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### Next Whist Drive

The next whist drive in the series held in the Court House, Berkhamsted, will be held on Wednesday, 19th June, commencing at 2.30 p.m. Admission 2s., including tea.

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## NORTHCHURCH LINKS WITH THE COACHING DAYS

### From Lagley to Dropshort

ONE OF THE JOYS of piecing together the modern history of Northchurch is the readiness of the residents to supply information. Unfortunately, apart from recollections of the Duncombe family and later occupants of Lagley, little is known about the first large house we see on the south side of the High Street.

Until recently we were too anxious to pass safely along a notoriously narrow stretch of the highway to notice Lagley. In fact, there was little to see through the screen of tall trees. Then the road was widened, and encroachments upon the front garden took away the trees and a flint summer-house. Suddenly, Lagley was over-exposed and glowered above a scene of roadside desolation.

#### BUILT IN 1832

A little privacy has been restored by a new wall and fence, and the plain, uninteresting house is blessed with a pleasant background of trees in new leaf. But we miss the old boundary wall with the bow which enabled the Duncombes to step straight from the garden into coaches and carriages.

It was just beside this bow in the wall where the original Lagley stood. It was rebuilt in 1832 by Mr. W. A. Duncombe, whose initials, with the date, appear on the façade. If he had not rebuilt some distance behind the old site it is possible that the mansion, and not merely part of the garden, would have been a recent casualty.

We find the name Lagley Field as early as 1607, when it was owned by the rector of Berkhamsted, the Rev. Thomas Newman. John Arris and Thomas Bates also held small plots of land at Lagley, as it was sometimes spelt, but a house is not mentioned in early 17th century surveys.

#### WAITING FOR THE COACH

Some years ago the mansion was converted into flats by its present owners, the Urban District Council, and we shall never again be invited to fetes in the grounds.

Lagley has lost its roadside memento of the coaching days, but a more interesting relic survives at the opposite end of the village. Dropshort is the name of two cottages facing Northchurch cricket ground, and one of them owes its origin to a landowner's desire for

comfort while waiting for the stage-coach.

Thomas Smart, of Norcott Court, shared the modern bus passenger's dislike of standing in the rain at a bleak request stop. He therefore built two cottages beside the highway, one for an estate workman, the other to serve as a waiting room. The wife of the workman was required to keep the neighbouring building warm and clean, so that the Smarts and favoured friends suffered no discomfort in the interval between stepping out of their own carriage and awaiting the stage coach. In many other areas, rich people who lived some distance from the highway provided similar lodges for their own convenience.

Of the two cottages at Dropshort, the one nearer Northchurch is the more interesting. For many years it has been the home of Miss Alice Bruton, and I imagine that originally it was the caretaker's cottage. A massive chimney at the west end of Miss Bruton's home faces the other cottage, which originally consisted of two rooms—"one up, one down". It is logical to assume that this was Mr. Smart's private coach shelter.

#### THE VILLAGE POUND

A generation ago the two cottages stood in splendid isolation, the last buildings on the south side of the highway between Northchurch and the Cow Roast. Now they are engulfed in modern ribbon development.

With such a name as Dropshort, it is not surprising that the jokers of Northchurch have been busy. For generations tales have been told about builders who should have proceeded farther along the road but dropped short of their destination. Another version is that a load of bricks fell off a cart and was used to build cottages at the nearest convenient spot, to save re-loading the cart.

But it was a rich landowner, not a lazy or careless builder, who dropped short at Dropshort. The name is found in other districts; Aylesbury, for example, has a Dropshort.

On the opposite side of the road, between the cricket field and the recreation ground, you will see a tiny triangular piece of land. This is believed to have been the village pound, where the stray

animals of the parish of Northchurch were kept. Incidentally, until recently I did not know where the Berkhamsted pound was situated. The finding of a long-forgotten map of the early 17th century shows that it was near the Castle, a short distance west of Mill Street. The pound probably disappeared when the canal was cut.

#### HAMBERLINS

A quarter of a mile west of Dropshort, standing back some way from the main road, a fairly modern house bears an ancient name, Hamberlins. The earliest spelling is Amberleyne (1525), but we have no knowledge of an ancient house on or near the site of the present one.

The estate bearing this name has an interesting ancestry, for it was owned by Berkhamsted School until Victorian times. An early 17th century survey refers to 200 acres of land held by the master and usher of the school. A further entry tells us that the heirs of John Southen held a parcel of land but, "upon what cause we know not", withheld payment of rent to the owner of Amberlaynes. The inhabitants of "the town of Northchurch" also held land for which they paid rent to the "Lord of Amberlaynes". I cannot help thinking that these old spellings are distinctly better than the present Hamberlins.

#### FROM EXHAM TO EXHIMS

Returning to the village of Northchurch, we see roadmakers providing graceful curves as they remodel the entrance to Darrs Lane. West of the lane all is modern, but to the east we see a mixture of many periods. A tall, red-

bricked house at the corner (Exhims) was called upon to shoulder a tall conservatory where, many years ago, Mr. J. F. Alcock grew orchids.

It is rare to find a property which has undergone so many alterations and additions as Exhims. To the casual passer-by it is somewhat bewildering, and the little courtyard and fine old coach-house in Darrs Lane have prompted enquiries whether Exhims was once a coaching inn. I do not think so. The interesting painting of bygone Northchurch in St. Mary's Church (presented, incidentally, by a former owner of Exhims, Mrs. McDougall) shows the house standing alone, uncluttered by additions which have certainly made full use of the site.

#### ANOTHER GEORGE

An entry dated 1616—"One parcel of Common near Dawslane and the Tenement of Thomas Exham, upon parcel whereof he hath built a Chamber"—tells us that Exhims is a variant of an old Northchurch family name. Nine years earlier, William Willett held one messuage called Exhems (yet another spelling), with forty acres of land, for which he was to pay "one Gelloflower when anie King or Queene shalbe crowned at the Castle of Berkhamstede. But what rent we knowe not."

Gillyflower, peppercorn and other nominal rents figure in many old documents, and William Willet was not the only Northchurch man who was required to contribute a "gelloflower" if (as never happened) a monarch was crowned at Berkhamsted Castle. A similar duty fell upon George Percival, and it

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is possible that he was an ancestor of his namesake who serves on the Urban District Council today.

In the course of time William Willett's forty acres were much reduced, though many villagers remember when the grounds stretched a considerable way up the hillside. Today Exhims is divided into flats, and if the occupants grow gillyflowers, as I hope they do, they will still be able to pay tribute "when anie King or Queene shalbe crowned at the Castle of Berkhamstede."

BEORCHAM.

(To be continued).

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