

TUBBENDEN LANE.

In the year 1295, in the 21st year of the reign of Edward I, a house stood on the south side, at the Orpington end of what is now known as Tubbenden Lane, called "Tubbendens" (or "Tuppence"), the demesnes of which were partly in the parish of Orpington, and partly in that of Farnborough.

In that year, 1295, Gilbert Saundre of Crofton demised several parcels of land to John de Tubbenden of Farnborough and his sons, and ever since then the estate has borne his name.

At the Farnborough end of the lane, about a mile away, stood Farnborough Hall, dating back to the middle of the 13th Century. It was then held by Simon de Chelsfield of Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester in the reign of Henry III, its lands on one side adjoining those of Tubbendens. The lane connected these two houses, and for at least 5½ centuries it must have seen little or no change, for on a tithe map dated 1840 (Maidstone) these were still the only two buildings shown. Hopfields were marked (between Tubbenden Lodge and Southcroft Road) and on the north side land marked "garden" was owned by St. Thomas' Hospital, London, who rented it to a Mr. John Westbrook, while a little further on, still on the north side, Worley's Hole was shown as a deep depression like a small quarry. All along were orchards and farm lands. At one time the lane was called Farnborough Road, but later reverted to its former name.

In the year 1866, the owner of Tubbenden, Col. G.S. Maxwell, sold certain land on the north side and from that time to 1868 an inn was built and called "The Maxwell Arms". It was taken over by Messrs. Neakes & Co. Ltd., Brewers, of Bermondsey in 1868, and apparently rebuilt in 1920. Kelly's Directory (1890) described it as a "Commercial and Posting House - Cabs to meet most trains at the station." The stables are still there on Station Road. In 1931 it was purchased by Messrs. Courage & Co. Ltd.

The construction of the Orpington line (Lewisham, St. Johns, to Tonbridge) South Eastern Railway commenced in May 1863 and about that time land was sold by the same Col. Maxwell for the construction of the chalk embankment running through his lands and upon which stands Orpington Station. The railway arch over Tubbenden Lane must have been built about that time, and the whole line was opened to traffic in 1868.

After this, change came to the old lane, and soon some houses were built on the north side. These were substantial homes of successful business and professional people. The first was "Sherlies" with its little lodge opposite the main gates and lodge of Tubbendens, built on orchard land of the name of "Sherlies", owned by a Mr. Shadbolt. It became the home, in about 1883-4, of a Mr. Harrild, and must have been built shortly before that date. Mr. Harrild enlarged it (he had a large family) adding a west wing and in 1895? a much larger east end was added. He erected a small theatre in the grounds in 1904, where plays, etc., were produced, also Gilbert & Sullivan operas, in which the family and friends took part. In 1924-5 it was let as a hotel,

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and continued so until 1955 when it and the land was sold for building purposes.

Next to "Sherlies" was built "Fernbank" (now "Northolme"), built about 1878, where the famous cricketer, Mr. C.B. Fry, lived for some time with his stepfather. Mr. Harrild's son says C.B. frequently knocked cricket balls into "Sherlies" garden. (This house is now a Club for Southern Railway staff). Opposite - on the one time hopfield - was Orpington Cricket Club, with whom Fry often played.

Next came "Kokine" (now "Lubbock House", a home for old people), followed by "Tubbenden Lodge". This was at one time the home of the late Commodore Harwood, who won the first Naval victory in the 1939-45 war. He, with his fleet of little ships, accounted for the German pocket-battleship "The Graf Spee" at the battle of the River Plate, for which he received a Knighthood. Tubbenden Lodge is the only one that remains a private house.

The fifth and last house of this group was called "Sunnyside", now "Ruskin Lodge", and was owned by Ruskin's publisher, Mr. George Allen. In the grounds a substantial shed was erected serving as a warehouse, and also as the publisher's distribution centre for Ruskin's works for a considerable time. Mr. Ruskin's idea was to eliminate the middleman, so he appointed his agent to be bookseller and publisher in one.

The business was essentially a family one; Mr. Allen was an engraver, assisted by his eldest son. His second son and daughter were chiefly responsible for the detail work, while Mrs. Allen and the remaining son and two daughters made up the rest of the staff. No outside help was ever used. Mr. Harrild relates that the drawing room walls were literally covered with Ruskin's original drawings and paintings. Later the house became the property of Sir John Hunt, who was Town Clerk of Westminster. It has been used to house homeless families awaiting new accommodation, since the bombing raids during the war.

On an Ordnance survey map of 1908 these houses are shown with some additions. The land between the railway and "Sherlies" is still orchard, and half way down on the north side is now marked "Tubbenden Farm", with farm-workers' cottages nearby, and then there was nothing but orchard and agricultural land until the block of houses at the Farnborough end is shown. These were built on orchard land formerly belonging to Farnborough Hall and sold by Sir William Hart Dyke in 1902 or 1903 to Mr. Hubbard, a builder. He developed this site bounded by Tubbenden Lane, Palmerston Road, Gladstone Road, Cobden Road and Pitt Road, larger houses being on the lane and smaller property behind.

On the south side of the lane - nothing is changed until another block of houses appears, also at the Farnborough end, and which finish at an orchard which belongs to the next house, "Topcliffe Grange" (built about 1870), not of any great interest. The grounds of this property, on the other side, met those of Farnborough Hall, and the lane ended where it joined Farnborough Hill.

By about 1929, building began in earnest and by 1954 the lane was built up as far as Sherlies on one side, and on Tubbenden land (sold for building 16 houses) on the other. The old fruit trees were left in the gardens on the north side. The lane was widened this

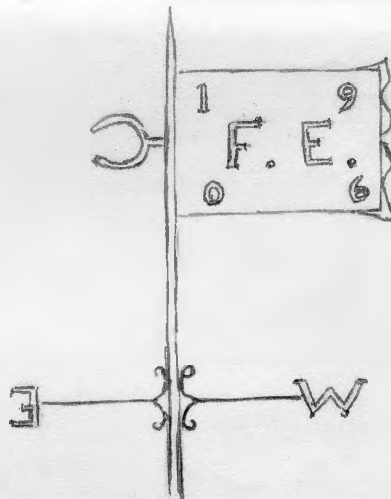
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far, the old hedge of Tubbendens remaining in the centre. Quickly Ruskin Drive and Southcroft Road were cut and built up. A beautiful wheat field on the south side was left cultivated, and a few allotments were worked up by Ashbourne Rise - which was constructed and partly built up, and more houses - just a ribbon development then, were built opposite this cornfield. Tubbenden Farm was now a private school, the labourers cottages in ruins. Where these buildings finished, almost opposite Ashbourne Rise, water draining from the sloping fields beyond flooded the lane in wet weather, so a culvert was made and the water drained into the field opposite and found its way through Tubbenden land to the foot of the railway embankment where a large "lake" soon collected, but as soon drained away.

Beyond Ashbourne Rise, a new housing estate was built - The Davis Estate - the main road of which - Tubbenden Drive - joined up the Sevenoaks Road and Tubbenden Lane.

By this time "Tubbendens" was a poultry farm owned by Mr. William Cook, with pens of beautiful hens along the lane including the world famous "Buff Orpingtons".

It was very beautiful here, the enormous beech trees edging Cook's land, forming a high tunnel with those on the other side of the lane. There was a picturesque lodge at the main gates in which Mr. Cook lived, as the old house had fallen into disrepair, and this bore a weather vane with the letters "F.E." and the date "1906" cut into it, being the initials of Sir Francis Evans, who rented Tubbendens at that time.



Here also is the old milestone bearing the words "15 miles from London Bridge. 1779." (This was shown on the 1840 tithe map.

Behind this stood the old mansion with its beautiful trees, amidst which cattle peacefully grazed and beyond, along the hedge bordering the once Orpington Cricket Field, occasional hops could be found, souvenirs of what was once grown there many years ago.

Beyond the Davis Estate, at the Farnborough end and the row of Victorian or Edwardian houses, an arterial road from London to the Coast was cut through the fields and the orchard of Topcliffe Grange in 1926-7. This house was demolished in 1933-4 and new houses built on the site, both on the Lane and behind it in a cul-de-sac Topcliffe

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Drive. Among these houses in a garden of a house opposite Cobden Road there remains a large evergreen shrub which formerly stood at the gates of Topcliffe Grange. The stables, with the gardener's quarters above, were not demolished, but converted into a house standing in Topcliffe Drive in which lives the naval padre, the Rev. Owen Peebuck. All further development along the lane was held up by the 1939-45 War, but soon after this building began in earnest. The good agricultural and orchard land behind the ribbon of houses on the north side became another solid block, "Tubbenden Farm Estate", and in 1954 another came into being on the chalk land which was formerly a fine cornfield and allotments. Ashbourne Rise was completed, so all the open land on that side was built upon as far as the arterial road, for, also in 1954, the old house Tubbendens was demolished and in its place are now 200 small houses, 38% of which are called "Cornish Unit" houses. Some of the old trees have been left on the site, but although several of the large beech trees remain, the beauty of the lane has gone for ever. The builders were James Miller & Partners. The estate is called Tubbendens Estate and most roads thereon bear that name.

Tubbenden Lane is now sadly different from what it was, even but a few years ago. People used to go along it for a pleasant walk - now it teems with people and traffic, its beauty and peacefulness obliterated, and almost forgotten.

K. DIXON
1956.