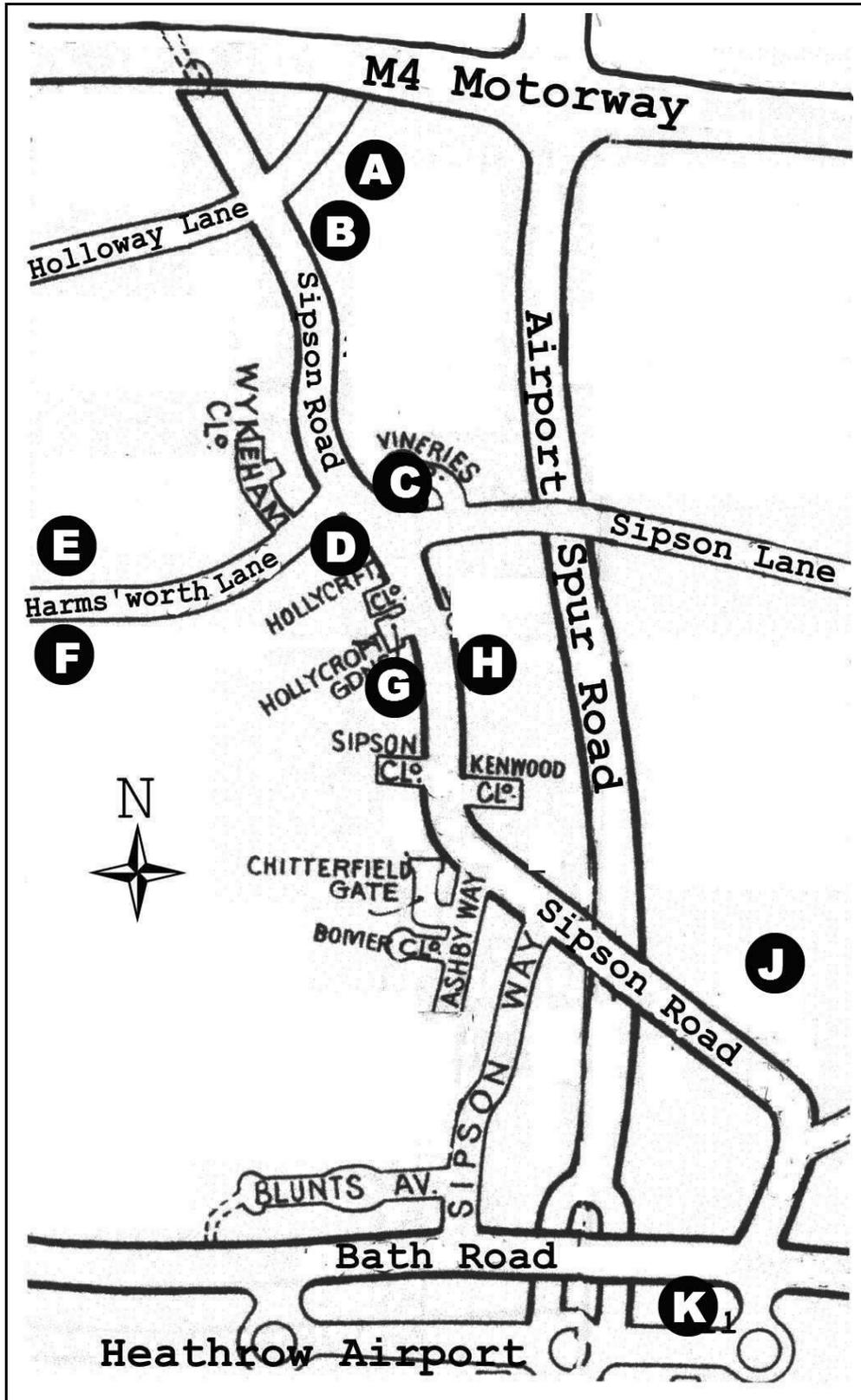


SIPSON
A VILLAGE UNDER THREAT
 by
 Philip Sherwood



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|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Holiday Inn Hotel | B. The "Plough" | C. Former Baptist Church |
| D. The "King William IV" | E. Primary School | F. Old Farmhouse |
| G. Post Office | H. The "Crown" | J. Sipson Court |
| | | K. The "Three Magpies" |

Map of Sipson, 2007

Sipson is a village in the north-east of the parish of Harmondsworth that in the past 60 years has three times been threatened with destruction to allow for the expansion of Heathrow Airport.

It is the second largest settlement in the parish and is first recorded as Sibbeston in a manorial document of 1110. The name is of Anglo-Saxon origin and it must have existed long before it appeared in the records. In the Harmondsworth Parish Registers it frequently appears as Shepiston which has led to the erroneous assumption that the name is derived from the town-ship of sheep. In fact it is said to mean “Sibwin’s tun” which reflects the earlier name and has nothing whatever to do with sheep.

The latest threat to the village came in the Government White Paper of 2002 which proposed the construction of a “short runway” between the Bath Road (A4) and the M4 motorway. This would have involved the destruction of most of the village but it has since been followed-up by BAA’s Master Plan for Heathrow published in June 2005. This envisages not only a third runway but the construction of a sixth terminal for Heathrow which would lead to the complete obliteration of the village and the forcible eviction of the villagers from their homes. The Master Plan estimates that 700 houses would have to be demolished but this is a serious distortion of the true position. It relates only to the houses directly affected by the development and takes no heed of those just outside the airport boundary that would be made uninhabitable. In 1992 a previous plan for a third runway made the more realistic estimate that 3000 homes would have to be destroyed and if air pollution considerations are taken into account the figure is nearer to 10000. The scale of the destruction is so enormous that one can only wonder at the state of mind of those who can even contemplate destroying whole communities and forcibly evicting the villagers just to improve the profitability of the aviation industry.

A tour of the village

Sipson is a linear village which straggles for about ¾-mile along Sipson Road from the “Plough” public house in the north to the junction of Sipson Road with the Bath Road.



“The Plough”, Sipson 1984

On the road from West Drayton, the “Plough” public house (B on the map) is the first building in the village itself. This is a modest mid-19th Century inn that is now completely overshadowed by the grotesque bulk of what is now the “Holiday Inn” (A on the map). Planning permission for this monstrosity under its original name of the “Post House Hotel” was given on appeal in 1969. The Inspector who recommended that the appeal should be allowed said that *“an hotel reaching about 120 feet, set well back from the M4 would do no violence to any part of the M4 or its immediate surroundings”*. Few people would agree and to quote the Duke of Wellington *“If you believe that you will believe anything”*.

The next photograph shows that until the early 1960s the “Plough” stood alone at the northern end of the village and was a prominent feature; although unchanged since then it is now so overwhelmed by the hotel and the garden centre to its south that it could be easily missed.



Sipson Road 1952 after a blizzard, as seen on the way from West Drayton.

The photograph shows the relative isolation of the village at that time. The “Plough” was the first building at the extreme north of the village. Ten years later the land in the foreground was carved-up by the construction of the M4 and the realignment of the local roads. Twenty years later the monstrous “Post House” hotel (now Holiday Inn) was built on the land on the left side of the road. The gateway in the hedgerow is approximately where the entrance to the hotel is located

About 300 yards south of the “Plough” at the staggered cross-roads in the centre of the village is the “King William IV” Sipson’s second and most interesting public house (D on the map)



“The King William IV”, Sipson, 2001

It is a late mediaeval Grade II listed building unusual in style, for West Middlesex, of a hall house known as a Wealden type because of its prevalence in the Kent area. There are only two such houses within the Borough of Hillingdon and the King William is remarkably fine in that internally one can still appreciate the pattern of an open hall rising through two storeys with accommodation on two floors at each end. The centre has been infilled, but the building still retains its character and, although re-fronted, its medieval origins are very clear from the side elevations and roof form.

About 150 yards from the “King William” and along Harmondsworth Lane is a Grade II listed farmhouse (D). It is listed as being late 17th but is possibly much earlier. Unfortunately it has been rather unsympathetically restored in recent years so that it has lost some of its original charm and character.



17th Century farmhouse in 1998 after restoration, Harmondsworth Lane, Sipson



Heathrow School, Harmondsworth Lane, Sipson 2005

Almost opposite the farmhouse is the village school (E). This moved from its original site on the Bath Road in 1966 because of the aircraft noise. Paradoxically its previous name of Sipson and Heathrow School was dropped in favour of its present name although the school is unquestionably in Sipson and not Heathrow.

Returning to Sipson Road and at its junction with Sipson Lane is the former Baptist Church (C). This building dates from the early 1900s but as its congregation declined it was converted into residential accommodation now known as Church Court. However, the external appearance has been largely retained.

One hundred yards further south on the left-side of the road is the “Crown” public house (H) which dates from the mid 19th Century. Opposite is the Village Stores and Post Office (G). At first sight this seems to be an undistinguished late 19th Century building but there has been a shop on this site for at least 200 years and much of an original building even older than this lies hidden behind the Victorian front. This back half is half-timbered with low ceilings and could well be the oldest building in Sipson but surprisingly it is not listed.



Church Court (formerly Sipson Baptist Church), Sipson Lane, Sipson



Sipson Village Stores and Post Office.

The Victorian addition crudely added to a much older medieval building hidden at the back

Just past the Post Office are Holly Cottages dating from 1906 and now re-numbered as 432-450 Sipson Road. Almost opposite is the former Gladstone Terrace of about 1880 and now re-numbered as 415-423. Both were formerly occupied by farm workers employed by Wild and Robbins of Sipson Farm and are shown below.



Sipson Road, Sipson looking south.

Everything else in the village street from this point is mostly post-1935 and of lesser interest. The main exception is a pair of modest mid 19th Century cottages now numbered as 499 and 501 Sipson Road opposite the junction of Sipson Road with Sipson Way. Architecturally they are of no interest but their original name “Scroogeall Cottages” can still be seen on a plaque just under the eaves. This strange name is derived from the name of the field on which they are built and could be the origin of the name of Ebenezer Scrooge given by Charles Dickens to the chief character of “A Christmas Carol”. Dickens is known to have been a frequent visitor to Sipson House which stands nearby and he may have picked up the name of the field on one of his visits



Sipson Way, Sipson looking north.

Opposite Scroogeall Cottages is Sipson Way which with its houses dates from 1923. This provides a short cut from Sipson Road to the Bath Road. Before this the only link with the Bath Road was at Sipson Corner.

On the way to Sipson Corner on the left side of the road is (or to be more precise was) Sipson House (J) an attractive Grade II listed Georgian house standing back from the road. It apparently still substantially survives as office accommodation under its new name of Sipson Court. However, in the 1970s the house was acquired by BAA which failed to maintain it and it became in a ruinous condition. Permission was therefore given by Hillingdon Council for its “restoration” and conversion to offices. This “restoration” took the form of the complete demolition of everything except the front façade so that the present building is little more than a neo-Georgian replica.



Sipson Court, neo-Georgian office accommodation in Sipson Road.

At a point about one hundred yards further south Sipson Road meets the Bath Road. All about is dreary modern development associated with Heathrow Airport but just across the road is the “Three Magpies” public house a unique survivor of a bygone age (K).



The “Three Magpies”, Bath Road

This 18th Century coaching inn, which in 1765 was known as the “Three Pigeons”, has been extensively restored but it is the only survivor of the many such inns that once lined the Bath Road in the vicinity of Heathrow. Just south of the “Three Magpies” is another unique survivor in the form of the barrel of an 18th Century cannon half-buried in the ground .. It is rather difficult to see because it is on the fringe of the airport and surrounded by busy roads. The origin of this is discussed in Chapter X. Just to the left of the “Three Magpies” is the beginning of a road which is all that remains of Heathrow Road which linked the hamlet of Heathrow with the Bath Road.

If the proposals for the expansion of Heathrow were ever to be implemented everything described above would be buried under concrete. This has been the fate threatened for Sipson ever since 1946. Evidence for this can be seen from the next photograph dating from the late 1940s which shows the village high street still bordered by fields in intensive agricultural production and an area to the east of the village designated as “helicopter area”.



Sipson, village centre from the air 1949