

The Village of River

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This account was discovered in the archives of River WI which suggests that it was written by WI members. We think it might have been written in 1957. Does give an interesting perspective of the village.

Seventy years ago, River, which is now an ever-increasing suburb of Dover, was then a separate village without main drainage or street lighting and many houses relied on their private wells or the village pump. The inhabitants were principally employed in paper-making, brick-making and agriculture.

Approaching the village from Dover by way of the passage alongside Buckland churchyard, under the railway arch and along the footpath through Crabble Meadows, where St. Andrew's Terrace and Crabble Athletic Ground now stand, the Lower Road was reached near Crabble Paper Mill.

On the left of the road stands Crabble Farm, formerly known as Parsonage Farm, and which may have been an outlying property of St. Radigund's Abbey. Many of the



Crabble Corn Mill

cottages and outbuildings previously attached to it have long since disappeared.

Crabble Corn Mill and the quaint cottages adjoining it form an outstanding feature of this part of the village and with the mill pond, the swans and wild fowl, and the pleasant surroundings and background have always been a great attraction, especially to artists and photographers. The mill was probably rebuilt at the beginning of the C19 to provide supplies for the Army and Navy, considerable forces being stationed in the area during the Napoleonic Wars.

Opposite the mill are two well built old houses, one now occupied by Mr E Mannering, was formerly River Parsonage, the other, which is now River Clinic, was the home of Mr E Colman who farmed much of the surrounding land. The sloping meadow behind the mill will be remembered by the older inhabitants of Dover as the venue for Sunday School and other treats and the exciting adventure in those days of being conveyed to the spot in the miller's horse-drawn vans.

A little further on, the road divides, one part crossing the bridge to the right and proceeding through the main part of the village, the other, Valley Road branching off to the left, with a short road leading to what were Lewis's Brickfields and now part of Lewisham Road.

On the western side of this junction stands an old house which has served several purposes. Until 1835 it was the River Union Workhouse for the parishes of River, Alkham, Capel, Hougham, Buckland, Charlton and Whitfield. When the

workhouse in Buckland Bottom was built, the River poor-house was closed. In 1841 it was used by the Wesleyans for religious purposes. Later on, it became a select private school known as Hofwyl College and was under the direction of Mr and Mrs Weston. Its upper storey was eventually removed, and it became in turn a dairy and a private dwelling now occupied by Mr J Mannering.

Having crossed the bridge and proceeding through the village, one notices 'River Dale' formerly the home of Mr Willsher Mannering, and in the near future likely to become a junior school for Dover College. Old buildings in this part of the village include Rose Cottage, Yew Tree Cottage and 'The Oak', a well-known public house which was built sometime during the reign of Charles I. The upstairs room was site of the first 'Penny School' started by a Mr Halliday who was a school master in River for 56 years. Where the newer houses now stand and stretching beyond the site of the present Co-op premises, older residents recall waving cornfields and pleasant orchards. The small nursery is known as 'Orchard Nursery'. The land between Lower Road and Valley Road was known as Thorpe's Meadow. Mr H W Thorpe, for many years a member of Dover Town Council, built a commodious residence at the southern end of the meadow and had the road, now known as Beresford Road, made. Modern

residences occupy nearly all the meadows and recent builders have certainly obeyed the vendor's instructions that, "No houses of less than £400 be erected on the site".

In 1926 Common Lane, the road joining Lower Road, was carried over the river, previous to which vehicles crossed the river by a ford; a small footbridge provided for pedestrians. Near this ford stood the village pump. Several local inhabitants remember that in their younger days one of their daily tasks was to fetch water from the pump.

Close by is a fine old Elizabethan house called 'Weeford', for many years a farmhouse and now the residence of Mr W Fish. Opposite 'Weeford' stands River Bakery, rebuilt and enlarged in 1887, and for well over a hundred years was kept by members of the Tritton family. Mr Robert Tritton was a well-known man who kept an active and keen interest in everything connected with the village and its development. River Bakery was also River Post Office for many years.

About twenty years ago several very old cottages on the south side of Common Lane were pulled down to make way for modern dwellings. In Common Lane stands River School which was built by River School Board. It was later enlarged and is now a provided school of Kent Education Authority. Adjoining land is reserved for its future extension. At the top of Common Lane and stretching across to Minnis Lane is River Minnis on which the poor of the parish formerly had 'common rights' over an area of some 300 acres.

Returning to Lower Road, it is interesting to note that the first Co-op Society in this area was formed in 1880 by Mr Radford Evans and a few others. The tiny shop next to the 'Dublin Man of War' was opened with a capital of £139 and was chiefly supported by



Common Lane Ford at River

the paper makers of the district (In 1906 it had a capital of £42,729). The society rapidly grew, and larger premises were taken which were improved a few years ago. A flourishing bakery business steadily developed. This was transferred when the new Co-op Bakery opened in Maison Dieu Road.

At the lower end of Minnis Lane were River Paper Mills either founded or owned by Thomas Radford. Mr William Phipps married one of Mr Radford's daughters and the mill came into his possession and it remained in the family for three generations. Members of the Phipps family were owners of considerable property in River. The mill was demolished several years ago and the cottages in River Street which were built for the paper makers are in the process of demolition. One of the cottages still in use was formerly The Vine public house.

Mill House, for many years the home of the mill managers, is still occupied. Near it stood the Dublin Man of War, the licence of which was transferred to the house of the same name in Lower Road. It is reported that Mr William Phipps, a man of dominant personality, marched across the road in frockcoat and tall hat and cleared the house when he thought his workers were spending too much time there!



River Bakery

River Church, which was served by the monks of St Radigund's Abbey until the Reformation, was rebuilt in 1831 and restored in 1876 when the high-backed pews and the west gallery were removed. It is a plain substantial building without ornamentation. At the beginning of the C19 the musical service of this church was assisted by the paper makers. When Mr Plater was vicar, a barrel organ was in use; its ten tunes offered little variety, and its action was not reliable. It was succeeded by a harmonium and later an organ. The present organ was installed by the vicar Rev. D Townsend, himself a keen organist. The church contains an ancient font of great historical interest. It came from the ancient church of St Mary Magdalene in Canterbury and was consecrated by St Alphege, Archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered by the Danes in the year 1010. Two new vestries have been added recently.

Adjoining Kearsney Railway Station is Kearsney Manor. The original manor house together with the manor lands was held in Norman times as part of the Barony of Saye, being a knight's fee for the guarding of Dover Castle. In the early part of the 19th century it was bought by Mr J M Fector, a well-known Dover banker. About the beginning of the present century the premises were acquired by French nuns who opened a day school there and accepted several boarders, mostly from the Continent. More recently the Manor House has been used by the nuns as a guest house. It was destroyed by fire during the last war but has been rebuilt; a part of it becoming a nursing home.

In 1822 Mr J M Fector built Kearsney Abbey as part of the manor grounds using in its construction stones from the old Dover wall. The Abbey, which stands in delightful grounds with a lake formed by the junction of two branches of the River Dour, was

purchased a few years ago by Dover Corporation and is now a popular pleasure ground. Much of the original building has been demolished. Many of the plants for Dover's public gardens are propagated at the Abbey. The Marquis of Ely was a distinguished resident at the Abbey in the latter part of the last century.

The extension of the electric tram system from Buckland to River Church in 1905 did much to encourage the rapid development of River which has taken place in the last fifty years. The tramlines were originally laid on sleepers and ballast. The track, which was fenced like a light railway ran through the old brickfields. Lewisham Road was afterwards built on the track, and houses were soon erected along the route. The trams were superseded by buses in 1937. The improvement to Lewisham Road with its present delightful avenue of flowering trees, the laying out of River Recreation Grounds, the development of Coxhill Estate and many other areas in the village have taken place during the lifetime of most of the local inhabitants.

In 1956 the new Methodist Church was opened in Lewisham Road; the original building in Common Lane which had become inadequate for the needs of its supporters is now used as a Sunday school.

Apart from the erection of several desirable residences on its Western side, little alteration has been made to London Road, generally known as the Upper or Top Road, although the workshops of J Robson and Sons, agricultural engineers, no longer exist. For many years Robson's Traction Engines were well known throughout Kent and further afield (some are currently available on vintage sites).

During the hunting season a former attractive sight was the assembly of

huntmen on the skyline of the Old Park slopes with hounds working through the gorse below.

River suffered some damage from bombs and shells during the last war. One of the first cross-channel shells landed near Minnis Lane. Two houses in Valley Road were destroyed and other houses in that road and in The Meadway were badly damaged. There was considerable tension in the vicinity of River Bakery for some weeks while the Bomb Disposal Squad were unearthing with difficulty two large, unexploded bombs, one of which had gone under Ivy Cottage, the other falling near the back of Brooklands. A bomb which landed in a manure heap on a farm in Kearsney ensured a good crop of vegetables for all the surrounding gardens! In 1947 food parcels were received from Port Dover WI in Canada who adopted River.

Soon after the First World War, River Hall Company was formed under the chairmanship of Mr H E Russell, a former Mayor of Dover; two large army huts were purchased and converted into recreation rooms known as River Hall. These are now the headquarters of River Women's Institute, and they are also used for educational and various entertainment purposes. During the war, the village hall was taken over by the military, but the Women's Institute never missed a meeting, convening in members' houses until the Church Hall became available. A successful preservation centre was run by the Institute on behalf of the Ministry of Food, and, in four years, the total of jam alone was 30,000lbs!

A former landmark adjoining these premises was a large barn which stood at the junction of Common Lane and River Street. The barn was destroyed by fire and the corner shop which stands on part of the site was for some time known as 'Ye Olde Barn'.