**Families**

Until the disforestation of Wychwood, Leafield was surrounded by woodland and developed as an isolated village, distinctly different in character from the surrounding area. In 1858 James Akerman described Field Town as "a large primitive village in the very heart of the forest. The inhabitants have always been noted for their uncouth dialect". It remained insular in character until the First World War when marriage with people from outside the village became much more common. Before that a great deal of inter-marrying took place, so that almost everyone was related to many other people in the village.

**Leafield surnames**

Because of the degree of repeated inter-marriage, until the First World War the majority of Field Towners shared a small pool of surnames. The Pratleys, still a name often met in Leafield, was the most common, to the extent that to distinguish them one from another many people were given nicknames; one such branch was the "Samson Pratleys", so called because the first of this family was a strongman who could pick up a horse. In 1851 there were 160 people in Leafield with the surname Pratley (originally derived from Spratley): they constituted one fifth of all Leafield inhabitants. Also living in the village at that time were 49 Holloways, 47 Eeles's, 40 Shaylors, 36 Busbys, 34 Sifords (earlier spelled Cyfers), 33 Dores and 28 Wiggins's. Most of these were very old Leafield families; all but the Holloways can all be traced back in Leafield to at least the early seventeenth century. The Busbys were an especially ancient Leafield family; they had been living in the village as long back as 1500.

In earlier times many Field Towners had surnames derived from their birthplace or their occupation. Most medieval inhabitants were called de la Felde, le Forester, le Potter and the like. Shaylor, Slatter, Gardiner, Taylor and Franklin are names with ancient origins still to be found in Leafield today. Gradually a wider variety of names is found in documents relating to Leafield. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, dominant families in Leafield included Empson, Greenaway, Harris, Hitchman, Lardner, Rawlins, Underwood.

***Sources***

There is a rich variety of sources for tracing the history of Leafield families. The Leafield registers are not very ancient: baptisms began at Leafield in 1784, burials in 1831 and marriages in 1853. Before that Leafield baptisms, marriages and burials are recorded in the Shipton-under Wychwood registers, which survive back to 1538. All these registers, many of which have been transcribed, are kept in the Oxfordshire Record Office (ORO) as are 130 wills and inventories of Leafield people dating between 1569 and 1851. The returns from the censuses, held every ten years from 1831, are held in the PRO, though copies are available in the Westgate Local History Library.

Surveys of land holdings are also valuable. The earliest are a 1547 survey held in the Gloucestershire Record Office and surveys of 1552 and 1609 held in the Public Record Office. The ORO holds surveys of 1764 and 1815, together with the Enclosure Award of 1837, the Reassessment of 1860 and the Tithe Commutation Award of 1841, tithe receipts from 1727-34 and 1788 and miscellaneous conveyances.

Leafield School has log books with pupils' names dating back to 1871.

Useful printed sources include the 1642 Protestation Returns, the 1665 Hearth Tax Returns and the 1754 poll of freeholders.

On the web, an informative resource is the Oxfordshire Surnames List at [www.rootsweb.com](http://www.rootsweb.com).

Pratley information website [www.pratley.info](http://www.pratley.info)

A message from the webmaster of pratley.info web site:  The "History" link on the left of the home page gives a brief overview of the history of the surname, which of course mentions Leafield quite a bit. The "People" link connects to the pages for each of the people I have in the database, which visitors to your site may find of interest if they're researching their family trees.