



AERIAL VIEW OF GREAT  
BOWDEN 31 MARCH 1998.



GREAT BOWDEN CHURCH WITH  
SOUTH FRONT OF OLD RECTORY  
c.1830.

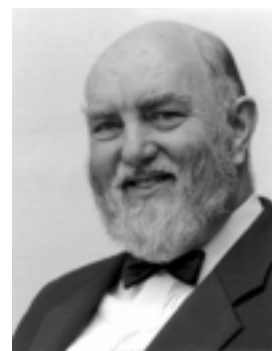
Following a Public Meeting held in the Village Hall on 25th September 1996 a group of local people volunteered to be part of The Great Bowden Village Appraisal Committee under the guidance and auspices of The Leicestershire & Rutland Rural Community Council. Thereafter this group, giving freely of their time and individual expertise held monthly meetings to discuss, formulate and trial the Appraisal Questionnaire and bring the analysis and publication to fruition. Never before had such a task been undertaken in Great Bowden, a village of at least a thousand years old and pre-dating the foundation of Market Harborough by some two or three hundred years.

The aim of the Appraisal Steering Group Committee was a sincere endeavour to obtain the views of the residents of Great Bowden as to what they thought of their environment and how it could be improved; furthermore to produce a historic record of the situation in the village in 1997/8. However, the committee were acutely aware that in spite of the many hours of deliberation it was inevitably flawed inasmuch as that some of the questions could have been better formulated and some questions were never asked. But that was largely with the benefit of hindsight in which the committee and readers are all well qualified! In spite or perhaps because of the problems involved, every member of the committee felt the project was well worth doing and every effort was made to obtain a representative and worthwhile result that would be beneficial to the village, its residents and for use by the local authorities and others when planning - in effect a "snapshot" of village life in the closing years of the 20th Century.

Throughout the period of gestation, the residents were kept fully informed about the purpose of the Appraisal and this resulted in the excellent result of an approx 70% response to the 429 questionnaires circulated to every household in the village. Every effort was made in

## GREAT BOWDEN VILLAGE APPRAISAL 1997-98

Michael C Brown



GREAT BOWDEN VILLAGE APPRAISAL STEERING GROUP COMMITTEE 8 MARCH 1998. STANDING L TO R: ROSEMARY CULKIN; PETER RHODES; BERNARD HART; JOHN HUNT; DIANA COOK; CAROLINE SENIOR; TRISH HOLLAND; MURIAL BIBBY; MICHAEL BROWN. SEATED L TO R: JEAN RICKWOOD; BUNTY JONES; ENA WARD.

the analysis to faithfully record without modification, all opinions and comments as written. Confidentiality was preserved throughout.

The final publication of 500 copies, priced at £5 each, comprised over 100, A5 pages which covered a brief history of the village. Although the village is recorded in The Domesday Book of 1086, and the Parish Church in C1220, very little else seems to be recorded, (or perhaps has yet to be found), for several hundred years until about 1500. A Chronology of village events since 1086 is listed and the publication covers such topics as the 1991

Census, traffic problems, public transport, security law & order, population, housing, services and facilities, recreation, environment, information and communication, religion, education, community volunteers, a tree survey and the community wood, concluding with a directory of village facilities. In addition there were included some 100 photographs including several aerial photographs and maps. Distributed throughout the publication were drawings by the children from the village school in an effort to try and obtain their feelings about the environment. The final publication was launched on the 7th June 1998 to festivities in the Village Hall and on the Village Green with the Appraisal Committee appearing in fancy dress ! In the past three years 41 other Leicestershire villages have published or about to publish their own Appraisals with some modelling their versions on the Great Bowden Appraisal and hopefully not making the same mistakes !

Where did the Appraisal books go apart from the villagers ? Complimentary copies were sent to the Harborough District Council, Great Bowden Parish Council, Leicestershire and Rutland Rural Community Council, both Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Record Offices, Leicestershire County Council, all the local schools, museums at Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Hallaton, local libraries and further afield to the Society of Genealogists, British Association for Local History, the Public Record Office at Kew, and the British Library at Wetherby and many other potentially interested



EXERCISE RING; BELONGING TO THE FERNIE HUNT.

organisations including the sponsors. Furthermore it was favourably reviewed in the East Midland Historian journal, published by Nottingham University and the Village Voice journal published by Leicestershire & Rutland Rural Community Council. But most surprising of all was a polite request for 5 copies, apparently legally required, from a London agent who distributed the Appraisal to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, National Library of Scotland, Trinity College Library in Dublin and the National Library of Wales. So the final publication has been widely dispersed, but feedback as might have been expected, has been minimal.

So what happened afterwards ? Some of the original Appraisal Committee formed a new group to formulate a Village Design Statement, (supported by the Parish Council and Harborough District Council), whose remit was to describe the distinctive character of the village and to formulate design principles to influence local planning authorities, developers, architects and others, in future planning developments. It is expected that this document will be published during this year by the Great Bowden Parish Council and is thought to be the first such publication in Leicestershire, with two others in draft form.

So was it all worth it? Well, the local authorities cannot plead ignorance of the Great Bowden village residents views and aspirations about their local environment ! It is earnestly hoped that these views will be considered when the planning authorities and others are making important decisions about the village and its people. It is clear that there is a strong community spirit and distinct identity about the village. This has also encouraged the recent publication of a book entitled 'Great Bowden: A Village and its People' published by the recently formed Great Bowden Historical Society. This is not a comprehensive history of the village, but is a collection of personal experiences and photographs of village folk. However, the real value of the Appraisal will only come in the future when this document, and the Village Design Statement is consulted for historical reasons or for residents views on certain aspects that may affect planning decisions. If these consultations are made and considered then the Appraisal publication and the Village Design Statement can be considered successful endeavours by the residents of Great Bowden.