

THE  
DITMAS HISTORY  
OF  
**BENSON**

by

**E M R Ditmas**

with new appendices by

**Paul Smith & John Leighfield**

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## Preface

Edith Ditmas MA (Oxon) had clearly been involved in sometimes rather obscure if extensive historical research for many years. At some date, perhaps in the early seventies, she moved into one of the (then) new houses in Castle Close. Thereafter she immersed herself in many aspects of village life. This is a book written with the authority of an academic who has scrupulously researched her sources.

As readers will discover, she clearly came to love Benson in general and St Helen's Church in particular. The only photograph we have of her is



this tiny and rather fuzzy enlargement from a photograph of a Women's Institute group, taken in 1977.

Inevitably the story has moved on. Security restrictions on the role of RAF Benson in the last war have been lifted, of which we were able to write in the second book. Finally, there are odd aspects a quarter of a century on, to which she refers at the end of this book – the Barclays Bank that came and went, the developments up at the “Drome” (itself a dated reference). The “Cruiser Station” is now renamed “The Waterfront”.

So this book marks the end of one stage. Perhaps the next will be reached when the Victoria County History researchers reach Benson and Ewelme – rumoured to be in the next few years. Those professional historians may be able to uncover much more of this vibrant community's past.

*TS, JB, PDJC, Editorial Committee*

## Introduction to this Edition

by Peter Clarke  
President of the  
Bensington Society

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this book – the third in a trilogy. Neither of the Bensington Society's two earlier books could have happened without the help of Dr Kate Tiller, teaching a few of us to research the local history of Benson nearly 20 years ago. I was immensely glad when she agreed to edit, and write a large part of *Benson: A Village Through its History*. Since 1896, when The Revd Pearman had written his worthy but dry *History of the Manor of Bensington*, no one had published a history of our village.

In the early 1980s, Edith Ditmas was finishing writing her history of Benson. As an Oxford MA, it had been written with tremendous diligence and clearly demonstrated her love for the village. Typed copies were carefully preserved in Benson Library, her own College and elsewhere, where those wishing to study Benson's history had access. But for reasons, now unclear, no attempt was made to formally publish her history. Perhaps it was simply due to lack of resources.

Both Kate and her chapter authors drew considerably on her work, as did Janet Burt and I, recording peoples' personal memories, when later writing *Benson: A Century of Change*.

It was only when Tom Stevenson found ways of electronically converting her work, that we realised the simple *fairness* of publishing this history.

With the benefit of hindsight, and as research has developed, her work is not without criticism. Paul Smith, County Archaeologist, puts this well into perspective with his most useful and comprehensive archaeological appendix to her history.

Professor John Leighfield's maps showing Benson, from their earliest appearance on parchment to modern Benson, provide an amazing enrichment to this book. His enduring passion for Oxfordshire maps makes an immense addition to the history, and would certainly have been enthusiastically welcomed by Edith Ditmas.

This is a final publication of which we can all be proud.

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