

# Conington Village and its Lost Castle



**Remembered by Reg and Wendy Hubbard, who still live in Conington today.**

Produced by Great Fen staff and volunteers, with the help of Ramsey Rural Museum, as part of the Great Fen oral history project.

All photos courtesy of Reg and Wendy Hubbard.



# The Castle and the Heathcotes



Conington Castle in September, 1926

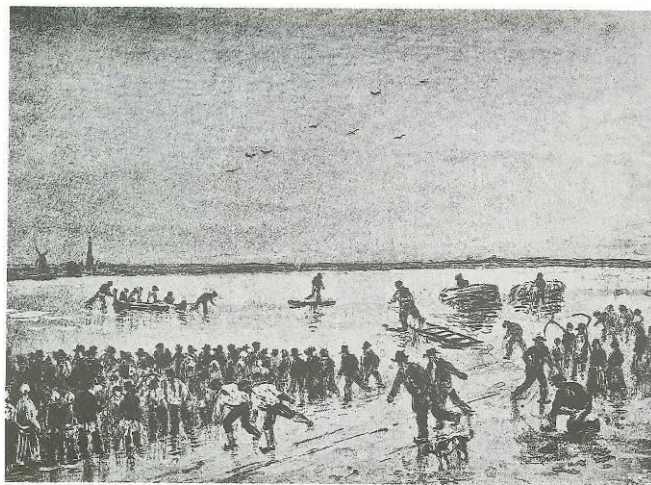
Conington Castle, built in the 16th century, was once an estate home to generations of the Heathcote family.

**Reg Hubbard said: "The Heathcotes were lovely people. They really were like family. You could walk all over the estate, wherever you wanted to go."**

The building was sadly demolished in the 1950s, but the lodge is still standing.

One of the Heathcotes in the family line, J M Heathcote, is well known for his book 'Reminiscences of Fen and Mere' (1876).

J M Heathcote recorded memories and illustrations of the fens in the nineteenth century, including boating and skating on nearby Whittlesea Mere.



A skating race on the Whittlesea Mere – once the largest lake in lowland England. The Mere was drained in the 1850s.



Conington Castle, 1875

Illustrations from Reminiscences of Fen and Mere



## **Working life in the twentieth century**

Reg's father worked for Squire Heathcote on Bruce's Castle Farm, which was also on the Conington Estate.

Reg said: "Nearly all the people in the village worked at the castle because that's the only work there was. My sister used to be up there as a maid during the 1940s."



Conington Castle, north western view  
taken on tennis court

Reg added : "They had maids, they had nannies, they had butlers - you name it, they had it. They had gardeners and they used to grow all their own produce."



Gardening staff at Conington Castle

(left to right) Clara, Reg Jarquett, E Baker, Frieda, E.M.H. Ethel H. Baxter, Maggie M. Spot Stokes Aug 1916.



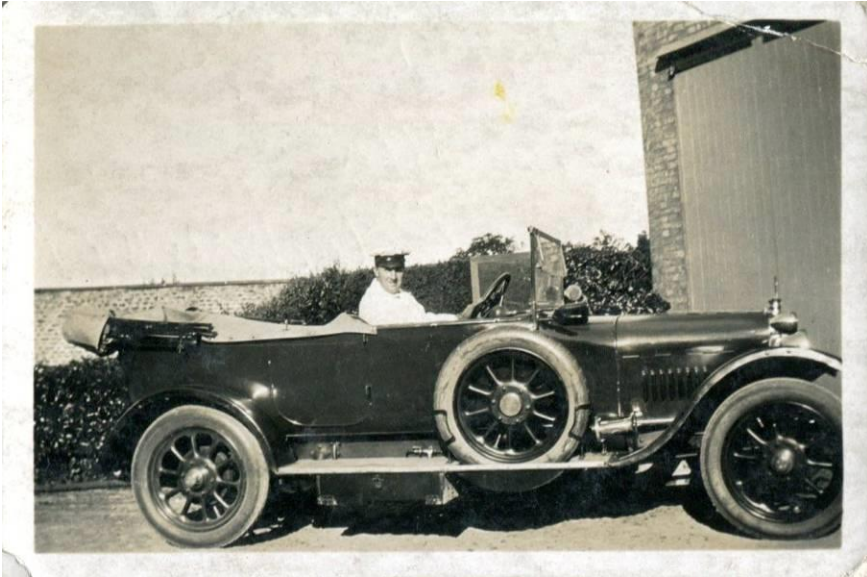
## **The gamekeeper: A man of many talents**

Wendy said: "Arthur Baxter was the gamekeeper and the chauffeur - he was everything. They only had Arthur Baxter to do it all. He lived in the gamekeeper's cottage."

Arthur J Baxter  
(right) and the  
gamekeeper's  
cottage (below)



A J Baxter in his chauffeur's uniform (top left), driving car (top right) and washing car (bottom).





## Hard work at the church organ!

Wendy said: "Mr Baxter's wife used to play the organ in the church and she was the schoolteacher. I used to have to pump the organ for her and the organ leaked so that it was continuous pumping with a long handle. It was really hard work!"

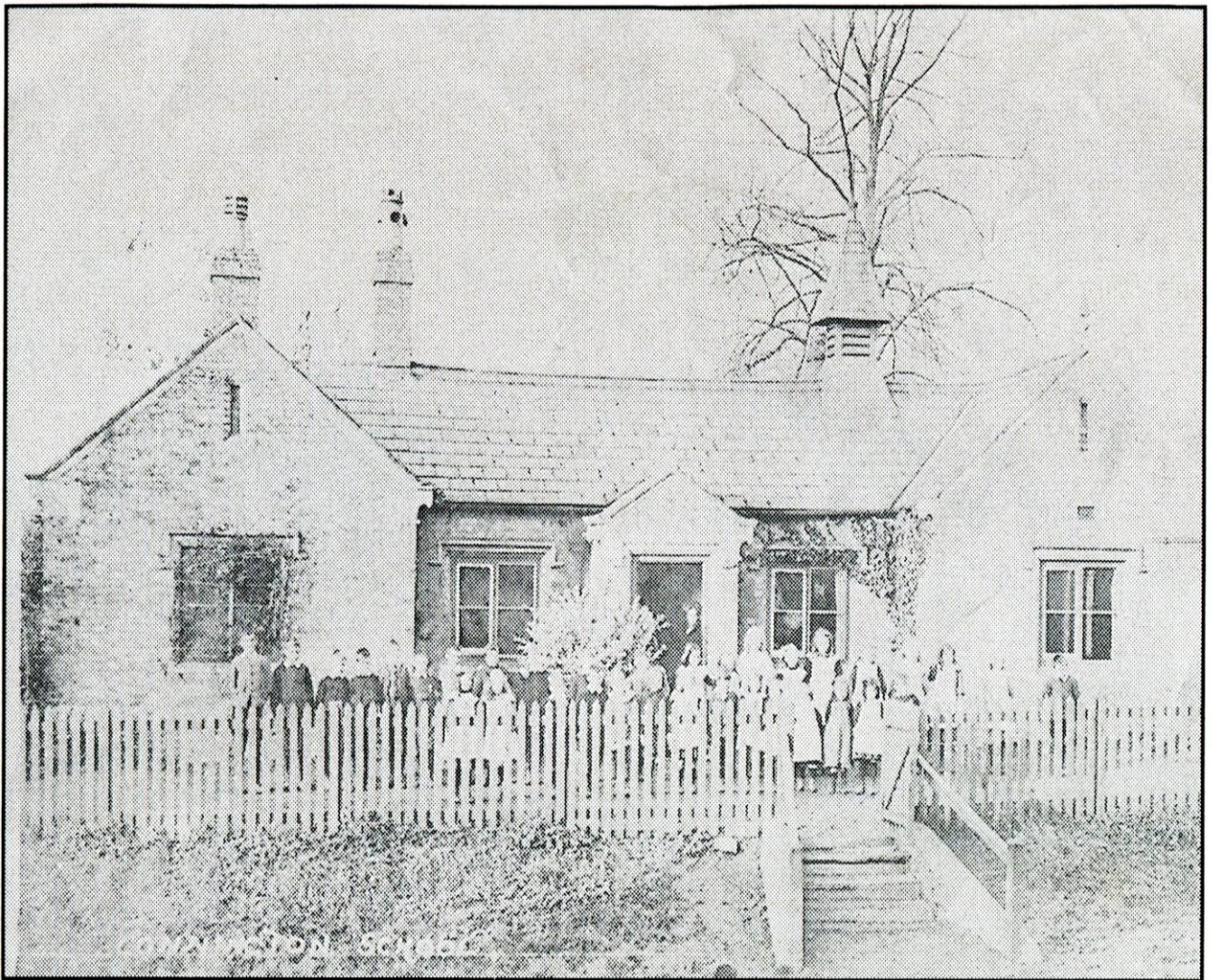
"We haven't had any church services for years. The church is almost redundant now. We get two services a year, but I don't pump the organ any more. I'm seventy and that's it!"



"The rectory is still there but it has been turned into flats. The vicar at the time was a man called Canon Wayne, he used to live there with his daughter, Eleanor Wayne."



# Conington School



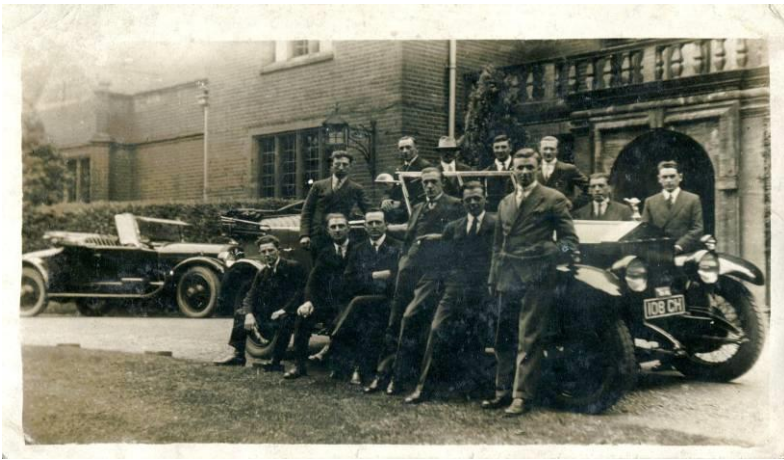
**VILLAGE CLASSES:** Conington School pre-1914, when the village population was fewer than 300. The school was originally set up as the National Endowed School for 67 children and records for 1898 show in that year there was an average attendance of 35, and a mistress called Louisa Fagg.

Reg went to Conington School from the ages of nine to eleven, "In the summertime we used to come down the steps, go over the road and into the park to play football, and when it was time to go back into school the headmistress used to ring the bell."



## Social life

Reg said: "They used to have a lot of shooting parties up at the Castle. We used to have garden fêtes up there and they used to have ballroom dancing on the green at night time."



Above right: Squire Heathcote with a friend in 1963



Mayday Celebration in Conington



Reg said: "We had a hall down the top of the road here, what they called the ex-serviceman's hut, and we used to have whist drives and dances in there. **It was the best dance floor round here for miles. They used to raise money then take all the children and the parents to the seaside.**"

"There were never any pubs in the village because old squire Cotton, who came before the time of the Heathcoates, was a teetotaller, so he said there was to be no pub. But we all used to go the Woolpack just up the old A1. **They used to have a bloke playing the piano, and people used to get up and sing on the microphone.**"

## **The end of an era**

Reg remembers the castle being demolished: "I think it wanted a lot of money spending on it for repairs, so they decided to pull it down but they kept the big house at the side which used to be the footman's quarters."

The estate is now owned by the Rochester Trust.



**Our sincere thanks to Reg and Wendy Hubbard for sharing their stories, photos and memories.**

## **Local Memories project**

If you have a story, photos or objects that you'd like to share with us, please do get in touch:

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**You may also be interested in some of our other Local Memories booklets, including:**

### **Four generations on the Fen:**

The Masons at Woodwalton Fen

### **Family Life in the Fens**

The story of the Kemps and the Keightleys

### **Fireballs and Flying Fortresses**

The story of 457<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group