



BASSINGBOURN  
~ CUM ~  
KNEESWORTH



### **The New Village Sign (front cover)**

The double-sided sign was commissioned by Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council who received a Community Chest grant of £1,500 from South Cambridgeshire District Council towards the cost. It was designed by Alex Hirtzel and Steve Sams, both of whom are Parish Councillors, in 2015.

The sign is cast in resin by Signs of the Times Ltd of Leighton Buzzard. Installed to mark the 50th anniversary of Bassingbourn joining with Kneesworth to become one parish on 1st April 2016, the sign now features the full name of Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth.

## **Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Village Sign**

**Wellington Bomber** – The plane on our sign is the Vickers Wellington long-range medium bomber. It is one of two aircraft named after the Duke of Wellington, the other being the Vickers Wellesley. Many of these aircraft flew from Bassingbourn airfield. ( It is not an image of the Memphis Belle which was a four-engined B-17f Flying Fortress.) Bassingbourn Airfield was opened on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1938 and 16 Wellington bombers moved in on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1939. In April 1941 one Wellington was shot down over the airfield and in July 1941 a Wellington collided with a Junkers 88 (the much feared Stuka) and crashed between the springs and the Recreation Ground. The American 91st Bomb Group arrived from USAF Barksdale (Louisiana) in October 1942. In July 1945 the base was handed back to the RAF and the American flag was presented to Bassingbourn.

**The Church** – The Church of St Peter and St Paul is Bassingbourn's primary place of worship. The church is very old being first mentioned during the reign of Henry III (1216-1271) but was not finished until 1400. The earliest reference to the vicar of Bassingbourn, according to the *Independent Press and Chronicle*, is Alan de Bassingbourn in 1206. In 1511 a mystery play was performed about St George and the Dragon. The play apparently lasted 5 days and was attended by many people from the surrounding villages. The church is constructed from flint and stone rubble, some of which no doubt came from the Clunch Pit, but was much reconstructed in 1864 and 1897. The church went through hard times and by 1807 there were only 5 or 6 people attending communion. By 1873 there were up to 50 attending. In comparison, there are around 80 people on the church electoral roll today. In addition to worship, the church hosts concerts and, jointly with the Transition Village, runs the popular village markets. It has 6 bells which chime the notes D#, C#, B, A#, G# and F#.

**The Lamp** – The lamp here is an old gas light. Bassingbourn was early in adopting street lighting and the Bassingbourn Gas Company was started in February 1866. The company went bankrupt in 1896 and all the village's gas lights were changed to oil. Although electricity reached Bassingbourn in the mid-1930s, electric street lighting wasn't in place until 1946.

**The Taxi** – The image of a car is a Rational taxi which was the first London Taxis ever built. These were produced at the taxi works which were in the area opposite the chemist. The old taxi works office can still be seen. The company was run by two gentlemen called Heatly and Gresham. However the business in Bassingbourn was short lived and it moved to Letchworth where rail connections were better. It is thought that only 15 taxis were made in Bassingbourn. The Rational was also exported to India.

**The Heron** – The grey heron emblazons the crest of both the cricket club and football club teams. It is the logo of the Bassingbourn Village College and is also the name of their newsletter (It is said that a heron was seen during construction work.) There is a Heron reading club and a Heron driving service in the village.

**The Flowers** – The flowers on our sign represent the John O'Gaunt gardens where it is said mystery plays were often produced. The garden was created between 1461 and 1470 by John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester. Now visible only as crop marks from the air, this was one of the most remarkable late-medieval gardens in England. A garden such as this had not been seen before. It resembled the early Renaissance gardens of Italy, which the Earl of Worcester had recently visited at the time of the garden's creation. Tiptoft's house stood on a high mound within a moat giving long views to the adjacent hills to the north and south. Around it are moated compartments with ponds and pathways. A long raised causeway linked it to the village.

**The Trees** – The trees represent our rural nature as well as the fact that Bassingbourn used to be home to many orchards (Orchard

Close). Sadly most have now gone to make way for housing. Also, poplar trees were grown by the Sell family who lived at what was called Poplar Farm for nearly 300 years. They owned the land alongside the A1198 at Bassingbourn Barracks and planted many poplar trees in this area. Apparently, according to a sale of wood document, the wood was used for railway sleepers and coffin sides.

**The Plough** – The Bassingbourn Plough (one of two ploughs found in the church tower during renovation work) was probably used in a Plough Sunday service, but just why or when the ploughs were left in the tower is unknown. Plough Sunday is a traditional English celebration of the beginning of the agricultural year. Plough Sunday celebrations usually involve bringing a ploughshare into a church with prayers for the blessing of the land. It is traditionally held on the Sunday after Epiphany, the Sunday between 7 January and 13 January. Accordingly, work in the fields did not begin until the day after Plough Sunday: Plough Monday. Although the nature of farming has changed over the centuries, Plough Sunday is seen as a way of generally celebrating farming and the work of farmers. As well as a ploughshare, in rural areas, it is common for local farmers to attend the service with their tractors - both new and old. One plough currently resides at Denny Abbey. Denny Abbey is a farmland museum and is situated just off the A10 from Waterbeach.

**The Coprolites** – Coprolites (bottom left) are phosphatic nodules a.k.a. fossilised dinosaur dung and look like small round pebbles. The word comes from “kopros”, the Greek for dung and “lithos” the Greek for stone. It was in the 1840s that it was discovered that coprolites, being rich in calcium-phosphate, could be turned into fertiliser. The fertiliser it produced was much cheaper than imported guano and a thriving industry soon grew up around coprolites. Mr Colchester and later Mr W.E. Cocks manufactured coprolite mining machinery at the Bassingbourn Iron Works in the High Street. An advertisement in

the Royston Crow from the 18 January 1878 stated: “Manufacturer of **ALL KINDS OF IMPROVED MACHINERY** required both for the raising and manufacturing of Coprolite; complete sets of which are always in stock or progress, including **Centrifugal and other pumping machinery, Contractors’ Trucks, Barrows, &c**”. Corn mills situated at the back of Tower Close were converted to grind coprolites which was then taken to Royston station. The ground coprolites were treated with sulphuric acid to manufacture superphosphate fertilizer. The introduction of cheap phosphate from Chile sounded the death knell for the local coprolite industry. In October 1895, the coprolite plant in Bassingbourn was sold at auction. In 2004, the Parish Council was offered a grant from the District Council towards a work of art. The winning design by Dave Billings was a brass sculpture of coprolites. However, the cost escalated from £5,000 to near £10,000. This was well in excess of the budget and the proposal was dropped. The sculpture was also derided in the national press as ‘dinosaur dung’.

**The Pigs** – In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Bassingbourn had a large acreage of orchards and pigs were often kept in the orchards. The pig population of Bassingbourn at one time was greater than that of humans; the prize-winning pigs used to be exercised on the green adjacent to the church. Mr E. W. Pepper bred pigs in Brook Orchard and showed them at the Royal Agricultural Show. An industry grew up to serve the pig farming industry with Wilkerson’s Progress Iron Works selling pig shelters and timber pig houses and Playles butchers (now Playles Yard) advertising prime pork and sausages from Bassingbourn bred pigs. However, keeping pigs was not without incident. Nick Wedd was in his orchard repairing a pig sty when he fell from the roof of the sty and was killed. Mr E.W. Pepper kept his pigs in straw pig-houses and in a disastrous fire at Brook Orchard half his herd was killed. The name of Saddleback Lane reminds us of the distinctive breed of black and white pig that was popular in this area.

## **The First Village Sign (rear cover)**

The first village sign was commissioned by Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council who decided to erect it on the small village green opposite Spring Lane.

It was designed by Chris and Su Merton who won first prize of £50 in 1993.

A quote of £590 was accepted for its manufacture.

The single-sided sign featured the parish church, a Rational taxi and pigs with a heron at the top. The sign only bore the name of Bassingbourn.

In September 1994 parishioners in Kneesworth requested their own village sign but it appears that this request was not pursued.

The sign appears to have been made from medium-density fibreboard. In 2014 the sign was seen to be deteriorating beyond repair and it was agreed to proceed with a replacement.



BASSINGBOURN