

ABBOTS LEIGH CENTENNIAL RECORD

Volume 3 Church Road

There are older parts of Abbots Leigh to the west of the Bristol Road – Tanpits, Old Park House and Cottage, Glen Cottages for example - but Church Road contains much of the historic heritage of the village. It is the setting for several of the oldest large houses (Leigh Lodge, The Chantry, Abbots Leigh House, The Villa, the Glebe), as well as for a number of nineteenth century estate worker cottages, the Village Hall and of course Holy Trinity Church.

Attributing house names to particular dwellings in Church Road is complicated. Over the years from the mid nineteenth century there have been changes as older buildings were demolished and replaced, existing dwellings extended and improved and new dwellings built in the grounds of the larger houses, and as in 1972 when the street numbering was adjusted. In a letter to all Church Road residents (July 1973=2) Long Ashton Rural District Council changed old numbers 5 to 12 Church Road to 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 66, and 68. The current Centennial Record uses the numbers as they are today.

Leigh Lodge was built around the mid eighteenth century and extended in the 1850s. It was occupied until 1924 by a series of lawyers – James Short, James Fussell, Col. Carey Batten and from 1924 to 1964 by Dennis Grierson Fry, his wife (later widow) Norah and their daughter the reclusive Elizabeth Ann Lee. Loyal to her servants (especially the chauffeur Faulkner), to her neighbours (and particularly her contemporary Pam McFeat), and a major benefactor to both the McFeats and others. Elizabeth Ann moved to London in 1964 but is buried, with her husband (alleged to be her gardener) Joseph Lee in the graveyard at Abbots Leigh (Dennis Fry's granddaughter). Leigh Lodge was occupied briefly by Lady Cadbury and thereafter by a succession of owners. **Elm Lodge** was built as an extension to Leigh Lodge to provide kitchens, dining room and living quarters for staff. On the other side of Leigh Lodge were stables and a loft later converted to a dwelling, again for staff. **No 5 Church Road**, the former stables/coach house was converted into a dwelling by Elizabeth Ann and occupied for many years by the Faulkners.

Opposite Leigh Lodge is the **Village Hall**, commissioned and paid for by Sir Cecil Miles, 3rd baronet, designed by Edward Down (surveyor of Leigh Bank) and built in 1896. The Hall has a fine hall, and a reading room, improved kitchen facilities and a caretaker's flat above. Beyond the Hall lie **Nos 8/10** and **12/14** two pairs of cottages built in 1879. Owned by the Fry family after 1916 the cottages were occupied by Fry workers who did not live in at the Priory. We know of their gardener George Chamberlain at NO 14, Bertha Rowles kitchen maid then cook at No. 12, George Chamberlain gardener at no 14, and later Amy Gillard who was able to buy No. 14 in 1952 after the death of the Frys.

Leigh Farm dates from at least the 18th century, and for much of the 1800s was farmed by the Hollyman family who held ownership for over a hundred years. Kelly's Directory 1939 shows then still on the farm. The Hollymans also held **Byfield** and **Oakleigh** to which Jack and Olive Nottingham had moved from Yew Tree Cottage at the end of Manor Road. Close to the road are two cottages known in 1972 as Rose Cottage 1 (owned by Dennis Osborn of Campfield and occupied by his gardener and Rose Cottage 2 (today's Rose Cottage) where lived Arthur Fear and Ida – head teacher at Abbots Leigh school.

Across the road and stretching along a 19 acre site from Leigh Lodge to the Church was **The Chantry**, originally the small mansion house of Robert Bright (cotton merchant and

owner of over 1000 slaves in Jamaica).. On the estate in the nineteenth century was a small farmholding which for several years acted as the village meeting place and café run by Sarah Wade. At the 1915 sale The Chantry states did not sell – Caroline Bright was still in residence aged 87. She died in 1917, however, and at a subsequent auction The Chantry was bought jointly by Colonel Carey Batten and Inghram Gunn of Abbots Leigh House (see below). Batten enlarged and improved which was bought in 1923 by William Lansdown and has recently 2014 been extended to form three dwellings – **Swallowfield Farm, Batten House and Potager House**. The Chantry itself was bought by Derek Avery but soon sold on to the Inskips. They built two cottages in the kitchen garden for their chauffeur (xx Mitchell and (Ackerman), cottages since demolished with **Oakfields** being built on the site. Also built later within the grounds were **Westover**, later extended to include **Westover Lodge**, Linden Gate (now **No 19 Abbots House**, together with **Nos 9 and 11**. On the death of the Inskips The Chantry itself was divided into two – **Chantry House** and **The Chantry**. Outbuildings were converted into **Chantry Fields** whilst **Chantry Cottage** remains now as it was in the 1920s.

On the southern side of the road, No. 26 **Closeburn**, **No. 28** (formerly Byeways in 1972) and No 30 **Archways** (formerly Primavera) were built in the kitchen gardens of Abbots Leigh House. Next door **Carey's Cottage** was the conversion of an Abbots House squash court. **Abbots Leigh House** itself dates from 1750-1775, then a modest mansion or dower house, but in the nineteenth century enlarged to become the home for some time of Henry Miles (acting as the Miles estate steward) and in 1911 of Alfred Tomes, a retired Lieut. Col surgeon. In 1915 it was bought by Inghram Gunn, chief engineer and later chairman of W.D. and H.O. Wills and executor of the will of Lord Winterstoke. Abbots Leigh House was owned from the 1950s by the Arrowsmith-Browns (printing business in Bristol) and later by architect Roger Gallanaugh and family, designer of several Abbots Leigh houses.

The **Old School House** (before 1915 called Severn View Cottage) was occupied from 1915 for a further thirty years by James Hare, village schoolmaster. Next to it on a site which is now **Avonhurst**, was in 1800 The Villa, the site of which became the first village school in 1839. The school was sold to Somerset County Council in 1914 and a new school built in 1923. The foundation stone laid by Janet Fry is still visible on the Village Field wall. The school was closed in 1986 and Avonhurst built on the site. The **Village Field** was once rented by Caroline Bright of the Chantry from the Miles family before being bought by Melville Wills and later owned by Luther Brimble of Leigh Farm and afterwards given to the village.

The vacant land opposite Abbots Leigh House and the Old School House was in 1918 the subject of a haggle between Carey Batten and Gunn over the view from Abbots Leigh House across the Severn. Gunn bought the view and this is preserved to this day by a later covenant which precludes building on that site. **Muiravon**, however, was built on this site in the late 1930s.

Close by are the older **1 and 2 Muiravon Cottages** dating from the eighteenth century. Occupied by a succession of Miles estate workers through the nineteenth century both cottages were bought at the 1915 sale by Gilbert Morgan who lived there for a few years before selling – but again as separate cottages. After the sale Samuel Parsons, village carpenter was displaced but was able to move to 12 Church Road. Also on this lane is **Church Gate** built and occupied by builder Dave Roberts in 1980 on land sold to him by Livings of 2 Muiravon Cottages and now in the process of improvement and modernisation after a period when it was empty.

Throughout the history of Abbots Leigh, however **Holy Trinity Church** has been a pivotal focus. The Holy Trinity of today was built at varying intervals over a period of about 800 years. It is thought that a Saxon hermitage or small chapel was built near the present day church. 1115 is the first date put on construction. The original crypt has been filled in, and the nave is probably 13th century, the south aisle is probably 14th century with the tower mid 15th century. The small door in the south wall was the entrance to the pew for the Lord of the Manor. On 21st February 1848, the church was gutted by fire. The tower and the chancel were saved and William Milles, son of Philip John, paid for the rebuilding of the church.

Immediately to the east of the church is **Glebe House** for many years the vicarage but in 1924 superseded by a new vicarage. When the new vicarage was built Glebe House was the residence of it was C J King, owner of CJK Tugboats at Avonmouth. Next door the **White House** was built in 1955 in the garden of the vicarage. The **Vicarage** itself was built for the Rev. Robert Raymer who studied at Dublin University, former school teacher, officer of The Leicestershire Regiment in the Boer War and of the Leicestershire Regiment in the Great War in which he was wounded before resuming his career and becoming vicar of Abbots Leigh in 1923. Beyond the Vicarage was, until 1995-86 Petra built in 1966 by Leslie Hawkins, but now **Abbots Gate** a group of four detached houses developed by Crest Homes.

Back on the southern side of the road, land next to the Village Field had been bought by Luther Brimble of Leigh Farm from Melville Wills and in 1963 this was sold to Nell McNaughton Wainwright (Clifton bank manager and Reserve Captain HMS Flying Fox) who built **Galleon's Reach**.

On the adjoining plot, bought by Melville Wills in 1918, had stood one of Abbots Leigh's oldest buildings – Old Stone Cottage. The Wills Estate sold this land to Hubert Russell of Home Farm and one (or perhaps both) cottages were rented out to the Woodville family in the 1960s. Over thirty years before that Old Stone Cottage (No 50 Church road, was the home of 'Granny White' known to several of today's village residents but best remembered because three of her sons – Thomas, Gilbert and Ernest - were killed in the first world war. Later Rose Skinner, Granny White's daughter lived at No 52 married to Sidney Skinner, gardener at ham Green Hospital. Rose was caretaker at Abbots Leigh school and their son David ended up as a Chief Inspector in the Bristol Constabulary.

In 1938 Melville Wills had commissioned builder Dowling to build two estate worker cottages next to Old Stone Cottage. **The Maples** (No. 46 rented to Arthur Hickery, estates offices at Leigh Woods until 1998 when it was sold and **Gablecott** (No 48 rented to Harry Baker, forester until 1982). Old Stone Cottage itself was demolished in 1999 and **Langford House** was built on the site.

Standing back from the road are three pairs of cottages – improved and extended - but still retaining the shape and character of the estate worker cottages built probably in the 1830s. It is said that they were set a little down hill from the road in order not to be seen from Leigh Court. In 1915 the pair of cottages 52-54 were bought by Richard Jenkins, tenant of No. 52. The tenant of No. 54, James Gillard had enlisted but by 1921 had moved away perhaps to No 14 where his daughter Amy is known to have lived in the 1950s. Jenkins' wife had died in 1914 and by 1921 the 80 year old Jenkins had also moved. **No 52** was bought by William Frampton, returned from the war and later to become a village stalwart as clerk to the Parish Council. **No 54** had been bought by Walter Gabbitass (because the cottage he tenanted in 1915 had been bought by someone else) but he was killed in 1916 and it was his wife Florence and their children

that occupied No 54 for several years. **52a** and **54a** were built as new dwellings added on to existing cottages.

Nos 56-58 were bought at the sale by John Chamberlain, long time tenant of **No. 58**, and his daughter Mary lived there until his death in 1972. **No 56** had been bought in 1916 by Edwin and Ellen Frampton and their son Eric was still resident at No 56 in 1972. When Mary Chamberlain left to move to xx Church Road (see above) Edwin Frampton's granddaughter moved from No 56 to No 58.

Nos 60-62 were bought in 1915 by Colonel Carey Batten. One tenant, Walter Gabbitass (No. 60) was killed early in the war (see above) but was able to buy No 54. The tenants of No 64 were the Wiltshires. Since 1871 James and Emma Pennell had lived at 62 Church Road but after James Pennell's death in 1884 Emma Pennell continued to live there with her grown up children after the death of her husband in 1884. By 1891 the house was occupied by the Wiltshire's with Emma Pennell remaining as a boarder until she died in 1915. By 1916 the Wiltshires had moved to Bristol. Reflecting perhaps the close relationship between Pennell and Wiltshire families, William Wiltshire is buried in the Pennell grave in the Lower Churchyard (which also commemorates Arthur and Rowland Wiltshire both killed in the final weeks of the war. By 1921 William Hunt had moved from No 56 to No 62 **2 Anchor Cottages**, where the Hunt family remain today, whilst Samuel Amos moved into No 60 Anchor Cottage, now **April Cottage** until 1976 when the cottage was bought by Catherine Brown.

Here the numbering becomes difficult since a new wooden bungalow was built next to No 62 in 1926 – resident Gilbert Hunt and became – and still remains No 64. It was demolished in 2002 and a new house built on site.

What were then Nos 64-66 have become today Nos 66-68. They are a younger pair of cottages built in 1903. They were purchased by the Frys soon after the 1915 sale. William Frampton, former tenant of No 66 moved to No 52 (see above) and **No. 66** was tenanted by the Allens after the sale and bought by them probably in the 1950s. It was sold again in 1975 to its present owner. In 1921 No 68 housed the family of Edward Rowles, formerly tenant at Tanpits and later Martcombe, who had moved to Church Road by 1921. No 68 probably housed Fry tenants after but on the death of the Frees was sold to William Hunt (snr) in 1953.

In 1915 No. 70 Church Road remained as it had for many years two cottages, one thought to be where the village laundress (Mrs Lawrence lived). In 1915 both cottages were bought by a Mrs. Tupman of Clifton for her daughters Alice and Catharine who are listed as living there in 1921. But they soon sold and in the early 1920s the cottages were combined by Howell Davis into what is now **George's Plot** (named after a small plot 'George's Ground' to be seen on Richardson's 1800 map). Davis died young and his widow married Sir Paul Gueterbock (equerry to King George v and keen horseman). He donated the church gates on which his initials PG can be seen.

Opposite George's Plot is **Campfield** built in 1923 for Ernest Taylor who owned 'Taylors of the Green' Bristol's first department store. Used as land for training reservists in the first world war the house was originally Camp House but has since changed its name, Since 1923 it has changed owners three times - to Dennis Osborne, coal merchants of Hotwells, to William Strang, then Concorde Project Director and to the present owner.

Beside Campfield is **Windyridge**, built in 1924 for Ernest Savory who lived there for twenty seven years. He was followed by the Claremonts (1951 – 1958), the Hacks (1958 -1975) and since then by the present owner. This was a distinguished part of the village. James Arrowsmith Brown (Abbots Leigh House) and Ernest Taylor were successive High Sheriffs of Bristol in 1927 and 1928.

Down the short lane from Windyridge are **Pendle House** and **Park Hill** whose past owners include Banks (antique shop on Park Street⁰ and later George McWatters (managing director Harveys wine merchant). The house is under renovation in 2015.

Above Park Hill is **Deerhurst**, an older part built in the mid 1950s with a second part in the 1970s. In the garden can be seen traces of what Humphrey Repton called 'that obtrusive mass of yellow ugliness' – the house of John Protheroe. Philip Miles went to the Somerset Quarter Sessions and not only diverted a public right of way but in the end forced the demolition of 'the yellow house'.

Deerhurst was one part of Southdown Park, bought at the 1915 auction by Col. Carey Batten but sold in 1924 to the Willes brothers who built a small cottage on the site that is now **The Lodge**. Dr. Charles Willes used local quarry material to make garden ornaments which he sold at a Whiteladies Road shop, but turned to dairy farming (shorthorns) the milk from which he sold to William Lansdown (see Swallowfields above).and later to pig breeding. Willes died in the 1950s and the land was purchased by Terry Bryant who later sold to the Heywoods in 1985. On the site in 2015 stand **The Oaks, Long Barns** and **The Barns** – new houses set on what are self evidently old farm buildings.