

House History -31 Littleworth Rd, Benson by Dave Rushton

In 1838, the property belonged to **William Holgate**, a merchant corn dealer. William made his will in July 1838 and subsequently died in Feb 1840, leaving his estate to his son also called William, and also a corn dealer, although his widow - **Sarah Holgate** - was to enjoy all incomes for her lifetime. By April 1853 Sarah had died, and in accordance with his father's wishes, **William Holgate** jnr put the Littleworth properties (consisting of three cottages) up for auction. The winning bidder was **Benjamin Butcher**, a courier/tanner of Wallingford, who paid £150 for the properties.

Living in the cottages through this period were James Pugh, John Coates, Will Skinner, Mrs Archer, Thomas Rislingbury and Cato.

Benjamin Butcher made his will in Oct 1862 and died not long after in Dec 1862. He left his estate to his widow **Elizabeth Butcher**, who later died in March 1874. Subsequently, the heirs - son **Henry Butcher** (a tanner/courier), and son in law **John Pittman King** (farmer) - sold the properties for £130 to **Ralph Hutchings**, a baker of Bensington.

Tennants in 1874 were again Will Skinner and Mrs Archer, with a Mrs Skinner in the other. At this time, there were still three cottages mentioned in the estate.

In 1881, there were 2 cottages on the land where Nr 29 now stands and 1 on the site of nr 31, all still owned by **Ralph Hutchings**, baker of Bensington village. The tenants of the cottages were still Will Skinner, Mrs Archer, and Mrs Skinner.

Ralph Hutchings made his will in Jan 1879 and died on the 30th November 1881, his estate being settled by the trustees -

William Littleboy (a miller of Crowmarsh), **William Bartholomew Goodey** (postmaster of Bensington) and **Thomas Field** (a miller's clerk of Hope Cottage, Bensington)

In March 1882, the trustees sold the 3 cottages to a **Francis Polley** of Lancaster Gate, for the sum of £135. Sometime before 1895, the old cottage on this site was pulled down and a new house was built. Francis obviously bought other properties, since a Land Tax settlement of 1897 showed **Francis Polley** as paying 9s/4d on his estate in Littleworth, consisting of 3 cottages (24 poles in area) occupied by William Spyer, A Orchard and A Wise, and 2 cottages (3 poles) let to Samuel Hine.

Francis Polley gave the cottages to his son - **Francis Edward Polley** - in July 1906, not long before he died on 16th December 1907. The Conveyance document lists:

- 3 cottages with various tenants
- 2 cottages with **Will Skinner & Mrs Archer**
- 3 other separate cottages

According to the 1924 Land Tax Declaration, **Francis E Polley** lived in Lancaster Cottage himself from 1895-1905, then Mr **Brooker** had it as tenant.

In March 1924, Francis Edward Polley sold **Lancaster Cottage** (as it was now called) to a local builder - **Harry Maxwell West** - for the sum of £175, complete with sitting tenant, **Charles Spicer**.

Mr Spicer was still the tenant in December 1946, when Harry Maxwell West did a deal with **John Percy West** a local farmer. Harry West swapped Lancaster Cottage plus £145 for John West's Rose Cottage in the High St, Benson.

Part of the land with Lancaster Cottage (over the footpath) was obviously sold off at some time, and hence it is now necessary to look at an adjacent plot at Perry Oaks, to the south of the footpath. It could well be that this land purchase happened in the time of **George Whitney** (keeper of the Lamb & Flag Beer House, Benson), who bought the 3 cottages and land making up Perry Oaks in 1907, since he would seem to have bought several properties in the area. This date would match with the death of Francis Polley and the handing over of his estate to his son.

George Whitney died in December 1936, and his wife Emily Witney also died in January 1943, whereupon the cottages and land passed to **William James Whitney** (a farm labourer of Swyncombe). Tennants of the 3 cottages in 1943 were **J Hutchings, Arthur Green and Harry Lay**. William James Whitney later sold off the cottages and land to **William John Aldridge** in November 1954 for £180.

By Sept 1956 **William John Aldridge** of Hope Cottage sold off the cottages next door *plus some of the old Lancaster Cottage land* to a **Miss Patricia Scott** (of the RAF Station, Benson) for the sum of £250. Seven years later, Patricia Scott (then living in Pilgrim Cottage) in turn sold off Pilgrim Cottage (and some of the land) to **Florence May Smith** for £2,500.

Returning to the original property however, a rear extension to Lancaster Cottage in 1970 provided a kitchen and bathroom, whilst in 1973 a garage was added. In June 1994, Lancaster Cottage was sold by **Mr & Mrs Lloyd** to **Stephen and Stephanie Yates**, who sold it in turn to **Neil Hollis & Lucy Thorpe** in April 2000.

Subsequently in November 2003, the Hollis' bought extra garden land to the south of the public footpath - *part of the*

same land which belonged to the old Lancaster cottage a hundred years before. Around this time, the Hollis's expanded the cottage by adding a rear two floored extension, whilst demolishing the garage.

In August 2005, the property now known just as 31 Littleworth Rd, was bought by **David & Susan Rushton** - who promptly named it "Field Cottage", not knowing at the time of the original name.