

History Sheet 39 - Capell Road

Kind hearts and coronets – that's Capell Road. It is one of the shortest and one of the oldest roads in Watford.

It bears the surname of the Earls of Essex and until 1882 was part of Bushey.

Step back even 50 years, Capell Road was partly gravel, horses clattered over the cobbles, gaslight from the shop interiors illuminated the street.

People called at Morell and Stone's, the big draper's shop which is now Palmer's the grocer's, to buy their cottons and elastics; or went to the dairy (now a television shop) for half-a-pint of milk in a jug.

Mr Papps was serving the children with sweets at his general shop and from the cellar (now filled in) at No. 34 came the aroma of baking bread.

Mr Spicer, the coal merchant, was keeping the home fires burning; Mrs Coleman rented No. 20 and took in "theatricals" from the Palace; and at No. 18 Georgie Foreman was making coffins.

All this is remembered by Mrs Amelia Axtell, who is 79 years old and came to Capell Road 60 years ago.

She herself has always been a pillar of the neighbourhood, who never quaked when called upon to sit with the dying or lay out the dead.

A walking history of old Oxhey, she declares: "Years ago we none of us had any money, but we were all good neighbours. It is a thing of the past. Oxhey was a lovely old village, really, and this was the shopping centre. You could buy anything you wanted in this area years and years ago."

Capell Road features on a map of 1871, though it was then part of Old Bushey.

It was not swallowed up by Watford, then run by a Local Board of Health, until 1882 – 13 years before Watford claimed urban status and 40 years before it became a borough.

The 1871 map shows Palmer's shop as a post office and the pub opposite as The Volunteer.

On the corner of Capell Road and Pinner Road stood one of the old coal-duty posts. These posts marked the boundary at which coal being carried into London was subject to duty.

The spelling of Capell Road is a bit of a riddle, too.

Is it Capell, as shown on the name



Capell Road coal-duty post.

plates in the road?

Or Capel, as given in Kelly's Street Directory?

Well, the road bears the family name of the Earls of Essex, who lived at one-time Cassiobury.

Nearby Villiers Road commemorates the family name of the Earls of Clarendon, who used to reside at The Grove.

Burke's Peerage and Debrett give the spelling Capell, though back in the seventeenth century it was Capel and at one time even became Capell-Coningsbv.

Bridging the gap

Mrs Axtell, of No 28, has lived in the road longer than anybody.

A bridge between past and present, she is a

brave, no-nonsense woman who has had to bear more of life's harsh realities and tragedies than most people.

Her husband came home from the First World War an invalid, having lost a leg, and in 1948 her son Peter was killed in a terrorist explosion in Palestine.

She has nursed the sick and helped bring babies into the world and in the days when her mother, Mrs Elizabeth Atkins, used to go round Oxhey and Northwood with a horse and cart, selling greengrocery, Mrs Axtell often had to do the debt collecting.

Mrs Axtell's daughter, Jean, and son-in-law, Mr Patrick Quinn, now lived at No. 28, which is very different from what it was when Jean was a girl.

In those days, the yard included stabling for the two horses.

There were chicken runs, rabbit hutches and room for any other pets which Mrs Axtell's children might bring home.

The house, dating back to 1829, is thought to have been the first in the road. Ten years ago it was demolished and a new house, complete with a dream kitchen, built in its place.

The yard has been transformed into a lovely garden.

Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine

For help with a wide range of common health problems – and more... These may include stress, anxiety, depression and fatigue, everyday 'difficult' aches and pains and long-standing concerns.

The approach is of particular help for women – for fertility, pregnancy and gynaecological conditions.

Less well known, acupuncture can help with reaching more positive levels of health and energy to better handle the challenges of daily life.

Mary Hurley is an established practitioner in Oxhey and a member of the British Acupuncture Council (BACc). All BACc Practitioner Members are properly qualified, insured and observe a strict code of professional conduct and practice.

For an appointment please call on 01923 240793 or 07599 412571

This text is from an article published in the 13th August 1971 issue of the Watford Observer written by Gwen Dargavel. Some minor changes have been made to the original opening paragraph by the author. Photograph by Bryan Hutt (the Capell Road coal-duty post is currently located in New Street, Watford High Street - opposite Charter Place).

In a neat row of houses called Caroline Cottages lives Capell Road's oldest and much-loved resident, frail but chirpy 87-year-old Mrs Ethel Mullett.

She used to be parlour-maid at a big house in Upton Road.

Now, whenever one of her devoted family takes her along that way in a car, she feels she could cry, because the old house has been pulled down and the part of Upton Road she knew as a girl no longer exists.

Mrs Annie Rickard, of No. 16, has lived in Capell Road since 1938.

Her father, Mr Jim Webb, kept The Rifle Volunteer from 1929 until 1955. "My daughter, who lives at Leighton Buzzard, was born at the pub", she says.

During the war, Mrs Rickard did secretarial work for Mr Cutchee, the builder at No. 34.

Since then, the business has been bought, by Mr Seward Dennis Barnes.

As she lives nearby, Mrs Rickard looks in, "just as a friend," to see if she can be of any assistance to Mrs Barnes, who now looks after the office.

Cutchee and Riches set up in Cappell Road as builders and decorators over 50 years ago.

Mr Barnes, who hails from Somerset, saw the business advertised for sale in 1949, came to see it and has never,

looked back.

He has no particular link with Oxhey, "I just wanted a change of scene," he explains.

He does a lot of work for Harrow Corporation and his main interest, outside work, is motoring.

He always has a distinctive car. His latest: an Opel sports. "I don't drink or smoke," he says in explanation of his one indulgence.

Mr Barnes thinks the traffic restrictions have improved conditions in Capell Road. "I couldn't get in and out of this entrance sometimes."

Hopcraft's, the grocers at No. 22, have been trading under that name for 32 years.

They are noted for their home-cooked hams.

Mr Frank Hopcraft gave up his career in insurance to take over the business, previously run by his brother, Leslie.

Before that, the shop was owned by a Mrs Dilks, an aunt of Leslie's wife. "We shall have been here 22 years this Christmas," says

Mrs Elsie Hopcraft, who comes from High Wycombe, says: "I do a lot of knitting when I have got the time to sit down in the evening.

"With three grand-children to knit for, I have plenty to do."

Appropriately, a stork stands in the front garden of No. 12 — home of Mrs "Dot" Hall, who has, to date, already fostered 42 babies for the Church.

She has two adopted children of her own — Hazel, 16, and Stephen, 14. Mrs Hall's husband, Kenneth, who died nearly nine years ago, was born in the house.

Mrs Hall used to have a miniature zoo in her front garden. Children loved to stop and look.

Then one night, vandals destroyed some of the animals. Unable to afford replacements on her widow's income, Mrs Hall transferred the animals to the back garden for safety.

One day, she was sitting near the

window when she heard a child in the street asking its mother in a puzzled, disappointed voice why the animals were no longer there.

She decided, for the children's sake, to put the animals back. But the vandals struck for a second time — which is why the local children have lost this little bit of pleasure.

Only the stork remains — its legs embedded in concrete.

Coming to Capell Road and opening up a pet shop — Sangina's Pets' Parlour — was the realisation of a life's dream for Miss Daphne Pollard. She is a truly happy person.

The name Sangina is the Kennel Club registration of her three cocker spaniels. She breeds cockers "in a small way" and also runs a small cattery, taking in about 20 cats a week.

"That again is very personal," she explains with a smile. "I get great fun out of looking after the cats, though they are very bossy. I'm not the boss down there."

A truly Watford family

Mr George Henry Brown, his wife, Esther, and their family were already living at 20 Capell Road 41 years ago when the opportunity arose for Mr Brown to buy the greengrocery shop at No. 7, then being run by a Mr Lumm.

The Browns have been greengrocers in Watford for over 100 years.

It was Mr G.H. Brown's father who used to travel round round the district with horse and trap, selling fruit and vegetables.

Mr G.H. Brown branched out with a stall in the old Watford Market, later took on the shop in Capell Road and finally acquired another shop.

Today there are three shops bearing the name G.H. Brown and Sons — one in Bushey High Street, run by Mr Brown's son, Alf, another in Bushey Mill Lane, run by grandson Brian, and the one in Capel Road, run by Mr Brown's daughter and her husband, Mr Keith MacDonald. They are assisted by the charming 22-year-old Lynn Walsh, whom they look upon as a daughter.

As well as their own 14 children, Mr and Mrs Brown brought up their grandson Brian.

During the war, five of the sons were away in the Forces and one of them, Alf, escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp.

Mr Brown struggled against ill-health to keep his market stall and two shops running until they came home. "It was hard going" says Ethel in tribute to her father who died at the end of the war.

The brothers are still involved in the business.

Now a fourth generation is coming along to participate.

Mr Gordon Dixey, the butcher, is lucky to be in Capell Road. he is a Dunkirk



The largest independent firm of Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents, with 5 offices in the local area.

The Complete Property Service

Residential Sales

Residential Lettings and Management

Land and New Homes

Valuations

Building Surveying Services

Commercial Property Agency

Landlord & Tenant Advice

www.johnwhiteman.co.uk

Newly opened to complement our existing offices:-

Oxhey Village Office
37 Pinner Road
Oxhey Village
Herts
01923 247742

survivor.

He also served in the Middle East. His father, Maurice, who had shops in Watford High Street, Stanmore Hill and Rickmansworth, took over the Capell Road shop from a Mr Pargeter in 1918. For about 20 years the shop was run by Maurice's brother, Arthur.

Then Maurice closed his High Street shop and moved to Capell Road himself. Gordon, who served his apprenticeship at F.E.Fisher's in the High Street, later joined his father.

The following was sent to OVEG by Doreen Doe of Villiers Road after she read the History Sheet in the last newsletter:

I enjoyed the letter from Mr Chowns (by the way I knew his mother) about Attenborough Fields. It was exactly as it was for me as a child, but I think I was enjoying them a decade or so earlier.

My friends and I were also chased by the park keeper, a red-haired man who wore very shiny gutters and corduroy coat. He could, and did, run very fast, we used to slide on the icy moat in the winter time.

Perhaps Mr Chowns would like to

know what his home in Wilcot Avenue looked like before being built on.

It was a field known as Bucks Meadow which we local children played in. Early summer it was a picture with the gold of buttercups, dandelions and another wild flower we called milk maids.

Summer holidays it was hay-making, building our hay houses and picnicking.

At the Bucks Avenue End of the field, there was a white fire barred gate across the opening and to the left of the gate there was low stile which you climbed should you want to take the footpath to the allotments or over the stile to Attenborough Fields, the same way as you go now.

There was another entrance to the field further up Bucks Avenue where there are now houses. It was enclosed by a hedge. With an entrance wide enough for a cow to pass through.

This was known as Butcher's Field. Mr Butcher kept a few milking cows in this part. He was a dear little old man with a snow-white Father Christmas beard, but if he caught you birds' nest hunting, he would chase you waving his walking stick! Butchers once had a dairy milk round. Mr Butcher once had a son who had a building firm, Butcher and Richer.

We local children didn't take kindly to our field being built on.

Mr Chowns remarks that his living in Wilcot Avenue prevented him mixing with the commoners, I presume he meant the folks in the surrounding roads such as Villiers, Upper and Lower Paddock and Pinner. I do not think my classmates were anymore snotty nosed than any private school children. I also cannot recall any of my classmates, boys or girls, with ringworm or purple painted heads etc.

We had measles, mumps and one epidemic of diphtheria which my sister and brother caught. But these were the days before anti-biotics.

I started school in the mid 1920s. We were brought up hardy and not coddled.

We lived in a hardworking, close knit community. Everyone knew everyone and many were closely related. Folks didn't move around as they do now. Yes, I do remember Kingsfield's School's yellow uniform, caps and socks but did not know boys were known as Canaries, but maybe us local children, all those years ago, had our own name for them!

I am Villiers Road born and bred as were both my parents so my roots are deep. I am a true Oxheyite and proud of it, and probably one of the most ancient