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Any errors and omissions are entirely my own

The Story of

The Folly

Wheathampstead

A Celebration of Community

Dianne Payne

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Introduction

Fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell; fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death; and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake ye do them.

A Dream of John Ball, William Morris (1888)

History is an ongoing story, or rather a multiplicity of stories that chronicle events, lives, places and ideas.[1] Each story, rather like a multi-layered Russian doll, leads to the discovery of another and another.

This book tells the story of The Folly, a small rural community in Hertfordshire, and its transformation from a Victorian hamlet to the 21st century community it is today. The story of the cottages built at The Folly, their owners and their tenants creates links to local families across the social classes, some whose histories have already been recorded and others that might otherwise be forgotten. It is a story of initiative, struggle, social disorder and regeneration, it charts continuity and change, with inter-marriage between a broad network of Folly families; and it recounts stirring and poignant episodes from individual lives.

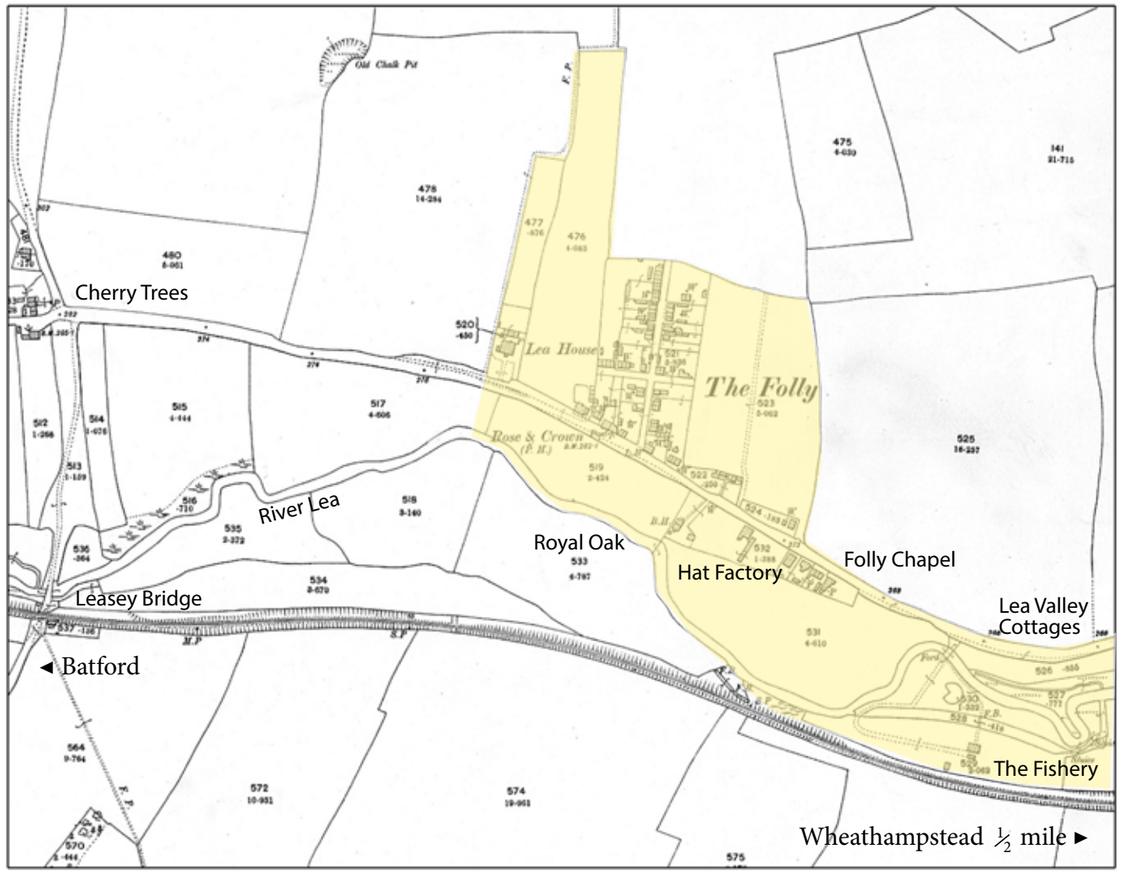
The raw historical sources that tell the 'official' history of The Folly – registers of births, marriages and deaths, census returns, house deeds, the reports and log books of institutions, newspaper articles, maps, plans and photographs – are many and various. Some convey remarkable details of past times, while others provide only brief snapshots, leaving many questions unanswered. Oral history and family memories, although often fallible, provide a different dimension and, used with care, can add to the rich fabric of social history and the lives of ordinary people. Speculation and rumour can easily be transformed into historical fact and tales about The Folly and residents in the area can sometimes prove to be myths.

This book presents material from original sources without embellishment, but as you read, allow your imagination to venture beyond the printed page. Tune your ear to the sounds, savour the smells and allow your senses freedom to bring the past a little closer. Try to visualise the lush foliage and fields of wheat and barley in the Hertfordshire landscape, the golden haystacks where children played and the puffs of smoke from the railway running through the Lea Valley. Recall the tapering spire of St Helen's Church, rising above a skirt of trees and cottage roofs, and the rectory and school gathered round the ancient churchyard with its crooked gravestones.

In the humble cottages at The Folly detect the heavy breathing of the original inhabitants, agricultural labourers, clammy and exhausted as they return after hours toiling in the fields. Sense their rough, muddy garments stiff with cold and the cramped conditions of poor families with six or seven children. Observe the piles of wet washing, the flicker of oil lamps and the overflowing privy. Feel the weight of coins in the pocket of the labourer as he makes his way to the beer house and imagine the desperation of his family when he is drunk or unemployed.

Picture local artisans in their workshops and let your ears vibrate to the sound of the blacksmith's anvil in the forge at The Folly, or the saw and hammer of carpenters and builders as the cottages were constructed there. Heed the trundling of heavy wagons on the mud and flint track and glimpse the steam rising from horse dung left on the roadway.

Imagine mothers and daughters employed at home plaiting straw for the local hat factory. Join the Folly children playing in the fields, dirty and dishevelled, and observe them on Sunday mornings, washed and tidy, assembling with the congregation at the Folly Chapel for Sunday School.



Wheathampstead 25 inch Ordnance Survey Map 1890-1920 (with additions) National Library of Scotland

Follow the collage of transformations as the seasons change: Spring with heavy, clay-laden fields; the stillness of Summer with the distant sound of the railway; Autumn, the time for burning of leaves and gathering the harvest; and Winter with the dreaded frost signalling unemployment. Perceive the timeless pattern of the life-cycle: the agony of childbirth, the clamour and bustle of family life, the groans of the dying and the silence of mourning. Consider St Helen's churchyard where Folly landowners and labourers lie buried together.

Observe The Folly as the 20th century dawns, a changing society with new job prospects halted by the coming of the Great War. As you read the stories in this book share the laughter and tears. Try to understand the thwarting of ambition and promise, and mourning for early death. Listen to some of the voices that until now have been silent, imagine gossip that has never been recorded and share a few of the secrets of The Folly.

As you arrive at the period within your own living memory, try to reach beyond nostalgia and recollections of personal ancestors. Seek to form an understanding of The Folly in the wider context of community and recognise the joy of life that existed in the past and still continues in Folly Fields today.

Note

The cottages at The Folly were not numbered until 1936 so determining the order in which they were built and their occupants during the early years has relied on a limited number of available property deeds. The 1939 Register, printed on pages 141-145 includes house numbers for Folly Fields at that time and details of occupants with dates of birth and occupations. Individuals' records marked 'Closed' remain so for 100 years from their date of birth or until proof of death is produced.

‘On the Eve of Change’

The Origin of ‘The Folly’

On 7 January 1888, *The Herts Mercury and Reformer* published an enquiry from one of its readers:

> *At Wheathampstead is a small hamlet containing a few houses known as The Folly; perhaps some resident in that neighbourhood can give particulars why the name was originally applied to the place?*

No response was recorded.

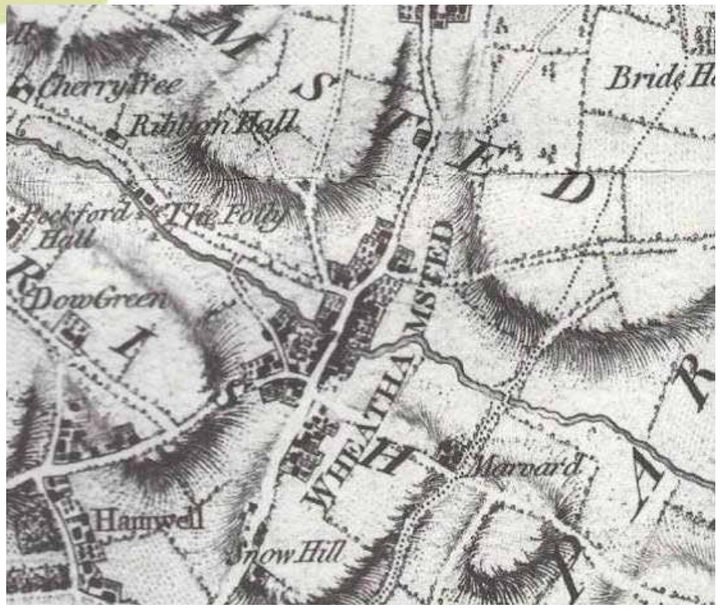
The Folly lies about half a mile from Wheathampstead village along Lower Luton Road towards Batford and the origin of its name is obscure and intriguing. In the 1970s local historians suggested that the name might be linked with the fulling mill near Leasey Bridge marked on John Seller’s map of 1676.[2] But the linguistic connection between ‘Folly’ and ‘fulling’ is tenuous and there may be other possibilities. One is that a ‘folly’, a whimsical ornamental building quite common in England during the 18th century, was once built on the land when it was the garden of a large house or a park. Alternatively, an older meaning of the word ‘folly’, from the Old French *folie,* is ‘delight’ or ‘favourite abode’, used especially of country estates.[3]

Ribbon Hall

Equally intriguing is the ownership of the land known as The Folly before it was developed into a small hamlet and the story of the local family that has emerged from the records.

The Folly appears for the first time on the 1766 Dury and Andrews map, which shows the Hertfordshire countryside ‘on the eve of change’.[4]

At this time Britain had changed little for centuries and rural life was dominated by agriculture. The countryside was ruled by daylight and the seasons and for most people in rural communities horizons were limited. Their world was their village, where their family had lived for generations and the fastest thing on earth was a galloping horse. The Folly, with its enigmatic past, awaited change and transformation.



The Folly on 1766 Dury and Andrews Map [5]

The Dury and Andrews map of Hertfordshire shows a number of minor settlements in parishes across the county around buildings named as ‘Halls’. The vast majority of ‘Halls’ on the map bear names of 12th or 13th-century origin, often those of a medieval owner or occupier and many were not destined to survive beyond the late-18th or early-19th centuries.[6] *Ribbon Hall* is marked next to The Folly, close to the site of the present *Lea House,* 204 Lower Luton Road.

Ribbon Hall was probably a traditional timber-framed dwelling owned by a yeoman holding a small landed estate. It is mentioned

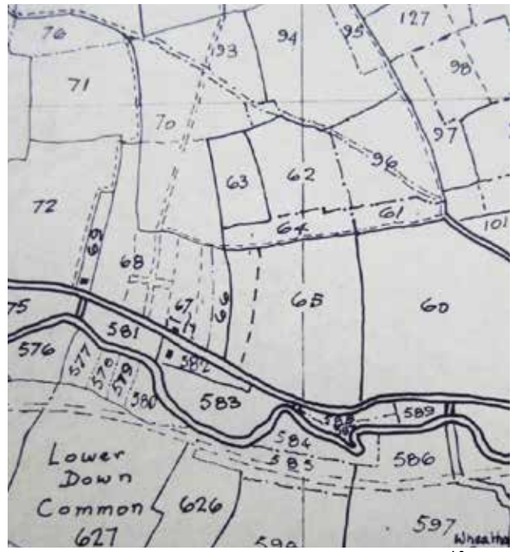
again in parish records when Daniel Nicholls, a ‘labourer of Ribbon Hall’ and his wife, Hannah, took their children from there to be baptised at St Helen’s Church in Wheathampstead, their son in 1820 and their daughter in 1823.[7]

Daniel Nicholls (1782-1830)
m
Hannah Filby (1799-1866)
St Helen’s Church, 5 Dec 1819

- William 1820
- Mary 1823

Ribbon Hall was surrounded by fields and the ownership and occupation of the land on which it stood can be traced on the *Tithe Map for Whethampstead* of 1840. The payment of ‘tithes’, one tenth of local produce, to the church was established before the Norman Conquest. Following the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 and an amendment in 1837, tithes could be paid as a cash-based rent charge rather than in goods and this legislation resulted in detailed maps being produced showing all the land in parishes across the country. Each map was accompanied by a schedule, listing map items by number and showing the owners, occupiers and a description of the land, sometimes with field names.

In 1840, Charles Benet Drake Garrard of *Lamer* owned more than 1,000 acres of land in Wheathampstead but outside the *Lamer* estate most land was in the hands of local farmers or maltsters like Charles Lattimore, Henry and Robert Sibley and John Dorrington.[8] Some landowners farmed their own land, employing local men and boys as labourers,[9] while others rented it to ‘Occupiers’.



Detail from Whethampstead Tithe Map, 1840 [10]

Ribbon Hall itself does not appear on the Tithe Map schedule so by 1840 it must have been demolished. Two areas of arable land called ‘Ribbon Hall Field’ are situated on the site. ‘The Folly’ is not mentioned so perhaps this was just a local name not used in official documents.

Ribbon Hall Field (72) and two adjacent areas (70 and 71) were owned by the Earl of Verulam.[11] Ribbon Hall Field (68) and the strip of land next to it labelled ‘cottages and gardens’ (67) belonged to Abigail Thrale, the widow of Ralph Thrale, whose family members played a significant role in the story of The Folly.[12]

Local Family Connections

Several branches of the Thrale family were well-established around Sandridge and Wheathampstead by the 18th century. Ralph Thrale, the son of Thomas Thrale and Ann Parsons, was born in Sandridge in 1766.[13] On 29 September 1796 he married Abigail Burchmore from Flamstead at St Helen’s Church in Wheathampstead and they settled in the village.[14] In 1801 Daniel Nicholls was employed by Ralph Thrale for three years, before he left his service to

join the West Midlands Militia. Daniel returned to Wheathampstead in 1817 and was then recorded as 'a labourer of Ribbon Hall' in 1820 and 1823.[15] Ralph Thrale may have owned 'Ribbon Hall Field' at that time and possibly the ancient dwelling called *Ribbon Hall.*

By the time the Tithe Map was drawn in 1840, Ralph Thrale was dead. [16] His plots of land passed to his widow, Abigail, and they appear in her name on the Tithe Map schedule.

In 1840 Abigail's plot of land (67), listed as 'cottages and gardens', was occupied by 'Matthew Munt and others.' The 1841 census for The Folly, shows seven householders on the site, including Matthew Munt, and a total of 27 residents.[17] By 1851, the cottages must have been demolished because all the occupants were living elsewhere.[18] At one time the foundations of these cottages could be traced on the front lawn of *Lea House.*[19]

Ralph and Abigail had two sons and three daughters. Their elder son, Ralph, did not survive infancy and their younger son, Thomas, died in 1840 at the age of 39.[20] The 1841 census shows Abigail, now 70 years of age, living in Wheathampstead village near *The Swan.* Lodging with her were her grandsons, Norman and William Thrale, aged 10 and 12, who had recently lost their father.[21]

Abigail's three daughters lived nearby with their families. Elizabeth, the eldest, had married James Arnold of Kings Walden in 1833 [22/23]and he had set up a shoemaking business in Wheathampstead. [24] It was common for craftsmen to have more than one occupation and in 1835 and 1837 James Arnold was the tenant of *The Boot* beer house in the village.[25] He was also mentioned in a document of 31 May 1836 as the rent-paying 'occupier' of *The Royal Oak,* near The Folly.[26]

The Two Brewers, 8 and 10 High Street, Wheathampstead

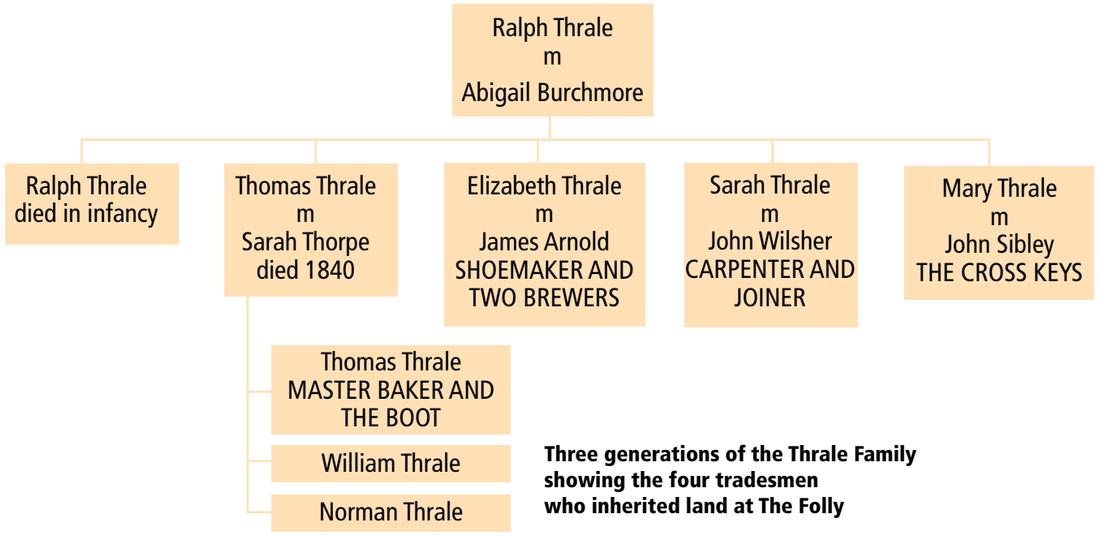
The Cross Keys, Gustard Wood [29]

By 1841 he was the established licensee of *The Two Brewers.*[27]

Abigail's second daughter, Sarah, married John Wilsher, who ran a carpentry and joinery business in the village and they lived next door to Abigail and her grandsons in 1841. Mary, Abigail's youngest daughter, was the wife of John Sibley, a bootmaker and publican at *The Cross Keys* in Gustard Wood. [28]

The Boot, 33 High Street [32]

Norman and William Thrale, lodging with their grandmother, had an elder brother, Thomas, who married in London in 1848. He returned to Wheathampstead with his wife and by 1851 was a baker and beer seller at *The Boot* in the High Street, later known as *The Bricklayers Arms.*[30] He continued to work as a master baker in the High Street until his death in 1886. [31]

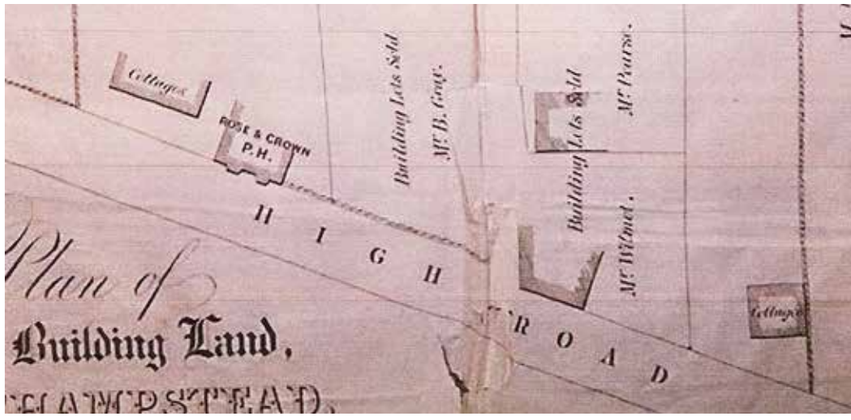


Three generations of the Thrale Family showing the four tradesmen who inherited land at The Folly

First Cottages and Tenants

Abigail Thrale died in the Spring of 1849[33] and a few months later these four related tradesmen shared Abigail's land between them. An Indenture of Conveyance shows that on 18 October 1849 Thomas Thrale, John Wilsher, John Sibley and James and Elizabeth Arnold had 'a share in a plot of land at The Folly'.[34] There was a local need for cottages and landowners had status in the community.

The preliminary purchase arrangement was short-lived for by 26 December 1849 James Arnold of *The Two Brewers,* the senior member of the group, and Henry Pinks Arnold, a relative and brewer from Kings Walden, shared the central plot of building land between them.[35] John Sibley and John Wilsher retained ownership of land that was later used for allotments or grazing and John Sibley had several properties built on the site.[36]



Detail from Plan of Building Land, 1860

Building at The Folly began slowly in around 1850. The first pair of cottages appeared to the east of the main site near the High Road (now Lower Luton Road) and can be seen on a detail of the 1860 plan of building land marked 'Cottages.'

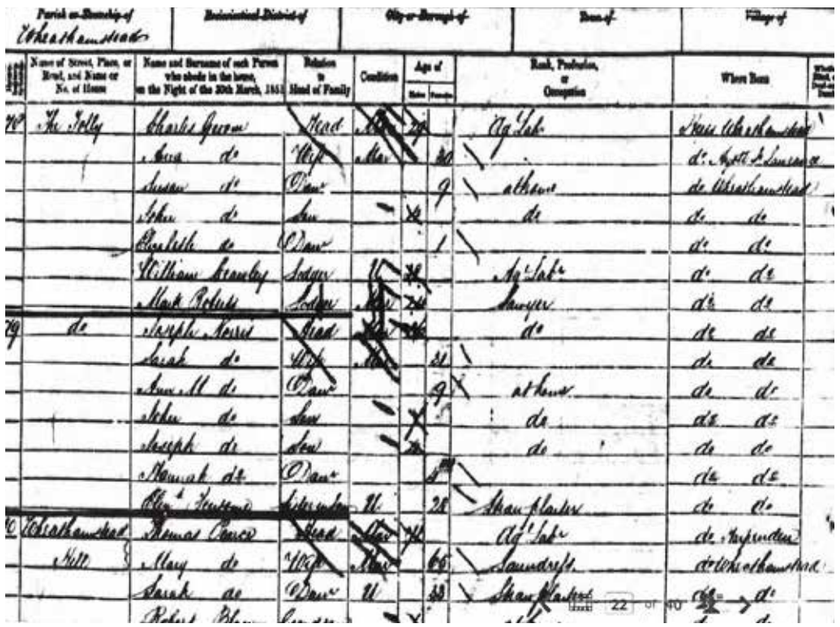
These cottages were built for John Sibley and his wife, Mary, who rented them out to tenants. They were simple two-bedroom cottages with check-patterned brickwork and stood back from the road. Now extended to twice their original size, 170 and *Bramble Cottage,* 168 Lower Luton

Road, can be glimpsed through the trees. Many cottages at The Folly have been altered over the years and the original door and window arches have disappeared but they are still visible in the brickwork here.

170 Lower Luton Road showing the original cottage on the right

Close up of original check brick window and door arches At one time 170 was called The Cottage, 1 The Folly

John Sibley's first tenants were Joseph Norris and Charles Groom and their families, totalling fourteen occupants.[37] These two families appear on the 1851 census as the only residents at The Folly at that time. Newly built cottages with surrounding land, where pigs could be reared and vegetables grown would have attracted young couples with children.



1851 census return for The Folly[38]

Over the next 70 years three generations of the Norris and Groom families lived at The Folly. In 1881, when ownership of the two cottages passed to John Sibley's nephew, John Wilsher junior, who had worked with him at *The Cross Keys* in Gustard Wood, Joseph Norris's widow, Sarah, was still living in her original home with two of her children and a lodger. [39]

To the west of the main site, and again marked on the 1860 plan of building land, was another pair of cottages, built during the 1850s. These two cottages have recently been converted into one dwelling called *Folly Edge,* 192 Lower Luton Road. From the 1870s until 1963 these cottages were occupied by members of the French family. [40]

Folly Edge, 192 Lower Luton Road

A Beer House and a Beer Shop

The story of the building of *The Rose and Crown,* the public house that served the residents of The Folly for nearly a hundred years, like the ownership of the land at The Folly, has an intriguing and mysterious twist. Although it appears on the 1860 plan of building land, it is not recorded by name in a census return until 1881. So when was it built and who was the first licensee?

The deeds of two terraces of cottages built during the 1860s on the main site of The Folly refer to the building of an unnamed 'beer house' for Henry Pinks Arnold around 1851.[41] It seems likely that this 'beer house' was *The Rose and Crown,* named on the 1860 plan.[42] Henry Pinks Arnold, a brewer, would have anticipated trade both from the new hamlet planned at The Folly and from passing travellers on the main road. A sizeable beer house with a cellar and upstairs rooms to accommodate guests had considerable potential.[43]

Formerly The Rose and Crown The Folly, now Crown Cottage and Rose Cottage, 188a and 188 Lower Luton Road

The Beer House Act of 1828, followed by the Beerhouse Act of 1830 liberalised the regulations governing brewing and encouraged the sale of beer from premises other than inns. Any householder who wished to sell beer, but not wines and spirits, from his home could apply for an Excise Licence at the cost of two guineas per year. Charles Groom, in his new cottage at The Folly, was an agricultural labourer and he too saw the possibility of local trade. For several decades he and his wife, Ann, sold beer from their front room, providing a useful service for their community.

In 1857, Charles Groom's 'beer shop' was mentioned in a Hertfordshire court case, when Ann Groom gave evidence that she had bought four bushels of acorns for use as pig food from a labourer, who emptied the sacks of acorns into her barn. The labourer was accused of stealing them but there was insufficient evidence and the case was dismissed.

Also giving evidence in court was Sarah Mead, who kept the 'beer house' at The Folly, where the labourer and his friends had sat down to enjoy a pint.[44] This was clearly a different establishment from Charles Groom's 'beer shop'. The 1861 census shows Sarah Mead and her husband, Felix, a labourer and beer retailer, living at 'The Folly, Luton Road' so probably at the 'beer house' built for Henry Pinks Arnold. The 1866 *County Directory* lists both Felix Mead and Charles Groom as beer retailers. *The Rose and Crown* was also mentioned in another court case of 1868[45] but was not officially named in a census return until 1881.

The court case involving Charles Groom's 'beer shop' offers a brief snapshot of life at The Folly soon after the first cottages were built, but what do we know about their Victorian residents, Joseph Norris and Charles Groom? Who were they and who were their neighbours? What local events did they witness and what changes did they encounter as their children grew up?

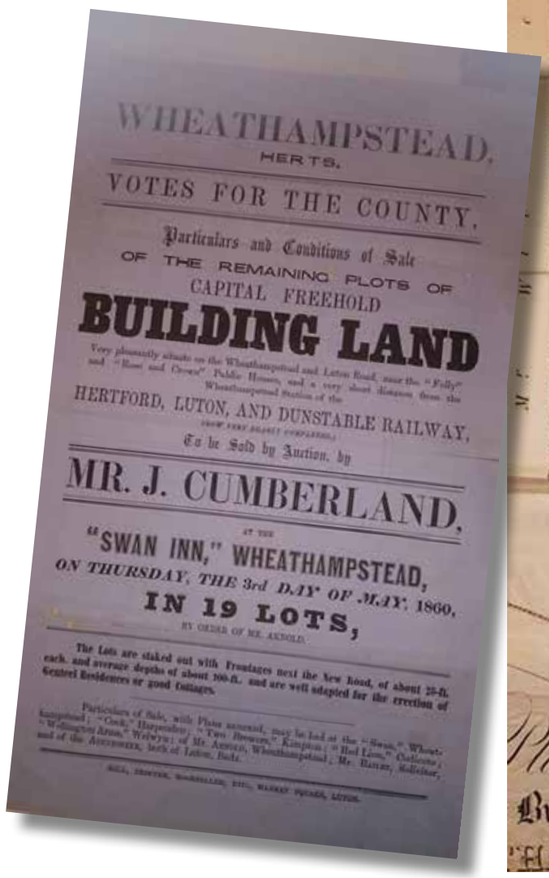
Joseph Norris, a sawyer, and Sarah Fensome were next-door neighbours in Wheathampstead village and married in 1841.[46] They had eight children, two of whom died during infancy. Sarah gave birth to their family over a period of 20 years and four of her children were born at The Folly. Charles

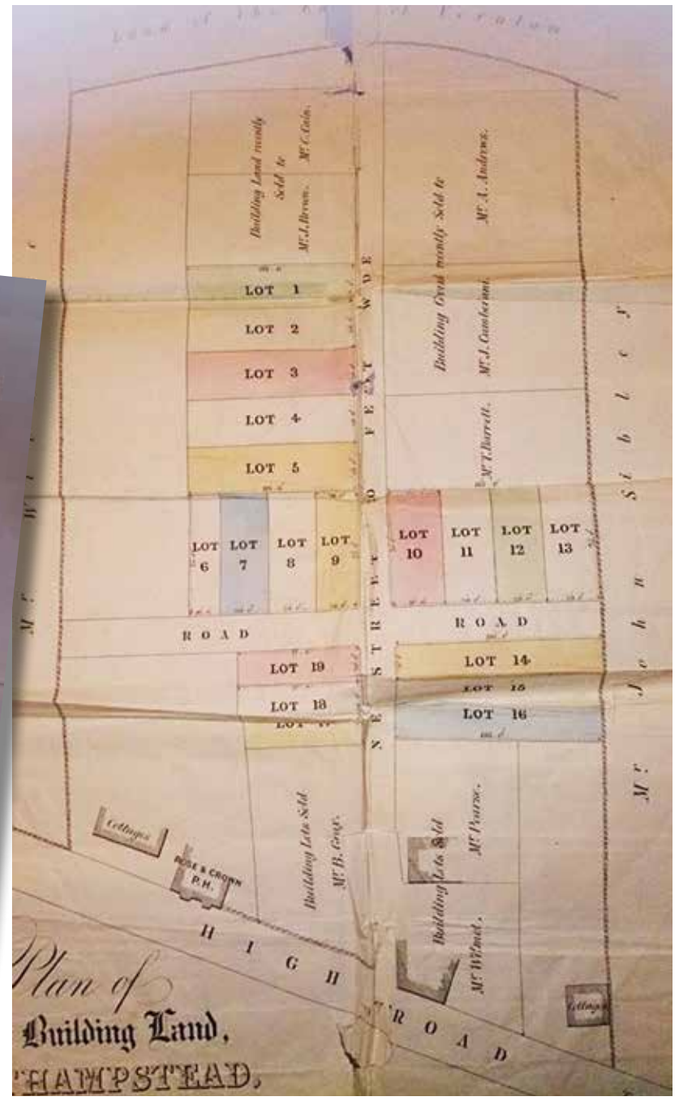
Groom and Ann Bygrave from Gustard Wood also married in 1841 when they were both 19 and their eight children all attained adulthood. At this time infant mortality was high and around 15 per cent of babies died before their first birthday. During the 1840s and '50s a family with fewer than seven children born alive would have been considered 'small'. Fifty years later, five or six children would have been considered a 'large' family.

New Street

Not long after the Norris and Groom families arrived at The Folly a rough road was laid out to the instructions of James Arnold so serious building work could begin. This road, initially called New Street, had a small cross road named New Road (or Cross Roads on some plans). These roads together form Folly Fields today. Land surveyors measured and staked out plots and prospective purchasers viewed the site. Plots on either side of New Street nearest to Lower Luton Road were sold to three purchasers named on the plans and immediately earmarked for building.

On 29 September 1859 James Arnold offered two plots of land near the top of the road for sale by public auction and John Brown, the licensee of *The Horse Shoes* at 106 Park Street in Luton, was


WHEATHAMPSTEAD,
HERTS.
VOTES FOR THE COUNTY.
Particulars and Conditions of Sale
OF THE REMAINING PLOTS OF
CAPITAL FREEHOLD
BUILDING LAND
HERTFORD, LUTON, AND DUNSTABLE RAILWAY,
To be Sold by Auction, by
MR. J. CUMBERLAND,
"SWAN INN," WHEATHAMPSTEAD,
ON THURSDAY, THE 3rd DAY OF MAY, 1860,
IN 19 LOTS,
BY ORDER OF MR. ARNOLD.
The Lots are staked out with Frontages next the New Road, of about 28-ft. each, and average depths of about 100-ft. and are well adapted for the erection of Genteel Residences or good Cottages.



the highest bidder for one of them.[47] Around the same time a similar plot just 'north' of this was purchased by Charles Cain. No doubt the Norris and Groom children ran up the road in excitement to watch developments and saw builders and carpenters at work as the new cottages gradually took shape.

On 3 May 1860, James Arnold offered the remaining building plots at an auction at *The Swan* in Wheathampstead. There were 19 Lots staked out with frontages each 28 feet wide and at least 100 feet in depth 'well-adapted for the erection of Genteel Residences or good Cottages'. On 20 June 1861 Henry Pinks Arnold released his share of the land, conveying it to James Arnold, who now became sole owner of most of the site.[48]

John Brown used his land at the top of The Folly in 1862 for a terrace of five cottages. Today these

The terraces built for John Brown and Charles Cain

are numbered 44, 46, (48 is an archway entrance) with a room above that is now part of 50. The last cottage in this terrace, originally number 52, is now part of 54, the first of the terrace of four cottages built for Charles Cain. This terrace also includes 56 and 58/60, now a larger dwelling. [49]

A Growing Community

Although these cottages were not completed until 1862, the Norris and Groom families already had new neighbours elsewhere. The 1861 census shows occupants in nine cottages on the site. Fifty residents are recorded, mainly agricultural workers from Wheathampstead or Sandridge, including the Lake and Latchford families, who lived at The Folly for at least six decades.[50]

One newcomer arrived with her own very special memories of The Folly. Hannah Nicholls and her husband, Daniel, a labourer, had once lived at The Folly at *Ribbon Hall* and their two children were baptised from there in 1820 and 1823. Their baby son, William did not survive and Daniel Nicholls died in 1830,[51] leaving behind his six-year-old daughter, Mary, and his young widow, Hannah, who was 31 and pregnant. A few months later Hannah gave birth to a son, whom she named Daniel William Nicholls, after both the husband and son she had lost. For a few years Hannah found work as a straw plaiter in Luton before returning to Wheathampstead, where her daughter, Mary, died at the age of 14.[52] So the only child of Daniel Nicholls who lived to adulthood was Daniel William, the one he never met. On 17 February 1839 Hannah married John Maddox/Maddocks, a widower, at St Peter's Church in St Albans.[53] They had one daughter, Ann, in 1840 and lived for some years in Batford,[54] before moving to The Folly.[55] Hannah had come full circle, returning to the place where she had spent the early years of her first marriage with Daniel at *Ribbon Hall.* [56]

Developments for the Community

The Coming of the Railway

While the building of cottages at The Folly was in progress, significant changes were taking place in the village. Wheathampstead was surrounded by fields, orchards and farms, with the River Lea running from west to east through the parish. The High Street rose up The Hill toward Sandridge and St Albans, branching off up Brewhouse Hill to the hamlets of Amwell (known as Hamwell in the 19th century) and Down Green. In 1851 only a third of the local population lived in the village; a quarter inhabited the 18th-century settlement of Gustard Wood and the remainder lived in Amwell, Nomansland or in scattered isolated farms. Wheathampstead was essentially a farming community.

The Industrial Revolution, the transition from a handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machinery, began in the 1760s, with improvements to the efficiency of water and steam power, increased mechanisation and the introduction of factory systems. On 15 September 1830 the dawn of the 'modern' railway was marked by the opening of the first 'intercity' line between Liverpool and Manchester and, as the rail network stretched its iron fingers across Britain, it became a potent force changing the face and pace of the countryside. By 1850 Britain was criss-crossed by 6,000 miles of track[1] but the sleepy village of Wheathampstead had to wait another decade for the arrival of its own railway line and a station, which opened on 1 September 1860. The coming of the railway to the village transformed the local landscape and profoundly affected the lives of local residents.

The station was on the line that ran from Welwyn via Luton to Dunstable and the track was clearly visible across the fields from The Folly. To many Folly residents, who had never been further than St Albans on market day, the coming of the railway to Wheathampstead was a remarkable innovation.

Wheathampstead Station, 1 July 1909 [2]

Nothing like this had happened before – a bridge across the newly-named Station Road, a smart station platform with a signal-box and swathes of railway track cutting across open fields. As in other rural areas, farm labourers put down their forks and scythes and children cheered as the steam trains chugged past. A small goods yard and cattle dock were built beside the track but, as the station platform was on an embankment and the road and housing were in close proximity, Wheathampstead remained a single platform station with no passing loop like those at Harpenden East and Ayot.

The railway brought immediate business to the village. Watercress from *Cresswell Farm* [3] near The Folly was sent to London, while straw plaits went to Luton for the hat makers there and local straw plaiters and others travelled to Luton or St Albans to work in the hat factories and other trades. A comparison of the 1851 and 1881 census returns for Wheathampstead shows that a number of railway workers came to live in the village and a few rented cottages at The Folly.

From Wheathampstead Station the line crossed the River Lea by means of a brick and girder bridge. At New Bridge, just off Lower Luton Road, the railway line was crossed by a footpath to Wheathampstead village, guarded by a wide gate and kiss-gates on either side. This path was often used by children from The Folly and their safety became a cause of concern for the parish church authorities at the time. So much pressure was brought to bear on the railway company that a tiny subway, only six feet wide and six feet high, was excavated. In the south wall of the subway was a small cavity that housed an oil lamp and kiss-gates were put at both entrances. As the subway was below the level of the river a raised iron floor was put in to allow flood water to lie underneath. The water was then pumped out by means of a hand pump by a porter from the station.[4] Perhaps Henry Underlin, the railway porter who lived at The Folly for 20 years, took his turn, watched by his son, Frank, who also later became a railway worker.[5]

Other means of transport changed very little at this time and there were no hard, shiny-surfaced roads. Traffic passing The Folly was slow-moving, consisting mainly of horses and farm carts, with the occasional jingle of a bridle from the carriages of the gentry.

The Role of the Parish Church

During the Victorian era the parish church was an overwhelming presence at the heart of English village communities. It registered, christened and married, it passed judgment on moral behaviour and it sustained, comforted and buried. There had been a church in Wheathampstead since at least the 12th century, which drew the village community together.

St Helen's Church (west end) prior to 1865 [6]

Folly residents, even if not regular churchgoers, were familiar with their parish church. Charles Groom and his wife, Ann Bygrave, the first residents at The Folly, were married at St Helen's in 1841 and their eight children were all baptised there.[7] During their regular visits they would have noticed the church building descending into a sad state of decay during the incumbency of Canon George Pretyman, the Rector of Wheathampstead-cum-Harpenden from 1814 until 1859. Notorious for acquiring wealth out of the revenues of the church and using his influence to advance family members to lucrative positions, he spent little time in the parish.[8] While he initiated the original National School on The Hill for poor children of the village in 1815, George Pretyman held 'but feebly the minds and

affection of the poorer classes' and was considered by them 'haughty – stiff and proud – keeping them at a cool distance'.[9]

This National School, one of the first in the country, was designed for 100 children and cost £183 to build but by 1859, like the church, it was in a dilapidated condition. No school register has survived but Charles and Ann Groom's oldest children may have been pupils and, as part of their education, attended the main church festivals at St Helen's Church.

The vast, stark, neglected church would have been bewildering to children from The Folly. The exterior, apart from the tower, was covered with plaster and repaired with whatever bricks and slates came to hand. The only entrance to the nave was at the back of the church at the west door, where a porch was used to store coal and the tools of the gravedigger. The south porch, the present main entrance, was filled up level with the ground and extended to house a fire engine.[10] What did Victorian children make of this vast, decaying, multi-purpose space, where they bowed their heads for prayer and stood for song? What did they understand of the ancient font, the reclining knight and his lady in the Brocket Chapel and the monuments and brasses to the great and the good of Wheathampstead? The windows were walled up some feet above the sills and the only respite from the bleakness must have been the ever-changing leaves on the trees in the churchyard, visible as they flickered and danced outside the windows.

When Canon George Pretyman died on 23 June 1859 after an incumbency of 45 years, his successor, Canon Owen Davys, embarked on a vast scheme of restoration at St Helen's. This was not his personal initiative, although he did contribute £500 of his own money, but part of the expansion and restoration of nearly 80 per cent of parish churches in England and Wales between 1840 and 1875. This varied from minor changes to complete demolition and rebuilding and was part-funded by local dioceses. Since the English Reformation the fabric of many churches and cathedrals had suffered from neglect. Restoration was seen as a way to reverse the decline in church attendance and reassert the Church's power, prosperity and influence.[11]

A New National School

Wheathampstead National School, c. 1862

The driving force behind the Wheathampstead church restoration project was Canon Owen Davys and the architect was Edward Browning, who also designed a new school in Church Street for the children of the village.[12] The new National School with its belfry and flint walls, wet with overnight rain or gleaming in the morning sun, was an attractive addition to the village. With classrooms for infants and for boys and girls, it opened on 29 December 1862 and over the years provided

education for children from the village and from The Folly.

On Tuesday 24 April 1866 the new National School Log Book recorded: 'Holiday all day owing to reopening of the Church after its restoration'.[13] The children would immediately have noticed that the outside plaster had been stripped to reveal the original flint facing, so the church now matched their school.

Inside, the triple stained glass windows at the east end, the gift of Mrs Drake Garrard of *Lamer House*, reflected rainbow colours in bright sunlight. Another huge stained glass window was donated by the Pretyman family in 1869. Despite George Pretyman's scandalous reputation and his neglect of Wheathampstead during his incumbency, this lavish window was accepted as a valuable addition to the new church fabric. In 1888 the House family of *The Grove*, Wheathampstead donated another window to the south of the sanctuary. The stark, gloomy building of earlier years was now more inviting for adults and for children from the new National School.

St Helen's Church after restoration [14]

The First Folly Wedding

In the summer of 1864, a year before the church restoration began, Joseph Norris and Charles Groom from The Folly, who had been neighbours for more than ten years, celebrated the marriage of Joseph's eldest son, John, to Susan, the eldest daughter of Charles Groom.[15] After their marriage John and Susan Norris rented a cottage at The Folly and brought up their four children there. This was the first of the Folly marriages and many more would follow.

As the Folly population expanded it became a tight-knit community, where extended families lived together and intermarried, their names recurring over decades and generations. In 1865, for example, Thomas and Susan Wood from Gustard Wood rented one of James Arnold's cottages, while their daughter Louisa and her husband, Samuel Izzard, lived in the other one next door.[16] Already there was a growing sense of belonging, identity and mutual support within The Folly community.

Folly Schoolchildren

The 1871 census for The Folly shows about 50 children of school age identified as 'scholars'. With large families conceived over a period of about 20 years, the generations sometimes overlapped. The four youngest children of Charles Groom were at school at the same time as two of John and Susan Norris's children.

The opening of the new school provided a wider range of friends for children from The Folly and made them aware of the social hierarchies within the village. The Forster Education Act of 1870 introduced the idea of compulsory education but it was not confirmed until 1880, when children had to attend school between the ages of five and ten. Pressures on poor families who needed their children to work to provide income resulted in frequent absences and by the early 1890s 'compulsory' school attendance nationwide within this age group was only 82 per cent.

Developments for the Community

The National School in Wheathampstead, founded by the 'National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in England and Wales', aimed to instil religion into the poor. At ground level schools founded by the Society were implemented by the local rector or vicar and members of the Church of England. Canon Owen Davys visited the school frequently so would have been a very familiar figure to all the children.

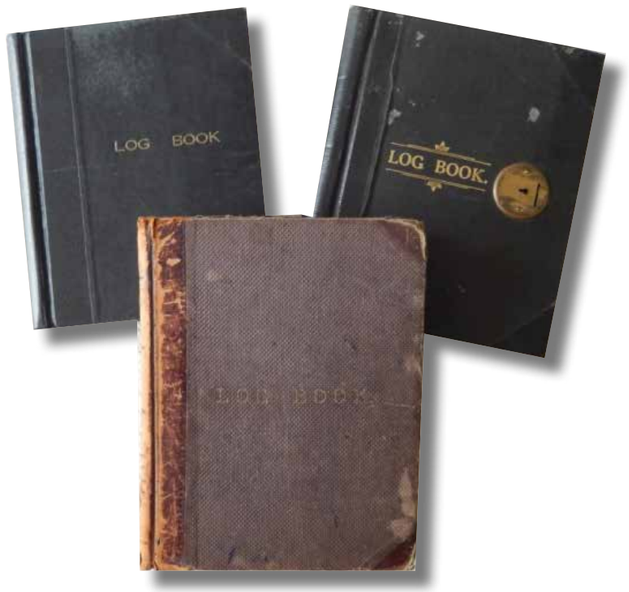
Canon Owen Davys

Occasionally the school Log Book implied that his visits were almost intrusive as he encouraged the teachers' efforts and strove to ensure the success of his work in establishing the new school.[17]

Folly children, like their village contemporaries, received an education that consisted predominantly of Church of England Christian doctrine, together with reading, writing and arithmetic. Scripture was taught daily and children attended church on all the main festivals, when their behaviour was particularly noted by the schoolmistress. If out of order, it incurred punishment. They learnt to sing hymns and songs, and both boys and girls were taught needlework. 'Object' lessons aimed to extend their understanding of everyday items such as bread and coal; familiar places like the Railway Station and Post Office; and objects from the natural world, bees, butterflies and, more exotically, elephants, monkeys and eagles.[18] The success of these lessons depended on the skill and imagination of the teacher.

During their time at school children from The Folly would have met Mrs Honora Drake Garrard from *Lamer.* Charles Benet Drake Garrard and his wife, Honora, were members of the land - owning class and gentry of Wheathampstead with grand memorials to their ancestors in St Helen's Church.

Charles Benet Drake Garrard donated £200 towards the new National School (equivalent to about £8,500 today) and Mrs Drake Garrard laid the foundation stone.



Wheathampstead National School Log Books

Developments for the Community

Portraits of Honora and Charles Drake Garrard John Cox Dillman – Engleheart [19]

Like many of their generation, Charles and Honora believed in the divine right of the aristocracy and presided over Victorian Wheathampstead like minor monarchs. Honora, who looked like Queen Victoria, was known as 'Lady' to tenants and villagers. [20]

Visits by the gentry to Victorian schools always had an air of patronage, acts of charity practised by the wealthy for the benefit of the poor. Mrs Drake Garrard came occasionally to hear the children's reading or to bring needlework materials, gifts of soup or clothing and presents at Christmas.

When Charles Benet Drake Garrard died on 19 June 1884 the National School closed for his funeral. Mrs Drake Garrard died in 1892 and towards the end was pushed about in a wicker wheelchair by a footman and little girls were obliged to curtsey if they saw her. Most of the estate cottages still had a framed picture of her on their wall.

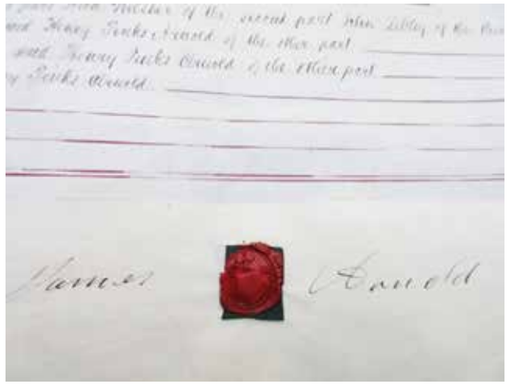
Children from The Folly attending the National School and St Helen's Church would have been aware of the local gentry and their own lowly place in the social hierarchy of the village.

Mrs Drake Garrard as many of The Folly children would have remembered her

Arrivals and Departures

An Unusual Landlord

In 1866 James Arnold, the main landowner at The Folly, sold the two cottages he had built to James Desborough for the sum of £140 (£6,000 at today's value), so his tenants had a new landlord. In later years these cottages were numbered 32 and 34 Folly Fields and now form one dwelling, number 34.[1]



James Arnold's signature on the Indenture for sale of the two cottages to James Desborough in 1866

Number 34 Folly Fields, originally two cottages

James Desborough, the new landlord, was described as a 'yeoman', a famer of some means, and he was a bachelor. His father owned the 200 acre *Tinkers Hall Farm* near Luton,[2] where James acted as farm bailiff, before setting up his own 141 acre farm in Kimpton.[3] As a local farmer James Desborough would have had a network of contacts with other farmers in the area, including perhaps those at *Lamer Farm,* part of the Garrard estate.

Charles Garrard and Honora employed 15 servants at *Lamer House,* including laundry, kitchen, scullery, dairy, house and lady's maids, a butler, a coachman and a footman.[4] Among their employees was Priscilla Meachem, who by 1870 had worked at *Lamer House* as a dairymaid for at least 20 years. Exactly how she came to meet James Desborough and how long they had known one another is unknown but in 1871, a few years after purchasing property at The Folly, James, aged 52, married Priscilla, who was just a year younger.[5]

Victorian dairymaids

By 1871 James Desborough had retired from farming and eventually he owned a total of five cottages at The Folly, including three near the cross road, now numbered 25, 23 and 17.[6] Number 25, on the right-hand corner, still has distinctive patterned brickwork and may have been the cottage where he and Priscilla lived, well-placed to keep an eye on their properties and tenants.

As a resident landlord with independent means, James Desborough was an unusual newcomer to The Folly but he and Priscilla remained

The Corner House 25 Folly Fields

there for more than 20 years.[7] Mary Desborough, James's sister, and her niece, Emily Medcroft, also occupied one of his cottages for a similar period.[8]

Agricultural Labourers and Straw Plaiters

Property auctions continued so that by 1871 a huge expansion had taken place at The Folly, with a total of 45 cottages now on the site occupied by 231 inhabitants.[9] New arrivals included carpenters, sawyers, a wheelwright, a master blacksmith with two apprentices, a porter, four platelayers working on the railway and three men who were unemployed; but the majority of residents were agricultural labourers, whose wives and daughters worked as straw plaiters in the hat trade.[10]

Agricultural labourers sharpening their tools [11]

Many Victorian families at The Folly now had six or seven children so living conditions were cramped and clothing was passed from father to son. While life at The Folly was not as deprived as in London's slums or the vice-ridden, overcrowded lodging houses of the capital, for poorly-paid agricultural workers life was still a struggle. Hours were long, work was arduous and exhausting and labourers were not paid for workless days of winter or bad weather. Their homes were cold and draughty and drink helped to warm body and spirit.

The 1870s saw a period of agricultural depression, with poor weather, disappointing harvests and grain imports from the USA and Canada becoming significant. Unions were formed across the country, aiming to improve general conditions and there were strikes by agricultural labourers. Meetings around Wheathampstead attracted hundreds of farm workers. On the evening of 6 June 1872 at a gathering of 500 on Nomansland Common labourers recounted the experiences and difficulties of earning only 12 shillings a week.[12]

Bronchitis and rheumatism often afflicted agricultural labours, whose clothing could be soaked through for days on end. Strength deserted many a labouring man as he turned fifty and in heavier jobs much earlier. Toiling in the fields at harvest time was demanding, for the weather was hot and the pace relentless, but most labourers were grateful to be employed, particularly in September when there was a temporary wage increase. If the breadwinner was out of work, the situation could become desperate and there was no safety net to cushion the visitation of illness or death. Lack of security cast a dark shadow and almost all were unemployed at some time in their lives because of sickness, injury or old age.

Straw plaiting and hat making reached its peak in 1871, when it employed 12,804 adults and children in Hertfordshire, 94 per cent of them female.[13] Children learnt to plait from an early age and contributed to the family income. In some local areas there were straw plaiting schools, where girls acquired plaiting skills and a smattering of education. The only evidence of the existence of such a school in Wheathampstead is the claim by an old inhabitant interviewed in 1956, who said:

As you go up Wheathampstead Hill, on the right at the top, in one of those old cottages above the Red Cow, was where there was a plaiting school for teaching straw plaiting - on the other side was where the old village school was; you can see the stone that marks the spot. [14]

Straw Plaiting School [15]

Before 1866 the managers of the new National School in Wheathampstead allowed 'one or two afternoons for plaiting instead of sewing,' with lessons continuing while plaiting was in progress. They regarded this as the only way to keep many of the girls in school but in 1867 plaiting was discontinued at the school. Absenteeism returned and in 1872 the School Log Book states, 'Many girls make it a rule to stay at home in the afternoons to do straw plait', and in 1875, 'Irregularity of many girls is much greater than in previous years accounted for by the briskness in the straw trade'.[16] The income produced by women and children was important for a family and could amount to more than the wage of a labourer.

Many Folly residents kept pigs or chickens and grew vegetables on their allotments so, despite meagre wages, managed to provide food for themselves and their children. Rabbits could be trapped in the fields and fish from the River Lea provided an occasional change of diet.[17] Crayfish or fresh-water lobsters, known locally as 'crawmees', which only breed in unpolluted streams, were caught by an age-old method passed down from their ancestors. An iron hoop, preferably from a wooden barrel, served as a frame and wire netting was stretched across it, with offal, usually chicken liver, tied on to serve as bait. Strings were attached and the home-made contraption was lowered onto the river bed in the hope of luring a crayfish, which was considered a delicacy. [18]

Arrivals in the 1870s

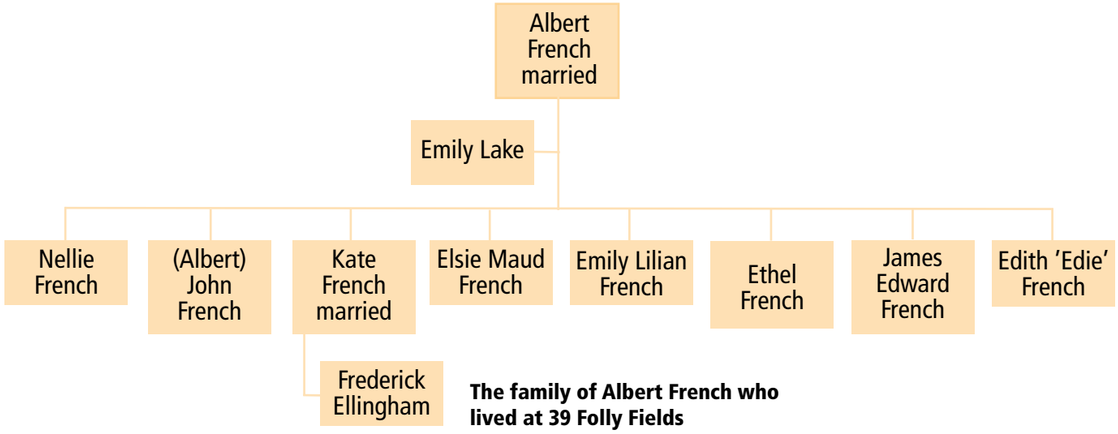
Among the new arrivals at The Folly in the 1870s were members of the French family, who became long-term residents. They intermarried with other Folly families and brief interludes from their lives appear regularly in the story of the community.

James French, a farm labourer, had lived at *Marford Cottages* in Wheathampstead with his first wife, Mary Bigg, and their five children [19] but Mary died in 1869.[20] The following year James married Eliza Wheeler, a straw plaiter [21]and they settled together at The Folly with James's five children and raised seven more of their own.[22] Fortunately they were not all resident at the same time. James French died in 1880 at the age of 51[23] and the 1881 census shows his widow, Eliza, and nine children aged 1 to 16 living together in their two-up two-down cottage, part of *Folly Edge* on Lower Luton Road.

Albert French, a son from James's first marriage, was six when his mother died. In 1880, the year his father died, Albert was 18 and he took a short commission as a Private in the Bedfordshire Militia,[24] before returning home to find work. Like many unskilled young men of his generation, Albert took whatever jobs were available, working at various times as an agricultural labourer, a gravel-digger and a council road mender.[25] In 1884 he married Emily Lake, from an established Folly family, and they lived in the same cottage, later numbered 39 Folly Fields, for 58 years, raising a family of eight children.[26]

This cottage was one of a terrace of four on the right-hand side of New Street, built around 1870.

The home of Albert and Emily French, now 39 Folly Fields, the only cottage that retains the original-style windows



The family of Albert French who lived at 39 Folly Fields

William French, born in 1873, was a son of James French's second marriage.[27] Ten years younger than Albert, he also lived at The Folly for the whole of his life, a typical long-term Victorian Folly resident. Interviewed by *The Harpenden Free Press* on his 88th birthday in 1960, for an article titled, 'Unfavoured by Fame or Fortune', William sat before a warm fire at 192 Lower Luton Road (now *Folly Edge*) in the cottage next door to the one where he was born, and described his childhood.

His father, a labourer earning 10 shillings a week in the 1870s, died when William was seven so times were hard. 'It's a rum world now, but better than when I was a boy,' he recalled. Parish relief amounted to 1s 6d for each child at school, but two shillings was deducted from the total allowance immediately a child was no longer eligible. As a boy he had bread or toast for breakfast and at lunch time 'a lump of bread and occasionally a bit o' pork. In the evening Mother used to make what she could – maybe a bread pudding of something like that.' Frequently his diet consisted of bread and sugar or bread and treacle. Commenting on his education, he said, 'I was at school from five until I was thirteen, but I am no scholar. The only people ever taken notice of at Wheathampstead School were the trade peoples' children'. William left school to work on *Bury Farm* in Wheathampstead for 6d a day, while his sisters earned a similar wage in domestic service.

Bury Farm. The Ash Grove and Bury Green houses were built on the site

When he was 15 his mother gave him 6d a week out of his wages, so he could buy his own clothes. After saving for more than a year he bought his first suit, paying 26 shillings – £1 for the jacket and 6 shillings for the trousers. [28]

Another arrival to The Folly in the 1870s was John Smith, a blacksmith. He came south from Scotland and married Sarah Ann Hartwell from St Albans in 1867.[29] By 1871 they were living at The Folly with two small children and two blacksmith apprentices.

The Old Forge Cottage

Over a period of 70 years the census returns record only one blacksmith at The Folly so it is reasonable to suppose that he lived at *The Old Forge Cottage,* now number 8 Folly Fields. Unlike the French family, John Smith and his wife were not long-term residents and within a decade they settled with their seven children in Wheathampstead village next door to *The Swan.* By 1891 their sons, Henry and Sidney, were working as blacksmiths and farriers in the village.[30]

Lea House and Residents from London

In about 1870, *Lea House* was built at The Folly, appearing in the census return for the first time in 1871. The name of the house is clearly connected to the River Lea, visible in the fields opposite, but may also relate to the area of land marked on the 1840 Tithe Map as 'Lea House Common' (71). This land, adjacent to Ribbon Hall Field (72), was owned by The Earl of Verulam in 1840 and farmed by Thomas Ephgrave of *Herons Farm.* If there was an original *Lea House* on the common, it disappeared into the mist of time but it is interesting to speculate that the new *Lea House*, in a throwback to earlier history, may have been named after it.

In contrast to the simple cottages nearby, this elegant nine-roomed residence was built in Georgian style over a cellar, with square bay windows and stone steps leading up to a stylish Tuscan porch with columns over the front door. The house is still surrounded by several acres of land and is now Grade II listed. [31]

Lea House

Members of the old aristocracy of Wheathampstead like the Garrard family had, over the centuries, created firm roots in the area but the wealthy middle classes, the bankers, lawyers, merchants and retailers who arrived from London during the 19th century seeking a country property in Hertfordshire, had no ambitions of establishing a dynasty and some did not stay long.[32]

Who built *Lea House* and whether it was an investment to be rented to tenants is unknown but the first occupants, recorded in the 1871 census, were the Harrison family. Daniel Alfred Harrison, born in London in 1835, was educated at home at *Chase Hill House,* Enfield. Chase Hill, sometimes known as 'Harrison's Lane', was named after his father, a landed proprietor and JP. [33]

Daniel Alfred Harrison with three of his sons, Alfred, Reginald and Herbert

In 1859 Daniel married Mary Jane Hardcastle Burder, who was born in Australia to British parents,[34] and they had eleven children. Like many wealthy Victorians arriving in Wheathampstead from London at this time, the Harrison family lived in style. Daniel Harrison had a private secretary, his children were taught at home by a governess and the family employed five servants. Three of their sons, pictured above, spent

their childhood at *Lea House* but their stay in the Hertfordshire countryside was relatively short. By 1881 the family had returned to Tavistock Court in London and Herbert, Alfred and Reginald all attended Stonyhurst College, a Roman Catholic public school, in Lancashire. [35]

On 20 July 1885, Daniel Harrison died at sea in a catastrophic shipping accident 15 miles from the Longships Lighthouse off Land's End. *SS Cheerful,* a steamer heading from Falmouth to Liverpool carrying about 50 passengers and a cargo of tin, was run down by *HMS Hecla*, a torpedo depot, in thick fog and sank within four minutes. Alfred, his eldest son, who was then about 19, survived but nine passenger, including Daniel Harrison, went down with the ship and three more perished shortly after being picked up. The Liverpool-registered vessel and all its cargo of tin were lost.[36]

Mary Jane Hardcastle Burder

Daniel Harrison's widow died in Kensington in 1888, aged 47.[37] Reginald and Herbert migrated to the United States and Alfred travelled to various countries as an explorer. In 1908 he published a book, *In Search of a Polar Continent, 1905-1907.* [38]

The Lure of the Capital

The coming and going of the Harrison family at *Lea House* probably made little impact on the small community at The Folly, for the Groom and Norris families, who had lived there for twenty years, were experiencing departures of their own.

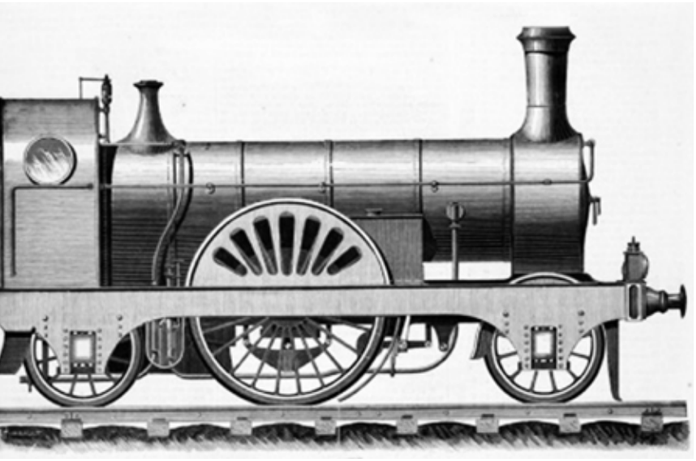
Not all those who grew up at The Folly wanted to stay in a rural area and London was a magnet for members of the rising generation, eager to make their own way in the world. Charles and Ann Groom's eldest daughter, Susan, had found a husband, John Norris, at The Folly and settled there but by 1871 Charles and Ann's second daughter, Elizabeth, who was 21, had left for the capital. The Groom family had run a beer shop for twenty years so Elizabeth found a job as a barmaid at a pub in Walworth Road, Newington.[39] James King, a young man from Hertfordshire, was a barman there and in 1872 he and Elizabeth were married in the parish of St Marylebone in Middlesex.[40] James was the son of John William King, licensee of *The White Horse* in Shenley, whose family eventually owned pubs around London.

By 1881, James King was the licensee of *The Two Black Boys* in Hackney and Elizabeth's younger sisters, Mary Ann and Martha Groom, had joined them there. Elizabeth and Annie, the daughters of John and Susan Norris, also later left The Folly to work with them.[41] Charles and Ann Groom's youngest son, George, departed for the capital when he was about 19 and by 1881 was a barman at *The Adam and Eve* public house in Hampstead.[42] Both he and his sister, Mary Ann, married into the King family and became licensees of pubs in London. [43]

Members of the Groom and Norris family, who had begun life in a rural community, now had kinship bonds within the more complex communities of the capital. Members of the younger generation, who had taken the initiative to leave The Folly, were able to share news of their new lives and opportunities with their family back home.

Trials and Tribulations of the Victorian Folly

As the community at The Folly continued to expand during the 1870s, it had its share of joys and sorrows and a few of its problems and misfortunes were reported in the local press.



Express Passenger Locomotive Great Northern Railway [1]

A Railway Accident

To the Victorians the railway was a symbol of progress and improvement but the number of accidents involving passengers and railway workers that continued throughout the 19th century makes grisly reading. On 1 August 1870, Mary Roberts, aged 74, the wife of Henry Roberts, a licensed hawker from The Folly, died in an accident at an unspecified station 'on a Great Northern Railway platform'. It appears that after collecting tickets for her journey, she stepped two or three steps backwards and fell between the buffers of the second and third coaches of the 3.50 pm train that was just moving slowly to the platform. The train stopped and she was removed to the stationmaster's office but 'there was a wound from the back of her head to the brain, the whole of the scalp had been taken off, and she had lost her right eye.' Despite the attention of a surgeon she died a week later.[2]

Illegitimacy

While Mary Roberts's husband mourned the death of his wife, Mary Lawrence from The Folly was facing problems over the birth of her illegitimate child. The Victorians placed great emphasis on the bonds of marriage, and those who deviated from this social norm often faced condemnation, if not from their own family and local community, then certainly from the law courts dealing with maintenance payments. Unmarried mothers and their infants were seen by the authorities as an affront to morality and were spurned and ostracised both by public relief and by charitable institutions. In 1842, the Poor Law Commission issued orders that in workhouses 'loose' women ought to be kept away from women and girls of good character. Promiscuity had to be punished in the most efficient and least costly manner possible and the new law singled out women to face the humiliation of illegitimacy alone in the hope of reforming their behaviour.[3] Although illegitimacy rates steadily declined during the Victorian period, some 65,000 out-of-wedlock births were occurring each year at the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1870, Mary Lawrence, the eldest daughter of Thomas and Ann Lawrence (née Fensome) of The Folly,[4] gave birth to an illegitimate child. At this time if there was a dispute over maintenance, hearings were held at the Petty Sessions and Frederick Gray of Kimpton, the alleged father, was summoned to show why he should not be made to contribute towards the support of the child. Mary Lawrence claimed he had already made some payments but this could not be corroborated. Three local men called to defend Frederick Gray proved conclusively that Mary Lawrence was 'a loose character' and the case was dismissed. Gray was

also summoned on the charge of being the father of another child born to Mary Lawrence within the previous twelve months, but owing to the evidence in the earlier charge, the Bench declined to hear the case.[5] In the eyes of the law, Mary Lawrence was guilty and deserved to be punished.

The church at this time also preached that illicit sex was a 'sin' and some families went to great lengths to keep awkward secrets under wraps. In some communities biological grandparents sometimes passed a baby off as the youngest child in their large family and it was not unknown for granny to tie padding around her middle to give a semblance of pregnancy, while keeping her eldest daughter out of sight for a few months.[6]

While records suggest that Frederick Gray of Kimpton married in 1873 and raised his own family of ten children, 23-year-old Mary Lawrence disappeared both from The Folly and from traceable records. As a result of the court case and reports in the local press, she had a slur on her reputation and had experienced humiliation and public disgrace. What were her options for the future and what became of her two unnamed, fatherless children? For a young woman in her position, marriage to another partner was one possibility but so were the workhouse or prostitution. The 1871 census, recorded soon after the court case, shows Mary still living at home with her parents, Thomas and Ann Lawrence, with seven other children, the youngest two born just twelve months apart. [7]

1871 Census, The Folly

Thomas Lawrence	43
Ann Lawrence	45
Mary Lawrence	23
William Lawrence	14
Eliza Lawrence	9
Annie Lawrence	7
Charles H Lawrence	5
Alfred Lawrence	3
Harry Lawrence	2
Emily Lawrence	10 Months

Did Thomas and Ann take on Mary's children and enable her to start a new life? Did Mary's children ever discover they were 'bastards' and suffer a potential lifetime of disgrace? Both parents and grandparents sometimes hid facts from their offspring and some succeeded in their deception throughout their lives.

Problems with Beer Houses

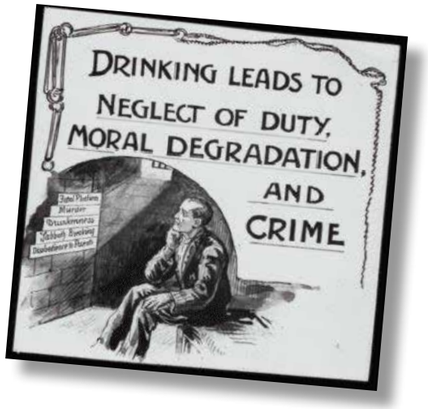
Around this time local newspapers were peppered with cases from the St Albans Petty Sessions dealing with beer house landlords who had transgressed the Beer House Act, overrun licensing hours or, in some cases, been privy to more serious crime.

The Beer House Act of 1830 was introduced to encourage trade and increase competition between brewers. The Act's supporters hoped this would lower the price of beer and that the population might be weaned off more alcoholic drinks such as gin.[8] In fact it resulted in the opening of hundreds of new beer houses, inns and breweries throughout the country and by 1841 licences under the new law had been issued to 45,500 commercial brewers.[9] As a result, drinking in pubs became increasingly popular in the 19th century.

At the same time The Temperance Movement grew rapidly up and down the country. In 1852 public houses were described as 'haunts of dissipation and vice' and intemperance was seen as 'the monster evil of our day'.[10]

In Wheathampstead the Church of England Temperance Society had considerable support during the 1860s, '70s and '80s. At one local

meeting members were reminded of 'the glaring evils of intemperance as the main source of crime and misery, both in town and country' and 'badges were distributed to those members of the total abstaining section who had kept the pledge for a full year'.[11] In 1860 local magistrates began tightening control and *The Woodman* in Gustard Wood and *The White Hart* in Wheathampstead village were closed.[12]



On 14 February 1863, John Hyde from The Folly spent the evening at *The Two Brewers* in the village, the beer house run by James Arnold, who owned land and cottages at The Folly. As the evening drew to a close, Pc Moulden, stationed at Wheathampstead, arrived and accused the landlord of serving beer 'a little over time'.

A week later James Arnold was required to appear at the Petty Sessions and Thomas Ward Blagg, a solicitor recently arrived in Wheathampstead, who was at *The Two Brewers* on the evening in question, acted for his defence. John Hyde from The Folly gave evidence for the defence, declaring that the clock in the tap room read ten minutes to ten when the policeman arrived and that James Arnold 'would not draw any beer after that and all the company went out', but the evidence of Pc Moulden, who claimed to have heard the striking of the church clock at a quarter past ten, was accepted by the Bench.

James Arnold was also accused of being drunk that evening and aggressive toward the policeman. Mr Blagg argued that his defendant had kept a public house in Wheathampstead for many years and this was the first time any complaint had been made. Pc Knight, who had been stationed at Wheathampstead for about eight years, told the court that James Arnold 'did not have the character of a drunken man' and had always treated him civilly and cleared the company out of his house when desired. Mr Blagg claimed Arnold had been sober 20 minutes prior to the encounter with the policeman, but this evidence was also rejected and the Bench imposed a penalty totalling £2 1s 6d, (about £90 in today's money) which James Arnold paid. [13]

The Rose and Crown at The Folly, another sociable venue for local residents and passing visitors, also had its share of problems. It was described at this time as having four bedrooms, a parlour and taproom with bay windows and a bar, kitchen and cellar. Behind the building were a two-stall stable, a wood house and a good garden. [14]

On Sunday afternoon 8 March 1868 at a quarter to four, Pc Hill visited *The Rose and Crown* and found four young men with a jug of beer and glasses on the table before them. Daniel Adams, the innkeeper, was charged with having his public house open at an unlawful hour and at the St Albans Sessions on 21 March 1868 was fined 12s 6d with 17s 6d costs (about £70 in total at today's value). [15]

Daniel Adams died suddenly the following year at the age of 39[16] and on 12 November 1870 *The Rose and Crown* was sold by auction.[17] It was not named in the 1871 census but Daniel Adams's successor was probably Charles Hoy, a publican, who at the time was living with his wife, Ellen, at an address given as 'The Folly, Luton Road'. [18]

Trials and Tribulations of the Victorian Folly

Adultery

In 1873 *The Rose and Crown* was the scene of an incident that caught the attention of both the local and the national press. In about 1870, John Wilsher, one of the original Folly landowners retired from his carpentry and joinery business in the High Street and moved to The Folly with his wife Sarah (née Thrale). Their son, Thomas Wilsher, a master baker, came to live next door with his wife, Eliza, and their two children. [19]

John Wilsher **Sarah Wilsher (née Thrale)**

Thomas Wilsher, who married in 1863, lived there happily until Eliza began drinking heavily and using abusive language towards him. In July 1873, she left home in the morning and, returning at midnight drunk, rushed at Thomas and assaulted him. The following morning she departed, taking their youngest child with her, and remained away for 14 days. On her return she begged forgiveness and Thomas received her back on her promising to remain sober. But on 9 August 1873, he discovered she had committed adultery with John Calverley at *The Rose and Crown* at The Folly.[20]

Thomas's father, John, died in 1876 and his mother moved from The Folly to live with her nephew, John Wilsher, and her widowed sister, Mary Sibley (née Thrale) in Gustard Wood.[21] Eliza continued to live with John Calverley in Notting Hill so Thomas started divorce proceedings and on 30 January 1877 a decree nisi was granted.[22] He married Sarah (née Squires) later that year and remained at The Folly, with his new wife and his son, Thomas, also a baker.[23] At the age of 20, young Thomas emigrated to Australia so Thomas and Sarah Wilsher moved to *Cambridge Cottage* on The Hill, leaving their home at The Folly, the scene of so many trials and tribulations, to be rented by newcomers.[24]

Wells and Cesspools

Sanitary conditions in properties at The Folly, as in most cottages in the village, were rudimentary at this time and the wells and privies in the gardens behind the cottages became health risks if they were not properly maintained. Cesspools had to be emptied frequently and the contents carried away by horse and cart. In 1877 the medical officer of health presented the Rural Sanitary Authority for the St Albans Union with a report, explaining that the geological formation of the area was 'lower chalk' allowing water to be easily obtained within a few feet of the surface, facilitating numerous wells in Wheathampstead, but mostly quite shallow. He warned that, even where water was not polluted by sewage from nearby cesspools, filthy water could easily seep onto the surface of the ground from shallow wells. He stressed the extreme importance of protecting wells with brick-built kerbings and a good well-lining to keep out surface water. [25]

In 1873 James Arnold and John Brown, as landlords of cottages at The Folly, were summoned to the Petty Sessions charged with 'allowing privies and cesspools to become so full as to be a nuisance'. James Arnold pleaded guilty and quickly completed repairs so was fined 9s 6d. John Brown, who after three complaints had still failed to find a bricklayer, had to pay 14s costs. [26]

The possibility of installing a proper sewerage system at The Folly was discounted by the authorities, who argued:

> *When one contemplates a scheme of sewerage, which includes an outfall sewer of a 12 inch pipe main, laid at an inclination of 1 in 1100, for a population without an independent water supply, and sees moreover, the utterly futile attempt at sewage treatment such as is exhibited at the tanks at Wheathampstead, and when it is remembered that such a scheme was carried out under the auspices of presumably competent persons, it ceases to be any wonder that Sanitary Authorities, are exceedingly cautious how they embark on sewage undertakings.* [27]

It would be more than 70 years before a sewerage system was provided for residents at The Folly.

Death of the Breadwinner

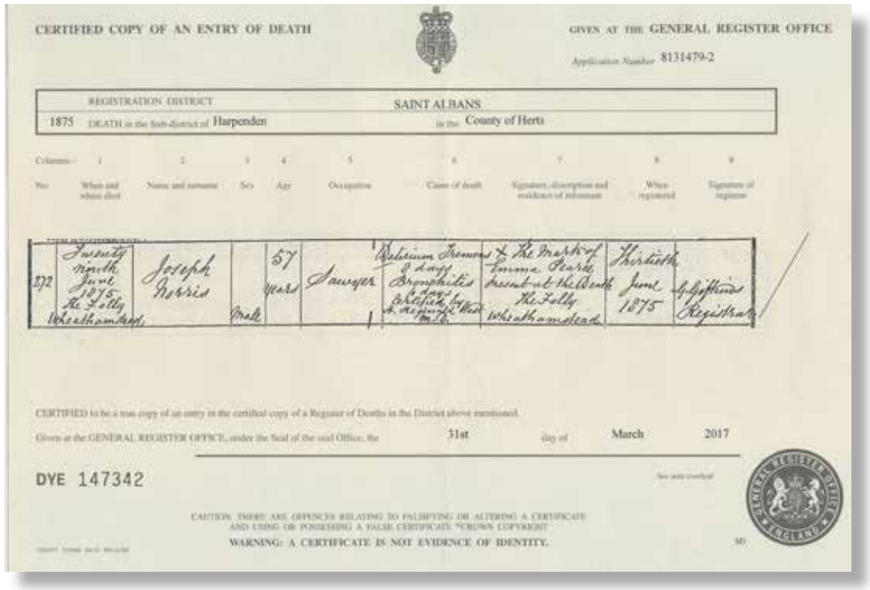
One of the greatest misfortunes a poor family might suffer at this time was the death of the main breadwinner and in 1875 Joseph Norris and Charles Groom, who rented the first two cottages at The Folly and had lived there for over 20 years, died within a few months of each other.[28] Life expectancy in the 1870s was 41 for men and 44 for women although there was considerable variation. Joseph Norris was 57 and Charles Groom 55. Among the causes of death in Britain between 1871 and 1880 were smallpox, scarlet fever and diphtheria, water-borne diseases such as dysentery and cholera; and, particularly among agricultural workers, respiratory diseases including tuberculosis, commonly known as 'consumption'.[29] One might, therefore, expect Joseph Norris and Charles Groom to have succumbed to one of these, but the nature of their deaths is a sad and sharp reminder of the circumstances of numerous poor labourers and their families at this time.

Joseph Norris was a sawyer, a semi-skilled labourer, working in an occupation requiring considerable strength and stamina. His job involved cutting wood into planks for use as lumber or veneer. Timber was laid on a brace straddling a trench in which one sawyer worked the bottom of a long saw, while another sawyer stood above to guide the saw as they cut lengthwise.

Sawyers at work [30]

Sawyers were often paid in the pubs where, as one pitman interviewed in about 1850 explained, 'we were obliged to take our beer every day … some of us had to go home with nothing on a Saturday night. I know of no teetotallers among us. Sawing is hard work, and requires four or five pints of beer a day to support a man, but many drink a great deal more. The public house system made men drunkards – I'm sure it did, sir'.[31] Lung disease was common among labourers and when Joseph Norris died on 29 June 1875 he was suffering from bronchitis but the main cause of death was 'Delirium Tremens', shaking, seizures and confusion caused by a sudden withdrawal from alcohol.

Charles Groom was an agricultural labourer all his life and, like most of Britain's poor, drank beer as



CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 8131479-2

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SAINT ALBANS

1875 DEATH in the Sub-district of Harpenden in the County of Herts

No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
272	Twenty ninth June 1875 The Folly Wheathampstead	Joseph Norris	Male	57 years	Sawyer	Delirium Tremens 5 days Bronchitis 5 days Certified by H. Mervyn Webb M.D.	X the Mark of Emma Pearce present at the Death The Folly Wheathampstead	Thirtieth June 1875	G. Griffiths Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 31st day of March 2017

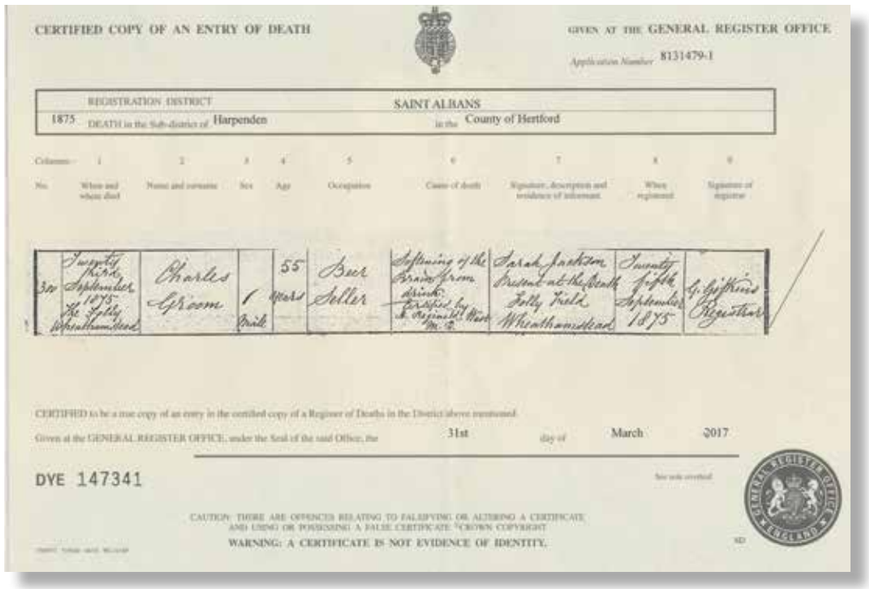
DYE 147342

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE *CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

Death certificate of Joseph Norris 29, June 1875

a thirst-quencher, for stamina and because water was often polluted. He also ran a beer shop at The Folly so had direct access to alcohol over many years and may have brewed his own beer.
The cause of his death on 21 September 1875, recorded by the same doctor who attended Joseph Norris three month earlier, was 'softening of the brain from drink', a form of mental deterioration. Both men died in circumstances that must have been highly distressing to their wives and families. Married women neighbours gave them support and Emma Pearce was recorded as present when Joseph Norris died and Sarah Jackson at the death of Charles Groom.



CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 8131479-1

REGISTRATION DISTRICT SAINT ALBANS

1875 DEATH in the Sub-district of Harpenden in the County of Hertford

No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
330	Twenty third September 1875 The Folly Wheathampstead	Charles Groom	Male	55 years	Beer Seller	Softening of the brain from drink Certified by H. Mervyn Webb M.D.	Sarah Jackson present at the death The Folly Field Wheathampstead	Twenty fifth September 1875	G. Griffiths Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 31st day of March 2017

DYE 147341

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Death certificate of Charles Groom, 23 September 1875

The following year a further disaster struck the Groom family when Charles and Ann's 23-year-old son, William, also died.[32] Charles and William were buried together in St Helen's churchyard, the only known Folly residents from the 1870s to have a gravestone, although others may be buried there too, under the many unidentifiable memorials.

Charles Groom died 23 September 1875 aged 57 William Groom, died 25 September 1876 [33]

After her husband's death, Sarah Norris continued to live at The Folly with two of her children, working as a straw plaiter, and spent the last decade of her life with an elderly lodger as a companion. Ann Groom's youngest daughter, Martha, was about 12 when Charles died but by 1881 all the younger Groom children had left home and Ann continued to make her living as a beer retailer.[34] At the age of 70 she lived 'by her own means' with her niece [35] but by 1901 she had become frail so her daughter, Susan Norris, stepped in to care for her.[36] Life was precarious for the elderly and there was constant fear of the workhouse, but living within the Folly community and with kinship support enabled these two widows to spend their final days in their own homes.

A Hamlet of 'Good Cottages'

Despite the trials and tribulations of The Folly and matters aired publicly in the local and national press, new residents continued to join the community as properties became vacant. Following the departure of the Harrison family, *Lea House* was occupied for about 20 years by a retired couple, John and Ann How, from *Revel End Farm* in Redbourn, where John had employed seven men and two boys farming over 200 acres. John remained there until his death in 1900 and Ann moved to Malvern Wells where she lived until 1915.

John Wilsher, one of the original landowners, had moved to The Folly in about 1870 and he was joined for a short while by James Arnold, the principal landowner. Now a widower, James Arnold had retired from his boot-making business in the village and he moved into a cottage near *The Rose and Crown*, where for a few years he ran a grocery store.[37] James Desborough, the resident landlord of cottages at The Folly, was their neighbour. These men were all from the middling ranks of society and all probably owned the cottages they occupied, but it suggests that The Folly, a hamlet of new, 'good cottages', as the original advertisement indicated, was a reasonable place to live. Convenient for the village and surrounded by countryside, this was a place where these three decided to spend their declining years.

Next door to *Lea House* was a sizeable eight-roomed house, now 192 Lower Luton Road, pleasantly sited overlooking a meadow and the River Lea. Joseph Glenister, from Kings Langley, arrived there in the 1880s to run a butchery business at The Folly and in nearby Kimpton. He married Evelyn Pearce at St Helen's Church in 1882[38] and they lived in the same house with their family for at least 40 years. [39]

From the 1950s, and perhaps earlier, the house was known as *Woodlands* but it was re-named *Glenisters* by John and Pat Hughes, who bought it during the 1980s. By chance, an elderly lady they

Glenisters, 192 Lower Luton Road

met in Gustard Wood told them Joseph Glenister, the butcher, once lived there so they decided to name it after him. [40]

On the land behind the house Joseph Glenister had his own well, a barn used as slaughterhouse and an area where he buried animal bones. When a pig was slaughtered, the squealing brought women from The Folly running out of their houses with pails for the chitterlings (pig intestines for a cheap, tasty dish), sixpence a set. One local resident, a child at this time, later recalled:

> *I've watched them scudding a pig many a time –– to get the bristles off – and those great earthenware basins of lard standing on the shelf, gone all crinkled as it got cold, and the women used to buy it to make Crinkling Cake – very nice for us children, but nowadays people would think it very plain.* [41]

A Family from the Workhouse

Another long-term resident arrived with his wife and three children in 1882. (Alfred) George Lines from Sandridge rented a simple cottage at The Folly with his wife and children, who had recently suffered the ordeal of a period in the workhouse. George had been an agricultural labourer at *Turners Hall Farm* but work was irregular and seasonal and in 1881 he must have been in financial difficulties and perhaps unemployed. His wife, Ann, and their daughters, Mary Ann, Emily and Ada, aged 8, 6 and 2, spent some time during that year as inmates of the St Albans Union Workhouse.

Entry into a Victorian workhouse was voluntary but would have brought shame to George Lines, a young man unable to provide for his family. The workhouse provided shelter, food, and medical care, but aimed to act as a deterrent to malingerers so would not have been a pleasant experience for Ann and their children.

Emily Lines, daughter of George and Ann, born in 1875. Photograph taken in 1892, when she was 17, in a field at The Folly

They were there at the time of the 1881 census together with 181 other inmates, including unemployed labourers and straw plaiters, the elderly, the sick, those classified as 'imbeciles' and 24 children between the ages of 2 to 14 identified as 'scholars'. [42] Workhouses were required to provide children with three hours of education each day in 'reading, writing, arithmetic and the principles of Christian religion', but it is likely that the workhouse schoolmistress, Priscilla Wheeler, offered only a smattering of rote learning, for workhouse populations were constantly changing and some children would have had little schooling.

Town Farm, a medieval hall house at the junction of Marford Road and The Hill, demolished in 1971

The following year George Lines and his family managed to rent a cottage at The Folly, where their other four children were born.[43] George and Ann remained there for the rest of their lives.

At the Sessions Court

Kinship bonds continued to grow at The Folly as families who had established themselves there were joined by their relatives. Samuel Izzard and his wife had rented a cottage from James Arnold in 1865 and during the 1870s Samuel's younger brother, Robert, also came to live there. Robert Izzard and Julia Bozier, both from Gustard Wood, married in 1872 and their eight children were all born at The Folly. [44]

In the 1880s Robert Izzard and one of his sons found themselves at the local Sessions Court and once again the trials and tribulations of The Folly were aired in the local press. Robert Izzard was summoned to the Sessions in 1885 for assaulting a well-known local farmer, Jesse Chennells of *Town Farm,* and damaging barley growing on his land. [45]

Chennells, who farmed 100 acres, stated in court that he was riding on horseback across his land when he saw Robert Izzard crossing the field. He ordered him back onto the path but Izzard threw down a bottle of beer he was carrying, used abusive language and struck Chennells's horse two or three times. Chennells said he did not particularly wish to press the case, but wanted to draw attention to trespass, which was common on his land. Although Izzard had been insolent, Chennells judged that he 'scarcely knew what he did' and offered to forgive him if he would pay for the summons. But Izzard was stubborn and refused so the case continued and he was fined five shillings for each offence and costs. [46]

Folly Children in Trouble

The following year, on 17 July 1886, Robert Izzard's eldest son Thomas, who was 12, and 13 year-old Frederick Swallow, one of a family of

11 children raised at The Folly, appeared in court at St Albans charged with damaging a wall on James Desborough's property. The extent of the damage was calculated at one shilling (equivalent to £3 in today's money) and both boys pleaded guilty. [47] This would have been a trifling sum to James Desborough, the resident landlord, but his initiation of a court case may suggest these children had been troublesome. The outcome is unknown but the cost of the damage and a court hearing to George and Ellen Swallow and Robert and Julia Izzard would not have been trivial.

With both parents working, it was not easy to keep mischievous children out of trouble and some Folly parents did not see education as a priority, particularly when tempted by opportunities for them to earn casual wages and provide extra income. The pattern of the farming year dominated school attendance figures. Annually in September many boys in Wheathampstead were absent from school until the harvest was gathered and remained at home to help with potato picking, blackberrying, acorn gathering and weeding as the seasons required.

Boys and girls were also tempted out of school during the summer months for regular events such as the Gustard Wood Fair and, most frequently, for the Harpenden Races, which were held from 1848 until 1914.[48] Attendance officers visited the homes of children who failed to attend school, but this often proved ineffective.

Trials and tribulations affected not just adults at The Folly but children too, as the School Log Books testify. Specific problems with Folly children are mentioned, where the demands made by large families came into conflict with government requirements for school attendance. At the end of April 1888 the schoolmistress of the Infants section complained to the attendance officer about irregular attendance, suggesting that the twenty-minute walk to and from The Folly might provide part of the explanation. Some children were only four years old and muddy lanes, a lack of proper shoes or waterproof clothing and a schoolroom with an inadequate stove, all contributed to poor attendance, especially in winter. On 31 May the schoolmistress complained again, this time about 'the bad attendance of several of the older children who were well but kept at home to mind babies'.

Absence was also caused by illnesses, such as 'fever', whooping cough or epidemics. In December 1888, after a year of health problems, there was still a 'great deal of illness among the children'. That month Canon Davys more optimistically complimented them on their 'brightness and cleanliness', but after the Christmas holidays measles broke out for a second time at The Folly. On 11 February 1889 the Log Book records that while 'snow prevented many children from attending school ... others are not allowed to come on account of infectious diseases in their neighbourhood.' On the same day, 'a Sanitary Doctor called and examined several children's hands and forbade any children from the Folly hamlet to attend school.' This was not the first time Folly children had been sent home with suspected ringworm on their heads, hands and faces, or because of filthiness and lack of hygiene. [49]

The Folly Chapel and Hat Factory

From The Fishery to The Royal Oak

Not far from The Folly on the banks of the River Lea stood a fishing lodge known as *The Fishery.* At the end of the 19th century this was a country retreat for Alfred C Harmsworth, the newspaper magnate, who was created Viscount Northcliffe in 1905 and was the founder of *The Daily Mail* and eventually proprietor of *The Times.* His main interest outside his business and politics was fly-fishing and each summer he organised regular fishing parties on the River Lea. Folly residents walking into the village would have seen his friends from London brought by rail to Wheathampstead station and conveyed by wagonette to the golf course, established on Gustard Wood Common in 1892, or to his home for a day's fishing.

Alfred C Harmsworth [1]

In the 1880s several new properties sprang up east of The Folly and two Victorian terraces were built near *The Fishery* on the south side of the main road. Boundaries extended and residents of these houses became part of The Folly community.

Census returns provide a rich source of evidence on social change and the occupants of new housing as it developed. Every effort was made to create accurate records but inevitably omissions occurred and the south side of Lower Luton Road from *The Fishery* to *Royal Oak Cottage,* now numbered 125 to 173, is missing from the census returns from 1881 onwards. Information about developments in this area, in particular about the Folly Chapel and the hat factory, has been gleaned from other sources.

The Folly Chapel

In 1887 a new Methodist Chapel opened on the main road, providing a place of worship, a Sunday School and a centre for social activities. Methodism at The Folly had really begun two years earlier, with services held in the warehouse of the local hat factory near the site during winter months and in the open air during the summer. These were conducted by preachers from Luton and during these early years funds were raised by members of the congregation, including the Smith, French and Munt families, to enable a permanent place of worship to be built. [2]

The Folly Chapel, as it became known, consisted of one room that could accommodate 100, with a plot of grass at the back for the preacher's horse. Generations of Folly residents, particularly the children, took an active role there.

The Folly Methodist Chapel

Lower Luton Road in c. 1900

The Folly Sunday School

The Sunday School movement, initiated in the 1780s by middle-class and gentry evangelicals, 'to train the lower classes in habits of industry and piety', was an enormous success. Nationwide by 1851 roughly two thirds of the five to fourteen year age group attended Sunday Schools. Popularity continued into the 20th century, beyond the point when religious commitment had begun to decline, reaching a peak in 1906, when well over 80 per cent of children attended. In other words, it was exceptional for the late Victorian child, of whatever class, not to go to Sunday School.

They went, not because of coercion, but chiefly because their parents wished it. Particularly in non-conformist Sunday Schools, where there was a considerable take-over of working-class control, parents wanted their children to be taught values such as orderliness, punctuality, industry and cleanliness at the hands of teachers who were more homely and kindly than many they were likely to encounter in ordinary classrooms. Many parents wanted child-minding, teaching of manners and behaviour in support of home discipline and some genuinely wanted their children to be brought up in Christian principles. Sunday Schools also had a social function, enabling children to mix with their peers and learn acceptable forms of group behaviour. [3]

The highlight each year was the Sunday School Outing and children began saving up for this in advance. Many years later, one participant from The Folly described her own childhood experience of the 'Outing', dreamed of for weeks beforehand and lived over and over again afterwards:

Yarmouth or Skegness as a rule, at least that was what the Folly did - the Sunday School, I mean - people didn't go for holidays to the sea; well, how could they? ….
And it was really an adventure to go in a train! I think we looked forward more to the train journey than to the seaside. I remember the excitement. At five or six in the morning the train would leave, and as we hadn't slept much for excitement, we'd be ready to jump up that morning.

We got to Yarmouth about twelve; we hadn't much time there, or so it seemed, but the train was what we enjoyed most – all crowding to the window and singing and cheering at the stations: the train stopped quite often, much slower in those days.

My mother used to make us up parcels of food for our lunch, big meat pasties and cherry pasties, and we'd have them when we were hungry, as like as not in the train before we got there. Some of the mothers came too because we were a lot of children and needed some looking after, and sometimes the grown-ups came back with boxes of Yarmouth bloaters. We were tired coming home, some of us going to sleep in the carriage, and tired next day, Sunday. We always went on a Saturday and there was no Sunday School so we could have a rest before Monday.

I don't think I can remember a wet day for the Outing; summers were mostly fine in those days and winters colder, with harder frosts. They stopped the Outing after a while and we had our treat in the village instead, maybe because some of the children couldn't afford the journey. But we enjoyed the day of the Treat just as much, waiting for the Salvation Army Band to arrive from Luton and then marching with our mugs, in all our best clothes, along the road behind the Band to the meadow behind our house at The Folly. There the children sat around on the grass for their tea and grown-ups went round filling our mugs and handing out bread-and-butter and special kinds of sugar cakes; after tea there'd be games, races and scrambling for sweets.[4]

Throughout the year the new Methodist Chapel and Sunday School provided a weekly focus for Folly children and the social activities within their own community were a welcome addition for many of their parents. For the rest of the year children who lived at The Folly created their own amusement, played their own games and, inevitably, got up to mischief:

Young madcaps we were, I suppose, and up to all sorts of tricks; at school we got into trouble for chasing the Rector's two peacocks to make them spread out their tails. People would say 'It's those Folly children again' …..

I remember my brother falling on a broken bottle when he was playing 'Hounds and Hares' with the other boys one night, and having to go to the hospital to be stitched up.

We used to be out playing after dark often, summer and winter, but especially moonlight nights; there wasn't the danger of traffic then and not much room indoors, with the big families.

There were different games for different times of the year – in the spring Whipping Tops when the roads began to dry up, in the summer Hop Scotch. We chalked the lines and squares on the road and went round on one leg kicking a piece of platter into each square on the way. Conkers in the autumn, a boys game mostly, they got their chestnuts baked to make them hard and stop them cracking; in the winter we had hoops to keep us warm – wooden ones for the girls and iron ones for the boys who had iron hoop-sticks with a hook on the end to fasten onto their hoops; they got the black-smith to put the stick into a wooden handle to make it warmer to hold. Marbles were played at any time when it was dry, in frosty weather we'd find some icy ruts in the road to roll them along. Another game that we girls played was Five Stones, five nicely rounded stones on the back of your hand and then turn your hand over quickly and try and catch all five in the same hand.

Christmas? Well, Christmas was always the same except I don't remember a lot of carol-singing round the houses …. handbells, yes, but no singing. I remember the snow and the long frosts when the river froze over and we used to go skating and sliding by moonlight all the way from the Mill through to the meadows at The Folly. [5]

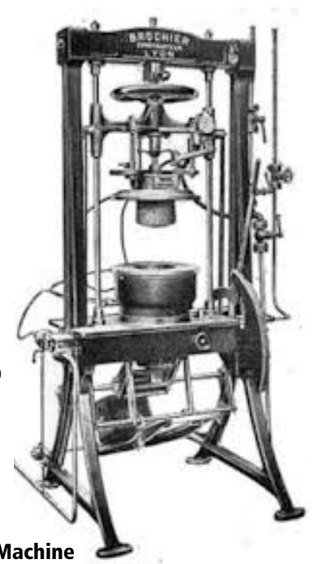
The Folly Chapel and Hat Factory

The Hat Factory

Just along the road from the Chapel stood a hat factory and warehouse, the initiative of Christiana Wright, the wife of Frederick Wright from Gustard Wood. During the 1870s, while Frederick learned the trade of a shoemaker and ran a small grocery store in Gustard Wood, Christiana, a woman of ambition and drive, started up a hat making business and opened a small factory near The Folly.[6]

Fred Wright (1842-1933) and his first wife, Christiana

Her enterprise prospered and the 1881 census for Gustard Wood records Frederick Wright as a 'straw hat manufacturer and grocer'. Soon he had enough money to buy a piece of land next to *The Cross Keys* on Gustard Wood Common, where he built up a flourishing nursery business, providing employment for a large number of local men and boys for many years. [7] No longer needing to run the hat factory, the Wright family sold it on. By the 1890s it was in the hands of Charles Haddon Osborne, a young straw hat manufacturer, bleacher and dyer from Redbourn, who ran it until the 1920s.[8] English plaiting and hat manufacture had begun to decline during the 1870s so Osborne arrived rather late on the scene, but his business seemed to thrive, providing work for local women as 'the hats were wheeled to the station twice daily and sent by train to Luton'.[9] Osborne and his wife, Florence, made their home in Luton,[10] where he became a JP and a freeman of the Borough. He was twice Lord Mayor, in 1902 and again in 1930, and a street in Luton was named after him. [11]



A Hat Pressing Machine

Many of the young girls from The Folly worked as finishers, machinists or hand sewers at Osborne's and a few boys were employed, perhaps starting as crate-boys, taking hats to and from Luton twice a day on the train, before progressing to work as 'stiffeners' in the hat trade.

A Cottage Industry

Women at The Folly also continued a cottage industry, preparing lengths of plait for hat manufacture. Plait was sewn together and made into straw boaters, brimmed hats or bonnets in the factories. A plait-buyer from The Folly travelled regularly to Luton by cart to sell straw plait made locally and bring back the special plaiting straw on his return.[12]

The Folly was surrounded by corn fields and, at the end of the harvest, no straw in the fields went to waste and what was unsuitable for plaiting was put to other uses, as a Folly resident, recalling her childhood in the 1880s, described:

We looked forward to harvest time because of the gleaning. You couldn't start gleaning till after the corn was carried and the field raked over; the farmers used to put a thorn-bush in the middle of a field as a sign that gleaning could begin. My mother was too busy to get out but I used to go along with some other women and their children – it was a woman's job.

I wasn't more than six or seven but I gleaned a bit with the older ones and played around. We were out all day, gleaning where we could and taking something to eat with us and bottles of cold tea. You gathered as much as you could carry in one hand, holding your bundle close under the ears, and then all the bundles were tied with a wisp of straw and put together heads turned inwards, onto a big sacking, bundle by bundle as they were gleaned, till all the field had been covered.

Then the sacking with its corners fastened together was put on the head of one of the women – no fear of getting any pieces in her hair because she'd have her husband's cap on – and that's how we'd make our way back of an evening with those great sackfulls on the women's heads with the ends of the straw sticking out all round, and us little ones following with the odd bundles tight in our hands.

Those gleanings were really useful to us; the heads were thrashed out and then taken to Titmuss at the Mill to be ground cheaply, making some nice wholemeal flour for extra baking. But the gleaning-straw, that was for pigs; everyone kept a pig when I was young, with a sty at the end of the garden. When the pigs had done with it, the straw went on to the garden; there's nothing wasted with a pig. [13]

Factory House

In 1888 a substantial four-bedroom dwelling was built on the main road in front of the hat factory. It became known as *Factory House* and Frederick Ellingham, Osborne's factory manager, lived there for several years from about 1914.

Frederick Ellingham came from Luton, where he had worked as a straw hat packer from the age of 14.[14] He married Annie Bartholomew in 1909[15] and two years later was running a small business in Luton, employing three straw workers at their home.[16] He and Annie had two children, Frederick and Gladys, but Annie died in 1914 at the age of 27.[17] Frederick was appointed as Charles Osborne's manager around that time and moved to *Factory House* with his two children.

Factory House, built in 1888, Folly General Store until the 1960s, now 163 Lower Luton Road

During the course of that year he met Katie Agnes French, one of the daughters of Albert and Emily French from The Folly. In July 1915 they were married at St Helen's Church and he and Katie lived at *Factory House*, where their two daughters, Kathleen and Mary, were born.[18] Frederick and Katie later moved with their four children to *The Willows* on the corner of Marshalls Heath Lane and, after a long life, Katie and Frederick were buried together in St Helen's churchyard.

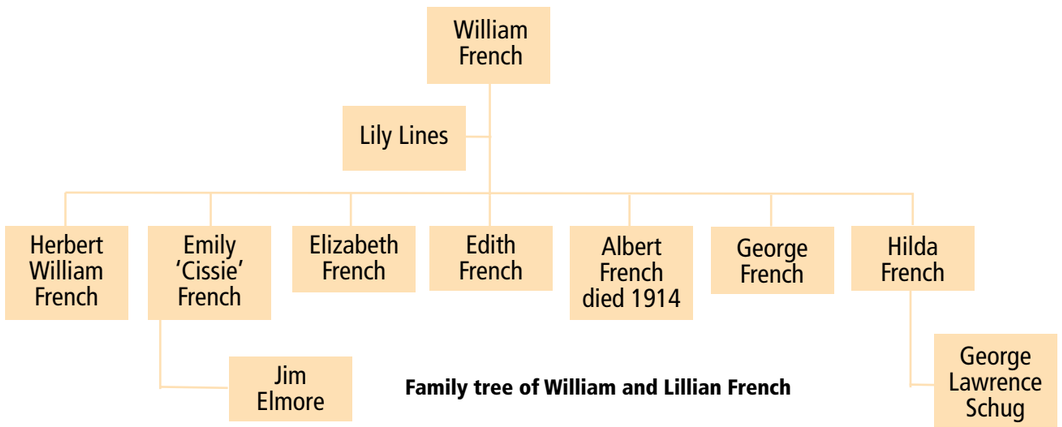
More Folly Weddings

During the 1890s, as the Chapel became a religious and social centre and the hat factory business developed, newcomers continued to arrive at The Folly and young people who had grown up together formed further kinship bonds through marriage.

On Christmas Day 1892, William French, the son of James French and his second wife, Eliza Wheeler, who was born at The Folly in 1872, married Lily Lines at St Helen's Church. It was not uncommon to be married on Christmas Day because this was a day when people were not expected to work. Lily was not from The Folly but was the daughter of Lewis Lines, a blacksmith and the licensee of *The Traveller's Friend,* later known as *The Cherry Trees,* just a short distance away. [20]

Lily was 19 and in domestic service and she and William rented a cottage near his parents for 2s 4d a week. At that time William's weekly wage was never more than 16 or 18 shillings and he had to find employment where he could. While their seven children were growing up, William worked as a labourer on a farm and for a coal merchant.[21] Later, like his step-brother Albert French, he was employed as a platelayer on the railway based at St Albans. 'This meant getting up every morning at 4.30am and walking to St Albans to arrive there by 6 o'clock. But it wasn't so bad in the evening as we would come back on the train to Harpenden and then only had to walk to The Folly'.[22] His eldest daughter, Emily, born at The Folly in 1897, was known as 'Cissy' because her younger brother, who could not pronounce sister, used to say 'this is my cissy'.[23] 'Cissy' spent her whole life at The Folly.

Another Folly marriage of young people who had grown up together, took place in 1897 when Thomas, the son of Robert and Julia Izzard, married Ada, the daughter of George and Ann Lines.[24] Perhaps they recalled their childhoods, laughing about Thomas's court appearance after he damaged James Desborough's wall, and reflecting more seriously on the period Ada spent with her mother and sisters in St Albans Union Workhouse.



Family tree of William and Lillian French

Another Link with the Past

Among the Folly residents recorded in the 1891 census was Norman Thrale and his family. In 1841 ten-year-old Norman had lived in the village with his widowed grandmother, Abigail Thrale, who owned Ribbon Hall Field. When his grandmother died Norman worked with his uncle, John Sibley, at *The Cross Keys* and by the age of 19 he was a

journeyman miller.[25] In 1864 Norman Thrale married Caroline, the daughter of George Welch, a local miller,[26] who also owned cottages at The Folly, and they raised eight children in Gustard Wood and at Bengeo, near Hertford. Caroline died in 1884 at the age of 41 and Norman, with his eldest daughter as his housekeeper, and three children of school age, came to live at The Folly. Like John Wilsher and James Arnold, from the original Thrale family of landowners, Norman spent his final years on their land and died there in 1900, aged 69. [27]

By now many of the families who moved to The Folly in the 1880s and '90s were firmly established and formed a network of inter-relationships by direct ancestry or marriage. Among the family names that recur in the census returns are Carter, Edmonds, Elmore, French, Hawkins, Izzard, Jackson, Lake, Latchford, Males, Pearce, Swain and Swallow.

Landlords and Property Sales

Victorian Conveyancing Deeds showing names of Landlords [28]

The cottages at The Folly, built gradually and mostly in short terraces, were over the years in the hands of various landlords. The majority of the landlords named on Folly house deeds were not from Wheathampstead but all were from the middling ranks of society, skilled craftsmen, tradesmen or retailers, and several were licensed victuallers. Among the landlords were Ann and Henrietta Wren, spinsters from Luton, whose father, Joseph Wren, had also been in the property business, converting and renting out cottages in the town.[29] George Welch, a miller from Codicote, died intestate so his eldest son had to return from America to sort out his affairs including his property at The Folly. William Grummitt was a baker and corn dealer from Hertford[30] and William Males was the licensed victualler at *The Bell Inn* in Codicote. [31]


WHEATHAMPSTEAD,
HERTS.
FIVE FREEHOLD
COTTAGES,
THE FOLLY,
WHEATHAMPSTEAD,
£26 PER ANNUM;
Beningfield, Troy, Norris, and Duvall,
On Wednesday, Nov. 12, 1890,

Sale advertisement 1890 [32] **and The Bell and Crown Inn, 21 High Street, Wheathampstead**

The cottages on the east side of The Folly were built from the 1870s, later than those on the west. In 1890 prospective landlords attended a sale at *The Bell and Crown Inn* in Wheathampstead, where five cottages at The Folly were being offered for sale. Each cottage had a small garden with coal sheds, closets and a shared well and they were all 'let to respectable weekly tenants' at a rental of £26 per annum.

In 1892 several more cottages on the east side and two terraces on the west at the top of The Folly were sold together to a local landlord, Dolphin Smith senior of *Mackerye End.* [33] The Dolphin Smith family, originally from Wiltshire, moved to Hertfordshire in the early 19th century. Dolphin had been used as a Christian name in the family for generations. When Dolphin Smith senior died in 1902, ownership of the cottages at The Folly passed to his wife, but they were managed by Dolphin Smith junior, the eldest of her ten children. Born at *Mackerye End* in 1879, he farmed there and at *Castle Farm* until the mid-1930s. He was a landlord at The Folly until 1932, when he sold on a total of nine cottages. [34] In 1894 James Desborough, the resident landlord, sold two of his cottages, including the present 17

Folly Fields, to George Adams, who had rented a property there for about 15 years.[35] George Adams ran a watercress-growing business and as he and his wife, Caroline, had no children, they were in a position to purchase property. The watercress business and investment seem to have been successful, for on his death in 1913 George Adams left £1,408 (£80,340 in today's money) to his widow.[36] Caroline died three months later and in her will arranged for the cottages to be sold to Hubert Chalkley of Kimpton for £490.

When James Desborough died in 1894 he left three more cottages at The Folly and two in Harpenden, together with £1,558 (about £93,400 in today's money) to his wife, Priscilla and his two nephews. [37]

A Voice and a Choice

Rural society in Wheathampstead, as in other country villages in 1890, was still hierarchical. The landed aristocracy resided in grandeur attended by servants; middle-class professionals from London adopted their own standards and life-styles; while the middling ranks of the village, the tradesmen and retailers, ran small businesses, bought building land or made money by employing others.

Despite the rise of trade unions in the 1870s, the lower classes still had little influence over their working conditions or everyday lives. Rents were dictated by landlords, wages remained low for agricultural and general labourers, and few had prospects beyond their existing condition. With meagre education, low earnings and irregularity of employment occupants of The Folly had little voice or choice.

However, in March 1894 when the Local Government Act required all parishes with a population over 300 to elect parish councils, an opportunity arose for several Folly residents to take on a minor role in local affairs. The first Wheathampstead Parish Council met on 2 January 1895, consisting of well-respected members of the community, many of them wealthy and influential: the Rector, Owen Davys; the landowner, Apsley Cherry-Garrard of *Lamer;* John Chennells, a chemist and grocer from a well-established Wheathampstead family; the miller and corn merchant, George Titmuss; John Nash, the grocer and draper from the High Street; Frederick Wright, a nurseryman and the former owner of The Folly hat factory; and Albert Howard, a Prudential insurance agent from Brewhouse Hill.

The Folly Allotments

One of the new parish council's responsibilities was the formation of a management committee for allotments. The area of land to the east of The Folly cottages was, from the early days, used as allotments by the residents and was important to them. Natural leaders emerge in any community and William Pearce, a baker and grocer, Owen Odell, a bricklayer, and Henry Smith, an agricultural labourer, were chosen to form an allotment management committee for The Folly. [38]

Two weeks after their appointment William Pearce proposed that the allotment land at The Folly, then owned by George Upton Robins of *Delaport* and tenanted to the farmer, William Seabrook, should be taken over by the council at once at 35 shillings an acre.[39] This proposal was carried unanimously and after negotiation the allotments became the property of the council and rents for Folly residents were set at 4d per pole.[40] In a small way, residents of The Folly were able to engage with the upper classes, to have a voice, to make a choice and to suggest action for the benefit of their community.

A New Era and an Old Village Tradition

'A National Loss'

On 22 January 1901, Queen Victoria died at *Osborne House* on the Isle of Wight at the age of 81. Hubert Herkomer, a well-connected German portrait artist who ran his own Art School in Bushey in Hertfordshire, just 12 miles from Wheathampstead, was summoned to *Osborne House* to paint a water colour of Queen Victoria on her death bed.

Queen Victoria on her Death Bed, 24 January 1901
Hubert Herkomer

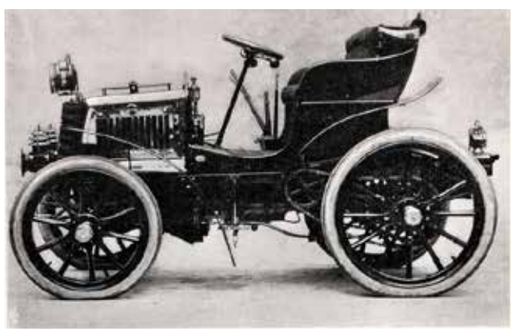
Victoria was laid out in her bedroom, wearing her bridal veil and surrounded by lilies and spring flowers. Above her head hung a portrait of her husband, Prince Albert, also painted after death. Herkomer did not have long, for the Queen's body was to be transported to London, so he completed a hasty sketch. Sir James Reid, the Queen's physician, had a quick glimpse and declared it a flattering portrait of his royal patient. Herkomer used the sketch to create a water colour of the dead Queen, which was framed in ebony and is now on display at *Osborne House*. [1]

On 25 January 1901, the Wheathampstead Parish Council meeting opened with the chairman's reference to Queen Victoria's death. He was sure all present were 'truly sorry at such a national loss and hoped King Edward VII would make as good a monarch as his mother and that he would have a long and prosperous reign'. As queen and empress, Victoria had ruled over almost a quarter of the world's population and her death, coming so soon after the end of the 19th century, marked the beginning of a new era.

The Arrival of the Motor Car

By 1901 it is estimated that 78 per cent of the British population lived in towns, reflecting the powerful forces of the Industrial Revolution. Wheathampstead remained predominantly rural but had, none the less, already yielded to changes such as the coming of the railway, the opening of small factories, compulsory education and the beginnings of social mobility.

The standard mode of transport in Wheathampstead at the turn of the century was still the horse-drawn wagon and the private horse and carriage. Members of the landed classes were among the few who had the money and leisure time to buy and run a motor car. Alfred Harmsworth, who visited his country retreat at *The Fishery* near The Folly during the summer, was an enthusiastic early motorist and villagers later recalled his first vehicle, 'Long before he came we'd hear it and everybody would stand out along the road and watch – he had a French chauffeur'. [2]



Alfred Harmsworth bought a 12 hp Panhard in 1900 [3]

Harmsworth used *The Daily Mail* to extol the virtues of motor cars, 'the vehicles of the future', as they were known to his readers. He was a staunch campaigner for motorists and an early member of the RAC.[4] It was not long before Lord Cavan of *Wheathampstead House,* William Beach Thomas, the war correspondent from Gustard Wood, and Dr Matthew Smallwood were also driving along the roads of Wheathampstead.

A Local Family at Lea House

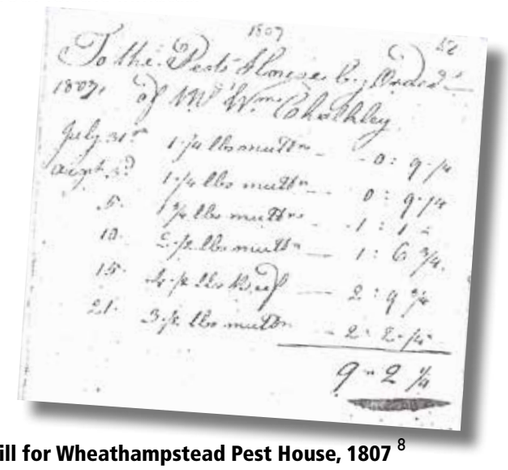
A new era merited new occupants at The Folly and, following the death of John How of *Lea House* in 1900 and the departure of his widow to Malvern, the property was taken over by the Upton Robins family from *Delaport,* a small estate in Gustard Wood, presided over by Emma Flora Upton Robins, a widow, who lived there with her daughter, Olivia, and five servants.[5] This was the first time *Lea House* had been occupied by a 'local' family and in 1905 it became the home of Emma's son, George Upton Robins, on his marriage to Beryl Stevens, the daughter of Colonel Malcolm Wilkinson Stevens.

A few years earlier George had obtained a commission in the East Yorkshire Regiment during the Boer War and in 1901 he went on service to South Africa attached to the Mounted Infantry. After his regiment returned to England, he resigned his commission and soon became a partner of Brand & Company, export merchants. Following his marriage, he and his wife lived in Shanghai for two years, where he was employed on his firm's business. They then returned to *Lea House* and the 1911 census shows them living there with three servants. [6]

The Royal Oak, Lower Luton Road

The Royal Oak

Across Lower Luton Road, not far from *Factory House*, was a late 17th or early 18th century building, which in 1799 had been used as a 'pest house', an early form of isolation hospital, positioned well away from the village. Pest houses were run on similar lines to parish workhouses but for those with diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera, smallpox or typhus. A bill dated 1807 has survived, showing the purchase of mutton and beef, which would have been used to prepare broth for the inmates. [7]



Bill for Wheathampstead Pest House, 1807 [8]

The building subsequently became *The Royal Oak* beer house and the spacious building was described in 1836 as 'containing a front Parlour, large Tap Room, Bar Parlour or Sitting Room

(divided into two) Wash House, three Bed Rooms and good underground Cellar; Wood Barn, Garden and Skittle Ground'. [9] James Arnold from Kings Walden, who married into the Thrale family and later owned land at The Folly, was the 'occupier' at that time, paying an annual rent of £10.

In 1899, George Elmore was listed as the 'occupier' of *The Royal Oak* [10] although the census returns for 1891, 1901 and 1911 all show him living with his family in a cottage at The Folly.

In about 1904, nearly 70 years after James Arnold from Kings Walden was named as the 'occupier', another unrelated Arnold family took on the licence. Frederick, the son of Matthew Arnold and Rebecca Males, was born at The Folly in 1881 and, like his father, became a hay binder. After his marriage to (Rose) Lilian Jackson in 1904, he became the licensee of *The Royal Oak*, although he continued to live at The Folly and is still recorded as a hay binder there in the 1911 census.[11] In 1920 *The Royal Oak* continued to be 'let to Mr [Frederick] Arnold on Annual Tenancy at the annual rent of £10', the same rate as in 1836.[12]

Post Office Directories show he remained as landlord until at least 1937 [13] and *The Royal Oak* was a public house until 1954, when it was converted into *Royal Oak Cottage.* [14]

On the opposite side of the road *The Rose and Crown* continued to provide a social venue for Folly residents, with Amos Smart as the licensee from 1901 to 1912.[15]

Changing Attitudes

The new Edwardian era saw a number of government and legislative initiatives to support women and children, the unemployed and the elderly and all these had an impact on those living at The Folly.

It had always been assumed that women did not need the right to vote because their husbands would take responsibility in political matters. A woman's role was seen as child-bearing and taking care of the home. Organised campaigns for women's suffrage began to appear in 1866 and the suffragist movement enlisted widely up and

Customers of The Royal Oak, The Folly, around 1914
Back row: Archer, Roger Elmore, Archer, J Slough. Front row, Arthur Carter, Ernest Carter, Will Lawrence, Matthew Arnold, A Hawkins and Unknown
Fredrick Arnold (the landlord) is standing in the doorway. His name is over the door. The child is Ruby Arnold

Frederick and Lillian Arnold with daughters Elsie, Ruby and Millie outside The Royal Oak c 1914, now 173 Lower Luton Road

down the country, as women marched along city streets carrying banners and posters with slogans such as 'Dare to be Free' and 'Justice not Favour'. By 1900, women had been granted some improvements to their lifestyle via the law courts so women unprotected from male violence or drunkenness, or whose reputation was under threat, had increasing confidence to take legal action.

In 1901 a female member of an established Folly family initiated a personal court case. Mrs Sarah Munt (née Edmonds), a young woman with three small children whose husband, Owen, was in South Africa fighting with the Bedfordshire Regiment in the Boer War, brought a case against a neighbour, 23-year-old Daniel Jackson.[16] On 12 August Sarah had woken at 3am, to find her bedroom door wide open. Suddenly, Daniel Jackson crawled from under her bed, claiming he got through the window because he wanted a bottle of wine. She told him to leave and he did so, but felt she needed to take the matter to court to preserve her reputation. Daniel's defence claimed he was the worse for drink but was not there for the purpose of stealing from Sarah Munt and on this legal point the case was dismissed. The Chairman, however, expressed the Bench's 'extreme reprobation of the defendant's most improper conduct in entering a married woman's house as he did and considered that in consequence of his act there was no stain whatever on the character of Mrs Munt and that it was a very proper case for her to have brought before the court.' [17]

The right of a woman to take legal action and gain support is an indication of the changing attitudes of the new Edwardian era, and in the next few years further social legislation was introduced to benefit the young, the old and the unemployed. In 1902 the controversial Education Act made radical changes to the entire educational system of England and Wales. It ended the divide between schools run by school boards and the church schools, administered primarily by the Church of England. Local Education Authorities were established and in Wheathampstead the National School became officially known as 'St Helen's Church of England Elementary School'. In 1906 local authorities were allowed to provide free school meals, while the 1908 'Children's Charter' imposed severe punishments for neglect or ill-treatment of children.

The same year, pensions were made available for those over 70, which gave them 5s a week, or 7s 6d to a married couple. Initially not everyone was included, but the principle was established and some elderly people collecting their pensions wept in gratitude. The 1911 census return for The Folly shows five Old Age Pensioners, including 80-year-old George Swallow, his wife, Ellen, and Eliza French, William's widowed mother.

Mrs Eliza French, an Old Age Pensioner, outside her cottage c.1911 now *Folly Edge*,192 Lower Luton Road, next to *The Rose and Crown*

In 1909 labour exchanges were set up to help the unemployed find work and the National Insurance Act was passed two years later. This gave people the right to free medical treatment and sick pay of 10s a week for 26 weeks in return for a payment of 4d a week and the right to unemployment pay of 7s 6d a week for 15 weeks in return for a payment of 2½d a week.

Parish Charity for the Needy

In addition to financial support from government legislation, needy residents at The Folly could also take advantage of charity provided locally. Coal and Clothing Clubs, found in towns and villages countrywide from the 1820s, were organised within local parishes to assist the poor. In 1853, a Hertfordshire Rector, who acted as treasurer of the Coal and Clothing Clubs in his parish, commented, 'One of the most important objects of these institutions is to promote and encourage among the poor habits of frugality and prudence and to induce the poor to depend mainly on themselves'.[18]

Coal and Clothing Clubs were open to all, without religious distinction, but benefit was denied to anyone displaying 'indolence, extravagance or inordinate thirst'. Coal Clubs delivered coal to the poor from funds raised partly by subscriptions from the gentry and partly from contributions collected from the poor themselves. It was estimated that one hundredweight, used with care, was sufficient for a week unless the weather was excessively cold or there was sickness in the house. A small quantity of coal was also often distributed without charge among the very old and infirm. Clothing Clubs worked on the same principle of adding small sums raised by subscriptions from the gentry to deposits made by the poor.

In 1907 the Coal Club in Wheathampstead was organised by the Rector, Canon Owen Davys, and the Clothing Club was run by his wife. Blanche Davys, the Rector's daughter, an energetic organiser of many parish-based charities, was responsible for the Mothers' Meeting that took place regularly at The Folly in the early 1900s. With help from Sister Annie, she was also a district visitor there and ran a Penny Bank, a scheme for those unable to afford to join a regular savings bank. [19] While most savings banks required a minimum deposit of £1, Penny Banks allowed customers to deposit as little as one penny. Once they had saved £1, an account was opened at the parent savings bank. The idea quickly caught on and Penny Banks were established up and down the country in Sunday Schools, schools and social clubs.

Penny Savings Bank Advert 1850 [20]

'Behind the Times'

The majority of those at The Folly benefiting from government legislation and parish charity were, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, employed as farm labourers or unskilled workers. Thousands of farm labourers had already left rural areas to take up new occupations in towns and cities so, in terms of occupations, The Folly in 1911 was 'behind the times'.

1911 Census for The Folly showing occupations of male residents aged 18 and over

Trades

Retail/publican	12
Carpenter	1
Hurdle maker	1
House painter	4
Bricklayer	2

Agriculture

Farm labourer	22
Hedge maker	2
Horseman on farm	2
Shepherd	1
Stockman	1
Woodman	1
Straw binder	2
Nursery/domestic gardener	11
Watercress cutter	5
General labourer/roadman	12
Gravel digger	6
Bricklayer's labourer	2

Miscellaneous

Railway worker	2
Rubber/tyres worker	5
Electric factory	1
Straw hat blocker	1
Police Constable	1
Clerk - Tourist Agency	1
Old Age Pensioners	5

The census returns for both 1901 and 1911 show that, contrary to the general trend in Hertfordshire, most women from The Folly were still working in the straw hat-making industry. From the 1870s the import of cheap straw plait from Japan and China had signalled the demise of the plaiting trade and, although straw hat-making held on better than plaiting, the impact was dramatic. In Hertfordshire the number of female plaiters almost halved in the 1870s, and halved again in the 1880s, with wages plummeting simultaneously. By 1901 numbers employed in the county had fallen to just 2,342.[21] For women and girls at The Folly the presence of Osborne's Hat Factory from 1890 until 1920 must have provided welcome employment and, for some families, a life-line.

A few girls living at The Folly in 1901 abandoned the straw plaiting their mothers had taught them for alternative employment. In 1897, Pickford Mill in Batford had closed as a flour mill and was converted into a factory manufacturing gutta percha, a rubber latex used for many domestic and industrial purposes.[22] Clara and Florence Swallow, Maud Smith, Alice Webb, Kate Carter and Florence Arnold, all aged between 15 and 20, became 'india rubber workers', either at Pickford Mill or at factories manufacturing india-rubber and waterproof goods in Harpenden.[23] A decade later four of these girls were married and bringing up young children. Clara Swallow, who continued to live at The Folly with her husband, George Izzard, returned to straw hat making and was one of 29 women machinists named in the 1911 census.

1911 Census for The Folly showing occupations of female residents aged 18 and over

Straw hat machinist	29
Domestic service	11
Laundress	8
Cook	2
Rubber tyre worker	1

Seeking 'Respectability'

Within every community there are always those with ambitions to improve themselves and make their own way in the world. John Goodman was a carpenter and he and his wife, Charlotte (née Summerfield), who worked as a bonnet finisher, arrived at The Folly in 1875, remaining there for about 40 years and raising three sons.[24] A family photograph, with the boys formally

John and Charlotte (née Summerfield) Goodman with their sons in c 1891. Philip b.1884, Frank b. 1876 and Andrew b. 1879 [25]

dressed and their mother probably holding a Bible, suggests a family aspiring to the 'respectability' of the middle classes, which meant church or chapel-going, temperance and a desire for self-improvement.

Just as the Groom and Norris children had set out for London 20 years earlier, so the Goodman sons stepped out of the mould set for many of their generation at The Folly. By 1901 Frank Goodman had left home and taken up lodgings in Luton, where he was employed as a railway clerk.[26] He married Maude Day and they raised a family of four children there. By 1911, they were employing a domestic servant, 14-year-old Hilda Swain, the daughter of Walter and Annie Swain from The Folly, and could therefore claim to have joined the ranks of the lower middle class. [27]

Frank Goodman and Maude Day, possibly on their wedding day in 1901 [28]

Frank's younger brother, Andrew, left The Folly for London and by 1911 was a sergeant in the Metropolitan Police, married to Amelia Williams. [29] John and Charlotte Goodman remained at The Folly until John's death in 1913, while their youngest son, Philip, continued along more traditional lines as a local nurseryman and married Annie Dawes, an elementary school teacher, in 1917. [30]

The Folly Charivari

In 1908 *The Luton Times and Advertiser* reported an intriguing incident of disorder at The Folly and as a result:

Summonses against sixteen Wheathampstead folk for playing on noisy instruments or hooting and yelling were heard at St Albans Divisional Court. The disturbance, which took place outside Mr Odell's house at The Folly, lasted several nights and scores of people took part with kettles, baths and tins. [31]

William and Owen Odell, who were cousins and members of a large family originally from Bedfordshire, lived at The Folly in 1908. It is not clear which one was targeted in this event or the precise reason but it was 'organised against parties in a previous police prosecution' and aimed to express disapproval.

WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

Folly at the Folly.

REMARKABLE DEMONSTRATIONS AT WHEATHAMSTEAD.

SEQUEL AT THE POLICE COURT.

SIXTEEN DEFENDANTS.

The large crowd filling the space allotted

A detailed report of the subsequent court case appeared in the press:

A large crowd filled the space allotted to the public at the Court House in St Albans, composed mostly of inhabitants of Wheathampstead. Sixteen of the number had been summoned to appear on rather unusual charges and they had been accompanied to court by scores of their friends.

The names of the defendants were:

Charles Archer, Arthur Carter, Percy Carter, John Edmonds, George Thompson, George Males, George Swallow, Annie Swallow, Annie Swain, John Carter, William Lawrence, Walter Lawrence, Walter French, James Elmore, Alfred Hawkins and Frederick Arnold.

All were summoned for playing on noisy instruments and many of the above answered a second charge, that of hooting and yelling. The 16 defendants lined up amid laughter, which was immediately suppressed. Some remarkable and at times humorous evidence was offered and at intervals the court was convulsed in laughter.

Pc Lovell for the prosecution described how Arthur Carter carried a clothes box, Percy Carter had a tin box with handles tied round his neck, which he hit with two sticks, and John Edmonds had a tray. 'Men were dressed in uniforms and had their faces blacked. You could hear them two miles off (laughter). They did not interfere with the police. Mrs Swain was beating a small tray and danced and sang. The lady was one of the foremost ringleaders. I don't think anyone was injured.'

This kind of event was not unique to The Folly. During the 18th and 19th centuries a 'charivari' was a folk custom in which the community gave a noisy, discordant mock serenade, frequently with pounding on pots and pans, known as 'rough music' to demonstrate disapproval, quite often of sexual infidelity. The loud, public ritual was part of the web of social practices by which small communities enforced their standards.

A Charivari

Participants in the planned charivari would decide on a meeting place and word-of-mouth was used to summon the largest possible crowd, with women helping to lead and organise. The group usually proceeded on foot to the home of those they were acting against, making as much noise as possible with makeshift instruments. Following a long community tradition, residents of The Folly who had stepped out of line were judged, targeted and humiliated. Nearly all the participants involved in The Folly charivari were fined five shillings each.

That same year Ann Groom, the last of the first residents at The Folly, died at the age of 86. She had lived at The Folly for more than 50 years, where she and her husband, Charles, had raised their family and run a beer shop for their neighbours.

A Family Tragedy and a New Arrival

In 1910 George V succeeded his father, Edward VII, to the throne and although residents of The Folly would not have had not seen their sovereign in person, coinage bearing the new king's head would soon have joined older coins jingling in their pockets. 'George' was a popular name and at the time of the 1911 census there were no fewer

than 14 residents named George living at The Folly, including one newcomer, whose arrival had not been anticipated.

Emily Lawrence

Emily Lawrence was the daughter of James and Charlotte Lawrence (née Catlin) from Marshalls Lane Cottages and grew up with her siblings at The Folly. [32] In 1904 when she was 22, Emily married 38-year-old George Schug, a German baker, who had been working in London for nearly 15 years. [33] The marriage took place in Wheathampstead at St Helen's Church on 24 September. [34]

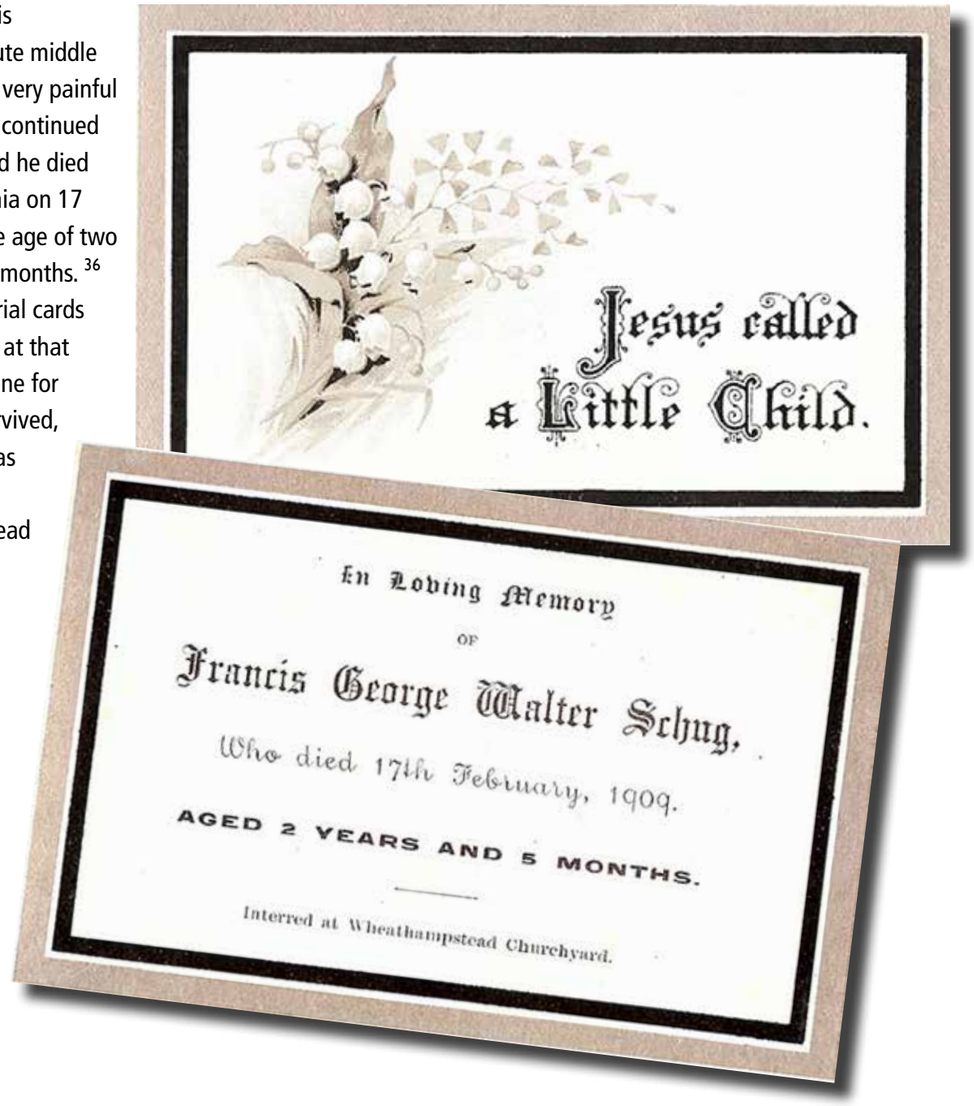
Emily joined George in London and while they were living at 144 Campbell Road, Bow, they had a son, Francis, born in 1906.[35] Emily proudly took

George and Emily Schug c 1904

her baby to Charles Cross, the local photographer at 114 Campbell Road, to have a studio portrait taken.

Emily with her first son, Francis Walter George Schug, 1906

In 1909 Francis developed 'acute middle ear disease,' a very painful condition that continued for 14 days and he died from pneumonia on 17 February at the age of two years and five months. [36] Printed memorial cards were common at that time and the one for Francis has survived, showing he was buried in Wheathampstead churchyard a week later. [37]



Memorial card for Francis Schug

George and Emily moved to new lodgings in Bow and there a second son, George Lawrence Schug, was born on 20 October 1910. Sadly, Emily died just four hours after his birth from 'acute Bright's Disease', a kidney complaint, combined with 'uraemia and heart failure'. She was 28 years old and was buried on 25 October in St Helen's churchyard with her son, Francis. [38]

Emily's parents agreed to care for her baby, taking on new and unexpected responsibilities at a time of grief. The 1911 census shows George Lawrence Schug, aged five months, living with James and Charlotte Lawrence and six of their children. Their three sons, who were labourers, were in their 20s, their daughter, Maude, a laundry ironer, was 17 and two younger boys were still at school. [39]

George Schug, now a widower, remained in London, where he continued to work as a journeyman baker, lodging with another baker and his wife, both of German origin, who ran a shop in Portland Street near Elephant and Castle. [40]

‘The War to End All Wars’

On the Cusp of Catastrophe

The period between 1900 and 1914 was one of increasing tension between the great powers, intensifying the long-term ‘pressures-towards-war’ and moving towards the final crisis at Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, when the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb terrorist. For most people in Britain this was a remote and insignificant event, but the conflict soon escalated sharply.

The notion that Britain was totally unprepared for war is a myth. Even in small villages like Wheathampstead residents read the newspapers and discussed cinema newsreels. When war was declared, it was a shock, but for many not a complete surprise. No families, however, rich or poor, foresaw the carnage that would follow, nor did they realise that before long so many people they knew personally would be in mourning.

When Britain declared war on 4 August 1914 few people in the population at large expected it to be a protracted affair and many thought it would be ‘over by Christmas’. In Wheathampstead in the summer of 1914 churchgoers were probably more preoccupied with the death of Canon Owen Davys on 27 August, [1] who had served the parish for 55 years, and by the appointment of a successor.

Grave of Canon Owen Davys in St Helen’s churchyard

For others living in the village, and particularly for parents of children at The Folly, the epidemic of diphtheria that broke out at St Helen’s School in September 1914 was also a more pressing concern. Outbreaks of diphtheria, measles, influenza, scarlet fever and whooping cough were common in schools across the country and when numbers affected reached a critical level schools were closed. On 24 September Albert Ernest French, the son of William and Lilian French and the younger brother of Emily ‘Cissy’, died in hospital. [2] He was nine years old. [3]

A Folly group probably taken just before The Great War in 1914
Back row: ‘Pinky’ Swain, Fred Bozier, Will French, George Males, George Russell, Soldier unknown, Alf Hawkins, Danny Jackson, Will Elmore.
Front row: Lizzie Latchford, Maud Swain, Amy Pearce … others unknown

Albert Ernest French (1905 -1914)
Taken from a school photograph

The following day there were 171 children present in school out of 234 and two more children looked so ill that Dr Matthew Smallwood, who lived at *The Laurels* on The Hill, was sent for and he ordered them to be sent home. On 28 September the school sent a wreath to Albert’s parents at The Folly. Dr May visited the school and ordered its immediate closure and within days, Mr Davies, the Nuisance Inspector, arranged for it to be sprayed. [4]

The only photograph William and Lilian had of their son, Albert, was one taken of his class at school and this may have prompted them to have studio photographs of some of their other children taken around that time.

Albert’s siblings –
Cecil George (b.1909)
Emily ‘Cissy’ (b.1897)
and Hilda Irene French (b. 20 August 1911 after the census)
c. 1914

Herbert William French, William and Lilian’s eldest son, c.1914. He died in 1917 at the age of 23 [5]

Emily ‘Cissy’ French c 1915, now a young woman

An Enemy Alien

For the Lawrence family, bringing up their grandson, George Lawrence Schug, during the Great War must not have been easy. Nationwide anti-German sentiment had been rife before the war and anyone with German connections was regarded with fear and distrust and many changed or anglicised their German names to avoid victimisation. When the Kaiser's army invaded Belgium in 1914, attitudes to Germany hardened and a wave of hysteria swept Britain.

In 1914 George's father was 47 and working as a baker in London but he was born in Schlierschied, Koblenz so when war was declared, like thousands of other Germans living in Britain, he was arrested under the Aliens Restriction Act. He was sent to the Frith Hill Internment and Prisoner of War Camp at Frimley near Camberley in Surrey, his serial number 33509. [6]

Like his compatriots, unceremoniously snatched from his home and livelihood, George Schug might have anticipated hostility from the British public, but curiosity was the dominant reaction in 1914. Frimley, one of the first outdoor camps in England for German prisoners, was of a temporary nature with a public road running through it. On one side were the tents of civilian internees and on the other those of the first prisoners of war to arrive after the Battles of Aisne and Marne fought in September 1914. [7]
Crowds arrived in Frimley to see them and an officer regulating traffic at Frith Hill described it as worse than Ascot Races. [8]

The author Vera Brittain was among the early 'sightseers' and recorded her visit on 24 September 1914 in her war diary:

> In the afternoon Cora and I motored to Frimley Common, a large plateau much higher than Byfleet. At Frimley there is a camp of German prisoners, and though one feels almost mean in going to look at them as if one were going to the zoo, yet, since it is a sight that has never been seen in England before and probably never will be again after this war, it was of too great interest to be missed. Although there is a board standing by the entrance to the camp saying that this thoroughfare is forbidden to the public, the day we were there the public were so numerous that one could hardly see the thoroughfare. Cora and I got quite close to the imprisoned Germans. They are guarded by four rows of wire entanglements.
>
> We spoke to one Reservist about the prisoners .... who said that they were a decent set of men and he had no complaint to make about them; he said he preferred looking after the military half of the camp as the soldiers, who understood discipline and the principles of war, were easy to keep in order. The civilians were a ragged, unwashed, unshaven looking lot who seemed to do nothing but crowd against the wires and gaze at the people who came to see them. [10]

Frith Hill Prisoner of War Camp

On 16 December that year the press reported:

> *'The last batch of enemy alien prisoners left Frimley concentration camp for ships off Southend on Tuesday, and the camp will now be closed until the spring'.* [11]

George Schug and his fellow prisoners were sent to the internment camp of Knockaloe on the Isle of Man, where they stayed until 1919. All the prisoners were civilians and some had been in England since early childhood – so long, indeed, that when they entered the camp they could not speak a word of German. For George Schug internment must have been a distressing and disorientating experience, following so closely on the death of his wife and separation from his young son. The future must have appeared bleak as he wondered how the war would end and if he would ever see his son again.

Card found in George Schug's possessions when he died

Recruitment

As soon as war was declared young men from Wheathampstead began to answer the call to recruitment. Nationwide no fewer than three-quarters of a million men flocked to the colours in August and September 1914 and by the end of the year that number had risen to over a million. Probably no other cause, religious, social or political, had mobilised so many different people in a common aim.
The patriotic upsurge across Europe in the early months of the conflict has led historians to conclude that in a profound sense many people in Europe wanted war. Mass communication such as railways, telegraph, wireless and newspapers had fostered a great sense of nationhood and people of widely differing backgrounds were moulded by common concerns. In Britain, national identity and pride were foremost among these concerns, powerful and unifying, almost part of the Edwardian psyche.

A generation had been brought up on the *Boys' Own Newspaper* and best-selling accounts of the Boer War, promoting an image of war that was both honourable and glorious. Eagerness to participate can also be explained in the context of a generation innocent of the realities of modern warfare. No man in the prime of life knew what war was like and all imagined it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided. [12]

The great enthusiasm of new recruits still speaks to us in photographs such as that of The Folly Boys taken in the summer of 1914 (overleaf). The lad holding the horse and the whip was Ernest William Carter, who was 19 at this time. The horse and cart is thought to have belonged to George Swallow, a 'marine dealer' or rag-and-bone man, the youngest son of George and Ellen Swallow, whose family had lived at The Folly since the 1860s.

For young men from The Folly this war was a patriotic adventure, an escape from drab routines, with the exciting prospect of foreign travel. Among those who volunteered immediately with the Hertfordshire Regiment was 16-year-old Horace Izzard, the illegitimate son of Emily Izzard, who had been brought up by his grandparents, Robert and Julia Izzard.

At the head of the horse is Ernest Carter. The remainder include Sid Arnold (centre with white shirt), next to Albert Lawrence and John French. Sitting on the wagon are Fred Bozier, Danny Jackson and George Russell

In early September Cyril John Pearce, a travel agent's clerk and the son of Nellie Pearce, a single mother, and grandson of William and Sarah Pearce, who ran the baker and grocer's shop at The Folly, volunteered with the Hertfordshire Yeomanry. Just before Christmas 18-year-old Albert Odell, employed at the rubber works and the eldest son of William and Cicely Odell, signed up with the Royal Sussex Regiment.

Sidney Arnold, Arthur Carter and Frank Hawkins were among those who joined the Bedfordshire Regiment in 1914. By the time conscription was introduced in 1916 about 60 men living at The Folly were between the ages of 19 and 41 and eligible for service, some of whom had already enlisted. It is impossible to know exactly how many men from The Folly served because the majority of Great War service records for ranks other than officers were destroyed during an air raid in 1940 and only about 40 per cent survive.

The five sons of William and Fanny Carter from The Folly

Harry Smith, Jim Elmore and Sid Arnold from The Folly c 1914

Harry Smith, Dave Archer, Frank Hawkins, George Russell, Unknown, Jim Elmore, Sid Arnold

Some recruits were photographed together and some from The Folly who served were recorded on The National Roll (Luton V) but this too is incomplete:

S Arnold	1914	Private	Bedfordshire Regiment
A Carter	1914	Sergeant	Bedfordshire Regiment
F Hawkins	1914	Private	Bedfordshire Regiment
E Carter	1915	Private	Duke of Cambridge (Middlesex)
R H Latchford	1915	Private	Prince of Wales (South Lancashire)
H French	1916	Private	Duke of Cambridge (Middlesex)
J E French	1916	Sapper	Royal Engineers
G Barsby	1916	Sapper	Royal Engineers
W Lines	1916	Private	Suffolk Regiment
F E Odell	1916	Private	Machine Gun Corps
C E Swain	1916	L/Corporal	Loyal North Lancashire Regiment
J R Pearce	1918	Private	Queen's (Royal West Surrey)

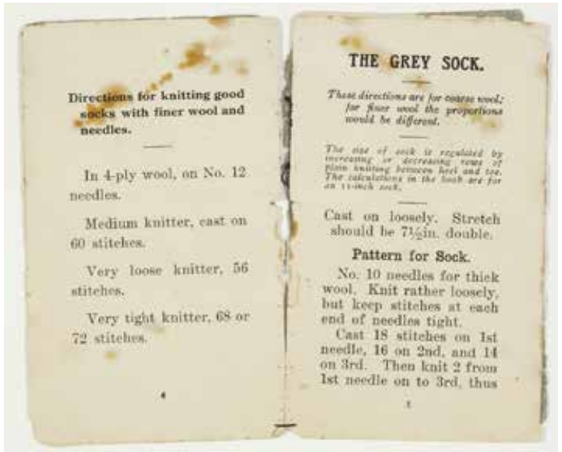
Captain George Upton Robins from *Lea House* had already served in the Boer War. When Germany invaded Belgium in 4 August 1914 and Britain declared war he was away on business in Shanghai. His sister, Olivia Robins later wrote:

> *As he was in sole charge of the business out there, it was not until December that he was able to fulfil the one wish of his heart and come home at once to offer his services to his country. Between August and December 1914 he was terribly impatient at his enforced exile. Writing of the battle of the Aisne he said: 'I know of one gentleman of England ... who thinks himself accurs'd he was not there.' I think he was never so pleased to see any one in his life as he was to welcome the man who came out to take his place and so set him free to come home. My brother was an idealist, and to him his King and Country were not mere names, but a very real part of himself. That he came from the other end of the world to fight for them is, I think, sufficient proof of the realness of his feelings.* [13]

In February 1915 George Upton Robins rejoined his old regiment, as captain of the 3rd Battalion, and in France, in April, he was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment.

On The Home Front

At St Helen's School the routines of children from The Folly changed during the war and from as early as 1914 they began making items for soldiers in France and Belgium. Over the next three years, they did an increasing amount of war-related work with materials provided by Lady Cavan of *Wheathampstead House* or Mrs Cherry-Garrard of *Lamer.* 'Lady Cavan sent 24 yards of calico for covering splints' and 'Mrs Cherry-Garrard sent 60 yards of khaki flannel; 5 dozen buttons; 4 reels of cotton; 1 dozen neck bands and 2 lbs of wool for children to knit for soldiers.' Children also sent boxes of chocolates out to 'our boys at the front' and received thank you letters from the soldiers. [14]



THE GREY SOCK.

Directions for knitting good socks with finer wool and needles.

In 4-ply wool, on No. 12 needles.

Medium knitter, cast on 60 stitches.

Very loose knitter, 56 stitches.

Very tight knitter, 68 or 72 stitches.

These directions are for coarse wool; for finer wool the proportions would be different.

The size of sock is regulated by increasing or decreasing rows of plain knitting between heel and toe. The calculations in the book are for an 11-inch sock.

Cast on loosely. Stretch should be 7½in. double.

Pattern for Sock.

No. 10 needles for thick wool. Knit rather loosely, but keep stitches at each end of needles tight.

Cast 18 stitches on 1st needle, 16 on 2nd, and 14 on 3rd. Then knit 2 from 1st needle on to 3rd, thus

Instructions for making socks for WW1 soldiers

Allotments were used extensively during the war, particularly when food became scarce. School boys measured out gardening plots, planted, tended and harvested crops, including potatoes, beans and turnips at *The Wick* and children were absent from school, working locally at *Bury* and *Maltings* farms. The school garden produced 30 hundredweight of potatoes, two hundredweight of onions, 33 pounds of beans and 60 pounds of turnips, which were distributed among the pupils' families.

News of fighting on the Western Front filled the newspapers but war became a reality for the schoolchildren when, on 15 November 1916, a large British silver-coloured airship came over the village. They were let out of school to see it and the senior classes wrote essays about it. On the night of 1 October 1917 there was an air raid over Wheathampstead village and 'the anti-aircraft guns of Harpenden and Hatfield were much in evidence.' This was frightening for both parents and children and 'in consequence' there were absences from school the following morning. [15]

Not everyone volunteered for war service and some were in 'reserved' occupations, vital to the war effort on the home front. George Swallow, whose rag-and-bone cart was used by the 'Folly Boys', did not serve in the Great War. After he left school, he was employed as a labourer before enlisting for a Short Commission with the Army Service Corps at Aldershot in 1902 when he was 19. This involved three years with the Colours and

George Swallow during his pre-war army service

George Swallow and Julia Moules

an optional nine years with the Reserves. [16]
In the meantime, he married Julia Moules from Harpenden at the St Albans Registry Office in 1908 and they rented a cottage at The Folly, where their daughter, Florence, was born. She died in 1912, at the age of four. [17] George was discharged from the army in March 1914, having continued with the Army Service Corps for a total of 12 years. After his pre-war army service he ran a general store and in 1917 decided to invest in property at The Folly. He paid Hubert Chalkley, a landlord and builder from Kimpton, £250 (£10,765 at today's value) for two cottages.[18] James Pearce and Henry Smith, whom he had known for many years, were living there and became his tenants. [19]

Folly Fatalities

Within a few months of the onset of war, news of the first fatality reached The Folly. Cyril Carter, the youngest member of the Carter family who had worked at a watercress nursery, was killed, not on the battlefield, but in a tragic naval accident.

Cyril Carter

He had enlisted as Ordinary Seaman J/20486. On 26 November 1914, while anchored near Sheerness, *HMS Bulwark* was destroyed by a large internal explosion with the loss of 736 men. Only 14 survived and of those two died later in hospital. The explosion was probably caused by the overheating of cordite charges that had been placed adjacent to a boiler room bulkhead. Witnesses all described a huge sheet of flame, thick smoke, followed by an explosion and the ship suddenly disappearing.

HMS Bulwark explodes

Cyril Carter, aged 18, died in the explosion. A number of bodies were retrieved from the disaster and *The Herts Advertiser* reported: 'It is believed his body was washed ashore and was buried locally'. [21] He is remembered with honour on The Portsmouth Memorial Panel.

The following year news came of two more deaths. The first was Private Murray Walter Harrison, who served with the East Surrey Regiment and was killed on 11 April 1915 aged

The Battle of the Somme 1916

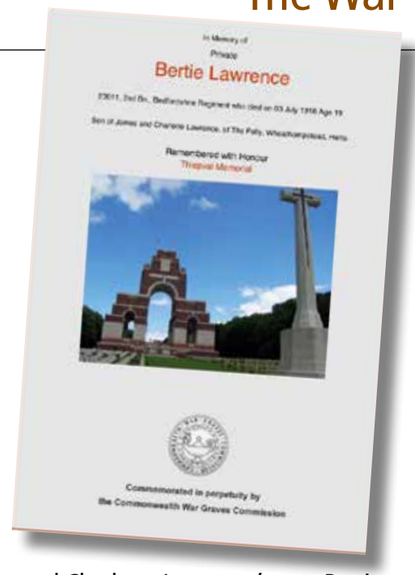
22. His father was a baker and Murray grew up at The Folly with his brother and two sisters before moving to Bedford before the war to become a draper's assistant. [22] News of fatalities soon spread to those beyond The Folly, who only knew the victims by sight and reputation or remembered them from their school days. Murray Harrison was buried in Bedford House Cemetery in Belgium and after the war his parents moved on to Luton.

Captain George Upton Robins

Also in 1915 news of the heroic death of Captain George Upton Robins reached his wife at *Lea House* and his widowed mother and sister, Olivia, at *Delaport.* He was in command of the 2nd battalion of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment on Hill 60 south of Ypres, when his whole company was wiped out on 5 May in a gas attack. He managed to crawl down the hill to report what had happened and died in a field ambulance later that night. The Upton Robins family retained ownership of *Lea House* but Beryl moved to Windsor, where she remained for the rest of her life. She never re-married.

As war continued and fatalities mounted, the Battle of the Somme was described in the national press:

The earth shook, the ground and all that was on it turned to dust. Chaos reigned. No one who has experienced war could ever forget the horror, the early death, the waste, the pain, the suffering.
The Times 28 August 1916



James and Charlotte Lawrence's son, Bertie, enlisted as a private in the Bedfordshire Regiment and was killed on 3 July 1916, the third day of the Battle of the Somme. He is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.

Cyril John Pearce, an early volunteer, who served in Egypt and in the Dardanelles was discharged in June 1916 after a medical board declared him 'medically unfit …. totally incapacitated' with pulmonary tuberculosis 'as a result of service, exposure and infliction'. He died at home on 3 October that year and was buried in the graveyard at St Helen's Church.

Cyril John Pearce

Albert Odell, the son of William and Cicely Odell from The Folly, served from 1915 and was killed in action at Ypres on 23 September 1917. A rumour that two Germans buried him as his sergeant was being carried off the field badly wounded was later confirmed by the sergeant himself. In a letter of condolence Odell's Commanding Officer wrote, 'He was a keen and good soldier and his loss is regretted by his comrades. He was employed as a Lewis gunner and I hope it may lessen his mother's sorrow to know that her son's death was instantaneous.' His body was later moved and now lies in Aeroplane Cemetery close to Ypres.

Albert Odell

Horace Izzard, among the first to enlist, served throughout the war and saw action in many of the principal battles including Ypres, Arras, Armentieres and the second battle of the Marne. He died in hospital in Rouen on 6 September 1918, aged 20, and is buried in St Sever cemetery in Rouen. Although Horace's mother, Emily, had married Arthur Hawkins, a farm labourer from The Folly, in 1915, Horace had named Julia Izzard, the grandmother who had brought him up, as his next of kin and his effects were sent to her. [23] 1918 was a devastating year for Robert and Julia Izzard, who had also just received news that Reggie Bozier, Julia's nephew, who was born at The Folly, had died in France on 30 August.

Horace Izzard

Reginald Bozier

Armistice, Peace Day and Memorials

Ceasefire

On 11 November 1918 the Armistice was declared. In London crowds celebrated the victorious end of war as church bells clanged, flags were waved and crowds cheered in a frenzied mixture of joy and sorrow. That night, as the darkened streets were lit again, some bereaved families gathered silently at home with little to celebrate.

Armistice Day, London 1918

This reaction was played out in towns and villages up and down the country, with a combination of relief for families with servicemen who had survived and heightened sorrow and anguish for those who had lost loved ones.

In Wheathampstead on Armistice Day flags were put out at the school and on 13 November the children were given a holiday to celebrate. The following week Olivia Upton Robins, whose brother had died in the conflict, 'called in the afternoon and had a little chat with the children on Sunday's rejoicings in Wheathampstead, at the signing of the Armistice by the Germans'. [1]

As Armistice Day faded into memory, the nation struggled to come to terms with the aftermath of the Great War. Across Britain thousands suffered the pain and sorrow of losing a husband, father, son, fiancé, uncle, cousin or friend. The silence of grief visited many homes, creeping into every corner.

Demobilisation

On foreign battlefields news that four years of horror and turmoil were now over left some in a state of disbelief, stunned and bewildered. As demobilisation gradually got under way, men who had fought together bade farewell to trusted comrades, while others suffered survivor's guilt, haunted by loss and painful memories. Despite the flag-waving enthusiasm that greeted Britain's returning troops, the mortality of the war on such a massive and unanticipated scale caused many to see the conflict as a catastrophe and ask if it had all been worth it.

Demobilisation was never going to be easy, either for servicemen or for their families at home, and as soldiers gradually returned to The Folly they had to make adjustments. It soon became clear that employment prospects were not good and, despite politicians' promises of a 'land fit for heroes', many ex-servicemen nationwide found little help in terms of housing, pensions and welfare.

Such was the situation for the able-bodied, but the war led to large numbers of formerly healthy young men returning home with disabilities and injuries on a greater scale than ever previously witnessed. The use of advanced weaponry, including heavy artillery fire, machine guns and

poisonous gases led to a wide range of impairments and psychological effects.[2]

Some who returned to The Folly had suffered life-changing injuries and their experiences remained with them throughout their lives. Arthur and Ernest Carter took part in heavy fighting on the Western Front and both were wounded twice.[3] George Latchford, who served with the Bedfordshire Regiment, received a gunshot wound to his thigh in 1915, rendering him 'permanently unfit for war service' and he was discharged the following year. Before the war he had been a farm labourer. Jim Elmore sustained a leg wound that never healed and he spent the last years of his life bedridden.

William Lines, the son of George and Ann Lines, joined the Suffolk Regiment in 1916 but was not transferred overseas because of ill health and he was discharged that year unfit for service. Men in his position often suffered guilt and frustration at being unable to make their contribution to the war.

Frank Edwin Odell, the younger brother of Albert who was killed, joined the Machine Gun Corps in 1916 as soon as he was eligible for service. He had the unenviable task of burying the dead and was not discharged until 1920.[4] C E Swain, resident at The Folly from about 1914, joined the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment but, after serving in the battles of the Somme, Arras and Cambrai, was severely wounded and had his arm amputated. He was invalided out in 1916. [5]

John Slough was gassed and wounded but returned home to his wife and children with the Military Medal he had been awarded during the last months of the war for his involvement in the conflict at Forceville, a village north-west of Albert on the Somme. There were significant casualties and servicemen missing that day and, like countless men nationwide, John Slough may never have talked to his family about his war experiences. [6]

The Military Medal was awarded to those below commissioned rank for bravery in battle

The reality of the trenches, mud, rats, lice, infections, foot rot and VD, the noise and terror of engagement in industrial warfare, the sight of rotting bodies and the stomach-churning reek of death were hideously painful to relate. The gulf between those who had experienced hell and those who could merely glimpse it was impossible to close. Ten years after the Armistice almost two and a half million men were in receipt of pensions for war disabilities, approximately 40 per cent of those who served. [7] The lives of millions of people had been changed for ever and for many this resulted in years of silence.

Peace Day

Although the Armistice marked the end of fighting on the Western Front, formal negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference continued into 1919 and the Allies' formal peace treaty with Germany, the Treaty of Versailles, was not officially signed until 28 June. As negotiations continued, the British government planned a public celebration to include a Victory March through London, a day of thanksgiving services, a river pageant, and popular festivities. The unveiling of the Cenotaph, initially a

wood and plaster structure designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and erected in 1919, took place in London on 18 July, followed by the Peace Day Celebrations the following day.

King George V

That morning King George V issued a message to the wounded:

To these, the sick and wounded who cannot take part in the festival of victory, I send out greetings and bid them good cheer, assuring them that the wounds and scars so honourable in themselves, inspire in the hearts of their fellow countrymen the warmest feelings of gratitude and respect. [8]

Arrangements for Peace Day did not receive universal approval. Some objected to triumphant military parades and a number of ex-servicemen refused to participate. Others felt that the funds would have been better spent on support for returning servicemen. Just nine miles from Wheathampstead a group of ex-servicemen, despairing of the high level of unemployment, torched Luton Town Hall, where the mayor was holding a celebratory lunch. [9]

Despite the grief of Folly families who had lost loved ones:

The Folly celebrated Peace Day by giving to all the inhabitants a meat tea in Mr Glenister's field, where a carnival was arranged. Prizes were offered for the best character dresses. Mr Holdsworth Hunt and Mr Dolphin Smith distributed the awards, and presented one hundred Peace mugs as souvenirs to the women and children, and a packet of cigarettes to each demobilised soldier and sailor. Sports were organised, and an impromptu concert was given. Two gramophones helped to fill in and fireworks completed the evening's enjoyment. At 10.30 refreshments were again served, and soon afterwards the happy party dispersed. [10]

Folly Teenagers on Peace Day. Note the floral buttonholes and the three boys on the front row posing with cigarettes, perhaps given to them by demobilised servicemen.
Back: Derek Lane, Percy French (b 1903)
Front: Stan Bozier (b 1904), Bert Smith (b 1903), Charlie Elmore (b 1908)

'The Folly Boys home from the War – Taken on Peace Day 1919
The second from the left on the front row is John Slough, wearing his Military Medal

Visiting War Graves

Soon after the Peace Day celebrations Olivia Upton Robins set out for Ypres to visit the grave of her brother, Captain George Upton Robins. On her return, she wrote a letter to *The Times*:

Sir,

I have read lately in The Times a great many letters about the difficulty of getting to Flanders to visit the graves of those who have fallen. Having just returned from Ypres, I thought it might be of use and interest to your readers to know how very easily and cheaply the journey can be accomplished. We left Charing Cross at 8.45 am on Thursday and returned at 9.15 pm on Saturday. The whole journey, inclusive of hotel bills, tips, etc cost £7. We stayed two nights at Bruges, at the Hotel de Flandres, where we had the most comfortable rooms and excellent food. On Friday morning we left Bruges at 8.25, and arrived by train at Ypres at 10.55, the return fare, second class, being 9 francs. The journey from Thourout, where one changes, is all through the battlefields and is of great interest, although the utter desolation of the country is beyond description.

At Ypres we received the greatest kindness and hospitality at the Church Army Hut and Mr Brooks, who was in charge, personally conducted us to find the grave of my brother, and on to Hill 60. It is not safe for women to go about outside the ruins of the town alone. We reached Bruges at 7.30 that night, and left for Ostend at 11 pm on Saturday. It is now possible to stay at Ypres itself, at the Hotel Splendid, which we were informed was very comfortable and quite reasonable. To anyone who wishes to see the battlefields as they were left, and to realize a little of the horrors of the war, this journey will furnish them with all they can desire. To those who have dear ones buried out there I would advise that they wait until the spring to visit the graves. There will be flowers out then, and the graves will look less lonely. If I can be of any use to any of your readers, in helping them to take this sad journey, I shall be only too glad to furnish them with any information in my power.

I remain yours faithfully, Olivia Robins.
Delaport, Wheathampstead, Herts,
19 Oct 1919 [11]

All that remained of the Belgian town of Ypres in March 1919

Olivia Robins aimed her letter at upper-class families similar to her own, able to afford to travel abroad at that time, but for the majority of bereaved widows and families living in Wheathampstead, and certainly for those at The Folly, such a pilgrimage would have been out of the question. The minimum weekly wage for agricultural labourers in 1919 was £1 10s 6d. [12] For many families, just dealing with the formalities surrounding the death of a loved one was a protracted and painful process, involving countless enquiries about the exact circumstances of death, the place of burial and re-burial. Often there was no definitive answer and some widows were still receiving paper work and attending memorial services where a relative's name was honoured in 1925.

A Victorious Homecoming

Four months after the Peace Day celebration at The Folly, rejoicings took place in the village for the homecoming of Field Marshal Frederick Rudolph Lambart, 10th Earl of Cavan, who lived at *Wheathampstead House.* He had a distinguished military career, having served in the South African war and commanded a battalion of the Grenadier Guards from 1908 to 1912. In November the following year he retired to live on his estate in Wheathampstead but was recalled for service. He proved an outstanding leader of the Great War, in which he commanded the Guards Division in France in many of the great battles and the British troops in Italy.

Field Marshal Lord Cavan KCB KP CB MVO [13]

His homecoming to Wheathampstead on 21 November 1919 was an occasion for celebration. It was described in the School Log Book and children from The Folly would have been among those who welcomed him:

> *Head Master and Mr Beard were away helping to arrange street decorations in honour of Lord Cavan's homecoming. It was wet all day. School met soon after 1 pm and closed at 3.10 pm for children to get tea. They returned at 4 pm and formed part of the procession to the station where Lord Cavan received an address of welcome.*

Far less prestigious, but more significant to his family, was the homecoming of Harry Smith, the son of Henry Smith and Sarah Males. He had grown up at The Folly and returned safely to the joy of marriage in 1919.

Harry and Emily Smith's wedding day, August 1919

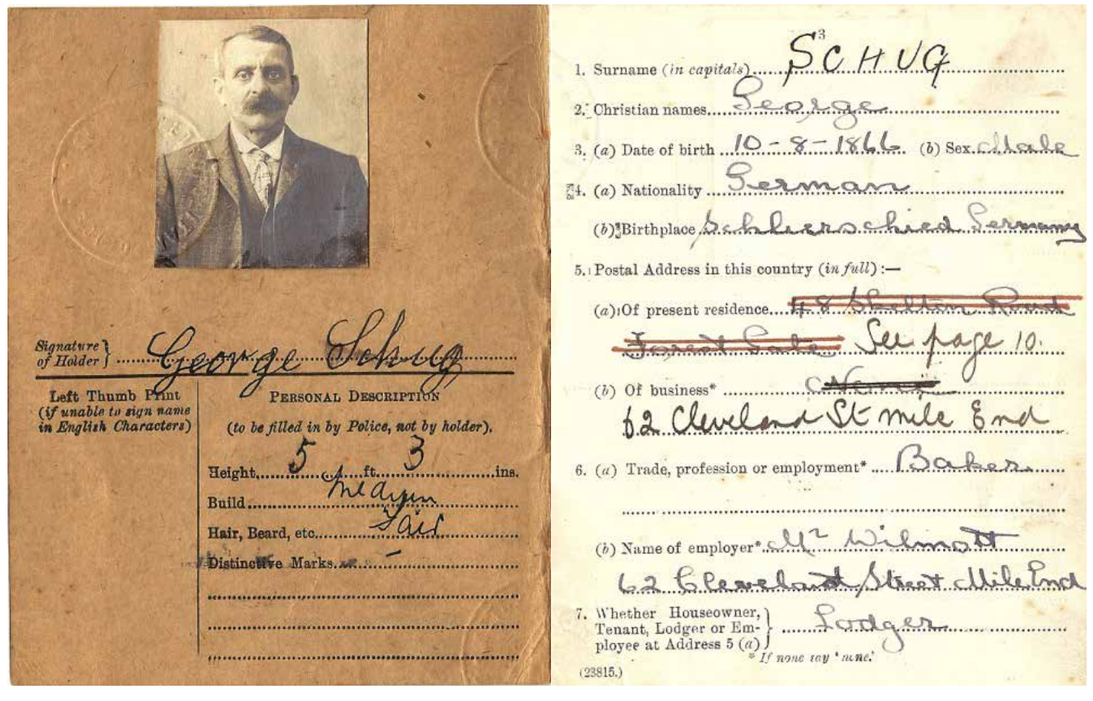
The Aftermath of War

For another Folly family the years after the war brought great sadness. Robert and Julia Izzard's youngest daughter, Maud, had married Sidney Bandy in 1910. They lived initially with Robert and Julia[14] and had four children, two born before Sidney joined up in 1916. Sidney was discharged in 1919 as medically unfit and returned to The Folly, but died on 15 April 1921, two years to the day after his discharge, probably from tuberculosis. He did not qualify for a Commonwealth War Graves Commission gravestone, but Maud received a small army pension.[15]

Children suffered their own traumas both during the war and in its aftermath. 350,000 children nationwide were made fatherless by the conflict.[16] Most of the fatalities from the Folly were young single men so there were only a few Folly children bereaved by the war. Sidney and Maud Bandy's children, Leslie, Cyril, Elsie and Sidney, born between 1913 and 1920, were among them and their experience was particularly poignant.[17] In March 1922, a year after Sidney's death, Maud married George Latchford from The Folly, who had been discharged unfit for war service in 1916.[18] Maud died the following September at the age of 29, leaving her four children, who were then between two and nine years of age.[19] What happened to them? Their grandparents, Robert and Julia Izzard, were both quite elderly. Having brought up their grandson, Horace, did they step forward for a second time to care for these young children? Did George Latchford have a role? Robert Izzard died in 1929 and Julia in 1938. Did The Folly, a close family community, come together to support this family?

A Prisoner Released

George Lawrence Schug was 9 years old in 1919 and fortunate to have been brought up by the Lawrence family while his father, an alien prisoner of war, was interned on the Isle of Man. But the



George Schug: Identity Book No 453615

previous decade had brought great sorrow to his grandparents, James and Charlotte Lawrence. After losing their first grandson, Francis Schug, in 1909, and then their daughter, Emily, the following year, news came that their son, Bertie, was missing, presumed dead at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

When James Lawrence died in March 1919 and Charlotte the following December,[20] George must have wondered what would happen to him, but Maude, the only female member of the family who was then aged 25, took responsibility for him with support from her brother, Will.

George was clearly accepted by The Folly community, who remembered his mother, Emily, but prejudice against Germans continued long after the Great War and there are local stories that George suffered bullying at school in Wheathampstead because of his German ancestry. In 1928 Maude married Arthur Dineen and George, who by then was 18, continued to live with them and their children, Ernie and Eileen.[21]

Meanwhile his father, George Schug, was released from internment on the Isle of Man in 1919 and his return to London was recorded on 8 September. His Identity Book shows that he took lodgings in Clerkenwell and was employed as a professional baker by a Mr Wilmot. It records Emily's death, states that on her marriage she acquired German nationality and lists George's male relatives as William, Walter, Bert and Horace Lawrence of The Folly.

George, the son of Nichlaus Schug and Elizabeth Groh, first came to Britain in around 1891 when he was 24, but there seems to have been a rift with his family in Germany. In August 1920, as he continued to re-establish himself in London, he received a letter from his nephew, Julius Crummenauer, who lived in Darmstadt and had obtained his London address from the German Consulate. The letter, written in old German on behalf of Julius's mother, George's sister, passed on family information from Germany and asked for news of George and his family. George does not seem to have replied, for the following year another letter arrived, this time in modern German, from Julius's brother, Otto:

Dear Uncle George,

As we haven't had any news from you, I have been asked several times by my brother Julius to write to you. Surely all the post hasn't failed to reach you … Mother would like to know how her brother – my uncle – is getting on, as we haven't heard anything for a long time. To me our uncle is a stranger, who we only know from the photographs which hang in our living room.

I hope we shall soon have news of you.

Otto [23]

Although neither of these sad letters seems to have been answered, George kept them and they were among his possessions when he died. [22]

Wheathampstead War Memorial

The Great War was the first conflict to involve British servicemen in such huge numbers and as early as 1916 street shrines began to appear in Hertfordshire villages in memory of those who had already given their lives. When the war ended each local community decided how to commemorate those who had fallen and the outpouring of grief was manifest in countless memorials in towns and villages, many of them in or attached to churches.

In Wheathampstead the call for a war memorial to honour those who had fallen came in 1920 and

Wheathampstead War Memorial, 1920

it was agreed to erect a cross of Portland stone outside St Helen's Church in the High Street. It was unveiled by Lord Cavan on 31 October that year.

Folly Chapel Windows

In 1928 a new hall was built at the Folly Chapel and on Sunday afternoon, 18 August, a large congregation gathered for the re-dedication of the entire building. Sunday School children had purchased bricks for five shillings each and the event included the unveiling of two stained glass windows at the front of the Chapel. One window with two panels was in memory of those from The Folly who fell in the Great War and the other commemorated Mr H Smith and Mr A G Hunt, two respected workers in the Chapel and Sunday School.

Among the guests were Mr and Mrs Kemp from *Mackerye End,* who supported the Chapel, the builder, Mr C J Smith, and the son of Mr A G Hunt, William James Hunt and his daughter, Elsie.

Miss Edith 'Edie' French from 39 The Folly, who knew all those named on the memorials personally, described the event:

It was a very real pleasure for us to welcome the Rector of Wheathampstead to the service, and his very gracious unveiling of the window in the memory of the brave soldiers who died in the Great War made a deep impression on our minds. It was the privilege of the Rev W A Parrott to unveil the other window and offer up a short prayer of consecration.

We have been very interested to note that this delightful meeting of the Rector with the Ministers and people of our Folly Church … was mentioned on the wireless, broadcast from London the same evening, and the following morning was reported in The Daily News, The Daily Express and The Times.[24]

Opening of The Folly Methodist Hall, 1928

Memorial windows at the Folly Chapel

The 12 local men commemorated on the stained glass windows were Sidney Bandy, Cyril Carter, Murray Harrison, Horace Izzard, H Lawrence (an error as he was baptised as Bertie), Albert Odell, Cyril Pearce and George Upton Robins, all from The Folly. Francis Gray and Albert Munt lived at Cherry Trees, George Minall in Harpenden and Horace Wilson in Wheathampstead village.

'More Than Just a Name'

The story of these windows did not end with their installation and dedication in 1928, as Terry Pankhurst from Wheathampstead explained in 2014:

The Folly Chapel was demolished in 2006. The windows formed part of the general recyclable building material and were advertised on eBay. They were bought for £120 by a lady who thought it an absolute tragedy that these men, who had fought so bravely, and of whom the windows said that 'their name liveth for evermore', were obviously not being remembered. She held on to them for some years, trying to find an appropriate home for them, and eventually heard about our War Memorial Project and offered them to myself and then to St Albans City Museum where they now reside. [25]

Armistice, Peace Day and Memorials

The Folly Chapel and Hall

The Wheathampstead War Memorial Project was the work of Terry and Margaret Pankhurst, who spent four years researching the names of all those commemorated on the local war memorial that was erected outside St Helen's Church in the village. Using newspaper archives, the County Records Office, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the internet, they produced two books entitled, 'More Than Just a Name', and 'Wheathampstead Hertfordshire: Details of the Fallen 1914-1918', the story of the soldiers of both world wars honoured in the village.

During their research they found countless errors and omissions, a common feature of war memorials up and down the country. In 2014, a stonemason was employed to add ten more names to the Wheathampstead memorial. These included Sidney Bandy, Francis George Gray, Murray Walter Harrison, and Cyril John Pearce from the Folly Methodist Chapel memorial windows.

Recollection of Silence

The Folly Chapel has associations and memories for many people. Harry Smith survived the war and married in 1919 and his grandson recently recalled the stained glass windows:

In my home chapel, in Wheathampstead in Hertfordshire, there was a memorial window to World War One soldiers, which I used to sit in front of every Sunday as a child. The names on it were mostly my distant relatives from The Folly. My grandad, Harry Smith, was from that little community. He went off to war and fought in the Battle of the Somme. He survived but never talked about his experiences until much later. The majority of those who saw indescribable things came back with little support, indeed many of them were unemployed and in their absence society had changed. On his Diamond Wedding in 1979, only then did I discover a bullet at the Somme went through grandad and out the other side. He was perhaps lucky, but he lived with the pain of his experiences for the rest of his life. [26]

Folly Fields and a Local Legacy

Post-war Employment

After the disruption of war, men and women from The Folly settled back into employment. Some found jobs at Randall's Nursery in Ox Lane, Harpenden, a local industry producing vegetables for Covent Garden. Tomatoes and cucumbers were sent by rail and after the tomato season ended chrysanthemums with heads as big as plates were grown for the Christmas trade. [1]

Folly folk at work at Randall's Nursery, Ox Lane, Harpenden, 1921
Left to right; Emily 'Cissy' French, Mary Webb, John French, Mr Crumplin, Ann Catlin, Ray Arnold

Some Folly residents found work at Pickford Mill in Batford, producing tyres for the business known as Almagam and many more returned to labouring or continued making straw hats until about 1920, when Osborne's factory closed.

In 1928 Helmets Ltd. opened on Brewhouse Hill and in stages moved to the site now occupied by the King Edward Place housing development.

Helmets Ltd made tropical and policemen's helmets, military hats with peaks, plumes and pom-poms and the pillbox hats, which were the height of fashion. By the 1930s there was 'a friendly almost family atmosphere at Helmets, where all the girls were local and knew each other and many remained friends for life.' It had the feel of a cottage industry and appealed to women from The Folly after Osborne's Hat Factory closed.[2]

The Folly hat factory site was taken over by Chivers, Gosnold and Lewis (CGL Ltd) a company of precision engineers. The head office and main works was in Harpenden but for many years the firm employed 32 workers in Wheathampstead, including quite a number from The Folly.

C.G.L. ENGINEERS LTD.

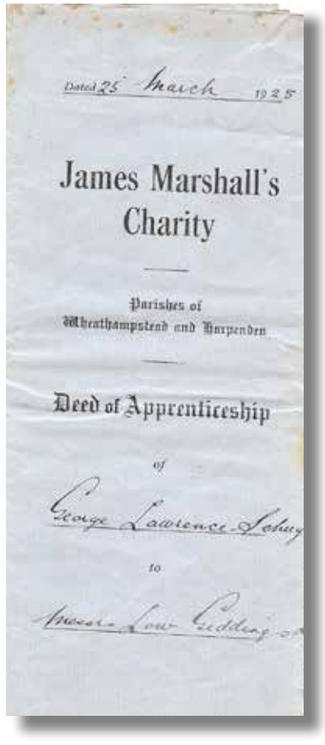
The firm supplied the motor trade and made high grade jig and tools, prototype machinery and test equipment. Ron Webb, who today lives at *The Old Forge Cottage,* 8 Folly Fields with his wife, Nina, worked there for 26 years. When he started with the firm on 27 January 1958 as 'number 32', he was informed, 'The rate will be slightly above the standard rate for apprentices aged 15 years, ie 1s 3d per hour to increase by yearly increments as laid down.' [3]

Murphy and Sons came to *Garden House* in 1926, initially as chemists in the brewing industry. Later they diversified into pesticides and became agricultural chemists, producing Tumbleweed and

other aids to the grower. Gradually they expanded, taking over *Wheathampstead Place* then also *Wheathampstead House,* even having their own branch line for the safe delivery of dangerous chemicals. [4] Over the years this company provided employment for residents of Wheathampstead and from The Folly.

A James Marshall Apprenticeship

In 1925 George Lawrence Schug, 'ward of (Alice) Maude Lawrence' living in Folly Fields, was 15 and he was apprenticed under the James Marshall Charity. When James Marshall died in 1722 a charitable trust was formed with income from his properties in the parish. At that time it was his intention to help poor children apprenticed to crafts and trades with the purchase of tools and, in some cases, clothing. The charity, which still functions today as the James Marshall Foundation, supports young people living in the parishes of Wheathampstead and Harpenden by providing funding for school, college, university, through an apprenticeship scheme or in a career.


Dated 25 March 1925

James Marshall's Charity

Parishes of Wheathampstead and Harpenden

Deed of Apprenticeship

of

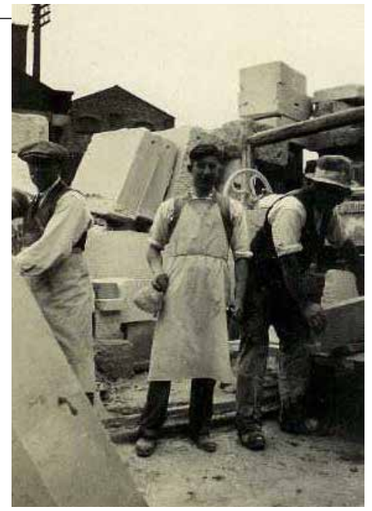
George Lawrence Schug

to

Messrs Low Giddings

James Marshall's Charity Apprenticeship document

George Lawrence Schug's apprenticeship in 1925 with Messrs Low Giddings Ltd, a company of stone masons, was for five years and the Trustees paid a sum of £15, followed by a further £15 two years later. George was paid 12 shillings a week during the first year, rising to 30 shillings a week during the fifth and final year of his apprenticeship.



George Lawrence Schug, apprentice stonemason c. 1925

Delaport to Lea House

Delaport, Gustard Wood

After the Great War, *Lea House* remained in the hands of the Upton Robins family and Mrs Emma Flora Upton Robins of *Delaport* in Gustard Wood moved to *Lea House* for her final years. [5] She was a well-known figure in Wheathampstead, described as the 'mother of the village'. Everyone was familiar with the jingle of the bell on Pixie's collar, as the little pony drove her mistress to St Peter's Church in Gustard Wood for services on weekdays and Sundays.

When Mrs Upton Robins left *Delaport* and came to *Lea House* she was not content to be a 'visitor' but took a keen interest in the people of The Folly until walking became difficult. She was always

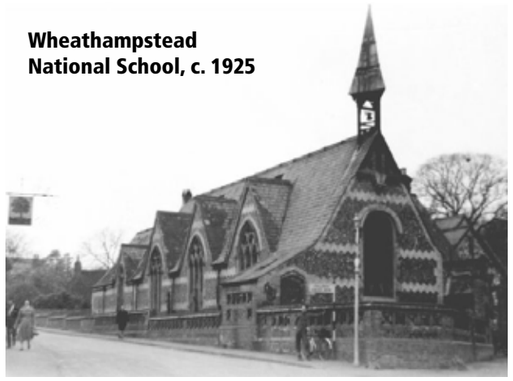
involved in 'good works' and, the Christmas before she died, she was drawn in her wheelchair to distribute gifts of toys to the cottages at Cherry Trees near The Folly, which she called 'my district'. During the last year of her life, when she was no longer able to go to church, she waited expectantly once a week for the Rector to bring her Holy Communion. She died at *Lea House* in 1927 at the age of 85. [6]

Her daughter, Olivia, also involved herself with the residents of The Folly. She was an enthusiastic follower of local football and started a boys' club at 'Robins Nest' near The Folly and the working men's club in the village in a tin Nissan hut near where the Post Office now stands. [7] After her mother's death, Olivia moved to *The Dell* at the top of Rose Lane. She died in 1950. [8]

The post-war years saw properties change hands at The Folly. On 10 September 1930 several freehold cottages 'with gas connected' and rent potential of around £40 per annum (about £1500 at today's value) were sold at *The Swan.* The 'double-fronted shop and dwelling house', formerly *Factory House,* with 'two cellars and four bedrooms, a brick yard with a slate bakehouse, gas connected and a good well of water', also went under the hammer. The goodwill of the well-established grocery and provisions merchant went with this property.

Post-war at St Helen's School

During the war St Helen's School had suffered from staff turnover, disruption of the curriculum and sad reports of deaths of former pupils. Thomas Clark had been appointed headmaster in 1891 and remained there for 36 years. His entries in the School Log Book, particularly during the Great War years, show him to have been a schoolmaster who cared deeply for the children and was profoundly conscientious, perhaps at a cost to his own health. Many children from The Folly passed through his hands but only after the war ended were they able to experience normal schooldays.



Wheathampstead National School, c. 1925

Sydney Dollimore, the son of Arthur and Martha Dollimore (née Clark), who lived near the railway station and started school in 1918 left an account of his experiences of the village school during the post-war period, experiences that would have been shared by children from The Folly.

When I started school in September 1918 the village was still undergoing the awful effects of the Great War and German POWs were a common sight in the village being employed by local farmers.

The infant teacher in charge was Miss Warren who lived opposite the school with her handicapped niece, Mavis. She was an old-fashioned teacher, a kindly well-educated lady very much concerned with her pupils' welfare. She was assisted by a younger female teacher.

The school was presided over by the headmaster, Thomas Clark, who I considered to be a truly remarkable village pedagogue. He lived in a large house at the top of Wheathampstead Hill. [10] *He was well over six feet in height, a slender austere figure, invariably attired in pin-striped trousers with black waistcoat and jacket and usually out of school carrying an umbrella which he seldom unfurled.*

He was a strict disciplinarian, an artist of merit and could play both the violin and pianoforte equally well. On Sundays he was always present at St Helen's attending both Matins and Evensong and while there he kept his eagle eye open for any pupil misbehaving, any offender receiving the full treatment with the cane on the following Monday. I can still hear the dreaded swish and feel the pain.

His main tenet of teaching was the three Rs linked with a respect for elders, a deep interest in local history, a fostering of patriotism and an overlying sense of reverence for anything appertaining to religion in general and to St Helen's in particular.

Thomas Clark with his staff

The staff in the senior part of the school consisted of Charlie Hampton, known to all as Hoppy because of his gammy leg. He lived in the adjoining school house and suffered with the gout, which did not prevent him from playing cricket regularly for the village eleven, being well known locally as an exponent of the straight bat technique.

Charlie Hampton was a strong believer in corporal punishment and had his own particular quirk in the way it was administered. The lad who misbehaved was handed a pocket knife and told to proceed to the Ash Grove, a piece of wasteland near the school. There he had to cut a hazel stick which had to conform to certain dimensions. Upon his return to school, Charlie trimmed the stick and then caned the lad with it.

Another teacher was Bob Seabrook, a brother of my father's employer. He was an excellent musician, being organist and choirmaster at St Helen's.

Apart from sport there were only two breaks away from the classroom. These were for gardening under Mr Hampton and carpentry under a Mr Gridley from Harpenden, who visited the school once a week. Until recently I still owned a clothes horse which I made at school for my mother.

There were no physical education classes at the school in those days, which I expect was due to the fact that most of us came from poor families with some children having literally only the clothes they stood up in.[11] *Quite a few were obviously undernourished which was unfortunately due in some cases to their fathers' fondness for strong drink.* [12]

Folly Children after the war

In 1921, eight-year-old Les Lambe arrived at the Folly from his home in London, 'within the sound of Bow Bells', to live with his aunt in a cottage near *The Rose and Crown.* [13] 'He dazzled the drinkers there with his speed and agility on the roller skates – London's street must have offered excellent terrain for practising – and he surpassed the local lads, among whom roller skates were something of a rarity.' [14] In later life Les worked on the railway.

Children like Les Lambe, whose education had been disrupted by the war, and those made fatherless during the conflict, had to adapt to new circumstances but they were not entirely forgotten by the outside world and occasional outings and parties were arranged by the British Legion, helping them to understand that they were not alone.[15]

In the post-war period attempts were made to provide treats for all children and schools arranged special activities and outings. Many elementary school pupils at this time, including those from St Helen's, enjoyed a visit to the Zoo. Whipsnade Park Zoo did not open until 1931, so visits prior to that would have been to the Zoological Gardens in Regents Park, which opened to the public in 1847 and caused an immediate sensation. Chimpanzees, giraffes, hippos and elephants drew large crowds and a stream of exotic animals was added over the next 50 years. Progress in developing the zoo was delayed by the Great War but Monkey Hill opened in 1925, designed as an open-air pit-like enclosure with spectacular rockwork at its centre. It was stocked with Hamadryas baboons, who entertained the public by rampaging around and fighting. [16]

Hamadryas baboons on London Zoo's Monkey Hill in 1927

This group of girls from Wheathampstead School may have seen Monkey Hill and would have included children from The Folly

Despite events such as this, school attendance fluctuated and frequent excuses for absence were given such as toothache, mumps, very bad cold, dreadful cough, blister on foot, accident, and 'supposed' cold. A random selection of 'Reasons for Absence' taken from the School Log Book of 1927 shows children from The Folly (shown in red) were prominent in lists of absentees.

ST HELEN'S SCHOOL LOG BOOKS EXTRACTS

Reasons for Absence in 1927 (random selection)

Jan 27th Thomas Maskell, Bury Cottages	age 8	Having boots mended
Jan 13th Queenie Mayles, The Folly	age 12	Mind baby
Jan 13th Teddy Slough, The Folly	age 8	Fetching coals
Jan 13th Raymond Seabrook, High Street	age 12	Visiting pictures
April 29th Daphne Humphrey, The Hill	age 5	Toothache
May 6th Muriel French, Three Oaks Cottages	age 8	no boots
May 13th Gwendoline Hodson, High Street	age 5	Really queer

May 13th Derrick Day, Wheath House Stables	age 7	Stomach cough
May 13th Ronald Hicks, The Folly	age 5	Had castor oil
June 3rd Gerald Rowe, High Street	age 10	Helping father [shopkeeper]
June 3rd Septimus Mayles, The Folly	age 5	Playing in the fields
June 3rd Sidney Russell, The Folly	age 6	Supposed earache
June 10th Marie Simons, High Street	age 6	Thought it was a week's holiday
June 10th Kenneth Kelvey, Marford	age 8	Attended County Show
June 17th Gwendoline Grey, Oak Cottages,	age 6	Feet wet going from school
June 17th Sydney Arnold, Bury Green Cottages,	age 8	Bee sting – eyes closed
June 17th Kathleen Mayles, Brewhouse Hill	age 5	Kept at home to evade Nurse
Sept 2nd Teddy Westwood, Marford	age 7	Bilious attack
Sept 9th Ronald Hicks, The Folly	age 6	Gathering Blackberries
Sept 9th Cecil French, The Folly	age 7	Barnet Fair
Sept. 30th Willie Millan, Lea Valley Cottages	age 5	Had mumps? Been away one month
Sept.30th Denis Munday, Lea Valley Cottages	age 7	Blackberrying
Sept 30th Dorothy Shrimpton, West End Cottage	age 5	Stayed at home after being dirty
Sept 30th Gwendoline Grey, The Folly	age 6	Wet half day
21 Oct Charles Shrimpton, West End Cottage	age 6	No boots
Oct. 28th Gwendoline Grey, The Folly	age 6	No good shoes
Oct. 28th Kathleen Hunt, Nomansland	age 7	Influenza – been absent 3 weeks
Dolly Shrimpton, West End Cottage	age 5	Complains her sister ran without her – afraid to come
Cyril Arnold, Wheathampstead Hill	age 6	Was dirty
Sydney Bandy, The Folly	age 7	Harpenden Fair
Queenie Mayles, The Folly	age 12	Mother sick
Betty Webb, Marshalls Heath	age 7	1st day Barnet Fair, 2nd day the Zoo

(22 absences in one week in May, mostly for colds)

Cecil French's visit to Barnet Fair, a distance of about 20 miles, must have involved an adult with transport, who condoned the expedition. Familiar family names from The Folly appear here – French, Slough, Bandy, Males/Mayles and Russell, together with newcomers – Grey, Hicks and children living in Lea Valley Cottages, properties built in the 1920s to the east of The Folly along Lower Luton Road.

On 13 April 1927 Thomas Clark retired and Mr W J Housden took over as Headmaster. [17]

Pupils from one house at St Helen's School c. 1927 On the left are Rev Alexander Baird-Smith, Rector of Wheathampstead, and Mr W J Housden, Headmaster from 1927

A New Senior School

In 1932 a new senior school for boys and girls aged 11 to 14 was built on Brewhouse Hill on an area known as The Wick, the present site of St Helen's JMI School.[18] The old flint school, with its stove in the middle of the building, a sliding door dividing the huge space into two classrooms and a small triangular playground above street level, continued to be used until after the Second World War but facilities there were limited.

The Sands, Skegness, 1930s

The new school was basically a pre-fab building but must have seemed like a palace after the overcrowding of the flint school premises. It had a large assembly hall, three classrooms, a science room, staffroom, cloakroom and headmaster's study. From the early 1930s senior children had travelled to St Albans for domestic science, metalwork and woodwork but now they could be taught on the Wheathampstead site. Most of the scholars bought a brick for sixpence and their initials were put on it. The bricks were placed in rows midway up the wall around the Assembly Hall.[19] The school badge had three wheat ears with a cross superimposed and the school motto was 'Courtesy, Culture and Courage'. Mr Housden, who was well-respected, was the headmaster was for 30 years.[20] This was the senior school for the village until the secondary modern school opened at the top of The Hill in 1969.

A Day at the Seaside

During the early 1930s The Folly Chapel continued to flourish and children who attended Sunday School enjoyed the United Churches Sunday School outings to Hunstanton, Skegness, Yarmouth and Felixstowe. They were organised by Mr W J Hunt, the Managing Director of Almagam Mills in Batford, who was a Sunday School teacher and Secretary at the Folly Chapel. Several hundred children from Batford Methodist Church, The Folly Chapel and St Helen's Parish Church with their parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and babes-in-arms assembled for a day out.

For children living at The Folly this kind of outing would have been in place of a family holiday, which most families were unable to afford. 'As long as there was a seat and the fare was paid, you were welcome,' recalled Elsie Smith in later years, as she described her father's 'remarkable feat of interdenominational organisation'. [21]

The long train came up from Luton and stopped first at the LNER Station in Harpenden North. My father checked everyone (from Batford) was present, then allotted everyone their seats, joined the train himself and came on to Wheathampstead, where the station platform was packed solid with excited youngsters. Once again, every name was checked and when all were safely on board, he climbed aboard himself, the whistle blew and the train began to depart.

The outing was a big responsibility for my father but everything was very well organised. There was never any bother or anyone lost. After about two and a half hours' travelling, out came the sandwiches and lemonade. Then it seemed no time at all until we were at the coast. On arrival each church group was told which restaurant had been booked for tea, how to find it, and at what time their sitting was. It was also emphasized that everyone must be back at the station at a set time for the return journey. [22]

Folly Fields and a Local Legacy

Farewell to a 'Folly Boy'

The Folly Chapel was still an important part of the local community after the war and in 1933 it was licensed for marriages and local couples had their weddings there.

Members of the French family were involved in the Sunday School and in the wider Methodist Circuit over several decades. (Albert) John French, the eldest son of Albert and Emily French of 39 Folly Fields, had been in the Sunday School all his life and was one of 'The Folly Boys', who served in the Great War. [23] During his wartime service with the Labour Corps he suffered a gunshot wound to his chest, which removed two of his ribs and caused severe breathing difficulties. He was discharged in 1919 with a '20 per cent degree of disablement' and a weekly pension of five shillings and six pence. [24]

He returned home, married Ethel Willis in 1919, and 'entered with renewed zeal all the church activities, serving as Society Steward, Assistant Superintendent of the Sunday School and Treasurer of the Guild.' He was known for his cheery temperament and punctuality but in 1933 John French died suddenly in the West Herts Hospital after a short illness. He was buried in St Helen's churchyard, 'amid every sign of sympathy from those near and dear to him and also from the larger public which knew his sterling character and integrity'.[25] His wife was buried beside him in 1954.

Albert John French, 6 July 1933, aged 46 and his wife, Ethel Alice French, 6 February 1954, aged 61

A Legacy for The Folly

Children from The Folly had always enjoyed playing in the surrounding fields but in 1933 a new facility, Melissa Playing Field, was made available to them. This site opposite The Folly had a chequered history, with ownership passing from family to family and person to person. In the Tithe Schedule of 1840 it appeared as 'Roadside Mead' in the name of Amelia Chennells, a member of a well-known Wheathampstead family.[26] When reference to the freehold appeared in the will of Charles Benet Drake Garrard, the land was known as 'Chilver Mead' and was bequeathed to Apsley Cherry-Garrard (senior). It then passed through various hands until Cherry-Garrard's death in 1908.

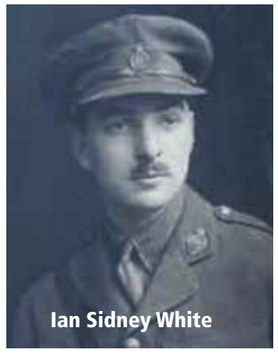
The first mention of a resident of The Folly being involved was in 1919 when George Swallow, who had earlier bought and sold two Folly cottages, purchased the land from the Cherry-Garrard estate. It then passed to William Pearce from The Folly and to others, before being sold to joint owners, 'Harold Fitch Kemp, Gentleman of *Mackerye End,* and Elaine Mary Ashton, Spinster, of *Lea House'* in 1931. [27]

Harold Fitch Kemp was an accountant and landowner. No evidence has come to light that, as has been suggested, he was connected with the firm that made Kemps Biscuits, an example, perhaps, of local speculation transformed into historical fact. In 1902 he married Marguerite Lucy Stedall and the following year their

daughter, Lucy Melissa Kemp, was born in Clapton Park, London.[29] Their son, Derek, was born in 1906 and soon afterwards they moved to Hertfordshire.[30] The Kemp family lived for many years at *Rosehill* in Kings Langley,[31] before settling at *Mackerye End* in about 1925.

In 1923, just before the family left Kings Langley, a notice appeared in *The Times,* announcing the engagement of Harold Fitch Kemp's daughter, Melissa, to Captain Robert Baynes Cowley of Bovingdon, near Kings Langley.[32] Captain Cowley was a London solicitor, a keen cricketer and the grandson of the late R J P Broughton of *Callipers Hall*, Chipperfield. Educated at Harrow and Cambridge University, he was 15 years older than Melissa but it appeared a suitable match between the offspring of two local upper-class families.

But it was not to be, for in 1926 another notice appeared in *The Times* and other newspapers, announcing 'the engagement between Ian Sidney, only son of the late Mr Alexander Sidney White of *Tulliebelton House* Perthshire and Mrs White, and Lucy Melissa, only daughter of Mr and Mrs Harold Fitch Kemp of *Mackerye End* near Harpenden Herts'. [33]


Ian Sidney White

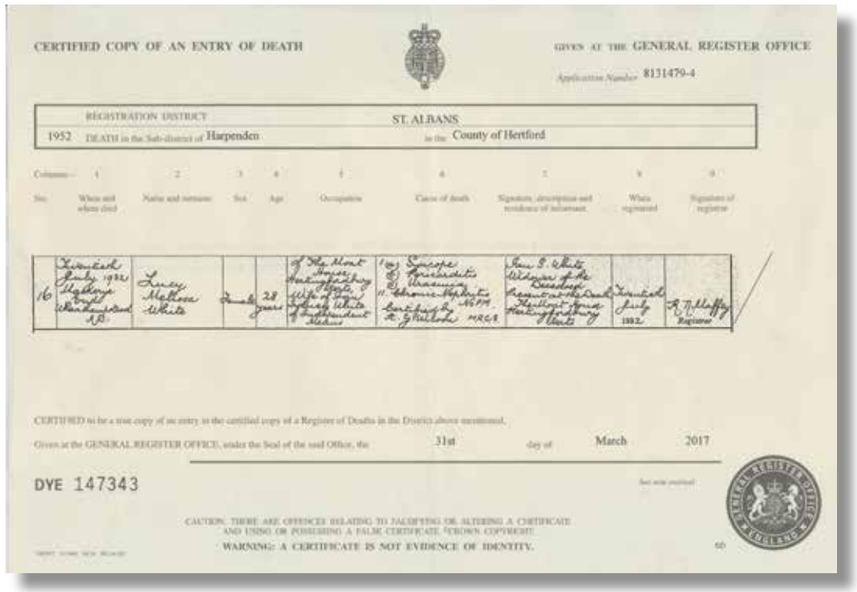
Ian Sidney White was born in Scotland and studied engineering before graduating from Cambridge. [34] An announcement of the forthcoming marriage of Ian and Melissa appeared on 31 May 1927,[35] followed by their wedding at St Helen's Church, Wheathampstead at 2.15pm on 8 September that year. According to the local press, this took place 'in mediaeval style before a crowded and fashionable congregation'.[36]


Melissa and Ian White leaving the church after the ceremony

Five years later on 20 July 1932 Melissa died at *Mackerye End,* her parents' home, at the age of 28. Her husband was with her and her death certificate states she died of a heart condition and kidney disease. During their tragically short life together Melissa and Ian White lived at *The Moat House,* Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire, built as the Miller's House to Hertingfordbury Corn Mill, and now Grade II listed.[37]


The Moat House, Hertingfordbury, home of Ian and Melissa White

During the 1930s Harold Fitch Kemp was one of the principal landowners in the Wheathampstead area.[38] In 1933 he donated the two-and-a-half acre field opposite *The Rose and Crown* to the Parish Council in memory of his daughter for 'exercise and recreation'. It was called 'Melissa Field' and gave the children of The Folly a delightful area to play, with exciting possibilities.


CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 8131479-4

REGISTRATION DISTRICT ST ALBANS

1952 DEATH in the Sub-district of Harpenden in the County of Hertford

No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
16	Twentieth July 1932 Mackerye End Harpenden	Lucy Melissa White	Female	28 years	Of The Moat House, Hertingfordbury Wife of Ian Sidney White Gentleman Retired	(a) Syncope (b) Endocarditis (c) Rheumatic Heart Disease 11 Months Certified by H. Pollock M.R.C.S.	Ian S. White Widower of the Deceased Present at the Death The Moat House Hertingfordbury Herts	Twenty-first July 1932	R. Tollhoffy Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the 31st day of March 2017

DYE 147343

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE [CROWN COPYRIGHT]

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

Death Certificate of Lucy Melissa White, 20 July 1932


Opening of Melissa Playing Fields 1933 by Mr and Mrs Harold Fitch Kemp, seated on the swings centre and left.

Following the Great War, the slow and painful return to normality meant that resumption of leisure activities had to take its place among other priorities but during the 1930s the new facility, Melissa Field, became a focal point of concern for the Playing Fields Committee. In May 1934, the committee unanimously recommended repairs to fencing and painting of the swings and a month or so later obtained an estimate from the Rural District Council Surveyor for a swimming pool on the site. The estimated cost of between £300 and £400 was accepted and in July it was agreed that the scheme should go ahead. But in October there was news that a similar development had been proposed for Batford and that sites other than Melissa Field were now under consideration. This was disappointing news for parents and children at The Folly. The following May a paddling pool and sandpit were constructed for younger children on the site at a total cost of £23 10s.

House Numbering in Folly Fields

The streets at The Folly were named Folly Fields during the post-war period but the cottages there and houses on Lower Luton Road were not numbered until 1936, when:

> *It was agreed to take the necessary action to assist The Head Postmaster, St Albans in regards to the numbering of houses at Folly Fields, The Folly and Gustard Wood in order to facilitate the delivery of correspondence.* [39]

A Folly Poacher and Other Folly Characters

A Folly Childhood

Donald Milnthorpe, like a number of Folly residents in the 1940s, was a regular poacher. He lived with his wife, Violet, in the short terrace of cottages next door to the Folly Stores on the east side of the entrance to Folly Fields (on the right of the photograph). This terrace was later demolished and replaced by a new house, 178 Lower Luton Road.

Cottages on Lower Luton Road near the entrance to Folly Fields, c 1890s

Donald and Violet's eldest daughter, Olive, was born in 1934[1] and spent her childhood at The Folly. In an interview in 2012, Olive Norris (née Milnthorpe) described her memories of growing up there. [2]

Mum had seven children altogether, but she lost two so there were Mum and Dad and five children – me, my sister Betty, my first brother, Robin, and the twins David and Philip. I was the oldest. Dad used to pay the rent and it was only 3/6d a week, or something like that, and we had penny meters for gas and electric.

We had a small kitchen but it had a big table in the centre with chairs round it and then we had a sitting room that just had a settee, another table, a radiogram and a sideboard. There wasn't an awful lot. Upstairs, Mum and Dad's bedroom had a double bed, a dressing table and a big box to keep the clothes because you couldn't get a wardrobe in there. In our bedroom, my sister and I slept in the three-quarter bed and the three boys slept in the double bed and they had a curtain in a corner. Dad put up a shelf and fixed a curtain round for us to keep clothes behind, because we hadn't got money for wardrobes.

Donald Milnthorpe was employed for a time by Smith Brothers, a local builder. Violet worked at Helmets Ltd in Wheathampstead. Men operated the machinery to make the helmet shapes and cut them and women lined them. Violet was involved in producing miners' helmets and there was a nursery at the factory where she could take the twins.

Employees at Helmets Ltd 1932

Olive and her brothers and sisters attended St Helen's School and Olive recalled:

I started school on the 17 April 1939. The first school was the old building opposite the big church. I liked school because it was a way of not having to look after my sister and my brothers.

When I went home from school, I'd say to my Mum and Dad, 'Can I go out to play?' and they replied, 'Yes, if you take Betty and Robin'. As I was the oldest one, I was made to wash up, make beds and do things that the others didn't have to do.

Everybody at The Folly was so friendly in them days because there was nothing else to do, was there? No cinemas to go to, so we used to make our own sort of entertainment. We used to go up the fields and pull the farmer's haystacks apart. We'd make a big hole in the middle, put boughs and stuff across, sprinkle hay over the big hole and then call the kids up so they all fell in. It was funny, we used to love it. We used to make huts up in the fields, play rounders and skip in the middle of the road as there was hardly any cars then. We had swings and playing fields in front of our cottage, there were four large swings, two baby swings, a seesaw and a sandpit – just opposite the house – it was good.

We used to go to Sunday School every Sunday and sit on little chairs in a circle and Mr Bert Cobb used to organise concerts there. And then there was the Robin Hood Club in a corrugated iron hut on the Luton Road that was used for wedding receptions and things.

You didn't need to lock your door then, you know. Neighbours used to come in because my parents had more children than the others. If Mrs Hunt or Mrs Dineen had anything left or over, they used to open the door and say, 'Vi, would your children like to use this up?' Everybody used to help everybody else out, you know. It was wonderful it was, when you've got no money. Poor Dad, he only earned £9 a week to keep seven of us on and that was to pay the rent, buy the food, so you were glad of a little help really. Although he was naughty, he was a poacher so we had plenty of meat.

A Ferret in his Pocket

I used to love going poaching with him. It was lovely. He used to wake me up early in the morning and say, 'Olive, do you want to come up the field with me to get some rabbits?' We'd go up the field at, say, five o'clock in the morning and he used to have a ferret in his pocket and some nets. He would lay the nets over the rabbit holes, then put the ferret down and the old rabbits used to jump into the nets and he used to knock them on the head.

He used to come home sometimes with three or four rabbits, so we lived on rabbit stew and roast rabbit, and he used to shoot pheasants and partridges, oh yeah, and he used to sell them. We used to go across the river and if we caught rabbits, he would thread the rabbits' legs on a pole and we brought them home. I was in front, he was behind.

Caught Red-Handed

He only got caught once. He worked at Batford, and these two chickens were running around on the pavement, well not on the pavement – on the bank – so he picked them up and put them in his bicycle bag and brought them home. We'd got a chicken run up the garden and he put them up there.

The policeman came up the path with another man and he said, 'Have you got this gentleman's chickens, Mr Milnthorpe?' and my Dad said, 'Would I take anybody's chickens? Course I wouldn't', but the man called them by name and the chickens went running to him. And Dad had to go to Court and was fined £5 at St Albans.

The Official Account

This event took place in 1944, when Olive was ten years old and the court case was reported rather differently in *The Herts Advertiser & St Albans Times.*

STOLE TWO HENS WHEATHAMPSTEAD MAN FINED

At St Albans Divisional Sessions, on Saturday, Donald Hubert Milnthorpe (32), of The Folly, Wheathampstead, pleaded 'Not guilty' to stealing two hens, valued at 50s, the property of Frederick Dunton, of Forge Cottage, Batford, on June 21st.

Pc A Barnard stated that the defendant, when told he was suspected of stealing the hens, said: 'Yes; I am sorry. I did not want to steal them. I will give them back to the owner.'

Frederick Dunton gave evidence of identifying the hens the only two he had.

The defendant said that, for some weeks past, he had noticed the hens straying about the road or in the meadow, and thought they were straying, so he took them home, expecting the Police would be making enquiries and he could then return them.

In reply to Supt Hales, the defendant said he had had no chance to try to find the owner, as the Police came to see him the same evening.

Replying to the Clerk (Mr T Anderson Davis), the defendant said it did not occur to him to ring up the Police and report about the straying hens to them.

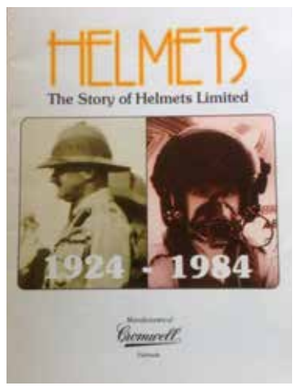
The Chairman said the Bench were convinced the defendant took the hens with the intention of keeping them. He would be fined 40s with 2s 6d costs. [3]

Regardless of her father's conviction and illegal activities, Olive was unrepentant:

Oh! I tell you what though, we laughed, we were so happy. There was always something going on. I mean, what vegetables he wasn't able to grow himself, he used to pinch out of the farmers' fields – Brussel sprouts, cabbage, you know, whatever we needed, Dad would get. And it didn't matter how he got it, as long as he got it [laughed]. We grew a lot of vegetables because we had an allotment and a garden at the back of the house. But, Dad worked for a gentleman who used to breed pigs and he always used to give him the 'Harry pig', the smallest of the litter, so we did live well. We never went hungry, never.

Olive left school in 1950 when she was 16 and her first job was making hats at Helmets in the village. She recalled:

They made so many hats then, firemen's helmets, jockey hats, cyclists' hats, policemen's hats and airmen's hats, yes there was no end of stuff there. They even used to make dog coats for greyhound racing. I was a machinist, that's where I learned all my machining.



When she was about 20, Olive left Helmets and worked for a while at the Shredded Wheat factory in Welwyn, an ultra-modern factory built in 1926, with tall concrete cereal silos that were a local landmark.[4] She left to get married to Charles W Norris in 1959 when she was 25. [5]

During the period Olive lived at The Folly it had a reputation as a rough area but Olive did not describe it like that.

There were quite a few girls and boys at the Folly and we all seemed to really get on well together. The boys walked us home to make sure that we got home safely, but I can't remember any fights between boys from Wheathampstead and The Folly. I couldn't honestly tell you if it was rough because my father was so strict. We had to be in by 10 o'clock and earlier than that if we weren't going out anywhere. We were never allowed to walk the streets.

Two Weddings and a Funeral

While children like Olive were growing up at The Folly, a number of established residents were tying the knot and settling down together and others were coping with old age.

'Cissy' French and Jim Elmore

Just before Christmas in 1933, the French family celebrated two marriages. Emily 'Cissy' French, William and Lillian's eldest daughter, left school when she was 12 or 13 and worked in the straw plaiting industry in Luton. The story goes that her first 'sweetheart' was her neighbour, Albert Odell, who was killed in the Great War, so she did not marry Jim Elmore, who also hailed from The Folly, until 1933, when she was 36 years of age. [6] They were married on Saturday 6 December at St Helen's and moved into 15 Folly Fields together. They did not have any children but 'Cissy' was able to stay at home, where she kept chickens and rabbits and enjoyed her garden.

Hilda Irene French

Hilda Irene French was 14 years younger than 'Cissy', and she married George Lawrence Schug at St Helen's a week later on Saturday 16 December 1933.[7] They had grown up together and George, who had arrived as a baby in distressing circumstances after his mother Emily Schug (née Lawrence) died, now had an even closer link to the kinship network that was fundamental to the Folly community. [8] George and Hilda moved out of Folly Fields and rented 8 Lea Valley Cottages.

George Lawrence Schug's father, who had been an alien prisoner-of-war on the Isle of Man, retired from his job as a baker in London in about 1931 and moved to Wheathampstead to catch up on the years he had missed with his son. He was present at George and Hilda's wedding but sadly did not live to see the birth of their two sons, Anthony in 1936 and Kenneth in 1944.

George died on 25 May 1935 at the age of 69 and his funeral cortege, organised by T & E Neville, undertakers and funeral carriage proprietors of Luton, assembled at 8 Lea Cottages, now 114 Lower Luton Road. The procession solemnly made its way through the village to St Helen's Church,

his coffin in a glass shillibier drawn by two horses and followed by a coach and pair. For a man who had led a sad life, estranged from his family in his homeland, imprisoned as a foreign alien for five years, and separated by death and circumstances from his wife and son, this was a dignified end, indicating honour and respect from his British relatives and The Folly community. [9]

Glass shillibier of the type used for George Schug's coffin

Octogenarians of Folly Fields


Eighty-One
And Goes On
Working

Grand Record Of
Mr. Geo. Elmore,
Of The Folly

Can any Hertfordshire rural worker challenge the record of Mr. George

Headline from The Herts Advertiser, 1939

In 1939, to the delight of 'Cissy' and Jim Elmore, George Elmore, Jim's father, who had lived at The Folly since 1884, was featured in a local newspaper report. He and his wife, Sarah Webb, moved to The Folly after their marriage and had eleven children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. [10]

EIGHTY-ONE AND GOES ON WORKING

Grand record of Mr George Elmore of The Folly

Can any Herts rural worker challenge the record of Mr George Elmore of 16 Folly Fields, who at the age of 81 works daily on local farms?

Besides this he tends a small garden and allotment, the latter so expertly that during a long life his wife never had to buy vegetables.

Mrs Elmore died 18 years ago [11] and he lives with his daughter, Miss C Elmore.

STARTED WHEN SIX

Work on the land has always attracted him, from the time when he was six years old and helped on a large farm in Lincolnshire by leading horses. Even then he had half an hour's walk to work, rising at six o'clock and finishing at six in the evening.

Getting up at six is still his habit, though he enjoys comparatively leisurely hours as compared with the old days. Starting work at eight o'clock, he sometimes finishes at four although when there is work to do he goes on much later, in spite of his age.

NEVER LEARNED TO WRITE

Work then, has occupied most hours of his life and as he began at such a tender age, there was little chance for education. Mr Elmore cannot write but is able to read.

However, his deficiency with the pen is replaced by an extraordinary efficiency with a considerable variety of agricultural implements. A 'Luton News' reporter found him swinging a scythe with a steady regular beat on the outer edge of Melissa Playing Field at The Folly.

LOOKS BELIE HIS YEARS

Mr Elmore is a tall, straight-backed man with an open air look that gives him a youthful bearing. In addition to being probably the oldest working man in the district he is the oldest male inhabitant of The Folly and has no intention of retiring yet.

There is an unmarried son living at home, married daughters in Kimpton, Batford and Derby, and three married sons residing at The Folly. [12]

George Elmore died in 1943 at the age of 85. [13]

Albert French with produce from his allotment

Albert and Emily had always been supporters of The Folly Chapel and must have been delighted to see their daughter taking part in a play on Good Friday in 1939.

Christina Elmore,who looked after her father until he died

The play 'His Master's Cup' presented at the Folly Methodist Chapel on Good Friday 1939. The Cast included members of the French family

When George Elmore was interviewed in 1939, Albert French, still living at 39 Folly Fields, was 77. He had worked as a platelayer on the London and North Eastern Railway. He retired at the age of 68 and managed his allotment for 12 years until he broke his thigh in an accident. Fortunately, Albert and his wife, Emily, received support in their old age from Edith, known as 'Edie', one of their unmarried daughters, who lived with them.

In July 1944, Albert and Emily French were interviewed by *The Herts Advertiser* on the occasion of their diamond wedding anniversary and they expressed their delight at having received a message of congratulation from King George VI. Emily died in 1948 and Albert in 1950 at the age of 88. His daughter, Edie, who was the Superintendent of the Infants Department of the Sunday School, continued to live at 39 Folly Fields until her death in 1987.

Identity Cards, Air Raid Shelters and Evacuees

The 1939 Register

The Great War was described as 'the war to end all wars' but the terms on which it ended set the stage for the Second World War, which began just 20 years later. Britain declared war with Germany on 3 September 1939.

On 29 September 1939, a National Register was created, recording around 40 million people and providing a snapshot of the civilian population of England and Wales just after the outbreak of the Second World War. The information was used to produce Identity Cards and, once rationing was introduced in January 1940, to facilitate the issuing of ration books. Information in the Register was also used to administer conscription and division of labour, and to monitor and control the movement of the population caused by military mobilisation and mass evacuation.[1]

The 1939 Register for Folly Fields showed the residents of the newly-numbered cottages, their occupations and their dates of birth. (See pages 139-146) Many names familiar from earlier generations were still present – Archer, Arnold, Bandy, Bozier, Carter, Elmore, French, Hawkins, Izzard, Lake, Lines, Munden, Odell, Slough and Swain as well as a range of newcomers.

The majority of households were now much smaller than in former years, most totalling up to four family members and only a few with six or seven. Male occupations were similar to those recorded in the 1911 census but in 1939 more women remained at home involved in household duties.

Walter Swain of 6 Folly Fields (1866 -1949)

Male occupations

Agriculture 18 (+ 1 retired)
Labourers 29
Factory worker (Helmets) 6
Semi-skilled 6
Retail 3
Civil servant (retired) 1
Incapacitated 1

Female occupations

Household duties (unpaid) 41
Domestic work (paid) 4
Basket maker 2
Hat trade 2
Factory worker (Helmets) 2
Retail 1
Laundry worker 1
Watercress packer (unemployed) 1

The 1939 Register showed that 36 men from Folly Fields were eligible for war service but it is not known how many of these actually served.

Air Raids and the Home Guard

Olive Milnthorpe was six years old when the war broke out and her experiences were similar to those of families living at Folly Fields.

When the war was on, you'd get the searchlights come up and you'd hear the doodlebugs and then the guns go off. We used to have black-outs up at the windows and Dad built an air-aid shelter up the garden. He dug this great big hole, corrugated inside and we used to have benches in there to sit on. Once you heard the sirens go, you used to run up the garden to get into this air-raid shelter. I can remember doing that, or if they thought we weren't going to get up the garden quick enough, we had a cupboard under the stairs so we used to get in there.

Anderson air-raid shelter [2]

Wheathampstead was fortunate not to suffer many bombing raids but, following the government initiative of 1935 inviting local authorities to make plans to protect their people in event of a war, and the creation of the Air Raid Wardens' Service in April 1937, the village was well prepared.

In September 1939, five Folly Fields residents were Air Raid Wardens including Ernest Carter, one of 'The Folly Boys' who served in the Great War, and his son Ernest L Carter.[3] Their main duties were to patrol the streets during the blackout to ensure no light was visible, to report the extent of bomb damage and assess the local need for help from the emergency services. Nationwide there were eventually 1.4 million ARP wardens in Britain, mostly part-time volunteers with full-time day jobs.

One local Air Raid Warden patrolling between Gustard Wood and Harpenden kept a log book, sparse in detail but offering a couple of local snapshots from 1940.

Big flash bang in direction of Kimpton/ Ayot St Lawrence or beyond. Much firing all night. At 4.30 rung by Head Warden asking Miss BH to drive him to The Folly to find unexploded shell. Had heard a thud at 2.45.

18 September 1940

Three heavy explosions near Wheathampstead and incendiary bombs seen in same direction. Heavy explosions all round.

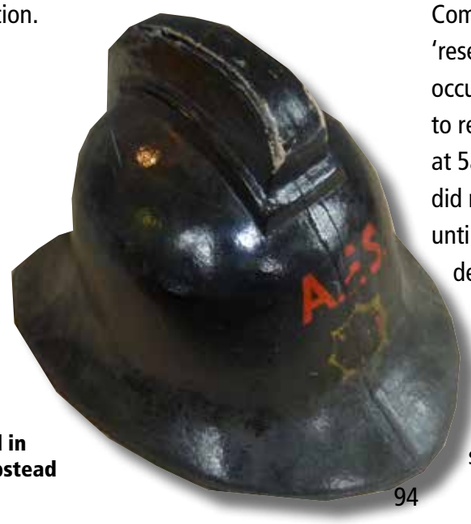
20 November 1940. [4]

A few incendiaries fell around Wheathampstead and children searched to find souvenirs but apart from broken windows the bombs caused little harm. On 26 June 1944 St Helen's School Log Book recorded: 'At 1.45 this morning

a Flying Bomb burst 60 yards west of *Bury Farm House.* Damage was caused but there were no casualties.' The blast destroyed some of the plaster at *Place Farm*, revealing the original timbers [5] and blew out the stained glass window in the north transept of St Helen's Church. The stained glass, which had depicted the Resurrection, made the north transept very gloomy but now light flooded into the sanctuary. The bomb damage was considered a blessing in disguise and plain glass has been retained there ever since.

During the war Folly Fields residents walking to work in the village or children on their way to school might have seen soldiers billeted at *Garden House* parading in the station yard, or tanks and army lorries from Nomansland Common used for training exercises. Perhaps they noticed the airmen who sometimes stayed at *The Swan* while undertaking secret flying missions from the nearby de Havilland airfield at Hatfield. [6]

Donald Milnthorpe from The Folly spent the war at home with his family and in September 1939 he was a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service. [7] This was formed nationally in January 1938 and fire stations were set up in buildings such as schools, garages and factories. Donald Milnthorpe, AFS Number 18 in Wheathampstead, was based at the railway station.



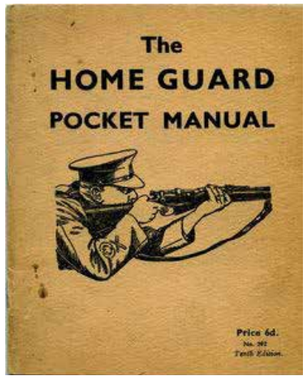
An Auxiliary Fireman's helmet made by Helmets Ltd in Wheathampstead

Donald's daughter, Olive, also recalled:

During the war Dad had a duodenal ulcer so he wasn't allowed to go to war. He joined the Home Guard and I remember him in a uniform. [8]

Home Guard duties included manning look-out posts around Wheathampstead and he would have been required to attend regular Home Guard parades. Spectators who lined the streets were encouraged to give donations for the war effort.

Jack Mangham, a 25-year-old tractor driver from 20 Folly Fields, also joined the Home Guard but in August 1944 he was summoned to the St Albans Sessions Court, where he pleaded guilty to being absent from a Home Guard parade at Harpenden on 23 July. Sergeant-Major Durbridge gave evidence that Mangham's attendances at parades had always been poor and he was difficult to contact. When warned to attend the parade in question, Mangham had told him to 'Clear off'.



Jack Mangham was a full-time employee with the Herts War Agricultural Committee in a 'reserved' occupation so had to report for work at 5am and often did not return until 8pm. Mr de Mornay Davies, for Mangham's defence, claimed his case was one of many reported in the press where an agricultural worker found his work clashed with his Home Guard duties. Agriculture was vital to the war effort so he asked the Justices to give this special consideration.

Jack Mangham was fined the maximum of £5 with £1 costs and was told that in default of payment within seven days he would go to prison for a month.

The Arrival of Evacuees

Anticipating that German bombing would cause civilian casualties, the government made the decision to evacuate children from towns and cities into the countryside. Evacuation took place in several waves and the first came on 1 September 1939 – the day Germany invaded Poland and two days before Britain declared war. Over the course of three days 1.5 million evacuees were sent to rural locations considered to be safe. Wheathampstead was one of them.

As in other Hertfordshire villages, women in Wheathampstead responded to advertisements asking for help with the evacuation service. Some became administrators while others acted as foster-mothers to children evacuated from London.

Evacuation was voluntary, but fear of bombing, closure of many urban schools and organised transportation of school groups helped persuade families to send their children away to live with strangers. Parents were issued with a list detailing what their children should take with them, including a gas mask, a change of underclothes, night clothes, plimsolls (or slippers), spare stockings or socks, toothbrush, comb, towel, soap, face cloth, handkerchiefs and a warm coat. Many families struggled to provide their children with all these items. [9]

On 1 September 1939, 231 children and 15 staff from the Argyle Senior and Mixed Infants School in Kings Cross arrived in Wheathampstead with their headmaster, Mr Barnes. Mr Housden, the headmaster of St Helen's School, and other staff were there to meet them. The children were billeted both in the village and on a new housing estate of bungalows known as Cherry Trees, close to Folly Fields.

One of these evacuees, Patrick Bicknell, recalled his wartime experiences:

On 1 September at three o'clock on a warm summer's afternoon, three hundred or so of us, with ages varying from seven to fourteen years, marched from our school in London. Excited, frightened, bemused, bewildered, all these emotions we experienced as we travelled the short distance of a hundred yards to St Pancras Station to catch the train.

We waited in our school uniforms, clutching our attaché cases, holding one change of clothing

and one pair of pyjamas, with a gas mask in its cardboard container slung over our shoulder and our name written on a parcel label tied around our neck. Parents hid their anxiety behind a mask of smiles and bland assurances that we would be home soon. Then in minutes we were ushered onto a train, knowing only at the last moment that this was the Bedford line. And from that moment the world changed.

A gas mask like the one carried by Patrick Bicknell

The journey was short and uneventful. For the villagers it must have been a portentous sight as one after the other the double-decker buses from St Albans trundled down the steep hill into the village, disgorging their human cargoes.

The billeting arrangements were fairly well organised, given the circumstances, unlike other places where it was akin to a cattle sale. Potential foster parents were not in evidence. Whilst we were served tea without sugar and a biscuit, children were organised into single and family groups. Once they had been matched to suitable accommodation the children were ferried by car to their new homes. For many it would have been their first ride in a car but all the same it was a long and tiring process. Finally at eight thirty, after waiting three and a half hours, my turn came. I was given a brown paper carrier bag with rations, supposedly to last the weekend. It contained, I recall, a tin of corned beef, a packet of very hard biscuits. But joy of joy a quarter pound bar of Cadbury's milk chocolate – the one that has a glass and a half of milk in every bar.

It was dark when I reached my billet and I was a scared little boy just coming up to twelve, scared because I had only had my cleft palate operated on less than a year earlier and I wondered if I would be able to make myself understood. Also that September I had been due to have further operations to repair my hare lip and have my nose straightened. Were there children in the house who might make fun of me? I need not have worried. The couple I was billeted with lived alone and were kind. I was so tired that I went straight to bed. For the first time in my life I had my own bedroom.

I woke to find myself in a modern bungalow. It was spotlessly clean. I was one of the lucky ones for there was a bathroom with running hot and cold water. I rescued the stamped addressed card from my attaché case and wrote:

Dear Mum & Dad, My address is c/o Mr & Mrs Manning, 2 The Cherry Tree, Wheathampstead, near St Albans, Herts. I am alright.

Your loving son, Patrick.

The first morning we assembled in the school hall. But instead of the usual 'Good morning, boys and girls,' followed by a hymn and a short prayer, we were plunged into a full scale Church of England morning service, hymns, chanted psalms, collect for the day, prayers and the lot, except a sermon. For this was a Church of England school, and named after the nearby parish church of St Helen, very rigidly it was, too! It was meaningless to us. I doubt if any of us had set foot inside an Anglican church. I know I hadn't. This is not to infer that we were unschooled in Christian beliefs, far from it. The majority of us had been members of the Kings Cross Methodist Mission Sunday School, a very lively and active institution.

Fortunately for Patrick and other evacuees billeted at Cherry Trees, the Folly Chapel was nearby and it was there they met children from Folly Fields. Patrick's account of his experiences continued:

Identity Cards, Air Raid Shelters and Evacuees

We turned up en masse at the Sunday School and completely transformed it. One of the Sunday School teachers and his wife who originated from North London were pleased to have us and in them we had an ally. 'You know you all brought a breath of fresh air to the chapel,' he said. I recall Christmas tea parties and a visit to Whipsnade Zoo organised by the Folly Methodist Chapel. During my stay in Wheathampstead I regularly attended Sunday School there.

After a while Patrick had to leave his billet in Cherry Trees and he was moved to 42 Necton Road in the village, the home of the local coal merchant, Mr Hawkins, and his wife. In the bungalow at Cherry Trees he had enjoyed the luxury of a modern bathroom but in his new billet he found more basic facilities, similar to those experienced every day by all his new friends from The Folly.

Some of the houses in Necton Road had electricity but number 42 was gas lit – on the ground floor only. In my room was a Victorian washstand with basin and jug. It was candlelight to bed and back to bathing in the kitchen in a tin bath like I did back home in London.

Mrs Hawkins was a pillar of the Anglican Church. I often think that she wondered what motivated me to go to the small Folly Chapel. In the final school year, pupils were prepared for confirmation and the class was visited by the Dean of St Albans Cathedral. It was his brief to ensure that we had been well instructed in the Catechism and the most knowledgeable received the Dean's prize. Mrs Hawkins could not hide her pride as neighbours, whose children attended church, could not believe that the coveted prize had been scooped by a London Methodist. Dear Mrs Hawkins still could not understand why the following Sunday and onwards I still jumped on my bike at 9.30 and cycled the mile or so to the Methodist Sunday School. [10]

Batford POW Camp

In 1942, after British wartime successes in North Africa, there were thousands of Italian prisoners so camps were needed in Britain to house them. In January 1943 the War Office compiled a list of possible sites and No. 95 Prisoner of War Camp, Batford, opened in May 1943 for Italian prisoners. It accommodated about 600 men, originally housed in tents that were gradually replaced by huts. In October 1943 the Italian government signed a peace treaty with the Allies, and shortly afterwards declared war on Germany. This altered the status of the Italians who, although still prisoners, were granted certain privileges and better treatment. In July 1944 the camp was re-designated as an Italian Labour Battalion Camp and the men were employed mainly on local farms. [11]

Olive Milnthorpe from the Folly recalled:

There was a prisoner-of-war camp at Batford and the prisoners used to come down the road in groups, five or six of them and they would talk to us. I can't remember an awful lot because I was only about 10, but I can remember them giving us sweets. But the older girls, there was a couple of girls I know, well they're married and have been married for years now, but two of them had children by two of the prisoners. But yeah, they were really friendly. I suppose they gave the girls stockings and used to bribe them with stockings and things. I don't know where they ever got them from and I wasn't old enough to accept anything from them except sweets.

After the war was over, my aunty and uncle lived in one of the Nissan huts on the Batford camp and they had a living room and a couple of bedrooms in there. People used to live in those after the war. [12]

Batford POW Camp, vacated September 1948 [13]

Armistice and Fatalities

When the Second World War ended in 1945 there was great rejoicing and villagers remember dancing to records in the High Street outside the antiques showroom, now Oxscale Restaurant, with people singing through a microphone. VE Day in May was celebrated with bonfires and fireworks.

Welcome Home
June 22nd, 1946

FOLLY AND LEA VALLEY ESTATES

greets all returned ex-service men and women, and as as a token of gratitude for the service they have rendered whilst with the Forces of the Crown—in the cause of justice through the World War—is honoured to provide this

Welcome Home

To those not yet back a speedy and safe return is the Sincere Wish of all the Welcome Home Committee.

During the Second World War there were no fatalities at The Folly as there had been during the Great War, but there were servicemen who had been born in Folly Fields or had family connections there and were remembered by relatives and school friends.

Railway Employees' Privilege Ticket Association.

No 97951

GENERAL SECRETARY: GEO. H. CHAPPELL, 6, NEWHAMPTON ROAD EAST. PHONE 20545. WOLVERHAMPTON

MEMBERSHIP CARD, 1938

Signature of Member: *Mr. / Mrs. / Miss — GJ Swallow

Private Address — Cherry Trees Wheathampstead

This card must be shown when applying for Vouchers, &c.

* Strike out where not applicable.

Cards issued to Member's Children must be signed by Member, who must add after Signature "For Son," or "For Daughter." Give Age of Child.

L.N.E. Rly. King's Cross Committee:

Secy.—Mr. J. E. Stearns, 12a, Lavender Gardens, Enfield, Middx.

(135)

THIS CARD MUST ONLY BE USED BY THE MEMBER TO WHOM IT IS ISSUED.

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George Julian Swallow was the only son of George Swallow and Julia Moules, members of a family who had lived at The Folly since the 1880s. George attended St Helen's School and worked briefly as a station porter before joining the Territorial Army at the age of 16.

He was called up when war broke out and left his parents' home at Cherry Trees to join the Royal Artillery. By May 1942 he was serving in Egypt as a Lance-Bombardier in the Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. He was killed on 8 May 1942 at the age of 20. He was buried in a temporary grave and his body was later moved to Halfaya Sollum War Cemetery in Egypt. Shortly before his death he had sent a photograph of himself taken in Egypt to his mother.

George Julian Swallow [14]

He is remembered on the Wheathampstead War Memorial and the old Roll of Honour.

22 April 1942 has been described as 'Malta's darkest hour', when for 18 hours wave after wave of planes in huge massed formations attacked airfields, docks, towns and anti-aircraft batteries. The following morning a diary of events listed the dead; they included nine Royal Artillery anti-aircraft gunners, five of them, including Cecil French, in 4 Heavy AA Regiment. [15]

Identity Cards, Air Raid Shelters and Evacuees

The following month *The Herts Advertiser* reported:

The Gunner Cecil French, of the Royal Artillery, younger son of Mr and Mrs G French of Marshalls Heath, Cherry Tree, has officially been reported killed by enemy action. He was 21 years of age. Born at The Folly, Wheathampstead, Gunner French attended St Helen's School and was later apprenticed to Smith Brothers, builders. He was called up in 1940.

He is remembered on the Wheathampstead War Memorial and the old Roll of Honour. His memorial in St Helen's churchyard carries the epitaph: 'His life a beautiful memory. His absence a silent grief.' Perhaps Cecil French's contemporaries fondly remembered him as the boy who in 1927 skipped school to go to Barnet Fair.

Gladys Barwell (née Ellingham) is the only woman commemorated on the Wheathampstead War Memorial. She was the daughter of Frederick Ellingham, the manager of the Folly hat factory, and his first wife, Annie, and spent part of her childhood in *Factory House* before moving to *The Willows,* 264 Lower Luton Road. She attended St Helen's School and Harpenden Church of England School and was well known as a Sunday School teacher at the Folly Chapel and at Batford Methodist Church until she decided to go to London to train as a nurse.

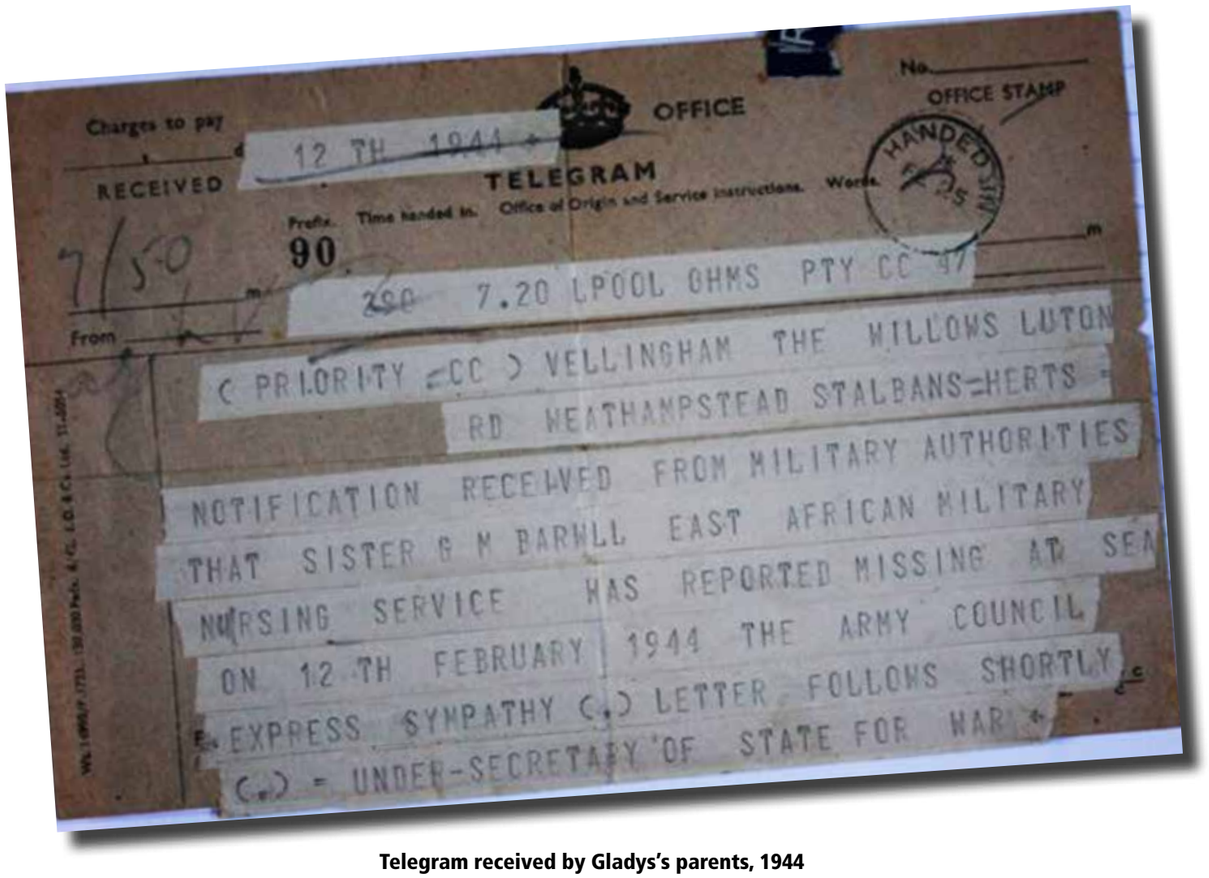
Gladys Barwell

She qualified and spent a year at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, before going to South Africa in 1938 to work in a hospital in Cape Town. In 1943 she married Captain Cliff Barwell of the King's African Rifles. Gladys wanted to carry on nursing until after the war and then settle in Kenya, but her husband moved with his unit to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and she asked for a transfer to be near him. On 12 February 1944, the convoy of ships on which she sailed was attacked by torpedoes south west of the Maldives.

Gladys Barwell (née Ellingham)

Back home at *The Willows,* Gladys's parents received the kind of telegram every family dreaded. 'Notification received from the military authorities that Sister G M Barwell, East African Military Nursing Service, was reported missing as sea…. The Army Council express sympathy.' She was 31 and is commemorated on the East Africa Memorial in Nairobi War Cemetery.

Kenneth Reginald Glenister, the grandson of Joseph Glenister, the butcher who lived at The Folly for over 40 years, would also have been remembered by friends from Folly Fields. His father



Charges to pay

RECEIVED 12 TH 1944

OFFICE

No.

OFFICE STAMP

HANDED IN 7.25

TELEGRAM

Prefix 90 Time handed in 7.20 Office of Origin and Service Instructions LPOOL OHMS PTY CC 97 Words

From

(PRIORITY =CC) VELLINGHAM THE WILLOWS LUTON RD WEATHAMPSTEAD STALBANS=HERTS

NOTIFICATION RECEIVED FROM MILITARY AUTHORITIES THAT SISTER G M BARNLL EAST AFRICAN MILITARY NURSING SERVICE HAS REPORTED MISSING AT SEA ON 12 TH FEBRUARY 1944 THE ARMY COUNCIL EXPRESS SYMPATHY (C) LETTER FOLLOWS SHORTLY

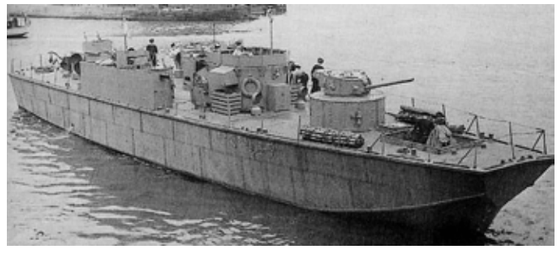
(C) = UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR

Telegram received by Gladys's parents, 1944

Reginald Douglas Glenister, married Alice Swain, also from The Folly, and they lived at Lea Valley Cottages.

Kenneth attended St Helen's School and was employed at Murphy Chemical Works and later by Helmets Ltd. He served in the Royal Navy as an able seaman and was a crew member on Landing Craft L252, which, with others, drew the fire of the formidable

Kenneth Glenister



Landing Craft L252

German batteries on itself and provided the assault forces with comparative safe conduct to shore on the Dutch coast. One Navy Commander said in his report, 'There can have been few more gallant actions in Naval history'. It was in effect a suicide mission. Kenneth died on 1 November 1944 and is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial, the Wheathampstead War

Memorial, the old Roll of Honour and in St Helen's churchyard.

The 1939 Register shows *Lea House* at The Folly occupied by Reginald Weighill, his wife, Kathleen, his mother and his 11-year-old son, Richard, from his first marriage. *Lea House* was convenient for the de Havilland Flying School at Hatfield, where Reginald was engaged as a Pilot Instructor in 1933.

Reginald Weighill, born in 1905, was the son of an actor and manager of The Picture House in Aberdeen. He was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in 1926 and joined the Air Force Officer Reserve.[16] In 1931 he had a remarkable escape when the plane he was piloting crashed near RAF Netheravon in Wiltshire. As he was about to land from 1,000 feet, he heard a loud roar and the machine became uncontrollable. Ordering the other occupant, A/C1 Alexander Merriman, to jump, he bailed out himself and parachuted to safety. Merriman was killed and an examination of the wreckage disclosed that one blade of the metal airscrew had broken causing vibration of the engine, which then dislodged. [17]

Squadron Leader Reginald Weighill

In 1934, a year after being engaged as a Pilot Instructor at the de Havilland Flying School, he married Kathleen Jacomb-Hood, a widow, in Staffordshire. [18] He was promoted to Squadron Leader in June 1941.

On the night of 16 July after a raid over Hamburg, a Wellington bomber was flying low over the Norfolk coast on its way home to Alconbury. It is believed the pilot was dazzled by searchlights and, flying at 500 feet with little margin for recovery, crashed at Caister, north of Great Yarmouth. The crew of six, which included Weighill, were all killed. [19]

Weighill's wife, Kathleen, published a death notice:

In proud memory of my husband Squadron Leader R G Weighill killed in action 16 July 1941, aged 36; and to the men of his crew, all his former pupils and his friends who have given their lives in the service of their country.

He was buried in Scottow Cemetery in Norfolk and is remembered on the Wheathampstead War Memorial and the old Roll of Honour.

Lea House at The Folly was once again home to an officer who died on active service as it had been during the Great War.[20]

Austerity or 'Heaven on Earth'?

'Make-do-and-mend'

Nationwide the period following the Second World War was one of austerity with food shortages, drab clothes and endless queues. Food rationing had been introduced at the beginning of 1940 and ended 14 years later at midnight on 4 July 1954, nine years after the end of the war.

In rural areas eggs, butter and meat could be obtained fairly easily without coupons and the continuance of rationing encouraged people to produce their own food in gardens and allotments, just as they had in wartime. Folly residents had the advantage of allotments on site but there were also severe shortages of most consumer products, so the 'make-do-and-mend' attitude continued throughout the war and for some time afterwards.

In rural communities farmers' incomes were boosted by the 1947 Agriculture Act which provided subsidies for cereal production and livestock. Tractors had largely replaced horses, but most farmers still employed poorly paid agricultural labourers, many of whom lived in tied cottages. The picturesque character of the countryside often contrasted with the poverty of its residents and many rural homes lacked modern facilities like running water, sanitation and electricity.

A Water Crisis

Just before the end of the war, a crisis arose at The Folly and was reported in the local press:

Fourteen private wells at Folly Fields, Wheathampstead, have failed to yield to the demands of the occupiers of forty-two houses, who are very perturbed about the matter. 'Every one of these wells has failed and residents of more than forty years standing inform me that it is the first time they have known this to happen', reported the Sanitary Inspector (Mr D J Graham) at a meeting of St Albans Rural Council on Tuesday.

The Sanitary Inspector had submitted a report to the effect that out of the forty-five houses at Folly Fields only three have mains water and the remainder normally draw their supplies from fourteen private wells in the gardens of the various groups of dwellings. All the householders concerned were now taking their water from a stand-pipe at the junction of Lower Luton Road and The Folly. Seventeen of the houses were within a radius of 200 feet of the standpipe. The residents, he continued, were deeply concerned at the possibility of their having to carry water the long distance throughout the winter. Some of the householders were old and infirm, and in a delicate state of health. It was therefore desirable that the water main should be extended into Folly Fields and a further two standpipes fixed at convenient points. The Committee recommended that the owners be approached and asked whether they would be prepared to make a capital contribution towards the cost of laying a mains water supply.

The Public Health and Lighting Committee reported that it had had under consideration a letter from the Ministry of Health and one from Wheathampstead Parish Council with reference to the lack of a suitable water supply to individual houses at Folly Fields and Amwell. Members of the Council made no comments on the matter and the recommendation was agreed to. [1]

Rundown Properties

The Folly was not alone in its lack of amenities at that time. On 29 December 1943 a resident of Wheathampstead wrote a letter to *The Times:*

RURAL NEEDS

Sir,

Much has been written about the supply of water and electricity to rural areas but no mention is made of one important point. I pass daily a row of country cottages with water mains and electric cables alongside their garden gates, but because there is no compulsion on the owner, they receive no supply of either. The oil lamps, the wells and tanks of their ancestors are still their lot. Is this right?

Yours truly,
HELEN BEACH THOMAS
High Trees, Wheathampstead [2]

In 1950 Laurie and Gwen Beavis took over the *Elephant and Castle* pub in Amwell [3] and were in a position to buy a property at The Folly. *Woodlands*, next door to *Lea House*, later re-named *Glenisters*, became available and they lived there with their son, Joe, until 1959.

In 1952 Gwen Beavis wrote a letter to *The Times:*

REPAIR OF OLD HOUSES

Sir

Since this question of the fate of old houses is so important to the under-housed community, why are local councils, as well as building societies and insurance companies, so reluctant to lend money to enable people to buy and rehabilitate them? We should probably never have secured our present dilapidated but comfortable home without the aid of the bank-aid which, always rather expensive, is no longer readily available. The insurance and building organizations may be able to justify their attitude, but surely local government should show some practical interest in any private proposal to buy and repair a decrepit elderly local house.

Yours
GWENNETH E BEAVIS
Woodlands
The Folly , Wheathampstead [4]

An Eviction

By the 1950s some of the cottages at The Folly were almost a hundred years old and Folly Fields was still characterised by a lack of basic facilities, with a number of cottages neglected and falling into disrepair. Responsibility to effect change and improvement rested with the local council or landlords so Folly tenants had limited power. The post-war period of austerity, when there was little money about, left a few residents in real hardship and despair.

Looking back in later years, Gwen Beavis' son, Joe, recalled:

Folly Fields in the '50s was a fairly poor street. It had a very rough gravel road, which was quite rugged for those who had reason to drive up it and there was a general air of dilapidation. I remember one day seeing an old lady sitting on her bed in the road weeping – she had been evicted.

This was Mrs Rose Lines (née Fisher) married to William Lines, the only son of [Alfred] George and Ann Lines, who arrived at The Folly in 1882. William, who was declared unfit for service during the Great War, had been married to Rose since 1916. [5]

The event in Folly Fields caught the attention of *The Herts Advertiser* and a photographer was sent

to capture the moment. The photograph and a report were published on 13 March 1953 and illustrate how relatives and neighbours in The Folly community rallied round to help.

Mrs Rose Lines with her dog and furniture outside her old home

WHEATHAMPSTEAD FAMILY EVICTED
Furniture stacked in the street

The generosity of a neighbour prevented an enforced stay in the open on Wednesday night for Mrs Rose Elizabeth Lines of 46 Folly Fields, Wheathampstead, who was evicted together with her furniture from her home on Wednesday morning. The eviction followed an order made at St Albans County Court on January 20. Besides Mrs Lines also living in the house were her invalid husband, Mr William Lines and her nephew and his wife, Mr and Mrs Edward Miller. The day before the possession order was enforced Mr Lines was removed by ambulance to the St Albans City Hospital. Five men arrived to carry out the court order on Wednesday and after she had been turned out and her furniture stacked in the street, Mrs Lines was given help in keeping a watch on her belongings by her nephew and his wife. In the meantime she tried to obtain assistance from the authorities in St Albans but met with no success.

NO RAIN

The furniture remained exposed to the elements all night. It remained dry, while Mrs Lines and Mr and Mrs Edwards were accommodated by a neighbour. Other neighbours assisted by providing refreshments for the evicted family. After Mrs Lines' failure to obtain any official help, the Rector of Wheathampstead (Rev G H E T Roe) was contacted and yesterday morning he got in touch with the St Albans Rural Council. An offer of temporary accommodation at Royston has been made to Mrs Lines by W R Best, Divisional Officer. Mrs C I Sharp told a Herts Advertiser reporter that she has advised Mrs Lines to accept this offer. St Albans Council has provided a tarpaulin to cover the furniture. [6]

A Child's View of Folly Fields

In 1950, when few families could afford a car, there was little traffic in Folly Fields and visitors usually arrived on bicycles or on foot. Alice Woodcock, who was born in 1941 and lived on the Lea Valley Estate, Wheathampstead, with her parents, Thomas Woodcock and May Slough, [7] and her younger brother, Terry, was a regular visitor. Her grandparents, Alfred and Frances Slough, moved to 54 Folly Fields, a tied cottage, from nearby Cromer Hyde when her mother was a small child.[8] Two of Alice Woodcock's uncles and aunts also rented cottages in Folly Fields and she visited them frequently. Little had changed since the Victorian cottages were built, but Alice nostalgically described Folly Fields as 'a magical place of my childhood':

Folly Fields was an unmade road with no paths and a stony and furrowed surface which the rain water carved out as it streamed in torrents down the hill. Gutters emptied onto the roadway and each property had a stone step giving access to the front parlour. There were passageways called 'alleyways' through the terraces allowing access to the 'back yard', which was the communal yard used by about nine cottagers and their large families. A well situated in the yard provided water for these homes in my mother's day. In later years a single cold tap was fitted internally, under the kitchen window over the Belfast sink. Wash houses lined the yard and two families shared each one. The roofs were tiled and they were constructed of wood, tarred black, each containing a brick-built corner copper with a fire-grate underneath, where the laundry was done each Monday. They also contained a large iron mangle, bungalow baths and buckets, onions hung to dry, gardening tools and other equipment.

Typical wash houses in Folly Fields

Across the back yard …. were wooden shacks, very crude and usually painted white, with a wooden bench-seat containing a circular hole over a pan of ash. These were loaded by hand onto the 'lavender cart' (a motorized collection) once a week.

The inside of my grandparents' cottage …. always seemed cold. I believe they only used the parlour on Sundays. Parlour and kitchen were fitted with a small range … and there were narrow stairs hidden by a raised door with a latch leading up from the kitchen. These were rather steep and swung round sharply. My mother said as children they each sat on a particular step to eat, with their plates on their laps. [9]

Alice's visits to Folly Fields were always on Sundays after Sunday School at the Folly Chapel. Her aunt and uncle, Doris (née Slough) and Len Bentley, a plasterer by trade, lived at number 32 (now part of 34), which was 'small but incredibly snug and cosy'.

Len and Doris Bentley with their daughter, June

Her aunt 'laboured to keep it clean, dusted and polished, and was often on her knees with the Cardinal Red, brightening up the kitchen quarry-tiled floor. She was very proud of her house. For most of the year she had a glowing coal fire in the front room.' The bedroom, where Alice often stayed with her cousin, June, overlooked the garden, surrounded by hedges alive with birds and vibrant with flowers in summer. With newly-laid eggs to be collected from nesting boxes of the clucking chickens in the garden and the family's dog, Prince, to play with, this for Alice was 'heaven on earth.' [10]

Opposite her aunt's house, at 29 Folly Fields, was a sweet shop run by Mrs Parsons, whose front room had an old wooden counter, bare floorboards and shelves lined with jars of gob-stoppers, lemon sherbets, liquorice, toffees and Edinburgh Castle rock. At number 17, near the cross roads at the entrance to the allotments lived Mrs Hilda Hawkins, who invited neighbours to pick cherries from the large tree that grew in her garden.

The Cherry Trees

With open country on the doorstep, Alice and her cousins walked in the golden fields of wheat, corn and barley, searching for blackberries or nuts. In spring they collected bluebells and violets from the dell and with help from their mothers made necklaces of daisy-chains. 'It was a wonderful time of discovery, of security, love and friendship.'

Pub Trips to the Coast

Alice and her cousins went on the occasional day-trips to the seaside organised by local pub landlords like Derek Minter at *The Cherry Trees*, [11] where working men sat over their pints playing cribbage, dominoes or darts.

Derek's was a smelly pub of the old style with no refinements and no pretensions, never having been refurbished or updated. The uneven quarry-tiled entrance floors rang with echoes of generations past. Smokers and drinkers had all left their mark … It was an uninviting place and not patronised by women-folk, most of whom would have been glad to see it razed to the ground. [12]

But another aspect of *The Cherry Trees* was that men were encouraged to join 'clubs', originally for sickness pay-out or medical costs, but by the 1950s to save for Christmas or for outings to the seaside.

These pub trips were more raucous affairs than the outings organised by the Folly Chapel. Adults and children gathered at *The Cherry Trees* to wait for the cream and brown coach with its small windows and protruding engine. Although the war had broadened the horizons of some, for families whose only private means of transport was a bicycle, these outings were a treat, an opportunity for those who had known little but life in the local community and could not afford a holiday, to enjoy themselves.

A day of delights lay ahead with bottled beer in the back of the coach, winkles, whelks or jellied eels on the prom, a fish-and-chip tea eaten out of newspaper on the sea-front or in a café if it was raining. For children a helter-skelter ride, roundabouts and a game of putting or the pier beckoned, together with paddling in the sea and the chance of vanilla ice cream or candy floss and a stick of peppermint rock to take home. On the return journey, women and children and the men,

Austerity or 'Heaven on Earth'?

who had been drinking and were uninhibited, were led in a repertoire of old music hall songs by Ernie Dineen from Folly Fields. The Slattery brothers often had too much to drink and sometimes finished the day fighting. [13]

The Eleven Plus

In Alice's final year at junior school, she took the 'eleven plus' examination. The majority of children at this time went to secondary modern schools when they were 11 and left, at the age of 15, with few or no qualifications.
The Education Act of 1944 had created a new system of secondary education and decisions were made by the 'eleven plus' examination. Those who passed went to grammar schools, stayed on a little longer and gained qualifications and a small number went on to higher education. The vast majority of girls left school at 15 and, after perhaps a brief training period, entered employment only to leave once they married. Alice recalled that in 1952:

The 'eleven plus' was a turning point in my life, when my best friend and cousin, June, passed the test and went on to St Albans Grammar School. I failed and went to Manland Secondary Modern. [14]

From St Albans Grammar School June went to Hatfield Polytechnic to study secretarial subjects. This would have been unusual in Folly Fields at this time and Doris Bentley, June's mother, 'was so proud of her and couldn't help boasting to one and all'. [15]

Farewell to another 'Folly Boy'

Alice had always been welcome as a visitor to the Folly Fields community and in 1948 when she was seven she was a bridesmaid at the Folly Chapel for the wedding of Les Arnold and Phyllis Carter, both members of established Folly families. [16] Phyllis's father, Ernest Carter, held the horse in the

photograph of 'The Folly Boys' in 1914 [17] and his wife, Winnie, was a close friend of Alice's mother. Ernest had married Winnie Miller at the St Albans Registry Office in 1923[18] and they lived in Folly Fields for the rest of their married life. Ernest became a foreman in the building trade and during the Second World War he served in the Home Guard and as an Air Raid Warden. [19] Remembering his own experiences during the Great War and the loss of his youngest brother, Cyril, and other comrades, Ernest joined the Wheathampstead British Legion to commemorate the fallen and support those returning from war. He was also the Secretary of the Wheathampstead Football Club.[20] Ernest and Winnie had three children and looked after their granddaughter, Linda, who was born in Folly Fields in 1948, until she was five years old. Ill-health forced Ernest to retire from the building trade and he died suddenly at 26 Folly Fields in 1952 at the age of 58.[21] His funeral was held at the Folly Chapel followed by burial in the churchyard at St Helen's and a short obituary appeared in the local paper. [22]

A Local Murder

Just after Christmas in 1957, when Alice Woodcock was 16, the village of Wheathampstead was shocked and alarmed by news of a local murder. Folly residents must have been particularly concerned because the victim, Anne Noblett, lived at *Heath Cottage* in Marshalls Heath Lane, just a few minutes' walk from The Folly and her father was one of the directors of Helmets Ltd, familiar to those employed there.[23] Alice and June had often walked from The Folly across three tranquil fields to Marshalls Heath Lane and on to Alice's home on the Lea Valley Estate,[24] but now a girl of similar age had been murdered by an unknown predator there was a general feeling of unease and suspicion so everyone avoided the area.

The events were reported in the local newspaper:

Anne Noblett was innocent, shy and seventeen. She'd been to dancing classes – rock and roll lessons – at Lourdes Hall, Harpenden, then caught a Green Line bus home. It was just after six o'clock that evening, 30th December, 1957, when she alighted, alone, at Cherry Tree Corner,

Marshalls Heath and began to walk up the quiet lane to her home, barely quarter of a mile away. Another local girl, Shirley Edwards, saw her walking in the lane as she passed by on her scooter. But Anne Noblett never got home that night, and wasn't seen again until her frozen corpse was discovered in a lonely wood, nearly seven miles away, over a month later. Except, that is, by her killer, who almost certainly picked her up in a car and drove her past her house to the place where she was suffocated. Thoughts that Ann had been abducted and murdered by a local person, someone she would have known, were reinforced by the theory that if her body had been hidden in a deep freeze and later taken to the place where she was discovered, whoever it was must have known the area. [25]

At the time of the police investigation, mystery calls were logged by detectives. The Noblett family was plagued by them and so was the family of the young RAF man who found her body. In April 1958 a man was jailed for six months by magistrates in Luton for making malicious calls to the Noblett family.

A massive police hunt swung into action after the murder, but even the intervention of Scotland Yard

Police at the scene where the body of Anne Noblett was discovered

Anne Noblett [26]

drew a blank. The pathologist's examination of the body and his conclusion that it had been stored in a freezer following the murder sparked national amazement and ensured the case remained in the public consciousness for several years. [27]

Sylvia Hincks, who now lives at 17 Folly Fields, was a schoolgirl at this time and travelled from Harpenden East station to school in Welwyn Garden City. She always made sure she got into a carriage with other female passengers.

Anne Noblett 30 December 1957
Thomas John Noblett 25 November 1985

Anne was buried in St Helen's churchyard. Despite extensive investigation this murder has still not been solved.

Notoriety and a Change of Tone

'A Law of its Own'

Alice Woodcock, who visited her relatives in Folly Fields during the later 1940s and early '50s, described The Folly as 'a magical place of my childhood' [1] but from the 1940s until the mid-1950s, it had a reputation for crime and disorder.

Arthur and Elsie Defty moved with their children to Wheathampstead from Durham in the late 1930s and lived in Folly Fields for a short time but Elsie, a staunch chapel-goer all her life, was not comfortable with the rough atmosphere and bad language there so the family rented 147 Lower Luton Road, one of the Victorian terraced houses, where their son, Gordon, still lives today. [2]

Richard Rosser, born in 1945,[3] lived in Folly Fields with his parents and his brothers, Melvyn and Barry, for about 20 years. His memories of Folly Fields were less romantic than those of Alice Woodcock, for he recalled the basic living conditions of his childhood and scenes of drunkenness and disorder in the early 1950s that gave The Folly its notorious reputation.

Richard's father, Hector Rosser, came to Wheathampstead from Wales and worked initially as a barman at *The Bull* in the village. He married Molly Latchford from Wheathampstead and they rented 42 Folly Fields, the last of a terrace of four cottages that, with number 40, has now been converted into one dwelling.

Number 40 (and 42) Folly Fields converted into one home

When Richard lived there the present front entrance hall, measuring 9ft by 10ft, was his family's living room, with a kitchen of similar size behind it containing the original staircase. When he was a small child the cottage had no running water and relied on a standpipe on the Lower Luton Road until another was added outside 44 Folly Fields. There was no electricity so downstairs rooms were lit with gas lamps, water for the tin bath was heated on the cast-iron range in the kitchen and there were sewage collections from the outside toilets. Running water and electricity with overhead cables were installed over the next few years and main sewerage arrived in Folly Fields and the nearby section of Lower Luton Road in 1951.[4] Richard's family were among the first in Folly Fields to have a bathroom, initially with only cold water so at bath-time hot water was carried upstairs from the kitchen.

Follydene, Lower Luton Road

One of Richard's school friends was Graham Lines, whose parents owned *Follydene* (formerly *Factory House*) on Lower Luton Road from 1946 to 1955. Although Graham's house was large with a cellar and an inside toilet, there was no bathroom and facilities were not very different from those elsewhere at The Folly. Graham recalled:

Bath-night was the steel tub, which hung behind the door in the outhouse and was placed in front of the open fire on Saturday nights. Not an event I looked forward to! Neither was the emptying of the sewage pit at the end of the garden.

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953 is a single day imprinted on popular memory. Many people bought a television for the first time and children remember sitting with others in front of a neighbour's brand-new set with its tiny, bulbous screen and hearing the cry 'Vivat Regina' again and again. But only 20 per cent of the British population had a television in the early 1950s and at The Folly, before electricity was installed, news and entertainment were obtained from radios powered by accumulators, storage batteries that needed regular re-charging.

Graham Lines recalled:

I remember Follydene being a butcher's shop run by a Mr and Mrs Jimmy Whyte … and not long after we moved there the shop became a confectioner's, the right hand side selling sweets, papers etc. and the left side was an area reserved for charging accumulators, but suffered tremendously from the smell of acid. [5]

Richard and Graham played at The Folly with children of all ages, older ones looking after those who were younger. 'Edie' French took them all to Sunday School, where they were taught values such as honesty, industry and sobriety but fewer adults attended the Chapel than in previous years.

As a child Richard witnessed groups of tenants, some notorious for drunkenness, creating disturbances or breaking the law and Folly women, with their sleeves rolled up, swearing and fighting in the street. Sack-loads of potatoes, swedes and cabbages were snatched from the farmers' fields and one family stole sheep and butchered them in their cottage. 'On occasions the police refused to come,' said Richard. 'The Folly was a unique place with a law of its own.'

A Diverse Community

Bad behaviour of a minority often taints the reputation of a whole community and over the years lurid tales about The Folly have been told and embellished by gossip. But by no means all the inhabitants of Folly Fields were rowdy drunkards, thieves and troublemakers.

'Edie' French, who lived at 39 Folly Fields directly opposite to Richard, cared for her chapel-going parents until they died. From 1950 she lived there alone and would certainly not have been among those swearing and fighting in the street. 'Edie' was a member of a close family and her sisters came to visit. Nellie, who was also single, had moved to Berkshire but died in 1958 at the age of 73 at *The Willows,* the home of her sister, Katie Ellingham, a few years after the photograph of the French sisters was taken.[6]

Five of the six daughters of Albert French in the back garden of 39 Folly Fields in about 1955. Edith 'Edie', Lilian, Nellie, Ethel and Maud

During the 20 years Richard's family lived in Folly Fields their next door neighbours at number 44 were Henry and Queenie East. Queenie, born in 1915, was a member of a third generation Folly family. Her grandparents, George and Ann Lines, had arrived in 1882 [7] and her mother, Gertrude, married George Males, whose family also came from The Folly. [8]

In addition to Queenie, George and Gertrude Males had at least four other children with colourful names, including Harold, Septimus, Myrtle and Venus.[9] While they were growing up Queenie had helped look after her younger siblings and in 1927 was recorded as absent from school on baby-caring duty as her mother was unwell, while her younger brother, Septimus, also listed as absent, was playing in the fields.

Queenie's husband, Henry East, known as 'Jock', was a keen gardener who kept specimen chickens and the couple lived in the same cottage for most of their lives. Queenie was one of the 'characters' of Folly Fields, outspoken and a notorious gossip, but well-liked and Richard Rosser remembered her kindness to children. Joe Beavis from *Woodlands* (now *Glenisters*) recalls, 'She was a formidable lady, who struck fear into me as a ten-year-old, though in later life we became good friends'. Queenie's sister, Venus, and her husband, Tom Kelly, lived at 33 Folly Fields.

Richard's other neighbours included members of the French, Elmore, Arnold, Parsons, Carter and Slough families, some of whom had lived at The Folly for decades. Until the mid-1950s, The Folly was a community of related families and neighbours, some of them disorderly, but a community that in the face of intrusion from outsiders stood together. Despite rows and arguments, when the 'chips were down' they were there for one another and Richard's memories of growing up in Folly Fields were very happy ones: 'There was little money, but they were good times.'

Schooldays in the 1950s

Looking back on his schooldays in Wheathampstead in the 1950s, first in the old flint school in Church Street and then across Brewhouse Hill for his final years in the new school, Richard recalled that children from Folly Fields mixed with those from the village and there was no feeling of inferiority or a group set apart. He remembered John Housden, a respected headmaster, who, as Richard said, 'would cane you, but was fair'. Mr Housden made it his personal crusade that no pupil would leave school without a job to go to and did his utmost to fit pupils into what they had an interest in doing.

Mr Housden with some of his pupils

The 'Swinging Sixties'

Almost every decade sees the pace of life increase but few have had the breadth of impact of the 1960s. In sharp contrast to previous decades cast in black and white, this was a decade in glorious technicolour. Worldwide, change was afoot, with

war and protest, the space race, the exuberance of The Beatles, innovative technologies, and new fashion and politics. This was the 'Swinging Sixties'.

Far more mundanely, the pace of life in Folly Fields increased in the 1960s with the arrival of a mobile supermarket. Until then the only regular traffic on the unmade road had been a horse-drawn grocery van and the coal and rag-and-bone carts so the arrival of a motorised vehicle in the 1960s caused huge excitement. Not long afterwards Queenie East and her family were among the first in Folly Fields to own a car.

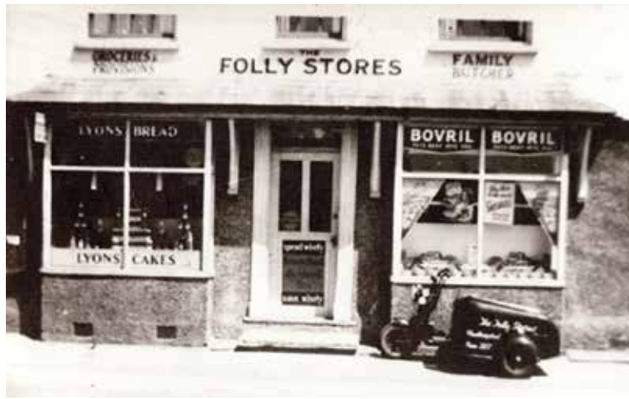
Cleaning the car outside 44 Folly Fields in 1960: Wendy Kerr (née East) Queenie's daughter, Jock East and, looking on, Venus East, Queenie's sister

By the 1960s all the properties at The Folly had electricity and Mrs Bandy was one of the first in Folly Fields to own a television. At 5 o'clock each afternoon she invited children into her cottage to watch the children's programme.

A New Generation

Young people are a vital component of any community and positive initiatives for their benefit can make a significant impact. During Richard Rosser's teenage years Albert Ott proved an inspiration, helping to change the tone of Folly Fields.

Albert Ott



The Folly Stores in the 1950s, now *Follyfoot*, 184 Lower Luton Road, a private house

As well as running the Folly Stores from 1950 until 1964, [10] Albert Ott organised a football club for local boys. They played on the field near *Cherry Trees* until the parish council took over the farm land above Folly Fields, which then provided an ideal new venue for sport. As the football teams flourished, Albert Ott initiated fund-raising days and football dinners during the late 1950s and 1960s, shared activities that helped to create a sense of belonging and feeling valued.

Folly Athletic F.C 1963/4 photographed after beating Harpenden Rovers 'A' 6-2.
Left to right back: A Smith, R Dunham, N Salmon, R Howell, P Brownin, R Rosser. Front: B Belcher, C Smith, T Latchford, C Oliver, K Schug

Folly football dinner at the Memorial Hall in the 1960s

Young people like Richard, born during or just after the war, were the rising generation. They identified with the Rock and Roll songs of the 1950s, with lyrics about cars, school, clothing and dating, some of the first songs to define an age group. The Beatles wrote their first hit, 'Love Me Do' in 1962 and 'Beatlemania' grew rapidly. Pop music was all the rage, played on radios in Folly Fields cottages where there were teenagers.

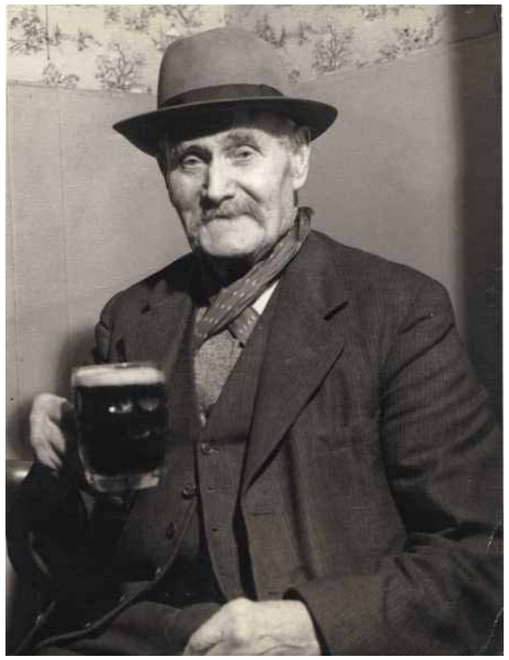
The new generation, free from conscription and full of hope and promise,[11] ventured either for work or pleasure into the wider world. Butlin's Holiday Camp at Skegness had opened in 1936 and, after being used for Royal Navy training during the war, re-opened in 1946 at a time when many Folly families could not afford holidays. But in the summer of 1963 Richard and his friends went to Butlin's at Skegness. Entertainment was at the heart of Butlin's holidays and the previous year Ringo Starr and his group Rory Storm and the Hurricanes had played the summer season there. Also in 1962 a miniature railway and the longest chairlift in the Butlin's empire had been installed at Skegness.[12] For young lads from The Folly, the 'Swinging Sixties' had arrived and this was just the place to be.

Richard Rosser, Ken Schug, Chris Smith and friends at Butlins, Skegness, 14 August 1963

The Older Generation

The adult population of Folly Fields, particularly those who had suffered post-war unemployment, also began to hope for improvement in their life-style in the 1960s. For those employed in factories there was more money available to spend on leisure activities.

In 1960, 88-year-old William French, one of the oldest residents, was still living in the cottage next to the one where he was born. After his first wife, Lilian, died in 1922[13] he re-married but was widowed a second time. To support himself and his family after retiring from the railway, he became a labourer for ten years working on road construction for Hertfordshire Country Council. This probably involved maintaining a short section of roadway and doing repairs there as necessary rather than strenuous toil on a daily basis but he eventually had to give up work because of rheumatism.



William French in 1960

Interviewed in 1960 about his life, he described himself as 'very happy and contented'. His two daughters cleaned and cooked for him and his very good neighbour laid the fire and brought him a cup of tea in the morning. During the day he liked to sit quietly by the fire and read the newspaper. There was a radio set in the corner of the room but he told the reporter he never listened to it and had 'never seen Rock and Roll'.[14] William French died at home on 3 March 1963 at the age of 90, with his daughter, Emily 'Cissy' Elmore of 15 Folly Fields, at his bedside. Both Rock and Roll and the 'Swinging Sixties' had passed him by.

'The Good Old Days'

In general, living conditions in the 1960s were improving but there was still hardship around The Folly, as a brief snapshot of Harold 'Larry' Barker's experiences revealed. Harold Barker, born in 1948, was the youngest child of Wilfred Barker and Gladys Laney and lived with his parents, his brothers, David and Roy, and his sister, June, at 10 Lea Valley Cottages The 12 semi-detached properties known as Lea Valley Cottages were still simple council houses with only cold running water inside and a toilet and outhouse in the garden.

Reflecting on his childhood, he recalled:

> *My father was a good labourer, but he spent his money on drink. I was the youngest so I used to be sent to The Cherry Trees to fetch him home. He would probably have another pint but he would come out for me. I didn't mind walking along there because I might get a bottle of Coke or a Wagon Wheel.*

Harold's mother worked as a cook and cleaner at the National Children's Home in Harpenden but money was always short and an aunt used to help by giving her ten shillings a week for the children.

Our meals were often bread and jam or bread with meat dripping and there was an apple tree in the garden. I went to Wheathampstead School and on the way home we would call at the Old Bakery over the bridge near The Mill to see if they had any stale cakes. They put them in a bag and told us not to eat them until later but they were all gone before we got home.

Fuel was expensive so on the weekend we used to go up to the golf course in Gustard Wood to collect wood for fuel. We used to pinch coal too and sometimes came back with a pram full. The worst job I remember was picking up dog-ends for my father, who used to roll his own cigarettes.

At home we filled a tin bath from kettles and, if we were lucky, put it in front of a fire. Everyone took their turn in the same water, Dad, my brothers and my sister. Mum had a bath at another time. I was the youngest so I got in last – not nice at all.

We used the shop at The Folly but I didn't play up there although I knew Peter Bozier, who lived at 40 Folly Fields, from school. I remember the Lake and Ashton families who lived in Lea Valley Cottages and I used to play with friends under the Robin's Nest[15] *which stood on stilts. Many of our clothes came from the jumble sales that were held there. Quite a lot of children used to go to Sunday School at the Chapel but Mum couldn't afford the outings. In summer we used to swim in the River Lea – that didn't cost anything.*

Eventually we moved to the Batford Camp and lived in a caravan for a while. I think we may have been evicted. Times were hard but I still think of them as 'the good old days'.[16]

Closing the Railway

The 1960s saw two important changes that affected the lives of all those who lived at The Folly. The first was the closing of the railway line that ran through Wheathampstead station. The initiative to move freight by road had already been made, but by the 1960s transport planners considered trains dirty, smoky and earmarked for extinction. Dr Richard Beeching, in his notorious report *The Restructuring of British Railways* published on 27 March 1963, decreed that the railway needed to be cut back brutally and that the car would replace the train. His cold business analysis saw no case for the Welwyn to Dunstable line and so Wheathampstead railway station closed to passengers in 1965 and the track was lifted shortly afterwards. The Station Road Bridge was demolished in 1967 to ease access to the village, and the station master's house was razed to street level in early 1970.[17]

The demolition of the railway bridge over Station Road, 1967 [18]

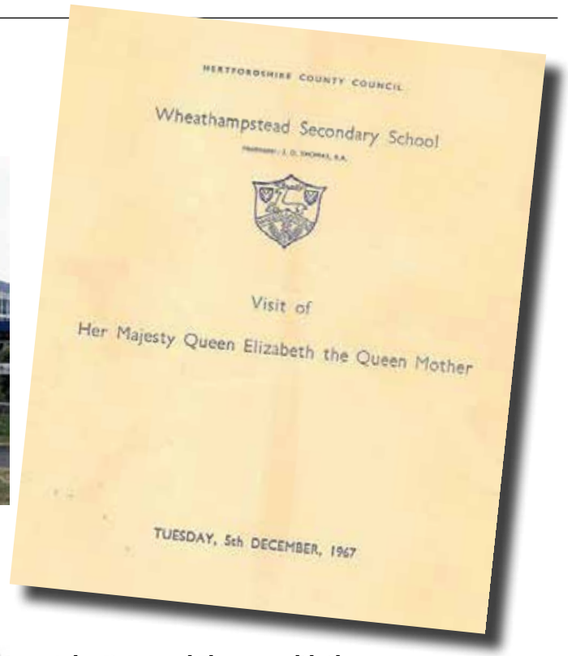
The impact of the closure was considerable for businesses and those who used the railway daily. A bus service was introduced as soon as the railway closed but it was considered less reliable than the train for getting to work or going on shopping expeditions. Special outings by train, which had once been a great source of pleasure, disappeared from the calendar.

Wheathampstead Secondary Modern School

The second change was the opening of a new secondary modern school at the top of The Hill on

Butterfield Road in 1967, a school that provided education for many children from Folly Fields.

Wheathampstead Secondary Modern School



John Desmond Thomas with the Queen Mother during the formal opening of Wheathampstead School in 1967

John Desmond Thomas, who was its only headmaster, took the Queen Mother on a tour during its formal opening in 1967. He liked to be involved in the local community and supported the activities of the Harpenden Scout Group, the nursery school, and the youth club. He was a supporter of the James Marshall Trust. [19]

Jean Collen (née Campbell), who taught music and drama at the school from 1967 to 1968 recalled how the school 'began with great promise and had many wonderful open-hearted children and staff'.[20]

It flourished for just 20 years, closing in 1986 at a time when population projections pointed to a shortfall in pupils for secondary schools in the area. Subsequently quite the opposite has proved to be the case. A housing development was built on the site.

New Priorities and Perspectives

Retrospection

From the time the first cottages were built at The Folly in the 1850s, members of the Folly community have supported one another throughout the various stages of life. In cramped conditions, where there was little privacy, birth took place at home with support from family, neighbours and a parish midwife. The census returns show the birthplace of many children was not 'Wheathampstead' but 'The Folly', a place with identity, a hamlet they were proud to own.

Most Folly families in the 19th century were poor and some, like William French's widowed mother, had to rely on parish relief, but over the decades during the child-rearing years when money was scarce, family and neighbours supported one another by sharing food and produce from the allotments or 'acquired' from a farmer's field. No evidence has come to light that any Folly resident was admitted to the St Albans Union Workhouse in old age, a reflection perhaps of the strong kinship network that existed within the Folly community.

Women from The Folly, responsible for raising children and contributing to the family income, needed to provide stability within their family, particularly if the main breadwinner spent his wages on drink. Tough decisions had to be made about the care of illegitimate children or those left orphaned. Mothers brought up in a tight-knit community perhaps watched sadly as their children left The Folly to find work in London.

Marriage joined many Folly families together in shared celebration and the close network produced a range of nicknames like 'Pinkie' Swain, 'Gawpy' Swallow, 'Sonny' Munden, 'Spider' Webb, 'Mossy' and 'Whip' Males, their origins long forgotten, but indicating the intimacy and friendship within the community.

Inevitably disagreements occurred and unspoken undercurrents existed from time to time, but when a crisis occurred, families and friends rallied to support those facing eviction or who had grown old and frail. Evidence of the community's ability to cope with the concerns and tensions of family life can be traced in every decade. The death of an infant, a young child or a spouse was a sorrow shared and the Folly community mourned together, particularly during and after the Great War.

A few residents took on the final service at the end of life, the task of washing the bodies of the dead. Intimate and emotionally difficult when dealing with friends, neighbours or family members, this was performed as a final act of kindness, a way of honouring members of their community, treating their bodies with respect and dressing them according to the wishes of relatives. Nellie Munden (née Pearce), who lived at 8 Folly Fields from about 1900 until 1953 was one of those who performed this sad and painful duty.

George and Nellie Munden (nee Pearce)
8 Folly Fields

When Nellie Munden was widowed, she continued to live with her son, Herbert 'Sonny' Munden, at 8 Folly Fields. Herbert was not free to marry until she died but in 1953,[1] by which time he was 52. George Elmore's daughter, Christina, who was 59

and had also cared for her father during his final years, became his wife [2] and joined him at 8 Folly Fields.[3]

Christina Elmore and Herbert 'Sonny' Munden at 8 Folly Fields (1953-76)

Ron Webb, the son of Nellie Munden's daughter, Irene, was brought up in Harpenden, but as a child came regularly to Folly Fields to see his grandmother and his uncle 'Sonny'. In 1976 when 'Sonny' died, Ron and his wife, Nina, made 8 Folly Fields their home, the third generation of a family living in the same house.

Ron and Nina Webb 8 Folly Fields

The Folly was a remarkable community where a landlord and his family once lived for 20 years alongside his tenants and where three members of the original land-owning family returned to spend their final years. Despite its unruly reputation during the 1940s and '50s, elderly members of the Folly community like Albert and William French and George Elmore were interviewed by the local press with respect and admiration.

Every community has confidantes and gossips and The Folly has had its share of secrets and private tragedies. Shame, failure or a misspent youth were sometimes deliberately hidden, disguised or unmentioned at the time, emerging unexpectedly from documents during later years: couples who never told their children they were not legally married, a young woman raped by a workman, a soldier treated for VD during his war service and a resident found hanged from a tree in her garden.

'Originals' and 'Improvers'

By the end of the 1960s some of the cottages in Folly Fields were in a poor state of repair and a number of residents moved to better housing elsewhere. The right-hand terrace at the bottom of the road had been demolished and in due course was replaced by one modern house, now numbered 7 Folly Fields. The terrace where the Milnthorpe family once lived on Lower Luton Road had also disappeared and one new property was built there.

178 Lower Luton Road c 1972

The final decades of the 20th century saw continuity and change, when old and new residents lived together. The 'Original' inhabitants like 'Edie' French, Rose Elmore and Elsie Arnold, members of long-standing Folly families who lived in the same terrace, continued to rent their cottages.[4] They were joined by the 'Improvers', who arrived during the 1970s and, 80s and were nearly all owner-occupiers, a new generation of younger residents with new perspectives and priorities.

James Desborough, the resident landlord at The Folly, once owned 17 Folly Fields, and sold it on to George Adams, who ran a watercress business. He

passed it on to one of the 'Original' inhabitants, an elderly widow, Hilda Hawkins. A member of the Bozier family, she married Frank Hawkins in 1926. After he died and her children moved away, Hilda lived alone with a number of feral cats for company, whom she summoned by banging a spoon on an old tin plate. When she became seriously ill and was taken to hospital, neighbours discovered she had been living in considerable squalor for some time. She died in hospital soon afterwards in March 1973.

The cats were rounded up and removed but two escaped. A black cat was taken in and named 'Hilda' by Mrs Beryl Jennings, who still lives at 13 Folly Fields. 'Hilda' was eventually buried with Beryl's two dogs at the bottom of her garden. [5] A big tom, known as 'Ginger', was fed every day for more than two years by Nina Webb before he allowed her to touch him, but eventually became a celebrity in Folly Fields, living to a great age.

Hilda's house, near the cross-road and next to the allotments, went on the market in 1973 and Ken and Sylvia Hincks, a couple from Harpenden with two young children, came to look at it. It was virtually derelict and the approaching roadway was covered in grass three feet high. As Ken and Sylvia entered the cottage, the floorboards in the hallway collapsed. Gas lamps downstairs provided the only lighting, an old cooker stood in the kitchen coated in grease and there was no bathroom. Sylvia was very doubtful about the property and recalled the earlier reputation of The Folly, but Ken, who was a builder, saw the potential of extending and transforming it into a family home. They secured it for an asking price of £14,000 and renovation took a year, turning 17 Folly Fields into a four-bedroomed house, where Ken and Sylvia brought up their family and have lived ever since. Sylvia was converted. 'The Folly was an idyllic place for our children to grow up. We would never want to live anywhere else'.[6]

17 Folly Fields

Their children, Nicola and Darren, remember 'years of fresh air surrounded by countryside and nature, with freedom to play and opportunities for adventure. We built huge dens in the fields and in the hot summers of the 1970s, we played by the River Lea, wallowing in the mud, swinging across the river on a rope and building a raft to drift to Wheathampstead.' With help from Ken, Darren constructed a tree house and scavenged the annual bonfire pile to extend it. 'I remember clearing the surrounding trees, putting up a zip wire using plastic piping, no doubt from the Hincks building yard, to transport ourselves to the ground.' Folly Fields felt a safe environment, where everyone was relaxed and friendly, where children could enjoy 'spur of the moment playtimes' until mothers walked up and down the road at dusk calling, 'Time for bed.'

The first two cottages built at The Folly, now 170 and 168 Lower Luton Road, went on the market in 1974. Originally built for John Sibley of *Cross Keys,* Gustard Wood, ownership was transferred to his nephew, John Wilsher junior, in 1881 and on John's death to his wife, Mary, who rented them to tenants until 1927. Passing through various landlords, including Sir Gerald Lenanton of *Bride*

Hall, a Jacobean mansion in Ayot St Lawrence, the cottages were sold by his widow, Carola Anima Lenanton (née Oman), a historical novelist and biographer, to Joseph Slattery in 1955.[7] Number 170 was purchased by the present owner, John Lowther.

Joe Beavis, who lived at *Woodlands* (later *Glenisters*) in the 1950s, missed number 170 by a few hours but bought number 168 from the Slattery family for £6,500.[8] These two-bedroom cottages stood back from the road behind a small orchard. They had outside toilets, no indoor water supply and a couple of gas lamps, but in 1974 both purchasers saw they had potential.

Folly Fields Residents' Association

Tenants rely on landlords to make changes or improvements but a community of owner-occupiers has its own priorities. On 8 February 1970, the Folly Fields Residents Association was formed, 'its purpose being to improve conditions, provide help when needed and endeavour to sort out any problems when they arose'.[9] Thirty-six residents attended the first meeting held in the Folly Chapel with Jim Ruskin of 40 Folly Fields in charge of proceedings.

Their first priority was to have the roadway in Folly Fields, which at that time was a rapidly deteriorating dirt track, made up to Council specification. St Albans Rural District Council agreed to 'private street works' at the expense of the residents, but there were problems. Not all residents were in favour of laying a tarmac road, some wanting to retain the 'countrified atmosphere' of the unmade road, and others were unhappy about the cost. It was established that loans could be arranged and payment deferred over five years, but letters went back and forth and the matter was discussed vigorously. Eventually it was put to the vote, with 22 residents in favour of the road works and 8 against.

The project, which had taken three years to reach fruition, went ahead on a majority vote and work started in October 1973. Overhead electricity cables were removed and placed underground, street lights were provided and Folly Fields was adopted by the County Council. Resurfacing with soakaways was provided at a rate of £9.40 per foot of frontage so each property was assessed on an individual basis. Single cottages with a 20 foot frontage were charged about £130, but Ken and Sylvia at 17 Folly Fields had a wide frontage so picked up a bill for £600. 'Cissy' Elmore, now widowed, lived at 15 Folly Fields with an unusually long stretch of roadway measuring 139 feet 9 inches beside her property. She was far from pleased to be charged £746.48p. [10]

Folly Fields 1986 [11]

In about 1976 several new houses were planned for vacant plots in Folly Fields and objections were raised by residents about these developments:

Folly Fields is a unique, well-established settlement in this area and normally infilling is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. There is anxiety among residents that the character and charm would be destroyed. [12]

Residents turned out in force to oppose the building of a new house next to 10 Folly Fields on the corner at the crossroads so the owner withdrew the plans and extended the existing Victorian cottage instead.[13] Elsewhere planning permission was also initially refused but despite opposition, vacant plots were filled with modern semi-detached houses. Two more were built at the top of the road and one of these, now called *Follys End* was later substantially altered and extended. When weatherboarding was added, some residents called it 'The Little House on the Prairie'.[14] One of the original cottages at the bottom of the road, is now clad in a similar way.

2 Folly Fields

The last new addition was built in the mid-1990s on the garden of Bill Parsons's cottage, number 29. *The Horse Keeper's Cottage,* so named because the first occupant kept horses in the field behind it, once again was not in keeping with the original Victorian cottages.

By 1973 the Residents' Association had been running for three years and turned its attention to social activities and other matters of concern. Highlights of the early years were Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee celebrated in Folly Fields in June 1977 with a big party, and 'Plant a Tree Year' in 1978 when trees provided by the council were planted in Melissa Field.

Bonfire Night with fireworks became an annual event each November, when Ron Webb erected a tarpaulin so gas-rings could be rigged up for the big saucepans of soup donated by the CGL factory where he worked. Nicola and Darren Hincks recalled, 'Bonfire Night was a particular highlight for Folly children; building the bonfire, wheeling a life-sized Guy up The Folly after the Best Guy Competition and throwing it into the flames, chasing fireworks as they soared into the sky and poking through the embers of the fire the next morning – not a whole lot of health and safety' – but all tremendous fun and there were never any accidents.

An increasing number of Folly Fields residents now owned cars so in 1979 a 'parking code' was introduced to ensure access for a fire engine or ambulance. A small turning circle at the top of the road had a parking capacity for 12 vehicles but a football pitch and pavilion had been established on the recreation ground and the traffic generated at weekends meant that as many as 32 vehicles arrived at one time.

During the 1980s there were 30 children under the age of 12 living in Folly Fields so there was

New Priorities and Perspectives

increased concern about road safety. By 1983 relationships with the football teams were 'less than harmonious'. Residents claimed that two pitches were now being used without consultation and that four teams arriving at the same time resulted in 55 cars in and around the turning circle or parked on the grass. There was acrimony on both sides and in 1984 arguments were aired publicly in *The Herts Advertiser.* The installation of 'sleeping policemen' was considered to stop fast traffic but declared unfeasible for Folly Fields. Footballers, parking and speeding were discussed at every meeting by the residents without real resolve.

On a brighter note, the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer was celebrated on 29 July 1981 with a street party at 4 o'clock when the television broadcast ended.

That year the Children's Christmas Party offered a special invitation to four of the 'Original' residents, 'Edie' French, Elsie Arnold, Rose Elmore and her sister-in-law, 'Cissy' Elmore, who sat on the platform to enjoy the proceedings. Presents and photos, hats and masks, games, a puppet show and Father Christmas were organised by Ken Hincks, now well established with his family at 17 Folly Fields. Sports days took place each summer, while the Bonfire party with fireworks, toffee apples, food and mulled wine and a cup given for the Best Guy was the highlight of the autumn. Suppers, barn dances and film shows with 'lashings of food' organised by Queenie East, Nina Webb, Marjorie Moss and others, took place in the Memorial Hall or the Folly Chapel and many enjoyed a special drink known as 'Folly Ruin.'

'Newcomers'

In September 1980 Chrissie Chadney purchased 33 Folly Fields. She was one of a number of young people who bought properties over the next few years and she immediately felt at home and welcome. Folly Fields was a small-scale community, a microcosm of a larger world, with representatives from a whole generation and real 'characters' among the established residents.

When Elsie Arnold died in June 1982, Chrissie was able to buy the adjoining cottage, number 35, for the same price of £24,000.[15] The gardens behind the terrace had no dividing fences and each still had a pigsty at the bottom. There were two wells and each cottage had a barn or washhouse with a chimney and fireplace.

The washhouses in the gardens of 37 and 39 Folly Fields in the 1980s

In the back room of number 35, beside the range where Elsie Arnold cooked her meals, was a Belfast sink with a cold tap and small electric water heater. The cottage had an outside toilet and no bathroom. Elsie was often seen dragging huge tree branches up Folly Fields for the open fire in her front room, the only form of heating in her cottage.

Elsie Arnold chopping wood for her fire

Only a nine-inch brick wall divided the two cottages so Chrissie had them turned into one larger dwelling. Her original cottage was number 33 so she kept that address and number 35 'disappeared'. Chrissie soon threw herself into the life of Folly Fields and became an active member of the Residents' Association.

33 Folly Fields

'Newcomers' continued to move into Folly Fields during the 1980s, replacing the barns and wash-houses of former years with lawns and flower beds. The wells that served previous generations were filled in and pig sties, chicken runs and outside toilets disappeared. Most residents installed central heating and some cottages were knocked together to form larger dwellings. Decayed brickwork was rebuilt, plastered or painted white or cream and tiled roofing replaced the original slates of some cottages. Property up-grades included extensions, double glazing and porches so for a while Folly Fields became known as 'Little Chelsea'. Convenient for the village, on a bus route to Welwyn Garden City or Luton, but on the verge of open countryside, Folly Fields attracted buyers of all ages and 'Newcomers' gradually became the majority.

Royal Oak Cottage

The Rose and Crown and *The Royal Oak,* the local beer houses of early Folly residents, had long since closed but a regular event during the 1980s, hosted in the homes of community members and known as the 'Folly Fall Down,' provided an opportunity to sample cider, beer, wines and cheeses from various countries. Brian and Margaret Pearce moved to *Royal Oak Cottage* in 1985 and welcomed 30 residents to a 'Folly Fall Down' in the old public house frequented by so many Folly predecessors.

In December 1982, another of the 'Original' inhabitants, Mrs Rose Elmore, the widow of Charles Elmore of 37 Folly Fields, died at the age of 89.[16] As usual the community provided a floral tribute and supported her family at the funeral.[17]

Mrs Rose Elmore

The community also came together to pay tribute to another elderly resident, Mrs Marjorie Moss from 30 Folly Fields, who had enjoyed a career as a Senior Civil Servant and was awarded an MBE for her achievements. She lived in Folly Fields during the 1970s and 80s, and died on Sunday 29 July 1984 around 5pm in St Albans City Hospital, after falling downstairs in her cottage the previous evening.[18] She was 77 years of age and had been a keen member of The Folly social committee and a notable voluntary worker in Wheathampstead. A donation in her memory was given by Folly residents to 'Stairways', the Harpenden Society for Mentally Handicapped Children, where she was 'a founder organiser of the playgroup and a great fund-raiser'. A further donation was made to St Helen's Church in acknowledgement of her valuable contribution to the Welfare Group and the Wheathampstead Community.[19]

30 Folly Fields (on the right) home of Marjorie Moss [20]

'Edie' French, the youngest daughter of Albert and Emily French, lived at 39 Folly Fields, the cottage occupied by her parents for nearly 60 years. 'Edie', who was single, had worked in the hat industry and was a stalwart supporter of the Folly Chapel.[21] She was fond of children and gave Chrissie Chadney's son, James, tea when he came home from primary school. After 'Edie's' two neighbours and long-standing friends, Elsie Arnold and Rose Elmore, died, the community remembered her birthday on 29 April 1983, when she was 'delighted to receive a toaster and beautiful flowers.'

Graves of members of the Milnthorpe and French families surrounded by snowdrops, Spring 2017 [22]

Edie lived a simple life with few luxuries and after her death her wardrobe was found to contain just three outfits, one for 'Sunday best' and two others for everyday wear. Edie ended her days in the Red House Cottage Hospital, where she died in 1987 at the age of 84. She was buried in St Helen's churchyard with her eldest sister, Nellie, who was also single and had died in 1958. Their grave, just inside the lower gate on the right, is next to that of Donald and Violet Milnthorpe from The Folly, and in February each year these graves are both surrounded by snowdrops.

A Sense of Community

In 1985 a burglar entered 'Cissy' Elmore's cottage while she was distracted by his accomplice at her front door and her purse was stolen. Her financial loss was minimal but her appreciation of the support she received from the community was clear from the note she sent to the Residents' Association:

Thank you all very much for your kindness and generosity which you have all shown me after I was robbed last week. I was completely overwhelmed and it is so nice to know that I have such wonderful people for neighbours. [23]

On 2 November 1990 a short item appeared in *The Herts Advertiser:*

Rev Tom Purchas and wardens of St Helen's Church, Wheathampstead decided earlier this year that the 1,000-year-old churchyard was full and should be closed. Parish councillors believed it 'was good for at least another 20 years' but decided to look for alternative sites in case they lost the fight to keep it open.

There must have been curiosity and concern among the Folly Fields community when three parish councillors were seen at The Folly playing fields and allotments but the Residents' Association soon assured members that they had heard 'unofficially that The Folly was the last choice for re-siting the graveyard'. Nothing further was heard from any direction about the matter.

In 1991 a sizeable car park was laid at the top of Folly Fields, the old pavilion was replaced by portacabins for the football teams and unused allotments were turned into two small paddocks, with stabling provided for several horses. When traffic increased on Lower Luton Road, the children's playground had been moved from Melissa Field to the Folly recreation ground and a new enclosed area with a slide and swings was later installed.

'Original' residents in the 1990s included 'Cissy' Elmore and Queenie East but as the Residents' Association Minutes recorded changes of occupants, it was noted that 'continuing throughout there is a positive sense of community and a love of this particular part of Wheathampstead.'

This sense of community was well demonstrated in 1997 when David and Mary Cheale of 18 Folly Fields had a serious flood in their cottage while they were away on holiday in Austria. A small section of unlagged pipe burst, causing extensive damage and neighbours stepped in to remove furniture and organise initial repairs. Neighbours offered temporary accommodation and David and Mary were very grateful for 'the community spirit of the Folly.'

A Special Birthday Celebration

'Cissy' Elmore with her nephew, Kristian Schug, 1973

'Cissy' Elmore had many birthday celebrations with her extended family in Folly Fields but her 100th birthday in 1997 was special. A steady flow of friends, family and well-wishers arrived throughout the Sunday afternoon and Queenie East, as usual, was the life and soul of the party. 'Cissy' received a telegram from Her Majesty the Queen, another from the Right Honourable Harriet Harman MP, Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, and a personal letter from Peter Lilley, the local MP, who recalled meeting 'Cissy' during the election campaign earlier that year.

Emily 'Cissy' Elmore was one of Wheathampstead's oldest inhabitants when she died in 2001 at the age of 103. Born in 1897, she was happily married to Jim Elmore until his death in 1974. She was a member of the Folly Chapel and attended Wheathampstead Darby and Joan Club. At 15 Folly Fields she had no modern conveniences and clung to her old habits, retaining a mangle, a larder and an outside toilet. She had a bath, although it was not plumbed in, but this was the way she wanted it. She had hoped to stay at her cottage until the end but it was not to be. In January 2001 she was admitted to the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital, where she died on 14 March. Her life as a valued member of the Folly community spanned three centuries. Her old house 15 Folly Fields is now named *'Emily Cottage'*.

A Sign for Melissa Field

The Rose and Crown public house closed in the 1950s and was converted into cottages but the pub sign remained stark and empty on the opposite side of the road.

The empty pub sign of The Rose and Crown in 1988

Mary Cheale, a retired art teacher, and her husband, David, have lived at 18 Folly Fields since 1976. Their active interest in the Folly Residents' Association and resulting collaboration with the Parish Council produced a project that demonstrated a concern for caring for and improving one of Wheathampstead's beauty spots. Seventy years after Melissa Field was donated to the community by the Kemp family, Mary was asked to create a suitable image to insert into the old pub sign that had stood empty for so many years.

Mary Cheale working on the Melissa Field sign

Memories recalled by Folly residents inspired her design, which shows the train, trees and an open gate. At a brief ceremony, the painting, 'Melissa Field 1933', was inserted into the signpost, creating a pictorial link with the past.

The Closure of the Folly Chapel

The Folly Chapel closed in 2004 after serving the local community for 117 years. Many of its original supporters had died and the congregation had dwindled. Arthur and Elsie Defty, who moved from Durham and settled at 147 Lower Luton Road, joined the congregation when they arrived in the 1930s. For a number of years Arthur was the caretaker and both he and Elsie 'trod the boards and scrubbed the floors', taking part in plays and entertainment and helping to clean the building. During their time the chapel was a venue for lively social events and a number of celebrities including the comedian, Charlie Chester, performed there during the Second World War.

Gordon Defty's garden, 147 Lower Luton Road, 2016

When Arthur Defty died in 1980 Elsie continued to worship there regularly. She was present for the Centenary Meeting in 1987 when Lord Donald Soper, arguably the most influential Methodist leader of the 20th century and renowned for engaging with the public at Tower Hill and Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, was the guest of honour. Donald Soper was a personal friend of the Deville family, prominent members of the chapel, and for many years he made an annual visit. He enjoyed preaching in big London churches but was also fond of the intimacy of the Folly Chapel. Elsie worshipped there for 68 years and made many friends so was very sad and disappointed at its closure. She died in 2006 at the aged of 97, the same year that the Folly Chapel was demolished.

Her son, Gordon, who has lived at 147 Lower Luton Road for most of his life, attended the Sunday School and has many happy memories of growing up within the wider Folly community. He attended St Helen's School and recalled running there across the fields and through the tunnel under the railway. He played with friends in the spinney at The Folly and down near the River Lea, where they used to put pennies on the railway line to be flattened by the oncoming train. Gordon's working life was spent in the building trade and looking back over his 80 years in the local area, he commented, 'I've always had very good neighbours and I've always liked The Folly and the characters who lived there. Many of them were related so you had to be careful who you were talking to! The happiest period of my life? I would say now, in some ways – life in the building trade was hard but now I have time to myself and I can enjoy my garden' [24] Every year Gordon's house is festooned with hanging baskets and troughs of flowers, a riot of colour admired and enjoyed by his neighbours and those passing by.

'The old order changeth, yielding place to new' [25]

Queenie East, from 44 Folly Fields and one of the last of the 'Originals', died in 2006, at the age of 91, and her friends placed a bench in her memory in the field above her home.

John Giles, who lived at *Drake Cottage,* 11 Folly Fields until 2012, was a member of the Wheathampstead Local History Society and gave talks for Folly Fields residents at the Folly Chapel. He was also responsible for encouraging interest in the history of The Folly, creating displays of historical photographs and publishing the 'Folly Facts', sheets of information distributed with the regular Folly Newsletter.

Over the years social activities in Folly Fields have changed to accommodate new trends and interests. Summer parties take the form of barbecues and include a dog show, while a Quiz Evening and a walk with a Treasure Hunt have been introduced in recent years. Health and safety legislation prevents fireworks being used at The Folly on Bonfire Night and there are currently fewer children than in former years but there is still plenty of food and drink as residents gather on the allotments in November.

Although the Folly Chapel no longer exists, a Reader from the clergy team at St Helen's Church and a regular bell-ringer both live in Folly Fields. Several families attend church services and several more households receive copies of *The Vine,* the magazine of Wheathampstead Churches Together.

Many people today lead more independent and private lives than those of previous generations but there is still social cohesion within the Folly community, as residents pass on recommendations of workmen, care for one another's homes or pets at holiday times and share concern for the needs of others.

Some residents retain a sense of community even after they move away. Olive Yeo, who took an active part in the Residents' Association, moved from 54 Folly Fields to Lea Springs in 2015 but still enjoys returning in the summer to sit in the field with her thermos flask and a bun and attending social functions run by the Residents' Association of which she is an Honorary Member.

Peter and Daphne Wright, who lived at 54 Folly Fields before Olive, both worked for Ken Hincks. Their enjoyment of around 40 years at The Folly is recorded on a new bench installed on the recreation ground in their memory in July 2017.

Folly Fields created many happy memories and long-lasting friendships. Some who grew up together still enjoy each other's company, while many residents of Wheathampstead and further afield, whose ancestors lived at The Folly, recall it with great affection.

Graham Lines, Chris Smith and Richard Rosser who grew up together in the 1950s meeting together in 2013. Sadly, Chris Smith died on 21 August 2017

Folly Fields Today

A visitor standing in the car park at the top of Folly Fields today could be forgiven for imagining that the narrow road between the cottages leads down to the sea. Folly Fields has the atmosphere of a fishing village, particularly in summer, when hanging baskets, pots and plant troughs billow with vivid colours.

Most of the cottages today are privately owned, some are still 'two up, two down' and others have been converted into larger dwellings, modernised and extended. Quaint notices hang on a number of the gates, while burglar alarms and satellite dishes on walls and rooftops form the trappings of modern living.

31 Folly Fields, one of several similar gate notices

The Allotments and Orchard, Folly Fields

Folly Fields is now home to residents of all ages, single occupants, couples, and families with children. Keen vegetable-growers trundle wheelbarrows up and down the road as they nurture and harvest their produce on the allotments and gather fruit from the orchard.

The closeness of the cottages encourages friendliness and those living alone appreciate the security of Folly Fields, with someone on hand to help should the need arise. Parking on the narrow road, not originally designed for heavy traffic, is managed by amicable negotiation, while removal and delivery vans, refuse lorries and taxis come and go with remarkably little incident. Postmen soon work out the puzzling numbering system of Folly Fields and the chimney-sweep on his annual visits, in traditional fashion, invites those with open fires to see his brush poking through their chimneys.

Each year begins with stark bare trees and dormant bushes on the land above Folly Fields, as yellow catkins and clumps of snowdrops signal the

coming of Spring. Tracks of footprints show on the grass, heavy with morning dew and, as temperatures rise, leaves unfold and green shoots appear. Folly Fields recreation ground leads to open countryside with magnificent views over Mackerye End, Aldwickbury, Wheathampstead and Gustard Wood, popular with hikers and dog walkers.

From April to June the fields are edged with hedgerows of blackthorn blossom and froth with cow parsley as wheat and barley fatten and turn from green to gold. Summer brings daisies and golden dandelions on the recreation ground, showing their faces to the morning sun and hiding them away at sunset. Ponies graze in the adjacent meadow, young children play on the swings, golfers practise their skills and archers aim for a bullseye.

On the allotments purple-leafed beetroots peep from the ground, eyeing shiny tomatoes, fat marrows, runner beans and gladioli. Horses nod in their stables or graze in the paddock. In the blue hour before dark, apples and pears gleam in the orchard, ripe for plucking at the end of the season.

As shadows lengthen and the farmer reaps the harvest, wild blackberries and purple sloes replace the white blossom. Acorns split open and barley stubble grows pale. Rabbits and pheasants, no longer prey to poachers, scuttle among the bushes, a fox disappears into the hedgerow leaving a pungent scent and very occasionally muntjac deer can be glimpsed in the distance leaping between the trees.

At the year's end, fields ploughed brown give rise to low mists. Rotting leaves and wormcasts are slippery underfoot as dog-walkers trudge home, their boots caked in mud. As naked trees and fences glimmer with hoar frost, Christmas is celebrated in Folly Fields with floral garlands and strings of delicate fairy lights. Santa Claus, touring local villages with Harpenden Rotary Club, arrives on his sleigh and children visit the cottages singing carols. Whatever the original meaning of The Folly, this is surely a place of 'delight' and for some a 'favourite abode'.

Every breeze that blows across a meadow is said to leave some memory of its passing in the lie of the grass and every man or woman who walks over that meadow leaves behind a trace of personal history. In this book we have encountered many former occupants of The Folly, who left behind something of themselves in the unique hamlet they called home. Their stories, many largely forgotten, are a series of fleeting snapshots

Folly Fields Today

across time, images for present and future residents of Folly Fields and others to consider and to share.

From earliest times people have formed groups to secure with more certainty the basic needs of life. Gathered together, they acquired habits, attitudes, patterns of behaviour and a sense of belonging. For our Victorian ancestors, kinship, the most intimate network, formed the basis of their community and was a vital element of life.

The origins of current Folly Fields residents are diverse and not necessarily local so the pattern of kinship within this community has now largely disappeared. Family size, education, employment and communication have all changed but a network of support within the Folly Fields community can still be mapped and measured. 'All real living is meeting'[1] can be understood as all real living is about relationships, tolerance, openness to others, curiosity and respect.

In the modern world, communities like The Folly are rapidly disappearing. This hamlet retains a positive identity and residents can now trace their predecessors, deepening their understanding of their surroundings, while sharing life and fellowship together. To be part of a community with a shared history, a developing story moving forward into the future, is a real cause for celebration.

Notes

ON THE EVE OF CHANGE

1 The word 'history' entered the English language in 1390 with the meaning of 'relation of incidents, story', derived from the Ancient Greek 'historía' meaning 'a learning or knowing by inquiry, history, record, narrative'. In Middle English, the meaning was 'story' in general – W D Whitney, The Century Dictionary; an Encyclopedic Lexicon of the English Language, (1889).
2 Wheathampstead and Harpenden, The Old Order Changeth: The places, the people, their work, problems and pleasures in the nineteenth century (WEA series, V) 1978, p 91. archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t...wheathampstead: There is some evidence to suggest that a fulling mill stood at Leasey Bridge from the 14th century (Gover, Mawer & Stenton 1938, 57; Seller's map of Herts, 1676).
3 Etymology Dictionary, www.etymonline.com/index.
4 Lionel Munby, The Hertfordshire Landscape (1977), p 190.
5 Hertfordshire Record Society, 1974.
6 Macnair, Rowe & Williamson, Dury & Andrews' Map of Hertfordshire: Society and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century (2016) p 125.
7 www.WeRelate.org. Daniel Nicholls.
8 HALS, Whethampstead Tithe Map & Commutation of Tithes, 21 July 1840.
9 Ancestry, 1851 Census and 1851 County Directory.
10 HALS, Whethampstead Tithe Map.
11 Occupied by Thomas Ephgrave of Herons Farm in Gustard Wood.
12 Occupied by Edward Bruton, a miller and farmer from Bridge Farm.
13 National Archives, Will of Thomas Thrale of Sandridge, 13 May 1774, PROB 11/998.93.
14 IGI Family Search, 'England Marriages, 1538–1973,' database, FHL microfilm 991, 403.
Not to be confused with Ralph Thrale, maltster, living at Mackerye End in 1841 or Ralph Norman Thrale of Nomansland, buried at Sandridge in 1876. There were at least three Ralph Thrales living in the area at this time.
15 www.WeRelate.org.Daniel Nicholls.
16 www.thrale.com estimates the death of Ralph Thrale as 1836.
17 Ancestry, 1851 Census, Former occupants of The Folly: Burgoyne, Smith, Allen, Munt, Warner, Bundy and Wilshire
18 Ancestry, 1841 census, Folly, HO107 442 8.
19 About Wheathampstead: Its Old Houses, the Families who built them, and those who lived in them, p 39.
20 www.thrale.com; Ancestry, England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837-1915, Hertfordshire, Thomas Thrale, St Albans, 1840, 6 349.
21 Ancestry, 1841 Census, listed as Abigail Shrale: HO107 442 8 Civil Parish: Wheathampstead; County: Hertfordshire; Enumeration District: 11; Folio: 46; Page: 20; Line: 13; GSU roll: 288829.
22 'England Marriages, 1538–1973,' database, Family Search, James Arnold and Elizabeth Thrale, 24 Oct 1833; London Metropolitan Archive, Parish Register.
23 IGI Family Search, 'England Marriages, 1538–1973,' database, James Arnold and Elizabeth Thrale, 24 Oct 1833.
24 HALS, Poor Rate Assessment, 1837.
25 HALS, D/EBY/B91, 'Auction of freehold brewery premises including The Royal Oak, footnote 70922.
26 Kelly's Directory, 1839. Not to be confused with James Arnold of Wheathampstead, 1767-1855.
27 pubshistory.com/HertsPubs/Wheathampstead/TwoBrewers.
28 All Abigail's daughters and their spouses are recorded on the 1841 Census, Class: HO107; Piece: 442; Book: 8; Civil Parish: Wheathampstead.
29 pubshistory.com/HertsPubs/Wheathampstead/CrossKeys.
30 Ancestry, 1851 Census, Class: HO107; Piece: 1713; Folio: 5; Page: 2; GSU roll: 193621.
31 Ancestry, census returns 1861, 1871 & 1881.
32 www.wheathampstead.net.
33 Ancestry, England and Wales Death Registration Index 1837-2007, 6 355 69; Abigail Thrale, Jan/Feb/Mar 1849.
34 My thanks to Peter and Jan Laurence for the loan of this document, a set of deeds relating to cottages at The Folly, dated 1866.
35 For information about Henry Pinks Arnold see 'The Red Lion at Breachwood Green - It's in the Blood', No. 239, February / March - South Herts CAMRA southherts.camra.org.uk/newsletter/pov239.pdf: and Law Journal Report, vol 12, Part 1, 1842, Henry D Barton.
36 A sketch map included with house deeds dated 1866 bears their names.
37 Deeds of 1 Folly Fields, now 170 Lower Luton Road, kindly loaned by John Lowther.
38 Ancestry, 1851 census, Class: HO107; Piece: 1713; Folio: 55; Page: 21; GSU roll: 193621.
39 Deeds loaned by John Lowther.
40 Ancestry, 1871 Census.
41 Deeds of 44 to 52 Folly Fields loaned by Peter and Jan Laurence.
42 Luton Times & Advertiser, 20 August 1859, BL Newspaper Archive.
W Branch Johnson in Hertfordshire Inns (1963) suggests Matthew Munt was the licensee of The Rose and Crown on The Folly in 1840 (no sources given). Matthew Munt lived in one of the cottages recorded in the 1841 census and is mentioned in the Tithe Map schedule. He was an agricultural labourer and no evidence has come to light that he was a beer retailer. The Rose and Crown is not marked on the Tithe Map of 1840 so the evidence on the house deeds of 44 to 52 Folly Fields that it was built around 1851 is far more compelling.
43 www.wheathampstead.net/pubs/pubothersource.htm. The Rose and Crown was converted into two dwellings, Crown Cottage and Rose Cottage, 188 and 188a Lower Luton Road, in around 1950.
44 Herts Guardian, Agricultural Journal and General Advertiser, 24 November 1857, British Newspaper Archive.
45 p13
46 Ancestry, FHL Film Number 1040873 IT 1.
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11 Eric Brandreth, 'No 95 Batford Prisoner of War Camp from 1943 to 1948', Harpenden History Society,
12 Interview with Olive Norris. The Urban District Council then took over the camp, renovated the huts each to accommodate two families, one at each end, and used them to help the housing shortage. The site was closed in 1958, when the Batford housing estate of Milford Hill and Tallents Crescent was built.
13 Harpenden Local History Society Archive.
14 My thanks to Kristian Schug.
15 Margaret and Terry Pankhurst, additional text & edited by Roy Markland, More than Just a Name (2014).
16 Roll of Honour, Aberdeen Grammar School.
17 The Aeroplane, May 1931.
18 Ancestry, England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2005, 6b 27.
19 Margaret and Terry Pankhurst, More than Just a Name.
20 Ancestry, England, Andrews Newspaper Index Cards, 1790-1976.

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Herts Advertiser & St Albans Times, November 1944.
2 Letters to The Times, Helen Beach Thomas, 'Rural Needs', The Times, 29 December 1943, Times Digital Archive. Helen was the wife of Sir William Beach Thomas, the war correspondent and naturalist, who lived in Gustard Wood.
3 pubhistory. com
4 The Times, 14 October 1952.
5 Ancestry, England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2005, Rose E Fisher & William G Lines, 1916, 3a 1543.
6 Herts Advertiser, 13 March 1953.
7 Ancestry, Free BMD. England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837-1915 Hertfordshire, Vol 3a p 874.