages. Close to the farmhouse and its large walled garden, are the sites of two magnificent houses once belonging to the Paulet family. This map also shows field boundaries and roads of the second half of the twentieth century, evidence which can be supplemented by that obtained from aerial photographs of the area.⁵

Maps and photographs show pastures and water meadows in the valley and four large arable fields adjoining Abbotstone Down. To the south-west of these fields is a small rectangular field laid down to pasture and surrounded on three sides by hedge-rows. A detailed aerial view indicates several earthworks and well-defined banks and a small enclosure on its western boundary surrounded by tall trees.⁶ The field lies on high ground from which excellent views are obtained of the Candover valley and its dry tributary valley to the east, rising and broadening into Abbotstone Down. An old

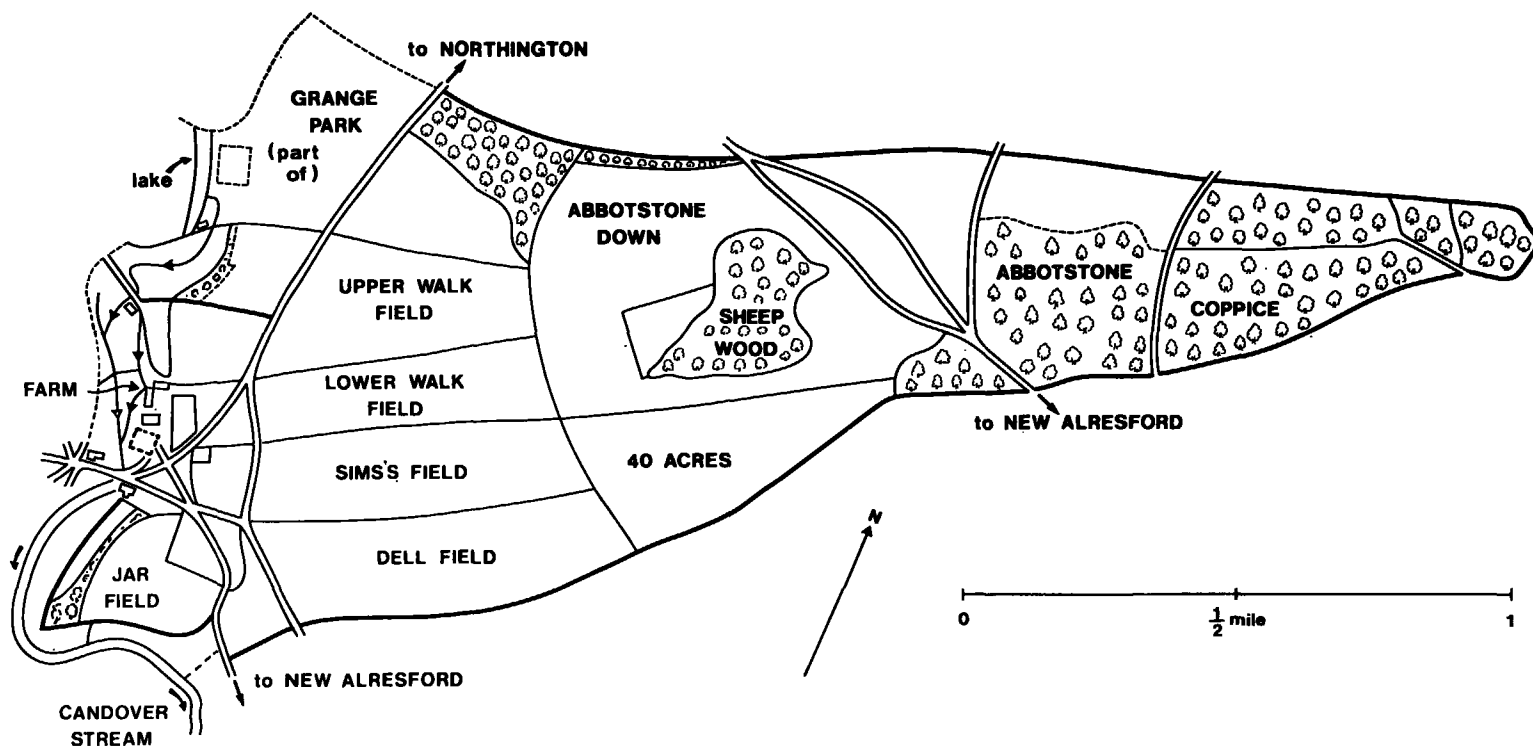


Fig. 25. The Rectory of Abbotstone, from the Tithe Map, 1838.

grassy track forms the northern boundary of the field and after passing through a gateway, it makes a right-angled bend and proceeds to Old Alresford.⁷ At the top of the hill the track joins a metalled road that cuts the field diagonally and leads to New Alresford. In the opposite direction, this road crosses the Candover stream before meeting four roads at a junction near some thatched cottages (SU 563345) close to the ancient parish boundary with Itchen Stoke.

The Tithe Map shows a road from this junction to Manor Farm, Itchen Stoke, that follows the Candover stream. Today, only the stretch from Fobdown Farm is usable since the rest has been ploughed up or overgrown with scrub. The other road to Itchen Stoke, that used today, leaves the valley in a southerly direction and at the top of the hill crosses an old grass droveway flanked by tall hedges, part of an ancient droveway from Andover to New Alresford, once an important market town. The signpost in the valley at Abbotstone indicates a 'No Through Road' and this points up a rutted cart track with thick hedges on either side. This is known locally as the Winchester Road and judging from the number of different species of shrubs found in the hedgerow, it is many centuries old.⁸ Another road from the junction leads to Northington Down and East Stratton village, not far from the Roman road from Silchester to Winchester that passed through Stratton Park.⁹ The unmetalled road at the junction is a private carriageway that leads through the beech woods from Abbotstone to the Grange Park.

All these roads leading out of the Candover valley pass through land that once was part of Abbotstone Warren, some 300 acres in extent, and prior to 1589 was in the parish of Itchen Stoke.¹⁰ These roads suggest that in former centuries Abbotstone was an important centre of road networks.

All the features of the present landscape that have been discussed – roads, droveway and tracks, large arable fields and downland, earthworks and banks in a small field at the top of the hill and the lack of settlement suggest that Abbotstone was in the past, more populous and of more importance than it is today and this raises the problem of how these changes have come about.

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

A close scrutiny of the 1838 Tithe Map shows that the field boundaries and areas of woodland have remained unaltered over the last 130 years. Abbotstone Down was extensive downland in 1838 and in the middle of it was a small wood known as Sheep Wood, suggesting that the downland was used for grazing sheep. Sheep Wood is still there and apart from a small acreage that has been ploughed and some 30 acres used by the public for recreation, the Down has scarcely changed in appearance over the years. Typical chalkland shrubs, such as spindle, dogwood, guelder rose and privet form thickets and beech and yew trees are numerous. The map indicates plantations and coppices in 1838 and most of this woodland is now managed by the Forestry Commission.

The names of the fields next to the Down are still used and these are Dell Field 82 acres, Sims's Field 66 acres, Lower Walk Field and Upper Walk Field, 50 and 59 acres respectively. On the western boundary of these fields the map shows a road leading from Old Alresford to Northington but the section next to Sims's Field and Lower

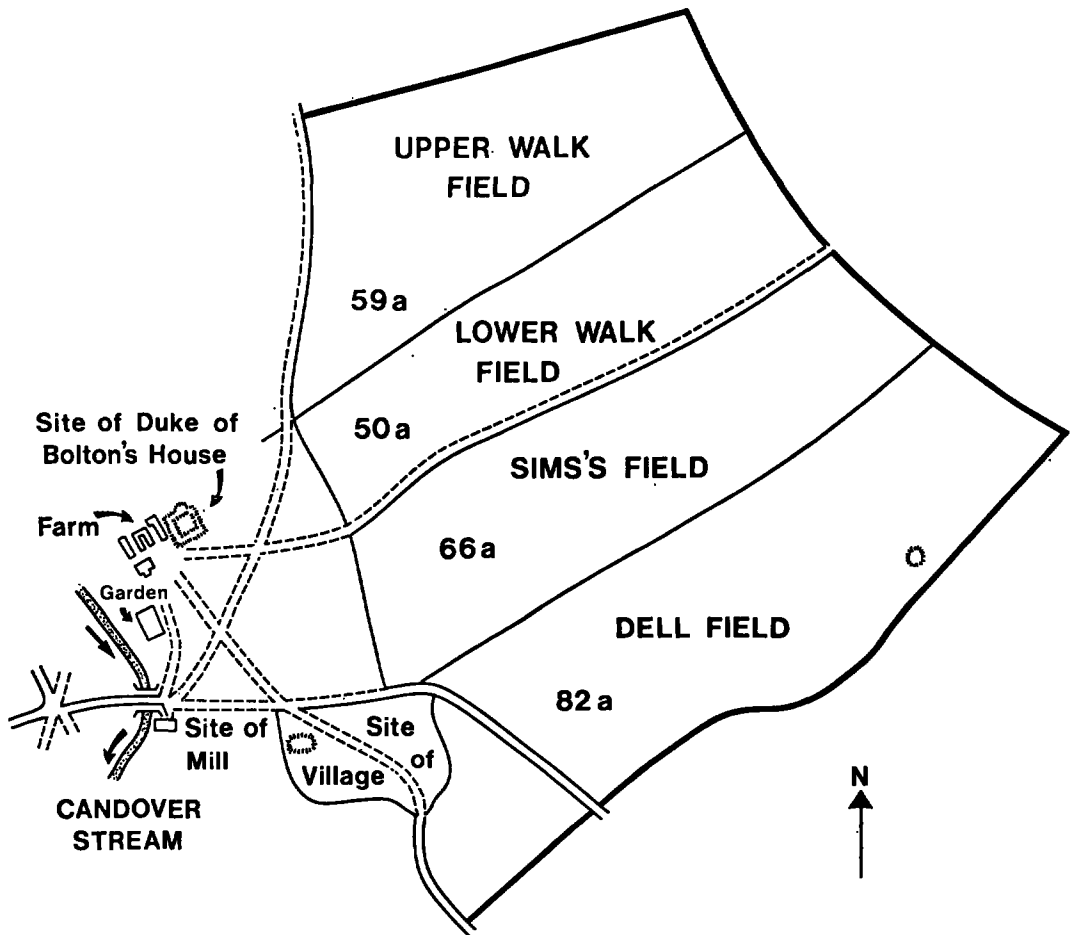


Fig. 26. Medieval fields at Abbotstone, Hampshire. (Scale 1:5280)

Walk Field has, in recent years, been ploughed up. The small rectangular field containing the earthworks was called Chapel Close in 1838 and the pasture field on its northern boundary was Pound Close, both names suggesting some type of settlement, and still in daily use (fig. 26).

The cottages at the road junction and the farmhouse marked on the Tithe Map are still standing but since 1838 other cottages, called the Barracks, have been built on higher ground on the road to New Alresford (SU 569342). A mill and mill cottage are also shown on the map near the bridge over the stream. The mill was removed from the site as recently as 1968 though the cottage remains. Further upstream, the map indicates another cottage, long since demolished, and near the lake are the ruins of Castle cottage (SU 563351) which was inhabited in 1841.¹¹

So far, the evidence indicates that in the last 130 years there was no division of the large arable fields and very little clearance of downland at Abbotstone. Two

derelict cottages were replaced by others on a different site suggesting little change in population.

EVIDENCE FROM THE GROUND AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

One of the most conspicuous features in the 12-acre field called Chapel Close is a well-defined rectangular area surrounded by earth banks in which grow some tall elms and maple trees. About 1930, one of the elm trees was blown down and attached to its roots were several human vertebrae and part of a lower jaw containing a few teeth, leaving no doubt that this was an old burial ground. Corroborative evidence is contained in the will of Nicholas Clapsho, dated 29th day of October 1505, which records that he wished to be buried in the church of Saint Martyn's at 'Abbottiston'.¹² Later it seems that the church was dedicated to Saint Peter.

Within this enclosure is an oval earth bank with its long axis pointing east-west. When a small piece of turf was removed from the bank, flint, mortar and some fragments of broken tile were found. These banks must indicate the position of the walls of the church which were probably built of flint. In Jar Field on the western boundary of the churchyard, several pieces of tile have been found, some showing peg holes indicating roof tiles. These fragments of tile doubtless came from the church roof.

Writing in 1892, Ella Conybeare, whose father was the incumbent of Itchen Stoke parish, mentions half of a large stone bowl in a rockery at Abbotstone and continues, 'tradition says that it is the remains of an old font belonging to Abbotstone church or chapel, that it was dug up in Chapel Close'.¹³ A stone, similar to the one described, was for many years in the garden at Abbotstone Farm. It appears to be the rounded arch of a Norman window and could well have been part of the fabric of Saint Martyn's Church at Abbotstone.¹⁴

Pottery

During the winter months Chapel Close is dotted with molehills and in the soil thrown up, small fragments of pottery and other substances have been found. These include thin pieces of terra-cotta and blackish pottery (some showing signs of greenish lead glaze on one surface), pieces of baked flint, fragments of charcoal, thin grey slate and oyster shell. The sherds have been examined and a thirteenth, or possibly early fourteenth, century ascribed to them.¹⁵ The fragments of roofing slate are of a type which was widely traded along the south coast from Devon, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

In the garden of one of the cottages at the cross roads, already mentioned, a few potsherds have been found. Some have been identified as Romano-British and one piece, terra-cotta in colour and glazed on its inner surface, as medieval.¹⁶ None of the material found up till now on Chapel Close, is as late as the fifteenth century.

Aerial Photographs

Apart from the earth banks associated with the church and churchyard, Chapel Close contains other well-defined grassy banks and also flat areas that may have been the sites of houses. These are visible on the ground but show up more clearly in aerial photographs when the boundaries of individual tenements can be seen. Although

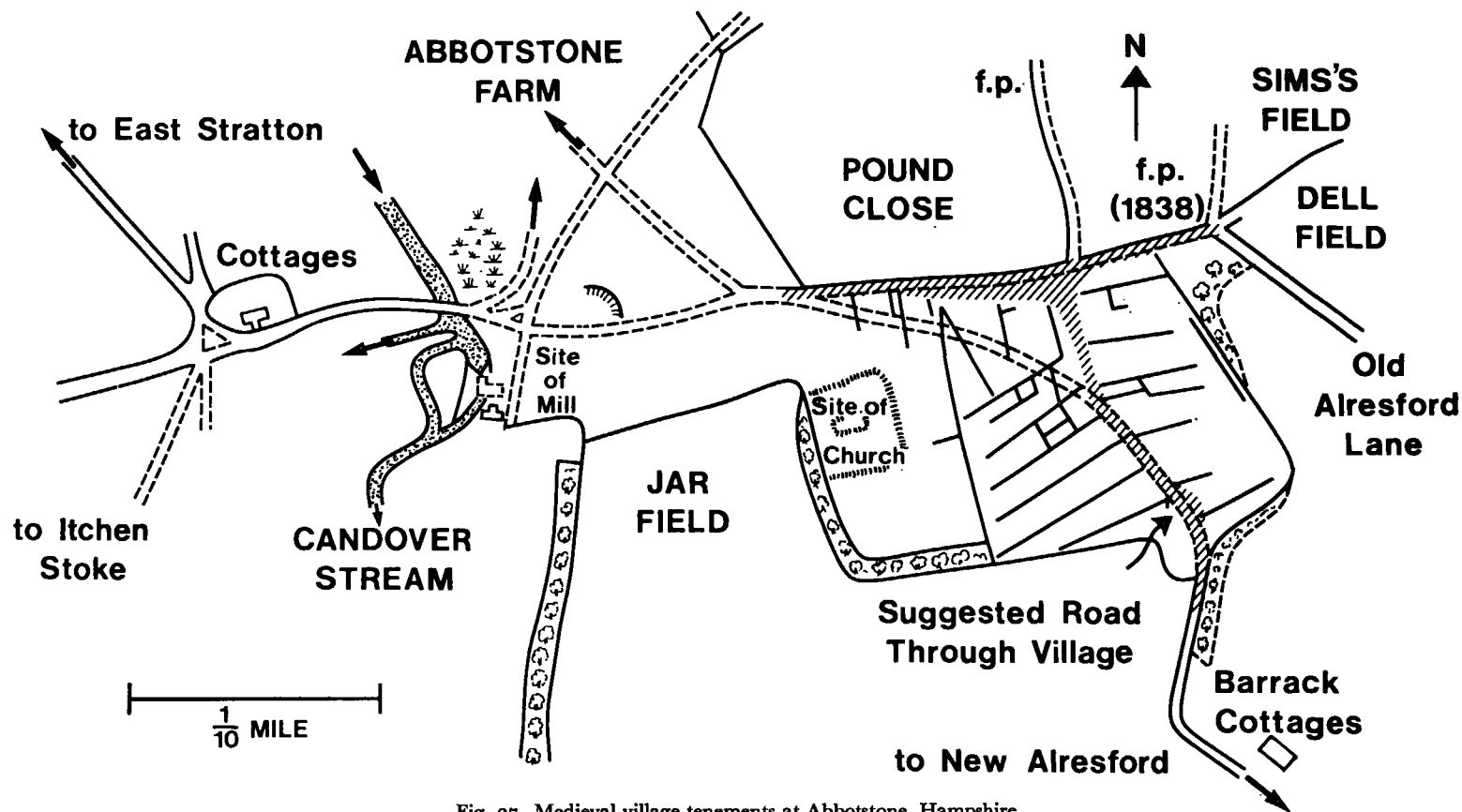


Fig. 27. Medieval village tenements at Abbotstone, Hampshire.

ABBOTSTONE: A DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE

some of these have been somewhat flattened there are unmistakeable signs of a former settlement of some size. The present road through the field to New Alresford cuts through some of these tenement boundaries and corresponding sections of bank can be seen on opposite sides of the road, showing that it is of later construction. Other tracks are shown on the photographs.

Using the evidence obtained from the ground and from aerial photographs, a tentative plan of this village settlement has been drawn.¹⁷ The shaded areas suggest possible roads through the village (fig. 27).

MEDIEVAL VILLAGE OF ABBOTSTONE

The evidence already discussed points to the presence of a thriving community at Abbotstone in medieval times, but what were the main requirements of such a village?

Water

Although the Candover stream is not far from the site of the village at the top of the hill, using it as a source of water would entail much daily labour. The site of a well has not been located on Chapel Close, but a well is marked on the 1:25,000 O.S. map on Abbotstone Down where the height is about 325 feet O.D. This is nearly 50 feet higher than Chapel Close and a well in the village is very probable. Not far away are the Barrack Cottages where in the past, water was drawn from a well and this shows that in this area, subterranean sources of water could be utilised.

Mill

Usually the lord of the manor owned a mill where villeins took their corn to be ground, the miller retaining a portion of the meal in payment. Abbotstone Mill, near the bridge over the Candover stream, was in use till about 1948 but in April 1968 it was dismantled with a view to re-erection.¹⁸ This then, was probably the site of the mill mentioned in Domesday Book belonging to the manor of Abbotstone.

Open Fields

Many common arable fields were long and narrow and rectangular in shape. The Tithe Map shows four such fields, with Dell Field nearest the village. These fields were probably claimed from downland many centuries ago by laboriously clearing the scrub and trees. In olden days, the land in such fields was cultivated in strips, using a wooden plough pulled by oxen.

Sheep and Cow Commons

Sheep have grazed the turf on Abbotstone Down within living memory and the name Sheep Wood suggests that this was common practice centuries ago. The sheep belonging to each villein often grazed together tended by the shepherd who was one of the villeins.

To the south and west of Chapel Close is Jar Field which may have been the Cow Common. Here the Candover stream forms part of the parish boundary and supplies water to cattle grazing in the field.

Early Documentary Evidence

In 1086 Abdestune, held by Hugh de Port of the Bishop of Winchester and assessed at nine hides, was clearly a sizeable settlement since there was land for five ploughs. 'Here are five ploughlands, two in desmesne, and eight villeins and six borderers with three ploughlands, also five servants, a mill which pays 15s. and five acres of meadow.'¹⁹

In 1173, Adam de Port, great-grandson of Hugh, borrowed 40 marks from Richard of Ilchester, bishop-elect of Winchester, and pledged the stock of Abbodestune for the following seven years.²⁰ This included 56 acres of corn, 42 acres of mixed corn, 118 acres of oats, 3 acres each of barley and peas and 60 acres of fallow, totalling 282 acres under cultivation by the villeins and serfs living at Abbotstone. The only animals listed were 12 oxen which would be used in ploughing the common fields. Witnesses to the document drawn up included Algar the reeve and Osmund the miller.

Further evidence concerning arable crops at Abbotstone is to be found in a document concerning the victualling of the English Fleet at Hamble in 1339.²¹ Among the items purchased was 108 qrs. 2 bush. of wheat and the manors of Abbotstone and Alresford were among those paid for transporting it to Hamble. Clearly, the village of Abbotstone was at this period a thriving community actively engaged in farming.

Tax Records

Another source of information about medieval villages and the people who lived in them is to be found in the Lay Subsidy Returns kept at the Public Record Office, London. When the king wanted money he levied a tax on the inhabitants of each village and this was collected locally. After certain deductions, the remainder was forwarded to the Exchequer and known as a Lay Subsidy. The Return for Abbotstone in 1327 is particularly interesting as it gives the names of the individual taxpayers, 18 in all.²² William, son of John de St. John, paid 10 shillings, Richard Hurlebat paid 5 shillings, Ricardo le Monck and Matilda atte Crouch each paid 4 shillings, while the others paid smaller sums. The total tax paid was 27/1d.

In 1316, John de St. John held the villa of Abbedestune in the Hundred of Bontisburgh, and his son William may have been living there in 1327.²³ There are indications of a possible site of a manor house at the top of the hill overlooking the valley and not far from the site of the old church.

In 1334, Abbotstone was taxed at £1 16s. 4d.²⁴ but by 1428 there were fewer than ten householders living at Abbotstone.²⁵ During the next 100 years the population declined rapidly, and by 1544 only John Pawlett and his servant John Brown were paying taxes.²⁶ The lord of the manor at this time was Sir William Paulet, later the first Marquis of Winchester, and it is probable that John Pawlett was a relative and may have lived in the Capital Messuage that was built sometime in the sixteenth century in the vicinity of the present farmhouse and not at the top of the hill near the site of the village settlement.

Church Records

A church at Abbestune is given in a list of churches and chapels compiled during the time of Bishop John de Pontisarra, 1282-1304, but it is not known when the church was built.²⁷ Saxton's map of Hampshire in 1575 indicates a church at Aberston, and it

is shown by Camden's 1695 map, but by this time even the ruins would have been overgrown and buried.

The earliest date that has been found relating to any incumbent of the Rectory of Abbotstone is 5th February 1292 when Thomas de Basing, though not ordained, was allowed to retain the living which was worth £6 13s. 4d.²⁸ He was followed by John de Keynesham. The names of later incumbents are given in the manuscript registers of succeeding bishops of Winchester.

An important year in the history of the parish was 1589 when the third Marquis of Winchester sent a petition to Bishop Thomas Cooper asking him to consolidate the living at Abbotstone with that of Itchen Stoke for the support of one incumbent for the two parishes.²⁹ The Marquis stated that the church was utterly decayed and collapsed. He was the Patron of the living and was resident at Abbotstone only at certain times of the year. The Bishop agreed to this petition and later in the year, on 6th September 1589, the two parishes were consolidated.

CONCLUSION

The documentary evidence shows that the village of Abbotstone was a flourishing community up to the early fourteenth century, growing various cereal crops in the common fields and grinding corn in the local mill. Eighteen householders are named in the Lay Subsidy Return for 1327, one of whom was William de St. John. He was the son of John de St. John, the lord of the manor, and may have been living at Abbotstone in 1327 though there is no well-established site of a manor house on Chapel Close.

There are few documents relating to Abbotstone in the fifteenth century but it appears that in 1428, some 80 years after the Black Death, there were less than ten householders living in the village. The effects of the Black Death of 1348-49 may have been an important factor contributing to the depopulation of the village. Philip Ziegler considers that the plague struck the diocese of Winchester with special violence and caused the death of nearly half the beneficed clergy.³⁰ In the city of Winchester in 1452, there was much economic distress and nearly 1,000 houses were empty or in ruins.³¹ In addition to the aftermath of plague and disease, the difficulties of the woollen industry were also a contributory factor. Abbotstone, less than eight miles from Winchester, possibly faced similar economic problems. New Alresford, too, was in dire straits partly due to a fire in 1440, pestilence and poor harvests.

The O.S. map shows a number of roads and tracks that converge on Abbotstone and in Saxon-Norman times, these were important wayfaring routes. One of these was the route from Winchester to London going through Abbotstone, Old Alresford, Bighton, Alton and Farnham, thus avoiding the marshy land round New Alresford. Due to the construction of the Great Weir and the formation of Alresford Pond, the land in the upper Itchen valley was drained and became passable.³² An important route from Southampton to New Alresford developed which passed through Twyford, Morestead and then over Fawley Down.³³ With increase in trade from abroad in the late medieval period, merchants used this route from Southampton to New Alresford by-passing Winchester, once the capital city of Anglo-Saxon England. The road went over the Great Weir at New Alresford and joined the old road to Bighton, thence to

Alton, Farnham and London. With this development of other routes due to the growing importance of London, the route through Abbotstone became little used and this could have contributed to its decline.

The fact that the lord of the manor did not reside at Abbotstone in medieval times would also contribute towards the poverty of husbandmen living there. The chief manor of the Paulets was Basing and the manor of Abbotstone was only a small part and parcel of their lands in Hampshire and it could well be that before Sir William Paulet built the Capital Messuage at Abbotstone in the sixteenth century, that there were few inhabitants and little cultivation of the common fields. Sir William Paulet held important offices of State and in Hampshire, and probably the main reason for building a Capital Messuage at Abbotstone was its nearness to Winchester where he had many duties.

Acknowledgement

I am deeply indebted to Gwyn I. Meirion-Jones, Sir John Cass School of Science and Technology, for considerable help in writing this article.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Abbreviations

H.R.O. Hampshire County Record Office, Winchester

B.M. British Museum, London

P.R.O. Public Record Office, London

¹ K. J. Allison, *Deserted Villages*, London, Macmillan (1970).

² M. Beresford and J. G. Hurst, *Deserted Medieval Villages, Studies*, London, Lutterworth (1971.)

³ H.R.O. MS. Reg. Thomas Cooper, fo. 15.

⁴ H.R.O. Tithe Map for Itchen Stoke and Abbotstone, 1938, see W. E. Tate, *The Parish Chest: a study of the records of parochial administration in England*, 3rd ed., G.U.P. (1969), for details of Redemption of Tithes.

⁵ Cambridge University Collection, CA49, 168/568344.

⁶ *Ibid.* UD77, 168/568344.

⁷ C. Cochrane, *The Lost Roads of Wessex*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles (1969); 60.

⁸ W. G. Hoskins, *Fieldwork in Local History*, London, Faber (1967); 118.

⁹ Ivan D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, London, Baker (1967); vol. 1, 82.

¹⁰ In 1732, Abbotstone Warren was leased by Robert Cropp from the Duke of Bolton and converted to tillage. H.R.O. 11M49/418.

¹¹ P.R.O. Census Returns for 1841.

¹² London Probate Registry. 39 Holgrave.

¹³ B.M. Baigent MS. 39966.

¹⁴ R. L. P. Jowett, Hampshire Field Club.

¹⁵ Dated by G. Moss, Ministry of Public Building and Works.

¹⁶ Dated by Miss Keefe, Sussex Arch. Soc.

¹⁷ Drawn by Patrick Hase, University of Cambridge.

¹⁸ By the Hampshire County Museum Service.

¹⁹ *Domesday Book or The Great Survey of England (MLXXXVI)*, prepared by the Ordnance Survey, 46.

²⁰ A. W. Goodman, (ed.), *Chartulary of Winchester Cathedral* (1927); 197, 200.

²¹ R. A. Pelham, 'The Victualling of the English Fleet at Hamble in 1339,' Hampshire Field Club, *Newsletter* (1965), vol. 1, no. 2, 19.

²² P.R.O. E.179/173/4.

²³ *Feudal Aids*, vol. 11, 306. William, son of Adam de Port, who lived in the thirteenth century, had taken his mother's name of St. John.

²⁴ P.R.O. E.179/173/21.

²⁵ *Feudal Aids*, vol. 11, 342.

²⁶ P.R.O. E.179/173/229a. I am indebted to John Sheail for this reference.

²⁷ C. Deedes (ed.), *Registrum Johannis de Pontisarra* (1924); vol. 11, 606.

²⁸ H.R.O. Dr. Andrew's Notes.

²⁹ H.R.O. MS. Reg. Thomas Cooper, fo. 15.

³⁰ P. Ziegler, *The Black Death*, London, Collins (1969).

³¹ B. Carpenter Turner, *A History of Hampshire*, London, Darwin Finlayson (1963); 60.

³² Great Weir was constructed by Bishop Godfrey de Lucy, 1189-1204.

³³ C. Cochrane, *op. cit.* 91.