

PART FOUR

The Past in Private Houses

This section features information we have obtained relating to a diverse mix of individual private houses all of which tell their own stories. Some of the structures have interesting features but of more importance are the people who lived in these dwellings. It seems entirely appropriate to mention their achievements and exploits in the context of the houses they inhabited.

We have grouped these residences as follows:

- 4.1–4.5 Houses occupied by members of the Newnham Davis family, who made a significant impact on the village in the early 20th century.
- 4.5–4.12 Older houses contributing to the slow expansion of the parish over the years.
- 4.13–4.14 Two significant large dwellings.
- 4.15–4.16 Two interesting Arts and Crafts houses.

Thereafter, sections 4.17–4.19 give information on different groups of dwellings rather than individual properties.

The approach we have taken seemed preferable to listing residences in strict chronological order which, practically, would have been difficult to achieve. It is certainly not intended to be an indication that any one building is of more importance than another. All are an equal part of the fascinating evolution of the parish.

4.1 Old Meadows

Old Meadows is situated on the lower part of Bramley Road on the eastern side of the parish.

This area was the main residential part of Silchester in mediaeval times. It was much later, probably in the 17th and 18th centuries, that the centre of the village became the area around the junction of the roads to Bramley, Little London and Pamber Heath.

Old Meadows is a Grade II listed building as are the two barns which stand on the property. Parts of the barns are mediaeval, probably belonging to a dwelling which is believed to have stood on this site before the present house was built in the late 18th century. One of the barns holds several magnificent oak beams which span the whole of the building. The largest beam has a length of 5.5m (18 ft), the maximum which could be obtained from a large oak tree, and has markings I, II, III and IV.

The house was originally called Dormers Farm. There is a clear reminder of its agricultural origins on a window which would originally have been in the kitchen wall. A unique metal structure was installed across the aperture to prevent cows from poking their heads inside!

Dormers Farm was purchased by Henry Newnham in 1826. At that time he was a senior member of the British East India Company who, after a successful career, had



risen to become Commissioner of Revenue. On retirement, he returned to England in 1836 to live in Dormers Farm. He sold all the farm implements and transformed the house into a comfortable residence adorned with Indian embellishments. Additionally, he evidently renamed the property as in the 1851 census it is shown as Bungalow House.

The only remnants of that transformation remaining today are a verandah at the rear of the house and some hints of Mughal decoration above the porch over the front door.

Henry's daughter, Mary Newnham (1826–1909) married Henry Davis of Southampton Row, London on 23 November 1852. They became Mr and Mrs Newnham Davis and eventually owners of Silchester House.

Henry Newnham died in July 1858 and is buried in an imposing tomb in Silchester churchyard.

Above right:
Old Meadows

Below:
Left: Old Meadows
1920s

Right: Listed Barn
at Old Meadows



4.2 Silchester House

Origins

Silchester House, at the junction of Holly Lane and Bramley Road, is a substantial property tracing its origins back to the 1600s when its West Wing was built. It is believed that, prior to this, in Tudor times it was the site of a farmhouse. There is also speculation that at one point it became the manor house during the era when the centre of the village developed in its present location.

The Newnham Davis era

The building was extensively developed in the 1840s and purchased by Henry Newnham Davis and his wife Mary. This residence was intended as their country villa, providing an escape to rural surroundings from the London house they owned at 20 Dorset Square, Chelsea. Indeed, according to Florence Davidson,

Silchester House was originally known simply as *The Villa*. No doubt Mr and Mrs Newnham Davis were attracted to Silchester because it had been the childhood home of Mary, whose father, Henry Newnham, had purchased Old Meadows in 1826. (See 4.1)

Irritated by villagers passing in front of his country home, Henry Newnham Davis converted the public roadway into a private carriage drive. As a result the route to Bramley executed the sharp curve which remains on the modern metalled road.

Henry Davis (as he was called before marriage) was born on 9 September 1826 to Sarah and William Davis, a bookseller of Southampton Row, Bloomsbury, London. He married Mary Newnham (also born in 1826) on 23 November 1852 when they became Mr and Mrs Newnham Davis. Between 1854 and 1866 the couple had no less than nine children, seven boys and two girls.



Silchester house 1912



Nathaniel Newnham
Davis

According to the 1861 and 1871 censuses, Henry Newnham Davis was a non-practising architect making his living from investments. He was obviously a familiar figure in London society. Indeed in 1860 he was the subject of an etching by the renowned American artist James McNeill Whistler who was enjoying a highly productive year in England.

Henry Newnham Davis died on 1 March



Nathaniel Newnham
Davis Grave

1873 aged 47 at his house in Chelsea, leaving an estate of over £50,000 [*approx. £6m*]. In his memory his widow, Mary, commissioned the stained-glass east window above the altar in St Mary the Virgin church.

Mary Newnham Davis continued to spend time both in Chelsea and Silchester. She was apparently a formidable character who came to her country residence for the summer when it was a convenient base for visits to the annual seasonal events at Henley and Ascot. In 1886 she transferred ownership of both Silchester House and the nearby Silchester Cottage to her eldest son, Nathaniel.

In the early years of the 20th century, the aging Mrs Mary Newnham Davis commissioned the architect Norman Evill to design an extension for Silchester House. These works having been completed, he was next tasked with designing two substantial new houses in Silchester. These were intended for occupation by the Mary's younger sons, although by now two had died and Nathaniel was enjoying a bachelor existence in London.

Mary Newnham Davis died in April 1909 and did not live to see work commence on her new commissions. They were completed by 1912, becoming New Timber and The Grange. (See 4.3 and 4.4)

Family members occupied the new dwellings while Nathaniel continued to live in London. Here he mixed with fashionable society and pursued a successful literary career.

Having been born in 1854, Nathaniel Newnham Davis was educated at Harrow and then commissioned in the army, serving in South Africa, China and India. While in South Africa he very narrowly escaped action at the famous encounter with the Zulus at Rorke's Drift. He retired from military life in 1894 at the age of 40, having risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He then became a journalist, working for the *Sporting Times* and other publications, as well as a writer of fiction and a playwright. He was renowned in affluent society as a gourmet food critic, publishing in 1899 *Dinners and Dinners: Where*



Plan of Silchester House and land approx. 1914

and How to Dine in London. The epitome of a bachelor man about town, he patronised all the fashionable establishments. Dining at The Savoy, he made the acquaintance of the famous chef Escoffier, whose bortsch he described as the best soup in the world.

During the First World War Nathaniel Newnham Davis once again offered his services to the army. He was reinstated and given command of a Prisoner of War camp located in Alexandra Palace, north London. During this period of service, he died in his house at Regents Park on 28 May 1917. His funeral took place in London, but his body was brought by train to Reading and then conveyed to Silchester churchyard where he was interred with military honours. Because on his death he was serving in the army, his grave is registered with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

One of Nathaniel's sisters, Ellen, together with her husband Henry Sealy, designed and carved the upright ends of the pew benches in St Mary the Virgin church. These were dedicated to the memory of their mother Mary Newnham Davis. Subsequently, in 1922, the western lancet was created by Stuart G Davis, in memory of Ellen and Henry Sealy. There are also several Newnham Davis family tombs in one area of the churchyard.

A grandson of Mary Newnham Davis, also named Nathaniel, became an eminent churchman. He lived from 1903 to 1966 and served as Bishop of Antigua from 1944 to 1952. Continuing his family's contributions to St Mary the Virgin church, in 1952, on his return from the West Indies, he presented a new chalice and paten (a shallow communion plate).

Pew carving St Mary the Virgin church, dedicated to Mary Newnham Davies



The Thomas Hartley era

Early in the second decade of the 20th century, Silchester House was sold to the Robinson family who added a two-storey extension. After only a short period of occupation they in turn sold the property to the Parkinson family. This family's fortunes were adversely affected by the Wall Street crash forcing them to sell in 1929. However, some members of the Parkinson family continued to reside in Glebe Cottage (subsequently renamed Woodrow).

Silchester House was then purchased by Mr Thomas Hartley, a civil engineer by profession. His father, who died in 1926 and from whom he received a substantial inheritance, had been a wealthy mine owner in Cumberland.

The Hartleys made some significant changes. They built the East Wing which still bears the initials of their names, Thomas and Joan, over the door. Thomas Hartley, who loved music, also organised the creation of a panelled music room where he could conduct his own orchestra.

But perhaps the most noticeable innovation was the construction of a mechanical clock.

This attractive feature was designed and built by Thomas Hartley himself in his workshop. On a rotating platform, a series of figures were

displayed, including Old Father Time together with his wife, son and daughter. These effigies, carved in wood, were discovered by Thomas Hartley in an Exeter antique shop and brought to Silchester to embellish the clock.

Originally Father Time would appear with his family on the quarter hour but then would shake his head and refuse to strike a chime as it was his responsibility to do this only on the hour. Later Mr Hartley added a cockerel and a cuckoo. Every third hour the cockerel would crow and flap its wings while the cuckoo appeared from a casement window, omitting its distinctive call. Unfortunately, the mechanism deteriorated over time so that well before the end of the 20th century it had ceased to function.

When the clock first became operational it used to attract small crowds of sightseers. As a result, the council became concerned that the congregation of people might cause a road accident in Holly Lane. Mr Hartley therefore built a gate in the hedge to permit onlookers to view his mechanical creation.

One such viewer was Michael Knight who, in his memoir, recalls seeing the clock in action. (See 2.23)

Thomas Hartley was an interesting village character. He travelled from Silchester House in a chauffeur driven Rolls-Royce and was widely respected as an authority on clocks. He gave the family name to a street of council houses built near Flex Ditch. Tragedy came to the family in the Second World War with the loss of their son, also called Thomas, whose name appears on the War Memorial.

The Oldland Era

Following the death of Mr and Mrs Hartley, the property was purchased by Mr and Mrs Oldland who moved in with their five children. The West Wing was occupied by Mrs Gwring, Mrs Alison Oldland's mother and also by Jean Gwring, Alison's sister. Jean became a well-known figure in Silchester, serving for many years as Clerk to the Parish Council.

Further improvements were made to the

property including the creation of two new bathrooms. Remarkably for such a large residence there had previously been only one.

Silchester House now became an important feature in village life. Alison Oldland started a Mother and Babies group which met in 'Mrs Hartley's big room'. Having five children of her own, she remembered how difficult life could be for a young mother in a small village. During the last meeting in December Father Christmas would invariably make an impressive entrance, striding down the imposing staircase to hand out presents to the small children. Village mothers who remember these events report that Father Christmas bore an uncanny resemblance to a local resident, although there is some debate as to whether this was Mr Oldland or the family's gardener.

The Oldlands also generously permitted the annual village Guy Fawkes Night celebrations on 5 November to take place in the field behind the house. Annually, The Silchester Association organised an impressive bonfire with a colourful display of fireworks, which became a popular event in the village calendar.

In 1989 Alison Oldland, drawing on her experience as a former lecturer in art history, founded a charity, The Living Paintings Trust. The charity creates relief versions of artworks which can be appreciated by visually impaired adults and children. In recognition of her services for the charity Alison Oldland was honoured with the award of MBE. She remained working actively for The Living Paintings Trust until her death in 2008 aged 92. Her daughter, Camilla still leads the charity.

There was an interesting article in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1995 when Silchester House was next offered for sale. Alison Oldland revealed that shortly after moving in she accidentally set off the chimes on the mechanical clock and was unable to turn them off. A local man promptly visited and, instead of complaining, explained how the clock should be operated.

One neighbour who was seriously bothered by the chimes at night, used to visit before going to bed to switch them off. He would then return

the following morning on his way to work and switch them on again. Later an electronic timing mechanism was installed. Indeed, some Silchester residents fondly remember seeing the clock in operation during the 1980s and enjoying their children's delight at the sight and sound of the mechanical display. However, subsequently age took its toll and the clock ceased to function.

Post 1995

Following the 1995 sale, Silchester House was substantially refurbished by the new owners, Mr and Mrs Cutmore-Scott. A licence to conduct marriages was obtained and the property became an attractive wedding venue. Generously, the Cutmore-Scotts continued to permit 5 November celebrations to take place in the field. Sometimes this provided additional entertainment for guests if a wedding had taken place that day.

Silchester House offered wedding celebrations for over 20 years before the property once again reverted to private ownership.

The Clock Tower
2020



4.3 New Timber

New Timber was the larger of two houses commissioned by Mary Newnham Davis towards the end of the first decade of the 20th century. It is situated in 3 acres of grounds near the centre of the village to the west of the road to Little London, although when first constructed it was surrounded by a considerably larger area of gardens, grounds and meadow.

As befits a grand residence, it also boasted a lodge. This was built with a thatched roof in keeping with other village properties. New Timber Lodge is now a separate residence.

Over the last 100 years New Timber served firstly as an opulent family home, then as a hotel known as The Romans until finally, early in the 21st century, it was transformed into a gated community of luxury residences.

Construction of New Timber started in 1909, the year Mary Newnham Davis died, aged 83. Like the other residence commissioned by her, The Grange, it was designed by the architect Norman Evill. (See 2.22) The builders were Musselwhite & Sapp of Basingstoke who worked simultaneously on both houses.

In distinctive Arts and Crafts style, the property has detailed brickwork, steep roofs and mock half-timbered features holding mullioned bay windows.

*Left: New Timber
early 20th century*

Right: The Romans



Extensive and attractive gardens were integral to the Arts and Crafts style, the well-maintained grounds forming a series of exterior spaces to complement the interior. The house contained several reception rooms, numerous bedrooms and ample accommodation for servants. Up to a dozen men from the village were employed as gardeners.

The initial occupants of the house, a very substantial dwelling, were the 3 youngest surviving sons of Mary Newnham Davis, Alfred, Stanley and Stewart. Members of the Newnham Davis family continued to live in New Timber for nearly forty years until, in 1947, it was sold to a group of entrepreneurs who transformed it into a 25 bedroom hotel and country club.

The grounds were easily large enough to accommodate tennis courts and a swimming pool, both of which were installed as modern amenities by the new owners. This still left ample space for lawns, attractive flower beds and borders.

The hotel changed hands again in 1960 when it was purchased by Zelma Myers. Under her tenure the restaurant became well known for its gastronomic offerings and for its stock of fine wine.

Zelma Myers maintained the highest of standards, transforming the establishment into a well-appointed boutique hotel. She also had some notable idiosyncrasies. Being Jewish and understandably repelled by the Nazi holocaust atrocities, she abhorred anything German. In particular, she refused to stock German wines in her extensive cellar. Similarly, believing that





the Guinness family had been supporters of Hitler, she refused to stock that brand of stout.

Throughout this period the house preserved most of its original internal features. However, a new kitchen was constructed and also an annexe which departed a little from the original Arts and Crafts design.

In 1973 Zelma Myers sold 5 acres of land forming part of the hotel's grounds. This area, which had previously been a large kitchen garden, was purchased by a developer for the construction of several detached houses in the close now known as Romans Field.

Subsequently Zelma Myers sold the hotel together with the remaining grounds and sports amenities to Mr and Mrs Michael Riley who remained proprietors until 1993. During this time, they too maintained the high standards achieved over the preceding decade.

The next owner was Mr Nick Tuthill. He continued to offer comfortable rooms and fine dining. He opened a health club, allowing Silchester residents to purchase visitors tickets to use the swimming pool, tennis courts and other facilities. The hotel also hosted events to mark the 50th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day in 1995.

Following the death of Nick Tuthill, the business became less successful. The hotel was closed in 2009 and the whole property offered for sale at auction. When it failed to reach its reserve price it was acquired by two Newbury businessmen who undertook



an extensive conversion and redevelopment. Substantial interior work was carried out to create the present gated community of eight separate dwellings. Nevertheless, the building as a whole still preserves its exterior Arts and Crafts appearance of Norman Evill's original design.

Top: Romans Hotel and gardens

Above: New Timber Lodge early 20th century

Below: Gates to The Romans



4.4 The Grange

The Grange is situated in Kings Road. It adjoins Silchester Common on two sides, west of Silchester School and faces Benyon's Enclosure.

This dwelling was the smaller of two houses commissioned in 1909 by Mrs Mary Newnham Davis, designed by Norman Evill (See 2.22) and constructed by Musselwhite & Sapp of Basingstoke. At that time Musselwhite & Sapp were held in high regard as builders of large Arts and Crafts mansions.

Like the larger New Timber, The Grange displays an unmistakable Arts and Crafts design. The neat brickwork, steep roofs and mullioned windows are all typical of this style. The bricks themselves were supplied by the Daneshill Brick and Tile Company, Basingstoke, a notable source for craftsman designed bricks used in other Arts and Crafts buildings.

Top: The Grange
1920s

Bottom: The Grange
2023



In true Arts and Crafts practice, the rooms in The Grange were positioned, according to function, to catch the daylight at appropriate times. Additionally, the attractive garden complemented the property.

The first occupant of The Grange was Henry Newnham Davis (1855–1925), the second son of Henry (Snr) and Mary Newnham Davis. He was a solicitor who is recorded in the 1911 census as living at his London residence with his wife Eleanor, daughter Kathleen and four servants. Following the completion of The Grange, he lived there until his death in 1925, leaving an estate worth nearly £23,000 [*approx. £1.1m*].

Thereafter the house had various different owners. At some point in the mid-20th century it was owned by the sister of the comedy actor Lance Percival. It is reported that on one occasion the whole cast of a *Carry On* film visited and carved their initials on one of the beams.

In 1982 The Grange was purchased jointly by John and Michael Burrell, two brothers who occupied the house with their families. The building was divided into two, permitting both families to enjoy the residence independent of each other, living in opposite ends. However, no irreversible alterations were carried out so that before the house was sold again in 2015, it reverted to a single property.

The purchasers were Ian and Laura Alexander who now live in house with their family. They have restored the original layout, removing blocked up fireplaces and reinstating walls, in keeping with the Arts and Crafts style. Many of the original fittings remain in place, including, most notably, the internal doors fashioned from solid oak. Also retained are decorative features and original timbers throughout the house.

As a result, The Grange continues to be enjoyed as an Arts and Crafts country family residence as it was originally in the early 20th century.

4.5 Silchester Cottage

Silchester Cottage, at the junction of Holly Lane and Little London Road, dates from about 1700.

In this era the most populous part of the parish was around the Pound, the area near the junction of Ash Lane and Bramley Road. The construction of Silchester Cottage is an example of the beginning of the gradual development of the modern village centre now located around the grassy areas close to the Calleva Arms.

The triangle of grass in front of the cottage, where Little London Road joins Holly Lane, used to be an important area in village life. It was here that for many years stood Silchester's unique sundial. This was removed in the early 20th century and is now affixed to a wall on the nearby Dial Cottage. (See 4.9)

Silchester Cottage was built as a two-storey dwelling, originally with a thatched roof. It has various outbuildings, including a stable block.



Above: Silchester Cottage 2020

Left: Silchester Cottage pre tarmac road



For a number of years, it was home to the succession of curates who attended to the day-to-day spiritual needs of Silchester's parishioners as, during much of the 18th and 19th century, rectors were frequently absent.

In the days when the village had its own GP, Silchester Cottage was home to Dr Peregrine.

Deeds of the property show that Silchester Cottage was part of an extensive holding of land belonging to Mrs Mary Newnham Davis. She owned not only Silchester House, but also the cottage and various other parcels of land within the village. In 1886, by Deed of Indenture,

Mary Newnham Davis transferred ownership of both Silchester House and Cottage to her eldest son, Nathaniel Newnham Davis.

Nathaniel died unmarried in 1917. Silchester House and other assets in his name were sold, although his brothers continued to live at New Timber and The Grange.

Silchester Cottage remained within the Newnham Davis family until well into the 20th century. In 1945 it was occupied by Stuart G Davis who designed one of the more modern stained-glass windows in St Mary the Virgin church.



4.6 Woodrow

Woodrow is situated next to the allotments alongside Silchester Village Hall.

Originally known as Glebe Cottage, the property can trace its origins back to 1639. The first dwelling was a small cottage, but later another cottage was added although with different floor levels. The outline of these early buildings can still be discerned if the southern wall is observed carefully. Originally the pair of cottages were south facing, looking towards the area now occupied by the Village Hall.

In Victorian times a large side extension was added. Improvements continued throughout the 20th century including the construction of an annexe in 1973.

Woodrow is one of the earliest surviving buildings in the centre of the modern village. When it was constructed it would have been surrounded by Common Land.

These days the only conventional patch of Common is that to the east of the War Memorial. Until the mid-20th century the ubiquitous gorse vegetation covered what are now the cricket and football pitches.

For most of the 20th century Woodrow was occupied by members of the Parkinson family. They had moved out of Silchester House when they hit hard times following the Wall Street crash of 1929. The final Parkinson family member to occupy the house was Mr Desmond Parkinson who inherited it from his mother. She had lived in the property for many years until her death in 1954.

One of Mrs Parkinson's possessions was a Visitors' Book originally kept by the family when they lived in Silchester House. This provides a record of friends and family visiting what must have been an opulent country residence and a useful base for travel to race meetings in Newbury or Ascot.

Also old photographs of the interior of Silchester House show several items of furniture which were subsequently relocated to Woodrow.



Woodrow

Mrs Parkinson (Desmond's mother) was a keen amateur thespian. Together with Mr and Mrs Bramley-Firth of The Old House she encouraged the building of the Village Hall, not least because it provided a stage on which plays could be performed.

The late Mr Desmond Parkinson used to tell a tale about the family's lost fortune. In the early 20th century the family had owned a vast rubber plantation near Kuala Lumpur in what is now Malaysia. Towards the end of his life Desmond took a trip to that country and decided to visit the former Parkinson estate. Instead of finding neat lines of rubber trees he discovered that the entire site was occupied by the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport!

Woodrow 1950s



4.7 The Old Manor House

The Old Manor House stands adjacent to St Mary the Virgin church. Apart from the church, it is the only building inside the walls surrounding the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum. It is a Grade II listed building, whose outbuildings, including a substantial barn, are similarly listed.

The oldest part of the house dates from approximately 1510 to 1520. Here roof beams on what is now the ground floor strongly suggest that the original building consisted of just one large downstairs room with an unusually high ceiling. It is possible that on the first floor, reached by an outside staircase, there were two rooms acting as sitting room and bedroom.

Such is the size of the roof beams that it is reasonable to assume the original house was indeed substantial. It is therefore possible that during the 16th century it was indeed the home of the Lord of the Manor. Prior to that,

during the centuries immediately following the Norman Conquest, a moated building near Clappers Farm was probably the principal residence in the Manor of Silchester. (See 2.6)

The house came into the ownership of Sir Thomas Gardiner when he became Lord of the Manor in 1589. It was transferred to the Dunche family in 1594 when the lordship of the manor became theirs.

In the early 17th century a two and a half storey timber frame extension was added to the west side of the house. This would certainly have enhanced its appearance and made it a fitting residence for Edmund Dunche who was Lord of the Manor at the time of the English Civil War (1642–1651). As Edmund Dunche was a cousin of Oliver Cromwell, it is speculated, although without any supporting evidence, that Oliver Cromwell may have stayed with him in Silchester en route to the siege of Basing House in 1645. (See 2.8)

Further improvements to the house were made during the early 18th century. In



The Old Manor House



The Old Manor
House 1970s

particular, the timber frame of the oldest ground floor section was completely replaced by bricks.

The building appears to have served as a farmhouse over the centuries although whether it continued to be the manor house is debatable. By the 18th century the village was developing around what is now its modern centre and there is speculation that a house on the site of Silchester Hall may have acquired that status.

Following the acquisition of the Manor of Silchester on behalf of the Duke of Wellington in 1828, a tenant farmer lived in the property. It functioned as a farmhouse throughout the 19th century but was eventually converted into three dwellings for estate workers. By the mid-20th century it had become a rather rundown turkey farm and was acquired by Hampshire County Council. In 1979, the property having become totally uninhabitable, the council offered it for sale. Its new owners sympathetically restored



the fabric, transforming the house into an imposing country residence and naming it The Old Manor House.

Listed barn at The
Old Manor House

4.8 Holly House and Holly Tree Cottage

Holly House and Holly Tree Cottage are semi-detached properties situated in Holly Lane.

The deeds of the properties date back to the will of George Goddard in April 1865, although their construction may have taken place much earlier. Described as a *Yeoman and shopkeeper* George Goddard held the freehold of both cottages. They were recognised as numbers 1 and 2 Holly Tree Cottages. Later the first cottage dropped the number 1, to become simply Holly Tree Cottage. Cottage number 2 became Holly House.

Of the two properties, Holly Tree Cottage is substantially unaltered. With its thatched roof, it retains much of the appearance it possessed when first constructed.

Over the years it has changed ownership several times. In the 1960s it was purchased by Alec and Barbara Culbert who made an interesting discovery. Living and working in

Kenya, near Lake Victoria, they were temporary residents until retirement. They then had the time to examine the cottage more closely, discovering that the end wall of the living room possessed a large inglenook fireplace which had been boarded over. Accordingly, they opened it up, restoring their sitting area to its original dimensions.

By contrast the adjoining cottage has been modernised and extended to become Holly House. It was registered as a Grade II listed building in 1984.

The current occupiers of Holly House possess an interesting set of title deeds. The original owner of both cottages, George Goddard, was described as carrying on a trade or business on the premises. It is believed that cottage number 2 (now Holly House) was once a bakery, with the current dining room, adjacent to the main entrance, acting as the shop. The kitchen had always been directly behind this room suggesting that it was conveniently located so that the proprietor



Holly House



Holly Tree Cottage

could attend to domestic duties as well as serving customers.

To the left, there was originally a passageway leading to a coal store. This has since become a curiosity. The lower section is part of Holly House, while the upper section is part of Holly Tree Cottage with its thatched roof extending over it. This is an example of a *flying freehold*: the term used to describe freehold property built over land which does not form part of the property, especially when one property overhangs another.

Although the two original cottages were owned by George Goddard, their occupiers were his sisters, Mary Goddard and Ann Goddard. Following them, the next resident was William Bentham whose occupation was described as shopkeeper. This supports the suggestion that the premises were indeed used as a shop.

Under the terms of George Goddard's will, his property was left entirely to his daughter, Ellen Wareham Goddard. She married firstly David Rogers and then, following his death,

William Staniforth. Their eldest son Robert Staniforth died in Battle Hospital, Reading in December 1956. His address was given as 1 Holly Tree Cottages, Bramley Road, Silchester, which indicates that even by the mid-20th century the renaming had not taken place.

The title deeds indicate several changes of ownership in the second half of the 20th century. Under successive occupiers Holly House was extended with the addition of a second kitchen and sitting room to the rear and two additional bedrooms and a bathroom above. Finally, in 1975 planning permission was obtained for the construction of a further sizeable extension. As a result of these numerous changes Holly House has been much altered and enlarged.

While the two adjoining cottages would have been very similar in George Goddard's day, now in the early 21st century there is a noticeable contrast between them, although both have an equally attractive appearance fronting onto Holly Lane.

4.9 Dial Cottage

Dial Cottage is situated at the junction of Holly Lane and Little London Road.

It is a Grade II listed building, dating from about 1700. Together with other buildings in the vicinity, it provides evidence that by the 18th century, Silchester village centre was developing in this area.

Originally two separate residences, the cottage was occupied by estate workers once it became part of the Wellington Estate in 1828.

Evidence of the property's origins is still visible. The exterior is partly timber framed, while the internal walls are made of wattle and daub. It has two walk-in inglenook fireplaces.

The cottage takes its name from the sundial that was previously mounted on a tall post in the nearby grass triangle. That was subsequently removed and is now sited on the south wall of the cottage.

The sundial in its original position was observed by James Thomson when writing *The Book of Silchester*.

Visiting in 1915, he wrote:

Near the Common, where the Basingstoke Road begins, there stands a tall Sundial of unusual and remarkable construction. The dial plate is placed on top of an octagonal shaped wooden post some 12 inches in diameter by about 69

inches in height. At perhaps 10 or 12 inches from the ground, this pillar has a wider base, on which are hollowed toe-holes. Near the top, a handle is fixed, on the proper side, for short-sized people to grasp when climbing to examine the dial. A bronze plate is also affixed, stating that a dial post (originally made by S Saunders, London) had stood at that spot since AD 1716, and that certain residents had renewed and repaired the post at various times.... The height of the dial on Silchester Common suggests it was used by the passing caravans, permitting the riders, without dismounting, to see where the gnomon cast its shadow.*

Thomson further stated that:

The wooden toe holes round the sundial according to Mr James Goddard (one of the oldest inhabitants of the village) are the remains of what was originally a seat.

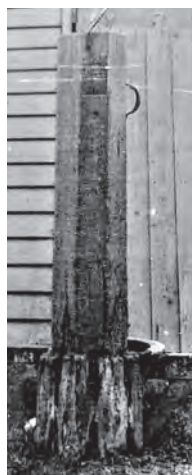
Villagers would gather on this to hear one of their number reading aloud from the weekly newspaper.

He also recorded that James Goddard remembered that near to the sundial stood the whipping post and village stocks. These were in use until 1830. The stocks were eventually dismantled and burnt although some older residents claim they were brought out to

* gnomon: the technical term for the upright rod or wedge on a sundial



Dial Cottage



*Left: The Sundial post as recorded in *The Book of Silchester**

*Middle: The Waterloo Plaque as recorded in *The Book of Silchester**

Right: Sundial on cottage wall

become part of the entertainment in village fêtes until well into the 20th century.

Also affixed to the wall of Dial Cottage is a metal plate recording that the dial post was first erected in 1761, renewed in 1815 in honour of the Duke of Wellington's victory at Waterloo and renewed again in 1871. This is undoubtedly the *bronze plate* observed by James Thomson just over 100 years ago.

There is a third curiosity adorning the outside wall. This is the symbol of a phoenix. Such symbols are not commonly seen on buildings and are a relic of the days before municipal fire brigades were established.

Immediately after the Fire of London a mutual insurance society was established to

offer fire insurance. It became known as the Phoenix Fire Office, named appropriately after the mythical bird which burns itself and then rises from its ashes. At the time Dial Cottage was built, a premium of 30 shillings would insure a property to a value of £100 for seven years. If it caught fire the company's own firemen complete with livery and badges would arrive, but of course they would douse fires only in buildings bearing the phoenix symbol.

It must be speculated as to whether the phoenix symbol was originally affixed to this building. There is no other evidence of liveried fire fighters residing in Silchester and of course in the 18th century there were no telephones to summon them from Basingstoke!



Above: Phoenix Symbol

Left: Dial Cottage 1904

4.10 The Old Stores

The Old Stores is now a private residence just to the west of Whistler's Lane and facing the grassy area in front of the Calleva Arms. It is a classical Georgian building with a symmetrical frontage.

The building served as a village shop for a number of years in the 19th and 20th centuries. The earliest written record comes from 1919 when, at an auction, the property of Mr James Yates (deceased) was offered for sale. It was described as consisting of *The Post Office and dwelling*.

There are records of a slaughterhouse behind the stores which presumably provided meat for sale.

It appears that the property remained within the Yates family and continued to act as the village shop and post office. The next record comes from the estate of Mr William Yates who died on 28 May 1937. His property included the stores and outbuildings described as being freehold with no tithes. Their value was £725 [*approx. £38,000*].



It appears likely that the premises continued as a shop following their purchase by Fanny Shering. She died in 1959, her will including the conveyance of a freehold shop and dwelling house known as The Stores to Alfred Joseph Pratt and Hazel Kathleen Pratt. Alfred later became chairman of Silchester Parish Council.

The Stores ceased to function as a shop in the 1970s. Over the years the Post Office has been located in several different buildings around the village.

Above right: The Old Stores 2020

Right: Silchester Post Office and shop early 20th century



4.11 Vine Cottage

Vine Cottage is situated near the Calleva Arms public house overlooking the village playing fields. It is a Grade II listed building.

The cottage dates from the late 18th century, one of several built during the period when the centre of the village moved westwards. Of brick construction, at its rear the property has a traditional slope of tiles, known as a cat-slide roof, extending over an additional ground floor room. The cottage has retained many of its original features including exposed beams and an inglenook fireplace.

Outside there is a traditional garden in which the well which once supplied the household's water is now a feature.

For many years Vine Cottage was occupied by members of the Goddard family. They have provided a number of interesting historical photographs on their family website: <http://www.jimgoddard.myfreeola.uk/index.html>

The first Goddard to live in Silchester was James. He had been born in Oakley in 1839 but came to Silchester at the age of 15 when apprenticed to his uncle, Ambrose Ham, who carried on the business of carpenter, wheelwright and undertaker. Ambrose Ham was also Clerk at St Mary the Virgin church, a role he eventually relinquished to his nephew James Goddard who also became Sexton. He held office for 51 years, serving five rectors, the Reverends Coles, Twisleton-Fiennes, Langshaw, Hetherington and Adams.

We know from Michael Knight's memoir (See 2.23) that the Goddard family ran an Undertakers business from Vine Cottage in the first half of the 20th century. Indeed, a snippet from the *Hants and Berks Gazette* of June 1903 tells us in rather tongue twisting fashion that *Messrs Goddard, undertakers of Silchester, have now obtained a single horse hearse.*

James Goddard built the bakery and post office at Pamber Heath and a number of the other houses in the area. He also assisted at the excavations on the Roman site carried out

in the early years of the 20th century by the Society of Antiquaries.

When James Thomson visited Silchester while researching *The Book of Silchester* he met Mr James Goddard who was then one of the oldest inhabitants of the village. It was from him that he learnt about the sundial, stocks and whipping post.

Another senior member of the family was Arthur James (AJ) Goddard. He and his son Thomas were the active members of Silchester Cricket Club whose family wagers on the subject of Thomas' match performance were featured in local press stories. (See 2.16)

Another notable family member who lived in Vine Cottage was Nancy (Annie Lottie) Goddard (1903–1985), third child of AJ Goddard. A pupil at the nearby Silchester School, she was befriended by a popular novelist of the early 20th century who paid the fees for her to receive secondary education at Kendrick School in Reading.

The novelist was the Scottish author Amy (Emily Louisa) McLaren (1859–1935). In the

Vine Cottage



years 1903 to 1929 besides writing for *The People's Friend* she published ten novels, the most well-known being *From A Davos Balcony* (1903). It is not known how exactly she made the acquaintance of Nancy Goddard, but clearly her generosity considerably broadened the horizons of her young protégé.

Before her death Nancy recorded her memories which can be heard on the Goddard family website. She recalled that early in the 20th century her father ran a horse-drawn taxi service to Reading and Basingstoke stations. She was not allowed to ride in the taxi as she was not a paying passenger!

Later Nancy became a governess and travelled widely with her employers.

One sister, Winnie (1904–1972) was a cook who, for a time, worked at Cliveden for Lord and Lady Astor. Later she moved back to Vine Cottage and worked at the Huntley and Palmer biscuit factory in Reading. Her brother, Stephen (1908–1991) served in the Merchant Navy during the Second World War. Some of his memories and an extract from his wartime diaries are included on the family website.

4.12 Culham's Farmhouse

Culham's Farmhouse sits on a corner between Little London Road and Dukes Ride. Its imposing brick chimneys tower above neighbouring properties and are clearly visible from a distance.

For many centuries a farmhouse existed on this site, surrounded by the fields providing its livelihood. The original house, built in about 1500, was a large half-timbered Tudor construction with distinctive brick chimneys, solid, ornate, and typical of the era. There are no recorded details of early tenants but through the 18th century it was occupied by the Cullom family and acquired the name Cullom's Farm.

In 1832 the farm was purchased by the Wellington Estate and renamed Lower Farm. At the same time, the estate purchased Upper Farm, now called Catthawlands Farm. That farm still exists on the edge of the village, adjacent to the road from Silchester to Mortimer and is now owned by the Englefield Estate.

The Tudor farmhouse building was in very poor condition in 1832. After an unfavourable dilapidation survey, it was agreed that it should be demolished and replaced with a contemporary dwelling. The work was overseen by the building's tenant, a member of the Goddard family of Silchester, who cultivated the farm's land for much of the 19th century.

The rebuilding was carried out between 1838 and 1840, using brick. It was decided to reproduce the distinctive chimneys of the original house even though the bulky stacks protruded well above the roofline. As a result, the building has a slightly top-heavy appearance. In addition, a range of brick outbuildings was constructed to produce a classical Georgian square around the farmyard.

After the rebuilding, the name was changed to Goddard's Farm. It later reverted to Cullom's Farm before being modified to Culham's Farm.

The farmhouse remained as the centre of a

Members of the Goddard family outside Vine Cottage





Culham's Farmhouse
2000

working farm for almost 100 years. Then in 1933 Percy Butler became the tenant and ran a business as coal merchant and haulier. (In his memoir of life in Silchester in the 1930s Michael Knight recalls the coal merchant as Charlie Butler). The venture was apparently prosperous. In 1944 its assets included two horses, one cart, one motorcar and three lorries.

With no farmer in residence, most of the farmland was subsumed back into the Wellington Estate, leaving 6.5 acres surrounding the farmhouse.

Following the Second World War, the Wellington Estate modernised the farmhouse. The property's water was supplied from a well within its grounds. Formerly it was drawn using a hand pump, but now a Hawkes Colonial Pump was installed which conveyed water up to the galvanised tank in the roof of the house. This antiquated tank still exists, although, as the house now benefits from modern plumbing, it is no longer in use.

Significant repairs were carried out to the distinctive chimneys. Their ongoing maintenance and preservation have subsequently become important obligations imposed upon successive owners.

In 1948 the tenancy of Culham's Farmhouse passed to 'Sooty' Freestone, who continued to carry on the coal merchant's business.

Over the following 20 years, due to lack of maintenance, the property deteriorated badly. Together with the surrounding 6.5 acres of land, it was purchased in 1969 by Basingstoke District Council (BDC) who intended to demolish it and use the cleared area for council housing. As an inducement to vacate the property, Mr Freestone was granted a plot of land to the south of the village. He was also permitted to retain all the bricks from a demolished barn. These he cleaned by hand for use in the construction of a house named Rampiers on his newly acquired land. (See 3.14)

All the outbuildings, apart from the farm



Culham's Farmhouse
2023

office and a 5-bay cart shed, were demolished. However, as plans for the new housing development were taking longer than originally anticipated, BDC installed a new temporary tenant. When he left in 1972 complaining of damp, the property was boarded up.

Prior to the tenant's departure, several local residents became determined to resist the demolition, realising that the loss of Culham's Farmhouse would deprive the village of a significant landmark. They campaigned to have it designated a listed building. This irritated BDC who, in opposing the listing, at one point described the property as *the ugliest house in Hampshire*.

Despite the local authority's objection, the listing campaign proved successful, a decision being taken on 15 December 1972 to grant Culham's Farmhouse Grade II listed status. Although this prevented its demolition, the property remained empty and boarded up for the following five years. Sadly, over this period it suffered a degree of vandalism.

Eventually, in 1977, unable to demolish a Grade II listed building, the local authority, by now Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (B&DBC) offered it for sale at auction as a semi-derelict house. Most of the remaining land surrounding it was used to build the nearby Hydes Platt and Hartley's estates.

A successful bid for the farmhouse and grounds was made by local builders, the Francis Brothers. They began the process of restoring the property which by then was in a very poor condition. They repaired the roof and resolved the damp problem. They also sold off the grounds which had come with the building to provide plots for the construction of two houses, Prospect House and Brookfields.

Within two years Culham's Farmhouse was again sold, the new owners inheriting an obligation to complete the renovation. This included rebuilding the eastern chimney stack which had collapsed while the property was empty and deteriorating. Unfortunately, the owners were unable to find the wherewithal to carry out the work and were threatened with legal action by B&DBC. The *Basingstoke Gazette*, having taken a close interest in the renovation, ran a headline in May 1981 proclaiming *Major Facelift at Historic Farm*.

The owners then pleaded with B&DBC for more time to carry out the work. This prompted a further headline: *Plea for Patience from Owners of 'Ugliest House'*.

Since that time there has been a succession of owners each of whom have gradually made improvements to the property. All of these have significantly added to its aesthetic appeal. Indeed a 1995 *Property Gazette* carried a headline which gave a resounding accolade: *Ugliest House becomes a Gem*.

Culham's Farmhouse remains a private residence. It is now well maintained and lovingly cared for, its chimney stacks still a prominent feature in the southerly part of the village centre.

4.13 The Old House

The Old House sits at the end of a long private drive off Bramley Road. It is a fine example of a Queen Anne dwelling having been built in about 1702/1703 as a prestigious residence for the Rectors of Silchester. It is a Grade II listed building, set on a rise and surrounded by gardens.

In her papers Florence Davidson notes that parish records refer to the Rectory being *rebuilt*. It is therefore assumed that for many decades, if not centuries, Rectors of Silchester had occupied a residence on this site, no traces of which now remain.

During the course of the 18th century, the rebuilt Rectory was occupied by five successive rectors. The first of these was Robert Betham, rector from 1698 to 1719, who met a rather grisly end. He was the tutor of the fifth Viscount Ikerrin, to whom there is a memorial in St. Mary the Virgin church. In 1712 Viscount Ikerrin died aged 14, apparently murdered in London and flung into the Fleet Ditch. Seven years later in 1719 the body of Robert Betham himself was found in the very same location. There is a suspicion that he was murdered, particularly as a highwayman later made a gallows confession to the deed. However, Florence Davidson's researches unearthed a London newspaper which blamed a defect in the Fleet Ditch rails for Robert Betham's accidental fall. Whatever may have occurred, this Rector of Silchester met an untimely end, leaving a widow and a large family.

One of Robert Betham's children was his son, Edward, born in Silchester and baptised in St Mary the Virgin church on 17 November 1709. He was therefore 10 years old on the death of his father. Subsequently Edward became a man of learning, having been educated at Eton College and King's College, Cambridge. He became a fellow of King's College in 1731 and, for a time, college bursar. Having entered holy orders, he was appointed to the living of Greenford in Middlesex where in 1780 he founded a school. Edward Betham

was renowned for his generosity towards causes he loved, having donated £2,000 [*approx. £275,000*] to help maintain the botanical garden at Cambridge and £700 [*approx. £100,000*] to erect a marble statue of Henry VI in Eton college. His name lives on in Eton College as the statue's inscription shows him as donor.

Robert Betham was followed as rector by Richard Taylor. In the five years of his incumbency, he was responsible for creating the pond in the Rectory grounds, constructing it on the site of an old spring. Florence Davidson records that the spring was well known in the parish as its waters were said to be a cure for sore eyes.

Next, in 1726, John Paris became rector. He was a senior fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and is commemorated by a monument in Saint Mary the Virgin church. He spent most of his time away from Silchester, employing numerous curates over the period of his rectorship. Nevertheless, he was munificent. Besides leaving a substantial bequest to permit the parish to commission more church bells, he also left £20 [*approx. £3,000*] to purchase *four or five cows that give milk and those to be given as far as they go one cow to one family the poorest most numerous and such as shall want it most*.

John Paris was succeeded by Jonathan Shipley (1714–1788). He was 29 when he became Rector of Silchester, at the same time becoming Rector of Sherborne St John, some



The Old House



Bishop Shipley

5 miles away. He was very well connected, having married one of Queen Caroline's maids of honour, a niece of the Earl of Peterborough. (Queen Caroline was wife of King George II who reigned from 1727 to 1760). John Paris became Bishop of Llandaff in 1769 and subsequently Bishop of St Asaph. However, like many other clergymen of the time, he was an absentee, living mostly in a large house situated in Twyford (Hants). As Bishop of St Asaph, his portrait was painted by the renowned Sir Joshua Reynolds. Several engravings taken from the portrait are held in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery.

The next two incumbents and occupants of the Rectory were Thomas Powers and James Brownlow. Rector Brownlow was followed by perhaps the most notable clerical occupant of the property. This was Rev John Coles (1787–1865) who became Rector in 1812 at the age of 25 and remained in office for 53 years until his death in 1865. During this time he made a significant impact on Silchester.

John Coles, a wealthy man, spent much of his time away from the parish. He kept a London residence and possessed sufficient means to make various land purchases in Silchester. He was married twice. His first wife was Mary Ann Goodhew Rogers who

bore him a son and daughter. Following her death, in 1844 he married Lucy Harrington (1795–1857), a well-connected widow.

The new Mrs Coles held a number of properties in London which paid substantial rents, augmenting the income of herself and her husband. When Lucy Coles died in 1857, the rental income should have reverted to her family. As it was, Rector Coles continued to employ bailiffs to collect the tenants' payments which he retained. Legal proceedings having been commenced by Lucy's family, a writ was issued for his arrest. However, he died in 1865 before it could be executed.

It appears that Rector Coles' financial fortunes had worsened considerably towards the end of his life. He died insolvent with the threat of imprisonment for bankruptcy looming. The assets of his estate were subsequently auctioned to meet his debts.

After his arrival in Silchester, John Coles purchased Gunners Farm, adjacent to the Rectory. This consisted of a farmhouse, including a Malthouse used for brewing, and approximately 80 acres of land. The farmhouse was subsequently demolished and became the site of Silchester Hall.

In 1839 Rector Coles provided land to build the public house in Silchester then known as The Crown. He was apparently irritated by people crossing his grounds and congregating in the nearby malthouse to consume local ale. An expedient solution was the construction of an alternative establishment. (See 3.6)

He was also responsible for starting a Dame school in the village which became redundant following the establishment of Silchester School in 1844.

By his first marriage, John Coles had a son who became famous in naval circles. Cowper Phipps Coles was born in 1819, seven years after his father became Rector of Silchester. His birthplace was apparently Tunbridge Wells in Kent and it is not known if he ever lived in the Rectory, although James Thomson in *The Book of Silchester* repeats the suggestion that he might have indulged his sailing interests by

launching model ships on the Rectory pond. This is corroborated by Florence Davison who records that *Old Goddard helped him to make models ... in his shed on the Common and they used to sail them on the Rectory pond.*

Presumably *Old Goddard* was one of the Goddard brothers of Vine Cottage. (See 4.11)

Having joined the Royal Navy at the age of 11, Cowper Coles made rapid progress, attaining the rank of captain in February 1856. Throughout his career he was interested in naval design and by 1870 had drawn up plans for a turret ship (a warship whose guns were not static but mounted on revolving turrets). Unfortunately, the vessel, named *The Captain*, proved to be top heavy. It sank on its first voyage during a storm in the Bay of Biscay on 7 September 1870 with the loss of 480 lives including that of its designer who by then had become Captain Cowper Phipps Coles, CB, RN. The disaster is commemorated on a plaque in St Paul's Cathedral.

According to Florence Davidson, Rector Coles' son by his second marriage was rather more disreputable. Her Reading Library manuscript records:

One of his sons, Henry, used to act as his father's agent and collect his rents and lives in a cottage that had belonged to his old nurse and was known as a wild reckless man who sank to the rank of the villagers among whom he lived and was the leader of all the idle lads in the parish.

The cottage referred to is what is now Woodrow. (See 4.6)

John Coles was followed as rector by the wonderfully named The Reverend and Honourable Wingfield Stratford Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes. He was the first rector to be presented to the living of Silchester by the Duke of Wellington, Rector Coles having been installed prior to 1828 when the first Duke of Wellington became Lord of the Manor of Silchester. (As the first Duke died in 1852, Rev Coles outlived him by 13 years.)

WS Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes was the



fourth son of the 16th Baron Saye and Sele. He was born on 1 May 1834 in the village of Adlestrop, Gloucestershire and educated at New College Oxford. There he was a noted cricketer, playing in first class games for the *Gentlemen of England*. He then entered the church becoming Rector of Silchester in 1865 before leaving in 1880 to become Rector of Milton Keynes.

The Old House 1920s

Having fathered five children, he was the great-great-grandfather of the actors Ralph and Joseph Fiennes. One of his brothers was the great-great-grandfather of the explorer Sir Ranulph Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes, noted for numerous expeditions and being the first person to cross the entire length of Antarctica on foot.

We have Rev Wykeham-Fiennes to thank for the straight, unmetalled lane that runs to the north of the Rectory grounds. For over 150 years the path towards the Roman town and the church had followed the line of the Rectory's drive before bending to join the Drove. Possibly Rector Wykeham-Fiennes was more permanently in residence than his predecessors, as it appears that he disliked his garden being used as a thoroughfare. Sponsored by the Duke of Wellington, a Private Act of Parliament was passed, which

had the effect of extinguishing the right of way and creating the lane parallel to the boundary of the property.

Despite the restriction of access, the Rectory remained an important building in village life. A Sunday school was held on the steps in the entrance hall or even outside on the lawn if summer weather permitted.

Rector Wykeham-Fiennes was also responsible for a substantial restoration of the church. In researching her manuscript Florence Davidson had access to letters sent by him once he had become Rector of Milton Keynes. Referring to the chancel screen he wrote:

The mutilated and beautiful screen was made good by Ambrose Ham. Old Ambrose is long ago dead and interred at Bramley. He was rather a character, a splendid workman but not always as temperate as he should have been.

Rector Wykeham-Fiennes did not have a good opinion of his parishioners. In another letter he wrote::

The people of Silchester were somewhat wild and there were continual leakages from Pamber and Tadley, both lawless places.

Alec Waugh and family



Thomas Langshaw became Rector in 1880. It was during his incumbency that Silchester lost its pound for stray animals near the junction of Bramley Road and Ash Lane, apparently on his initiative.

The last rector to occupy the building was Rev Edward Charles Hetherington who officiated at the unveiling of Silchester War Memorial. In 1923 the church authorities commissioned the construction of a new Rectory in Arts and Crafts style situated in Bramley Road. This was a more modest dwelling, perhaps better suited to a 20th century incumbent living less like a peripatetic gentleman and being more closely involved in the day-to-day life of the parish.

In the same year the Queen Anne building was sold to Mr Charles Bramley-Firth. He was a member of a well-known Sheffield cutlery manufacturing family from whom his wealth was acquired. He renamed the residence The Old House and made significant improvements to the grounds, employing no less than nine gardeners. He oversaw the planting of vast swathes of daffodil bulbs which continue to present a colourful display each spring.

Mr Bramley-Firth was responsible for the building of a number of cottages on the northern boundary of the property where he accommodated his gardeners and other domestic servants. He also took an active interest in the life of Silchester. He became honorary secretary of Silchester Cricket Club and was a prime mover behind the building of the Village Hall, donating the plot on which it stands.

The next occupants of The Old House, Mr and Mrs Alec Waugh, arrived in 1935, bringing a famous literary name to Silchester. Alec Waugh (1898–1981) was a very successful novelist having written a bestseller in 1917 entitled *The Loom of Youth*. However, his career was later eclipsed by that of his younger brother, Evelyn Waugh (1903–1996), author of *Brideshead Revisited*, *Scoop*, the Second World War trilogy *Sword of Honour* and other well-known works.

The Waughs changed the name of the house to Edrington. This was the name of the South Australian town where Alec's second wife, Joan Chirnside, who he had married in 1932, had grown up. It in turn took its name from a small town in Scotland. Although the name was later changed back to The Old House, Edrington survives as the name of the lane created at the request of Rector Wykeham-Fiennes. The dwellings built by Mr Bramley-Firth have also retained the name Edrington Cottages.

Alec Waugh actively participated in village life. He was a keen cricketer and played many games for Silchester Cricket Club.

After hostilities broke out in 1939, Joan Waugh returned to Australia while Alec joined the intelligence services. The house was then used as an orphanage.

Joan Waugh returned later in the 1940s and occupied the house until her death in 1969. By then she had become estranged from Alec who spent much of his time out of the country.

Unfortunately, during the post-war years as Joan Waugh aged, the house fell into a state of disrepair. Although it was in very poor condition, it was put up for sale on her death and purchased by Mr and Mrs Michael Jurgens. They determined to restore the property and engaged the assistance of architects. Extensive work was carried out both to make the structure safe and preserve its appearance.

A notable discovery occurred in the lounge. It was thought the walls were thickly plastered, but on closer examination it was realised that the surface was wooden and covered in numerous layers of paint. Once these were stripped away some fine panelling was revealed. It was dated to about 1760 and is similar to panelling installed in the Old Rectory in Bramley at about the same time.

Mr Michael Jurgens was chairman of the Rhododendron and Magnolia group of the Royal Horticultural Society. He took great interest in the grounds of the house carefully tending an extensive collection of rare and



Alec Waugh in 1937

beautiful rhododendrons and azaleas. Many of these plants continue to flourish, making a colourful and fragrant display in spring.

Following the death of Michael Jurgens, his wife moved from Silchester. The house was sold again and remains a private residence.

Edrington Cottages



4.14 Silchester Hall

Silchester Hall is a large Victorian country house situated in private grounds off Bramley Road. As the crow flies, it is about 300m south of The Old House which was originally the Rectory, and perhaps owes its existence to a transaction made early in the 19th century by Rev John Coles when he purchased the neighbouring farmland.

Following the death of Rector Coles in 1865, his estate was sold by public auction to clear his debts. The farmhouse and land were purchased by Captain Ernest Boteler Lloyd of Holland Park, London. Captain Lloyd was formerly an officer in the Nottinghamshire Borderers regiment. He is named in the 1863 publication *The Rules and Regulations of the Conservative Club with a List of Members* as a club member, the total membership being limited to 1,200.

The farmhouse itself, possibly by now in a poor state of repair, was demolished. In its place Silchester Hall was constructed. This imposing country residence, built of yellow London stock brick, was designed to replicate Captain Lloyd's London home. The oldest parts of the building are its vaulted cellars which were probably part of the original malthouse closed down by Rector Coles following the opening of The Crown.

The 1871 census data shows that Ernest Boteler Lloyd and his wife were living at Silchester Hall, a very large building for two people. Also resident in the servants' quarters were a coachman, another servant, a lady's maid, a housemaid and an under housemaid.

The accommodation included dining rooms, smoking rooms and withdrawing rooms. At the rear were smaller rooms occupied by servants. Upstairs, the house possessed 12 bedrooms and a box room, but no bathrooms. This reflects the approach to personal hygiene in Victorian times. Hot water would have been carried by servants to be poured into washstands in the bedrooms. Perhaps occasionally more extensive washing was undertaken utilising the hip bath discovered years later in the attic.

Originally the house was reached by a drive that began south of what today are Silchester Hall Cottages. A subsidiary drive led past the stable block and gave access to the kitchen quarters. Today this drive is the only access.

Captain Lloyd was apparently unpopular with his neighbour, who from 1865 to 1880 was Rector WS Twisleton Wykeham-Fiennes. In correspondence Rev Wykeham-Fiennes complained that in purchasing the private property of Rector Coles, Captain Lloyd also *tried to filch with his purchase a bit of the Glebe*. In other words, there was an attempted encroachment



Silchester Hall front



Silchester Hall front
1930

on the grounds of the Rectory which, as glebe land, were legally owned by the church.

On the death of Captain Lloyd in 1894, Silchester Hall was purchased by Commander HGW Thorold. He died in 1906 but his widow, Lorna, lived in Silchester Hall for over 40 years. She was responsible for constructing a water garden, the stones of which are perhaps the last items of masonry to be removed from the Roman site. According to Florence Davidson she also created an archery ground.

The Thorolds were responsible for extensive tree planting. Numerous species were introduced, including oak, ash, whitebeam, cypress and monkey puzzle trees.

On one notable occasion in the 1920s a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was staged in the grounds of Silchester Hall with many villagers in the cast.

During the Second World War (1939–45) Silchester Hall acted as a Red Cross depot.

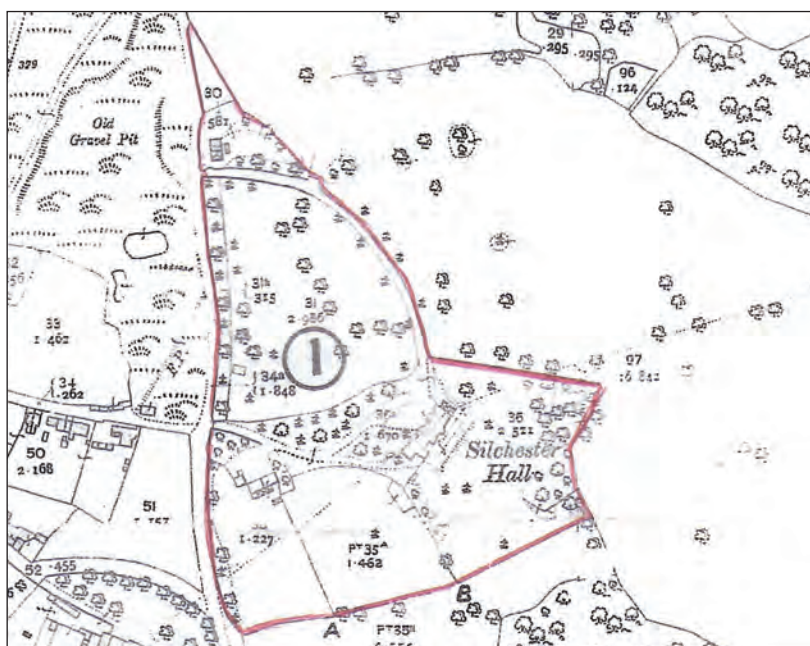
When Mrs Thorold died in 1946, her son, Guy Thorold, sold the house and grounds to the Wellington Estate. Then in 1953 the Estate sold the Hall and 8.7 acres to Mr Richard Gill. The remaining acreage was sold as farmland.

Mr Gill divided the house into three parts, literally from ground to garret. The garden was also divided but into unequal and irregularly shaped plots. Mr Gill converted the stable

block into the present Coach House and built four houses and two bungalows in the former grounds fronting Bramley Road.

Over the years there have been many changes of occupation of the three Silchester Hall units. Perhaps, the most well-known owners were Mr and Mrs Jowett who lived in West Silchester Hall. Mrs Jenny Jowett was a renowned botanical artist and a founder member of the Society of Botanical Artists. She died in 2019.

Plan of Silchester Hall
and grounds
c.1914



4.15 Macartneys

Macartneys is an attractive 'Arts and Crafts' House situated on the edge of Silchester Common opposite the Methodist Church on the corner next to the Soke Road junction.

The present house was designed and built by Sir Mervyn Macartney (1853–1932), who in 1895 bought a pair of fire damaged cottages on a plot of land next to Kings Road. Earlier records indicate that the operator of the windmill which existed on the site of what is now the Methodist church lived in a cottage in this location. As Macartney's purchase was nearly 60 years after the demolition of the derelict windmill, any connection with this activity had presumably been well severed by the end of the 19th century.

Sir Mervyn Macartney demolished the existing buildings, replacing them with what he called a *country cottage* which he intended to use *for weekends and the holiday month*, naming it Rosebank. It is said that Sir Mervyn entered the plans he had drawn up into a Royal Institute of British Architects competition which required that a home and garden be

designed for under £800. Rosebank, which cost £760, was the winner.

The house is constructed of brick, with the upper storey clad in tarred weather boarding. Two of its rooms possess unusual ceilings. In one bedroom a pentagonal ceiling was designed to maximize air supply, while the drawing room holds an interesting barrel-vaulted ceiling. This room was raised five steps above ground level to provide a good view of the garden and make room for a cellar.

Macartney later purchased Fir Cottage and Rosemary Cottage adjacent to the house and also purchased land from the Benyon estate. These additions made Rosebank a sizeable property and, following the demolition of the two cottages, facilitated development of an attractive garden, in keeping with the Arts and Crafts concept. A well-preserved cottage, thatched until the early 1960s, is situated within the garden. This small dwelling was occupied by Sir Mervyn's gardener, who reportedly, raised seven children within it.

The garden is a notable feature of the property. Central to the thinking of Arts and Crafts designers was a reverence for nature combined with the belief that a garden should be viewed as an extension of the house. Accordingly, the garden at Rosebank was laid out in compartments like a succession of outdoor rooms. There are formal areas exuberantly planted to appear less contrived, a water feature, corridors of shade leading to heather and woodland and also carefully designed plots for growing fruit and vegetables.

Gardens of this time also provided space for enjoying sport. Sir Mervyn constructed a bowling green and a tennis court. The bowling green remains unaltered but the tennis court, in a different part of the garden, was sold to permit the construction of Silchester Telephone Exchange which was opened on 28 March 1929.

The garden was featured in Lawrence Weaver's *Small Country Houses of Today* (1910) where it was described as a *pleasance in a wood, unsophisticated for all its skilful design*.

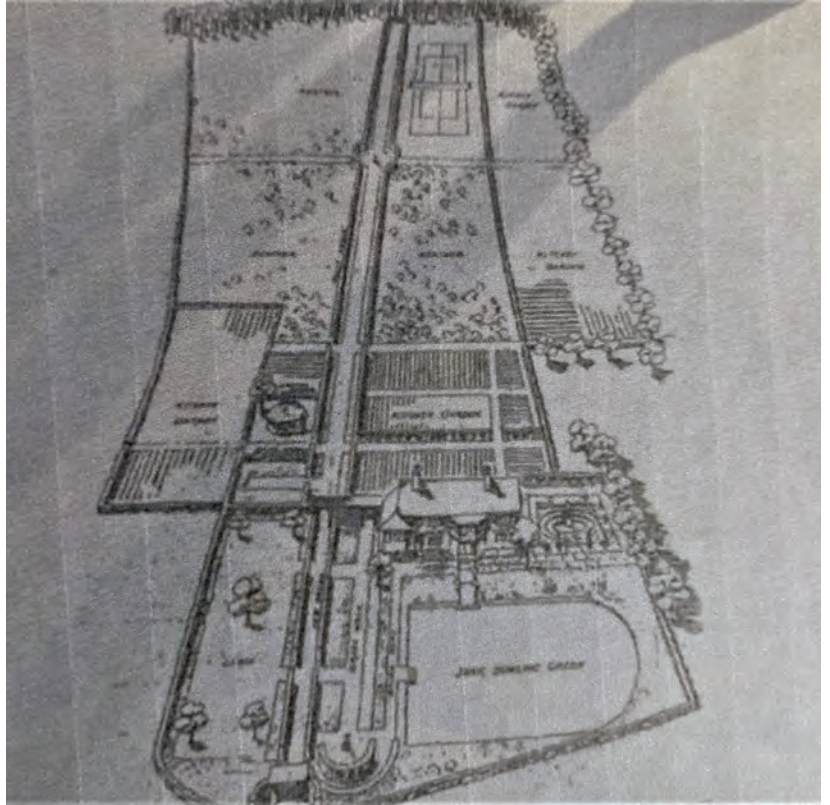
Macartneys



Sir Mervyn Macartney enjoyed an extremely successful career as an architect. After graduating from Oxford University in 1877, he became a pupil of Richard Norman Shaw, a leading proponent of the Arts and Crafts movement. In 1882 he began his own architectural practice, attracting a steady flow of commissions for houses in southern England. He designed two houses in Woolhampton and also some of the buildings at Bradfield College.

But the pinnacle of his career came with his appointment as surveyor to St Paul's Cathedral. Having identified some material deterioration, he was responsible for restructuring the dome. As a result, he was lauded as *the saviour of St Paul's* and rewarded with a knighthood.

Sir Mervyn Macartney's house in Silchester continued to be called Rosebank until after his death in 1932, when it was changed to Macartneys in his memory. This attractive Arts and Crafts building continues to be occupied as a private residence, while the name Rosebank continues in existence as that of a small adjacent cottage.



Macartneys Garden
Plan 1909



Macartneys 1920s

4.16 Heathercote House

Heathercote House is situated on the edge of Silchester Common to the south of the Methodist church.

It is known that cottages existed on this spot from the mid-18th century as a rafter from one of them was later incorporated into Heathercote House. This occurred when the present house was built in the early 20th century. As the rafter bears the date 1740, we have a clear indication of the age of the original dwellings.

The site was purchased in 1909 by Mr John Challoner Covington Smith. As detailed below, he was a learned gentleman with many interests. In public life he was known as J Challoner Smith.

The 1909 acquisition was extensive:

- The property which is now Heathercote consisted of two separate cottages purchased from a Mr Payne for £625.
- The neighbouring Oak Tree Cottage, consisting of two dwellings was bought from Mrs Newnham Davis of Silchester House for £390.

- The adjacent Heath Cottages were purchased from a Mr Peamen for £550.

The two cottages acquired from Mr Payne were incorporated into the new residence, originally named Calleva, creating a beautiful, substantial and well-proportioned home.

Building was completed in 1910. There is no record of the architect, although the property is unmistakably an outstanding Arts and Crafts building, showing features typical of that movement. It boasts a well-defined triangular roof line, hanging tiles, distinctive brickwork and elegant carpentry. Of particular note are the fine leaded windows and oak doors. It predates two other Arts and Crafts houses, The Grange and New Timber, both designed by Norman Evill.

Heathercote House bears a resemblance to the nearby Macartneys, now named after its architect, Sir Mervyn Macartney. There is no evidence to link the design of Heathercote House to either Norman Evill or Mervyn Macartney, but, given the status and influence of J Challoner Smith, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Mervyn Macartney may have had some input.



Heathercote House



Heathercote House
1911

Mr Challoner Smith and his wife Blanche took up residence in Silchester in 1910. Prior to that they had lived in Richmond, near London, and Whitchurch.

By profession, Mr Challoner Smith was a senior official in the Probate Registry at Somerset House. He possessed a scholarly interest in the past, becoming a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (FSA). In a publication of 1892 entitled *Will Registers of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1384 to 1840* which he co-authored, he is described as Superintendent of the Literary Department of the Probate Registry, Somerset House, London.

The move to Silchester enabled Mr Challoner Smith to continue the active pursuit of one of his interests. As a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, who organised the Silchester excavations from 1890 to 1909, he was a superintendent on the Roman site. It was therefore highly appropriate that he should name his new house Calleva. He installed an impressive stone carved nameplate, still visible today, insisting that *emphasis should be on the final vowel please!*

It is known that Mr and Mrs Challoner

Smith employed two live-in servants at Calleva. One came with them from London while the other was from Silchester. They were visited by James Thomson in 1916 while he was researching *The Book of Silchester*, in which he described the house as *the quaint bijou residence*.

J Challoner Smith was author of several publications. Besides the work referred to above, in 1887 he had also published a book entitled *Pedigree of the Family of Biscoe*. Beneath the title he is described as Corresponding Member of New England Historic Genealogical Society, and of Essex Archaeological Society. In 1903, doubtless drawing on his professional background, he edited a publication for the Surrey Parish Register Society on *The Parish Registers of Richmond*. While living at Calleva he authored *Vicars of Bramley 1316–1916*, a copy of which is held in The Vyne library and, according to the Worldcat website listing library catalogues, in 1919 he was responsible for the older portion of *Monumental Inscriptions in St. Cuthbert's Churchyard Edinburgh*.

Several photographs of the early 20th century excavations on the Calleva Atrebatum

Heathercote House
from the Common
early 20th century



site taken by J Challoner Smith are held in Reading Museum. It is evident that he was also an acquaintance of Florence Davidson who, when she stayed with her sister at Cole Byron in Pamber Road, was one of his closest neighbours. Indeed, one of his photographs is included within her papers held by Reading Library.

Mr and Mrs Challoner Smith enjoyed a long residence in Silchester. John died in 1928 after which Blanche remained in Calleva until her death in 1938. They are buried in the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin in an impressive tomb.

Their house was then purchased by Mr and Mrs Huntingdon Whiteley who moved to Silchester from South Kensington. They named the property Seven Wells, remaining in residence until 1966.

In 1955 the Huntingdon Whiteleys purchased a parcel of land from the Wellington Estate, establishing a proper tarmac drive running from the house and its various out-buildings, past the Methodist church to Pamber Road, just as we see it today.

Over succeeding years there were several other changes of ownership, the property reverting to the name of the original cottages and becoming Heathercote House in 1972.

In outward appearance and layout, the house is much the same as when completed in 1910. However, internally there have been various modernisations and improvements. The garden created in 1910 was upgraded in the 1980s but apart from this remains virtually unchanged.

4.17 The Lovegrove Gardens Area

Lovegrove Gardens is situated on the edge of Silchester Common west of the Calleva Arms. Set slightly back from Pamber Road, it is almost opposite Silchester School playing fields. Through the middle years of the 20th century this area was the site of Lovegrove Garage, one of two garages in Silchester.

Slightly to the east of Lovegrove Gardens can be found Yew Tree Cottage. Just beyond this property is the childhood home of Michael Knight, the cottage named Heathcote. (See 2.23)

In his memoir Michael Knight recalls the garage next door to the house where he grew up. It was firstly owned by Sid Lovegrove, although later his nephew, Sonny, carried on the business. The Lovegroves also owned coaches, which they hired out, and organised Sunday excursions.

The garage, which offered car repairs and sold petrol, was fronted by a showroom with workshops behind. During the 1990s it was sold, having ceased trading some years earlier.

The premises were demolished and replaced with a new development of houses around a large area of gravel which had formerly been part of the extensive hardstanding area holding vehicles. This development became Lovegrove Gardens, taking its name from the garage.

The nearby Yew Tree Cottage was listed Grade II in 1984. At that time it was an early 19th century cottage with a distinctive thatched roof.



Lovegrove Gardens



Unfortunately, following a devastating fire shortly after the turn of the 2000 millennium, the property had to be completely demolished. It was then rebuilt using modern materials but retaining the early 19th century appearance.

The rebuilding was not without controversy. When completed, the roof was higher than it had been on the original cottage. The planning authority intervened, requiring the lowering of the new roof to comply with the original plans.

The earlier cottage was famous for its topiary garden. It received an oblique mention in *The Book of Silchester* by James Thomson. The author, visiting in 1924, gave the following details of properties situated near The Crown (as The Calleva Arms was then named):

... the wheelwright, smithy and a garage are close by and a little further on there is a thatched cottage where, in the front garden, there are several quaintly trimmed trees, one of which is fancifully shaped like a peacock.

The lady who lived in Yew Tree Cottage also possessed a carefully tended cottage garden. She gave piano lessons and sweet music could often be heard through her open cottage door.

The property still retains its attractive historic appearance, although nowadays it is equipped with modern conveniences and heating, making it far more comfortable than its 19th century predecessor.

The business operated by the Lovegrove family was not the only garage in Silchester. Another garage was situated near the junction



Left:: Yew Tree Cottage 2000

Right: Yew Tree Cottage 2022

of Pamber Road and Soke Road. For many years it was known as Griffin's Garage, after the family which owned it. This business ceased trading at the end of the 20th century. The premises were sold to a company which specialised in the restoration and sale of classic Mercedes cars. Petrol sales ended, pumps and storage tanks were removed and in their place a modern showroom was constructed. In turn, this business ceased trading in the autumn of 2022.

Lovegrove Garage early 20th century



4.18 Farms in the Parish of Silchester

From time immemorial farming has been the main economic activity of the parish of Silchester. This changed gradually over the course of the 20th century and dramatically in the 1970s when a large area of new housing was built.

Although this development brought an influx of commuters from the 1960s onwards, the parish of Silchester retains its rural appearance. Apart from Silchester Common, the vast majority of its acreage consists of farmland interspersed with woodland. A number of farmhouses remain, although many are now private residences no longer associated with agricultural activity.

In altitude, the highest area of land is at the centre of the parish's northern boundary. From there the fields slope gently down towards the south-east. They offer not only good grazing, but also numerous footpaths, enabling walkers

to enjoy the pleasant countryside. Hampshire County Council own the site of Calleva Roman town, including the fields in its interior enclosed by the walls, although it is managed by English Heritage. The agricultural land is let to a local farmer for grazing.

The holder of the largest acreage in Silchester is John Cook. He acquired 882 acres of land, including Silchester Common, at an auction on 4 October 1977. In April 1978 he gifted the Common to Silchester Parish Council, retaining ownership of the agricultural land. (See 3.3)

The main agricultural activity within Silchester is arable farming. For the most part fields are moderately sized, bounded by long established hedgerows. Some offer grassland suitable for sheep and cattle, others are more extensive, ideal for the cultivation of cereal and root crops. Copses and strips of woodland are used as cover for game birds reared for shooting.

Apart from modern housing and tarmac

A Silchester Harvest



roads, the overall appearance of the parish is very similar to what it would have been 100 years ago. However, there are some particular differences. Silchester Common is now better managed and almost totally confined, largely enclosed by fencing. The playing field area has been progressively cleared of gorse to become a popular village amenity.

Many farmhouses, often more than a century old, are now private residences. These include:

Byes Farmhouse, Byes Lane, *c.*1718: Grade II listed building.

Culham's Farmhouse, Dukes Ride, *c.*1840: Grade II listed building.

Dickers Farm, Bramley Road, 1870.

Greenlands Farm, Bramley Road.

Halls Farm, Ash Lane: Grade II listed building.

Lower Farmhouse, Bramley Road, 18th century: Grade II listed building.

Wood Farm (previously Grange Farm), Ash Lane.

Other farms engage in commercial activity without necessarily having any agricultural connection. These include Clappers Farm which offers livery and the nearby Brickledons Farm providing storage facilities and premises for light industry. Similarly, Haines Farm in Ash Lane, dating from the 17th century and with a Grade II listed farmhouse, has a number of rented business units.

By contrast, Silchester Farm is now used for special events, weddings and other functions. Its surrounding land, offering grazing and arable crop cultivation, is rented by Church Lane Farm.

Church Lane Farm itself is the biggest single agricultural enterprise in Silchester. Having purchased a substantial acreage in 1977, John Cook commissioned the construction of the present house and buildings as the centre of operations. The farm is managed by Jonathan Stacey. Within the area for which he is responsible are numerous ancient embankments, including Rampier Copse which at the



Manor Farmhouse



Byes Farmhouse



Above: Silchester Farmhouse

Below: Church Lane, Farmhouse



beginning of the 20th century was the subject of Colonel Karslake's excavations. (See 2.21)

Several farms obviously take their names from individuals who once owned them. A notable exception is Clappers Farm. *Clappers* is a Hampshire term for stepping stones over running water, the farm's name deriving from a crossing of the nearby Silchester Brook.

Finally, we should mention Chitty Farm, in Wall Lane. Although technically it is outside the parish boundary and, like the amphitheatre, within the parish of Mortimer West End, it is regarded as part of Silchester. It is principally a sheep farm but has a seasonal side-line of free-range turkeys which are much in demand every Christmas.

4.19 Modern Housing Estates

By the end of the 20th century the greatest density of population within Silchester was to be found in the housing estates bounded by Little London Road to the south and east, Pamber Road to the north and Silchester Common to the west. As these dwellings are largely concealed from the roads, it may not be obvious to a traveller passing through the village that a considerable number of people live here.

Prior to the Second World War the only buildings in this area were The Crown public house and adjacent cottages, New Timber and New Timber Lodge, Culham's Farmhouse and the old cottage at Flex Ditch which was rented out by the Richard Hyde Charity and was falling into disrepair.

As indicated in 1.1 the village centre has, since 1992, been designated as a Conservation Area. This designation encompasses the area of the playing fields, Lovegrove Gardens, the properties either side of Little London Road as far as Flex Ditch and the properties within Holly Lane, Whistler's Lane and Bramley Road as far as Greenlands Farm. No new housing

developments are permitted within this zone.

The first development, in 1951, was the construction of the four Water Board Cottages at Flex Ditch when Silchester Sewage Treatment Works were established. (See 3.14) Shortly thereafter 27 homes were commissioned by BDC on a site at Hydes Platt. These dwellings were built partly on fields previously belonging to Culham's Farm and partly on the *two piddles of land* held by the Richard Hyde Charity. (See 2.10) The new properties were rented out as local authority housing.

Some private developments were also taking place in the 1950s. Silchester Hall and some surrounding land having been sold to Mr Richard Gill in 1953, four detached houses and two bungalows were built in Bramley Road. (See 4.14)

Further building took place in the 1960s. The meadow which had been part of the grounds of New Timber (where the cricket club used to play) had been acquired by Mr Stan Withers in 1950. He used it as a smallholding on which he also reared pigs, before selling in the early 1960s to Willetts Homes Ltd. These developers also acquired a



Hydes Platt



Silchester Housing estates – dotted line shows Conservation Area

strip of land which had been the southern part of the ornamental garden of New Timber (by now The Romans Hotel). They used this to create an access road off Little London Road which became the first part of Dukes Ride. Having established this ingress, Willets Homes Ltd built a number of detached bungalows and houses in an estate which was then known as Sarum Chase, comprising Lordswood, Inhams Way and Dukes Ride itself.

In 1969 BDC purchased the fields surrounding Culham's Farmhouse. (See 4.12) By now there was access from Dukes Ride enabling the building of 58 council houses in two new streets appropriately termed Hartleys and Firth Close. These names were those of Thomas Hartley and Charles Bramley-Firth, two prominent Silchester residents of pre-war years. (See 4.2 and 4.13)

Moving into the 1970s, there was a further

Opposite page
Clockwise from top
right:
 Dukes Ride; Romans
 Field; Hartleys

disposal of land attached to The Romans Hotel. In 1973 a plot which had originally been the property's sizeable kitchen garden was acquired by the builder BH Watts. Adjacent to this was a small bungalow originally owned by The Romans Hotel and occupied by a Royal Horticultural Society plantswoman who had been employed to maintain the extensive grounds. This property was also sold and subsequently extended to become a separate private residence.

BH Watts divided the land he had acquired into 12 building plots on which detached houses were constructed. A cul-de-sac was created and, in recognition of its origins, given the name Romans Field. An additional building plot having been created from a garden, another house was built in 1996. Accordingly, including the former bungalow, there are now 14 properties in Romans Field.

Following these developments, by the end of the 1970s the central area of the village had expanded considerably. Over the course of about 15 years a total of 187 new dwellings were constructed in Dukes Ride and neighbouring streets.

Thereafter the spate of building slowed down. It was not until 2003 that the construction of a small collection of houses





Early Lands

known as Early Lands, south of Hydes Platt, was approved.

In a philanthropic transaction, John Cook sold just under an acre of land to English Villages Housing Association Ltd (EVHA) for a nominal consideration. The area was a small corner of the former Wellington Estate acquired by him in 1977.

EVHA had been set up by the Rural Housing Trust whose objective is to create affordable

housing for people living in country villages. Those moving into newly built dwellings are required to have strong local connections. The Early Lands scheme was intended to make it possible for families from Silchester to remain in Silchester.

Shortly after completion, the development attracted royal recognition. In 2004 The Princess Royal, President of the Rural Housing Trust, visited Silchester. She arrived by helicopter, landing on part of the Common, before giving an address in the Village Hall to representatives from neighbouring communities, encouraging them to launch similar schemes.

It is interesting to note that the name of the development is a 21st century link to the geological features originating in prehistoric times. (See 2.1) The land on which the houses were constructed consists of gravel, being part of the spur remaining at the end of the last Ice Age 12,000 years ago. Because of the gravel in the ground crops ripen early in the season. Hence it is *early land*.



The Princess Royal
visits Silchester 2004

