

Little Chadhurst Farm

At the upper (southern) end of Westcott Street, just below the old pound and the triangular village green, are four detached houses. They stand in some seclusion, separated from the road by a high brick wall and a wide curved drive, but their back gardens adjoin Cradhurst, the village recreation ground. Unlike much of Westcott Street, this is a relatively recent development. In the late 1950s, when Belmont School moved to Holmbury St Mary after nearly 40 years on this site, the school buildings were demolished to make way for the four houses and gardens, and the Local Authority, with the backing of the Dorking and Leith Hill District Preservation Society (as it was then called) acquired the schools playing field for the use of the village. The school had taken over a substantial house identified on the 1914 25" OS map as Cradhurst, but for much of the previous century was called Little Chadhurst Farm.

Dorking Rate Book entries and the 1839 Tithe Apportionment indicate that in the early part of the nineteenth century, the property consisted of a house and garden, an orchard, a meadow and arable and pasture land, occupying altogether some 5 acres. It was bounded to the south by Wintershaw, an interesting property which is now split up, although the original house, built in 1740, still stands. To the north lay a wood and meadows and to the east, narrow north south strips of arable land. During the Napoleonic War, the farm's owner/occupier was William Clarke, who in 1798 inherited it for life from his wife, Hannah. He died in 1816 and several times in the interim the Manor Court Rolls mention the poor condition of the farm's outbuildings. The next 25 years saw several changes of ownership and occupancy, but there is no obvious reason to link this with the parlous state of agriculture during that time. Ann and James Carling of Ripon came into the picture briefly at the Manor Court held in April 1818, but in October of the next year the farm was purchased by William Hambling Herbert, as noted in the Sales Particulars issued for a later (1872) auction. William Herbert died some 13 years later. His will was proved in 1830, when ownership of the farm passed to his widow, Ann, for her life. By 1836 the farm was occupied by a tenant, Samuel Harcourt, and by 1839 Ann Herbert had died and the property had passed to a daughter Susanna Colebrook, a widow living close by on the south side of the Guildford Road. By this time Sam Harcourt had also died, and for a time Little Chadhurst was farmed by his widow, Jane, who also rented a quarter-acre meadow from her neighbour, John Philips. This was the situation shown in the Tithe Apportionment, but the Census Returns reveal no occupants in 1841

By the next census, however, one of the more colourful Westcott Street characters had entered the scene. Zephaniah Greenfield, described in 1851 as a 58-year-old agricultural labourer, had leased Little Chadhurst Farm from Susanna Colebrook and was established there with his wife, Hannah, and two of their children, 18year old John, an agricultural labourer like his father, and Eliza, aged 11. They had come from Dorking and in spite of his fairly lowly census designation and the fact that he could not sign his name (a common enough situation in those days), Zephaniah appears to have been something of a businessman. At the time of the Tithe Apportionment (c.1840) he occupied a beer shop, house, garden and pasture owned by John Rudge in The Holmwood, as well as two neighbouring fields belonging to Adam Cade and a further five acres or so owned by Samuel Dendy near Rosehill in Dorking town. More surprisingly, an 1857/58 list of National Freehold Land Society conveyances shows that he bought several building plots

in Hampstead Road, Dorking, some years after his move to Westcott. Houses had been built on these plots by the time of the 1869 Ordnance Survey, and Zephania's will, made in 1869, confirmed his ownership of six freehold cottages in Hampstead Road. (The same list of conveyances includes the purchase of two plots in nearby Falkland Road by a George Greenfield, probably Zephania's son.).

Meanwhile in Westcott, the 1852 and 1855 Manor Court Rolls recorded that Zephania, or an undertenant, also occupied some 8 acres of meadow with a house and garden (Pleasthatches) to the north-cast of the village and another acre or so of land lying south of the Pippbrook within the Furlongs. The 1861 census shows John still at the farm together with his brother George, then 39 years old, unmarried and described as a milkman. Eliza had left, having married Thomas Sax, a young Westcott blacksmith, in 1859. Zephaniah described himself in this census and in his will as a cowkeeper, and in 1871 as 'farmer and cowkeeper'. He supplied milk and presumably other dairy products to the local populace, and long after his death he was particularly remembered for his custom of giving his pony a rest every Sunday while he carried the milk to his customers in pails hung on a yoke across his shoulders. Some time after 1861 John married, but by 1869 he was dead. In 1871 his 26-year-old widow, Mary, was working as a laundress and living elsewhere in Westcott Street with her daughter Caroline Hannah, aged four (or Hannah Caroline as in Zephaniah's will) and her son James Zephaniah, aged three. Later Mary married another local resident, by then the Greenfields had left Little Chadhurst Farm.

In May 1872, four months before their lease expired, Susanna Colebrook (by then remarried and living in Shalford) auctioned the property. The Sales Particulars listed a farm house together with an impressive collection of buildings, two orchards, about 5.5 acres of arable pasture land and a well 'supplied with a never failing spring of water.' The farm house contained on the ground floor a brick-paved wash-house with oven, copper

However, when the Rookery Estate was auctioned in 1894, the property (Lot 12) was vacant. This time it was offered for sale as a 'small pleasure farm' and as a 'suitable site for a moderately sized residence'. Severe economic depression had hit the rural south-east again and there are plenty of press reports of its effects on this locality. The Surrey Advertiser of 23 September 1893 commented: 'The lowest depths of agricultural depression must have been reached at Dorking last week' when a six or seven year old cow, admittedly 'not in the peak of condition' was auctioned for six shillings. The Dorking Advertiser editorial of 4 October 1894 noted that 'after a badly-gathered though heavy harvest, prices have sunk so low that something like panic exists', while the end of 1896 saw the opening of a soup kitchen in the Westcott Reading Room (ibid Special Council Ed., 11 December 1896). In this economic climate, the Rookery Estate was bought by a land company intent on residential development and Little Chadhurst Farm disappeared to make way for the residence called Cradhurst and subsequently for Belmont School.

This note was researched by Audrey Seeley and published as the 'Changing Fortunes of a Small Westcott Farm in Dorking History No. 16.