

ABBOTS LEIGH CENTENNIAL RECORD

Volume 1

**Abbots Leigh Road
Ashgrove Avenue
Home Farm Road
Manor Road
Manor Lane
Fishponds Lane**

Land on the Leigh Woods side of the road at Beggar Bush had been bought at the 1915 sale for £1000 by Thomas Weeks of Bedminster. He sold on to Melville Wills and in the 1920s the Wills Estate built an estate worker's cottage now **Inwoods Bungalow**. Reg. Hole, a carter on the estate, married to Mabel Meech, acquired the bungalow in the 1940s but it was later demolished and the current bungalow built in 2004. On an adjoining site **Woodland Bungalow** was built in 1951, extended into two halves in 1987 and is now a single dwelling.

The Gateway was built by Philip John Miles in 1820 as the main entrance to Leigh Court Mansion and incorporated two dwellings – now East and West Gateway. In 1915 it formed part of a large site stretching down what is now Coronation Avenue, through Oak Wood and up to Leigh Court. In 1915 it was bought by Donald Kennedy of Bath, a well-off sixty year old colliery owner business man from Queen's Square Bath who displaced two former Miles tenants (widows Matilda Carey and Annie Goss) and occupied what became known as Upper Lodge from 1918 until in the late 1920s it was sold to Melville Wills. Though originally joined by an underground passage it is now two separate dwellings - **East Gateway** and **West Gateway**. East Gateway was tenanted by Tom and Hilda Meech and after their death their daughter retained the tenancy until she married and moved with her husband Ernie Hunt to Ashgrove Avenue. West Gateway was occupied by Sidney and Phyllis Mattock until the present owner bought it in 1998.

Down Coronation Avenue behind The Gateway lies **Oak Wood Lodge**. Built around 1840 under the Miles family this was a gamekeeper's cottage (former occupants Lange, Morse, Gamester) and was sold to Sir George White in 1916 and owned by the Wills Estate until 1947. From then until 1983 it was let to a succession of tenants (including nurses at Ham Green Hospital).

Beyond the Gateway much of **Ashgrove Avenue**, like Inwoods Bungalow, was built in the 1920s by Wills from materials which had become available when the White City at Rownham was closed down. From 1930 **Nos 1 and 2** were occupied by two generations of the Meech family (Tom Holt at No.1 Tom, with wife Ada at No. 2. Ada moved to Portishead in 1995 and is remembered as the only centenarian in the Holy Trinity Abbots Leigh graveyard. Also established by the Wills Estate were **Nos 3 and 4** whilst **Tanglewood** was built in the garden of The Gables in the 1950s by Philip and Brenda Meech.

In 1817 Philip John Miles decided to establish a new **Home Farm** (also known as Lower Farm) closer to Leigh Court. Home Farm was tenanted by Charles Barnes (1861-71), John Robinson (1881) and from 1891 to 1918 by Edwin Alvis. Alvis had bought the farm at the 1915 sale but, shortly before his death in 1918 he sold on to Melville Wills. For

much of the period up to 1990 the farm was managed by Hubert Russell as tenant of the Wills Estate. The 31/5/41 Daily Express tells how Fred Mitchell, shepherd, was awarded the British Empire Medal in 1941 for fire-fighting through the night as incendiary bombs fell on the lambing pens of Home Farm. After seven hours he reached home -only to find it too had been bombed. The farm was sold in 1992, converted into four separate dwellings including **West Barn, East Barn, Home Farm House** in 1992d has seen a succession of owners since then.

The remainder of Home Farm Road developed as the Wills Estate undertook a gradual sale of sites. . In the late 1920s **Nos 1 and 2** were built by Alfred Dowling - builders who did much work for the Wills estate (see also 46-48 Church Road). In 1934 **Nos 3** (the Mansard) **and 4** were built for and occupied by Wills employees. In 1952 **Bow House** (then used as a police house) and **The Coppice** were built whilst 1959 saw the construction of Briarwood.

The histories of Abbots Leigh Road, Oakwood, Ashgrove Avenue, and Home Farm Road illustrate both the importance of the Wills family (Melville Wills from 1915 and Douglas Wills thereafter) in sustaining the character of this part of Abbots Leigh and in fulfilling a role as a relatively benevolent employer and landlord. Not only was new housing provided in the period up to the 1940s for estate employees, but from the 1950s the Wills Estate was willing to sell sites to existing tenants to allow owner occupation. In addition where circumstances such as the death of an employee the Estate was also allow continuity of tenure to a widow (e.g. Phyllis Shattock and Rosemary Hunt at the Gateway).

Such a policy of provision of housing for estate employees encouraged the continuity of community and an interesting feature of this part of Abbots Leigh was the presence of over several decades of the Meech family – at Inwoods, at East Gateway and at Ashridge Avenue.

On the opposite side of Abbots Leigh Road from Home Farm Road is the Clifton College Sports Ground within which the estate manager lives in **The Cottage**. Further along is **Leigh Warren**, built in 1933 and occupied for twenty years by the Armstrongs. After subsequent ownership by the Berni family, Leigh Warren was bought in 1981 by the Chippendalls until it was again sold in 2015. **Leigh Warren Bungalow**, alongside Leigh Warren was built around 1940 and occupied by the Hoods. For fifteen years from 1982 it was used by Mrs Berni (for exercising her dogs) but in 1987 was sold to Leeson and on his death was owned by Mrs. Leeson Magry. It was used as an animal sanctuary from 1987 to 1997 but has since been resold. **Folleigh**, a former war department hut became a residential dwelling in 1951, was further extended in 1969 and again in 1996.

The land on which **1 and 2 Manor Cottages** stand was bought by the Cadburys from the Wills Estate and after the death of Sir Edgar Cadbury was held by the Cadbury Trust which sold both cottages to the Lindsay Smith. After improvements in 1989-90 No1 was sold to its present owner whilst No 2 was sold to Peter Asheral and thereafter to its present owner. .

Leigh Grove was built in the late 1930s in the garden of Apple haze by Arthur Giddings then retiring from the shop and Post Office, **Post Cottage** and **Crossways Cottage** date from 1876 when they were built by the Miles family. By 1901 Mary Babbage had become postmistress whilst Fred Mitchell, a gardener, occupied next door. By 1911 Stanley Lloyd was in the police house with Arthur Giddings in the shop/post office, and

in 1915 Giddings bought both cottages. Giddings later bought land from the Wills to build Leigh Grove where he lived till his death in 1964 after which a succession of owners held the property. Although a plot of land fronting Manor Road was sold to allow the building of Applehaze (see manor road below).

The Priory, together with what is now **West Priory** was built by Christopher George in 1831 with a conservatory added from 1836. , Son of Philip George of Bristol based George's brewing family which had bought the Redcliffe Street shot tower; Christopher George had expanded the lead shot business and, as a wealthy newcomer to Abbots Leigh, took on a lease of land from the Miles. The Priory was built on the site of an earlier building belonging to the Trenchard family and dating from the eighteenth century (there are traces of cellars and a well). The Priory grounds, stretched from Manor Road down to Sandy Lane and included a walled garden, land adjoining the main Pill Road and a gardener's cottage – now Priory Cottage. Christopher George moved back to Gloucestershire by 1851 and by then The Priory was occupied by the Liverpool born John Johnson Brown, his son and daughter. a governess and five servants. By 1861 Henry Abbot, a Bristol attorney at law, his wife Martha, five children and five servants were resident. Henry Abbot died in 1874 but Martha remained at The Priory until her death in 1890.

The Frys - Roderick and Janet Fry with their sons Cecil Roderick, Dennis Grierson and Hugh Percival lived at The Priory from 1910 and bought it at the 1915 estate sale. For forty years there was little change but in 1952 Roderick and Janet Fry died and the Priory Estate was put up for auction divided into six Lots. Three of the Lots were sold (the walled garden, the orchard, and the gardens on the main road), but others were withdrawn. The Priory, together with outbuildings including the dairy which was later to become **Little Priory**, was sold to developer William (Billy) Bray.

Bray developed a number of houses on Manor Road (and also on Harris Lane – see Record Volume 2). Amongst these were **Priory Paddock**, as well as **Priory Close**. Also close by is **Priory Lodge**. By 1901 Henry and Martha's son Gilbert Leigh Abbot (1860-1925) was living in The Bungalow (now Grangewood – see below) on land adjoining the Priory Estate but not part of it.

Within the Priory Estate the 'Walled Garden' a site next to the George Inn, was bought in 1952 by Harold Lee (for £2,225). He developed this as a garage and petrol station which was active until 1971 when the land was sold. On some of this land there now stand **Priory Mews** and the **Tree House**, but a Mr. Bird bought had bought the site next to the George Inn and, in 1971, built **Drybridge**.

The oldest building on Manor Road is the **Manor House**. Shown on Donn's map of 1769 as being occupied by Morgan Smith a Bristol banker, the outlines of the original dower house or lodge which date from the mid eighteenth century can still be seen at the right hand end of the current Manor House. Extended through the nineteenth century the Manor House was often vacant - in the 1891, 1901 and 1911 censuses it remained empty or with servants only - but from time to time was let to wealthy tenants or friends of the Miles family.

Amongst Manor House tenants were, in 1861, the widowed Elizabeth Lloyd from Clifton (recorded in census as 'fundholder' by occupation). In 1971 The Manor House was occupied by the thirty nine year old Charles John William Miles who had married Elizabeth Maria Lloyd (daughter of Elizabeth Lloyd above). From 1878 to 1891

Jeremiah Osborne occupied the Manor House and Robert Fenton Miles was there in 1897. In 1916 the Manor House was bought by Melville Wills but in 1918 it was conveyed to Mrs Yda Richardson who before her marriage was Yda Stancomb Wills, adopted niece of William Wills, later Lord Winterstoke. She lived at the Manor House until her death in 1936. Later occupants were for many years Frank Oliver Wills, Sir Egbert and Lady Cadbury, later a DRG Management Centre, and most recently the Manor Nursing Home.

Adjoining the Manor House are the **Coach House**, dating from the mid nineteenth century and **Manor Lodge** built in the 1920s. Both offered accommodation for Manor House staff with the Coach House being the home of Albert Hams, gardener, who had previously lived in Church Road and whose descendants still live on the Pill Road.

In 1915 at the sale of the Abbots Leigh estate all the land fronting Manor Road had been bought either by the Frys (The Priory Estate) or by Melville Wills (all the property beyond The Priory on both sides of the road and including the Manor House).

Until the late 1930s when the Wills started to sell off some sites, Manor Road saw no further development. In 1938, however, F.O. Wills (now at the Manor House following the death of Yda Richardson) sold land to Arthur Giddings owner of the Post Office and shop, land on which Giddings built Leigh Grove. Giddings died in 1964 and between then and 1976 the site changed hands several times until **Applehaze** was built on a Manor Road site which had been the orchard of Leigh Grove. He also sold the land on which **Eastfield** and **Westfield** were built.

Meanwhile William Bray undertook much development in Abbots Leigh (see also the notes on Harris Lane and Dennyview Road), and on Manor Road built **Cotswold House** (1958), **Luxulyan** (1960) and **Rutherglen** (1962). In 1969/70 four houses – No 1 Longwalls, No 2 Swallow's Mead and Nos 3 and 4, were built in the Manor Close, the kitchen garden of the Manor House. , whilst in 2014 The Bungalow (built in the early 1900s – see above) which had earlier been given a pitched roof was further remodelled and extended as **Grangewood**.

Off Manor Road lie Manor Lane and Fishponds Lane (also known as the Cinder Track having been formed from the clinker from Portishead power station). The first dwellings were built on Manor Lane in the 1830s. The 'Poor House' or 'Slate' Cottages' (the latter now demolished but replaced by today's **Slate Cottage 1 and 2**) were built around 1830 by Philip John Miles when the village poor-house next to The George Inn was closed by the overseers of the poor because it lacked water. 1831 is also the first known date for **Priory Cottage** at the bottom of the lane, until 1952 two cottages for the gardener and groom at The Priory.

By 1915 two more cottages (now **1 and 2 Manor View Cottages**) had been added both with good sized gardens. At the 1915 Estate sale the four cottages plus the land behind over to Fishponds Lane were sold for £850 to Henry Bishop from Chessel Street in Bristol. Bishop soon sold on – the land to Melville Wills and two of the cottages to H.H. Wyatt. The Wyatts have remained in their cottage to this day but other Slate and Manor View Cottages have changed hand several times. In 1987 Tara was built on a plot that previously formed part of the garden of Manor View Cottages.

The purchase of the land lying between Manor Lane and Fishponds lane gave Wills ownership of all the land holdings from the field opposite the Manor House (which he

had earlier bought) along Manor Road to Yew Tree Cottage (now Orchard Lodge) and down past Fishponds Lane to Glen Cottages, and up to Old Park House.

In 1929 he sold land on Manor Lane to Stanley Lloyd (former village policeman) and Lloyd built Stanlea (so named because he was called Stanley??). Lloyd later sold part of his land holding back to Wills but retained part of the site on which he built a new Stanlea Bungalow, now the site of **Heywood Lodge** and **The Paddocks**. On the site he sold, Stanlea was renamed **Hernhill** in 1962, and in 1980 a second house **Greystones** was built in the grounds of Hernhill.

Land below the cottages was bought in 1930 by Jack O'Hara Letts. Letts built **Monk's Bench** there, but the site was later sold to Frank Shearn of Glen Farm and later to A.E. Pugsley who built a new house on the Monks Bench tennis court and took the name Monk's Bench with him, renaming the former house **Scarletts**. Later, part of the Scarletts land was sold and Orchard End (now **Longacre**) built on it.

All the while until 1952 Priory Cottage was held within the Priory Estate (probably occupied for a time by Charles Gittings, gardener at The Priory, whose son was killed in 1917), but on the death of the Frys it was sold since by the Fry Trustees since when it has had a single owner.

Historically the land on both sides of Manor Lane was bought by Melville Wills in 1916 and there have been numerous exchanges of land holdings between Fishponds Lane and Manor Lane (see above). Running from Manor Road down to the woods above Abbots Pool (then called the Fishponds) Manor Lane is often known as the Cinder Track because the lane was widened in the 1920s with clinker from the Portishead Power Station. At the foot of the lane, **Lane End Bungalow** was in the 1920s an estate garage/workshop but in 1979 was bought by its present owner. **Bosley** has been extended and improved as has **Stokeleigh Cottage** which like **Fishponds Cottage** was built in 1897 by the Miles for estate workers. **Friar's Gate** was built in 1949 and now stands between two rebuilt and modernised houses – **Whiteoaks** and **Abbotsway** (built in 1951 on a small plot of land sold to his son by the then owner of Friar's Gate).

Back on Manor Road **Woodleigh** was built in 1996 on the site of a former forester's dwelling. **The Spinney**, a Voysey built house was built in the 1950s and in the mid 1960s sold to Voysey in the late 1960s. Merrett. In 1924 Redvers Coate had started a new cider making business in Nailsea. From Melville Wills he bought land for an orchard off Manor Road and in the 1950s **Abbots Orchard** was built. **Orchard Lodge**, originally Butcher's Lodge, later Carey's Lodge, and later still Yew Tree Cottage dates from the eighteenth century and was long occupied by the Wheare family – hence the name Weir Lane for the road running up to Beggar Bush Lane. Lying at the junction of what are now Manor Road and Weir Lane it was occupied for several decades by the Wheare family – hence the name of the misspelled Weir Lane.