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OCCASIONAL PAPER

7. EWELL VILLAGE IN 1930

EWELL VILLAGE IN 1930

by P.H. Shearman.

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Following the publication of the third edition of Willis' "Short History of Ewell and Nonsuch" it has occurred to me that there appears to be extant no description of the village as it was on the eve of its submergence under the flood of bricks and mortar in the early 1930's. The following notes are made largely from my own recollection, but there must be many people whose knowledge is much greater than mine, and perhaps they may be encouraged to contribute more of what they know, and possibly provide photographs of buildings that have gone, so that there may be a complete record for the benefit of posterity.

Nostalgia is usually reckoned to be a sign of advancing senility. I do not think I am yet senil, yet, while realising that one's recollections are always of sunny summer afternoons, my memories of Ewell village as it was compel me to assert that it was a pleasanter place than it is now. This, of course, could be said of most places; after all, there is increasingly less nowadays to attract any reasonably civilised man, and streets of houses, however necessary and desirable, are to most people less aesthetically satisfying than trees and fields. The wanton destruction of old buildings, however, is another matter. This is normally motivated solely by the hope of commercial gain, which is not necessarily equated with pro-

gress. I am afraid, though, that there is little that can be done about it. Where there is profit to be made from the pulling down of an old building, then down it will come, despite everything. Again, it must be admitted that Ewell is dying as a village; a sign of this in any place is the proliferation of antique shops. A few years ago there were none in the village; now there are several, and when the only use that can be found for an old building is as an antique shop, then a village as such is beginning to cease to exist.

My own recollections of Ewell village go back to the twenties. Although I did not come to live in the district until 1935, I had been well acquainted with it long before that, from the days when as a lad I used to cycle over the surrounding countryside. It was then in the heart of the country; London had extended barely as far as Morden, the Kingston By-Pass was a new white slash across the countryside, and Tolworth as yet hardly existed.

The London Road from North Cheam was a country road. On the left was Nonsuch Park, then a private estate, the last owner, Mrs. Colborne, dying in 1937. There was a continuous ditch and fence all the way along, and the plantation of trees along the roadside, called the London Road Plantation, was somewhat thinner than it is today. On the other side of the road were the fields of Sparrow Farm, the farm buildings lying just inside the present recreation ground entrance in St. Clair Drive; the lane leading thither is now Sparrow Farm Road, and a part of the hedge and some of the trees lining it yet remain, although sadly battered. There were a few 19th and early 20th century houses on this side of the London Road, but these have mostly vanished in recent years.

At the foot of the hill, where Briarwood Road now is, there flowed a stream (in which one could gather watercress), from its source in Nonsuch Park across the

road. It is now a storm sewer under Briarwood Road, and can still be seen where it flows under the cattle arch a couple of hundred yards south of Stoneleigh Station. Round the bend, in the London Road, going towards the Park gates, there still stand a few older houses; the road, however, has been widened. Formerly it headed straight to the gates, then turned in a right-angled bend. On the angle opposite the gates was a hedge with several large elm trees. Inside the Park, to the right of the gate, stood a gate-house, built in the same style as the main house. There was a right-of-way through the Park, and an iron swing-gate just to the left of the main gate. You were expected to keep to the main drive, or to a footpath which ran to the main drive near the Cheam gate a little to the west of the gardens. This path can still be discerned, although a new one has since developed, leading to the house in a more northerly direction.

Returning to the London Road, the original houses still stand opposite, and past the gates the field of Cherry Orchard Farm is still there. The house beyond has gone, though, and the road has been widened to accommodate a footway; the trees formerly stood behind the fence in front of the house, and next door, Ivy Cottage, had its gate opening directly on to the road. Opposite, Ewell Park stood in its own grounds. It was formerly called Stoneleigh, hence the name given to the district. Beyond Blue-gates, on the site of the petrol station, was a brickworks, and then the house known as Woodgate, with an old mulberry tree in the garden, recently cut down when the garden was built on. The small building adjoining, coming up to the edge of the road, marks the site of the old turnpike gate. Beyond this was a hedge, running as far as the corner of Church Street, bounding the field where are now houses and the new churchyard. On the other side of the road, opposite the brickworks, stood an alehouse called the "Brick Kiln", closed some twenty years ago, and now the

headquarters of a sect calling themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses". To the best of my recollection, the "Organ Inn" is a creation of the By-Pass era, although here I may be mistaken. Further on there was a small spinney, the remains of which existed until Coppice Close and the filling station were built on the site. Beyond was a field, part of the hedge of which still stands, with the wrecks of some of its trees, houses having been built behind it.

By the end of the little lane leading to the Kingston Road was the gateway to The Grange, an 18th Century house in its own grounds, which stretched to the Kingston Road, and in which Grange Mansions and St. Mary's Close now stand. The house stood at an angle to the road, behind a circular drive, and with stables and outbuildings against the wall at the corner of Mill Lane. The Mill Lane cottages are unchanged, as is the Church Room, but I cannot recall what occupied the site of the Telephone Exchange. Behind the Spring Hotel were timber buildings resembling farm buildings, the last of which, occupied by the Spring Hotel Garage, were demolished a few years ago.

The Kingston Road, from Tolworth, was another country road. The original road at Tolworth Court still exists, although disused, running in a double bend round the farm buildings. The new road, wide and straight, was made about 1938, and the bridge widened. Worcester Park Road was a country lane, and the Kingston Road was about half its present width. The hedge down the middle of the road (possibly the original hedge, although I cannot be sure), marks the right-hand side of the old road. To the right were cornfields running down to the meadows along the river. Ruxley Lane was then a lane indeed, with Ruxley Farm on the left just across the river. There were more fields all the way down to the railway, with the lodge and avenue leading to Ewell Court, and Ewell Court Farm at the top of Meadow Walk, approximately opposite where is now West Mead.

On the other side of the road, there was a large wood behind a fence, from Worcester Park Road, ending opposite Ruxley Lane. Behind this was Worcester Park House, demolished about 1946. The remains of this wood can still be made out, between the houses. Beyond, down to the railway, were the fields of Coldharbour Farm, with the original "Queen Adelaide" public house, and one or two houses standing back in their own grounds. Coldharbour Farm itself stood at the top of what is now Newbury Gardens, opposite the school. Close to the railway, where is now the forecourt of the Rembrandt Cinema, stood a few weatherboarded cottages at the top of a bank, and beyond the railway bridge the first houses of the village came into sight - the vivid red tiles of the council cottages round the bend at the top of Beggar's Hill, and the houses opposite on top of the other bank. From here to the bend at the Lower Mill there were a number of weatherboarded cottages on both sides of the road, and the "Jolly Waggoners", a small alehouse behind a hedge, set a little back from the road in front of the present building. From the Lower Mill onwards the road has not changed greatly; the wall of The Grange is still there, with Grange Mansions rising behind; the timber cottages at the end of Mill Lane have recently gone. On the other side, the house next to Messrs. Longhursts was then a bakery, and the Upper Mill was a working mill, owned by Messrs. Hall and Davidson, with the mill house between it and the road, and a number of timber buildings behind it, across the river. Fitznells was a private house, its last owner being Mrs. Batho. In Chessington Road, The Turrets, originally the dairy of Bourne Hall, built at the turn of the 18th century in the neo-Gothic style of its contemporary, Ewell Castle, stood at the end of the Horse Pond. Round Fitznells were a number of outbuildings, including a large barn. Old Schools Lane was a little lane leading to the old village school, a timber building since converted into cottages, then between fields to the railway, continuing as a footpath across the meadows. The Chessington Road ran past one or two

houses to the railway station, then between fields across the stream and on to the few scattered houses of W.Ewell with Poplar Farm to the right of the road by the stream just beyond Hook Road, and with fields on both sides of the road to Bones Gate, where was a water splash by a small inn. To the left of the road, opposite Ruxley Lane, was a large wood called Butchers Grove.

Returning now to the village, Spring Street remains unaltered. Bourne Hall was an 18th century house of typical appearance, with a pediment, and Victorian conservatories on either side. In the corner of the grounds by the lake stood a small Ionic bathing temple, coeval with the house, and a water wheel. The house was at that time used as a girls' school " ... for the daughters of professional men", as the large board on top of the wall expressed it. The wall here, by the long spring, was then just an ordinary brick wall. The capping of tiles and the gaps with wrought-iron grilles came later, after the local council took over the property. At the same time the old single iron rail and posts alongside the water were replaced by the present low wall and flower beds. The Dipping Place was still in use; it was not locked up until the great typhoid scare of about 1938. I have no very clear recollection of the buildings beyond the butcher's shop long known as Cracknell's, but I believe there were houses close up to the road. There was a large barn in the yard of No. 24, lately the Electricity Board's show-rooms, the corner shop next door was a bakery. The windows from the original Rectory, mentioned by Willis on p.33, are still visible at the back of the house. Beyond West Street there is little change.

On the other side of the High Street, the public lavatory was yet to come, and the double gate beyond led to the stable yard of the Rectory, now occupied by the Visual Aids Centre of Glyn House. Then came Carpenter's Bakery, with two bow windows, where the new Post Office stands, and then the double gates leading to Willis' yard, next to No. 9. This was then an iron-monger's shop, with a yard behind, in which stood a

large blacksmith's shop, pulled down during the 1939-45 war. A new building has lately been erected there, but it is still possible to see where the lean-to roof of the former building was fixed to the wall. There is no change from here so far as the tailor's shop beyond the King William IV, but the one or two small shops which came next have recently gone. The furthestmost shop of the Victorian buildings at the commencement of the Cheam Road was then the Post Office.

West Street has been somewhat changed. Where is now a large factory was a row of cottages, close up to the road, and the Mary Wallis Hall. On the other side, beyond the old school, were a few timber buildings, originally farm buildings, and some weather-boarded cottages, and then, past The Grove, Ewell House stood behind its Victorian stable yard, now turned into flats. Beyond Hill Cottage and the football ground and recreation ground, at the end of the road, by the railway, was a cluster of weatherboarded cottages, now pulled down.

Church Street, from the cross roads to Ewell Castle, is unchanged, except that there are now houses between the Well House and Ox Alley, where was the wall of the Well House orchard, with a gate identical with the one opposite, at the entrance to Glyn House, then the Rectory. Beyond, round the corner, the churchyards are the same, but on the other side of the road were only the Vicarage, now rebuilt, the farm buildings of Rectory Farm, and the two cottages near to the London Road, with a field behind.

Green Man Street, that part of the High Street running from Cheam Road to Monger's Lane, has changed considerably. On the north side, past Goodship and Saunders' yard and the couple or so of shops, stood a Victorian building which was used as the Ewell Social Club, and then a row of small early 19th century cottages close up to the road. Next came a public house, the "Lord Nelson", and then another row of cottages

with small fenced front gardens as far as The Grove. Beyond was, I think, a wall, with the gate to Ewell House approximately where is now Ewell House Grove, beyond that the drive to Tayles Hill, and further on, first the stable yard, still there, and then Purberry Shot. As far as I can remember, there was a more or less continuous wall all along here. Purberry Shot was a large Victorian house hidden behind its wall with the glass roof of what appeared to be a porte-cochere visible above. Beyond this the road to Epsom ran between a straggle of houses, gardens, cottages and fields.

On the other side of the road, Barclay's Bank occupied until recently the house on the corner of the Cheam Road. The road is unchanged as far as the garden, which marks the site of the Congregational Church and Hall. These were buildings in Victorian Gothic, first the Hall, at right angles to the street, then the Church, with a spire, alongside the road. The small shops were originally cottages with small fenced front gardens running down to the road. The "Green Man" was re-built in the 30's, but I cannot recall its predecessor, and beyond there is no change as far as the Reigate Road. On the far side of this was a wall, close up to the road, running approximately where the edge of the pavement is, beyond which have been built a service road and a row of shops. Behind this wall was a house, with a garden behind, alongside Reigate Road, and then another house, Persfield, close behind its wall, demolished a few years ago, although the garden wall still stands, new houses having been built behind it on the site of the house and of the paddock which extended as far as Monger's Lane.

The Cheam Road as it was is now almost unrecognisable. On the left was Nuttall's, recently pulled down. Next was Dorset House, an 18th century house with a pediment. Its site is now the Car Park. Next, where is a chapel, was the wall of the orchard of the Well House in Church Street, and then the stable yard of Ewell Grove, built of flints and red brick, next to Ewell Grove itself, another 18th century house, standing back from the road,

with a shallow front garden and a drive with gates at each end. The far wall of its garden still stands at the end of the new houses. On the other side, there was a wall as far as Monger's Lane, behind which stood a house called for no apparent reason The Manor House. The big cedar tree by the roadside was behind this wall. Beyond Monger's Lane the road is difficult to visualise, because of the By-Pass and new houses. There were one or two large houses on each side, some of which still stand, and then, on the left, the avenue leading to Nonsuch Court, just before the "Glyn Arms". Beyond the railway, over Howell Hill, was open country.

In the Reigate Road, we have mentioned the house on the right-hand corner. On the other side was a hedge with large trees, still standing, bordering the Old Fair Field, which ran behind the Green Man as far as the Cheam Road gardens and down as far as Monger's Lane. Beyond this the road was a country road, running over the railway between fields.

On the outskirts of the village, the Hogsmill River ran between meadows, and the site of the powder mills at Ewell Court was a very pleasant spot, apparently remote, the river channelled into several streams, with weirs and coppices of, I think, alders. It is quite different now, the river having been straightened out, tidied up, and properly planned, and completely surrounded by the habitations of men, and, particularly, their offspring. Another pleasant place was in the fields beyond Nonsuch Park. Where are now the overgrown remains of an unfinished road which was to have run from the By-Pass to Cheam, and a number of roads, Castle Avenue and the rest, were the fields of Nonsuch Court, in one of which fields, a very large one, I remember seeing Sir Alan Cobham's Air Circus perform its feats.

All this was changed in a very short space of time; within two or three years, from being a village in the heart of the country, Ewell became a part of Greater London.

P. Shearman.