

OXHEY VILLAGE History Pages
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WATFORD HEATH by H.T.S.

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History Sheet 35



In the sweet summer time there is no more pleasant walk than over the Colne by Wiggshall, up the narrow way arched with trees, across the road leading to Hamper Mills, and through the fields to Watford Heath. From the road fine views can be obtained of the town lying on the opposite slope, nor do we know that this particular vantage ground has been taken possession of by our enterprising local photographers.

Watford Heath is a little green, dotted around with cottages, some of which are old and ugly, others old and picturesque, and a few modern models of rustic architecture. These latter were built by the late W.T.Eley, Esq., of Oxhey Grange. Most of the houses round the common belong to the Oxhey Grange Estate and in them are housed the gardeners, gamekeepers, &c., employed by Mrs. Eley. A drinking fountain, erected in memory of the late Mr. Eley, stands at the New Bushey entrance of the green.

It seems strange to walk in ten minutes from the asphalted streets of New Bushey to such an old world locality as Watford Heath. The tone of life is altogether different.. There is the influence of a great house, together with a rural aspect and a precious verdant freshness which has long departed from New Bushey. On the green, in the long light summer evenings, boys play cricket and old men sit smoking at their cottage doors facing the common. Just now the pond near the railway bridge is full and black, but in May the tendrils of the duck weed will seek the surface and the sun, nor will this little slum sister among the flowers blossom till its tiny white cups can open their petals towards the sky. At that season - 0 ye aristocratic tulips - the pond on the common will be a sight to see! It is worth a pause in a spring walk for there are some fragrant gardens hereabouts; the blackbird flits from the hedge close by; the thrush ascends to the apple bloom; the wagtails strut by the water's edge; and the ducks do an afternoon turn, like some others whom we know who wear feathers.

Watford Heath, small as its population is, has its local celebrities (sic). A few years ago, just off the Heath in the Oxhey lane, there lived a well known geologist, Mr. William T. Stone. He was a man of great knowledge, an authority on fossils - of which he gathered a fine collection. The Brickfield, from whence Mr. Stone obtained many of his specimens, was called "The Clays" as far back as the time of the Domesday Book. Shark's teeth and oyster shells are the most frequent geologic finds at this spot, although on one occasion Mr. Stone unearthed the jaw-bone of a monkey. More than once we had the pleasure of going through drawer after drawer of mounted specimens with the late owner, and only the other day Mrs. Stone was kind enough to show us the treasures once more, for the lady exhibits as much interest in geologic and horticultural pursuits as her deceased husband, whose loss, in the meridian of life, many true lovers of science deplored.

Another man of ideas is Mr. Foster, the gardener at Oxhey Grange. In his own line of business his