

BYGONE SILEBY



HOW SILEBY BEGAN

No. 5

**A SERIES OF BOOKLETS CONTAINING
HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT THE VILLAGE**

Foreword.

Have you ever wondered how the village came into existence?

Have you ever asked, "Who were the first people to dwell here?" Or "How did Sibley get its unusual name?"

This booklet attempts to describe events in those far-off times before records were written.

People have been living and working in Sibley for a thousand years, and later booklets will unfold the story of how the village developed.

It is hoped that eventually these booklets will cover the whole history of Sibley.

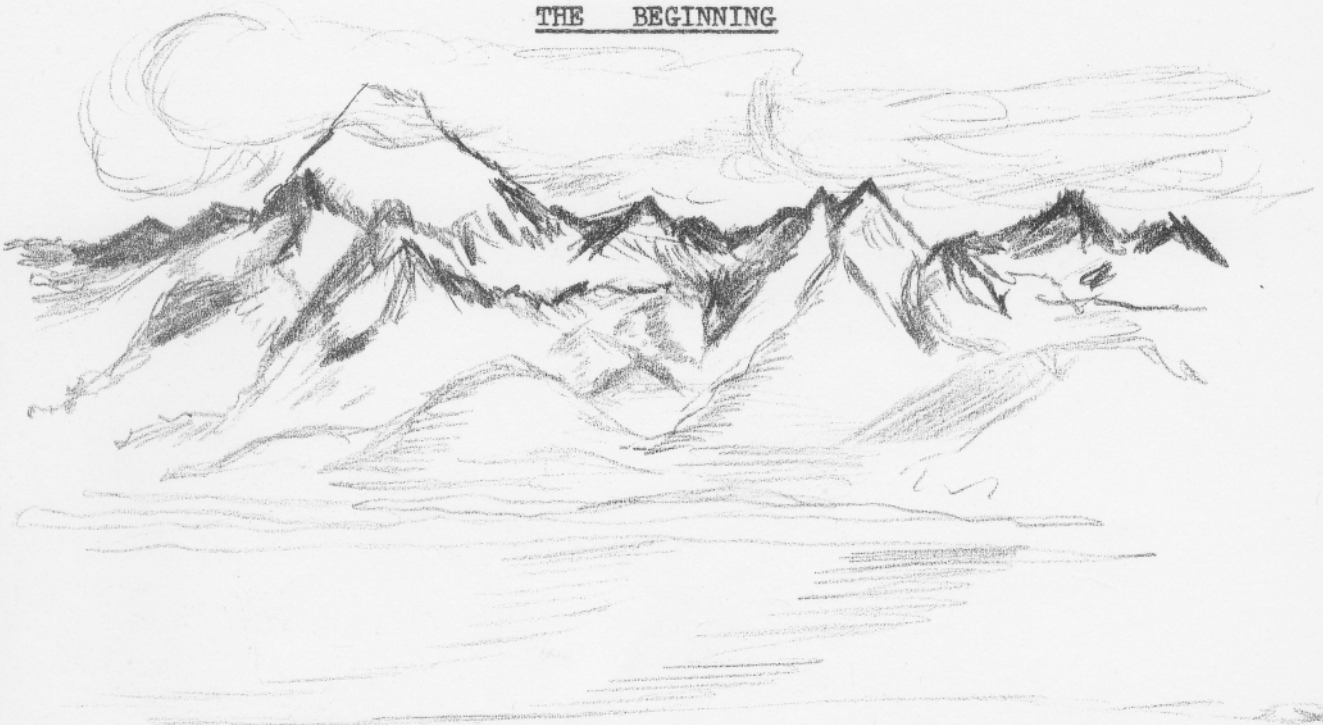
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PREHISTORIC CREATURES

In the deep muddy waters which covered this area, there lived huge aquatic reptiles, fish-lizards, which were up to thirty feet in length. In the clayey limestone between Sileby and Barrow-on-Soar, many fossils have been discovered, including the Plesiosaurus (1) and the Ichthyosaurus Communis(2). A model of the Plesiosaurus can be seen in the Leicester Museum, at New Walk. These and other prehistoric creatures swam freely above what was to become the village of Sileby.



THE BEGINNING



Hundreds of millions of years ago, the area in which we live was beneath a great sea which teemed with aquatic life. Today, we can find ample evidence of small shellfish which were in these waters, from their fossil remains. In gardens, and especially on the site of the former brickyard at the top of Albion Road, fossils can be found in quantity. The most common are (1) Gryphaea and (2) Amonites



Millions of years later, in the Triassic-Jurassic Age, when the climate was tropical, water still covered much of the land, and the savage Ichthyosaurus fought with the Plesiosaurus over where our village now stands.

As the great Ages passed, the tropical conditions gave place to the Ice Age, when the greater part of the northern hemisphere became like the Arctic, and massive glaciers were formed. Even in these conditions, there was life here, and the mammoth which inhabited these parts is illustrated on another page.

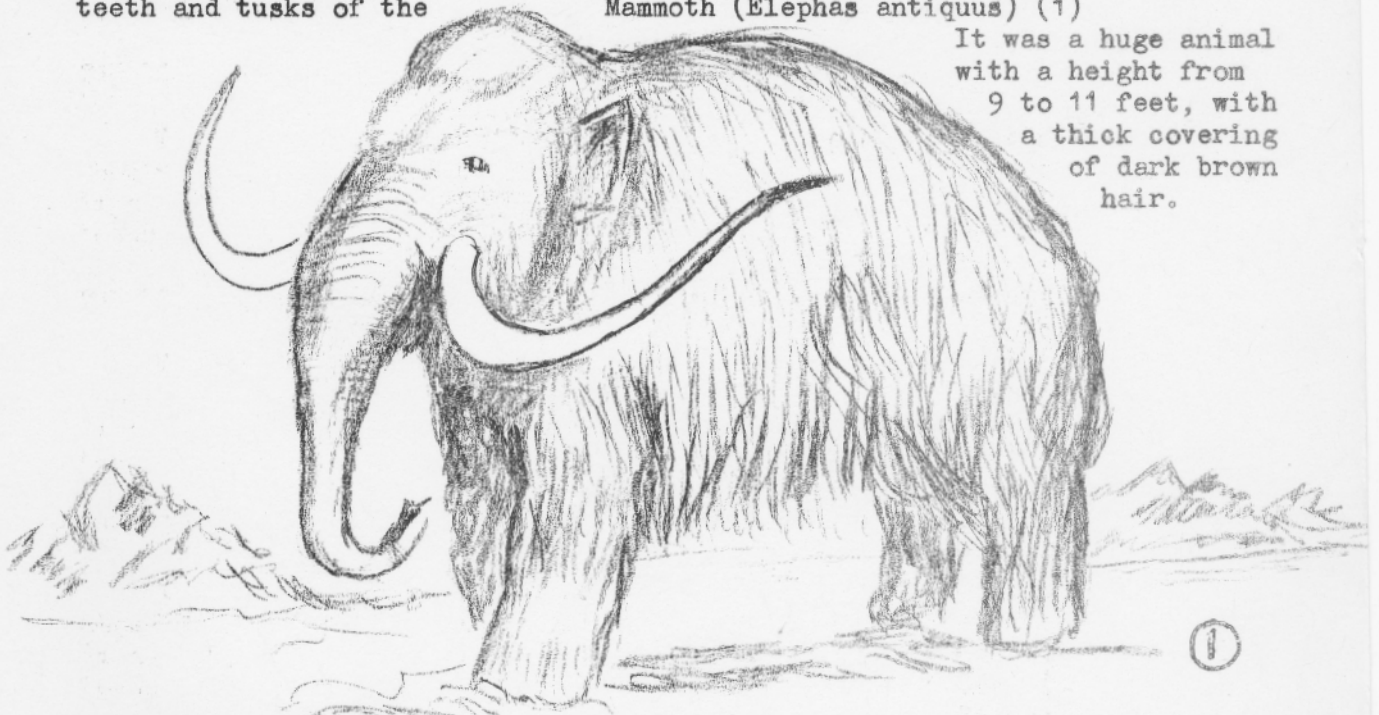
The Land Takes Shape

If we could go back through time to the Ice Age, long before man came to dwell here, and we looked to the west, we should see an ice-covered mountain range rising almost 7,000 feet, its peaks hidden in the clouds. As the Ice Age came to an end and the temperature

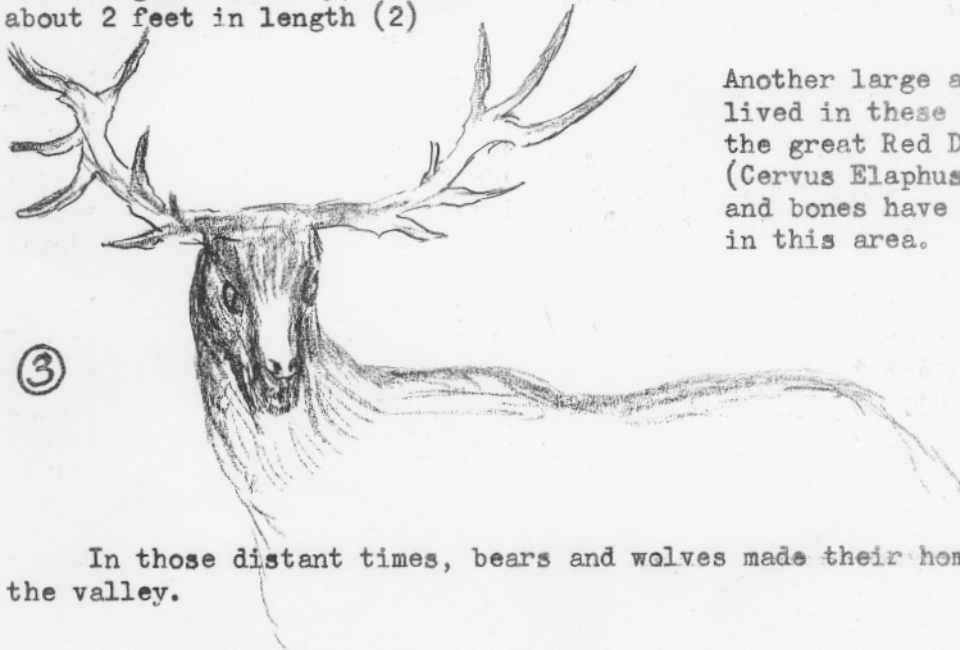
THE ICE AGE

Towards the close of the Ice Age, many animals now extinct roamed about the frozen waste where one day, the village of Sibley would appear. Among the fossilised remains which have been discovered locally, are teeth and tusks of the Mammoth (*Elephas antiquus*) (1)

It was a huge animal with a height from 9 to 11 feet, with a thick covering of dark brown hair.



The mammoth fed on the shoots of coniferous trees. The present Vicar of Sibley has some fragments of a mammoth tusk which was found at Wanlip a few years ago. The part of the tusk when it was brought to Sibley, was little decayed, and about 2 feet in length (2)



Another large animal which lived in these parts was the great Red Deer (3) (*Cervus Elaphus*). Antlers and bones have been found in this area.

In those distant times, bears and wolves made their home along the valley.

changed, the mountains began to crumble and splinter with the movement of the massive glaciers. The gradual shifting of the ice sheets began to alter the shape of the landscape as the mountains were rubbed away. The warmer conditions brought roaring torrents down to ever widening rivers. By the time the Ice Age had passed, the shape of the land had changed completely, and deposited over the whole area was gravel, sand and clay.

Early Inhabitants

We do not know who were the first people to live in these acres we now know as Sileby. As no excavation or organised search of the village has ever been made, the earth still perhaps conceals what evidence there may be of the earliest inhabitants. As a number of implements have been discovered in the villages adjacent to Sileby, it seems probable that primitive peoples dwelt in this place at the same time. At Mountsorrel, flint arrow-heads belonging to the latter part of the Neolithic Age were uncovered. At Barrow-on-Soar, a perforated axe-head of hard sandstone was found. An incense cup made of red clay and a mount for a bucket, dating from the Bronze Age were discovered at Mountsorrel, and a spear-head of the same period was taken from the bed of the river Wreake, at Syston. Perhaps Ancient Britons dwelt here, and used their wicker boats, the coracles, on the river, at a time when the Charnwood Forest extended down to the water's edge.

Roman Times

After the Roman army conquered Britain, Leicester, then called Ratae Coritanorum, became their largest town in the midlands. In the course of time, many of the Romans began to live outside of the town, and occupied villas in the ancient villages, or on country estates which they created. Some came to live in this area, where they erected villas at Rothley, Mountsorrel and Barrow-on-Soar. These were perhaps Romanised Britons, who had their farms and homes tended by slaves.

It is not generally known that on Barrow Road, close to Slough Lane, there was a Roman homestead. The site is now owned by Messrs. John Ellis & Sons. Workmen who were digging there in 1867, uncovered a tumulus, or Roman burial place. When it was excavated, it was found to be a vault, roughly constructed of stones and clay tiles. Within lay two skeletons, and a large amphora or two handled jar, which contained ashes and some iron nails. Nearby was a clay cinerary urn and several vessels made of glass. A further examination of the site in 1874, revealed a vault wall built of small pieces of granite, which had been brought from Mountsorrel.





In 409 A.D., the Emperor Honorius was compelled to withdraw all his troops from Britain, as Rome itself was in peril.

From the first invasion of Britain under Julius Caesar to the time they quitted the island covered a period of 464 years.

The small community in this village who dwelt in huts by the brookside, would be part of the Coritani tribe.



Some of the local tribesmen hearing of the departure of the Romans, would make their way to the Fosse to watch the detachments of the legions marching away from Ratae for the last time.

The departure of the Romans left Britain in such a state of weakness, The Picts and Scots in vast numbers invaded the country. The Britons sought the aid of the Saxons in 450 A.D. This warlike people from northern Germany drove back the Picts and Scots, then began to take possession of Britain for themselves.



Saxon Times

Although the tribes fought the Saxons, they were gradually overcome. More and more of the invaders crossed the North Sea, and penetrated inland down the rivers. One division sailed by the rivers Humber and Soar to reach Leicester, and spread over the towns and villages. They are known as the Middle Angles. All traces of the old Roman civilization soon disappeared, and even the town of Ratae had its name changed to Legester.

Evidence of the Saxon occupation is to be seen in many places in the county. The village of Cossington had a Saxon origin,

and in the churchyard at Rothley, there is part of a cross belonging to the later Saxon period. The Britons became serfs for their new masters, cultivating the land and rearing their cattle. As no investigation has been made in Sileby, the only indication of Saxon presence in the village was the discovery of an iron spear-head, in 1958.

Danish times

After the Saxons had settled in Britain, they established seven kingdoms, known as the Heptarchy. Leicestershire was in the kingdom of Mercia.

More than three centuries later, Egbert, the king of the West Saxons made war on the other six, conquered them, and in 827 A.D., united the kingdoms under the name of England.

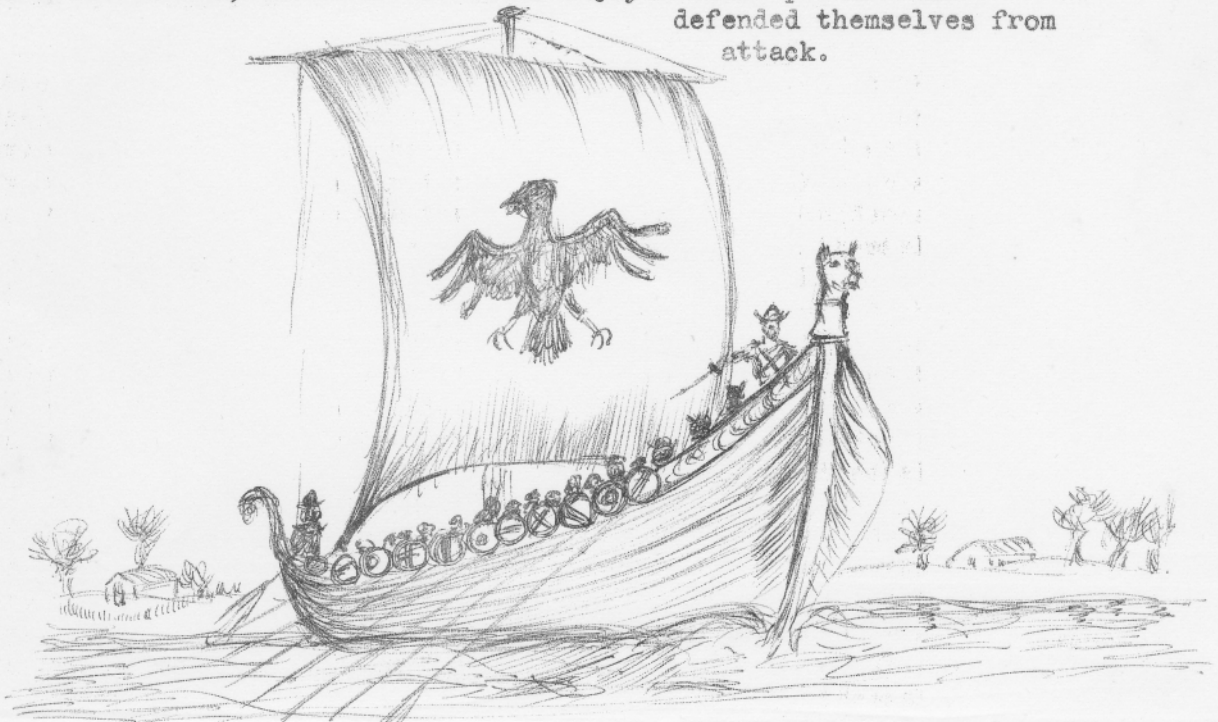
A new danger threatened the island. Danish raiders crossing the North Sea, had begun to invade and plunder the coastal regions in 798 A.D. Returning to their northern homeland in ships laden with booty, they encouraged greater numbers of their fellow sea-robbers to invade and penetrate even deeper into the English countryside. Sometimes the Danes were driven off in battle, sometimes they were bribed to leave, but they always returned, and by 897 A.D., they had begun the political conquest of England.

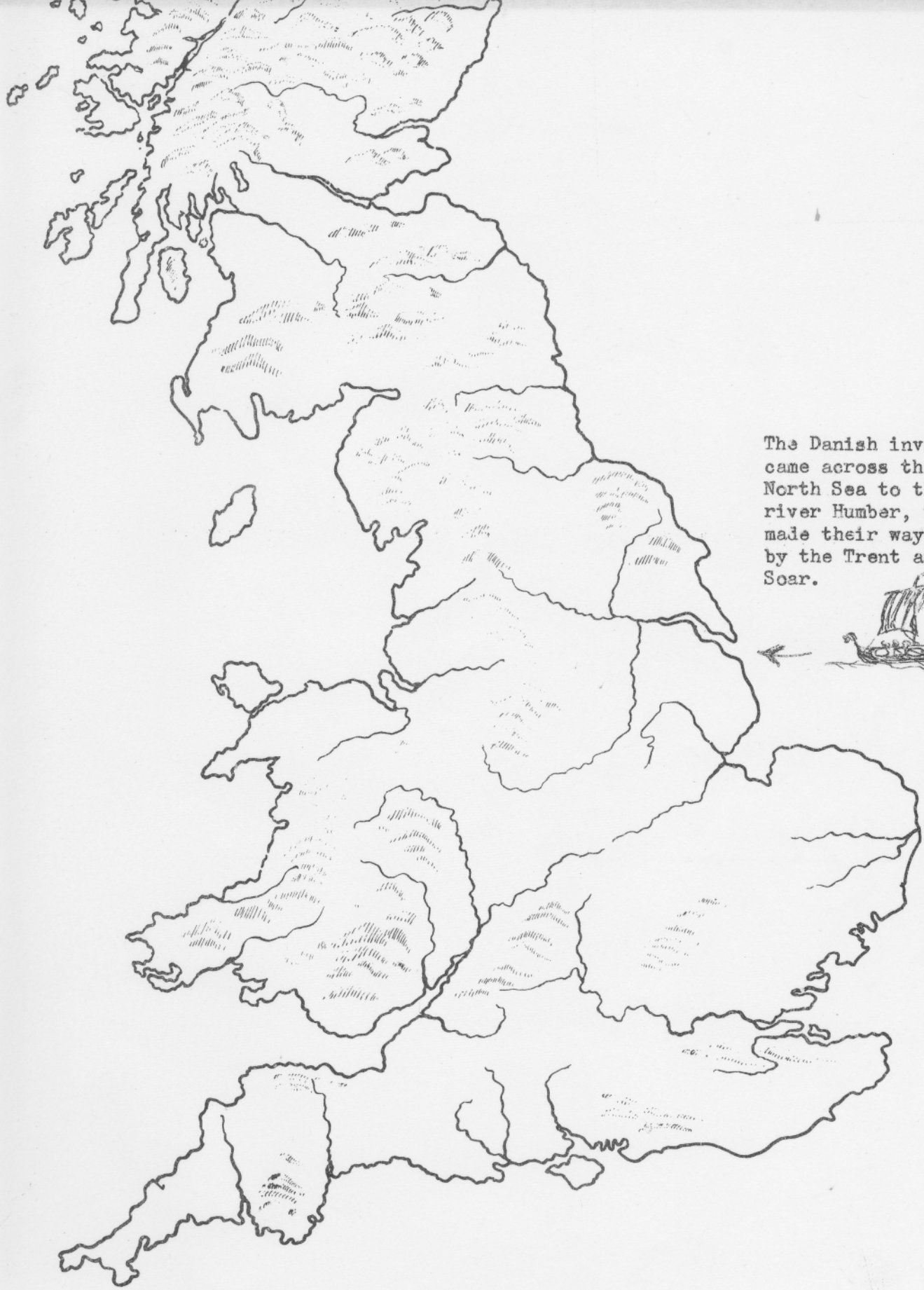
How Sileby got its name

In the midland kingdom of Mercia, the dragon-like Norse ships filled with fighting men, moved slowly along the Trent and the Soar, mercilessly attacking riverside villages and farms. The town of Legester was more than once stormed and left in flames.

The raiders dispersed along the rivers to seize and occupy the Saxon villages and cultivated areas. Their first task was to ensure the safety of the ship, which was their life-line with the main armies and their distant homeland. The warriors manhandled the heavy vessel out of the water and placed it on a prepared slope, where in emergency, it could easily be returned to the river. Around the ship they constructed a rough barricade of timber, and within this stockade huts were erected, where the invaders enjoyed their plunder and

defended themselves from attack.





The Danish invaders came across the North Sea to the river Humber, then made their way inland by the Trent and the Soar.



The Danish name for this stockade was "by," which was identified by the name of the leader. The man who led the invaders here was Sighuld, and this small region of Danish occupation became known as "Sighuld's-by," which was later modified to Sileby.

The gradual conquest and settlement of the Danes brought an influx of wives and families, and the original bys became expanding villages as the Saxon farms were taken over, and their occupants made serfs.

The Danish villages near the Leicestershire rivers are recognised by the distinctive suffix "by." The names of some of the other warrior leaders can be identified in Blaby, "Ela's-by;" Frisby, "Frisian's-by;" Ratby, "Rota's-by;" Rearsby, "Hreithar's-by" etc.

It is thought that the Danish village of Sileby came into existence about 950 A.D.



their shields when confirming decisions made in common assembly. Leicestershire had four Wapentakes, Gartree, Goscote, Guthlaxton and Framland. Sileby was in the Wapentake of Goscote.

Danelaw

Although in the spring of 918 A.D., the Lady Aethelflaed, daughter of King Alfred the Great, led a Saxon army into Danish Mercia and captured Leicester, it was but a temporary success, and eventually, Canute was accepted as King of all England.

The Danes imposed their own system of government, and the territory north of the Thames was called the Danelaw. Here were formed the Five Danish Boroughs of Lincoln, Derby, Leicester, Stamford and Nottingham, previously the headquarters of five Danish armies. Sileby was within the Borough of Leicester.

Wapentakes

Towards the close of the 10th Century, the midland shires of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby and Lincoln were given territorial divisions in which villages were grouped for the administration of justice. These areas were called Wapentakes. The ancient Norse word vapentak meant the sound made by warriors clashing swords against

A MAP OF LEICESTERSHIRE SHOWING THE WAPENTAKES

Sileby was in the GOSCOTE WAPENTAKE



Hundreds in the
Goscote Wapentake

Ashby Folville
Barkby
Beeby (including Sileby)
Belton
Dalby-on-the-Wolds
Diseworth
Great Dalby
Loddington
Loughborough

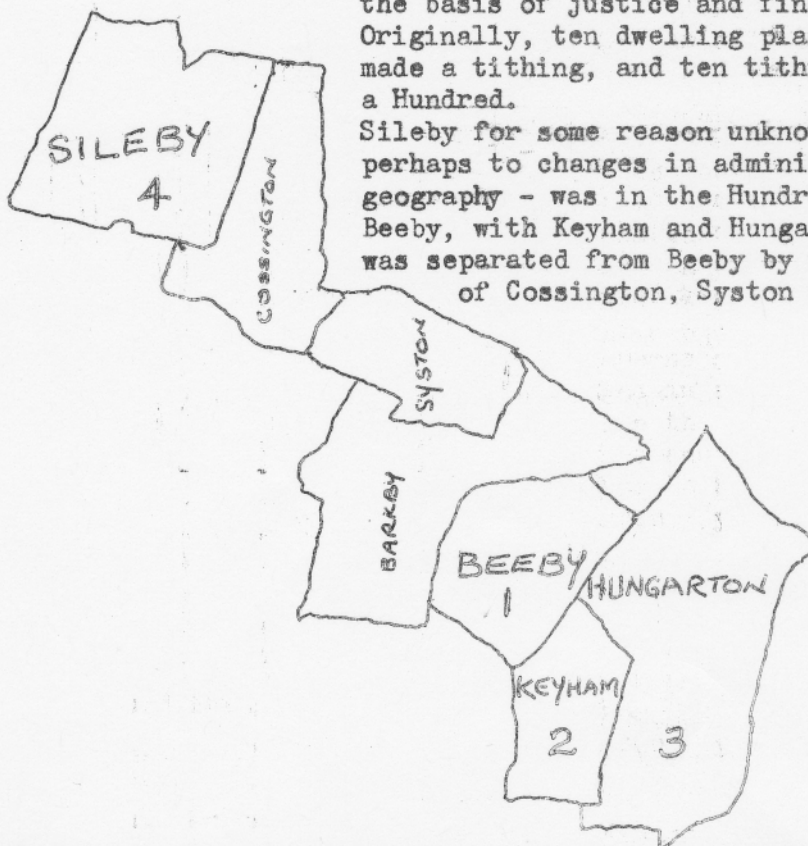
Rearsby
Seal
Sheepshed

Tilton
Tong
Thrussington

The Hundred

There was another regional grouping which involved Sileby. Subdivisions of the shire called Hundreds formed the basis of justice and finance. Originally, ten dwelling places made a tithing, and ten tithings a Hundred.

Sileby for some reason unknown - perhaps to changes in administrative geography - was in the Hundred of Beeby, with Keyham and Hungarton. Sileby was separated from Beeby by the villages of Cossington, System and Barkby.



The Hundred court met monthly to administer customary law and to hear pleas through its president, the King's Reeve. The breaking of the laws or dooms of the Hundred could bring a fine on all members, particularly for failure to pursue and secure thieves.

In the ancient tithing, a magistrate was appointed who was responsible for the good conduct of the inhabitants of the ten dwellings in his charge. To prevent vagrancy and crime, every man was obliged to reside in some fixed habitation. If a crime were committed, the magistrate endeavoured to arrest the offender, but if he failed, the tithing was fined. It was an effective system of maintaining law and order, for neighbours kept a watch on each other. The King's Reeve with a jury of 12 householders tried criminal offences within the Hundred. It must have been wearying for the Sileby thithingmen who were compelled to attend the court at Beeby.

There was little essential difference between the courts of the Hundred and the Wapentake. In county returns after 1100 A.D., Sileby is listed in the Hundred of Goscote instead of Beeby. The village of Beeby was in the Wapentake of Guthlaxton, so it may be that during the 12th Century, Sileby moved into the Hundred and Wapentake of Goscote.

Life in Sileby 1,000 years ago

In an age when life was spent in the open air, houses were merely places of shelter from the elements. The agricultural workers in Sileby dwelt in huts made of mud and wattle, with straw-thatched roofs. The floor was covered with rushes and straw, and in the centre, a circle of stones served as a fireplace for cooking. Smoke from the wood fire escaped through a hole in the roof.

Clothing was simple and practical. Smocks made from home produced linen were secured round the waist by a leather belt. In cold weather, a short cloak was worn about the shoulders, held in place by a pin or brooch.

Men wore linen trousers of knee length, the lower part of the legs being covered by woollen stockings, or skins bound with strips of leather. Their feet were shod in leather slippers made in the huts.

Life in the village a thousand years ago was entirely centred on farming, and the Calendar they used in those times shows how the months had names referring to the agricultural activities. It helps us to see how our ancestors spent their working days.

JANUARY	was called "Wolf-monath," when roaming wolf packs were most ravenous and dangerous. This was the month when the teams of oxen began to draw the ploughs.
FEBRUARY	was known as "Sprout-kele," from the word Kelewurt or kale. This member of the cabbage family could survive frost, and provided greens for a winter broth. Wood for cooking fires was cut on the waste land and in the woodland of the village.
MARCH	was the "Illyd-monath," or stormy month. The land was cleared, and digging, sowing and hoeing began.
APRIL	was called "Oster-monath," because of the easterly winds. Festivals were held when the first signs of life were seen in the fields, and the lambs were born.
MAY	was "Trimilki-monath," when the kine were milked three times in the day. May Day was a great festival in rural England, when drinking-horns were filled with home-brewed ale and mead.
JUNE	was known as "Weyd-monath," as cattle were "weyd," or driven to feed in the marshy meadowland.
JULY	had various names. It was "Hey-monath," the time of mowing and making hay. It was also "Heu-monath," the month of thick foliage. It was sometimes called "Li da-aftera," which meant the second month after the sun began to decline.
AUGUST	was "Barn-monath," the harvest month.
SEPTEMBER	was "Gerst-monath," when from the cereal grain a liquor was made called "Beerlegh," - hence the name barley.
OCTOBER	was "Wyn-monath," the month of wine. A hardy vine was cultivated in England which had been introduced by the Romans.

NOVEMBER was the "Wint-monath," the wind month, which brought the first of the cold winter storms across the land.

DECEMBER was called "Aerra Geola," as the sun changed its course in the heavens. In heathen England it was a month of festivity associated with the god Thor, but when Christianity became established, December was known as "Heilig-monath," or the holy month.

THE DANES SETTLE HERE

The influence of the Danish invaders was felt everywhere in this shire, and particularly in this area.

The members of the disbanded Viking army were to be found in the "bys" which were along the rivers - BROOKSBY, HOBY, BARKBY, DALBY, BEEBY, REARSBY, ROTHERBY, GADDESBY, BARSBY, etc. In all, there were more than forty villages in Leicestershire identified with the Danish occupation.

The word "bye-law" was in olden times, the law of the Danish "by" or village, a local law.

In the town of Leicester, and we suppose in Sileby too, the old Saxon language almost disappeared, and Danish was the tongue heard in these parts - even after the Normans conquered the country in 1066. Some of the old words used in every day speech about 1900, had been spoken in the village since Danish times. An obvious example is "thacking," or thatching, covering a roof.

People in the town of Leicester about 1,000 A.D., were divided into four classes: (1) Thaners, or gentry of that period. (2) Lawmen, or magistrates who administered the law at the town court known as the Moot. (3) Burgesses or townsmen, the freemen who resided in the borough. (4) Serfs or bondmen.

In those days, there were a number of Sileby men who were both residents in the village and burgesses of the town of Leicester. They were important people in Sileby, as they were tradesmen who sold their wares in the town market.

Sileby also had Serfs, the slaves of the wealthy landowners. These bondmen were the descendants of the earlier Saxon inhabitants of the village.

* * * *

In the next historical booklet, *Bygone Sileby No.7*, we shall find documentary evidence of people who lived in Sileby almost 900 years ago, when we look at the records of Sileby which are to be found in the *Domesday Book*, which was compiled in the year 1086 A.D.

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BYGONE SILEBY

The next booklet will be No.6, - to be called "More Old Words and Sayings." Those who liked the first booklet on this subject will find this one as interesting, and will revive some old memories of the past. On the cover is a rare old photograph of Barrow Road, near Cart's Yard.

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Mr. C. Dakin, 86, Cossington Road. 'Phone 2519
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Recent Speakers have included:

Mr. W. Jacques taking a course on Switzerland

Mr. H. G. Green of Quorn, topic "Youth and the Permissive Society"

Joe Hutchinson of Anstey. An artist's holiday in Bruges.

Mr. R. B. Davis of Leicester, "Immigration and its problems"

Speakers in the future include:

Mr. Singh Advisor to Leicester City Education Committee on Immigrant Education.

Alderman S. Tomlinson of Leicester