

High Wyck

In 1860 High Wyck was but a Hamlet of about 36 cottages, one private estate, some farms with cottages for their workmen, 2 public houses, & a blacksmith's forge. Most of the men worked on the land, or at Rivers Nurseries. One of these was at Redrucks Farm & the main one reaching into Sawbridgeworth, many ways at this time varied from 9¢ to 15¢ per week. Some children had elementary lessons in a cottage, taught by an uncertificated teacher.

There was no main water, some cottages had pumps in their garden, some even collected water in pails from land drainage. In the centre of the village a large wooden pump was installed in 1863, from which people living near collected the daily supply. The cost was borne by three local gentlemen.

An appeal was launched for contributions to build a Church & schools. Almost half the required sum was donated by the Rev. H. F. Johnson, who also offered to become unpaid curate until an incumbent could be appointed. He served in the Crimean War, & at this time Curate at Richmond, Surrey. He was inducted as vicar of High Wyck in 1862.

The foundation stone was laid on July 25th 1860, & the Church consecrated in 1861. The Rev. Johnson was vicar till 1880. During these years the Schools, School house Vicarage (now The Grange) Curatage (Wyck Croft) Allens Green Mission Church, 2 cottages at Vicarage Drive entrance, 3 bungalows to serve as Alms houses, 4 cottages in the centre of village, & 3 pairs in High Wyck lane.

High Wyck was in the Rochester Diocese until 1877, when it became part of the St. Albans. In 1894 Rev. Johnson was appointed Bishop of Colchester. He died in 1908. He always took a great interest in the Parish of St. James, giving generously of his wealth, & often coming to conduct Confirmation, Harvest Festival, & other special services.

The school had a large main room, a smaller one for juniors in which was a gallery for the tiny children, also a class room. The headmaster's salary prior to 1900 was £81 plus a free house, Assistant £45, Pupil teacher £10 & monitor £3 per year.

Coal & Clothing Clubs were formed, Penny Bank, Guild for Young Men, Mothers Meeting (The Mothers Union was started in 1898) also a Temperance Society.

All social activities were held either at The Vicarage or schools, & later fêtes were arranged in The Manor of Groves grounds. Entertainments, Dances etc held in the school meant a lot of hard work, as the desks & forms were all screwed down, & had to be removed before a stage could be put up, then everything in place again before Sunday School opened at 10 a.m. Church & Schools were heated by the old type - tortoise - coke stoves, & gas lighting.

The Ecclesiastical Parish now covered a much wider area & some tiny children would have to trudge 3 miles to attend school at 9 a.m.

For many years the schools were Church property, but eventually it was impossible to raise sufficient money to meet the cost of repairs & improvements so they became controlled schools in 1949.

Children were encouraged to help with any money raising efforts for Church upkeep, & persuade their parents to do so.

In 1903 the Porch was added to the Church, another improvement - inconceivable burners instead of naked gas jets - it was not until ^{the mid} 1940s electric light was used

Meetings were held in 1911 to decide on a suitable memorial to Bishop Johnson, & it was decided to build a Village Hall, Dances, Concerts, whist drives etc took place, also a Fete at 'Groves' by these means a goodly sum was raised, then came the World war of 1914, so the money accumulated was banked, & after the war ended it was agreed to link up the Hall in memory of Bishop Johnson & those lives lost in battle. The Hall was built & opened in 1923. further extensions & improvements were made in 1973-1974

The first motor car appeared in the village about 1898, it was owned by Mr E. B. Barnard, M.P. - afterwards Sir Edmund - who lived at 'Grove Lodge' the original name 'Manor of Groves' was revived later on, Mr Barnard had a French chauffeur, he also had horse racing stables, his jockey used to go over to France at times with the horses.

After the 1914-1918 war the first six Council houses were built, these had bathrooms, some of the early occupants kept potatoes etc in the baths & still used the large zinc ones they were accustomed to; not until 1906 was there a bathroom in the whole village, Mr Silva who then came to live at Grove Lodge had just one fitted in.

When digging the foundations for Rowney Garden houses, Roman remains were found: 26 skeletons, plus numerous pieces of pottery, ornaments coins etc, as the remains were nearly all of females, it was considered the men were probably away at war, & this was a peaceful burying ground, although Rowney Gardens are in Hertfordshire, these findings were sent to an Essex Museum,

We are told years ago High Wyck was called "The little Hell" but things improved after Mr Johnson came, the chief crimes the police had to deal with were drunken fights, poaching, but a lot of petty pilfering was practised among children.

Each summer there used to be a Flower Service, after which the flowers were sent to a Parish in East London & distributed to the poor people living there.

During Harvest time women & children would congregate on the Village Green, & at 8 am when the Church bell was rung for Morning Prayer, they went off to the corn fields to glean, at the end of the season, a machine came to thrash the wheat, & afterwards, it could be ground into flour at the Millings in Sawbridgeworth.

Milk could be bought at the farms, new 2^d per quart & skimmed 1^d per quart, after a time new milk was brought round to the houses at 2^d per pint.

After the 1918 armistice, Mrs Watt, the well known Canadian Womens Institute organizer - was asked to come & explain the movement, this she did, & our own W.I. was formed in February 1919, This proved of great benefit to, not only its members but also to the whole village, by learning new crafts, & also helping financially with any worthy cause. For several years High Wyck held the Hertfordshire Trophy for the Best exhibition of handicrafts.

High Wyck is considered a healthy place many inhabitants living to a ripe old age, one woman was 102 when she died - this was before my time, Mrs Polle was her name,