

VCH Nottinghamshire

On-line Texts in Progress

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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY



Nottinghamshire

KINGSTON ON SOAR

Location and boundaries

The township (later civil parish) of Kingston on Soar occupies 1,331 acres¹ about 10 miles south of Nottingham. It is bounded to the north-west by Ratcliffe on Soar, to the north-east by Gotham, to the east by West Leake and to the south by Sutton Bonington. To the west the river Soar forms the boundary with Kegworth (Leics.) and is also the county boundary between Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. The northern boundary is formed by field hedges and Kingston Spinney, with a small stream flowing north-east to south-west to join the Soar. The Soar forms the entire western boundary. The eastern boundary is formed by field hedges. To the south the boundary is part of Melton Lane before field hedges join up to the Soar. Kingston was a chapelry in Ratcliffe on Soar, and the incumbent remained a perpetual curate into the 19th century, by which date it was generally regarded as a parish.²

Geology and geography

Near to the Kingston brook the soil is alluvium with clay, sand and gravel. There is also clay on the north-east side around New Kingston. To the north-east of the village is a large area of gypsum. Beneath these areas there is mudstone and limestone.³ The north-east of the parish lies

¹ *VCH Notts.*, ii. 314.

² Below, relig. hist..

³ Geol. Survey map 1:50,000, sheet 141.

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about 150 feet above sea level but then drops to just over 100 ft to the south-west where the river Soar flows through. The Soar lies to the west of the village, where a new cut and wharves were built in the late 18th century.⁴ The Kingston brook flows from the south-east, through Kingston Park where it has been used to form The Pool (a fish pond), before flowing westwards to join the Soar. Various small watercourses flow into either the Soar or Kingston brook. There is a large area of parkland around Kingston Hall, to the east of the village. On the northern edge of the parish is Kingston Spinney. North of Kingston Park is a small area of woodland known as Moor Wood. On the eastern side is the edge of Crownend Wood. There is a small wooded area at New Kingston.

Population

In 1674 eleven households in Kingston were assessed to the hearth tax and a further three were discharged by reason of poverty.⁵ In 1801 the population was 152.⁶ It rose steadily to 1861 when there were 197 people in 39 households.⁷ The population reached a peak in 1891 of 281 but began to fall during the early 20th century. In 1971 there were 220 people in 75 households and in 1991, 222 people in 91 households. In 2001 the population was 239.⁸

Communications

Kingston lies on a minor road between Gotham and Sutton Bonington which is crossed by a similar road to the east of the village, linking Ratcliffe on Soar and West Leake. Another lane from the village runs south to Sutton Bonington, crossing Melton Lane. When Edward Strutt came to live in Kingston in 1845 he began remodelling the village. The roads in the centre were described by the justices of the peace asked to inspect the highway through the village. They said that ' the Old Highway does now pass through Kingston by sharp and inconvenient angles and continuing to pass

⁴ Below, this section.

⁵ *Hearth Tax*, 83.

⁶ *VCH Notts.*, ii. 314.

⁷ *White's Dir. Notts.* (1864), 549.

⁸ Census reports.

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for some distance by the side of a brook running through the village at last crosses the same by a bridge ... which bridge is now dangerous.' A new road layout and bridge were proposed and, as no objections were received, they were built.⁹

A further lane leads from Kingston westwards to Kegworth (Leics.), crossing the river Soar at Kegworth bridge. In 1315 the parson of Leake gave £10 and twelve oaks for the repair of this bridge. Later a stone bridge was built but soon fell into disrepair. At various times the villagers were ordered to pay for repairs to it. In 1785 the old bridge was pulled down and a new one, with five arches, was erected using stone from Bunny Hall. It was widened in 1936-7 and reopened by the duchess of Norfolk.¹⁰

The river Soar forms the western boundary of Kingston parish and flows into the Trent at Red Hill near Ratcliffe on Soar. In the mid 18th century, it was proposed to make the river navigable to bring coal to Loughborough from the Nottinghamshire – Derbyshire coalfield. With a few artificial cuts, where the river was shallow, this would be possible. In 1766 an Act was obtained to make the Soar navigable to Loughborough but the proposal was considered too expensive and the scheme lapsed. Ten years later another attempt was made and a new Act was passed in 1776.¹¹ William Jessop was appointed to oversee the scheme.¹² A cut was made at Kingston and two wharves were built. Horse-drawn wagons were used to carry the gypsum mined at Kingston to the wharf. From there it was taken by horse-drawn barges to mills at Zouch and Barrow on Soar (Leics.) for grinding. It was in use until just before the First World War.¹³ However, for some time Kegworth bridge was an obstacle which caused several accidents. In 1826 John Kiddy, the engineer to the Loughborough Navigation, dug a new cut which bypassed the bridge and a new lock was completed the following

⁹ B. W. Smith, *Kingston on Soar: further chapters in the history of an estate village* (1990), 46-7.

¹⁰ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 24-5.

¹¹ Hadfield, *East Midlands*, 37.

¹² C. & D. Crawford, *Sutton Bonington: widening horizons, roads, river & railway*, (1994), 27-9.

¹³ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 63.

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year. In 1833-4 Kiddy was again employed by Edward Strutt to straighten the Kingston brook between the village and the Soar to prevent flooding.¹⁴

In 1840 the Midland Counties Railway Company completed a line linking Nottingham, Derby and Leicester. The line, which took five years to build, passed through the west side of Kingston and there was a station named Kegworth but just within Kingston parish. The 10½ acres of land needed for the line was purchased from Edward Strutt and construction included four bridges and a cattle arch. The road from Ratcliffe on Soar to Kingston had to be diverted and remade alongside the railway. In the 1870s the line was quadrupled because of increasing traffic. By 1914 nearly 300 trains a day passed through Kingston. The station was used by local traders and farmers and especially for the annual Kingston Show. However, traffic gradually declined and the station closed in 1968.¹⁵

In 1883 a three-mile single-track railway was completed to link the gypsum mine with the Midland Railway. It was known as Lord Belper's Mineral Railway. At first horse-drawn wagons were used but after a number of serious accidents a steam locomotive was purchased in 1885.¹⁶ The railway continued in use until 1970 when haulage was transferred to road vehicles. The following year the track was lifted but the bridge over Kingston brook and bridge arch under the main line remained.¹⁷

At the beginning of the 21st century Kingston, although still a small rural village, has easy access to the M1 motorway, East Midlands Parkway railway station and East Midlands airport.

Landscape and settlement

¹⁴ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 25.

¹⁵ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 25-7; Butt, *Railway Stations*, 129.

¹⁶ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 63.

¹⁷ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 72-3.

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There is evidence of Roman occupation in Kingston from pottery finds and oyster shells, in an area south of the church.¹⁸ A more significant Anglo-Saxon settlement is indicated by over 200 cremation urns discovered in 1844 during the building of Kingston Hall. Many were damaged before their importance was realised. They were of very dark clay, probably local, and had fine decorative markings. Six complete urns were kept at Kingston Hall until 1957 when Lord Belper deposited them in Nottingham University Museum.¹⁹

The earliest forms of the parish name were Cynestan in 1082 and Chinestan in 1086. After several variants of spelling it became Kingston, meaning 'the royal stone', from the Old English *cyne*, royal and *stan*, stone.²⁰

During the medieval period the village grew up along the road from Gotham to Kegworth. Evidence of ridge and furrow was apparent up to the 1960s but much has since been ploughed out.²¹ Banks, hollow ways and other earthworks have also been recorded.²² Although there was a chapel at Kingston in the Middle Ages, the present building was begun in 1535 by Sir Anthony Babington. He lived in the moated manor house to the south of the church.²³ With absentee landlords the house soon fell into disrepair and in 1790 was described as 'formerly a large manor house' but with only a fence and gateway remaining.²⁴ In 1512 Sir Anthony Babington enclosed 100 acres of arable land in which to keep sheep. At his death in 1536 he held 10 dwelling houses, 500ac. arable, 500 ac. pasture and 60 ac. meadow in Kingston.²⁵ A survey of 1592 included Hill field (56 ac.), newly laid to grass, Moore field (76 ac.), also grass, and Town field (290ac.)²⁶

¹⁸ SMR, L5193.

¹⁹ B. W. Smith, *A History of Kingston on Soar up to the 19th Century* (1988), 5-7.

²⁰ *PN Notts.*, 252.

²¹ Smith, *History of Kingston*, 42.

²² SMR, L7885, L7887-90.

²³ SMR, M8.

²⁴ Thoroton, (ed. Throsby), *Notts.*, 23.

²⁵ Smith, *History of Kingston*, 18.

²⁶ Smith, *History of Kingston*, 22.

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By the late 17th century there were three farms in Kingston. A survey of 1796 records Manor farm (311 ac.), Church farm (380 ac.) and Kingston Fields farm (508 ac.), with eleven smallholders having a total of 70 ac.²⁷ Manor farmhouse dates from the mid 19th century and is built of red brick with a tile roof. It is a double depth of two storeys and garret, of five bays with a central doorway. It is now divided into two properties.²⁸ Church farmhouse also dates from the 18th century, with 19th-century additions, and is of red brick and tile. It has two storeys and four bays.²⁹ Kingston Fields farmhouse likewise dates from the mid 18th century with 19th-century additions. It is of red brick with a slate roof. It has two and a half storeys and nine bays.³⁰ The house and outbuildings are now part of a courtyard development of twelve properties.³¹ Two new farms were created from parts of Manor and Church farms c.1815 and new farmhouses were built on the Gotham road. They were known as Firs and Oaks farms. They remained working farms until the 1950s when the houses were taken over for farm workers.³²

Kingston Hall stands on a small hill, east of the village. Edward Blore designed the house for Edward Strutt in the Elizabethan style and it was built 1842-6 in grey Derbyshire ashlar. It has five bays and two storeys with attics. On the left side a long conservatory was added which is now a swimming pool. Set back on the right is a four-stage tower with a conical roof. There are extensive cellars under the house. Local alabaster was used for columns and other decorative features in the interior. A service wing was added at the back of the house with a range of servants' quarters round a courtyard.³³ There was also a single-storey stable block of seven bays built of ashlar with a slate roof. The central bay had a clock face in the apex³⁴ and there was a small dovecote on the upper floor. After conversion to 'Clock Tower House' in 1977 a bedroom replaced the dovecote and only a

²⁷ Smith, *History of Kingston*, 44-6.

²⁸ EH List.

²⁹ EH List.

³⁰ EH List.

³¹ *Nottm. Post, property section*, 23 Aug. 2012.

³² Smith, *History of Kingston*, 49-51, 53.

³³ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 41-5.

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single flight hole remains.³⁵ The house and outbuildings were sold in 1977 and altered to become twelve apartments.³⁶

There were two long drives to the house. On the Gotham road there is a single-storey lodge of ashlar stone with a slate roof. The attached gateway has ashlar piers with decorative iron gates.³⁷ On West Leake Lane is a smaller gateway with a brick lodge of the 1850s, formerly occupied by gamekeepers or gardeners. The rear of the hall was connected to the Gotham road by the 'Coal Road' which was used for the delivery of coal and provisions.³⁸

The parkland was landscaped and planted with a great variety of trees. There was also a lake, with two islands, which was fed by the Kingston brook. On the east side was a boathouse. Near to the house formal gardens were laid out. There was also an extensive kitchen garden and hot houses.³⁹ A small ashlar pavilion with a pyramidal stone slate roof, topped by an octagonal cupola, was built in the garden.⁴⁰ In the 1890s a Grecian Temple was erected in the grounds, using columns shipped from Greece by the 2nd Lord Belper. Several bronze statues were displayed inside.⁴¹

Soon after Edward Strutt moved to Kingston he began a gradual reconstruction of the village. The road layout was altered and many old thatched cottages, which had become very run down, were replaced by new Elizabethan style estate cottages to form a model village round the church and a new village green. The houses were in three terraces and built of red brick and stone with steep slate roofs. They had two rooms upstairs and two down, with a gabled porch over the

³⁴

EH List.

³⁵

A. E. Woolrich, *Notes on Nottinghamshire Dovecotes* (2010), 50.

³⁶

Smith, *Further Chapters*, 106.

³⁷

EH List.

³⁸

Smith, *Further Chapters*, 43.

³⁹

Smith, *Further Chapters*, 43.

⁴⁰

EH List.

⁴¹

Smith, *Further Chapters*, 45.

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front door. They each had an external privy and small back yard, together with a garden and pigsty. An area of allotments was also created.⁴²

Opposite the church was a row of six cottages, the first of which was also the village alehouse, The Anchor. The row was eventually demolished in 1969 but rebuilt as five cottages. Also near the church had been a range of buildings, part brick and tile and part half-timbered and thatched, which included the smithy, worked since c.1640 by members of the Hardy family.⁴³ The smithy was later moved to the railway station at Kegworth where William Hardy was licensee of the Station Inn, as well as blacksmith, farmer, coal merchant and cab proprietor.⁴⁴ Near the churchyard was the thatched village schoolroom and another terrace of cottages.

On the green the village pump was erected. It has four wooden posts which support a pyramidal tiled roof with a finial. Inside is a pump encased in wood, with an iron spout and a stone trough beneath it. There are benches on two sides.⁴⁵

The first purpose-built school was erected in 1848 on the edge of the park on the Gotham road. It was known as Lady Belper's school, as she took a close interest in the children and their welfare.⁴⁶

Kingston Fields farm was leased in 1895 to become the Midland Dairy Institute, later College, which was linked to University College, Nottingham. Over the next few years more buildings were added, including accommodation for the students. A new campus at Sutton Bonington was begun in 1914 and in 1928 Kingston College closed.⁴⁷ From 1929-30 part of the buildings were used for Lord Belper's Fine Art Co. which made decorative objects from alabaster. This closed c.1937. Kingston Fields then reverted to become the Home farm. During the 1970s most of the pasture was

⁴² Smith, *Further Chapters*, 47.

⁴³ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 17.

⁴⁴ *White's Dir. Notts.* (1864), 549.

⁴⁵ EH List.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 49.

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ploughed up and the land used for cereal crops by Gaudrey Ltd., an agribusiness based at Milton Keynes (Bucks.). In 1988 the farmhouse was sold and the buildings converted into residential properties.⁴⁸

There was a post office within a shop in one of the cottages on Kegworth Road from c.1848. By 1860 it had moved to the end cottage on the green. Over the years the post office alternated between a separate business and being combined with the shop. The post office finally closed in 1988.⁴⁹ A village hall was erected in 1935 near the site of the former village pinfold. Most of the cost was met by Lord Belper.⁵⁰

During the Second World War a searchlight battery was built on the southern edge of the parish. A large German bomb fell into the lake on the estate.⁵¹ In the late 20th century a few new houses were built on Kegworth Road, just beyond the village hall.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 74-82.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 82-4.

⁴⁹ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 97-8.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Further Chapters*, 101-2.

⁵¹ SMR, M6003, L6008.