

BELL LANE PROPERTIES

These notes have been compiled from various sources such as research in historical documents, printed material, local information gleaned from residents in the village and the tangible things found "on site".

Bell Lane appears on 16th & 17th Century maps as a track leading from Ladder Hill to the High St. and as a Public Highway on the 19th century Enclosure Award Map and the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map. There are only a small number of properties in the Lane and whilst all are now individual cottages some were not originally residential at all, and some lost the original identity by being made in to one residence with the adjoining property. The numbering of the properties is also confusing since they were numbered consecutively from No.1 left hand side from High Street right round and down No. 15 on right hand side, excluding those located in "Bell Alley" (i.e. footpath leading from the Lane to High St. by ex- Hairdresser's shop). All were re-numbered by Bullington RDC some years ago with odd numbers on left and even numbers on right (from High St) and the Alley was included in the numbering of the Lane.

To simplify this report it is commenced from High St with properties on left as follows:

FIRST FOUR COTTAGES - presently Nos 1, 3, 5, 7 previously 1, 2, 3, 4)

GENERAL These were originally part of The BELL INN and were in fact the various outbuildings etc to that hostelry before being converted in to 4 cottages in the late 19th century. The division was very "rough" and there is some "over-lapping" on the upper floors and loft space was undivided except for a rough stone/rubble wall between the 2 middle cottages (2 & 3). Nor did the 2nd cottage have a front door straight off the Lane since a door in to bakehouse, store rooms etc already existed in the Centre Passage.

In an advertisement in Jackson's Oxford Journal in 1780 THE BELL was very fully described with "Brewhouse, bakehouse...storerooms... stables...piggeries...etc convenience for mealing business..." Directories of 1847 & 1852 indicate ISAAC ELDERFIELD as Beer retailer and corn dealer at THE BELL INN.

A document of 1872 describes these properties as.. "malthouse and premises etc" "...adjoining the former BELL INN.

Early in this century these properties (part of the Chillingworth Estate) were sold off at Auction and the Sale Particulars quote "...4 cottages with garden ground and outbuildings in rear.....excellent water supply on premises".

The water supply was a pump & well - still located within No.5 and there are 2 "privies" (for use between 4 Cottages) at bottom of gardens of 1 & 7.

No. 1 (now named Malthouse Cottage)

This is the nearest building to the former Bell Inn and internal refurbishment recently has revealed much of the original structure such as - a small fireplace presumably installed when converted to a cottage and behind that a much larger open flue etc of the original malting ovens with unusual crevices and hardened barley seeds found amongst the debris. The wide chimney is still visible at the back of the property.

Evidence of connection with the Bell Inn was revealed in a blocked up doorway on the ground floor.

In the left area it is roughly divided from the former Bell Inn (No.64 High St) and undivided from No 3 (formerly No. 2) Bell Lane.

The privy (now derelict) at the bottom of the garden served the first 2 cottages and water was drawn from the communal pump (now behind No.5)

No.3 (formerly No 2)

This property overlaps No.1 at upper level. It seems fairly clear it would have been part of the bakehouse, storerooms etc for "mealing business" referred to in 1750. The Bakers' Oven area has recently been opened up on the ground floor (although the large flue and chimney is mostly within the adjoining property (No.5).

Reflooring carried out on the first floor several years ago revealed some evidence of the former use of the property - e.g. dried up hay & corn seeds amongst the debris which would bear out the advert in Jackson's Journal of "...convenience for mealing business.." and the directory describing Elderfield (licensee of the Bell) as a "corn dealer". The front door is located in a centre passageway and may have been left there even after conversion to a cottage (presume it was more economical than installing a new opening on to the Lane).

Centre Passageway - This is now part of No. 5 but in its original state would have been the access to the rear of the outbuildings of the Bell Inn. The large chimney flue and draught grill to the Baker's Ovens is still visible on the side adjoining No 3 and there is clear evidence that horses would be hitched inside the

passage by a heavy chain cemented in to the wall (near the entrance). The passage provides access to the rear of the four cottages.

In modern times.

No. 5 (formerly No.3) - also includes Centre Passage referred to previously.

Evidence found seems to indicate this property (& No.7) would have been "store-rooms, stabling, outbuildings, etc" of former Bell Inn. Rear yard (& passage) had original "stable-yard tiles and gullies" (e.g. "Blues") now concreted over, heavy-duty staple, strap & buckle (possibly for hitching horses), the chain already referred to in the Passage Wall, and an original horse brass found in the garden. (Other evidence may have been uncovered over the years by previous residents without the significance being recognised). The large chimney breast (referred to previously) passes right through the property from the ground to roof level and the top stack rebuilt to former state a few years ago, but sealed at the top as the flue was disused at the time - (see remarks re No.3).

The Water Pump in the yard served all 4 cottages and according to hearsay has not been used since about the early 1930s. The Well was found in the yard during rebuilding work and revealed a depth of 10ft from the top ledge to the bottom with a depth of 6ft of clear water! It has been cemented over for safety (as it is located, within the access path to rear of No.7) but is not filled. Inside the property recent re-plastering in the front bedroom on the first floor revealed a filled-in doorway in between No.5 and No.3. Above that framework there was another old timber frame which may have been the original opening between the store-rooms. In the loft area there is a rough stone and rubble wall on either side of the large chimney breast between Nos. 5 & 3. On the other side there is no division between Nos. 5 & 7 apart from the small chimney flue serving fireplaces in both properties.

No 7 (formerly No.4)

Again part of the outbuildings of former Bell Inn and there is little to add to the descriptions already quoted. However this is the only cottage still detaining board shutters on the front window. There is a privy located at the bottom of the garden (now a garden store) which served Nos. 5 & 7 originally. Also an unusually high stone wall separates the garden from the adjoining property (No. 9) - on a much higher level.

No 9 (formerly No. 5)

At the beginning of 20th Century this property was part of the Chillingworth Estate. It adjoins the former Infant School Site and the Auction Sale Particulars reads...."Cottage with 4 rooms with lean-to Offices and Stone and Tiled wood hovel". Special Conditions of Sale indicate.. "previously owned by MATHIAS HUNT from 1872...." It should be noted that Mrs Hunt was the Infant School Teacher from 1840/1862 (ref other Wheatley Publications). It was described in & Preliminary Listed Building Survey 1949 (ref. Ministry of Housing & Local Govt papers) - " One storey and attic, rubble, old tiled roof...."

Restoration in 1979 revealed in room right of front door a large open fireplace and baker¹'s oven in wall behind the sitting room fireplace; in room to left of front door when relaying floor unusual beam and "hollowness" observed which would confirm that a cellar existed and steps down - would be below the beam; in the garden when excavating for rear extension a brick cess-pit chamber was exposed near to boundary of school- yard.

A resident in the Lane recalls:-

- a) When School Caretaker Mr Jennings lived here he was allowed to open up a gateway in the boundary wall of school playground for ease of access from his back door to the School to carry out his duties.
- b) Before the last War (1939/45) there was a shop-window to left of front door selling bread, cakes etc. (Note that baker's oven been revealed during recent restoration).
- c) Large cellar was used by former owner's wife (Mrs Kitching) as a food larder until he closed it off and it may not have been properly filled in - thought to have happened soon after last War (1939/45.)

OLD INFANT SCHOOL - As this property is much detailed in other places it may be more interesting to quote some extracts from the Urban District Council Minutes- viz- 15 July 1895....Letter from National School Manager offers use of Infant School at 2/6 (that's 12.5p nowadays!) per night, such charge to include lighting, heating & cleaning."

...21 June 1897. ."agreed to request School Managers to supply chairs for use at Council Meetings in School Room as INFANT FORMS INCONVENIENT!!" Amazing to think Councillors managed to squat on forms for 2 years (1895/7) before making this request!!!

The Gateway road off Bell Lane (fronting No.9) appears to have been maintained by the Council as the

Surveyor was frequently asked to deal with the stone steps (presumably in the interests for the children)
Note - Stone slabs broken by vehicles some years ago and area now a tarmac slope.

A School Canteen was located on the land next to the School Building and catered for Primary School children as well as Infants.

Nos 11, 13, & 15 (formerly 6, 7, 8)

No. 11 faces down the Lane towards the High St

No. 13 the small wedge-shaped property angled between Nos. 11 and 15 with lower roof-line.

No.15 - tall property with windows at high level & entrance at right-angles to Lane (leading in to a private passage to rear).

The properties were described in the Sale Particulars of the Chillingworth Estate (1908) as .."Block of 3 Stone built & tiled Cottages, good well of water on premises....occupiers William Hunt, Miss Elizabeth Rogers, & Joseph Brandon..."

No.11 - was described in a Preliminary Listed building Survey of 1949 (ref. Ministry of Housing & Local Govt, papers) as - ..2 Storeys, rubble, old tiled roof, 2 leaded casement windows and 4 panelled central door..." It was noted that the Plan accompanying that report appeared to include the 2 adjoining properties (now- Nos 13 & 15) in the outlined property.

At present earlier details of these properties have not been researched as there have been several changes of ownership in recent years.

No 17 (formerly nos 9, 10, 11?)

This is at least two (maybe 3) properties converted to one cottage.

The Sale Particulars of the Chillingworth Estate (1908) describe as - "2 Stone tiled cottages, occupied one...6 Bedrooms, 2 sitting rooms, kitchen, scullery, small office & cellar with spacious wheelwrights shop adjoining.....extensive range of outbuildings.....also Stone & tiled 4 roomed Cottage with entrance in Farm Close." (It should be noted that the latter Cottage is now numbered in Station Rd.) - The other items included in this Sale and Special Conditions were detailed as follows:...."There is no right of way across the Infant School premises...merely enjoyed by Licence.... ..."The valuable Business premises are held on Long Lease of 500 years from 13 Nov 1833.."

The Preliminary Listed Buildings Survey of 1949 describes as ... "2 Storeys, old tiles roof, 3 casement windows, 2 porches under small flat hoods on cut brackets, board shutters to ground floor windows... Workshop to right, 1 storey, rubble, old tiled roof, 3 fixed lights. Building has importance overlooking old Church Yard." The whole of this property with Workshops, Smithy Timber Yard etc was used by Cullums for many years. One of the cottages was occupied by a Carpenter making Coffins for the Old Church Yard. The Cottage has been much modernised in recent, years & the Yard developed for housing.

War Memorial Garden - Entrance from Bell Lane - This was formerly the site of Old Burial Ground & main entrance is in High St.

The second part of this report refers to the properties on the Right-hand side leading from High Street and there are in fact only 3 cottages now including the one in "Bell Alley".

General - It is understood from hearsay that all were originally part of J.W. Henley's Estate (former M.P.). Furthermore a 'local anecdote indicates that a "certain Sea Captain" (name unknown) owned them and "lost all his properties in a gambling debt" !!!

No.2 (formerly No15) This is quite extensive with frontage in High St and Bell Lane - it has been completely re-furbished recently and it was noticed whilst this work in progress that an old door frame was revealed in the wall between the present front door and back door - this might indicate that there were two properties originally. An unusual feature of modernisation is the very low stone wall across the front door - tills is intended as a "flood barrier" as the property has been very regularly flooded from surface water off the High Street in rainstorms - other properties in Bell lane have had similar problems in the past, especially near High Street corner where the two drain grids are insufficient to carry storm-water away from both Bell Lane & High St.

At the present time no further details of earlier times is available.

No. 4 (formerly No.14)

This was originally two properties and the present occupier recalls having to live in "one end" - there is a small outside store still there - while waiting for the other occupant to move out!! It is adjoining the part of the Lane known as Bell Alley" (locally)

There is no information of earlier details available at present.

Bell Alley - Over the years this has sometimes been described as the "Alley" & other times just as part of Bell Lane. It forms a right of way for all purposes linking High St with Bell Lane. The gardens of High Street properties run through to the Alley and until several years ago were all enclosed in a low brick wall but part is now demolished to give access for a car to enter one of those gardens.

The Alley was walked for very many years by schoolchildren going to and from the School Canteen located on land at the Infants School.

No. 6 Bell Lane - (formerly numbered in Bell Alley)

Rear of this property adjoins the Old Church Yard - there were originally 2 (or 3) cottages, part now being part of 54- High St. An old hovel has been joined to the main building although completely re-furbished there are some unusual features still visible on the outside.

At the present time there are no further details available.

No. 8 – "Telecot" (formerly No. 13)

This property adjoins the Old Burial Ground and appears to have been the "Sexton's Store or Bier Store for the Old Church. Unusual features and openings inside would indicate where coffins were stored prior to being moved to the Burial Ground (next door). The present resident is a nephew of Charlie Shepherd of Ambrose Farm. There are many anecdotes about this property and its uses before eventually becoming a residence and the one most interesting seems to be that it was partly used as a "Fish Shop and Herrings were often soon hanging across the front"!!

The fact that it has the unusual name of "Telecot" originates from the days when numbering in Bell Lane became so confusing some years ago especially to the postman delivering mail - when old No. 13 became No. 8 (& old No. 7 became No. 13 etc, etc.) Lots of properties seemed to be called 'Something-Cot' so the postman said there isn't "a Telly Cot" in the village so "TELECOT" was the result.