



Foreword

Since Henry Fox-Talbot pioneered photography in 1839 Stevington has changed a little, to say the least. Up to the First World War and beyond a camera was an expensive luxury and Stevington was not a well-off community. When we of the Historical Trust decided that we would collect and publish as many photographs as we could to illustrate how the Village has changed, we found old pictures hard to come by.

However, in regard to the contemporary scene we were more fortunate in that three years ago Roger Day started to compile a photographic record of the Village and, having seen some examples of his work, we had no hesitation in asking him to help us. The result has been a brilliant series of images of contemporary Stevington.

For the old photographs which appear here I have to thank all those Villagers who have lent us pictures. For the new images we have to thank Roger Day who has dedicated his contribution to the memory of his daughter, Lizzy. We hope you will be fascinated by the old ones and

enchanted by the new.

I should confess to one liberty we have taken. The observant reader will find many references to Picts Hill. A boundary change in 1946 moved that area from Stevington to Turvey. Why, no-one can remember. The lost land includes Moat Farm and Picts Hill House. For historical completeness we have included pictures of Picts Hill here.

I must also record the generosity of Stevington Parish Council which made us a handsome grant and loan which made this publication possible. The Council's support has been a great spur to us as has been the willingness of all the subscribers to take us on trust.

We are grateful to Peter Conquest and Terry Studley who read the proofs, though of course any errors are the responsibility of the Trust.

David Stanbridge

Duck End Farm

October 2004

Good Morning, Stevington!





Introduction

Stevington lies five miles west of Bedford in the valley of the Great Ouse River. It looks across to Pavenham and Oakley on the other side. It is in the northern lee of the escarpment which carries the A428 Bedford to Northampton trunk road.

Historically, Stevington is an archetypal Anglo-Saxon Village. However, apart from St Mary's Church, the tower of which is Saxon, there is little building in the Village that predates the early 17th Century. The Vicarage is an exception, and possibly parts of Duck End Farm and Meeting Farm. The stone buildings of the 17th and 18th Centuries which give the Village its character were built of the local oolitic limestone. Brick was not used until the 19th Century, when slate also became available through the canal system.

The Village's rural scene dates from the Enclosure Award of 1806. The modern development took place first of all between the two World Wars, mostly in Court Lane; then in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Burridge's Close

and Farley Way, and latterly in 1999 with Foxbrook.

In *Stevington: The Village History* we remarked how the Village has constantly adapted to change over the centuries. Amazingly, it has continued to do so. Even in the face of the rural deprivation of the last 30 years, which has hit Stevington as hard as any other Village, it has maintained its sense of community; and that vibrancy is something which strikes many visitors to the Village.

You cannot escape it if you live here. Why this should be so is difficult to pinpoint, and it would take a complex sociological study to understand it. We can only count ourselves lucky and hope that it continues.

Chapter 1 Landscape and Seasons

*'Tis common knowledge that a witness is more stirred
By brilliant image than by any word;
So scan these views of nature flourishing:
The river flowing and the Bluebell Wood in spring.*

The River Great Ouse marking the boundary where once the Danelaw terminated and Anglo-Saxon England began, is probably the feature of the landscape which has changed least over the years. However, the fields and woodland we see now are very different from those which the Domesday Book commissioners encountered in 1086. The Enclosure Award of 1806 laid the foundation for today's field and road scene and swept away the open fields of mediaeval times. **Plate 3** is a plan drawn by Bernard West in 1943 showing the layout of the Village. **Plate 4**, an aerial photograph of 1935, illustrates the plan. **Plate 5** is the same view today and **Plate 6** shows the whole Village in its rural setting. This provides a rich backcloth to the four seasons.

Spring, the season of renewal, is featured most memorably in the romantic sight of the bluebell wood at Woodcraft [7]. At this time the Village decks itself in colour, as this picture of Park Road demonstrates [9], or shrouds the early walker in morning mist [1]. The new growth soon gathers pace and in **Plate 2** the trees on either side of Park Road form a leafy entrance arch at the eastern end of the Village.

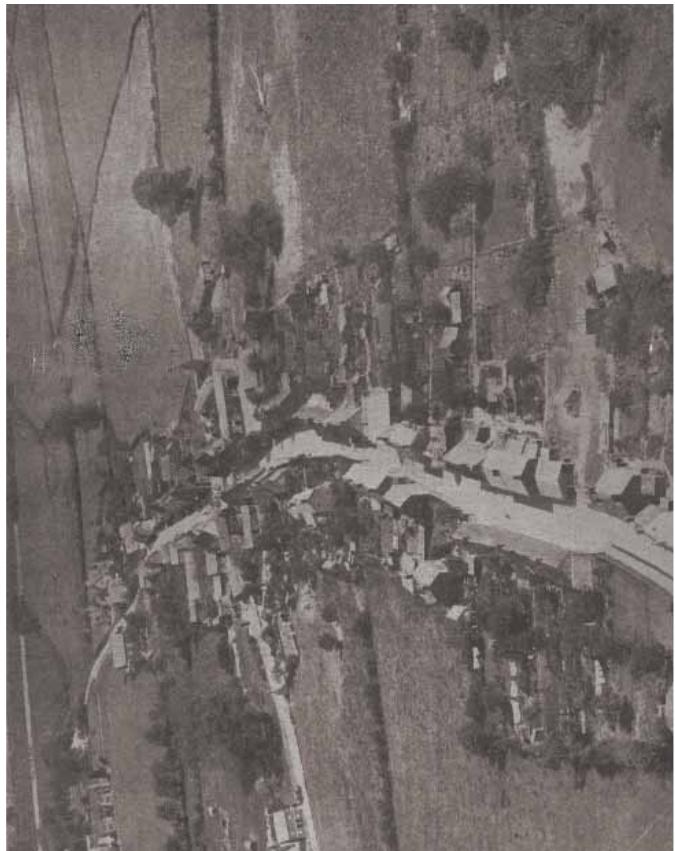
Later, in summer, the butterbur and roses flourish below St Mary's [11] while dots of poppies sprinkle their scarlet among the farmers' crops [12]. The odiferous rape encircles the Village in a halo of yellow [8]. Meanwhile, the Great Ouse mirrors a riot of skies, green banks and trees as it glides and meanders slowly towards Bedford [13 and 14]. The hatch of mayflies in glorious sunlight [10] delights the fisherman's eye and turns his thoughts to salmon and trout in vain, as there are none in our river. However, not all is calm at this time of year; the summer storm provides a tumultuous contrast [20 and 21].

Autumn, with its amazing and indescribable colours [24-6] and extraordinary skies [22] competes in beauty with all that has gone before [15]. Even stubble from the harvest presents an

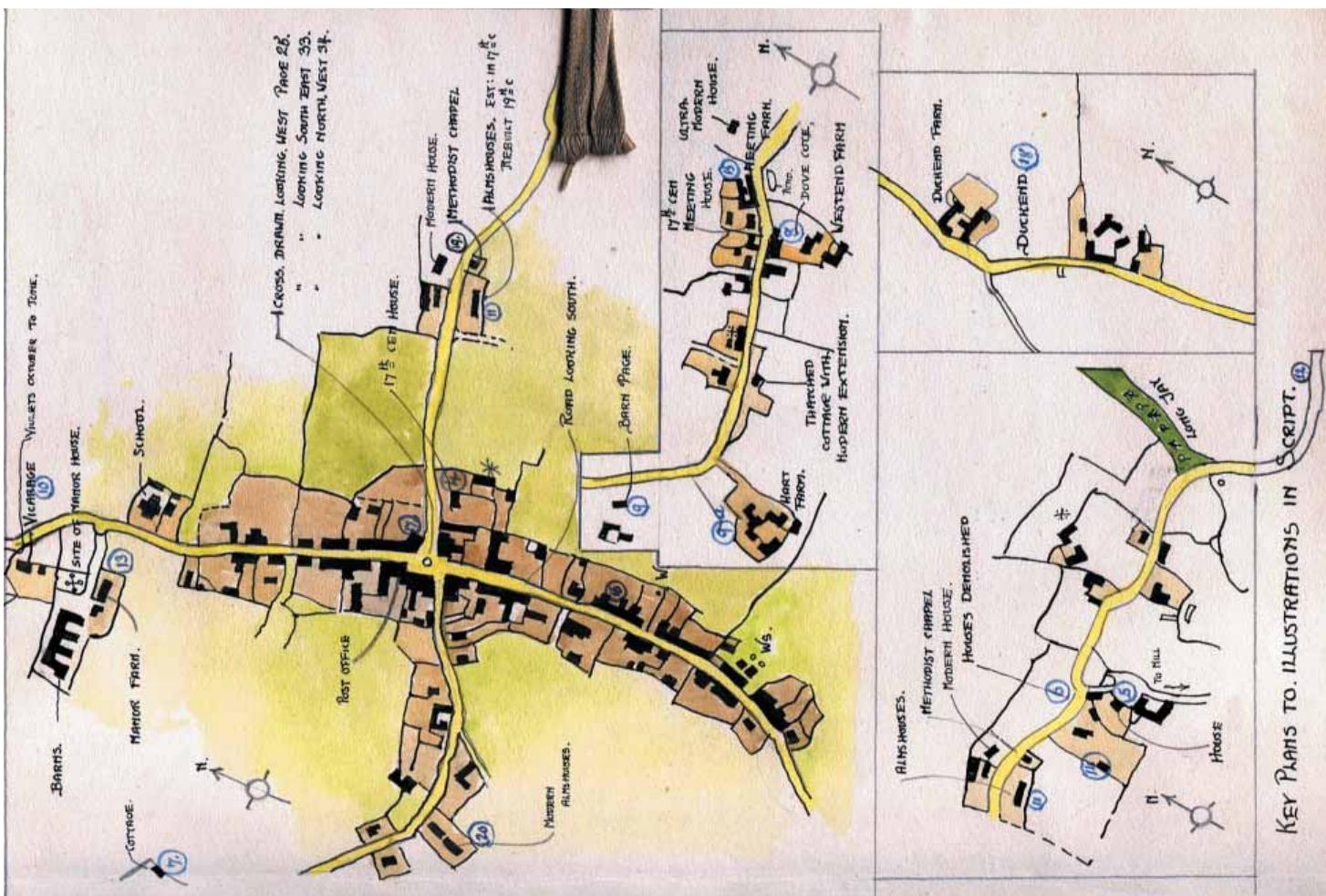
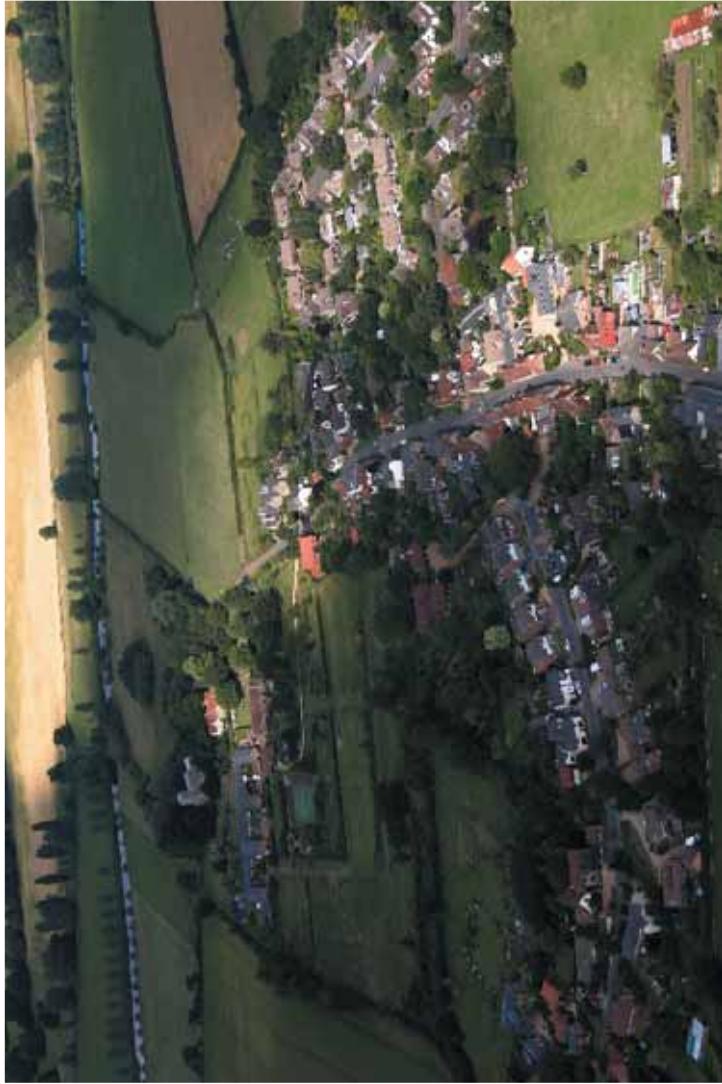
artistic prospect for the camera [16]; then the ploughshare churns up the earth to substitute a rival scene [17]. The countryside, usually dry at this time of year, provides ideal conditions for the walker [18 and 19], while the Ouse reflects the autumn tints of its bankside trees [27]. A leaf-strewn Park Road, appeals to the photographer's eye as it curves by Farley Way, [23], while the moon holds its pose for him [32]. Autumn is also the season of marvellous sunsets [28-31].

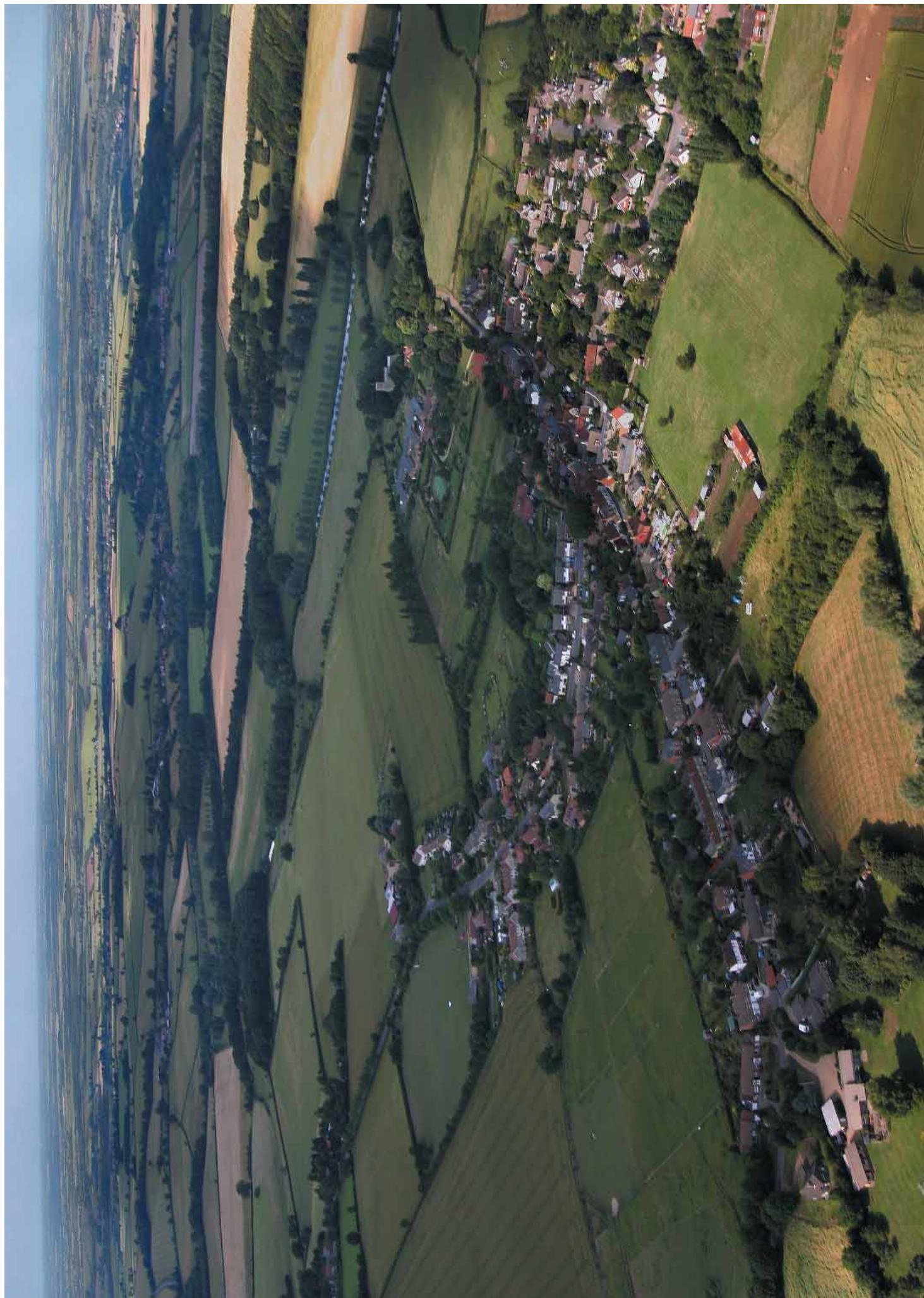
Winter, inevitably, gives the Village a sad look but with the trees shorn of their leaves [34] the Ouse maintains its varied appeal even in flood [33 and 35]. When it snows the prospect of the *Red Lion* is transformed [36], as is the view of the Cross with Silver Street behind [37]. When finally it stops snowing the whole Silver Street and Park Road vista appears [38-40].





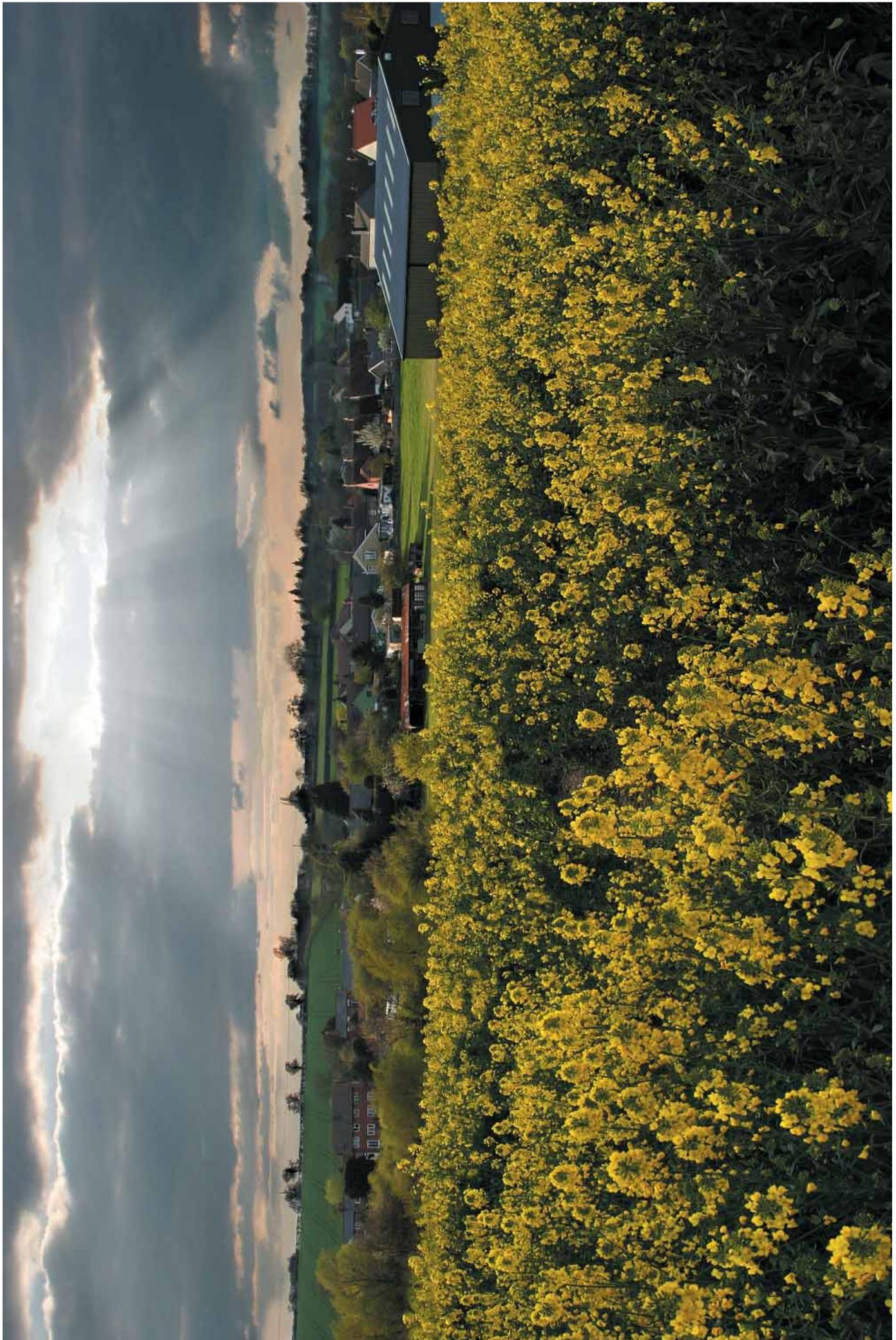
4 Aerial View of the Village in 1935, Looking North-East







7 Bluebell Wood in Full Bloom

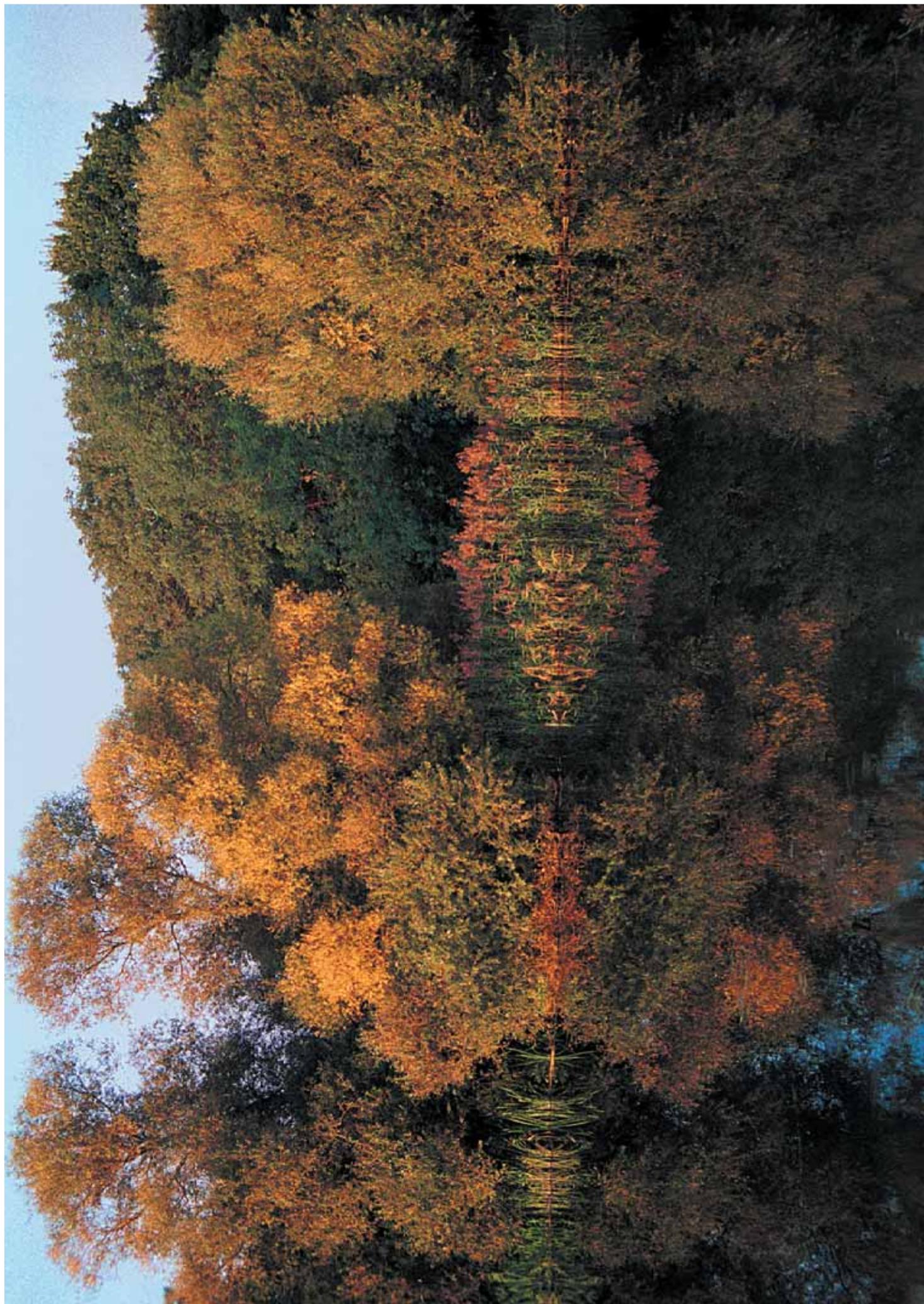




9 Park Road in Spring



10 The Mayfly Hatch





28 Sunset Boulevard



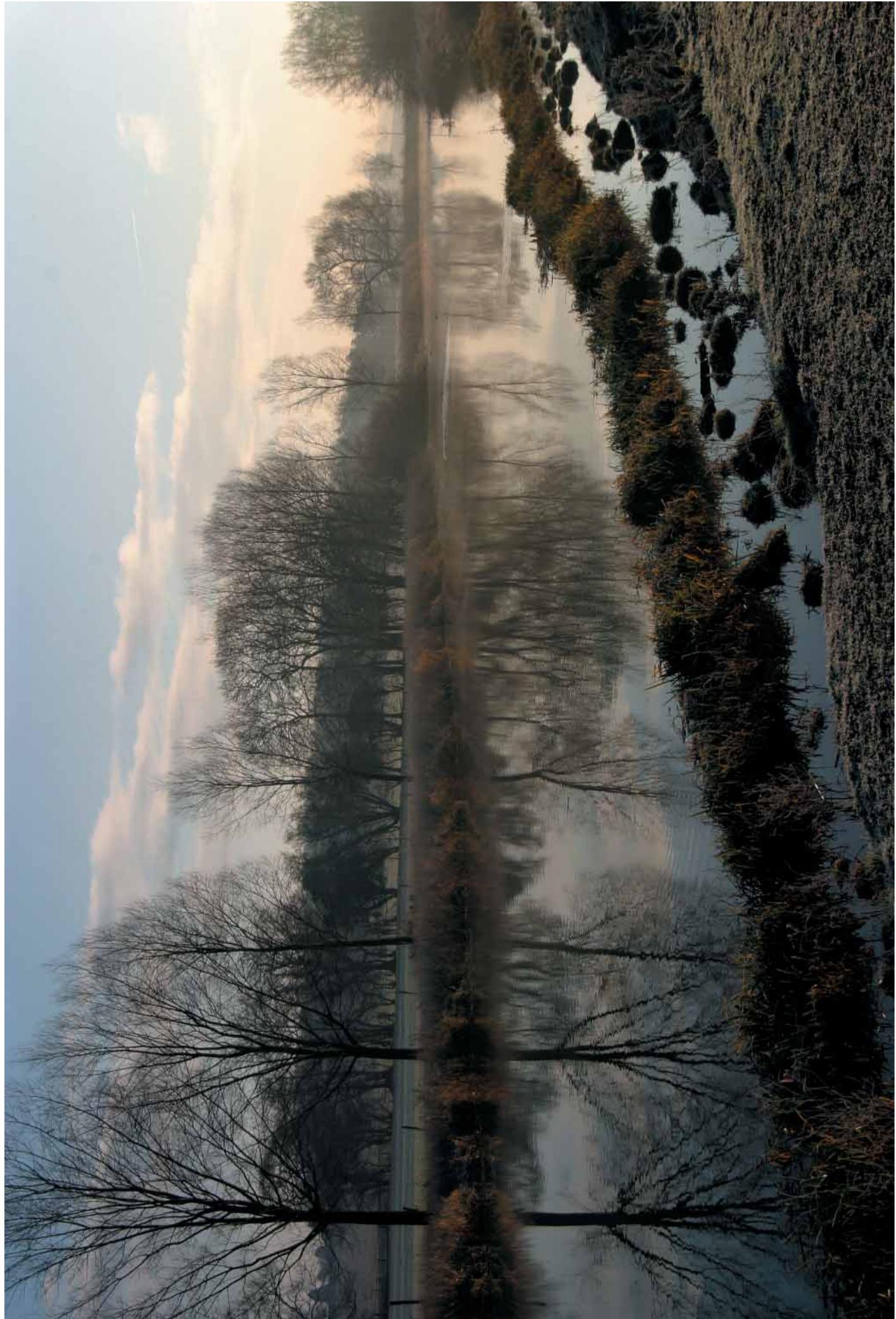
29 Red Sky at Night, Photographer's Delight



30 What Does This Portend? The End of the World?



31 The Windmill at Sunset



35 Levels of the Swollen River

