

Tilehurst Past and Present

In 1066 William the Conqueror defeated King Harold at the Battle of Hastings and became King. Twenty years later he ordered the recording and registering of all land, which was written down in the Domesday Book. Tilehurst is not recorded in that book because it was part of the Reading area of land and the Abbot of Reading was Lord of the Manor. No doubt William put some of his friends here but we have no record. The Abbot of Reading used to lease out the hunting and fishing rights, but retained the right to cut furze from the heath which was carried back for the use of the monastery. Gradually small hamlets arose in the various areas, each with a larger house; some of the areas are still with us - Coley, Southcote, Kentwood, Armour, Pincents, Tilehurst and Calcot.

The name "Tilehurst" was spelt Tygelhurst (13th.C), Tyghelhurst(14th.C), Tylehurst (16th.C) and only recently Tilehurst. It means a "Wooded Height". The area of Tilehurst was vast - reaching from St Mary's Butts to Theale; it was composed of woods, common and arable land. Here where we live was woods until the war in 1939 so no doubt deer and wild boar roamed about where you now grow your daffodils.

When Henry VIII closed the monastery, it was quite likely the families living in the bigger houses became the possessors and gave their name to the area and became Lord of the Manor.

It was recorded that when Queen Matilda was fighting Stephen she burned down a dwelling at Tilehurst, another at Purley and another in Caversham on her way to Oxford.

In 1545 Henry VIII granted Tilehurst to Francis Englefield but in 1585 he was under sentence of death and forfeited his lands; the following year Queen Elizabeth granted the lease of the Manor for 40 years to Humphrey Foster and George Fitton. However in 1599 the Queen sold it to Henry Best and Francis Jackson. It then passed to Thomas Crompton who in turn sold it to Sir Peter Vanlore in 1604 who by 1676 had obtained the portion held by Francis Englefield as well.

It is not known where the Manor House was as it was destroyed by fire. The tomb of Sir Peter Vanlore and his wife are in the east wing of St. Michael's Church. They originally came from Holland and came to Reading along with the Zinzan and Leibenrood families in connection with the cloth trade for which Reading was then famous. There were special qualities in the water suitable for its manufacture. Sir Peter had several children but only 2 lived beyond childhood - his eldest son and daughter Jacoba. Nine children died in infancy and are depicted around the tomb of their parents each holding a skull. Jacoba meanwhile had married Henry Zinzan and lived in the Manor House and had several children of whom a daughter Francis next lived there. In 1687 The Manor House was sold for £1087 to John Wilder who came from Nunhide; his relatives were

living in Sulham until the early 20th.Century. The property was then sold to the Kendricks of Whitley who were related to the Zinzans.

There were two daughters in the Kendrick family - Mary, who founded Kendrick School, and Francis. One day Francis was attending a wedding in Reading when she met a young lawyer called Benjamin Child and fell in love with him. For a year she fretted about him until in the end she wrote and challenged him to a duel in Calcot Park. When Benjamin Child arrived with a friend Francis was masked but he immediately saw it was a lady. Francis said to Benjamin - either you fight me or marry me. He chose to marry her. Francis made all the necessary arrangements - they went by coach to Wargrave where the register can be seen there. On arrival back home she left her husband alone in the house for about two hours with the maids and others peeping and sniggering. Eventually she descended the stairs beautifully dressed and asked him what he wanted. After teasing him for a time, she admitted she was his new wife and he then realised he had married the heiress to the Kendrick estates. The marriage was most successful and happy; Francis died at the age of 37 and is buried in St.Mary's Church in the Butts. Benjamin was so heartbroken that he sold the house and built himself a new one in Prospect Park.

The new owner was John Blagrave who built the present house in Calcot Park which became the Golf Course with the ground still belonging to his family until 1914 when Sir Henry Blagrave was Lord of the Manor. Prospect Hill was inherited by Child's daughter and her husband James Hill who sold it to John Leibenrood in 1813 before eventually being sold to Reading Corporation for a park.

Other properties and Families

Kentwood Manor. Nicholas Kentwood was a parishioner in St.Michael' in 1341 and in 1431 John Kentwood appeared in the list of gentry of the county. When Cromwell ruled England, he gave Kentwood Manor to his cousin Edmund Dunch.

The Pincents Family who came from Sulhampsted acquired the property but all traces seem to have been lost. Then it was acquired by the Blagrave Family.

Calcot Mill held by Reading Abbey. After the dissolution it was acquired by the King. It later came in to the hands of Sir Francis Englefield and then Queen Elizabeth granted it to the Earl of Essex

The Rectory. There was an argument regarding the living in the 17th.Century resulting in the dispute being taken to the House of Lords. At the time there were 2 cottages, 1 Church House, 1 house for the parish Clerk and a Smiths Forge built opposite the church at the cost of the parishioners in 1597. These were replaced in 1850 by 4

The Mary Lyne Almshouses at the bottom of New Lane Hill were built on land given by Mary Lyne and endowed with £4,000. Residents were chosen from Tilehurst and Burghfield and must be at least 60 years of age and each would receive 5/- per week,

30/- for clothing and $\frac{3}{4}$ ton of coal per year.

In 1914 Tilehurst comprised 3281 Acres. 2000 people were transferred to the parish of St.Mary's. St.George's Church was built in 1881 and the sister of one Rector Mrs.Sophia Sheppard built Theale Church in 1883. St.Mary Magdalen Church in Kentwood was housed in a temporary building in Weald Rise and similar arrangements existed for St.Birinus in Calcot and Little Heath (later St.Catherine's).

Tilehurst was a village on the hill with 269 acres of woods and much common and arable land. Norcot Road was a little lane with high hedges each side.

In 1930 when my parents with the family moved to Tilehurst, the Triangle was a plot of land with 2 cottages. There were no houses at all in Park Lane or Halls Road which was a little lane with fir trees either side. The Bear Inn was built a long time afterwards. I remember the two bungalows being built, then the Water Tower and the houses which sold at £350 each. Halls Road was fields - the only building being the Farm House which was supposed to be haunted with a fireplace in the centre of the room. Other roads included Back Lane with the Pond, Nightingales and Hollows, Churchyard Lane (later Church End Lane), Church Road (now St.Michael's Road), The City, The Gutter (now Chepstow Road), Twopenny Piddle, Straight Street and Deadman's Lane (later Dark Lane)

There were no houses in Norcot Road - just a beautiful meadow on the left covered with buttercups and daisies. Later I remember some of the shops in the area - Barefoot, Bragg, Kneebone. Nearby was the Tileworks and Treacle mines
In School Road were the Old national Schools and the Laurels, then a private house. Neither the Meadway or Mayfair had been built - this was all fields - there was Lovers Lane leading to Water Road.

In Church Road was the Priory a big house with a pond, boats and frogs and the Little Plough and cottages next to it. I remember our neighbours the Champion family and old Mrs.Davis and her dog.

The Prince of Wales was also in School Road.

At the bottom of Westwood Road was Westwood House inhabited by Mr.Barnett.

Near the Pond House was the 17th.Century Norcot Farm which ran near the tramway - you could catch a bus from there to the Triangle for 3d.

A favourite walk was to go through the fields to Mapledurham and then on to the King Charles Head at Goring Heath.

Dulcie Bone (nee Cull) written in 1975