

A Short Note on the History of the Estate

Introduction

As a resident you may perhaps wonder why your home is situated where it is and how it came to be placed there. There is an old saying, "the answer lies in the soil", and our position has been dictated to some degree by what lies beneath us.

The Geology

Most of Hertfordshire lies on chalk strata overlaid by a shallow veneer of clay. We are different, we sit on a deep cleft of clay some ten metres deep set between the chalk strata and call a 'slip'. The slip is found first in the vicinity of Redbournbury Mill, it trends north through Harpenden Golf Club, Rothamsted Experimental Station, Redbourn Golf Club, our gardens at Annables, Pepsal End and ends at a village just west of Luton appropriately named Slip End. It sits therefore approximately between the A5 and the old A6 or A1081.

Effect of the Slip

In its natural state the presence of the slip had a profound effect on its farming and commercial development. There existed a very high water table and the consequent development of spring lines. There are several springs around us – Penny Pond, in front of Beacon Lodge on Annables Lane and elsewhere, but the strongest was situated in the small plantation of firs some one hundred metres from our housing in the field that backs the houses on Spring Road. It is this spring which gives its name to Spring Road. The reason for the small copse is that historically it was too wet to plough. It is also this spring which was the head water of the Kinsbourne stream. The word "Bourne" denotes a river which flows in the winter and is dry in the summer. The Kinsbourne followed the path of the old A6, headed south to the Southdown Ponds and thence to the River Lee. In the period after the war the aquifer between the valleys of the A6 and A5 began to be exploited for portable water. Pumps were installed at Shaftunbury, Friars Wash and Markyate. The level of the water table fell and the slip became much drier. It is for this reason the lakes which have recently (2007) been constructed in the field which backs onto Spring Road, to the north of our estate, are taking a long time to fill. So the springs today are a minor presence, flowing only in times of intense rainfall and what water flow there is, is culverted along the A1081

Commercial Exploitation of the Slip

The most important activity on the slip has been and still is farming but the high clay content and the wetness factor dictated, at least before the Second World War, the type of farming universally carried out. The horsepower available to farmers prior to the Second World War was in fact the horse. It took a long time to plough, harrow and seed and an equally long time to harvest. Very often the rainfall pattern only allowed limited time for such operation to be carried out. Arable farming on the slip was a risky business, the least risky farming practice was dairying and farmers established their land in permanent pastures, grazed their Friesian and Ayrshire herds and produced milk and beef very successfully. Prior to about the 1950's we were surrounded by several very prosperous dairy farms, to the north east was The Kennels, to the south east Faulkners End, the west, Annables Farm and to the north west was Lady Bray. But during the 50's farming practice began to change. The slip became drier but mechanical horse power had become increasingly available to farmers. Cultivation and harvesting operations could be carried out quickly when soil moisture conditions were optimum. This, together with a change in relative value between milk and cereals persuaded farmers to convert their land from pasture to arable. With the result that today you will see crops of wheat, barley, beans and rape growing on the fields surrounding us. After the war there were some ten dairy farmers on the slip. There is one left at Pepsal End. Some of the working farmsteads have

also disappeared. Annables, Kennels (so named as it housed the hounds of the South Herts Fox Hunt) and Lady Bray farms have all been converted to dwellings and the two major tranches of the slip have become golf courses. The absence of livestock has had a very significant effect on bird life. The swallow, lapwing and other have disappeared from our skies.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries the other important commercial activity on the slip was brick making. The clay our houses rest on and which creates our gardens has a very high percentage of fines and was found to be ideally suited for the manufacture of bricks. Slip End was the major centre but there was also a small factory at Brickfield Cottage (near Whitewalls corner and now the site of a new house). The industry died out before the First World War.

The Estate

We owe our presence here to a group of entrepreneur developers who decided sometime in the 1920's that there was a market for quality housing in this area. Their plans were for a large estate, larger than the present 30 houses and extending north to Kennel Lane. The land owner at the time was no doubt delighted to make available a difficult wet area at a time also when arming was in deep depression. The first house built in 1934 was the White House. Its entrance is to Annables Lane because Spring Road had still to be laid down. I think the Red House and High Ridge were the next in 1937 and then others followed periodically. The advent of the Second World War and the establishment of the Green Belt halted further expansion of the estate. My family have lived here since 1964. It has been a very pleasant place to live. It is made so by the low density of housing, the well maintained grass frontages, the well paved roads, the beech, holly and laurel hedging, the variety of trees, convivial neighbours and the convenience of good walks. People often ask me if there have been any major environmental changes over the past fifty years and except for the increase in traffic and the demise of the farmsteads there hasn't been anything of major significance.

I do hope it will remain the same for the next 50 years!

Bruce Campbell

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