



Est-ce que vous savez le col d'arbor?

... from the Abinger & Coldharbour Parish News archive 2000

Coldharbour as we see it today is a largely nineteenth century village, developed as agricultural reforms turned the inherently poor land surrounding the village into reasonable quality farmland, increasing the demand for agricultural labour. However, to begin at the beginning, the earliest evidence of habitation in the village, the hill fort which dominates its eastern end, dates from between 100 and 200 BC, showing that there has been some form of human settlement here for at least two thousand years. The derivation of the name of the village is unclear, but two possible sources are popularly offered. The first is that Coldharbour was a wayside resting place where only basic facilities were offered; the second is from the Norman french col d'arbor - the tree lined Coombe.

The hill fort, Anstiebury Camp, is an Iron Age fort, oval in plan. It has never been comprehensively excavated. Surviving today on the north side are defences comprised of triple banks with double ditches. On the south side, where the land falls away steeply, there is little obvious evidence of earthworks. It is probable that there was only ever one bank on this side with greater reliance being placed on the natural topography for defence. The original entrance to the fort lay on the north east side. The track which climbs the south side being a later addition, probably part of the nineteenth century landscaping of the Kitlands estate. It is said that plans were laid to evacuate the women and children of Dorking to the hill fort should the French have invaded at the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

There is no tangible evidence of settlement in Coldharbour in Roman times, although Stane Street, connecting London and Chichester ran along the slopes of Leith Hill below the village. Traces of the road are still visible in the grounds of Bearehurst and Minnickwood as declivities in fields and woods.

During the Saxon period what settlement there was looked down on the momentous battle of Ockley where Ethelwulf father of King Alfred, finally defeated the Danes in 851 AD. Legend has it that Ethelwulf's troops charged down the slopes of Leith Hill carrying away the Danes before them in a violent battle which left the fields and surrounding streams red with blood. It seems likely that the battle took place on the land now covered by fields between Sheep's Green and Campfield Place since decayed remains and two rude coffins were apparently discovered here during the nineteenth century. The victory was notable enough to be recorded abroad in contemporary Frankish literature and Asser, biographer of King Alfred, writing fifty years after the battle, concedes that it was a greater victory than any of Alfred's. Also during the Saxon period a cache of coins was buried near the village where it lay undiscovered until April 1817 when some seven hundred coins dating back to 870 AD were unearthed during ploughing.

The dawning of the second millennium saw little development of the village, although the Domesday Book records the farmstead of Hanstega (the higher way in the old Norse) which was leased by one Baldwin from William Fitz-

Ansculf, thought to have been the builder of Abinger church (see Parish magazine Dec 99/Jan 00). The Domesday Book records that Baldwin also leased Milton (now Court) near Dorking from Fitz-Ansculf. Quite where Hanstega was is unclear although the most likely site is Anstiebury Farm on the eastern edge of the village.

During the course of the next five to six hundred years, as more cultivation of the heath and woodland took place, some houses were built in and around the Coombe where the village presently stands. Highland Cottage, Roffeys and Woodsmoke Cottage all contain old fragments of mediaeval or Tudor construction. Also in this period is recorded the earliest reference to Kitlands, contained in the Dorking Court Rolls of 20th January 1437 - John and Dionisia Stapele are listed as surrendering a toff and ferlong of land called Kyttebond in Capel. Kitlands passed to the Bennett family in the sixteenth century who perhaps gave their name to Bonnett's Wood on the Kitlands estate. A stone which used to be incorporated in the walls of Rowmount had carved on it "J.C. 1562", presumably referring to John Constable who lived at Kitlands at the time. Later in the sixteenth century Kitlands was leased to Jon Chasemore of Mosses (presumably where Mosses Wood now stands) whose family gave its name to the house now called Chasemores, the core of which dates from that period or from the seventeenth century.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries extraction of sandstone from the pits along the slope of the hill, some forestry and subsistence farming supported the small amount of habitation in the area. Coldharbour Lane and Broome Hall Lane formed part of the main route from London to Arundel. Some idea of its character may be gained from descriptions of coffins having to be carried to Capel for burial slung on a pole and carried by men walking in single file.

From the 1620s to 1824 the Bax family owned Kitlands, which became a centre for the Quaker movement in Surrey. Whilst in the eighteenth century, the Barclay family, whose wealth was founded on brewing, settled at Bury Hill to the north east of the village. During this period, the Howards, lords of the manor of Dorking (later Dukes of Norfolk) and seated at the Deepdene near Dorking, acquired lands in and around the village, including the Dukes warren and the land on which the church is now built.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, smugglers from the South Coast are alleged to have used the woods around the village to hide their booty - a form of entrepot where the contraband could be held before distribution into London and the surrounding areas. H.E. Malden, the nineteenth century Surrey historian who lived at Kitlands for a time, records that an old naval cutlass was found in fields between Leith Hill and Ockley which he surmised might have been lost in a skirmish with smugglers.

With the dawn of the nineteenth century the development of the village began in earnest. In 1819 the Barclay family founded and endowed the school in the heart of the village. The school was enlarged and rebuilt a number of times over the years before closing in 1965 and being converted into

three houses. Later in the nineteenth century an infant school was founded by John Labouchere of Broome Hall and run by his daughters in what is today the Old School House.

In 1848 the village's growth was recognised with the building for the first time in the village of a church. Until this time Coldharbour formed part of the parish of Capel and villagers had to travel to Capel or Holmwood to worship. As the village grew so it became less practical for the villagers to rely on these other churches. It is said that a particular problem was carrying coffins to funerals, which, as noted above was not an easy task given the state of roads at the time.

Coldharbour in the 19th and 20th centuries

Land for the church was given by the Duke of Norfolk, despite his own Roman Catholic beliefs. The building of the church was financed by John Labouchere of Broome Hall. The architect was Benjamin Ferret, a noted nineteenth century gothic architect and biographer of Pugin. The heads which form labelstops to the moulding on the outside of the East window are likenesses of Labouchere and his wife. An early notable event in the church's life was the marriage on 22nd February 1868 of the composer Ralph Vaughan Williams's parents, Arthur Vaughan Williams of Tanhurst and Margaret Wedgwood of Leith Hill Place (daughter of Josiah Wedgwood and Caroline Darwin, elder sister of Charles, the anthropologist).

During the nineteenth century the prosperity of the estates surrounding the village grew correspondingly increasing the prosperity of the village. Broome Hall, which had originally been built on the site of an old farmhouse for Andrew Spottiswoode of the publishers and royal printers Eyre and Spottiswoode, before being acquired by the Laboucheres, was sold to the Hargreaves-Browns, Liverpool merchants and co-founders of Brown Shipley, the merchant bank. The Hall and its grounds were extended and improved, Broome Hall Lane being diverted further to the West from Gordon Lodge onwards to take it away from the house improving the privacy of the park. Mosses Wood was replanted an arboretum with a private drive running through it which today forms the road from Coldharbour to Abinger (until this drive became the public road, the route between the two villages climbed over Leith Hill past the tower).

At Kitlands, bought by the Heath family from the Baxes in 1824 a steady programme of improvement to the house and grounds was undertaken. The first Heath to live at Kitlands, George Heath, was Serjeant-at-Law. As he increased his wealth from practising the law, the estate was extended by the acquisition of Moorhurst, Anstie Farm and Trouts Farm, whilst the house was gradually developed from a farmhouse to a rambling manor house. During this time the gardens were also developed and planted with the aid of the Hookers, the great nineteenth century plantsmen and directors of Kew Gardens. When Marianne North painted her definitive series of rhododendron paintings (now on display at Kew Gardens) she came to Kitlands to find the best specimen of rhododendron falconers.

In the 1870s, George Heath's second son, Admiral Sir Leopold Heath built Anstie Grange on a prominent site between the village and the Holmwood, using his share of the prize money earned from the siege of Sevastopol.

The big houses and estates provided employment for the people of the village as farmworkers, gardeners, coachmen and indoor servants. It is interesting to note that the number of people living in the village at this time was probably

greater than today. The village boasted a shop kept by Henry Roffey. A butcher called every day from Holmwood or Ockley and newspapers could be obtained either by the second post from Mr Clark, the librarian in Dorking or by walking down to Holmwood Station from Mr. Longhurst the Station Master. Roffey's shop also served as the Post Office for the village. The village also boasted a shoemaker and forge.

In 1904 the church was given a major overhaul paid for by Sir Alexander Hargreaves-Brown as a memorial to his mother who had lived at Bearehurst. The architect for the restoration was W. D. Caroe, a celebrated late Victorian/Edwardian architect who established a significant church practice. His new pulpit, choir stalls, organ case and reredos were completed in a wonderful free flowing gothic which shows a clear Arts and Crafts influence. Caroe also reconstructed the roof inserting the fine king posts which are now so well lit by the new church lighting.

The period before the First World War also saw the building of a number of larger houses in the village as new forms of transport made the village more accessible. From this period date Cliff Cottage, Hill View, Anstiehurst (thatched when first built) and Mountfield. At Anstie Grange, Cuthbert Heath (who founded the insurance broker CE Heath of the same name and who has been described as the maker of the modern Lloyd's of London) rebuilt the 1870 family house in a florid Edwardian classical style. Anstie Grange was maintained at some expense with fine gardens, good shooting and all the conditions essential for Edwardian country house life.

The First World War brought many changes to village life. The village had its share of casualties as is evident from the war memorial in the church. The war was no respecter of rank, the heirs to Kitlands (Raymond Heath) and Broome Hall (Gordon Hargreaves-Brown) both being killed during the conflict. After the war a familiar story of social change started to affect the old orders and to change pattern of employment and ways of life, but the community continued to thrive. The village shop now operated from new premises across the road from Roffeys next to the drive from Kitlands. Cricket was played regularly on the village green and a rifleclub operated on a range given by Cuthbert Heath to the right of the road which leads to the present cricket ground.

The Second World War saw fewer casualties from the village than the First but once again the heir to Broome Hall (Sir John Hargreaves Pigott-Brown, son of Gordon Hargreaves-Brown) lost his life. Mosses Wood was given to the National Trust in his memory.

The process of change continued throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. The big estates were gradually sold off and broken up. Bury Hill House was much reduced and converted into flats after a fire destroyed its central block. Kitlands fell into decay and was largely demolished in the 1950s whilst Broome Hall, after wartime occupation by the Army, became for a time home to the White Fathers religious order before being sold to Oliver Reed, the film star. Subsequently, the house was bought by developers and divided into a number of units. Anstie Grange was sold off from the Heath estate and divided into flats.

During the post war period the village also became home to celebrated film stars and conservationists, Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, as well as to Marian Hemar, noted Polish poet, and Caja Hemar who had been the girl holding the torch at the start of Columbia movies. The physical character of the village remained largely unchanged, although greater

mobility of the village's residents made the village shop uneconomic and increased road use meant that it was no longer practical to play cricket on the village green - the cricket club moving to its present ground on top of the hill (one of the highest in England) in 1950.

Today most of the village's residents travel to work outside the village. Nonetheless the feeling of community is still strong and today's residents derive as much pleasure as their predecessors throughout the centuries from the wonderful surroundings and setting of the village.

| Pat Newberry, Abinger & Coldharbour Parish News, March & May 2000