

A HISTORY OF WEST END (CONTINUED)

A story of agricultural villeins, highwaymen, secret tunnels, murder and Royalty!

The character of West End has changed almost beyond recognition since the Second World War, I remember when it was almost all village people. Some had been there for years, The Flippances, Plowmans, Nightingales, Lynn the Butcher, Fosters, Thompson, Lady Emma Talbot, Miss Talbot, who did such a lot of charity work for the village.

The Chequers was always favoured by stage folk. Gwen Farrar and Norah Blaney, cabaret artistes of the '30s owned it for a time, and also Carl Brisson, a matinee idol, lived there. The Old Nurseries was modernised and Pamela Wynne, a well-known novelist, bought it and lived there.

What is now Noel Cottage was the stables and apple loft to the Griffiths' house Hillside. One of the most interesting residents was the Hon. Mrs. Victor Bruce, a small lady who did big things. She held many world records for motor-ing, travelled farthest north into Lapland, was awarded the women's trophy in 1927 in the Monte Carlo Rally and broke flying records. In fact she was one of the founders of Imperial Airways. She was a Fellow of the Ancient Monuments Society and in 1939 was awarded the French Indo-China Order for the Million White Elephants and White Umbrellas.

She took later to show jumping, and in addition to all this she wrote several books. She lived with her son Tony at The Woodbines, now Pickenham. Abraham Sofaer later lived there.

Tunnel?

The fields at Hawkshill where once we used to toboggan, have been built over and there has been a great deal of infilling in the gardens of the larger houses, some of which are demolished. The Recreation Grounds were fields owned by Mr. Bob Timmis, who allowed us to keep a boat there. We used to swim a lot in the Mole.

During Queen Victoria's time at Claremont, Mr. Williamson (her favourite sculptor's son) got up early one morning to meet a friend for a swim. He swam into a tangle of weeds and drowned. At one time there was a stone which Mr. Williamson sculpted and had erected on the bank opposite the place where his son drowned, which bore the words "Take heed to thy ways".

I think it probably vanished when Esher Place was developed into a housing estate. A great deal of excitement and interest was shown when the owners of the Chequers found what appeared to

be the entrance to a tunnel in the house.

It was thought at first that this was the secret way out to the Portsmouth Road that Jerry Abershaw used to escape from the law, but it turned out to be a large oven used, as the house was an inn, for baking a large quantity of bread!

The little Chapel of Ease was often attended by the Duchess of Albany, who used to walk from Claremont to worship there. *She left her Bible there, but it has vanished. It was used at her wedding, and should have been preserved as an Esher relic.



The Holy Bible presented to St. George's Church, West End, by The Duchess of Albany in 1916 following the death of her husband, Leopold

Miss Marian Barker, a late well-known member of an Esher family and whose brother was Reader to the Duchess of Albany, lived at The Cedars, told an interesting story about the house. It belonged to the Verney family. Mrs. Verney's mother was an Indian Begum, and the house had large glass windows built on so that all got the full benefit of the sun. There was a tablet on the wall of the house mentioning the fact that the writers and reformers Mary and William Howitt had lived and worked there, but the tablet was lost in the demolition of the house. Under the huge parasol-like cedar tree a ghost of a grey lady was supposed to haunt, but she has quite probably taken a look at West End today, and emigrated!

Brewery

It is astonishing that for so small a place as West End attracted a star-studded collection of notabilities over the years. One of the most interesting was William Duckett, who in the 18th Century, farmed South Weylands farm. He was first employed by the Duke of Newcastle in the gardens of Claremont. He also farmed Sandown Farm for Francis Pelham, who owned both farms. He invented a drill-plough for which he received the prize of a silver cup, presented to him by the Marquis

George for his interest in agriculture, used to visit Weylands Farm. The King sent William Duckett's son John, to the Cape of Good Hope, with staff, to introduce his father's new farming methods. He died, at the rather early age of 53, of a fever, but there is a memorial to him engraved on the family tomb in St. George's Churchyard, where his parents and his brother Mark, are buried.

The Prince of Wales public house was built, a really rural pub. Until the First World War, there was a brewery attached which later became Mr. Frank Plowman's boot and saddlery repair shop. In 1870 a cricket club was formed, which played on the common.

The editors of *Punch*, Tom Taylor and Sir F.C. Burnand, had a cottage just past the Mole Bridge.

A fair amount of building had taken place during the 19th Century, and the early part of the 20th Century. There were small shops and a blacksmith's next door to The Chequers.

As the village grew the commoners who had rights to graze on various pieces of ground, including the common, were allowed to start their allotments at the bottom of More Lane in Sandown, and a special plot was leased to the West End villagers. Some of the allotments are still in use today.

Reprinted with the kind permission of Miss Irene Codd, who lived in her family home, Grapes House, Esher, for most of her life.

Garsons
Growing since 1871

Sunday 3rd December

Ember Choral Society
(in aid of the Hospice)

Saturday 9th December

Carols in aid of the Elmbridge
Mayor's Charities

Thursday 14th December

"Singing for Pleasure" (in aid of
Rotary Kids and at any time enjoy
"Santa's Singing Band" in the
Garden Centre.



**Garsons will be open to 6pm
Monday to Saturday from
December 1st to 23rd.**