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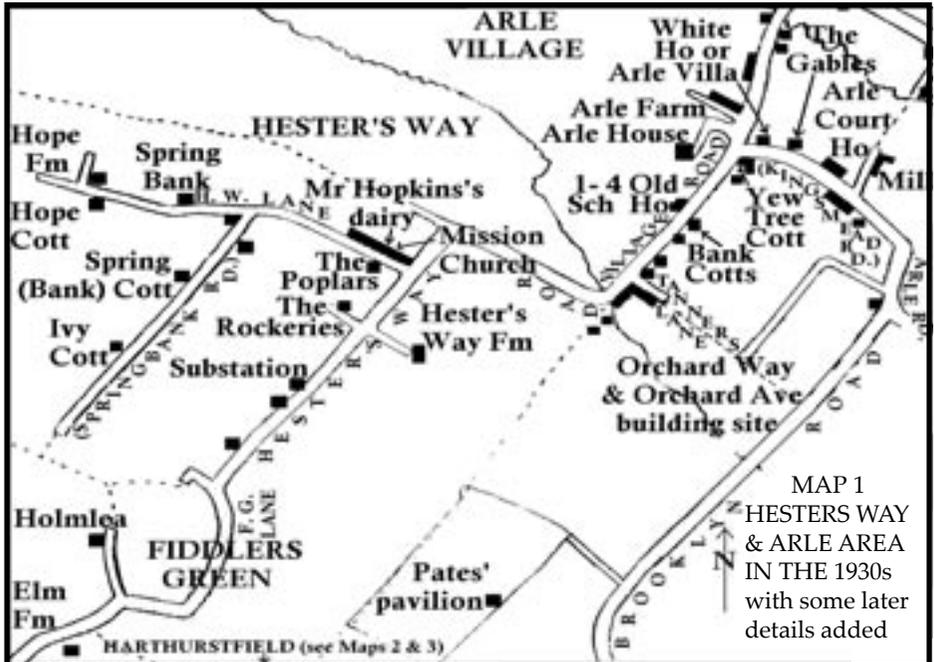
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MAP 1  
HESTERS WAY  
& ARLE AREA  
IN THE 1930s  
with some later  
details added

## DUST TO DUST

(This follows on from the archaeological chapter: 'The Footprints of Time,' in The History of Hesters Way Volume 4, pp.36-38).

There were no curious pupils gazing out of the upper windows of the school, wondering why construction work on the new school had ceased for a second time. For the old school had already been demolished, bit by bit: first the newer Art and Science Blocks, then the Music Block and Dining Hall and lastly, the Tower Block – the original building of Arle or Kingsmead School. In its place would rise a new Sports Hall and sports facilities.



Why had work temporarily ceased once more? After all, time was of the essence if the new Academy was to be ready for its first pupils in September 2011.

But that day was to be a very special one, because the Anglo-Saxon skeletons which had been discovered the previous year were to be re-interred with a private ceremony. Only a limited number of people had been invited for this solemn event: representatives from Christ College, the contractors Skanska, members of Gloucester County Council, and of

course a representative from Cotswold Archaeologists who had been examining the skeletons for several months in preparation for a report on this momentous find.

Building work had necessarily been suspended, indeed the tarmac was still hot under-foot, but due reverence was given to this occasion. Prayers were said, a hymn sung, and the remains of those ancient former residents of the site were duly returned to the ground from whence they came. Holy Water was sprinkled on the graves, and even if perhaps the occupants had never been Christians, nevertheless, they

were accorded a Christian burial.

Afterwards, those who attended were taken on a tour of the new building, which was a far cry from the typical post-war school buildings which had been built locally so hurriedly in the early 1950s. For this building was an iconic landmark, set to compete with the other popular schools of Cheltenham.

No doubt we will learn more as time passes of those people who lived on that site hundreds of years ago. But it is hoped such a discovery will have enhanced our knowledge of the lives of the Anglo-Saxons in Gloucestershire.



## MEMORIES

It is difficult now to locate older residents of Cheltenham who lived in the Arle or Hesters Way area during World War II, and who would have seen great changes in the landscape after the war when councils turned once again to building new houses and schools.

The area of Cheltenham which saw the greatest change in those early post-war years was Arle with Hesters Way. Because of the bombing in London and other major cities, many families were located to the safe area of Cheltenham. One major move was that of G.C.H.Q. which settled at Benhall in the 1950s, and which over the years has expanded. Staff formerly from the South-east were re-located; many of them in the fast-developing Hesters Way Estate.

## JENNY LANE

One such person who shares her memories of those years is Jenny Lane, who with her family moved into a new house at 61 Hesters Way Road, next to the Harris family. She recalls: "Dad worked at GCHQ. Our family migrated originally from Hillingdon, London, when dad's trade (mechanic grade) was transferred from that area to Benhall and later Whaddon."

“The Hesters Way we lived in was an eclectic area. The house opposite was owned by the Tiplady family - Mr Tiplady being the Headteacher at Monkscroft Secondary School. I played with his daughter for a while as young teenagers. The Hesters Way Estate seemed to have a lot of GCHQ workers.”

“My sister and I both attended Arle Secondary School - from 1961 to the end of the 5th year. I had previously attended Monkscroft Primary School when Miss Chandler was Headteacher.” Jenny’s sister attended a primary school near St. Paul’s. By the time her brother started to attend school, the new primary school opposite the shops on Hesters Way Road had been built.

Jenny recalls that: “The original house had outbuildings – a shed, outdoor loo; and a wash shed complete with copper, which I recall steamed away on Mondays, the traditional washing day. I recall the vegetable garden being developed. Dad also had an allotment, which was off the bottom of Welch Road.” The land in that area was very fertile so they had a good crop of fruit and veg.

The sisters can also recall “the little shop in Hesters Way Lane, owned and run by Mr and Mrs Kent. It was essentially a wooden lean-to building, attached to their farmhouse, which was set in a series of orchards extending from behind the flats on Hesters Way Road to opposite the dairy in Hesters Way Lane. The shop was opposite the St. Silas church hall, where my sister and I attended Sunday School.” At that time the area of Hesters Way Lane, before the housing development began to take shape “was almost all orchards – apples, pears, plums, with some arable and meadows.”

“Behind our house was the ‘dump’ – the mounds of sawdust from the old Saw Mill (no building survived at the time) which we used to play on. The main mound was of a significant size – or appeared so at the time. The site was also littered with huge tree trunks from the felled trees. Behind that was an orchard garden, and at the bottom of that was the scrap-yard - accessed from a lane at the top of Welch Road.”

“It was in the field adjacent to this access lane that a small crop-spraying aircraft came down, after hitting power-lines, which cut off the electricity supply for most of the area. I recall running over to the site as people gathered to help, and someone had plucked the pilot out. He was slumped against a tree-trunk, in a brown bomber

jacket, smoking a cigarette that he had obviously requested! Evocative of the images in all the war films which were famous at the time! I would have been around 10 years old." One assumes there was no spilt aviation fuel! This happened in 1959 (see The History of Hesters Way Vol. 4, p.72).

The children were not allowed to play out-doors on Sundays, which were reserved for Sunday Schools, for rest and respect for others. Washing was definitely not hung out to dry on Sundays.

In the early 1970s the dump was tarmaced over and developed into a car park. So much has changed over the years, that it is doubtful whether Jenny and her sister will now recognise the area they once used to live in and remember with affection.

## **RECOLLECTIONS OF PETER WHATLEY**

(Now of Minnesota, U.S.A. of his life in Arle and Hesters Way, 1942-1954)

"Shortly after my birth day - 1st May 1942 - my parents Hubert and Phyllis Whatley brought me home to 27 Orchard Avenue, a small semi-detached house in the village of Arle. I was their first child, destined to be their only child.

My father was an Aircraft Instrument Project Engineer at S. Smith & Sons and had been relocated out of London to the safer environs of the west of England. My mother did not work outside of the home and devoted much of her time to raising me. Cheltenham to me was the perfect town - happy days.

Orchard Avenue in those days was lined with flowering cherry trees. Springtime in Orchard Avenue was beautiful.

The family car was a black 1939 Morris 8 Series E, registration KML 311. We had a cat named Billy and I kept 'pet' snails in a box (outside!).

My first significant childhood memory was V.E.. Day, 7th May 1945. I was just three



*Local V.E. Day celebration*

years old. There was open ground at the top of Orchard Avenue where it met Orchard Way. Here a tent was erected - there were benches and tables, food provided by the resident organizers, decorations and, most memorable of all, a large bonfire reminiscent of Guy Fawkes Night. This night however, burned in effigy, there were two 'Guys,' stuffed dummies of Hitler and Mussolini. Our neighbours across the street wheeled their upright piano outside for an impromptu party and sing along. I was just three years old. There was great noise and music. I cried and was taken home.

The Morris family lived at No.29 – Alf Morris was a 'bookie' at the local greyhound racing track. They had two daughters, Ann and Joan. Bookmaking must have paid reasonably well as the family owned a new Morris 6 and had a radiogram. At the age of nine I was allowed to visit and play their records – 'You Belong to Me' by Ken Griffin was a favourite.

On the other side were Jim and Grace Whatling, a nice couple, also from London. They 'listened for me' on the odd occasions when my parents would stay out late, semi-detached walls not being that thick.

My best friend was Michael Gorton, who lived at the other end of Orchard Avenue in the maisonettes. We loved Dinky Toys and Hornby Trains. We were avid readers of the Eagle comic (Dan Dare) and the Meccano Magazine. Michael's mother was a teacher at Gloucester Road Primary School which I attended from 1947 to 1953.

Other friends included Michael Sayers and Roger Hathaway. Roger's father owned a butcher's shop on the Tewkesbury Road. One of our favourite games was to take blackout curtains, attach them like cloaks with a safety pin, and ride like the Lone Ranger through the neighbourhood. We tried using gas masks, but they were just too sweaty and uncomfortable.

Behind our house were fields, later to become the Hesters Way Estate. In these fields were (bomb?) craters, half-filled with water: very dangerous for lively young boys in search of adventure. I was told later that German bombers returning from raids on Coventry and Birmingham would lob any left-over bombs if they saw a light. A fighter was supposed to have shot up Brooklyn Road one day. Maybe true? – but a good story for a ten year old boy (think 'Just William').

I remember my father taking me on the cross-bar seat of his bike to

the post office where we picked up a box of half a dozen fuzzy little yellow chicks. They lived in a fenced-in chicken-run at the bottom of our garden. My job was to feed them. Fresh eggs during the years of severe rationing were a treat indeed. I also remember a day or two after one Christmas dinner when I realized we had 'lost' one of our chickens: my favourite Rhode Island Red!

The grocer's delivery driver used to take orders and deliver once or twice a week. In the late 1940s, milk was delivered by horse and cart and ladled straight from a churn, and my mother would take out a jug. There was no refrigeration, so these deliveries would have been made several times a week. Deliveries of all kinds were made by horse and cart. Our neighbour used to keep a bucket and spade behind his gate to pick up the manure for his roses.

Whilst my parents were not church-going people, my mother made it a point to see that I had some exposure to Christianity. Therefore I attended St Barnabas' Church which, as I recall, was located in a hall on Orchard Way at the top of Orchard



***St. Barnabas' Church nowadays (2013 D.E.)***

Avenue. I remember Mr. Barnett, who led the services. I was a 'Junior Covenanter' and had a shield-shaped lapel badge to prove it! Sunday school was fun, but I was too young to consider it a commitment.

My father was quiet, dedicated and brilliant. While still a boy of fifteen he had built his first radio set; and in 1929 at the age of twenty he was licensed to operate radio station G2BY, one of the earliest licenses issued. Our house on Orchard Avenue could be easily identified by the radio-mast near the bottom of the garden, designed and built by himself, and connected by the antenna wire to the chimney. We had no spare bedroom – that was Dad's radio shack. Nobody knew that - had the Germans invaded - he was part of a small group of 'listeners.'

Gloucester Road Primary School was a great little school, and just a short bus - or bicycle - ride away. I used to take the No.5 Cheltenham & District bus to Gloucester Road Primary School. The bus stop was at

the end of Orchard Avenue, which was the terminus before there was a Hesters Way Estate. We would get off where at the corner where Arle Road meets Gloucester Road. I remember I would buy a penny OXO Cube from the Arle Road Stores at that corner as a treat to suck on the journey home. In those days the bus company was owned by Red & White. My favourite buses were the Albion Venturers No.29 to 33.

When I was old enough (about nine) I would ride my bike to Gloucester Road Primary School, a short ride up the Arle Road. I would ride home for lunch and almost always stop at the bridge where Arle Road crossed over the main line – British Railways Midland Region. If I timed it right I would see the 12:27pm Pines Express as it wound down towards Lansdown Station. This was also a good spot for viewing the engine-sheds, and the extensive sidings leading into the Gas Works. Thus started my love affair with railways and many a train-spotting adventure.

There was an abandoned fighter aircraft in a field near Staverton. My friends and I would ride our bikes over there and play at being pilots. We would sit in the cockpit and pretend we were shooting down German fighters. The aircraft was, I think, a North American Harvard Trainer.”

(Roger Clarke, who moved to 19 Hesters Way Road in 1954, also remembered this. “We found what looked like a Second World War fighter plane in a spinney along Fiddlers Green.” See the website ([www.francisfrith.com](http://www.francisfrith.com)).

“It was in the early 1950s that the yellow Wimpy Bedford and Ford Thames Lorries started to traverse “our” fields. Bulldozers levelled the ground, and Ruston-Bucyrus excavators started to dig trenches for water and sewer piping. Our quiet little Orchard Avenue was about to be connected to a huge new housing estate, Hesters Way.

In 1953, having successfully navigated the 11+ exams, I started at Cheltenham Grammar School which was at that time located in the centre of town on the High Street - opposite Woolworth’s and right next door to the Cheltenham & Hereford Brewery. Although I was only there for one year I enjoyed my time and became infused with the smell of hops and barley.

At lunchtime I would occasionally walk to the Associated Motorways Bus Station where coaches arrived and departed for all parts of the country. “Black & White” coaches were my favourite. Strange to

remember, but I also developed a soft spot for the brown-and-cream lorries of building contractor Elliott Bros. Each lorry carried a girl's name on a head-board over the cab.

Other school memories: The visit to Cheltenham of Princess Elizabeth (1951?) ...waiting, waiting, waving a little union jack, waiting some more and then 15 seconds of cheering as the limousine swept by and was gone.

## **HESTERS WAY FARM CHILDHOOD**

Audrey Smith nee Peart recalls living locally around the 1930s:

"At Hesters Way Farm, Mr and Mrs Edgar Fletcher lived in one half, with two sons Maurice and Eddie (I think) and two daughters Betty and Rosie. The other half was occupied by a Mr and Mrs Reid, and their daughter Betty who sometimes took me to school at Gloucester Road (I rode a fairy cycle). Other times I went with Dawn Kearsey from Hesters Way, a lovely smiley girl with pretty auburn hair (who later married one of the Hulberts of Swindon Village).

We used to play hide-and-seek around the farm buildings. I shudder now to think what might have happened, as a favourite hiding place was in the animal feed bins. We used to climb into the upper level of the sheds and look down on the pigs, and when the rats came out we threw stones down on them. Because the (horse-drawn) dust-cart didn't come the length of the track to the farm from Hesters Way Road, all the household rubbish was deposited in a corner of one of the sheds. We used to have a great time sorting through and finding tins, old crockery, etc. to play 'house' in the hedges (dens)."

## **UP THE GARDEN PATH**

Audrey Smith has memories of other locations around the junction of Hesters Way Road and Hesters Way Lane. Near here were Mr Hopkins's dairy, the Mission Chapel, and a smallholding called The Rockeries. She says:

"It was fun too to catch and ride bareback the small black milkfloat pony of Mr Hopkins the milkman.

Mr Shirley Lefeuvre used to come and preach to us as a lay-preacher at the old Mission Hut in Hesters Way, when Miss Upcher, the usual Sunday School lay-preacher-cum-teacher-cum-organist could not come. He came when I was about four-and-a-half, and I have a vivid

recollection of him telling us that if we went to the pictures we would go to hell! I lived in fear of this, as my Dad used to take me to The Ritz to see Laurel and Hardy and Shirley Temple films – (my heroine, I longed to be like her). Of course, we used to call him Mr Le Fever! I can also remember going with my parents, their friends and children, up to Leckhampton Hill, where he and his wife had a tea-room at Daisybank, and there was a wooden slide in the garden. This was around 1935.

Mr Gabb at The Rockeries used to breed huge goldfish to sell to the pool in Sandford Park (at the Bath Road entrance). He had a very large pond outside his house, which was a wooden bungalow with a verandah overlooking this pond.

I used to jump off my bike and prop it up against the double iron gates leading down a long drive to The Rockeries, and slip inside, quietly approaching the house. I lived in dread of Mrs Gabb's dogs hearing me (she used to breed pekingese), as they would charge headlong down that drive barking and yelping en-masse. I don't think they were particularly dangerous, but it was the speed at which they came and surrounded me which was alarming. Mrs Gabb, who would be alerted by the noise, would appear at the far end of the drive: a very large lady with a mass of white frizzy hair and very large glasses. She would stand arms akimbo calling them back (they took no notice), and I would eventually pluck up courage to continue, carefully avoiding



*Members of the Gabb family*

many pieces of discarded animal bones scattered along the driveway: legs and ears the Butchers discarded (they didn't look very nice, but I suppose they kept the fifteen to twenty pekingese quiet at times). How she managed to feed them I really don't know – they were all her 'babies.'

I can recall at least one skinny dark-haired boy being there: I think the Gabbs fostered one or two boys who worked on the land there.

## **AROUND ARLE CROSS**

The junction of Village Road and

Kingsmead Road was once known as Arle Cross. This name can be seen in the Cheltenham Manor Court Book in 1692, and its location is marked on Coates's 1776 map. It was never a crossroads, so the name must refer to a historic stone cross once placed by the roadside, marking the village centre.

## HEARTH & HOME: ARLE HOUSE

The first Arle House was built in 1806 by John Gregory Welch. It was a grand three-storey house, with a covered way connecting it to a large kitchen-washroom.

It had a walled kitchen-garden with a conservatory. There were an orchard and stables behind, and a lawn at the front. And there was a high brick wall surrounding it all, (parts of which still stand, especially at the back, though much was removed in 2004).



The picture shown is a lovely old tinted engraving of Arle House. East Court in Charlton Kings also dates from 1806 – renovated in 1990 – so, that building may give some impression of the atmosphere that the old Arle House had.

The story of the Welches of Arle House is covered in brief in *The History of Hesters Way* Volume 3, p.29. Mrs Webb (who lived nearby at Box Cottage) recalled that at Arle House, Captain Welch and his wife were just like Queen Victoria and Albert walking about sedately along the village road. George Welch went blind, but she still used to see him walking down the lane before he died.

Of the house, Mrs Webb recalled there were vineries at the back, and a greenhouse, and an outside laundry. She said, “I remember they had chestnut trees in the grounds and an iron fence fronting it which was taken up in the last war. As a child I used to go early about 5 a.m.

to Arle Farm for milk and used to sneak in to get chestnuts on the way."

The Captain's children were Anne, Kate, Mary and Margaret. Margaret married a Mr Clissold and went to live in the Christchurch Road area. Mary was a nurse and did not marry. Kate was not married. Anne Mannooch Welch married late in life, and it was for she and Col. Denne that Mrs Webb was in service at Arle House in around 1925. "I scrubbed there many a time," she said – but they were very mean and used to give her only a tiny bit of soap. She was paid 6d an hour for scrubbing. She used to go up to town on Thursdays to get a piece of fish for Mrs Denne, who had some difficulty raising the cash.

Inside, Arle House had no piped water, so Mrs Webb's husband – and sometimes also her son Jesse – had to go early in the morning to pump water up into a tank by using a pump in the cellar. A water supply was going to be connected at the time Mrs Denne died. Amos Wilson – another character from Swindon Village – was starting work on installing this, but then the Borough Council took over the house.

Mrs Webb once asked Kate Welch why Welch Road had not been called Wood's Road instead, since the Wood family had owned and farmed the land around there. But Kate had said that years ago a lot of land there had once belonged to her grandfather.

As a 16-year old, Mrs Freda Bendall nee Williams worked as a house-parlour-maid. She had lived in the village of Arle since 1916 (as she told Mrs Hyett in an interview). She recalled that the gardener-handyman Mr Joynes lived in one of the Old School House cottages, as did her own family (they having been previously at Fiddlers Green Farm). During her employment, she lived in at Arle House, having a bedroom at the top of the house, while in the other room was the cook-housekeeper Gertie, that is, Gertrude Booth who was the sister of the above Maggie Webb. The rooms were sparsely furnished with just a single bed, a mat, and a corner-curtain to hang clothes behind.

Mrs Bendall said: "The cook and I used to get up in the morning at 6 o'clock. The cook would clean the range in the kitchen and get the fire going to boil the kettle and make tea, and then I would take tea up to Mr & Mrs Denne, and then take hot water (in cans) for their hip baths (no bathroom in those days). In between taking tea and hot water I would clean the grates in the lounge and dining rooms, sweep and dust, and lay the breakfast table, while the cook was preparing

breakfast. It was a lot of hard work in those days. I can't see the young people doing it today." She explained that tea-leaves were saved to sprinkle on the carpets before sweeping (in the days before Hoovers).

She used to churn the butter. The dairy was in the basement, with barred windows and no glass. Candles and oil lamps were used.



**Arle House care home**

In an interview with Mrs Hyett, Mrs Hulbert nee Kearsley recalled that there were often fetes held on the lawn of Arle House to raise money for District Nurse Boston (who had lived for a while in Arle House Lodge). When Arle House was sold off, she went to the auction sale-of-effects, which lasted for two days and included many large gilt-framed mirrors.

The Welch family dwindled out with the death in 1944 of Mrs Anne Mannooch Denne (nee Welch), leaving only Miss Kate Brace Welch (who died in 1965) and Mrs Margaret Eleanor Clissold (nee Welch, who died in 1956). These two in 1945 had sold the house to Cheltenham Borough Council. The Council converted the house into five flats, but then in 1960 demolished it.

The old building was replaced in 1961. Gloucestershire County Council built the present Arle House on the front lawn of the earlier one. The blocks of flats that make up Barlow Road, built in 1962, are on the site of the original Arle House. These were built as wardened flats operated by the Borough Council, whereas the new Arle House functioned as a residential care home operated by the County Council. Arle House closed down as a care home in 2012 and the building is currently empty; its function was replaced by the new Monkscroft Care Centre in Shelley Road.

## **A SMALLHOLDING: THE GABLES**

Off Kingsmead Road stands The Gables, an old house and former smallholding. The 1831 Inclosure Act map appears to show a pair of cottages within this same plot, which then belonged to Mr Greenwood. These

**The Gables (2013 D.E.)**



were called Arle Cottages in the 1871/81 censuses, although there was only one householder here, market gardener John Morris. The current building maybe dates to about 1876. George B. Cox was the occupant here by 1899, and through to at least 1938. The current house-name The Gables can be found recorded in the 1921 electoral register.

Mrs F. Ireland of The Old School House recalled when she worked in the gardens at The Gables (while her husband worked for Col. Denne at Arle House). This would have been in the 1930s. She recalled that people from Cheltenham used to come out and gather at the walls of Col. Denne's place around 10 o'clock on a summer evening to hear the nightingales. The improbable-sounding game of Motor Cycle Football was popular throughout Gloucestershire, and was played in the 1930s in the fields adjoining The Gables, which belonged to Jocker Brown of Arle Court House.

Former local resident Mrs Herring nee Johnson, writing in Hesters Way News No.3, says she once lived in a "glass-type house" in the vicinity of the George Readings Way Estate. "The Glass House" stood on stilts in the grounds of Arle Court House. This is one of possibly many informal dwellings in our area that may be hard to track down on any map or record. There were once lots of greenhouses at The Gables, as is apparent on old Ordnance Survey maps.

### **AT WORK: ARLE FARM**

The farmhouse called Arle Farm stood right beside Village Road until its demolition in 1986, having been built probably in 1810 on the site of an earlier farmhouse. It has also been known as Gregory's Farm or Home Farm. The 1748 marriage settlement of John Gregory and Mary Butt confirmed that "Gregory's or Home Farm" had been the home of that family for generations. (Compare the name "John Gregory of Arle, Husbandman" mentioned in a local will of 1573). The daughter of the above couple married Walter Welch in 1773.

It was primarily a dairy farm. The farm and dairy were acquired by the Wood family in 1879, who had been previously at Arle Court Dairy. James Wood was still living at the Arle Court location in the 1881 census, but by 1891 he was living here at Arle Farm, operating a colossal 394 acres. See Margery Hyett's researches on the Wood family here in our Volume 4, pp.25-31.

Audrey Smith (nee Peart) recalls of Gershom Wood senior's wife that "she was always 'Mrs.' to me. I was instructed to call the two children 'Miss' Wendy and 'Miss' Dinah. In 1933/34 I used to go there to play with my friend Leonora May Brown, whose parents were housekeeper and handyman and must have lived in.

I was about four and a half or five when I went to the front door (which was most improper). Mrs Wood opened it, and I went down a long passage with my dolls'-pram full of dolls. At the end were stone steps: my pram turned over spilling out the dolls, one of which was a lovely black one, china-headed of course, and now beyond repair. I asked for help from Dinah and Wendy. (Dinah was probably older than me and Wendy about the same age). The admonishment from Mrs Wood has stayed with me all these years. I suppose I should have gone to the back door of the farmhouse, but it meant going through the Dairy. I was sometimes sent to the Dairy to collect milk for my Mother in a metal container, and the noise of the machinery used to terrify me.

Gershom and Mrs. Brown rode to the hounds, but we didn't!"

More recently, a riding school was operated from the farmhouse, run by Mr and Mrs Street. They were here from about 1951 through until 1986. In 1986 Douglas Tugmasters acquired the old farmhouse, and had it demolished, presumably to help improve visibility for vehicles at their entrance, since the house stood right beside the highway – only a couple of inches from the current kerb line.

A description of Home Farm in 1854 said that adjoining the house stood "a mill room and cyder store, with a granary and lumber room over." That brick-and-wood barn, standing in Douglas's car-park until 1996, was the last of the old buildings to be demolished.

## **WORKS AT ARLE FARM**

Cheltenham Borough Council's policy of locating new industry at the edge of town, to ease congestion and visual pollution, is the reason why

there are factories hereabouts. The industrial site north of Arle Farmhouse is known as Arle Works. This area of outbuildings immediately behind Arle Farm was not part of the Council's compulsory purchase of the surrounding farmland, and so still belonged to the Wood family. Gershom Wood junior informed Mrs Hyett that his father received rent from Mr Street (see above) and from Griffiths (see below), but later sold off these buildings to pay for Gershom (jnr)'s school fees.

Kingston Caravan Co. occupied part of the site, by 1945 at least. A 1951 advert also mentions: "A.S. Brewer & Co. (Plastics) Ltd, Arle Farm, Cheltenham. Phone: Cheltenham 4585. P.V.C. Extrusion Specialists to the handbag and fancy goods industry; furniture and allied trades; aircraft, electrical and heavy industry users. Home and export." Also, from about 1951 Griffith & Diamond coachwork paint-sprayers, later called G & D Paints, operated from here. They moved to Bishops Cleeve in 1996. Mrs Hyett recalls Mr Diamond making a complaint to Arle School that children were smoking cigarettes in the playground too close to the paint-works!

A wholesale wine merchant's called The Sherry Box also operated at some stage from the warehouse building nearest Arle School: they were

suppliers to Martin's wine shops, based at Stoneville Street. Mrs Hyett once took a Commerce class from Arle School on a visit to The Sherry Box to learn about bonded warehouses, and she was shocked at the 16-year-olds'



*Douglas's office, just before its recent takeover (2011 D.E)*

familiarity with the various wines!

Also here from 1963 was F.L. Douglas Equipment motor-vehicle builders, sometimes called Douglas Tugmasters. They made towing tractors for aircraft, and other vehicles requiring hydraulics such as road-sweepers. The company had begun in 1947 in Regent Street in town, then had moved briefly to Kingsditch before coming here.

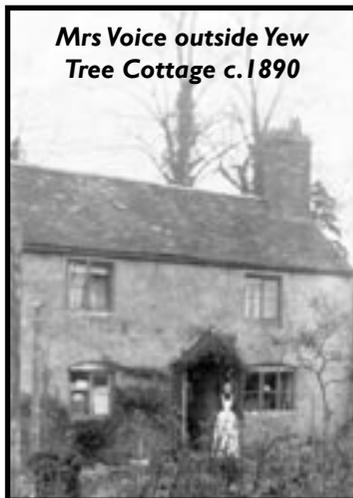
In 1996, when G & D Paints left, Douglas took over the whole site, and demolished the last of the farm buildings in order to expand their

car park. After a take-over in late-2011, the business now goes under the cumbersome name of Curtiss Wright Flow Control Company - Douglas.

## YEW TREE COTTAGE & ARLE VILLA

The authors offer their apologies to Audrey Smith for referring to her as Audrey Stevens throughout our Volume 4, p.15. The oriental furnishings she described in Volume 4 were at Arle Villa, not at Yew Tree Cottage opposite.

For more about Arle Villa, see the chapter below on the Butt family. Just as we described in Volume 4, p.5, regrettably Arle Villa is still (2013) semi-derelect.



*Mrs Voice outside Yew Tree Cottage c.1890*

## IN THE HEADMASTER'S LOG BOOK

### - Education in West Cheltenham

*'Education is not preparation for life: education is life itself.'* John Dewey

The year 2011 saw the opening of All Saints' Faith Academy in Arle and the closure of the former Arle or Kingsmead School, and then in 2012 also the closure of Christ College or St. Benedict's in Arle Road. This inspires us to take a look at the education facilities which were available to the children of Arle and Hesters Way in the far distant past.

In Victorian times, only the children of the nobility and gentry had the good fortune to be educated - either with private tutors or governesses, or sent away to those prestigious preparatory schools, many of which still educate children today.

For the children of this once rural district, education was life itself: helping on the farms, caring for the farm animals, collecting eggs, hoeing, weeding, chopping wood - all those tasks so necessary for the workers on the land. However, these children were at least more fortunate than their contemporaries in the industrial Midlands and North. For those poor children, whose lot in life included long hours

in factories or down the mines, compulsory education when it came about was perhaps a blessed relief.

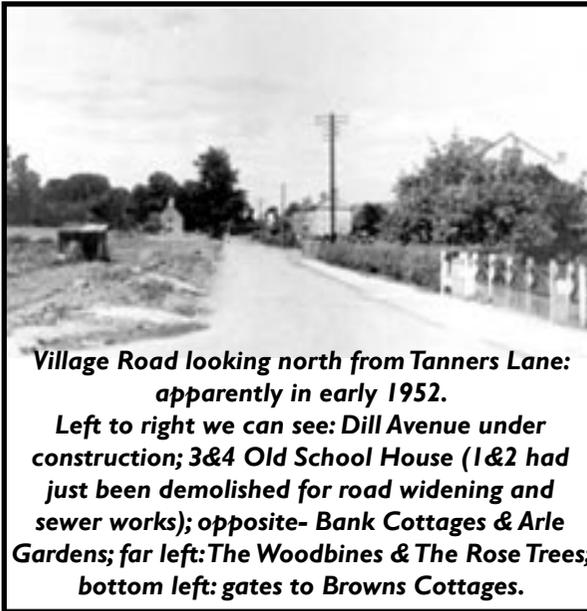
However, despite the effort of Victorian philanthropists, not everyone believed in universal education. It was claimed: 'However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would, in effect, be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness: it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them...' Despite these views, however,

Education Acts were passed in 1870, 1880 and 1891 which offered education for all in state and church schools.

Naturally, the curriculum was somewhat different from that offered to the richer scholars in the private preparatory schools, where Latin and Greek were considered necessary. In these less ambitious establishments, emphasis was on the 'three Rs' and moral



**Mrs Joynes outside The Old School House, Village Road**



**Village Road looking north from Tanners Lane: apparently in early 1952.**

**Left to right we can see: Dill Avenue under construction; 3&4 Old School House (1&2 had just been demolished for road widening and sewer works); opposite- Bank Cottages & Arle Gardens; far left: The Woodbines & The Rose Trees; bottom left: gates to Browns Cottages.**

education. Those scholars who were products of Eton or Harrow and later the Universities were the ones who could enter into Government, or acquire rank as officers in H.M. forces, often such commissions being purchased by their rich patrons. The world of commerce was run by these well-educated denizens of another society. But that is not

to say that less fortunate scholars could not make the grade through hard work.

Cheltenham, as its Coat of Arms displays, was already a centre for private education in Victorian times, and there was not a shortage of preparatory schools and colleges both for boys and girls. Fortunately, for the poorer children of Arle and Alstone, local gentlemen set up the first school for ordinary families. The first was in Alstone Lane (see *Discovering Alstone* Volume 2, pp.57,58) followed soon after by Christ Church School which still stands on Malvern Road, St. Mark's School in Roman Road and Hatherley School. It is from the School Log Books and Admission Registers that we learn of the history of these Victorian Schools which had a large catchment area.

### **CHRIST CHURCH SCHOOL**

One of the first of such church schools to serve the children of the Arle and Hesters Way area was Christ Church School in Malvern Road. Opening in 1850, it took in children from Alstone and the Lower High Street area of Cheltenham.

Being the first of such establishments, much was expected of it - and it certainly never failed, at least insofar as the education of its pupils went. Emphasis was on the three Rs, with great attention paid to moral and religious development.

The curriculum, in those early experimental days of educating the masses, was totally different to that offered the children of the richer inhabitants who dwelt in the grander areas such as Lansdown and Bayshill and The Park. For these pupils from the lower end of town, subjects were basic; Scripture, Arithmetic, English, Geography and History were taught. And of course P.T.: but no equipped gymnasium, and at first no playing fields, so physical education was a series of exercises held in the school yard or hall.



Nevertheless the children received a good all-round education which enabled them to get on in life.

What sort of homes did these children come from? Some of them, especially from Arle and Hesters Way would be children of farmers or market-gardeners. They probably lived in tied cottages, without running water: most of these out-lying areas were served from wells, and even parts of the lower end of town did not have running water until after World War I.

Often in the winter, as the Log Books show, heating in the school was totally inadequate: this was a situation which appeared to plague most of the early schools. Many children had to walk miles to school in all sorts of weather. When they arrived at school, cold and wet, it's little wonder that often attendance fell below that required, as they succumbed easily to the prevalent childish ailments, like measles, mumps and the like.

Nevertheless, standards were set high, and the Log Books record that one boy was sent home three times in one week because of his filthy condition. Poor boy; perhaps he came from one of the slums in Lower Dockham. But if cleanliness was considered next to godliness, the latter certainly was practised: for the children were encouraged at all times to think of others less fortunate than themselves. To that end 'Egg Days' were held once a year with each child bringing into school an egg; so, the records show that in 1934 the children brought 336 eggs and 15/3d in money for the children's hospital. It is possible that some of the children themselves rarely tasted an egg. But you can imagine the chaos which would ensue were today's school children asked to bring an egg to school!

As one would expect with so many children at play, accidents did happen; but it was the unfortunate Mr E. Hope, as Master at the school, who suffered an accident when the blackboard fell off the easel onto his foot. There were no wall-mounted boards in those days. This same teacher was later involved in a more serious accident when endeavouring to fix a new rope to the flag pole. He fell from the walkway and sustained serious injuries to his back.

There were of course the minor accidents as the children milled around in the playground. One mother, who endeavoured to take the authorities to court for the minor accident her daughter sustained, had her case dismissed. Today, however, it seems schools are much

more likely to be sued in this age of blame. Despite this, no child was ever seriously hurt and they all survived to go out into the world.

The advent of World War II, which added to dangers they might expect, meant that extra precautions had to be taken. Trenches were dug in the playground where pupils sometimes had to spend damp and cold hours huddled. But despite this, their thought for others did not wane, and the girls were encouraged to knit scarves and balaclava helmets for the troops, and the boys were encouraged to 'scrumpl' plums - from the sale of which the school funds increased.

When in May 1945 the war in Europe came to an end and V.E. Day was declared as a holiday, celebrations continued everywhere for days, so attendance dropped considerably. However, this little Victorian School had weathered the storm, and still stands today; evidence that 'educating the masses' was not a waste of time.

## **RED ROOFS**

St. Mark's Church of England School on Roman Road began in 1887 as a National School under the patronage of St. Mark's Church and was also under County Council control. In November 1967 the County Council purchased the premises of St. Mark's School and re-named it Red Roofs County Infants School.

Fortunately most of the early Log Books and registers have survived which tell us so much about those early pupils. The catchment area at first was widespread. The admission register of 1905-6 includes children not just from the immediate surroundings but as far afield as Hesters Way Farm, from whence came the children of the Gabb family, and also Evelyn Joan Edwards of Bedlam Farm (Hayden Road). Later, one Meriel Yeend of Bedlam Farm began her education there.

At that date Brooklyn Road did not exist and is first mentioned in the registers in 1938 followed by Merriville Road in 1940. It was not until the immediate post-war years that its catchment area began to extend to take in the fast burgeoning fore-runners of the vast Hesters Way estate.

As to the actual building itself, the Log Book gives the area of the main room as 49 ½ft. x 21 ½ft. divided by a folding partition. There was accommodation for 106 pupils; and another class room covering 19 ½ square feet could accommodate, when necessary, the 17 pupils who attended.



**Nursery class of 1928, St. Marks**

You must realise that in those far-off days there were no school buses, so some children had a long walk to school. By 1928 its average attendance was 81.3%. A nursery class, opened on January 7th 1928 which was a very cold and snowy day. But soon after, owing to an

influenza epidemic, the attendance fell to 58.4%.

In 1929 in November the walls of the classroom were so wet that the children had to take their coats into the classroom with them. A far cry from the cosy conditions of schools today! Nevertheless despite these conditions the school progressed and received excellent reports. There was great excitement when on December 18th a gramophone was added to the school's equipment, and stirring marching music could be played or gentle dance music. It was considered a privilege to be allowed to wind the gramophone up, but some of the boys tended to think they were cranking up a racing car! It also amused the children when it ran out of 'steam' and the singer's voice descended to basso and was changed to a soprano again as the child in charge hastily wound it up. But it was a popular and well-loved acquisition of 20th-century technology.

In January 1936 the school closed for the funeral of King George V, and again on May 10th for the coronation of the new monarch.

However, things were to change drastically when on September 11th trenches were being constructed in the playground as war once again loomed. For this reason it was deemed necessary to alter the afternoon time-table to start at 1-30 and end at 3-30 because of the darker nights and the black-out. Problems arose, and the A.R.P. had to be called in to pump water out of the trenches. The war itself loomed closer and on 25th July the children were obliged to take cover in the trenches because of an aerial battle overhead. They soon got used to hearing the sirens and moving swiftly to the doubtful safety of the trenches - the weather could make their sojourn there very damp and uncomfortable.

The situation in Europe changed, and by May 1945 V.E. Day was declared. The school, like many others, closed for two days to celebrate victory in Europe. A service of thanksgiving was held, followed a day or two later by a Victory Parade at the recreation grounds.

By 1947 despite the perils of wartime being over, in January the children were sent home because of the danger - this time of masonry falling during the re-building of the school chimneys. A few days later it had to close again, because of faulty sanitary conditions, due to a fuel shortage. But despite these set-backs this little school progressed and received excellent reports. And in June 1953 there were Coronation celebrations, each child being presented with a stainless steel spoon in a case.

By this time the post-war building programme had begun in earnest, and new schools were being built in the area, namely Rowanfield, Monkscroft and Hesters Way. Despite their dearth of suitable equipment, they were superior to this ancient, if happy, Victorian School.

But nothing untoward happened, until June 1971 when one Mark Blake somehow managed to get his left leg wedged between the drainpipe and wall. No-one was able to free him, and so the Fire Brigade was sent for, who viewed the situation seriously, whilst the boy's ghoulish mates teased him that it would be necessary to cut his leg off. Fortunately, the Fire Brigade chose to cut through the drainpipe instead, and after a brief trip to hospital young Blake was none the worse except for a bruised leg. One wonders if it troubles him now in old age!

Sadly, however, the completion of the new post-war schools, meant that Red Roofs' days were numbered, and in 1974 the last entry in the Log Book reads:-

**'Spring Term**

**Closure - Final Report**

After 89 years of service to the community, this school is closed permanently as of today. Part of my holiday will be spent in conjunction with the school assistants and caretakers packing the remainder of the books and equipment for removal on 29th July. Most of our stock will be transferred to Christ Church Primary School, Malvern Road, and the remainder, together with most of the furniture will be removed to County Stores, Shire Hall, but

children are transferring to the local schools on Malvern Road, Monkscroft and Rowanfield.

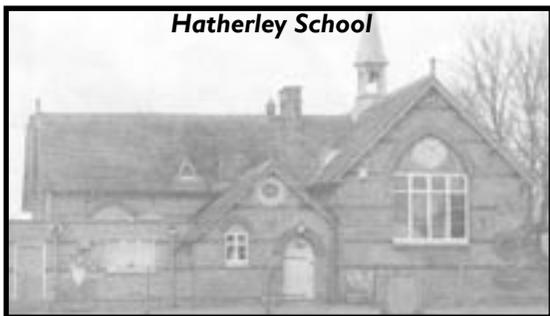
*Miss D Henson. D.H. to St. Mary's Infants, Prestbury'.*

And so ended this popular little school, of which, I am sure, many former pupils are still around who hold treasured memories.

## HATHERLEY SCHOOL

Whilst there must have been protests when Red Roofs was demolished, that was nothing to the outcry which arose when it was proposed to demolish the Victorian School by the railway in Up Hatherley. As in other areas, the building of new schools in the Benhall area rang the death knell for another of these ancient if popular edifices.

Hatherley School opened in 1876. The first entry in the Log Book dated March 13th 1876 reads – 'I, Elizabeth Langston opened up the



Hatherley School. Number of Scholars present, six. Rev George Griffiths and Mrs Hyde-Clarke visited the School....' The philosophy was that of the Church of England and the catchment area spread over several square miles, taking in Benhall Farm, parts of Arle,

the village of Hatherley and the area known as The Reddings. Some pupils came from as far away as Staverton.

There was no industry in the area: consequently the children were the sons and daughters of farm labourers and less wealthy farmers. They had to walk many miles over cart tracks in all sorts of weather, and arrived at this little Victorian School with only a small coke stove to heat it. There were no school buses nor parental cars to transport them. If they were lucky they might hitch a lift in a horse and cart. It is doubtful if any came from the middle classes of the day: their lot in life was to become gardeners, carpenters and house servants.

They often came from 'tied cottages,' with no running water and cess-pits down the garden for toilets. Their lives were spartan – they had no books apart from the Bible and a prayer book, and very little in the way of writing material. Pens, at first, were of the quill type. A

clock was a luxury and most had to rely on the school bell to summon them to their studies. Equipment was sparse and the log books record the presentations of such valuable items as an eight-day clock given by Mrs Hyde-Clarke, and a box of chalk by Revd. Griffiths. Mention is also made of a blackboard and easel, colour box, pot and frame, table cloths, work basket for needlework - and pillows for the babies in the crèche.

The school opened with one mistress and six scholars. Mrs Langston was only a provisional teacher but she was a strict disciplinarian. When the school broke up for its first mid-summer holiday on 22nd June the number of pupils had risen to just under 50, and Mrs Hyde Clarke came to the rescue again by opening up one of her rooms in her nearby home Hatherley Brake for an additional classroom. The children benefited from this brighter outlook.

Attendance was erratic as one would expect, bearing in mind the conditions under which many of the children had to walk to school and the various epidemics which occurred. Nevertheless, this little school earned good inspectors' reports. Prizes too were awarded by Revd. Griffiths for regular attendance. There was, of course, no school uniform then, for the parents could not have afforded them - but the children were expected to be neat and tidy. If the nearby railway sometimes served as a distraction to those boys whose one ambition was to be an engine driver, who could blame them?

That this school was well-loved by its former pupils was evidenced when a plea for 'memories' appeared in the Gloucestershire Echo, and the response showed that former pupils - now grand-parents and even great-grandparents - recalled their days there with great affection. One gentleman whose father attended the school recalled his father telling him how, whilst he was scrambling over the felled tree in the playground, which hazard was popular with the children, that the mistress came out looking very sombre to tell them that their dear Queen Victoria had passed away. Like all the other schools, on this sad occasion Hatherley School was closed as a mark of respect.

But life must go on and as the 20th century advanced so the school grew from strength to strength. As public transport was introduced, no longer did the children from Fiddlers Green or Hesters Way have to trudge miles to school. But as time passed, like the other Victorian Schools in the area, it had to learn to cope with new technology.

Because of its age and lack of certain amenities, the days of this little popular school were numbered. As the areas in Hesters Way and Hatherley expanded, and new schools were built, it was decided to close Hatherley School. The building for a time served as a Drama Centre

But this was not enough to save the building. One John Saunders bought the school in 1990 and applied for permission to knock it down and build three town houses and two bungalows on the site. There was an immediate out-cry from all quarters because the school itself owed its existence to John Middleton, Cheltenham's most successful Victorian architect, for he charged no fee and the Vicar of St. Mark's funded most of the building costs himself.

But despite a petition and the support of Prince Charles himself, the school's demise was a foregone conclusion. And so in September 2001 demolition workers moved in and razed it to the ground. The site is now called Hatherley Mews. All that remains are the memories of those former pupils who look back nostalgically and recall the happy days of their childhood at Hatherley School.

## OUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

### MONKSCROFT

The cessation of all but necessary building during the years 1939 to 1945 led to an immediate shortage after the war of Secondary School places. Just as it was urgent to start building houses, so it was urgent that schools be built to accommodate the children of those post-war years. As mentioned in *The History of Hesters Way* Volume 1, p.27, on the 4th July 1953 a school was approved for the Hesters Way Estate. This became Monkscroft Secondary School, which was officially opened by Lady Dowty on the 6th April 1956. With its own gymnasium and nearby playing field it was a far cry from those earlier pre-war schools.

The curriculum had been extended to allow girls to take scientific subjects and higher maths – girls who hitherto might have supposed Pythagoras was an ancient dinosaur, and that Archimedes ran down the street naked to shock his neighbours, not because he had just made a momentous discovery. Even with this realisation that girls, after all, might have brains, trying to persuade the boys to take up domestic

science was a harder task. However, the boys soon became proficient cooks, and whilst not in the ranks of Jamie Oliver, they proudly took their culinary efforts home - and happily there were no reports of fatalities.

School trips in the immediate post-war years presented some difficulties as Europe was still in a state of flux, nevertheless some of the pupils enjoyed their first trip abroad, to Switzerland. But despite the school's rapid progress, the erection of a new Grammar School off Princess Elizabeth Way led to the Monkscroft buildings being used to form a split-site with the Grammar School, whilst the former Monkscroft pupils moved to Pittville School. This state of affairs was not satisfactory and when the Grammar School became co-ed, the former Monkscroft School was demolished in the 1990s.

On that same site today has risen the Gloucestershire College of Art & Technology and, adjacent, Hesters Way Community Resource Centre.

## **ARLE SCHOOL**

The second post-war Secondary School to open was Arle School. It was built on land which used to be the very successful dairy farm of the Wood family from whom it was compulsorily purchased. This school opened in November 1959 under the headship of Mr Nicholas (See The History of Hesters Way Volume 1, p.28). From the original Tower Block and Hall, the school expanded rapidly with several new buildings at the rear and - perhaps the most valuable addition of all - a Swimming Pool paid for partly by parents and partly by the County Council. This building gave all pupils the chance to learn not only to swim but how to handle canoes and, most important of all, how to save someone from drowning.

A later addition in the form of Rural Studies was introduced, for the less able pupils and animal lovers. For several years good crops were produced; hens laid valuable eggs. And if the sheep at lambing time served as a distraction, the task of later shearing them, and utilising the wool, was an added bonus.

When Mr Brown commenced duties as Music Master, the school benefited enormously. Successful musicals were produced, such as 'Annie Get Your Gun', 'Evita' and, most successful of all 'Oh! What a Lovely War!'

The post-war increase in technology added immeasurably to teaching techniques with the introduction of video and computers – the old blackboard and chalk were becoming things of the past. Very soon, typewriters were to become almost obsolete as every child had the opportunity to learn computing. Today, even in Primary Schools, computers have become an everyday feature and there can be few children who do not know how to operate one.

However, competition from other newer school such as Balcarras and Bournside began to affect the intake. The school was re-named Kingsmead and its VIth form restored, but shortly after, it went into 'Special Measures' and although it recovered, its fate was sealed. It was decided to build an Academy on the site which would inevitably lead to the demolition of the old School.



***Angle or Saxon? Dated 640-680, the two bodies found at the All Saints' Academy site were probably of Saxon ancestry but were Anglians culturally and politically.***

Plans went ahead and gradually this new iconic building began to take shape, watched from the upper windows by the last of the pupils to attend Kingsmead. If they were excited at the promise of being the first pupils to attend this new school, it was tinged with sadness at seeing their old school

doomed. But their excitement about this was nothing in comparison to that when a momentous discovery was made in May 2010. Little did they or former residents of the site realise they had been sharing the ground with residents whose tenure went back centuries. As modest as that discovery was compared with other Anglo-Saxon finds in this country, nevertheless it added considerably to the local history of the area. And such a discovery as this has proved valuable for the teachers of History in schools in Hesters Way.

## ALL SAINTS' ACADEMY

Cheltenham, throughout the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries saw many new educational establishments open, both private and state schools. The Gentlemen's College, the Ladies College and Dean Close School with their Gothic architecture, and then the post-World War II schools with their rather uninspiring architecture. But however inspiring or otherwise they may have been, they continued to give their pupils an excellent education and set them high standards. But the development of 21st century technology, whilst, on the one hand allowing them to obtain access to almost any site in the world, and to extend their knowledge far beyond the range of what they learnt in the classrooms, also has its drawbacks.

Nevertheless, in speaking to the Gloucestershire Echo, Mr Peter Kingham the Principal Designate of this iconic building which cost £24.6 million to build, said 'not only will we have a brand new fantastic building but we will be introducing new ways of working, new subjects and much more.' His vision for the Academy is that every child that attends will succeed, and achieve and obtain the very best results they possibly can. To this end the school acquired the best technology the 21st century could offer for education. He believed the Academy would be breaking new ground, with its flexible approach to learning which allowed talented pupils to be fast-tracked. After their first tests in Numeracy and Literacy skills, those with an obvious talent for a particular subject were swiftly moved to the next phase.

To this end only the best equipment was to be made available. Of course, by this date almost all pupils were au fait with the latest hand-held electronic gadget, be it an Ipod, Blackberry or whatever new name such gadgets are called. Such gadgets would have bewildered their great grand-parents but today's pupils take them for granted.

Their ancestors would have been familiar with the black-board and chalk, and in later years the white board which called for the use of special felt tip pens. (Woe betide the teacher who used the wrong pen). But as useful as these earlier educational aids were, they were nothing compared with the latest technology which the Academy is able to use, namely the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB). This is a large interactive display that connects to a computer and projector. The computer's desktop image is projected onto the board's surface, where users control the computer using a pen, finger, stylus or other device.

The board is typically mounted to a wall or floor stand. They are used in a variety of settings, including classrooms at all levels of education, in corporate board rooms and work groups, in training rooms for professional sports coaching, in broadcasting studios and others, so there can be no doubt as to the versatility of this latest technological advance in the teaching world.

What a very far cry from the days when those early schools opened, with only a blackboard and a piece of chalk, donated by the local vicar or lady bountiful. Today all these pieces of equipment are taken for granted and the pupils become quite adept at handling them - and so there is no excuse for their not being able to do well.

But the best education in the world cannot teach children 'common sense'. This is not an acquirement obtained via books or the internet or the best equipment available, for it is inborn and gained with experience of life. The common-sense that tells a teenager when to say 'No' to so-called friends who try to persuade them to take drugs or have another drink; and the guts to stand firm against their cajolings and not join them on the downward path.

They should make the best use of 21st century technology and learn how to make life better for mankind generally, no matter what colour their skin, or what creed they follow, and not use this technology to learn easy ways to destroy them or how to assassinate people's characters via Facebook. There is so much of interest to be learnt and to add to the knowledge we gain in the class-room, and this, together with guidance from parents and teachers alike, should in the long run reach the goal Mr Kingham and his dedicated staff hope to achieve.

I recommend they read Rudyard Kipling's immortal poem - 'If'.



**Aerial view of Monkscroft  
Primary School c.2008**

## OUR OTHER SCHOOLS IN BRIEF

Pate's Grammar School was commenced in 1961 but opened in 1965, named as Cheltenham Grammar School until 1986. The new building was opened in 1995 and the old domed building was demolished in 1996.

St. Thomas More Primary School opened in 1975.

Monkscroft Primary School opened in 1954, with a separate infants' building added in 1970. The site closed in 2009 and was demolished in 2010.

Springbank Primary Academy opened as Arthur Dye Primary School in 1971, and was renamed in 2011.

Hesters Way Junior School opened in 1966 and was extended in 1978.

Regarding the St. Mark's school on Alstone Lane, see *Discovering Alstone* Volume 2, pp.65,66 (and for other classier establishments in that area, see Volume 3, pp.9-18).

## THE EPIC TALE OF ARLE COURT

### Part 1: THE GRAND OLD DAYS OF ARLE

**A**lthough it could not compare with the great palaces and mansions to be found in other counties, nevertheless there was a medieval mansion nestled in the tiny hamlet of Arle. It was the only substantial residence in the area, standing on a site now beside Kingsmead Road, and it first belonged to the de Arle family. The de Arle family, of whom (alas!) we know so little, took their name from the property.

We tend to picture such medieval aristocratic dwellings as resembling a Viking hall out of *Beowulf* – a huge wooden hall, thatched, with a central smoke-hole. There had indeed once been a structure of that type in Arle in Anglo-Saxon times, as recent archaeology has proven, on a site near Seabright Close in Springbank. But there was no connection between that earlier Anglo-Saxon hall and the mansion founded in the Norman period, which was more likely to have been a stone-built structure, with the main dwelling area on the second storey. A Chapel stood next door to it at the same site, now off Kingsmead Road.

Those of you who have followed the TV series 'Downton Abbey' will recall in the opening episode how the mansion and estate in that story were inherited by a distant cousin. There was a law called 'primogeniture,' which meant that if an aristocrat died without a son,

the grand estates would be inherited by the nearest male relative. As a result of this law, Britain's history tends to be male-dominated; but that was not the case at Arle, which at several dates was inherited by either a widow or a daughter.

The reason why distant male relatives didn't put up more of a fight to get hold of Arle's mansion is to do with its Norman origins. These questions will be covered in a later chapter.

## ARMED TO THE TEETH

You may have read of the ignoble families of Arle, but what of the noble families? It may seem unlikely in this day and age that such aristocratic families had ever lived in this area, but indeed if we go back to the 13th to 15th centuries, evidence shows that it was a noble

**Coat of Arms of the  
(de) Arle family**



**Crest of the Arle  
family**



family who lived here, and who bore their Coat of Arms with pride.

Such families through the ages served their monarchs in one capacity or another and were rewarded for their loyalty to the Crown. Some went into battle, others served as Justices of the Peace, but all received great honours in the form of land and great houses, along with which usually went the right to Armorial Bearings. Here, perhaps a brief explanation of the granting of 'arms' won't come amiss.

In that medieval period when knights went into battle, encased from head to foot in armour, they had to be recognisable - otherwise friends as well as foe would be inadvertently slain. So the practice of Heraldry grew up, and Coats of Arms or badges would be worn that were easily recognisable. Through the diligent research and artistry of the College of Heralds a suitable armorial badge would be drawn up, which

usually displayed some feature pertaining to that particular family. From these early beginnings the custom of the granting of arms grew up: at first to individuals, and later to towns and cities and then to Colleges, the Church and so on. And so today, even the most modest football team or school can sport its own particular badge.

In the language of heraldry, the arms of the de Arle family were: "Or, a Bird rising Vert, within a Tressure Sable." Their shield would have been a striking sight: a green bird on a gold background. A 'tressure' was a narrow border, decorated at intervals with a fleur de lis, in this case coloured black. Since the de Arle family themselves have vanished long ago, the exact appearance of the design is now only in the archives of the College of Heralds. The illustration of the arms of de Arle shown has been copied from the tomb of a descendant of the de Arles called Richard Harewell (or Harwell, from the village of Besford in Worcestershire).

The crest of Arle was a boar's head facing upwards, between two ostrich feathers. The crest is not the same as the arms.

The possession of such a device was, of course, something to be proud of, and the granting of arms was a long and expensive process. By the 19th century however, up-and-coming merchants in the Cotswolds, conscious of their own importance, sought to obtain such armorial splendour for themselves which they jealously guarded, as you shall see later.

### **FIRST LADY: MARGARET & ROBERT GREVELL**

It was at the time when surnames were first coming into use that the local gentry became known as the de Arle family. Their probable origins are discussed in a later chapter.

John de Arle was the last in the line in the late-1400s. The de Arles, as important as they were, could not produce a male heir to inherit the estate. John de Arle's daughter Margaret was married to Robert Grevell (a descendant of William Grevell of Chipping Campden, who had purchased the manor at Charlton Kings in 1387).

And so it was through the Grevell family that the future of the mansion at Arle continued. (Their surname is usually spelled Greville these days, but in most of the documents relating to our area, it was recorded as Grevell. The modern road-name Grevil Road represents another variant spelling. The significance of some other local road-names - Lygon Walk, Dormer Road and Redgrove Road - will become apparent).

The Grevells were a Charlton Kings family, who had substantial property throughout the county, and who already owned land around the village of Arle. They were rich wool merchants owning

many thousands of sheep in the Cotswolds. Their other homes were probably far superior to the mansion at Arle. Robert Grevell did not need Arle as a home - he preferred to live at Charlton Kings - so he sold it to his younger brother William, who was already living there anyway. This William Grevell was a well-known Judge of Common Pleas, a steward of Cheltenham manor, and a notably wealthy man.

### **WASN'T BORN YESTERDAY: WILLIAM GREVELL**

Studying wills is hardly the obvious way to research a building's history, but they do throw up some useful information, and illuminate parts of the story rather well. William Grevell died on 7th March 1513. His will was extensive, leaving his estates in the care of his wife Margery. His request that Masses for his soul should be held in several churches in the county shows how much such things meant to the people of those days. As well as those requests he made several bequests – some for the repair of churches, and a large sum was set aside to repair the highway between Cheltenham and Gloucester: “My executors shall sell 1000 of my shepe at Lemynton, and dispose the money therof coming, upon the highe wayes betwene Cheltenham and Gloucester.” (Lemynton was his other main estate, just outside Moreton-in-Marsh).

Richard Pate also left a substantial amount in his will for the same purpose in the same century. Would that we had such generous benefactors today! The state of Cheltenham's Old Gloucester Road was an ongoing issue: a 1753 petition stated that the entire main road from Puesdown (via Whittington, Cheltenham and Arle) to Gloucester was “very deep and foundorous.” Even after the Turnpike Act had improved things, a description of “scarcely fit” in 1789 was applied to the entire route from Arle as far as Wotton in Gloucester. Exactly five hundred years on from William Grevell's bequest, there is still recurrent subsidence of the highway beyond Hayden Hill – it seems to be a drainage problem.

William's will referred briefly to his sister-in-law and her parents: “John Arle and Alson, his wife, and Margarete their daughter.” William's will also referred to his brothers: “To my broder Robert, my best horse.... To my broder Gyles, my secunde best hors.” And also to his sisters and their husbands: “To John Goodryge, that married Isabell my sister, John Palmer that married another of my sisters, and to

Thomas Tame that married my thirde sister, the residew of all my horses that my servantes be used to ride with in my company; and my sisters Mary Palmer and Jane Tame shall have my 2 best garmentes or habites." And he referred to his surviving daughters: "All my goodes that bee in Arle, or elleswhere in the parisshe of Cheltenham, shall be divided in 3 partes among my wife and 2 elder daughters." And he referred to his sons-in-law: "Robert Wye, Robert Vampage and Richard Lygon, my sonnes in lawe." Here was named the first member of the Lygon family (pronounced Liggon) to be associated with the mansion at Arle.



*Coat of Arms of  
Grevell family*



## **Part 2: THE LADY OF THE HOUSE**

As with the de Arle family, the Grevells experienced problems of inheritance. William's memorial is in St. Mary's, the Minster Church of Cheltenham, in the form of a brass, sadly much damaged: it shows him in his Judge's gowns alongside his wife Margery, with their 10 children which included 3 sons. For all his wealth, however, his sons did not out-live him, so once again the mansion at Arle was passed down through the female line.

Documents show that William's widow Margery stayed very much in charge of the household at Arle, and also of William's other estates around Gloucestershire, which he had owned or tenanted. This included the tenancy of some monastic lands a couple of miles south, at Redgrove.

When Margery Grevell died in 1542 the medieval mansion at Arle was left in charge of her daughter Margaret, who was married to one of the heirs of another noble house, namely Richard Lygon of Madresfield, Worcestershire.

Richard Lygon was born c.1491 of an extensive family, the Earls of Beauchamp who, at least, were not short of male heirs. As it was always

the eldest Lygon son who inherited Madresfield itself, younger sons married landed heiresses or received other estates which the Lygon family owned.

The Lygons of Madresfield can trace their lineage back over many, many years - having a very interesting family history. And the imposing family home there is still held by the Lygon family. It has, of course been altered and extended over the years. It lies near the Malvern Hills, fairly secluded. Those of you have watched the television adaptation of 'Brideshead Revisited' will have seen it as the author and playwright Evelyn Waugh saw it. He was a great friend of the family and actually based his characters on his friends there. (That wasn't its only claim to fame: though this is not generally known, Madresfield was selected during World War II as a safe retreat for our Royal Family in the event of a German invasion. Fortunately, it was never called on for this purpose).

It must have been within a couple of years either side of 1550 that the Lygons replaced the medieval mansion at Arle. The old mansion would perhaps have been a two-storey stone hall, whereas the new one was built in a timber-frame with brick, in the latest fashion, henceforth dubbed Arle Court. This building was probably the work of Sir Richard's son William Lygon, who had acquired the land at Redgrove in 1540 (see the chapter on Redgrove below) and was living in Arle in 1554 (see The History of Hesters Way Vol.2, p.11). Roger Lygon of Fairford could also have been involved in the rebuilding, since he in 1554 became steward of the manor of Cheltenham,.

The religious sentiment - and the royal order - of the time was to do away with aristocratic chapels or 'chantries.' This new Arle Court was built within the historic four-acre plot upon which had stood the medieval Chapel and graveyard.

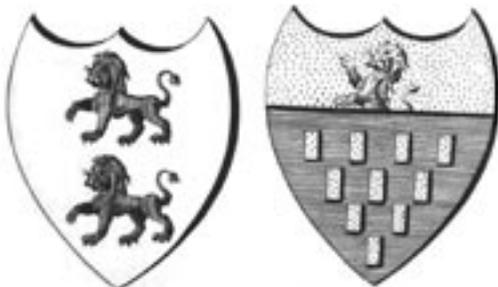
There is no specific record of the fact that the medieval building was replaced with a completely new one, but the tradition seems to be that Tudor Arle Court was built right on top of the old Chapel. This action was apparently considered neither preservation nor desecration - it was merely an act of de-consecration, and a re-using of substantial foundations. The earlier medieval mansion must have stood within the same four-acre plot, but some yards further to the northwest of the Chapel. (The four acres is now mostly occupied by Kingsmead Close). Tudor Arle Court had a massive doorway, set in a stone arch

of Norman-style: maybe this doorway was a survival of either the Chapel or of the medieval hall.

The various junior members of the Lygon family who went on to live at Arle Court retained strong interest in Madresfield, where many of the Lygons were buried. Mrs Eleanor Lygon, whose dower was Arle Court, lived in the house after she was widowed, and promoted the enclosure of fields in Arle in 1580.

Madresfield was where John Lygon spent some time after his marriage. Being a younger son he could not hope to inherit Madresfield itself. So it was that John Lygon came to own Arle Court in 1584. Unlike the others he became a permanent resident, and over the years sought to make the Arle estate profitable.

However, we now have some idea that the owners of Arle Court were all people of renown, owning splendid homes and a great deal of land not just in Arle itself, but in other places in Gloucestershire and other counties. Whilst Arle Court, as it was then, was not quite in the same class as Madresfield, nevertheless, it was an imposing residence. The historian Anne Manooch Welch wrote in detail of it, and was fortunate to be able to see it before it was demolished. It was an attractive residence, rather rambling, partly timber-framed but mostly brick-built, of



**Coats of Arms of Lygon (left) and Dormer (right) families of Arle**



**Effigy from the tomb of Richard Harwell, a close relative of the Arles and Lygons, in the costume of the period 1576-78 (2013 D.E.)**



**Lygon Walk, a 1953 development named after the historic family (2013 D.E.)**

**A.B. Welch's 1857 drawing of old Arle Court**



ARLE COURT - BUILDING DRAWN FROM OBSERVATION  
BY A. B. WELCH, ARCHT. 1857

**Arle Court House today (2012 D.E.)**

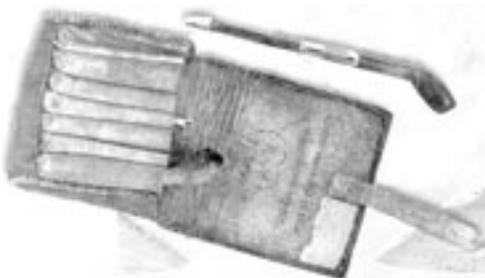


a typically Elizabethan style of architecture. The house could be approached along a carriage-drive from the Tewkesbury Road, through an avenue of elms. The interior was furnished with oak panels, with an oak fireplace, and there was an impressive oak staircase. However, there were no conventional handles on the doors, just a hole through which one inserted a finger to open the latch. The floors were somewhat uneven with occasional steps and the windows were small with lozenge-shaped panes of glass. Outside, ivy covered the walls.

The surviving drawings made by A.B. Welch, apparently dating from August 1857, give some idea of what old Arle Court once looked like. It's a shame there are no known photographs. Tredington Court, towards Tewkesbury, would be a surviving property of similar style which might give a feel for how it looked.

### **Part 3: THE TOBACCO EPISODE**

The 16th and 17th centuries were times of great exploration. You learnt of Drake and Raleigh, no doubt, at school - their exploits tempted other adventurers to try their luck in the New World. And it was from this New World that new discoveries, brought back to England, made a great impact, even in Gloucestershire. Sir Walter



**Sir Walter Raleigh's pipe and tobacco pouch**

Raleigh had discovered a plant which, it was said, had medicinal qualities when smoked. Nothing, of course, was then known of this plant – tobacco, but it caught on and very soon pipe smoking became very popular. This crop held out the prospects of profits, were it to be grown in England.

It was with this in mind that one gentleman of fortune decided to embark on growing this crop in Gloucestershire. So it was that John Stratford, gentleman and salter of London, approached John Lygon with the intention of renting land in Arle for this venture. Stratford no doubt hoped to make his fortune, for this particular crop, tobacco, had already got a hold on the nation – a hold which turned out to be addictive, and thus steady sales were ensured.

Tobacco was first grown in England in 1619, when a total of 100 acres were cultivated nationally. On February 16th, 1619 at Beauchamp Court in Worcestershire, Lygon and Stratford agreed that Stratford should rent 10 acres of land and some housing in Arle for the planting and curing of tobacco. For this purpose, John Lygon agreed to lease the land for 4 years, starting from the Feast of Annunciation in 1620, at a yearly rent of £80 to be paid in six-monthly installments: at the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel and Annunciation [29th September and 25th March] in equal portions.

At first this seemed reasonable and no doubt Stratford was rubbing his hands at the thought of the profit he would make. He sowed the seed and in May planted the tobacco, and in June 1619 John Lygon presented Stratford with a lease for the land for four years. John Stratford duly signed.

In December 1619, Prohibition was issued by the Crown, which had become aware of the pernicious effect of this ‘noxious weed.’ Growing tobacco in England had been banned. So Stratford could no longer plant any more tobacco. The next year he sowed barley. Stratford, having agreed to pay an inflated rent for land which he hoped would produce a very profitable crop, found himself considerably out of pocket and refused to pay the rental. Lygon stated that landlords could hardly be held responsible if their tenants were unable to produce a profitable crop.

So the two men were subsequently in 1622 squabbling: a protracted legal case, which lined the pockets of the lawyers, but did nothing to ease the relationship between these two gentlemen. (If the case was

the first of its kind, it may have been of some national interest!)

Stratford argued that Lygon had not tried hard enough to get special permission for him to continue growing tobacco, so he'd had to resort to growing valueless barley on expensive land. Lygon seems fairly to have stated that he did try to get permission to protect the interests of his tenant, but had never guaranteed being able to get it, nor had he encouraged Stratford to speculate in that way.

Lygon said that he had been approached by Ralph Wood, the previous tenant of the house and land, to allow John Stratford to grow tobacco there. Lygon had been reluctant, because the land was close to his Arle Court home, and he owned very little pasture ground near the house, so he didn't want it ploughed up unless for some advantage. Lygon went on to say that Stratford had damaged the land (by removing trees and ploughing up good pasture) and that the only reason he hadn't objected to this was because of the high rent to which Stratford had agreed.

A witness statement from Edward Attwood implies that the house included in the rental was actually Arle Court itself, or part of it. John Lygon had said that he would "let Arle Court" (whilst reserving for his own use there a dovehouse, conventional housing, an orchard, and land worth £13). Edward Attwood mentioned that John Lygon had been his school-fellow at Cheltenham. Another witness was the man who kept Stratford's accounts, George Clarke - described as a yeoman "of Arle Court."

The final result seems to have been that the magistrate didn't see any reason to intervene in a straightforward rental agreement. Lygon won his case. So ended the one and only attempt to grow tobacco in Arle.

Tobacco, despite James I's attempts to outlaw it, has proved addictive. No doubt today, other illegal crops are still being grown surreptitiously in the area - probably just as if not more harmful. But this particular venture in Arle was doomed to failure. So Arle returned to more convention arable farming.

#### **Part 4: MORE BRIDES AND GROOMS**

John Lygon inherited Arle Court in 1584 and died in 1644. However, like his predecessors, John Lygon had no male heirs to inherit his estate, only two daughters - Katherine and Elizabeth. To ensure

their future prosperity an Indenture had been drawn up in 1636, which was his way of making a will, in which he made more than adequate provision for Katherine and Elizabeth. Indeed, he may have already set afoot arrangements for suitable marriages. The choice of a husband, particularly for his eldest daughter, was of great importance, if his estate of Redgrove and Arle Court was to survive. Of the other daughter, Elizabeth, little is known except that she married a gentleman of Worcestershire. Katherine married in to another noble family – the Dormers of Buckinghamshire.

### **KATHERINE & SIR FLEETWOOD DORMER**

The Dormers' country estate, Lee Grange at Quainton in Buckinghamshire, was perhaps not so grand as Madresfield (and in later years became dilapidated). The ownership of Arle Court passed, on their marriage, from Katherine Lygon into the hands of her husband Sir Fleetwood Dormer. He was the youngest son of Sir Fleetwood Dormer senior of Lee Grange, Buckinghamshire. The monuments of his family can be seen in Quainton Church, but he became for a time a resident of Arle Court.

Sir Fleetwood Dormer was at that time a fervent Royalist: at the outbreak of the Civil War he deemed it wiser, as did many others, to absent himself from the country. Like many other gentlemen of the time, he took himself off to Virginia. Whether he intended to grow tobacco there is not known. Presumably he left his wife Katherine back in England to care for Arle Court.

Records of Virginia state that one John Meane, on December 26th 1649, witnessed a deed from John White of Jamestown to Sir Fleetwood Dormer, a recent arrival in Virginia from Gloucestershire. The deed referred to the lease of 1,000 acres of land near The Falls, on the James River. Whether this venture failed or not, we do not know. But after the Civil War and with the Royalists finally in control again, he returned to end his days at Arle Court and was well respected in Cheltenham.

Katherine died in 1678. Her husband made a colourful elaborate memorial stone for her, with a Latin inscription detailing her illustrious family connections. The colourful part of the memorial showing her ancestors' coats of arms has not survived, but the long inscription has, and it can still be read (by anyone who knows Latin) in St. Mary's

Parish Church, where it is now next to the Rose Window.

Evidently, Sir Fleetwood Dormer was not a poor man by any means, judging by his will – perhaps his venture in Virginia paid off. But sadly, like previous owners of Arle Court before him, his wealth could not buy the male heirs so badly needed. Indeed, he did not father any children on his wife Katherine. The problem arose once again on the descent of Arle Court. This he overcame, for according to his will he had made a:

“Deed indented tripartite bearing the date the ffifteenth of July in the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and eighty and seven: I have settled my manor of Redgrove, Capital Messuage called Arle Court, and all other my messuages,” [i.e. dwellings] “ffarms, lands, tenements and hereditaments in the said county of Glouc., to the use of myself for life, with remainder to my nephew Robert Dormer of Lyncolns Inn and the heirs male of his body. And for default of such issue then unto his brother my said nephew Fleetwood Dormer and the heirs male of his body.”

## **MARY & ROBERT DORMER**

In his will Sir Fleetwood Dormer left his possessions in Buckinghamshire to various members of his family. But Arle Court he left to his nephew Judge Robert Dormer - who spent much of his time in London, where he had a spacious home. The Judge, no doubt tied up with his affairs in the capital, would hardly have heard of Arle Court, which was after all somewhat distant from the family's other estates. But he came here, with his possessions, his wife Mary and four daughters.

Now at least, the problem of a male heir seemed as if it would not arise. But fate stepped in once again. Mary and Robert's only son, sadly, lost his life whilst visiting Holland. His tomb in Quanton Church testifies to this.

Unfortunately, it was not clear from Fleetwood's Deed quoted above whether Arle Court should therefore pass instead to Robert's brother, or whether Robert should be allowed to determine who his own successor should be. Robert Dormer was a judge, and no doubt had the legal expertise to influence matters to his advantage. But it wasn't to be straightforward.

Robert Dormer had been born in 1650, the second son of John Dormer, who was a brother of Sir Fleetwood Dormer. He attended

Christ Church, Oxford in 1667, and Lincoln's Inn in 1669, and was called to the Bar in 1675.

He succeeded his uncle at Arle Court in 1696. He had a brilliant career in Law as a Justice of the Common Pleas at Westminster. Aware of his mortality he made his will in 1726 whereby he requested to be buried decently, without any pomp and ceremony, amongst his ancestors in the chancel of the parish church of Quainton, Buckinghamshire. His properties in London, in Buckinghamshire and in Ripple, Worcestershire, he left to his wife Mary Dormer; likewise a property in Northampton which he had purchased from his brother Fleetwood jnr. His coach and four horses, jewels, plate, furniture and implements also were to go to his wife Mary, whom he appointed with his youngest daughter Katherine as executors of his will. Of Redgrove and Arle Court there was no mention; however, these fell to his widow Mary. It was through her that the ongoing fate of Arle Court rested.

On Robert's death in 1726, the estates were run at first by his widow Mary for about three years. The eldest two daughters had married well and moved away by the time their mother Mary Dormer died.

Mary's lengthy will listed many possessions: she mentioned family portraits, tapestries, some of which she herself had made – there was even a reference to a portrait by Van Dyck, and a Burling Coach (Berlin Coach). Of her home Arle Court there was no mention in her will, only the phrase – “I do hereby recommend that my daughter Mary may have the first refusal of the estate called Redgrove in the County of Gloucestershire if she will give as much for the same as another purchaser....” This suggests Robert's family were in dispute with other Dormers, and at some point had to buy the Arle estates back from them.

Mary Dormer (the mother) also referred to their house at Ripple, Worcestershire, which was to be available to any of her daughters who were able to look after the estate, which had come down to the family from her grandmother.

So the Arle estates were passed to the third daughter Mary; and then when she died without children in 1749, they passed to Robert Dormer's fourth daughter Katherine. No doubt the Berlin Coach helped to transport them to Ripple. (Both are buried not far away from there at Spetchley in Worcestershire).

(There was a further female intervention in the ownership, which still needs research. During the time of Mary Dormer junior and Katherine Dormer junior, Arle Court was half-owned by one Margaret Becket: she was perhaps a second-cousin).

## **LONG AND TROUBLESOME SUITS**

And so Arle Court and Redgrove remained for a time still in the Dormer family. The full cause of the friction in the Dormer family still lies in the archives of the Public Record Office, but evidently, this friction led to on-going court cases which lasted many years.

There was still an ongoing dispute about the interpretation of Sir Fleetwood Dormer's will. A John Dormer claimed entitlement to a fixed annual income from the profits of the Dormer estate at Lee Grange, but Mary and then Katherine had to send detailed accounts to prove that the estate was not making a profit. So, neither Mary nor Katherine were able to enjoy their occupation of Arle Court in peace, and were obliged from time to time to justify themselves to notaries sent to take their sworn statements.

So troublesome did all this prove to be, that Katherine's will indicates this; and the effect it had on her was to shun the Dormer side of the family with whom she appears to have been at loggerheads. She left Arle Court to the relatives of its former owners who were helping her out – namely the Lygons. So it was it passed down to the Hon. John Yorke, who had married a Lygon girl.

## **ELIZABETH & JOHN YORKE**

In Katherine's lengthy will she asked to be buried in the same vault as her sister Mary. More significantly she wrote of: "the true friendship, esteem and regard I have long retained for the late Earl and Lady Hardwick and their family, in consequence of the great friendship shown by them to me, and the constant assistance I received from his lordship in the course of many long and troublesome suits, in which I have been unhappily engaged for the support and in defence of my just rights, and in respect to which I should have been a much greater sufferer...."

She wished to show her appreciation of such help by leaving Arle Court to the Hon. John Yorke, the 4th son of the Earl of Hardwicke, and to his daughter Jemima Yorke by his wife, formerly Elizabeth

Lygon, daughter of Reginald Lygon. And so, by rather roundabout means, Arle Court renewed its ownership with the Lygon family - at least through a female member of that family.

Her generous bequest to the Hon. John Yorke in recognition of his family's aid was no doubt appreciated. However, Arle Court must by then have become somewhat ancient and dilapidated. It's difficult to know how appealing it was to be owner of the old pile by this stage. Whatever others thought of Arle Court at the time - 1767 - in Katherine Dormer's final wishes, she was most adamant that the house should not be "... demised to any person or persons who shall use or exercise the trade or business of a vintner, innkeeper, coffee house man or victualler, and that the said house shall not be made use of as a place for any publick entertainment or resort whatsoever." (It was this Katherine Dormer that we quoted in *The History of Hesters Way* Vol.3, p.28).

Thus Arle Court and its long history was not demeaned, and continued to serve as a mysterious half-timbered Elizabethan mansion-house nestling in the quiet backwater of Arle for future owners.

## **Part 5: ARLE COURT – THE CLOSING YEARS**

In 1795 John Yorke and his daughter sought to dispose of Arle Court to a suitable buyer, and so the aristocratic chain was broken.

Fortunately, at that time, a number of up-and-coming wool merchants in the Cotswolds were seeking to enhance their status. So when one, Thomas Packer Butt, came along, he found Arle Court to be just what he wanted. And so a sale was mutually agreed.

On viewing the extent of his newly acquired estate, Thomas Packer Butt must have been extremely satisfied at his acquisition of an important part of Cheltenham's history.

## **THOMAS PACKER BUTT**

At this stage Thomas, a widower in advancing years, must have felt that the time was long overdue for him to acquire heirs to carry on his name and inherit his new-found property. Thomas Packer Butt's first wife was Anne Sheppard, but she had died. With that in mind he courted a Cheltenham lady by the name of Anne Coulston with a view to marriage. Whether this courtship was based on mutual affection or haste because of his advancing years, we shall never know. But

evidently the courtship proceeded rapidly, and Thomas sought to obtain a Special Licence without delay. The Licence was granted on 5th April 1823; but apparently their calculations were somewhat astray because their first son William Coulston Butt arrived a few days before the wedding itself.

Both parents were delighted - Thomas, more so, because by then he was rapidly approaching his seventies. Nevertheless, they were to go on to have two daughters, and another son.

Thomas and his growing family continued to reside at the old Arle Court. His status in Cheltenham society was becoming known, and his sons evidently shared his ambitions. Thomas, to give him his due, acknowledged William Coulston Butt, his illegitimate son, in his lengthy will.

Thomas Packer Butt passed away in 1828 and is buried at Minchinhampton. It was up to his eldest son to apply for a family Coat of Arms. This was duly granted in 1845 to William Coulston Butt, then at Oxford, who had applied for himself, his heirs and heirs of his father. William Coulston Butt purchased a house near Arle Court called Arle Villa from one Mrs Fagg, and there his family lived for a time. Sadly he did not live long enough to enjoy his new-found status for he died of tuberculosis at Arle Villa in 1848.

Arle Court was still occupied by Thomas's widow who, shortly after, married Samuel Sadler, friend and executor for Thomas. The estate was actually owned by the widow's son Thomas Walter Packer Butt. After Sadler's death the widow and her daughters moved to Arle Villa (now called The White House) nearby. Of the two daughters, Lydia the eldest died an old maid and was buried at the family grave in Wiltshire, whilst Matilda had married the Revd Fisher and produced four children. After the Revd Fisher died, she married one James Sadler a son of the Samuel Sadler, who, after the death of Thomas Packer Butt, had married Thomas's widow Anne Butt. Thereby hangs another tale!

## **Part 6: ARLE COURT, ARLE COURT: SO GOOD THEY NAMED IT TWICE**

It was left to Thomas Walter Packer Butt, the surviving son, to further the family's fortunes, and this he proceeded to do. Through purchases, and also through the passing of the local Inclosure Act, he now owned

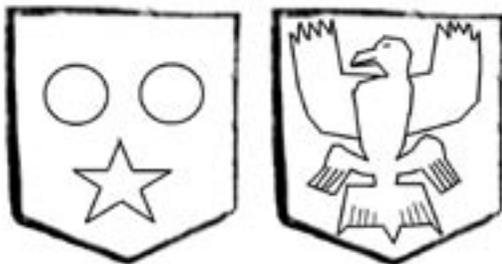
a great deal of land around Arle and the farm at nearby Grovefield. He decided that the old Arle Court was no longer in keeping with his status. After residing at Grovefield for some years, where he settled with his first wife, Anna Maria Lutener, eldest daughter of Dr William Lutener, he proceeded to better himself. Walter's ambitions extended to demolishing Grovefield and using parts of it to build a splendid new mansion on the same site to be called the New Arle Court. He also incorporated parts of the Old Arle Court - an oak staircase and fireplace - into the New Arle Court. Here he planned to raise a family.

But sadly this was not to be straightforward, because Anna, who had produced their first son, Walter William Arthur Butt, died giving birth to their second son, Francis Lutener Butt in 1851. As has been proved over the years, status and money cannot guarantee heirs, health or security.

The 1851 Census Return shows living then at Grovefield were Thomas Walter Packer Butt, age 27, with his father-in-law and mother in-in-law, and Ann Sadler his mother, and Eliza Lutener his sister-in-law, with his two sons, Walter William Arthur Butt and Francis Lutener Butt. The latter was on that date a mere 18 days old, his mother having died in childbirth.

Anna's elder sister Eliza moved in with Thomas Walter Packer Butt to care for the two young sons. In wishing to regularise their relationship, they sought permission to marry, but because of the laws of consanguinity they found it difficult. Trips to Gretna Green and even to Europe proved unsuccessful, but eventually they did marry in London.

They continued to live at the splendid residence of New Arle Court, where Thomas Walter, in keeping with his exalted status (before these days of Facebook and Twitter) had family Coats of Arms carved on to the tall tower between the chimney stacks. What better way to draw attention to oneself! Those same Coats of Arms, though slightly worn, still



***Coats of Arms of Mr & Mrs Butt, sketched  
from the inscriptions on the building***

adorn the premises. But even this was not enough, for Walter wished to be at the hub of Cheltenham society and threw lavish parties and balls for the gentry and nobility of the area, as reported in 'The Looker On' in 1888.

So the Butt family continued to reside in the New Arle Court, whilst regrettably about two-thirds of the Old Arle Court was demolished in 1880/81, and all that is left is one wing of the Tudor building, facing on to the road - what is now no.23 Kingsmead Road. Like Arle Villa (or The White House) nearby, it is now a listed building.

Thomas Walter Packer Butt died in 1900. In his will he requested that he be buried in the same grave at Badgeworth as that of his wives. His eldest surviving son, the Revd Walter William Arthur Butt, inherited the estate.

## **UNWINS AND DOWTYS**

The Revd. Walter, however, had imbibed socialist ideas whilst he was at Cambridge and had no desire to live in an ornate mansion in Gloucestershire, despite its ancient history. So he sought about disposing of it without delay. To this end he found a willing buyer – one Herbert Unwin.

Unwin, born in Sheffield, in 1901 was living at Dowdeswell Court a few miles from Cheltenham. He was a retired Civil Engineer and, no doubt, like Thomas Packer Butt wanted to enhance his position in society. The New Arle Court was just the sort of place he needed and, being a 'hunting and shooting' man, he proceeded to add stables and kennels for his 'Pack' and became a popular huntsman in the area.

He and his wife Jane had a daughter Dorothy and three sons - Frederick, Walter and Wilfrid. They were a well-known and popular family in Cheltenham, and there is a fountain in Sandford Park dedicated to them. But Herbert Unwin died on the 18th July 1925 and is buried at Badgeworth along with his wife who had died in 1916.

So once again the New Arle Court passed down to new owners. It might have lain empty for some years, as the cost of maintaining such a large establishment with extensive grounds was beyond the pockets of many people. Fortunately for the Unwin children, a new buyer appeared on the scene – one George Dowty who, having begun to make his fortune from his rapidly expanding business, found it to be ideal for his purpose.

The Dowty story has been well documented, but suffice it to say that, based at Arle Court, it grew into a world-renowned empire. They soon required further expansion, and Arle Court, as prestigious as it was, could not cope with the ever-growing Dowty business. With the take-over of the Dowty Group by T.I. Group for £504 million in 1992, the house was put on the market again.

## **MANOR BY THE LAKE**

The New Arle Court stood empty for several years until it was purchased by David Bill, who had many years experience in the film and television industry. He realised its potential. The outbuildings and 40 acres of formal gardens proved to be the ideal place for his film industry. The Gloucestershire Echo dubbed it 'Arleywood,' but officially Arle Court was re-named the Manor By The Lake, a prestigious conference centre catering for high-class events.

In 2013 it has been up for sale again, and bought by Michael Chittenden and Tammy Madge. Their plans were likewise to cater for functions, weddings, balls and corporate events. But its future is still uncertain.



*Manor By The Lake (2009 D.E.)*

It lies off Hatherley Lane, some two miles from its fore-runner, the original Arle Court with its history going back into medieval times, occupied first by noble families and in later years by perhaps less noble families. Yet these families, with a great sense of their own history, helped to make Arle Court a very important chapter in the history of the Arle and Hesters Way area.

## **NORMANS AND MANORS**

**I**n early centuries, history becomes less democratic. Records, especially to do with land-ownership, inevitably tend to concentrate on the 10% or so of the population who were aristocrats or clergy.

Historians seem to have been reluctant to start the story of our locality from its Norman beginnings, simply because one or two dates

are missing. This is not due to a total lack of evidence or of surviving documentation: rather, it's due to muddled family-trees. Another key to avoiding confusion is to explain the term 'manor' in words that make sense today: the term in those days referred to an area of land not to a large house. We will try not to add to the confusion in this publication!

The tale really does begin "in days of old when knights were bold." That is to say, there was an era when land-owning dignitaries and fighting-men were one and the same. Important families in those days owned estates on both sides of the English Channel.

There were two aristocratic Norman families in Cheltenham who were relevant to the story of our district. The rest of this chapter deals with the origin of the old Arle Court site, whilst the next two chapters cover the story of the southern end of modern Hesters Way, around Harthurstfield.

### **LORD OF ALL HE SURVEYS? NOT EXACTLY!**

Historian Douglas Trapp identified an aristocratic Norman family-line descended from Judith, who had been the daughter of the king of France during the Saxon era. The main line of this family held the title of Earl (or Count) of Flanders, and their family also apparently held the lordship of one of the manors in Leckhampton.

One member of the family of the Counts of Flanders was called Walter de Brussella, and he founded a Chapel at Arle in the late-1140s. He gave some land that he owned in Arle, so that its rental income would be of support to the clergy, and the services of his Chapel.

There is an account that St. Anselm had stayed in Arle in 1093. If so, perhaps that's why Walter de Brussella built the Chapel here: maybe it commemorated his visit, or was on the site of a house or a cell where Anselm had stayed. The location was beside the highway now called Kingsmead Road.

Chapel buildings did not look after themselves. Maybe Walter decided to build a new mansion next to his Chapel so that he himself could oversee it. Or maybe a junior member of the family was assigned the privilege of living there and looking after both buildings.

Certainly most old mansions had a neighbouring chapel, but in this case it's possible that Arle Chapel came first and that the mansion followed. This seems likely, simply because the mansion lacked the

lordly estate that is normal with manor-houses. The freehold plot on which the big house was sited – including its gardens, the Chapel and its graveyard – amounted to only four acres. But other than that, the big house was surrounded by fields which belonged to the commoners of the manor of Cheltenham. (If the house had also acquired the adjacent Arle Mill, that would account for a further three acres).

So unlike most mansions, the one at Arle had no jurisdiction over most of its immediate surroundings. Maybe this is why, over the centuries, if an owner died without sons, the distant cousins didn't put up more of a fight to claim it back from the widow or daughter who inherited. It was not a prestigious property, by the standards of some gentry! The owners of the big house did lease farmland around the neighbourhood when it was available (for example a large area at Redgrove). But this did not feel as impressive as owning the land that the house overlooked.

The existence of a hamlet called Arle is well documented, going back over 1250 years into Anglo-Saxon times (as corroborated by recent archaeology). Nevertheless, over the centuries in local documents very rarely was the term 'manor' used for the house or its estate (or indeed for the village of Arle as a whole). The word manor is often used these days to describe any historical place. But in times past, the word manor implied an agricultural status: it referred to a large area which was farmed according to feudal traditional customs, by commoners. A manor's commoners also had obligations to work on a smaller area which was under the sole control of the lord of the manor. Arle did not fulfil this description at all. The farmers of the village of Arle were subjects of the manor of Cheltenham, and they had no obligations to the owners of the mansion at Arle.

Neither should we assume any authority was implied by the word 'court' in the name Arle Court. No legal proceedings relating to the village of Arle happened here, other than that at times the resident was a magistrate, at other times was the steward of Cheltenham Manor. The owner was occasionally referred to by other gentry as the 'lord of Arle,' but this wasn't a term that would have been recognized locally.

The mansion did have an estate of its own: maybe 60 acres or so, located somewhere amongst the local fields. One or two farmers would have worked these acres, and other local farmers would have

worked the leased estates: but these farmers were employees, in the modern sense, rather than tenants in the manorial tradition.

The nearby Arle Mill is assumed to date back to Anglo-Saxon times, (although the earliest documentation of it by name is not actually until the 13th century). Arle Mill would have been initially owned and developed by the lord of the manor of Cheltenham. We could hazard a guess that the Mill was the first important building in the Kingsmead Road locality, followed by the Chapel. Then the big house could have been built adjoining by about the year 1150, at which point the resident took on responsibility for the Chapel, and maybe at times also the Mill.

(It could be that around 1150 the Chapel was upgraded to become also the village's burial-site. Hence the record of the Bishop's visit then).

So, this would be the origins of the Arle mansion. It would have been the descendants of Walter de Brussella's family who adopted the surname Arle or de Arle, and who were still there in the 15th century (as described at the beginning of the chapter above 'The Grand Old Days of Arle').

## **REDGROVE & GROVEFIELD: ancient & modern**

**T**he other family of the Norman era which was important to Arle's history were much more powerful. The character most often mentioned in relation to Cheltenham was Milo (or Miles), who was the Constable of Gloucester Castle. This was only one of his many titles. He was of a lineage which held the title of Earl of Hereford. The family owned a huge scattering of estates, manors and parishes all around Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and into South Wales.

Under William the Conqueror's feudal system, the whole of England belonged to the king. But in practice the various manors were under the control of their respective lords. However, in a few places the king was himself lord of the manor, and Cheltenham was an example of this. That is, Cheltenham was a Crown Estate, as we might call it now. The manor and parish of Cheltenham was a large area – (it extended northwest to southeast from Hesters Way to Charlton Kings, inclusive).

But the king was hardly in a position to deal with the year-by-year administration of all his manors. He deputised the decision-making

to a local official (“the king’s reeve,” as the Domesday Book called him). So, in those days it was Milo and his ancestors and descendants who were entrusted with making the decisions about Cheltenham.

Milo’s father Walter is credited with the founding of a new priory at Llanthony, north of Abergavenny in Monmouthshire. In those days, pious aristocrats would seek the favour of the Church or of God by donating farms and farmlands to monasteries. Walter gave away many of his properties, to help establish that new priory at Llanthony. By owning several such estates, and thereby receiving (considerable) rental income from tenant farmers, the priory could establish its resources securely.

Included amongst Walter’s donations to Llanthony were some large chunks of the manor of Cheltenham. These chunks were two corners of the manor: areas of farmland sited on recently cleared woodland.

Later on, when that priory came under threat of attack, Walter’s son Milo founded a second priory, so-called Llanthony-by-Gloucester. Milo took back all the estates which his father had originally donated, combined with them a large number of estates that he himself owned, and then re-divided the total between the two priories. The two Cheltenham properties were given to the new Priory (the remains of which can still be seen, seven miles away from our area, behind Gloucester Quays shopping centre).

Specifically, the Priory’s lands included a chunk in the east of Cheltenham at Oakley (later known as Priors Farm) and a bigger chunk in the west of Cheltenham, known as Hatherley. The use of the name Hatherley does not indicate that these lands were ever part of the manor of Up Hatherley, but merely indicates that the lands lay near and alongside the stream called the Hatherley Brook (which flows towards the village of Down Hatherley).

Soon after this donation, however, Milo made a small adjustment. He had also been instrumental in establishing a leper hospital on the north side of the city of Gloucester. In order to likewise give that institution a small secure income, he extracted one farmstead - of nearly 60 acres - out of Llanthony’s land-holding at Hatherley, and assigned it instead to this new place, the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen. All this had happened by the year 1143.

## SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES

Incidentally, to convert woodland to farmland as described was not a decision to take lightly – it was not only a lot of hard work, it also destroyed a useful resource. But the necessity had arisen because the manorial method of land-management had become a victim of its own success: it could adapt well to most local demands, but not to increasing population. Already during the 1100s our nation was becoming crowded, and a more precise method of local government was called for. After 1180 the ‘tithing’ took over from the ‘manor’ as a more useful method of people-management, since tithings divided the landscape into more logical geographical units. However, the Manor Courts continued to supervise the traditions of land-management. Also, Lords of the Manor continued to collect all the revenues which were based on land-values: both rents for their own use and taxes on behalf of the Crown.

As for Llanthony’s holdings, the Oakley section lay within the tithing of Cheltenham, whilst the Hatherley section straddled across the boundary between the two rural tithings of Arle and Alstone. In the early records of Llanthony, part of this Hatherley estate was simply referred to as being at ‘Alveston,’ that is, Alstone (probably in the Benhall area). The larger western parts of Hatherley, in Arle tithing, were referred to as being at Harthurst - this place-name was first recorded in writing in 1287.

Records of 1294 inform us of the acreages of the estates concerned. Oakley consisted of one carucate, which is about 120 acres. Hatherley contained two carucates, which is about 240 acres. In Llanthony’s terms, such acreages were quite small. To deal with the rent collections and other affairs, the Priory assigned a single bailiff to take charge of Hatherley and a group of other small properties – scattered through seven parishes all along the Hatherley Brook, through Down Hatherley to Sandhurst. Land under the authority of a bailiff was called a bailiwick, and this group of estates came to be dubbed the Bailiwick of Redgrove (or Manor of Redgrove).

Within this Hatherley area of farmland which had been cleared in Norman times, two patches of woodland remained: Benhall Wood (about 15 acres) and Redgrove Wood (about 9 acres). A surviving document from the year 1230 mentioned “the king’s wood called Benhale.” (Benhall Wood was not part of Llanthony’s property,

although the nearby farmland was). And there's no reason to doubt that Redgrove Wood also existed and was known by this name throughout the medieval period – although there is actually no written record of this place-name Redgrove until 1508. Part of Redgrove Wood survives as the area of old trees behind the Manor By The Lake conference centre in Hatherley Lane, whilst Benhall Wood has now been entirely built over.

The Red Grove presumably acquired its name due to the colour of the trees – either of their autumn leaves or of their bark. Anyway, the Wood was no doubt always a very conspicuous feature of our landscape. The word Grove implies a woodland within which the paths and clearings are maintained with a specific purpose. In recent centuries this might be for recreational use, but in those medieval days was perhaps to do with hunting.

There is a reference in the Llanthony records to a dovecote here, which could have been located in the woodland. Although a dovecote was a significant resource in those days, to supply meat, it's not necessarily the case that the bailiff or any monk or monastic servant would have been needed permanently on hand to maintain it. It might have been leased to, and managed by, a local tenant, as the local farmlands were.

## **WHAT MANOR?**

“The bailiff produced a jury from his bailiwick for the case between John, prior of Llanthony, plaintiff, and John Higgins, defendant, in a plea of wrongful taking of amercements. The abbess has never been seised of homage, fealty, or any suit from the prior of Llanthony in the Cheltenham manor and hundred. The plaintiff shall receive 20 marks of damages and 40 shillings for court costs and shall have the amercements returned. Jurors: John Alre, Thomas Goderych .... Witnessed and sealed by Sir John Grevel, knight, steward of the manor and hundred.”

A lot of significance has been attached to the above text, documented in 1464, in which the prior of Llanthony (John Hayward) took on a legal battle to claim that he owed no financial dues to the Manor Court of Cheltenham, and won his case. The document does not name Hatherley or Redgrove: the prior was arguing for all his lands in Cheltenham, including at Oakley.

The prior was lying, in fact. Or rather, he was a legal expert. It's hardly unusual - then or now - for rich institutions to find loopholes to avoid paying their taxes. He successfully appealed that the Priory had never owed dues to Cheltenham Manor, which was untrue historically

Incidentally, Redgrove never had a manor-house of its own: it was too small to need one. Nevertheless, having established in writing that the Priory had to pay no manorial taxes, the subsequent priors operated their properties in Cheltenham parish independently, acting as lords of their own manors. Their tenants were described and treated in the usual manorial tradition, as either 'customary villeins' or 'freeholders.'

## DISSOLUTION

This situation was a typical example of that creeping assumption of authority over their lands, which was what agitated Henry VIII enough to confiscate all monastic properties in 1538. Drastic economic restructuring! Mind you, that wasn't the first time that a king had interfered with ownership of land locally, as we have seen. Nor was it the last time, in a sense - if you consider the effect of compulsory purchases in the 20th century. There almost seems an inevitable cycle in history of the highest authority having to break the local chain of control over land.

So, the Redgrove manorial estate became Crown land. At Llanthony in 1539, the prior oversaw an orderly dismantling of the Priory's assets and functions, rather than have it forced upon him. Of course, farmland that goes uncultivated is of no value to anyone. Henry VIII promptly gave or sold all the former monastic lands to people able to work them, often the people who had been tenancing them anyway. Margery Grevell had been the tenant of the area around Redgrove Wood. In 1540, the properties were officially transferred from Llanthony into the hands of William Lygon, a grand-son of Margery Grevell. He was granted the manor of Redgrove 'in fee,' which meant that he held it directly from the king.

The exact shape of the manor of Redgrove is unknown. It is unlikely that any detailed map of the estate was ever made in medieval or Tudor times. Nevertheless, we can combine some guesswork with some detective work on the later maps and other sources available.

On the back inside cover map, the light grey area shows where the bulk of the manor would have been (represented in the 1830s by freehold lands belonging to T.P. Butt and Mr Pritchit). This adds up to the required 240 acres. However, parts of other farmers' estates may have lain within this area. And parts of Redgrove manor probably lay amongst the areas shown on the map in a darker grey, in the Harthurstfield area to the west (which also contained the Hospital estate described below). Some parts of Redgrove manor may also have lain further east into Alstone.

## A CHANGE OF SCENERY

In old place-names, the word 'field' signified far more than just a squarish plot of ground. Grove Field and Harthurst Field were two huge arable open-fields, which were divided into narrow strips in Anglo-Saxon style. A map of 1759 shows Harthurst Field was at that date still partly divided in this way. Whereas, it was documented in 1597 that Arnold Lygon had 'enclosed' the area of open-field known as Grove Field. What this meant in practice was that intermingled strips in Grove Field which belonged to neighbouring farmsteads were merged together (and also converted from arable to pasture): farmers at Harthurst to the west or Benhall to the east who had worked land here were instead compensated with plots closer to their houses. This left Grove Field as a single large block of land, operated from a single farmhouse.

The names Grovefield and Redgrove became used somewhat interchangeably here. In the early 1800s, both names were used for the farmstead built next to Redgrove Wood. Set back from the main highways, this farmstead's location is not typical of medieval buildings: it is more typical of those which were newly purpose-built in the Georgian era. That is when the building here is first actually documented, in 1737. Known as the Grovefield Estate, the farmstead's site is now called the Manor By The Lake.

(A little further north, Hesters



*Manor by the Lake (D. E. 2012)*

Way Farm was another farmstead probably built in the mid-1700s, and which was in the same fashion located at the centre of its farmlands, off the highway, and away from the existing village).

Redgrove Wood itself, an area of nine acres or so, seems not to have descended through the Lygon family's property, although it was re-attached to the Grovefield Estate nearer to the year 1800. An Estate Agent's details aren't always the most reliable of documents. But it's notable that a sales write-up in 1813 stated that "the manor or reputed manor of Redgrove" had been "added to" the Grovefield Estate. This is a bit garbled, and it's not clear which owner had done this. But taking it seriously, it can only be describing as a 'manor' the nine acres that constituted Redgrove Wood - which was by then the last remaining physical evidence that there had ever been a manor of Redgrove.

## NAMES IN PLACES

Just a note here about other more recent uses of the place-names Redgrove and Grovefield. The three pairs of cottages called Redgrove Cottages which stand in Hatherley Lane were built around 1876. Two further pairs were added in about 1903 and 1996. The adjoining Harvester restaurant and bar called "The Redgrove" was built in 2005. The street called Redgrove Park was built during the early

1990s. Just over a mile northwards, the street called Redgrove Road was built in 1952.

There was in Victorian times a cottage called Grovefield - perhaps part of Arnold Lygon's original farmstead - which once stood on the site now occupied by the Edwardian house called White Lodge (B. & B.) in Hatherley Lane. An adjoining smallholding called Grovefield Gardens was demolished to enable the building in 2005 of the by-pass Grovefield Way. Grovefield was also the name of the huge concrete office-block built by the Dowty company,



***1 Redgrove Cottages,  
Hatherley Lane (2009 D.E.)***



***White Lodge, Hatherley Lane (2011 D.E.)***

which in 1999 was converted into the Nuffield Hospital.

The former big open-field of Grove Field was the area between Hatherley Lane and the Hatherley Brook. The district has since those days changed out of all recognition. Grove Field now contains part of the Benhall housing estate - Robert Burns Avenue and the roads either side of it - along with streets such as Grace Gardens.

## **COTTAGE IN THE WOODS: HARTHURSTFIELD**

**A**s with the story of Redgrove above, a bit of guesswork added to research and interpretation of surviving documents can tell us about the story of the medieval landscape in the Harthurstfield area.

Throughout the 1700s, the Manor Court Book of Cheltenham referred to a farm property in the hamlet of Harthurstfield which was known as 'The Woods.' The written description of its lands in 1796 show that the farmstead which was so named must be the dwelling which still stands here, the black-and-white Tudor cottage now known as Willow Mead.

The fact that the inheritance of the cottage was being dealt with through the Cheltenham Manor Court proves that this property was never part of the Llanthony estates. Its lands formed an island excluded from the manor of Redgrove. Specifically, The Woods was an estate consisting of 40 acres of land, of which 7 acres adjoined the cottage which is still standing at Harthurstfield, and about 33 acres lay detached, a short way off, near Fiddlers Green.

The exclusion of this property from the lands granted to Llanthony indicates that a farmstead already existed here at the time of that grant, that is, in Norman times. So, a house stood at or near the site of Willow Mead around or soon after the year 1100. This is confirmed by the name 'The Woods' itself, since most of the woodlands in the vicinity had already been cleared by that era.

(It's true that the name of the estate could be derived from its ownership by a Mr Wood, at some time before 1701. However, this same location appears to have been named in a 1617 survey as Arle Woods, perhaps also known as Woodbrooke).

Incidentally, if a cottage existed at this location in around 1100, it would also be fair to assume that the highway beside it also existed then, that is, what we now call Fiddlers Green Lane.



*Willow Mead and Fiddlers Green Lane (2011 D.E.)*

This cottage acted as a focus. Any new farmhouses established for the new farmland in the Norman period were not widely spread-out, rather, they were all positioned near to this cottage, on the north side of Harthurst Field. This created a small hamlet,

known as Harthurst (or more recently as Harthurstfield) which was administered in medieval days as a part of Arle tithing.

Although only first documented in 1287, local people were doubtless using the place-name 'Harthurst' much earlier than this, since the meaning of the name itself reflects the traditional use of the land here before the woodland was cleared in the Norman era. Of the various woodland words, 'hurst' implies the presence of dense undergrowth such as bracken and holly — ideal habitat for 'hart' or deer, whose presence here is also commemorated in the place-name.

## **THE HOSPITAL ESTATE**

In medieval times, the large extent of arable ground called Harthurst Field contained intermingled plots, some belonging to Llanthony's Redgrove, and some also to the 58-acre estate which belonged to the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen. This Hospital once stood five miles away, where there is now a block of flats called Cathedral Court on London Road, Gloucester. The tiny medieval chapel which belonged to the Hospital of St. Mary Magdalen has survived, and was reopened to the public in 2010. But the institution itself had a more chequered history. It had been a leper hospital in medieval times, but developed into almshouses for the elderly poor. Queen Elizabeth and later King James I both gave instructions to Gloucester City Corporation to care for the buildings and their inhabitants. Despite these interventions, the Hospital slowly fell out of use.

Whereas Llanthony Priory's income was assured by its ownership of dozens of farms as sources of rent, by contrast the acreage at Harthurstfield was the largest property owned by the Hospital. (They



Over the centuries, the extended arable ground called Harthurst Field became divided into several small paddocks and pastures. Nevertheless in the early 1800s, the City Council was still the owner or trustee of virtually the same medieval estate of 58 acres of fields, as is apparent from surviving maps made at the time. Some of the land was sold off for the building of the Turnpike Road around 1810, but the City Council continued to rent out to a tenant the remaining estate of 47 acres, up until the 1860s.

## CHARITIES BEGIN AT HOME

A very similar story applies to a smaller area of around 16 acres on the southern edge of the parish of Swindon Village, around the Cross Hands. Here, the land was owned in medieval times by the Hospital of St. Margaret, which neighboured that of St. Mary Magdalen, a little closer to Gloucester city centre. (Again, the medieval chapel of the Hospital of St. Margaret still survives in Gloucester). The 16 acres were the land between Tewkesbury Road and the River Chelt, including the old mill-house which still stands in Newland View. The house and lands also came to be managed as a charity by the Gloucester City Corporation, until they were finally sold off to private ownership by the Charity Commissioners in 1890/91.

There were other charities which also owned land in our area: notably the Withington Poor charity, which had land at Fiddlers Green.



***Bedlam Mill (Newland View): redevelopment of 'The Homestead' and removal of trees revealed the overhang at the back of the building. It is a very ancient mill site, but this present building probably dates to around 1600. (2004 D.E.)***

Again, rents on this patch of land were used to help the poor: in this case the funds were administered by the clergy and churchwardens of the Cotswold parish of Withington for the benefit of that parish. Specifically, they sponsored apprenticeships for the children of poor parents. This applied from 1690. Their lands were transferred to the Charity Commissioners in 1857, and sold off by them five years

later.

In the same way, a group of four Cotswold parishes owned about 22 acres of farmland around Fiddlers Green for the benefit of the clergy of those villages. These were the four parishes of Salperton, Charlton Abbots, Sevenhampton and Compton Abdale. In those days, a Church of England clergyman had no guarantee of a decent income: they could include themselves as among the village poor!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & SOURCES

Thanks to Paul Hyett and family.

The interview with Mrs F. Ireland was conducted by David Edgar; all other memories were initiated and collected by Margery Hyett. Apologies to Audrey Smith for referring to her as Audrey Stevens throughout our Volume 4. Thanks also to Peter Tharia, Marilyn Dale, Derek Gissing, Frank Cox. Thanks and apologies to anyone else in recent contact with Mrs Hyett who hasn't been credited.

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Also worth trying for more on Arle Court's estates 1600-1870 is D2025 (Ticehurst

Wyatt & Co). There is not room here to list sources of evidence for the individual facts, especially for the early history. It will be apparent to other serious historians where the authors have reached the limits of their expertise.

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES

**A** footnote here, to pay tribute to Mrs Margery Hyett. Around 1995 the recently formed Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project recognised that local historians could help with the social cohesion of this reputedly rough area. Margery involved herself from the start. She proved to be the driving inspiration for historical fishing – throwing the net as wide open as possible in terms of subjects and sources, then drawing the facts into some kind of story. Then she had a journalist's determination to get it in print. She worked on seven volumes – four covering Hesters Way and Arle, and three covering the neighbouring area of Alstone and Lansdown.



**Margery Hyett**

Born in 1923 in Warrington, she married Donald Hyett in 1942. They moved to Cheltenham at the end of the war, staying briefly in Brooklyn Road. In 1946 they moved into the brand-new 167 Arle Road. From the early-1970s to the mid-1980s she taught at Arle School, subjects including Commerce and History. Later on, she was consulted about the proposal to change the name of that school to Kingsmead: her comment was that Bedlam might be better! (Referring to the nearby Bedlam Farm site).

This volume contains Mrs Hyett's final writings, which she was still working on a month before her death, just after her 90th birthday.

D.E. 2013

Without Margery's drive and determination, Hesters Way would probably have no documented history. The debt we owe to her is immeasurable.

C. G. 2013