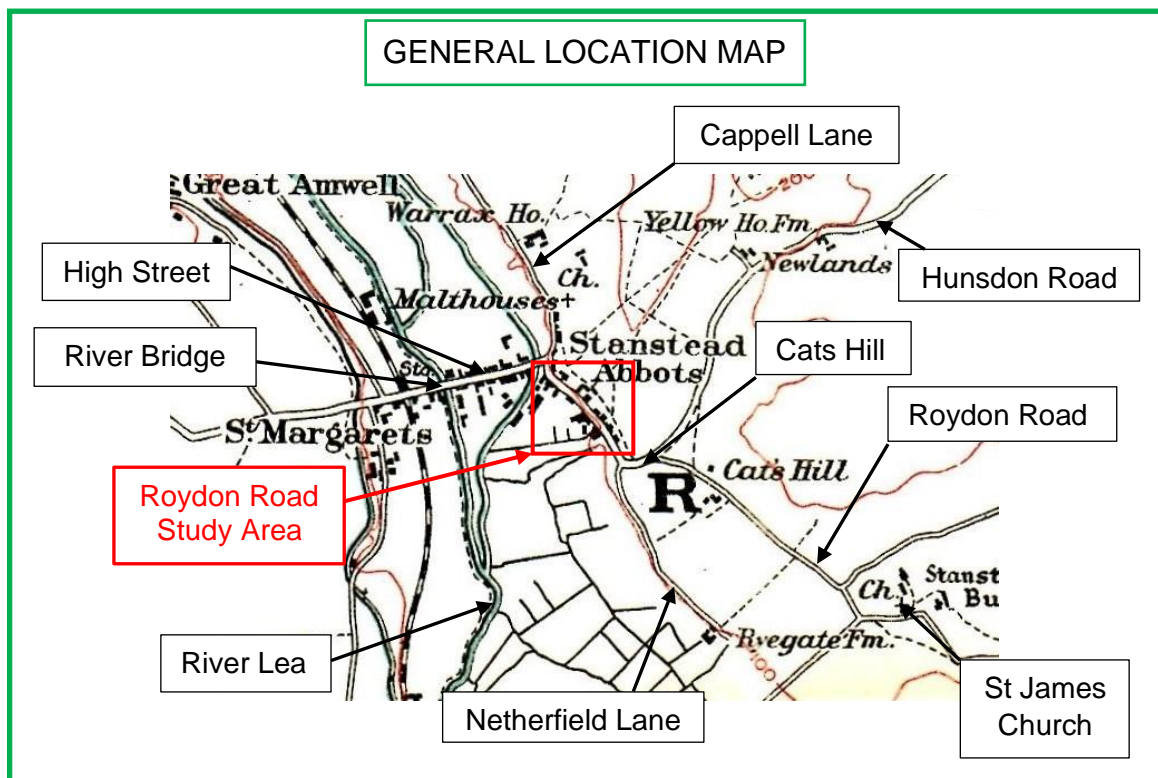


ROYDON ROAD STANSTEAD ABBOTTS A BRIEF HISTORY 1800 to 1950

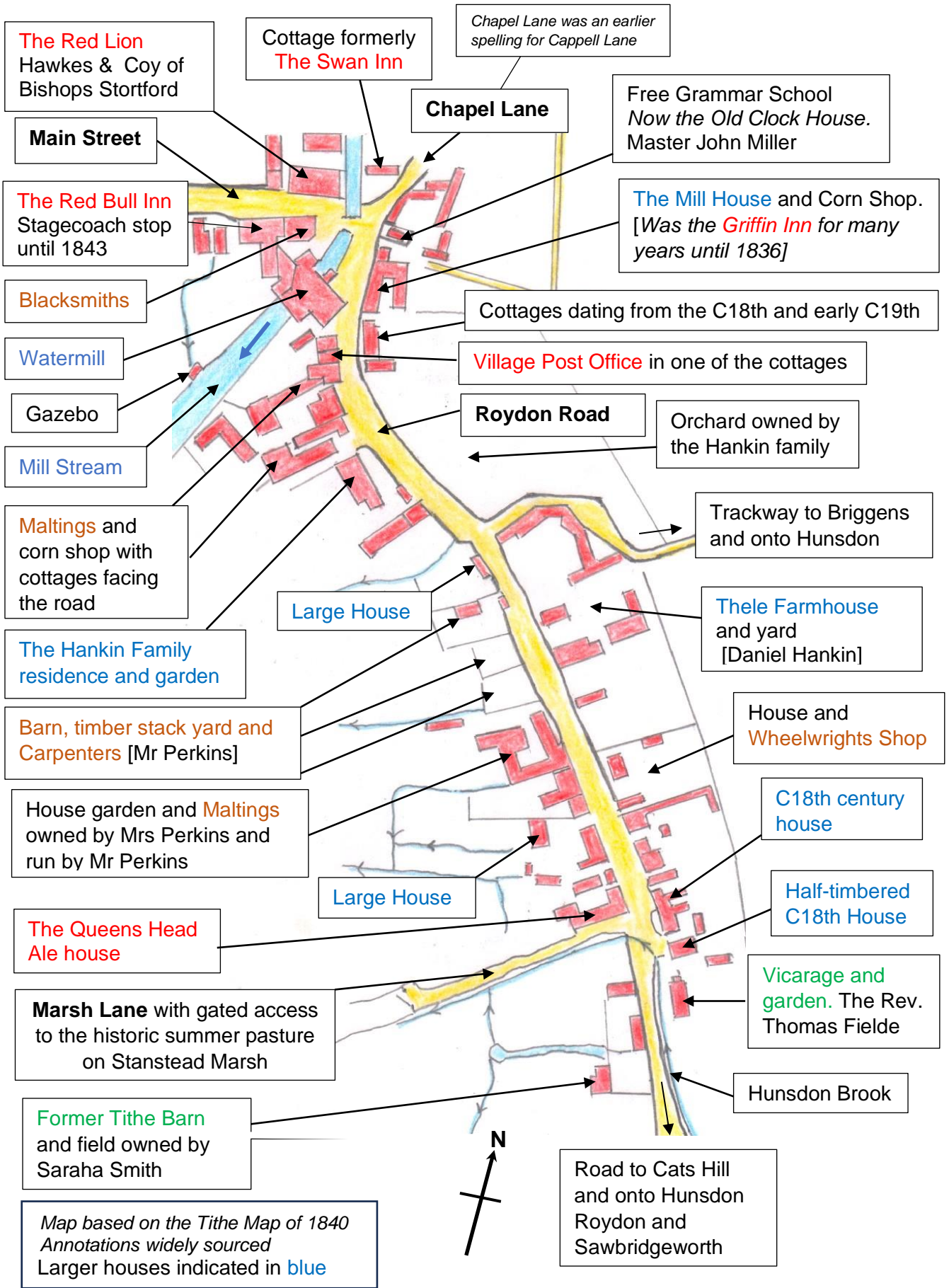
BY
STUART MOYE

This article focuses on that part of Roydon Road from the bottom of Cats Hill to the road junction with the High Street and Cappell Lane. This section of the road is just a small part of an ancient routeway which from early times formed an important west to east route from Hertfordshire into Essex. This short stretch of Roydon Road runs between the base of the steep valley side and the flood plain of the River Lea. Early development along the High Street was hampered because it was subject to frequent flooding events. Therefore, in the past Roydon Road, perched that little bit above the regular floods was more important than today's High Street. Following significant drainage improvements in the late 1500s either side of the High Street, development along it began to gather pace. At the time of the Tithe Award in 1840 the shift of importance away from Roydon Road to the High Street was already well underway. By the end of the C19th the status of the High Street as the new centre of the village had been firmly established.

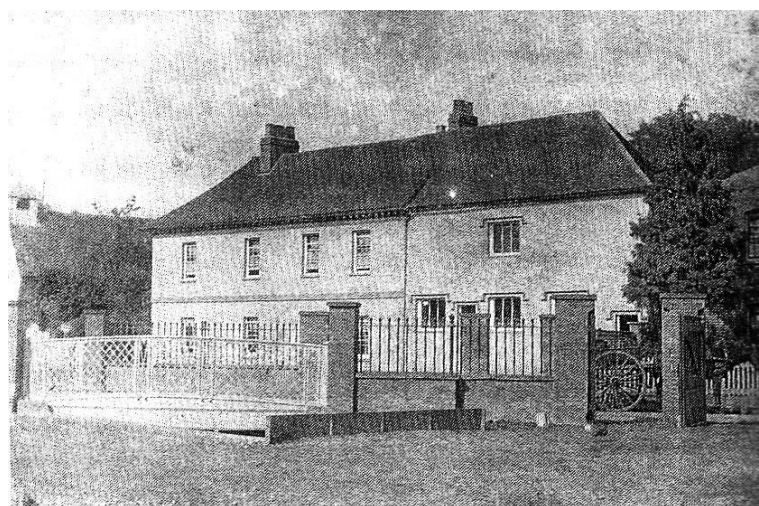


The junction of Roydon Road and the High Street was once the focal point of the village with the main Inns clustered there along with a large watermill. The watermill required a millstream to power it and this fenced watercourse cut across the junction of the two roads. A narrow bridge carried road traffic over the mill stream from the High Street into Roydon Road. At the other end of the study area was the vicarage after which Roydon Road was for a time named as Vicarage Road. It was near the vicarage that the Hunsdon Brook historically crossed the road by a shallow ford. The Tithe map appears to show that a shallow ford still existed there in 1840. At that time Roydon Road witnessed the passage of two stage coaches one starting in Much Hadham the other at Roydon travelling on their daily return journeys to London. The Roydon Coach ceased to run in 1841 when Roydon railway station opened and the Much Hadham Coach was cut back in 1843 to terminate at St Margarets Station running for a further 20 years until the Buntingford railway line opened.

A SKETCH MAP OF ROYDON ROAD AS IT WAS ABOUT 1840



We start our journey along Roydon Road in the early 1800s at its junction with Chapel Lane [Cappell Lane] and Main Street [High Street]. Looking along Roydon Road there was a triangular open space widest at the Red Lion end, tapering away to the width of the road beyond the mill. The large wooden watermill dominated the area intruding into the highway about mid-way along the triangular space. Access from Main Street was via a narrow bridge over the Millstream, requiring a fairly sharp and slow turn for horse drawn vehicles into Roydon Road. The open channel of the millstream, suitably fenced in, ran between the bridge and the mill. This triangular space had been the commercial focal point of the village for many centuries. Even as late as 1820 the area hosted The Red Lion, The Griffin inn and The Swan pub with the Red Bull Inn just around the corner in the Main Street of the village. By 1840 the Swan and the Griffin had closed and the character of this part of the village began to change. It is interesting to note that the early site of the village post office was located in one of the cottages just south of the mill. When the mill was redeveloped in the 1860s and the cottages demolished the Post Office was relocated round the corner in the High Street .



The left-hand photograph above is a rare and early view of the old wooden watermill. It was taken from Cappell Lane in the first half of 1864 not long before the mill burnt down on the night of August 28th-29th of that year. The current mill, building now offices, was built and in operation by mid-1866.

The right-hand picture, taken in the 1890s is of The Mill House. [formerly the Griffin Inn]. The photographer was standing where the old mill once stood with the millstream passing under the bridge seen to the left and flowing underground beneath the camera towards the new mill.



A modern view of the triangular space at the junction of the High Street and Roydon Road, the Red Lion Inn being behind the photographer. The wooden mill occupied the site of the homes to the right and the gap between them and the replacement mill seen beyond. The old mill stood at an angle to the road intruding into the roadway about as far as the centre of the modern road. The brick wall to the left hides the gardens of houses where once road traffic made its way along Roydon Road.



Opposite the mill today are 3 cottages [grade II listed] which were standing there in 1840. The two on the left, are early C19th semi-detached two storey homes with a shared central chimney stack. Their distinctive red brick frontage dates from the late C19th. To the right a larger C18th cottage re-fronted in the early C19th. When first built the front doors of these cottages opened directly onto the road. Up until the 1970s the left-hand cottage had a hand pump near the front door as the only source of domestic fresh water.

Beyond these cottages the road curves to the left and in 1840 on the right-hand side of the road was the impressive residence of the influential Hankin family. The Hankins were barge owners and maltsters owning a considerable proportion of the maltings in the village as well as a variety of other properties in the village. To the left of the road in 1840 was an orchard later to be the site of the village school and hall. A little further along the road on the left-hand side a track leads off up the valley side and onto Briggens and eventually Hunsdon. In 1840 this was a cart road which ran all the way up the valley side and over the fields to the Hunsdon Road. The first part of this track which once skirted around Thele Farmyard became known as the “Cow Barns”. Just beyond this track on Roydon Road was the Farmyard and Farm House of Thele Farm. The farm gained its name because it had been purchased centuries before by the Lord of The Manor of Thele [St Margarets].



A late 1920s / early 30s view of Thele House sheltering behind its roadside brick walls. Thele Farm’s fields extended to the other side of Roydon Road as well as along the slope above the farmhouse as far as the Hunsdon Road. The two brick gate columns, seen in the photograph, had white stone inserts in which the words “THELE and “HOUSE” were carved, one for each column. The right-hand photograph shows how one of the stones [“THELE”] was preserved next to the bricked-up gateway when the House and other buildings were demolished. The picture was taken on the 13th August 2013 but since then the wall has been remodelled and a wooden fence erected on top of it. The cracked stone insert was removed during the alterations and this link with the past was lost.

On the opposite side of the road in 1840 was a large house with an extensive garden. This still survives today in somewhat altered form and is known as The Abbots House. The house dates from about 1600 and incorporates parts of a late medieval house of about 1500.



The Abbot's House is a particularly attractive large home, to be found in Roydon today

In the photograph above the right-hand end is believed to have been the early northern two-storey section of the original house. That part of the house between it and the front door being the remodelled original hall with a second storey inserted in c1600. The 1500s house is thought to have had a cross passage in line with the modern front door. To the left of it is considered to have been an unheated service area into which was also inserted a second floor and attic room in c1600. An additional single storey kitchen was added in more recent times and is just visible on the left in this 2013 picture. The house was considerably altered in appearance in the C19th acquiring its attractive architectural [*Churchwarden Gothic*] exterior design along with the small two storey extension which tends to highlight the importance of the front door as the main entrance to the house. [*Churchwarden Gothic refers to a unique blend of architectural features combining practicality with a nod to the Gothic style of architectural heritage. It is more often seen in churches built new or modified in the C19th*].

In our perambulation along the Roydon Road of the 1840s we have already encountered three buildings of significant proportions. Namely the Mill House [*formerly the Griffin Inn*], opposite the mill, the Hankins family large home "Cromer House" [*no longer extant*] and The Abbot's House. This perhaps is not so surprising given that Roydon Road was once the most important part of the village albeit subsequently replaced by the modern High Street. It may come as some surprise to discover that there were several other sizeable houses further along Roydon Road in the past that still exist in plain sight today. However changing times have seen them subdivided into multiple dwellings rendering their previous higher status a little less than obvious in some cases.

These existing buildings with multiple dwellings in Roydon Road were originally built as one house;-

- (1) Nos. 16,18 & 20 [Three cottages probably of C16th origin]
- (2) Nos. 49, 51 & 53 [Three cottages originating in the C17th or earlier]
- (3) Nos. 38-44 **Colne Cottages** [Four cottages from an early C18th house],
- (4) Nos. 46-52 **Holmewood Cottages** [Building of C18th origins as one house]
- (5) No.54 Rectory Hall formerly **The Vicarage** [C18th building now apartments].

ORIGINALLY LARGE HOUSES NOW SUBDIVIDED IN ROYDON ROAD

(1) Nos. 16,18 & 20.

Despite the one plus two appearance these three cottages they were originally one large house, thought to date from the C16th. Built as a timber framed medieval house with two cross wings, the house was re fronted and subdivided in the C19th. The road here runs right along base of the valley side resulting in these cottages being raised considerably above the level of the road.



(1) Nos. 16,18 & 20



(2) Nos. 49, 51 & 53

(2) Nos. 49, 51 & 53

This row of three cottages is set back from the road and accessed by a narrow track between houses fronting Roydon Road. The building was originally built as one house in the C17th or earlier. It was later divided and extended to the rear in the C19th. No. 49 is believed to have a large open fireplace and bread oven which were boarded in for many years.



Tithe Barn



(3) Nos. 38-44 Colne Cottages

(3) Nos. 38-44 Colne Cottages

Originally one house built in the C18th, now a row of four cottages. The building was altered in the C19th. The cottages are notable for their old steeply sloping slated roof and the dormer windows of the attic rooms.



(4) Nos. 46-52 Holmewood Cottages
(5) No.54 The Vicarage

(4) Nos. 46-52 Holmewood Cottages

This is a row of very small two storey cottages. The four C19th cottages were created out of a large house that dated from the C18th. The building is aligned at 90 degrees to the road and is a timber framed building. The ground floor is clad in brick and the upper is weatherboarded.

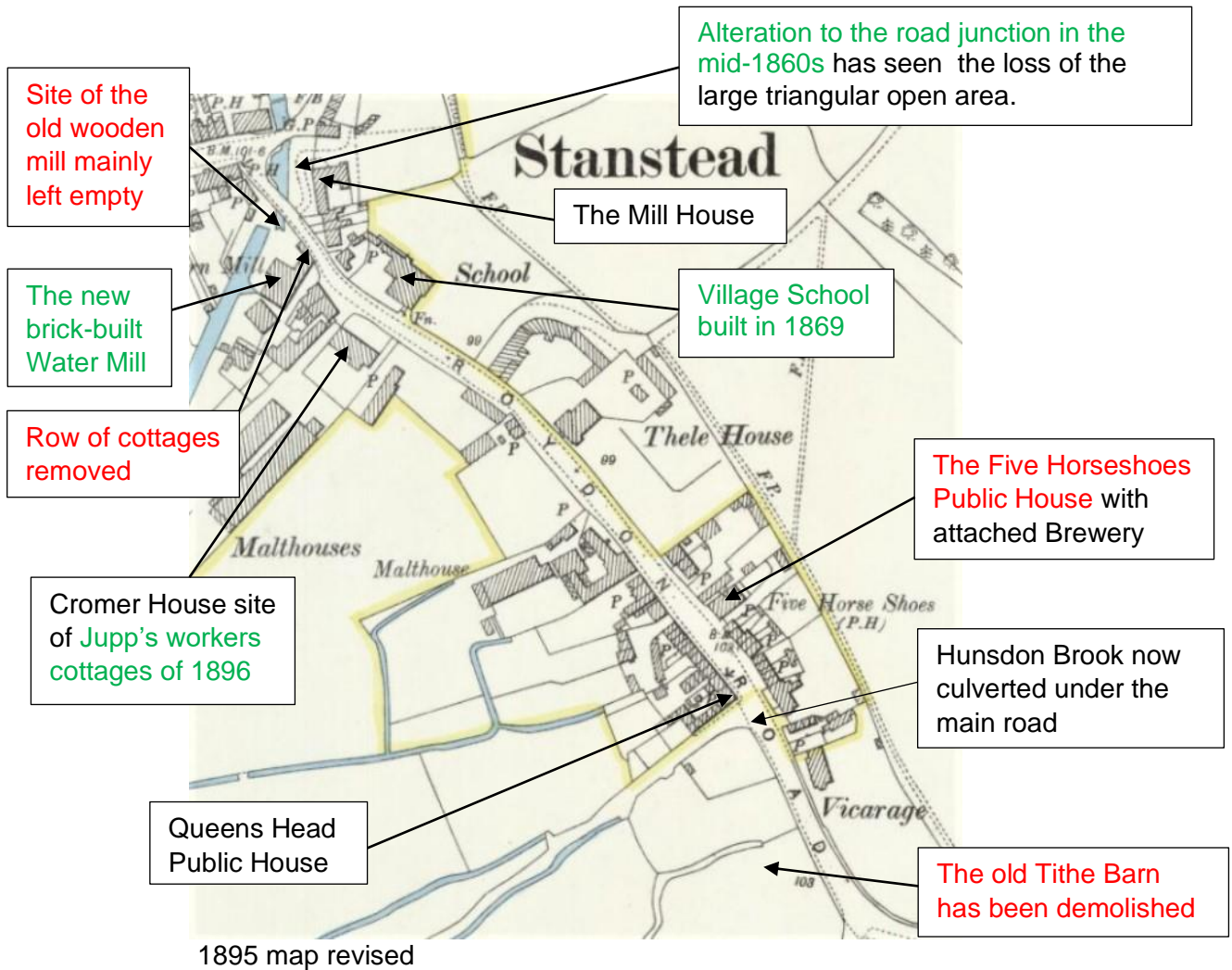
(5) No.54 The Old Vicarage

A Vicarage was first built on this site in the early 1600s by Sir Edward Baesh the then Lord of the Manor. The current building dates from the mid to late 1700s and was subsequently altered which included an extension to the rear. It ceased to be a Vicarage during the second half of the C20th. It is now called the Rectory and has been subdivided into apartments.

All the homes illustrated are within grade II listed buildings

Opposite the Vicarage in 1840 at the corner of Marsh Lane and Roydon Road was the Queens Head. The first mention of the Queens Head is in 1806 when it was referred to as a beer house run by Ann Canon. In 1815 another Ale House is mentioned called the Three Wheat Sheeves, said to be "close to the bottom of Cats Hill". It might suggest a temporary renaming of the Queens Head or perhaps more likely it was a different Ale House located much closer to the bottom of Cats Hill. Also, in a field opposite the Vicarage Garden but closer to Cats Hill than Marsh Lane was an ancient barn. This had been the parish tithe barn of St. James church for centuries and was to be demolished in 1866. We now move forward to the 1890s and the other changes that occurred in those fifty years since 1840.

ROYDON ROAD AREA IN THE 1890s



1895 map revised



Picture dates to the early 1900s

The Five Horseshoes Pub

A notable change along Roydon Road in the early Victorian period was the building of The Five Horseshoes Public House. This included a brewery that was built to the rear of the licensed premises. It was to be rebuilt in 1893 in an ornate style, as shown in the photograph, continuing to serve the public until the mid-1960s. The residential development that replaced it continued the horseshoe theme when it was named Horseshoe Court.

The road junction where Cappell Lane, High Street and Roydon Road meet was dramatically changed in the mid-1860s. This was part of the changes connected with the building of the new mill and the redirection of the millstream to power the replacement water mill. Roydon Road was moved to run along the western side of the once open triangular space. Much of the rest of the previous wide highway was walled in as private land and attached to the Mill House. The relocated Roydon Road crossed the diverted millstream by a new bridge located close to the new mill. The cottages that had existed south of the mill, including the one used as the post office and another shop or two, were demolished to make space for the new mill outbuildings.

A view of the new mill taken from the now private land behind the new walls and fence introduced during the mid-1860s alterations. Roydon Road is carried over the redirected millstream by the small bridge seen in the centre of the image. The impressive lucam, or "corridor in the sky" as mill workers tended to call it, allowed sacks of grain and flour to be taken out of the mill and lowered into barges on the millstream for transport down the River Lea to London



In 1869 Thomas Fowell Buxton donated the land and was the main financial contributor for the building of a village school in Roydon Road. Initially the school just catered for girls but after 1879 became the village school for both boys and girls. It was also consecrated as a place of worship and services were held there until the new St. Andrews Church in Cappell Lane opened during the last few days of 1881. The long walk to the ancient parish church at Stanstead Bury had long been a problem and for many years previously the Free Grammar School [The old Clock House] had been used as a Sunday Chapel. The school was to see additional rooms added in 1891 and 1895 to accommodate the growing number of village children of school age and as a village meeting room.

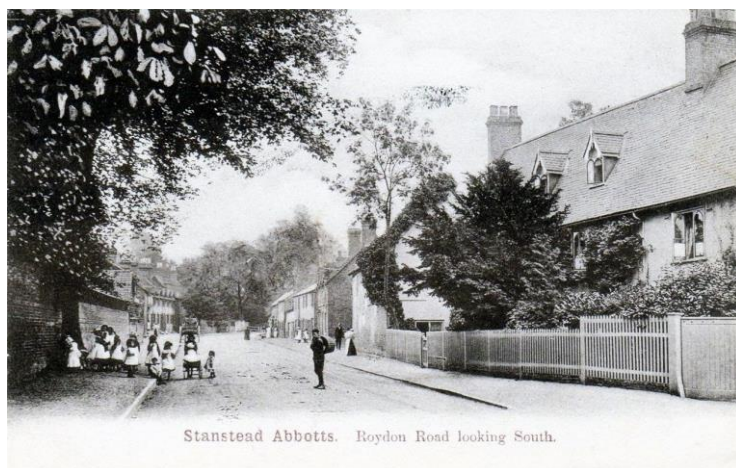


A postcard from the early years of the C20th showing both the school building and to the left the Head Teachers house. Of additional interest is the drinking fountain and dog trough incorporated as one of the railings supports. The water came in an underground lead pipe from one of the springs on the rising ground of Chapelfields behind the school.

A significant change occurred when Jupps, a malting family, moved to Roydon Road in 1896. They had purchased the existing malting by the mill from the previous owner H A & P Taylor. The new owners immediately set about building two new maltings close to the millstream for ease of river transport. They had brought with them some employees from London and built five cottages for these workers. These were built on the site in Roydon Road previously occupied by Cromer House the one-time home of the Hankin family, once themselves an important malting family in the village.



This 2007 picture shows the five workers cottages built by Jupps about 1896 on a plot of land close to the mill in Roydon Road. The 1860s mill building can be seen beyond the cottages. To the right of the picture can just be glimpsed the drinking fountain outside the school.

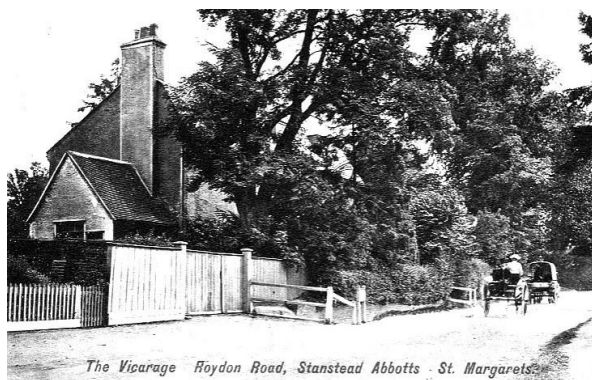


Three pictures taken 1900-1910

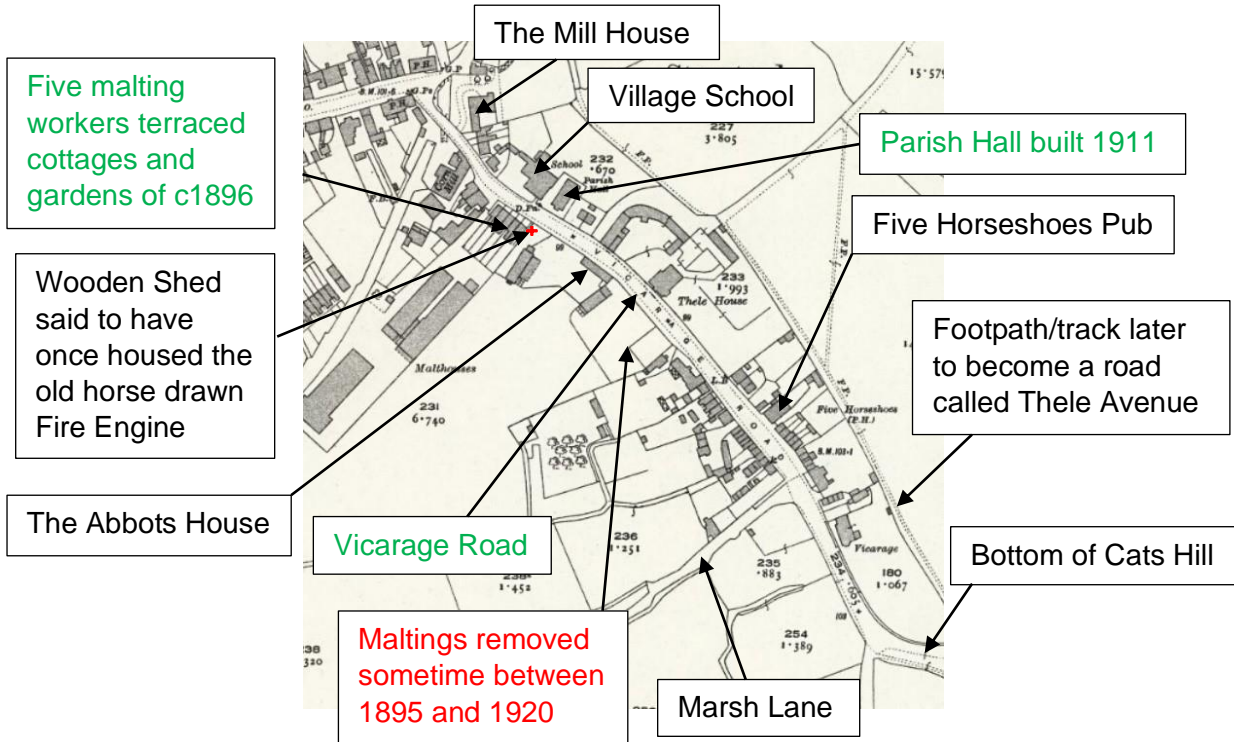
Top left A view looking east with the Abbots House to the right, known at the time of the postcard as "Fernside". Thele Farm is to the left behind the trees.

Bottom left A view of Roydon Road outside the Vicarage looking towards Cats Hill,

Bottom right Looking towards the High Street. The Five Horseshoes is three buildings away from the camera on the right-hand side.



Roydon Road / Vicarage Road in the 1920s

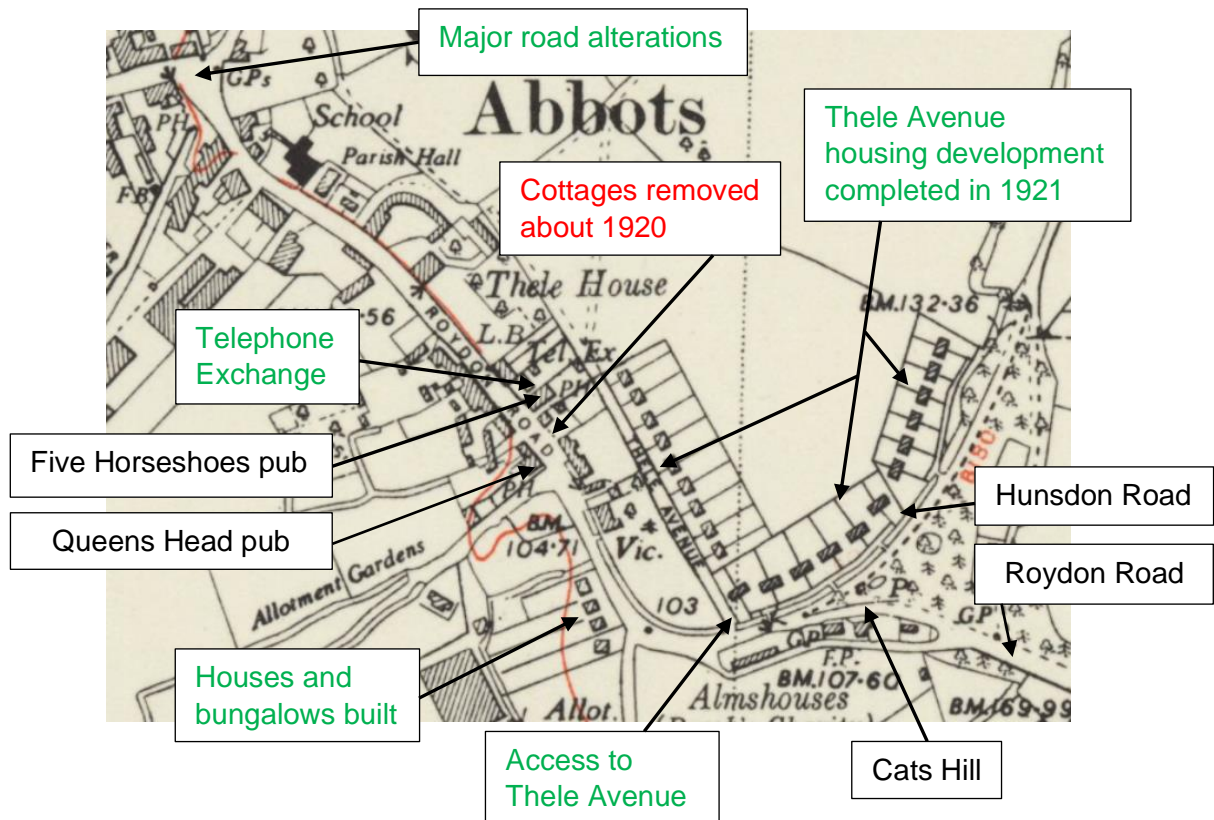


It is worth noting that on the map Roydon Road is named Vicarage Road. This alternative name appeared in about 1900 and seems to have fallen out of use by the late 1930s. Generally, only limited change took place along Vicarage Road between 1900 and the 1920s. One very visible and noticeable alteration that did take place was when the sizeable malting buildings opposite Thele Farm were demolished. The only substantial building erected in those twenty years was the Parish Hall erected next to the school. The Parish Hall was built as a memorial to Mr and Mrs Thomas Fowell Buxton with a plaque placed inside the hall, still to be seen today, testifying to that fact.



A coloured postcard of the village school as it was not long after the building of the Parish Hall in 1911. The Village Hall with a small porch facing onto the road is seen beyond the school. Of interest are the bell-cote on the roof ridge of the school and the lamp hanging from a metal arch over the double gates leading into the playground.

ROYDON ROAD AS IT WAS IN 1948



THE HOUSES OF THE 1920s THELE AVENUE DEVELOPMENT



After the end of WWI, a start was made on the construction of new houses by Ware Rural District Council on what was to become the Thele Avenue housing development. One section was located up the slope behind Roydon Road along a new road named Thele Avenue, the other row being built looking down on the Roydon & Hunsdon roads. The Thele Avenue roadway as first built had its junction with Roydon Road opposite the Almshouses. It was many years before the modern access road was built near the Five Horseshoes pub and the original junction with Roydon Road reduced to a short linking footpath. The 2013 picture above left shows houses on Thele Avenue where they meet at ninety degrees those houses of the same development that face on to Roydon Road. The characteristic outline of the Almshouses in Roydon Road being just discernible in the distance. The picture on the right shows how some of the houses that were built facing down onto the Hunsdon Road appeared shortly after they were built.



Sometime in the late 1920s early 30s the telephone exchange was built next to the Five Horseshoes public house. Seen to the left of the pub in this view. In those days telephone operators manually connected telephone calls and worked in the local exchanges. The exchange in Stanstead Abbotts served telephones for a radius of about 1 mile. There was originally a public call office just inside the front door. In this view a public phone box and even a telegraph pole are rather appropriately seen right outside the telephone exchange in Roydon Road



This late 1920s to early 1930s view shows a complete row of houses standing between the Vicarage and the Five Horseshoes pub. The three cottages with weather boarding below the downstairs window sills and with dormer windows in the roof space are the older cottages that were demolished in the mid-1930s. At the time they were numbered 30, 32 and 34. The house numbers in Roydon Road were to be later altered and the numbers now apply to the three brick-built cottages beyond the ones that were demolished. The gap created was to remain for many years but was useful later used as a route for the road that today connects Roydon Road to Thele Avenue.

In 1934 the road junction at the top of the High Street with Cappell Lane and Vicarage Road was again subject to further change. This meant that the arrangements made to this area in the mid-1860s only lasted for some 70 years. Some of the land but not all of it that had been hidden away behind walls and fences was released back into public highway use. However, the opportunity was not taken to reinstate the full historic triangular open space. Had this been done, it may well have proven to be a suitable location, in more recent times, to develop an attractive focal point for the village. The space released back to use as footpaths and roadway is by and large what we have today but the balance between footpath and roadway space was altered after the by-pass opened some 40 years later. The land still lost for use as the public highway is hidden away today behind a brick wall which provides privacy for the back gardens of a row of houses in Mill Race. The terraced houses being built on the footprint of the Old Mill House/Griffen Inn that had once stood right up against Roydon Road.

THE NEW ROAD JUNCTION OUTSIDE THE RED LION HOTEL IN THE MID 1830s



The picture above shows the redesigned road junction outside the Red Lion Inn. The photograph is thought to date from shortly after the road alterations of 1934. The ornate lamppost in the centre of the road and the large union flag flown by the Proprietor of the Red Lion Inn are notable features to be seen in this photograph.

In the 1920s and 30s four new homes were built opposite the Vicarage. They were erected on a field once occupied by the ancient parish tithe barn and a neighbouring field.



The homes pictured here are two of the four new homes built opposite the Vicarage between 1920 and the beginning of WWII. The bungalow to the left is fairly typical of the sort of bungalow that were being built at the time and today is no. 73 Roydon Road. To the right no. 71, a double fronted villa style house which carries the name "Fair Holme" carved into the arch over the front door.

A view of Roydon Road taken when both the Rose and Crown and the Five Horseshoes public houses were both still serving the locals in this part of the village. The publicans in 1949 were Mr. Mercer at the Queens Head and Mr Whally at the Five Horseshoes.

This picture was taken in the late 1960s by which time the new link road from Roydon road to Thele Avenue had been built. It can be just glimpsed beyond the telegraph pole and tree to the right of the photograph.





For many years the residents of Roydon Road and the Thele Estate enjoyed the benefit of a general store located at what is now a house at 47 Roydon Road. In 1949 the shop was no. 25 and was run as a general store by Mrs Turner. The picture above was taken later in the C20th when the Butlers ran the store. Sadly, both public houses and this very useful local shop have all now closed their doors to the public. Although the former shop building remains albeit somewhat altered in appearance as a residential property, both of the public houses have been demolished.



A look back at Roydon Road as it was about 120 years ago when it was possible to find the bicycle the only form of wheeled transport in sight. The photographer positioned his tripod and large camera in the road and no doubt took some minutes to set up the shot. Not something one could readily contemplate or easily succeed in doing today.

Change has continued to occur along Roydon Road in the 70 plus years since 1950. The road may have lost its shop and public houses but it still conveys a sense of its historic past.

Stuart Moye February 2024

NB The changes that took place to the road layout at the end of Roydon Road in 1934 are covered in more detail in an article on this website called *"Back in time at the top of the High Street."*