



MELKSHAM TIMELINE - DOMESDAY TO PRESENT

1086 At the time of the Domesday Book, the capital, or chief, manor of Melksham was held by the crown. It was a large and valuable estate, which eventually passed through many families, including the Brounckers and Danvers.

1130 The chancel of St. Michael's and All Angels parish church dates from this time; it is not known when the earliest church on this site was built.

1219 Melksham was considered important enough to be granted a Charter to hold a market every Friday and a fair on Michaelmas Day.

1236 20 oak trees from Melksham Forest were used to make the stalls in Salisbury Cathedral.

1250 A Tuesday Market and also a three day Michaelmas Fair were granted. A Medieval settlement was likely to have been concentrated round Church Street, Church Walk, High Street and The Market Place.

1300 During the 1300s St. Michael's church is enlarged.

1349 There were weavers working in Melksham.

1400 During the 1400s St. Michael's church is remodelled and many additions were made.

1415 The Town Bridge is first mentioned in records, when William Honeston bequeathed a sum towards maintenance.

1417 Thomas Trewin bequeaths money for the maintenance of Lowbourn Bridge.

1491 The Prioress of Amesbury, then holder of the manor, obtained a 2 day fair for the 15th and 16th July, thus providing more commercial opportunities.

1500 and 1600s Clothing industry was at its peak in Melksham during this period, producing white undyed broadcloth.

1539 The central tower of St. Michael's church was built about this time.

1550 Place House was built between the church and the Market Place around this time, by Henry Brouncker.

1555 There were 2 fulling mills in the town.

1608 First documented reference to Melksham House, built west of the church.

1614 A poor-house is mentioned when a payment was made by the churchwardens for having it cleaned. A parish constable of Melksham is first mentioned in this year.

1624 The Royal Forest had been sold off following an authorisation to disforest in 1618.

1631 Woolmore House was built at Bowerhill by George Hulbert.

1637 The town bridge was in a bad state and the Quarter Sessions order the townspeople to repair it under penalty of a £40 fine.

1650 About this time the weavers are producing medley broadcloth and trade improves.

1669 Melksham has been an important centre for the activities of the Society of Friends from the 17th century until the present day. The first recorded meeting is in 1669 when 80 Quakers were said to have attended service at the house of Robert Marchmant or Marshman at Shaw Hill.

1676 A census by Bishop Compton shows that there were 100 nonconformists and 1865 conformists in Melksham.

1690 The Chirurgions Arms public house was in existence (no longer exists).

1695 A Quaker boarding school established. In 1696 John Jeffry of Hampton (Gloucester) was appointed as the first master, he was succeeded by John Padley 'from the north' in 1705.

1697 The Reverend Bohun Fox, vicar of Melksham, established a charity school in the town.

1699 Sir Walter Long purchased Melksham House.

1701 A license was issued for Baptist meetings to be held at the house of James Webb in Melksham. Shaw House was rebuilt by Thomas Smith.

1714 The first Baptist chapel was built in Melksham.

1720 The George Inn was in existence (no longer exists).

1721 The Quaker school is no longer in existence.

1726 The piece rate paid for the cloth was so low that it was impossible for the weavers to earn a living.

1734 The Friends Meeting House was built in King Street.

1738 In this year a leading clothier, Henry Coulhurst, had his house and mill wrecked by weavers during a dispute over wages and eventually troops were sent in, some of the rioters were tried and three were executed.

1741 The poor were employed on public works.

1747 There were further riots in 1747 and 1750; dragoons were sent to the town to help keep order.

1750 When the toll road route from London was altered, resulting in stagecoaches from London passing through Melksham on their way to Bath, Bristol, Exeter and Devonport, The King's Arms Hotel was built in the town centre.

1750 Until the early years of the 19th century Methodism had not taken a strong hold in Melksham itself, although Wesley preached there on 23rd October 1750.

1753 The old Bath road had passed to the north-east of Melksham, descending Bowden Hill into Lacock but after turnpiking of the Melksham roads in 1753 the route moved south thus avoiding the steep hill.

1757 Jacob Selfe bequeaths the interest on £100, for bread & meat at Christmas for 8 poor Beanacre householders.

1762-1790 The Society of Cloth Workers & Others for the Support of Sick and Infirm Workmen meet at the King's Arms.

1771 A poor house with brewhouse & bake-house is built in King Street, at the end of a yard later called Union Place.

1776 A new Baptist church is built in Old Broughton Road.

1782 A Post Office is in existence.

1788 Congregational Church is built in the Market Place.

1790 During the 1790's the Ark cloth factory is built.

1791 Daily coach services to London and Bath are mentioned.

1792 An announcement was made in the Bath Chronicle in June 1792 of the establishment of the Melksham Bank by the firm of Messrs Awdry, Long & Bruges.

1793 Melksham has a fire engine, owned and operated by the vestry. The large fulling mill converted to a corn mill.

1795 The canal was authorised by an Act of 1795 and during the 19th century carried considerable traffic. Private subscription enables the footways to be paved. The Baptist church has galleries built to accommodate the increasing number of worshippers.

1801 Henry Moule 1801-1880, born in Melksham and pioneer of the dry earth closet. He was ordained to the curacy of Melksham in 1823.

1803 Charles Maggs bought a former cloth mill adjoining Spa Road and used it for making rope, matting & tarpaulins.

1808 Melksham Methodist Chapel is built in the High Street.

1809 Melksham Town Bridge was swept away a flood and replaced with the present four arched stone bridge.

1810 Wilts & Berks and Kennet & Avon canals by then were both fully open bringing raw materials including coal and slate into the town and taking away finished products.

1813 Mineral waters were first noticed at Bowerhill & chalybeate & saline springs were used to promote Melksham as a Spa. In November 1813 the misquoting of part of an advertisement in two London newspapers caused panic amongst the bank customers, many of whom quickly withdrew their money, reportedly causing "some bustle" among the bank partners.

1815 Several local gentry who had prospered from the woollen industry, the Awdrys, the Longs, the Methuens and the Phillips formed the Melksham Spa Company with a capital of 7,000 guineas to exploit the chalybeate spring. A reading and circulatory library was opened at Mr Ward's printing offices, primarily for visitors to the spa.

1817 Freemasonry first came to Melksham in 1817[citation needed], when a former Lodge of Westbury was transferred, and the first meeting was held in Melksham at the King's Arms on 9 September that year.

1819 The Wilts & Berks canal linking the Kennet & Avon Canal with the River Thames opened in 1819.

1822 The Spa closes, as could not compete with the one in Bath.

1824 There was trouble when the bank was listed on a Parliamentary Paper of the House of Commons under the title "Country Banks Becoming Bankrupt".

1826 John Fowler, agricultural engineer and inventor of the steam plough was born in Melksham.

1828 An 'Establishment' called the 'Melksham General School of the Education of Poor Children' was formed, at Lowbourne.

1830 By this year there were six coaches each day carrying passengers to London.

1832 A private gas company was formed in the town and became a public company in 1855 and in 1936 was bought by the Bath Gas Company.

1838 During May fishermen using a net in a deep pool in the River Avon had a big surprise when the net pulled up a very heavy object. It turned out to be the horns and part of the skull of an ox, infact it was a Bos Primigenius, from the Paleolithic area, a species long since extinct. It is now mounted above the door in the council chamber, Melksham Town Hall.

1839 Radical political activity came to the town in 1839 when a Chartist meeting was held. A Chartist group was in the town between June 1841 and January 1843.

1840 The National School was founded on a site by the churchyard and the old tithe barn.

1847 A private company had built a Market hall in the Market Place at a cost of £3,500 (later to become the Town Hall). Also a lock-up was built, which doubtless housed over-enthuasiatic revellers from the market as well as people awaiting trial.

1848 Railway connecting Melksham to Thingley Junction, south of Chippenham, and Westbury is opened by the Wilts. Somerset and Weymouth Railway Company. Shaw School founded.

1850 Benjamin Sawtell founded a business in Challymead, Bradford Road, filling palliasses with straw for the army.

1852 The Melksham Mutual Improvement Society with a reading room opens in Bank Street.

1858 The Fowler Almshouses (five) were founded and endowed by Rachel Fowler, a charitable Quaker who lived at No.1 Bank Street, now Gompels the chemist. The branch line of the G.W.R. from Devizes to Holt passes through Seend parish and Berryfields. The station at Seend was opened in 1858.

1859 A Volunteer force was raised in 1859 and was known in 1875 as the Melksham Rifle Corps (12th Wilts). A cheese market was opened, probably necessitated by the abundance of dairy farms & cheese making in the area.

1864 Place House and its orchards were bought by a syndicate of local people who demolished the house and split the land into lots which were sold at auction.

1868 A more traditional development came at the end of the 19th century when an estate was built on the west side of King Street, the present West End. A cottage hospital had been founded in Lowbourne in 1868, was rebuilt in Bank Street in 1895, and rebuilt again in Spa Road in 1938.

1870-1890 The Ladies High School is open Spa Road.

1870 The Post Office Telegraph Service was introduced and in 1898 the National Telephone Company bought a telephone service to Melksham.

1871 From this time the Melksham General School of the Education of Poor Children is known as Lowbourne School.

1872 The United Reformed Church built. Melksham Methodist Church is rebuilt in the Market Place.

1874 Rachel Fowler gives £266.13s.4d the income from which is to provide blankets and flannels for the poor. A church school opens at Forest.

1875 The last cloth factory is closed.

1877 Rachel Fowler gives New Hall in the market Place to trustees as a reading room and accomodation for religious and philanthropic meetings. The Old Crown Inn is built in the market Place.

1878 A small engineering business began on the corner of Bank Street & Union Street & was joined by C J Spencer, in 1878, and later by the brilliant engineer, W. Littlejohn Philip.

1879 Lowbourn Infant and Nursery School is separated from Lowbourn Junior School.

1880 By around 1880 the first public water supply was provided by the Trowbridge Water Company. A fountain is built in the Maket place to celebrate. The Post Office is now in Bank Street.

1886 St. Barnabus Church is built at Beanacre. St. Andrew's Church at Forest is consecrated.

1888 Matravers Mill, the last cloth mill, is sold to the Avon India Rubber Company following a century of decline in the clothing industry. Wilts United Dairies, founded by Charles Maggs at West End Farm, moves to New Broughton Road.

1889 Melksham Rifle Corps is integrated into the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, Wiltshire Regiment.

1892 Benjamin Sawtell began purifying feathers for pillows and eiderdowns, in Old Broughton Road.

1897 The Lodge was consecrated on 27 February 1897, with the first meeting scehuled for 4:00pm March 19th at the Town Hall. By November that year a new masonic lodge had been built in Melksham at Church Street.

1898 National telephone service started in Melksham by the National Telephone Company.

1903 Spencer & Co.Engineering Works moved to Beanacre Road and became experts in mechanical handling. The organ in St. Michael's Church is rebuilt.

1904 Lord Methuen provides £4 a year for the distribution of meat & grocery vouchers to 24 poor persons of Beanacre.

1905 Christ Church at Shaw is rebuilt.

1907 The Post Office has now moved to the High Street.

1909 Lowbourn School is rebuilt adjacent to the old school.

1910 Melksham Fair, held in the Market Place on 27th and 28th of July each year, is closed by an Act of Parliament because it encourages undesirables to the town.

1912 The Picture Hall (later named Maxime Cinema) opens in the High Street.

1914 The canal was abandoned.

1916 The population of the town continued to expand and an estate of 48 houses was built at Roundponds. The Atworth and District Agricultural Society was founded in Atworth. They moved to Melksham and became the Wiltshire Agricultural Co-operative Society and, in 1942 became Wiltshire Farmers. After expansion and several name changes they are now part of Countrywide Farmers.

1919 War Memorial is built in Canon Square and in 1921 a cross is built in memory of the Melksham people who died in World War 1.

1920 The Co-operative Wholesale Society established a large creamery opposite the railway station. Melksham House is virually destroyed by a fire, leaving only the front part of the house intact.

1924 Electric light and power were provided by the Western Electricity Distributing Corporation, making electricity available to all. Eight bells at St. Michael's Church are recast.

1926 Up to this time the King's Arms had it's own bus to collect visitors from Melksham Station.

1929 The Salvation Army acquire an old malthouse in Church Street as their Citadel. A new Police Station was built on Semington Road.

1938 The new Cottage Hospital is built at Spa Road.

1939 The Roman Catholic Church of St. Anthony of Padua was built in West Street (now West End) of stock brick. The Market is closed.

1940 R.A.F. Melksham opened – No.12 School of Technical Training.

1942 The large silos which used to stand adjoining the roundabout on the Bradford Road were built in 1942 for storing grain and the original milling machinery was made by Spencer & Co.

1950 The Friends Meeting House closes.

1953 Shurnold Secondary Modern School opened at Shurnhold. First new post-war school opened in Wiltshire.

1962 Spencer & Co. bought out by Elliot-Automation Group of Companies, later to be called GEC.

1964 The first purpose-built library of Wiltshire County Council was erected in the town. Maxime cinema in the High Street is demolished and replaced by Avon Shopping Precinct. Melksham Labour Club established in the old premises of Melksham Cottage Hospital, Bank Street.

1965 R.A.F. Melksham closed.

1966 Melksham Railway Station closed.

1969 Shurnold Secondary Modern School becomes George Ward Comprehensive School.

1970 Early in the 1970's R.A.F. Station is decommissioned. Western By-Pass ring road is built around the town.

1973 St. Michael's Church of England Primary School, moved from by the Church to a purpose built school at Queensway. This has since closed for housing development and only a nursery is on the site.

1974 The Local Government Act of 1972, effective from 1st April 1974, created District Councils (Kennet, West Wiltshire, North Wiltshire etc) and various powers became vested in these Districts but more particular powers enjoyed by the former Urban and Rural Districts became invested in these new Districts, in the case of Melksham, The Wiltshire District Council.

1980 The Melksham & District French Twinning Association was officially launched in May 1980. It is twinned with the French town of Avon, 45 kilometres from Paris, with Fontainebleau being its neighbouring town.

1985 On May 11th the Railway Station reopened.

1992 Leekes opened its department store on the outskirts of Melksham.

2000 In an extraordinary turn of events, a local businessman and entrepreneur, William Spiers, purchased the title [lordship of Melksham] at auction. May 30th 2000.

2010 Duncan Hames elected MP. Melksham Oak School at Bowerhill replaces George Ward School.

Note: Various sources have been used to produce this time-line, some with conflicting dates. Please feel free to let me know of any anomalies or anything that should be added.