Acknowledgement

This Parish History was originally compiled by Kathleen Lewis and abridged into this current form by Sue Edwards one time resident of Lois Weedon.

Kathleen Lewis was the wife of a former Vicar of Weedon Lois with Plumpton and Moreton Pinkney. The date of original publication of her Weedon St Loys: Priory and Parish history is now lost in the mists of time but it was reprinted in her memory as a token of regard and affection by the parishioners in 1978, the year of her death on the 26 January.

Twenty years on, none of Mrs Lewis’ valuable historical research has been questioned or indeed corroborated; her work has simply been edited to meet the demands of a new era, when even historians appreciate a shorter read.

Sources of information acknowledged by Mrs Lewis

Miss Dorothy Done of Hythe and the late Mr Aris Tinkner of London for the fruits of their researches which were made available to me; to Mr Cecil Hinton and Mrs Sidney Daniels for the information they have given; to Sir Sacheverell Sitwell, Mrs George Thompson, Mr Edward Poole and Mrs Frank Elkinton for the loan of books and documents.

The Historical Background

The modern village is known by two names – Weedon Lois or Lois Weedon. The use of both is common – maps say one thing, road signs and the Post Office another and the villagers appear to be divided on the correct order.

Back in Saxon times it was called simply Wedone – an Anglo-Saxon name meaning a hill with a temple. This would indicate the religious importance of this site in Roman or post-Roman days.

With the arrival of the Normans, the Saxon lords were dispossessed and their estates were used to reward the nobles from France. Among the conquerors were Ansculf and Gilo, the two sons of Guermont de Picquigny from Ailly in Picardy. Gilo de Picquigny (or Pinkney) was granted extensive lands including Wedone, Moreton, Silverstone, Wappenham, Culworth and Sulgrave. The Domesday Book of 1086 records the size of the demesne of Wedone to be three hides and that there were in addition seven and a half carucates of arable land. A hide and a carucate were the same size – about 120 acres. Wedone was chosen as the caput manorii – head of the barony of the Pinkney estates which extended almost as far as Windsor. It subsequently became known as Weedon Pinkney. Around it stretched extensive forests which provided good hunting as well as wood for building and other purposes and for firewood.
Gilo built his castle on the ancient hill with a temple and to this day there remains a prominent mound above the village green which is known as Castle Mound and was undoubtedly the site of Gilo's castle, although no traces remain. This suggests that it may have been a primitive wooden structure consisting of moat and bailey.

For over 200 years descendants of Gilo de Pinkney remained in the manor and castle of Weedon Pinkney. In 1301 Henry, the last Baron de Pinkney, who had already sold off several fees of his barony, gave up the manor of Weedon and the rest of his barony to the King, Edward I, his heirs and successors for ever for the sum of 100 marks. However, he had earlier conveyed the manor to Sir Thomas Wale and his heirs and Sir Thomas's widow was able to prove this in 1316. As a result she became Lady of the Manor and resided in the castle until her death in 1343. Her son, also Sir Thomas, was one of the original Knights of the Garter and died in 1352, leaving his sisters as joint heirs.

The manor of Weedon was later assigned by various kings, either as a reward or payment to one of their subjects or as a dower to their queen or the queen dowager. Edward III gave it in dower to his daughter Agnes who married a Spanish prince. Richard II gave it to his consort Anne and Henry V gave it to his mother, the Queen Dowager Joan of Navarre. Only the income of the manor was assigned in this way and the castle remained unoccupied, gradually falling into disrepair and eventually into ruin. This would probably explain the lack of any trace of the castle today. As the building collapsed, so its stones would have been removed for building work or road laying until nothing remained.

Gilo de Pinkney's dying wish had been that a priory should be founded and endowed at Weedon so that prayers might be perpetually offered for his soul and the souls of his ancestors. He probably died soon after 1100 but no written documentation exists relating to this foundation until the time of his grandson, Gilbert. Gilbert gave to the church of St Mary of Weedon, and to the brethren serving God there, all that which had been previously given by his father and grandfather – 120 acres of the manor, a mill with adjoining meadows, all the tithes of corn, cattle and cheese from the villages of Weedon and Wappenham and from the demesne land throughout the Pinkney estates, timber from the woods for buildings, wood for any purposes and pasturage for their flocks without payment. In addition to confirming these earlier gifts, Gilbert added a further gift of land to be held freely and quietly for ever, for his own salvation, that of his friends and for the souls of his ancestors. In order to make this gift binding, he placed the document on the altar in the church in the presence of his wife Eustacia, his children, the prior and three monks and other witnesses. With similar ceremony, he later made a gift of a further 40 acres. His son Henry and grandson Robert confirmed and added to these endowments.

It is believed that the Priory was founded, in accordance with Gilo's wishes, by his son Ralph soon after 1100. The de Pinkneys had come from Normandy and family ties with that area remained strong, so Ralph offered his foundation to the Benedictine Abbey of St Lucien at Beauvais. The Priory of St Mary at Weedon was founded as a cell, or daughter house, of the French abbey and the priors were answerable to the Abbot. However, one Prior, Matthew Pressour, was the subject of an inquiry by the Dean of Brackley in 1264.
and was found to have misbehaved and to have brought the Priory into debt. This would suggest that the Priory was not administered in complete independence of the local ecclesiastical authorities.

It was ordained a vicarage some time between 1209 and 1234. Many of the early vicars were clearly local – John de Toucestre, Peter de Moreton, Thomas de Wapenham, John Barfot de Kyngesthorpe and Philip de Plumpton.

The monks would have lived comfortably off their land, tithes, free pasture and timber and patronage of the Pinkneys but they would have worked hard also. There was no other source of endowment or income so it is unlikely that the Priory would ever have supported more than a small number of brethren. They would, to a large extent, have lived on the produce from their own land – possibly keeping fowls and pigs as well as the cattle which they received in tithes. They would have kept bees to provide honey for sweetening and their fish ponds were probably well-stocked. They probably had three ponds, of which two still exist today, in the field known as Church Close. Originally these would have been deeper and kept fresh by a stream running through them but they are still stocked and fished by members of an angling club.

All traces of the Priory buildings, which would have stood in Church Close field, seem to have disappeared, although one man wrote that in the 1870s or 1880s after harvesting in that field he had seen obvious traces of ancient walls.

Life continued at Weedon Priory in its routine of work and worship and its allegiance to the mother house at Beauvais for over 200 years. Then the wars between England and France caused a rude interruption: The profits of the Priory were seized by the Crown. Edward II systematically appropriated the wealth of all priories with foreign connections. The abbey was destroyed by fire – burned and destroyed in great part by hostile action. This, together with the fact that the monks at Beauvais no longer received any revenue from Weedon, resulted in them selling their rights in the Priory to the abbot and monks of the Cistercian Abbey at Biddlesden in Buckinghamshire, some six miles away. This sale took place during the reign of Richard II between 1392 and 1393, some 70 years after Edward II’s appropriation of assets. One can only suppose the royal claims had been relaxed as the deed of transfer was drawn up with the licence of the King of England, sought and obtained for this purpose.

In 1414 the Parliament of Leicester granted all alien priories to the King (Henry V) and dispossessed all foreign religious orders. The axe fell on Weedon Priory, already under the authority of Biddlesden, in 1437. Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, wanted to found a College of Priests at Oxford to pray for the souls of the men who had fallen at Agincourt in 1415. Henry V granted him five alien priories, of which Weedon was one, an endowment of All Souls’ College, Oxford. The transfer of the Priory and lands to All Souls’ College accounts for the fact that the college is still landlord today of a fair amount of property and land in the village and its surrounding area.
Thus after over 300 years the Priory of Our Lady of Weedon ceased to exist. The church was no longer endowed as a chantry where prayers and masses were to be offered for the souls of Pinkneys. Nor were prayers and masses long to be offered at All Souls’ College for the souls of the Agioncourt dead for in 1536 the college was secularized and was no longer a College of Priests.

Over the years memory of the Pinkneys had grown dim and, although the village was known for many years to come as Weedon Pinkney, another name was coming into use – this was Weedon St Loys or Loys’ Weedon. The earliest known reference to this name occurs in Bishop Fleming’s register of 1430.

The monks coming from the abbey of St Lucien in Normandy are said to have brought with them certain relics of their patron saint. These may have been a few of his bones, built into the east wall of the church or kept in a reliquary. St Lucien was a Roman of high birth who was martyred about the year 290. His shrine at Beauvais was famous and much visited by pilgrims. Before long the shrine at Weedon St Loys also became a centre of pilgrimage. The monks discovered a mineral spring to the south of the church so they made a well, roofed it, laid paving around it and dedicated it to St Lucien. The well had healing properties and was reputed to be especially good for sore eyes. In 1712 it was written that “even blind and leprus people it infallibly cured.” People used also to bring their horses for healing because St Lucien was acknowledged as the patron saint of horses. So many people came to the shrine and to the well that a pilgrims’ hospice was built. Called St Lucien’s House, it apparently stood until the days of Queen Elizabeth I.

The Church

Although the church contained St Lucien’s relics and the well was dedicated to him, the actual dedication of the church was to Our Lady and it is believed that the fragment of a mural painting above an arch in the church depicts the coronation of Our Lady.

The tithes of the rectory had always been distinct from those of the Priory and had, therefore, not passed to All Souls. When the vicarage was ordained soon after 1200 it was endowed with the tythes of twelve and a half virgates of land (about 375 acres), with a convenient manse or vicarage house and the fourth part of the altarage, excepting the small tythes of the Lord’s house and the offerings to the reliques at the church of Wedon and the candle on the purification of the Virgin Mary. The right to appoint the vicar (known at the advowson) had always belonged to the Lord of the Manor, although up to 1268 it appears to have been exercised by the Prior. After the days of the Pinkneys the advowson of Weedon had sometimes been in the hands of the King, sometimes the responsibility of one to whom the privileges of the manor had been granted. The Reverend Richard Day, son of the Bishop of Winchester, exchanged the tithes and advowson of Weedon St Loys with King’s College, Cambridge, for Stamford Courtney in Devon and King’s College continued to hold it until 1952 when they relinquished it to Jesus College, Oxford.
The first vicar to be presented to the living by the Provost and Scholars of King's College was William Losse, who was instituted on the 23 September 1618. Losse—a zealous loyalist—exercised 25 years of peaceful ministry before the memorable day, Sunday, 2 July 1643, when 12 Parliamentary troopers were sent from Northampton to apprehend him. The troopers burst into the service which Losse was conducting and told Losse to accompany them to Northampton. He declined and took refuge on the tower roof, where, after discharging their pistols and wounding him with their swords, the troops left him to his fate, believing that he was dead. It is not known whether Losse actually died on the roof that day or whether he was buried in the churchyard.

A tablet erected by public subscription to his memory in the church describes him as one of 7,000 clergymen who, for the honour of God and for the witness of his truth as expressed in the tenets of the Church of England, were contented (in those evil and cruel times) to suffer murder, violence and insult, to be dragged from their benefices and cast with their families upon the world, forbidden to earn their bread as scholars, or else sent to die upon the hulks, or in prison, or in foreign slavery, of whom at the Restoration only 600 survived to resume their livings. Following the event of July 1643, the parish appears to have gone into sequestration. In 1655 the Parliamentary Commissioners reported that the cure is served by strangers and what they have for salary is now known.

It cannot have been long after the restoration of the monarchy that life in the parish began to flourish once again as a new vicarage was being built before the end of the century. That building, with additions and alterations, remained as the vicarage until the early 1980s, when it was sold and a new one built in the grounds. The Castle Mound was let by All Souls' College to the vicar of the parish until the 1960s and formed part of his garden, to which it was connected by an arch footbridge.

The living was a particularly wealthy one and was regarded by King's College as a fellowship living. A succession of scholars became vicars of Weedon Pinkney. As the 19th century drew to a close, so the value of the living declined with the general depreciation of farm land. Lewes Soley was the last of the Fellow vicars at the benefice was no longer considered sufficiently remunerative. The connection with King's College, however, remained for another 60 years after his day.
Points of Interest

Although the church must have been built soon after the foundation of the priory in the early part of the 12th century, the only trace of Norman work is the font, believed to date from about 1200. The cover is a Victorian addition.
The masonry of the outside of the church clearly belongs to different periods and different kinds of stone have been used. The oldest part seems to be the central portion of the west wall, with its attractive "herringbone" stonework. Along the south side of the church are five large gargoyles, representing strange creatures, part animal, part human and perhaps part angel. They have sadly been somewhat spoiled by the insertion of long projecting water spouts during the early part of the 20th century.

Three scratch dials, or mass dials, beside the chancel door indicate this was the entrance used by the monks as they came from the Priory. The dials marked the hour of church services. The central hole held a gnomon (rod or pin of metal or oak). A perpendicular line drawn downwards from the hole was the noon-line because if the wall faced due south and the gnomon was at right angles, the shadow would fall directly along this line at midday. The lines at right angles to the noon-line, to the left and to the right, marked 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. The line midway between 6 a.m. and noon was the most important as this marked the hour observed in religious houses for Terce, followed by Mass. The Mass line is common to all scratch dials and on some is the only line. The hour of a morning Angelus may have been 6 a.m. and Vespers would have been at 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. The dial on the buttress to the left of the door is a hole dial. It appears that all the dials have at one time or another been added to or tampered with by someone who did not understand their original purpose. The reason for having three dials by the same door could be to allow for variations of the angle of the sun at different times of the year.

The low wooden benches in the entrance porch at the main south door show that the porch probably served as the village schoolroom, although the lower one may also have
been used for the changing of footwear or removing of pattens before entering the church.

As with all village churchyards there are a host of interesting tombstones. One of particular interest, near the chancel door, depicts a woman handing a drinking cup to a man. The story is that a wife poisoned her husband and was subsequently burnt at the stake and was one of the last people in England to meet such a fate. There was also, at one time, a preaching cross in the churchyard.

The main part of the interior of the church appears to date from the second half of the 13th century and the style of architecture is predominantly early English. The mullions and tracery of the windows and the deep hollows of the mouldings on the pillars are typical features of the Norman period but may have been carried on into a later period. Some are serene and beautiful, some grotesque and others appear contorted in agony. A king and queen watch over the congregation from the chancel arch.
The long chancel is typical of a monastic church. In the days of the Priory it would have formed the presbytery where the monks would have had their stalls. Originally the church comprised the choir and nave, with a central tower and probably two side chapels which would make it cruciform. The south aisle and side chapel are of considerable age but the north aisle was not added until 1849.

In the Middle Ages and later churches were highly ornate. The flickering of many candles, lit to represent the prayers of the faithful, would catch the gilding of statues and the walls would be decorated with richly coloured paintings. These have largely disappeared and what few fragments remain have faded but they would have been used not just for decoration but also for teaching purposes in the days when few people could read.
The original form of the sanctuary remains a matter of speculation but the ornately decorated ogee arch may well have been the medieval shrine of St Lucien, behind which his relics were preserved and where pilgrims came to pray.

We know, from the story of William Losse, that access to the belfry and tower was gained in his day from the interior of the church. It may be that a door from outside and a door from inside both led to the same belfry staircase which was within the thickness of the wall. When the north aisle and vestries were built, a new staircase to the belfry was made and the old one closed up. There is a theory that ancient church plate (mysteriously lacking in a church so richly equipped) may have been hidden during the time of the Puritans and to this day remains bricked up near the old stairway or in the east wall.

There is an unusual entrance to the pulpit through the thickness of the wall. It is possible there was once a rood screen and loft to which access was gained by a staircase from this entrance. An opening was cut through the pillar and the pulpit added in 1849 at the time when the north aisle was built.

The side chapel, which had been used as a baptistry, was restored and refurnished in 1932 and the font was then moved to its present position.
The church has a peal of six bells, still rung regularly every Sunday and, of course, on other special days.

The clock began keeping time for the village on the 2 August 1904 and with the exception of the periods of two world wars, when it was forbidden, the quarter hours have been chimed every since with very few interruptions.

As with all very old, much loved village churches there is an ongoing programme of maintenance at Lois Weedon to ensure we can protect the church from the ravages of time, thus preserving it for our descendants as our ancestors have fought to preserve it for us.

**The Surrounding Area**

The countryside surrounding Lois Weedon is rich in historical interest. Greek coins, medieval pottery and deer antlers have been found in gardens and fields. It is possible that the Romans came here when they were building their famous Watling Street from London to the north, which passes through the centre of Towcester, just seven miles to the east.

Weston was the settlement to the west of the castle. Today the two villages work together as one, sharing facilities and joining for social occasions. Around Weston traces of medieval farming methods are still clearly visible. Tenant farmers shared fields and gateways for access and for this reason farmsteads were clustered together, as they remain today. The ridge and furrow pattern in the fields is clearly defined – the number and direction of ridges is the same as in 1593. Maps of that time bear the name of each tenant on the strip and descendants of those tenants are still living in the village.

The Act of Enclosure in 1773 meant that fields previously used for common grazing were fenced in. At this time a certain amount of land was allotted for the benefit of the more necessitous, industrious and honest poor inhabitants of the said parish. This was the origin of the charity known as the Poor’s Land which is still distributed at Christmas. In 1860 this land was let out as allotments and the rent was used to fund the charity. Villagers benefit from two additional charities: Lady Wyndham Hanmer, who inherited Weston Hall in 1864, left £200, the interest on which is used to provide coal at Christmas. Jane Leeson, in her 1646 will, bequeathed money for the benefit of widows, the elderly and the infirm in a number of parished in this area.

Weston Hall has for a number of years been the home of the famous Sitwell literary family. The striking memorial to Dame Edith Sitwell, which can be found in the churchyard extension, was executed by the famous sculptor Henry Moore. Facing the green opposite Weston Hall is the beautiful Armada House, so called because it was built in 1588. The Crown Inn already existed in 1593 and the old coach house, now a function room, was of sufficient height to accommodate a large coach. This may indicate that Weston was a staging post on some small cross country route.
Towards the end of the 17th century the cult of the Anabaptists began to spread. Baptisms were held in the open air in a baptistry in the paddock at the now ruined Cat Anger Farm near Woodend. If you know where to look the bricks of the baptistry can still be seen. The Anabaptists later chose Weston as their headquarters and the present chapel was built in 1791 and enlarged in 1866. It is believed to be the oldest Baptist Chapel in Northamptonshire.

Lois Weedon and Weston may, over the years, have lost their shop and craftsmen but the villages have not lost their heart. Most importantly, there is a thriving Church of England primary school in Milthorpe, Lois Weedon. Built in 1848, it had a master’s house attached which was later converted into additional accommodation for the school.

The strength of our community lies in its unshakable links with the past — residents who can trace their ancestry back hundreds of years, whose ancestors lived within a footfall of their present home. These true villagers welcome newcomers with a rare warmth. The combination of history and new blood continually renews life, giving our village vitality and a positive future.

Other sources of information have included:-
The History and Antiquities of the County of Northampton, Vol II, by George Baker, London 1836-41

Victoria History of the County of Northamptonshire, Vol II, and especially an article by Rev R M Serjeantson on "Religious Houses of Northamptonshire"

General and Manorial History and Directory of Northamptonshire by William Whelan and Co., London 1849

History of Northamptonshire by Bridges 1762-1791

The Natural History of Northamptonshire by Rev John Morton 1712

Primitive Sun Dials or Scratch Dials by Dom Ethelbert Horne 1917