

# **The Emergence of a** **Community**

**An Introduction to the Origins and Development of the  
'Thanington High Lanes' area outside Canterbury**

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An aerial view of the contemporary 'High Lanes' area

## The Origins of the Hilltop area (or 'Thanington High Lanes') and its Community

If you stand at the top of the University Road and look south west across the city to the hills beyond, one thing might strike you. It is that, apparently in the middle of nowhere, there is one line of houses running diagonally up a slope (but stopping well short of the summit). Whereas elsewhere, buildings are clustered together, here they are starkly on their own. So why should these houses (and the ones behind which are not really visible from the top of St Thomas's Hill) have been built there ? And why are there virtually no houses on the other side of the road ?

While there is much that we do not know, the answer to the first question seems to be that the houses are a chance by-product of the vicissitudes of English agricultural society over the last 250 years. This finally made largely unsettled related lands available in small packets which, for the first time, were purchased by ordinary people from Canterbury rather than by large scale farmers. The former were then able, between the two World Wars, to exploit the small plots for their own purposes. Hence history has produced an unusual community, involving houses at the top of Hollow Lane, along one side of both Iffin Lane and New House Lanes, along with the Stuppington Court farm complex and Upper Horton Farm.

Many call this area 'Hilltop' although it is actually on the side of a hill rather than on its top. In any case, it is unhelpful geographically, doing nothing to make it clear to outsiders exactly where it is which is why the Community Association had to add 'Canterbury' to its name to avoid confusion with other Hilltop associations such as those in High Wycombe. Anyway, I some time ago realized that the Cornish would probably have called our area 'Thanington High Lanes', given that, firstly, much of it is in the high ground of the South Ward of the Civil Parish of Thanington to the south-east of the Stour Valley, and, secondly, because it has developed along a series of lanes crossing the hills and providing access both to Canterbury and villages like Petham, making it very much a transit zone. So 'High Lanes' seemed to me appropriate and meaningful, even if it clashes with received notions.

Although, seen from afar, the area seems isolated and on its own, it actually has quite a community feel about it. Why is this? In fact, this somewhat scattered area is held together by a number of factors beginning with its relative isolation on the rural fringe of Canterbury and also to a number of social developments. These include its population's use of St Faith's Hall as a centre for social activity and organization (led by Hilltop Community Association) and being mostly in the South Ward of Thanington Civil Parish Council [TCPC]. Thus there is much evidence of local involvement in TCPC whereas contacts with the neighbouring parishes, to which fringes of the area belong, seem to have been virtually non-existent since the centres of gravity of Lower Hardres and Chartham were so far away. Conversely, other more distant sites, like Horton, Milton and Thanington

proper did have a place in the history of our area. This too is something which has probably helped to develop a sense of community over recent years.

### **An Overview**

This is because the High Lanes area is, in historical terms, quite a new development. If we go back into the distant past, it seems, as far as we know, that the area was largely uninhabited with only a few farms in the area. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many of these, with their fields, passed into the hands of large scale gentry landowners. However, this changed after the First World War when new forms of agricultural development began between Iffin and New House Roads (as they were then called). Out of these emerged a certain amount of residential development, often created by the first residents, and this despite the lack of facilities in the area. However, legislation has sometimes limited the areas where building could take place, a fact which answers the second question.

Development increased in the 1930s and especially after the Second World War. At the same time the residents responded to their situation by attracting new facilities and creating new institutions for their social life. Such change continued into more recent times as the fragmentation of holdings increased. The new community has also adapted to meet new challenges. All this seems to testify to the existence of a community spirit which was visible both to outsiders and residents. However, this has not prevented problems from emerging. Maintaining interest has often been difficult and not everyone has been drawn into shared activities, including opposing the imposition of thousands of houses on the west side of New House Lane, as envisaged by various local plans and developers.

This imprecise initial account draws on interviews, local histories and some written and printed records, some from residents and others from official sources. It tries to create a basic narrative which traces the essentially social process by which a community emerged. Unfortunately, we know virtually nothing about how national political events affected the area. Equally, because of the nature of the sources, it is often easier to show what we do not know than to prove what actually happened. And our memories of the past can vary. Nonetheless I have tried to sum up what is presently knowable about how a community of bricks and people emerged in Thanington High Lanes in the hope that others may be able to develop this in future. For, without doubt, there is more to be learned, particularly from residents themselves and their deeds.

### **The Long Term Past**

The Thanington High Lanes area, or parts of it, seems to have been used, possibly settled, for many centuries, albeit extremely very very sparsely. How do we know this? The answer lies in facts such as the 1949 finding of a neolithic axe at Upper Horton. There is also a Bronze Age tumulus in Iffin Wood. Moreover an Iron Age lynch pin has been

found on Iffin Meadow farm land, while Swarling has a burial site from around the same period, in fact dating from around the time of Caesar's invasion. However, there does not seem to have been much real settlement until Roman times proper. Before then the area was probably too heavily forested for easy settlement.

With the Romans a proper road - known as Stone Street because of its method of construction - was cut through from Durovernum (or Canterbury) to Portus Lemanus (or Lympne). When this got close to Canterbury it turned into the southern part of Iffin Lane. However, crop markings suggest that it did not actually continue all the way down Iffin and Hollow Lanes as is usually thought. In fact it seems that, in later ages, its access to Wincheap was changed. Thereafter, from the old Iffin farm site, it went straight on to Stuppington Lane and entered the town from that direction (and eventually linking up with the road from Wye in front of the Worthgate), possibly joining the end of the footpath that runs downhill from the junction of Hollow and Merton lanes. Today's Iffin Lane in fact meanders slightly to the west of the old road line.

And, as some residents are aware, there are also several Roman settlements in the area. Thus remains have been found near the 'Plantation' and, more importantly, under the A2 shortly before it crosses Hollow Lane. Here there was evidence of buildings, pits and a pottery kiln. Further south, in fields running uphill from Stuppington and Merton there is evidence of another settlement, roughly in line with the little unnamed lane at the top of the settled part of the New House Lane. Many coins and tiles have been found there and some residents believe there to have been both a villa and a fort. The former seems the most likely since, the settlement was probably too far east of Stone Street to be able to control it militarily. However, the Council's Archaeology Officer believes that this was actually a mediaeval cattle enclosure, the Roman idea being an invention of a long dead clerical antiquarian.

In any case the road must have helped to open up previously virgin woodland. The evidence of both a Roman settlement at Swarling and of Romano-British burials pottery, dating from 80-100 AD, at New House Farm reinforces this idea. Branching out from a road, surrounded by cleared margins, would have been much easier than trying to create clearings in the middle of a wooded nowhere. But we do not know how much land was reclaimed from the forest under the Romans. However, it is possible that some present day footpaths emerged at this time.

The coming of the Jutes, if indeed they were Jutes and modern authorities are not always convinced that there were, must have increased such opening up, since there was a cemetery and settlement on the hill above Horton Manor. More significantly, by AD 791 there was a settlement in the Great Stour valley at Thanington, a name many think means the pasture of the men of Thanet. It points to a staging point along the road to their summer pastures in Tenterden at which they could guard their sheep and cattle overnight. The settlement would have been small, given that there were then probably only 50,000 people in the whole of the modern county. Others attribute the name to a founder known as Teyna, who had a farmstead there. His people also apparently settled Teynham.

## **The Middle Ages and After**

By the time of the Norman Conquest some of the settlements in the area were clearly well established, and were therefore turned into feudal manors, many of them passing into the hands of the Archbishop. This was true of Horton, Milton, Thanington, Tonford and Iffin. The last, which means the settlement of the young, was there from 1086. It may have belonged to the family of a knight called Vitalis who is pictured in the Bayeux Tapestry and who founded the churches of St Edmund Ridingate and its successor the old St Mary Bredin. The mediaeval parish of St Mary Bredin was the only parish in the city which spread outwards out of the city into the country, going almost two miles to reach Stuppington. The latter was linked to a now lost manor called Dodingale (or Dungeon). In fact Merton Lane seems to owe its name to one passing mediaeval owner of the manor, one Elias de Merton, not to the Oxford college.

Churches seem to have followed the manors, as with the chapel of St Leonard in Iffin Manor which dates from 1185. Interestingly, about that time the Bailiff of Petham and Swarling Manors was one Geoffrey of Thanington which suggests both that something like New House Lane already existed and that the Thanington High Lanes area was already, to an extent, linked up. Indeed Iffin Manor was described as being in Thanington. St Nicholas Church, Thanington itself was originally a wooden Saxon building. It was rebuilt in stone in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and extended in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Most of our area was in the Lathe of St Augustine (previously Borowart) and the Hundred of Bridge and Petham, which again suggests that communication along the lanes was possible. Land on the other side of the Stour was in Westgate Hundred.

The new monasteries, like that of St Gregory, may have played a part in developing farming in the area. Later on the Eastbridge Hospital seems to have acquired land in Thanington High Lanes. However, it was not until the thirteenth century that most of the building took place. Stuppington (a possession of Christchurch Priory) is recorded in 1233, followed by Cockering in 1235 and New House Farm in 1270 while Iffin Manor was redeveloped in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. The area may have been affected by the Black Death and the Peasants Revolt of 1381 since some of those involved came from just south of Canterbury. Equally the Wars of the Roses may have hurt the area. Thus Iffin Manor seems to have abandoned in 1465 while Tonford Manor also had its problems.

Conversely, Milton Manor seems only to have emerged between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Little seems to be known about Merton Manor and it may have ceased to exist quite early, or been downgraded to being simply a farm without feudal influence or jurisdiction. The Lordship of Thanington, however, survived almost into the 1930s as a legal entity. It seems to have embraced much of the High Lanes area as well as land down the hill, although it probably got detached from any particular building such as Thanington Court.

Under the Tudors and Stuarts stability seems to have returned. There is no obvious evidence of disturbances during the Reformation and the Civil Wars even though much of the land was then in the hands of the Hales family who were involved in religious

conflict in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This could have produced upheaval but there is no evidence of it affecting the Lanes. In fact, the family were to be Lords of the Manor of Thanington from at least 1697 until the mid 1770s. At the same time farming seems to have developed over this period, from being mainly wheat and arable. Thus hops began to come in during the late 17th century. And some large farms also began to grow more fruit, mainly for the London market.

As to ownership, like Milton Manor, New House Farm passed into the hands of the Hales family by the 16<sup>th</sup> century which suggests it was an attractive proposition. However, they may not have farmed it themselves, preferring to rent the land out. In any case settlements were still very small, Milton having no more than 20 people and Thanington about 150. Moreover they were purely agricultural, the cloth manufacturing expansion of the times passing them by. And the Reformation probably led to the decline of some churches such as Horton Chapel, suggesting that the area was still very under-developed. Nor was there was no sign of any real unity in the area.

## **The Preludes: From the Eighteenth to the early Twentieth Century**

Some things began to change in the eighteenth century, a time when English society was expanding and large estates were being created. The main one in the area was the Gipps estate which, at its full extent, comprised lands in Bekesbourne, Thanington High Lanes and elsewhere. Its centre was Howletts. But the Milton Estate, based then on Cockering and Milton, which passed from the Hales family to the Bells, ought not to be forgotten. These new estates flourished for the best part of a century but, after 1870, British agriculture entered a period of difficulty just at the time that the area acquired its own local government

### **Eighteenth century Estates**

In 1775 the Hales family - who were then moving, possibly to Bifrons - sold Thanington Court to George Gipps MP. He was already the owner of New House Farm. He may even have lived in Thanington Court before moving to Hall Place in Harbledown, from where his wife came. Indeed, although the present Farm looks to have been built earlier, it could have been erected by Gipps in the 1770s, a few years before Iffin and Stuppington Farms were rebuilt.

Gipps, who was born in 1729, was the son of an Ashford stay-maker. He then became an apothecary and hop merchant in Canterbury. Thanks to this and his first wife's wealth, by 1780 he was able to become one of the two MPs for Canterbury as well as serving as an Alderman and, on occasion, Mayor. About this time he also became a partner in a bank run by a nephew, himself a Sheriff of Canterbury. This traded as Gipps, Simmonds & Gipps out of what is now the Lloyds Bank site in High Street, the bank being ultimately absorbed into the Lloyds' family.

By the time he died in 1800 George Gipps had assembled a good deal of land around the town. This meant that he also succeeded to the Lordship of Thanington and other manorial rights. His was not an isolated development but part of a general expansion of larger estates. This trend seems to have profited from the fact that small holders had been undermined by a depression earlier in the eighteenth century. It may also have owed something to the fact that the new style agriculture of the times was capital intensive. So men with money were required not small holders. The new estates also had to support social status and the things which went with it, such as cricket, notably at Kenfield, and to profit from the growth of turn-piking, which affected parts of Stone Street between 1750 and 1780.

In any case, one of George Gipps' children unsuccessfully tried to become a Conservative MP for Canterbury in the 1840s and 1850s while another, also called George, served as MP for Ripon between 1807 and 1826. He was ultimately to be based at Howletts, a house previously built in the 1780s and then owned by the Hales family, although he too may have lived at New House Farm at one stage. He was there in 1830 during the so called 'Swing Riots' against mechanization on the land when a threshing machine in Bekesbourne was burned. His lands eventually passed on to his grandson, George Bowdler Gipps JP who was also Lord of the Manors of Bekesbourne, Debden, Howfield and Thanington.

G.B.Gipps lived in Howletts until about 1910 although before then, he had started to sell off land, reflecting the difficulties then being experienced by English landed society. However he retained the Lordship of the Manor of Thanington. He and his father, yet another George, had earlier been instrumental in rebuilding St Nicholas both in the 1840s and again in the early 1880s. Howletts itself was sold off to the sons of Robert Burnett Ramsay who, though British born, had been a grazier in Queensland before becoming a Gipps tenant in 1883. The Ramsay family were also installed at Lee Priory and were to sell Howletts to John Aspinall in 1957.

At the same time as the first George Gipps was buying land, John Bell of Street End House and Bedford Square London, a Cambridge educated lawyer, academic and magistrate, who was born in Kendal in 1764, also began to build up another estate round Milton. The Lordship of Milton came into the hands of the family which was already well established in the district. His son Mathew was responsible for sponsoring the excavation in the 1840s of the Iffin archaeological site. John Bell and some of his family are buried in the undercroft of Milton Church. His grandson, Matthew George Edward Bell of Bourne Park, was also a magistrate. More importantly perhaps, he was an army officer of a (probably territorial) kind, rising to be a Lieutenant Colonel by 1919. In any case, he also continued to buy up land, including in September 1910, some of the Gipps' holdings in Thanington High Lanes, including New House Farm. This transfer was to be significant.

### **Nineteenth century changes**

Around this time Gordon Neame and the Wachter family owned much of Stuppington and



Merton farms. Neame seems to have sold some of his land, often used for cherries and other fruit, to the Ashendens in the 1850s. However, even then, few if any of these large scale landowners actually lived in, or worked, the farms. The land was leased out to tenant farmers as an investment. However, the owners could be called on to provide new facilities and it may have been thanks to this that a series of 'cottages' - actually semi-detached houses - were built on several farms in the 1880s. This was true of Upper Horton, New House Farm, Wincheap, Stuppington Hill and Merton farm. They may well have been needed because of a further interest in orchards and dairy farming for the London market, by then accessible by train, which required more labour. The switch to fruit was probably due to rising prosperity, the popularity of jam making and a malaise in hop growing.

There were other changes in the area in the second half of the 19th century. The building of St Augustine's Hospital thus led to Upper Horton being carved out as a separate farm from the old Horton estate. In the 1880s Milton Parish was merged with St Nicholas Church, at which point Milton Church - the Rector of which had, on occasions in the previous century, also been the Curate at St Nicholas - seems to have changed its dedication from St Nicholas to St John the Baptist. This would probably have been to avoid confusion. It was essentially a chapel of ease for the manor, with almost as many funerary memorials as worshippers.

Even so Thanington remained small. In 1870 there were probably only 43 inhabited houses and 209 inhabitants in the parish, according to returns for the Education Act. By 1890 Thanington Church Parish still only had no more than 680 people. It did, however, have a school which few other settlements did. This was along the Ashford Road. Whether any children living in the new farm cottages went there we do not know. Moreover, things were happening that brought it closer to the High Lanes.

More significantly, the area was caught up in a national restructuring of local government. Thus in 1894 a new Local Government Act created two new Thanington civil parishes, *Within* and *Without*. Both of these were actually well outside both the city walls and the main area of settlement in Wincheap, albeit the former was inside the city limits. Nonetheless, they would have been better called *Near* and *Far* Thanington, but some civil servant decided otherwise. No doubt he liked the romantic sound of the names, as later Councillors were to do. The former started half way along Wincheap and ended at a toll bar around the St Jacobs area while the latter went far up the hillside to the south west as well stretching westwards towards Ashford. The *Within* Parish lasted only a few years since it did not attract much interest. It was then absorbed into the city in 1912, leaving little or no trace.

Thanington *Without*, on the other hand, proved longer lasting, despite an uncertain start. Because it had less than the minimum required number of voters, it was initially run not by a Council but by a Parish Meeting of male parishioners. Theoretically the Meeting should have started in 1894 but in fact the first gathering did not actually take place until 1899. This was because, according to the Kentish Gazette, nobody turned up to the initial

meeting when it was called in 1894. This non-appearance would have prevented the taking of decisions and the holding of regular meetings. Only when other Parish Councils were having new elections in 1899 did things change and annual meetings started. The Meeting ran the Thanington Without Civil Parish until the population grew large enough to gain its own Parish Council in the mid 1930s.

The Meeting was then dominated by the big tenant farmers such as the Lillywhites, of Thanington Court, and the Miles brothers, of New House and Iffin Farms. They all also acted as administrators of the Poor Law, the predecessor of national assistance and a major element in local life throughout the country. Their role shows both that the High Lanes farms were able both to cooperate and to play a major role in the new parish. However, the Civil Parish remained a very formal and inactive body before 1914. Nonetheless, when the First World War broke out, the leading figures, including the two Miles, were made special constables in case there was any disorder. Quite what form this might have taken we do not know. Luckily the new constables seem never to have been called on to use their new powers during the four years of war. This was despite the stresses that the conflict must inevitably have placed on the district, as the War Memorial in St Nicholas shows. Unfortunately we do not know whether any of those listed there came from the High Lanes.

### **Problems on the land**

Yet, despite such developments, the situation of landowners was deteriorating. Competition from the USA and South America, made possible by the completion of transcontinental railways and the introduction of refrigerated ships, undercut British production especially of grain and meat. Dairy farming and fruit did better but, overall, returns fell and many landlords sought to divest themselves of land. Locally the value of farm output declined by a fifth between 1870 and 1911. This meant that rents and returns to landowners fell at a time when their expenses were rising. Hence, as we have seen, in July 1906 George Bowdler Gipps sought to sell his estates at auction in London. This was a preliminary to him moving from Howletts a few years later.

In fact he may have moved to a smaller residence in Thanington. This may have been why he held on to its Lordship, continuing to hold manorial courts at the 'Hop Poles Inn', now the Café Solo, to levy feudal dues when land changed hands as a result of sales or bequests. Some of the lands in the High Lanes area, later bought by Lt Colonel Bell were subject to this kind of quit rent.

The lots initially put up for sale in 1906 included New House Farm, Thanington Court, Tonford, and Howfield, together with land in Petham and around both Howletts and Bekesbourne. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the conditions, much of it failed to reach its reserve price and was withdrawn from sale. This was the case with New House Farm. Much of the land was then put back on the Canterbury market in July 1909 through E. Gardener, a local landowner and agent. 41 lots were made available, not just the earlier offerings but also land in Chartham, Harbledown and Wincheap. Amusingly, part of the

latter was then seen as having potential for a golf course.

While William Lillywhite (who already leased Thanington Court) bought Wincheap Farm and its hop gardens, New House Farm, on offer at £1,900, failed (like some of the other lots) to find a buyer. But this, like other lots, was, as we have seen, later bought up privately by M.G.E Bell. The farm had been tenanted, as we have already seen, as far back as 1894 by the Miles family. They also farmed both land in Cockering and, until 1911, Iffin Farm. In that year the latter was taken on by one James Gibbs, again presumably as a tenant. In 1914 and 1917 Bell also bought up more land in the area probably previously owned by the Eastbridge Hospital, and including the central portion of land to the south east of New House Lane. This was to prove a crucial step in bringing together the core High Lanes lands under one owner. Moreover, there was then no suggestion that it would be broken up or used for anything other than farming. What was still going on then was the accretion of large estates. These were then rented out to people like the Miles family which, as well as working Iffin and New House Farms, also farmed the land between the two Lanes as well.

By the beginning of the twentieth century in fact the High Lanes hillside was an area without any real suggestion of community. It was described as mainly 'productive arable' and pasture, with some 'capital grazing' for sheep and no doubt a good deal of woodland as well. It was, in other words, an area of poor, flinty and chalky soil. No doubt this somewhat isolated and unattractive nature helps to explain why it was not snapped up in 1906.

There were few if any hops in the Lanes, although there may have been some near where the Hall now stands, They were found more down Hollow Lane and, especially, on the main road, there were some highly reputed hop gardens, hence the name of the Hop Poles pub, now the Café Solo. In fact, Thanington was renowned for the quality of its hops. Even so the area was itself still underpopulated with 104 people in the Civil Parish and 825 in the Church Parish which went a good way along Wincheap towards the city. It was also probably quite a poor area, the Rateable Value of Thanington Without in 1905 being only £1834 and even after the war the Church was providing free coal to the poor of the Parish. So one commentator said that it was 'a tiny parish, scarcely worthy to be called a hamlet'. However, all this was to change and Bell's acquisitions were to prove a short term purchase since war was about to change things dramatically for the hillside lands and lanes.

## **The Real Beginnings: From One World War to Another**

The old Thanington pattern of isolated farms above a centre of gravity along the Ashford/Thanington Roads was soon to change thanks to the underlying weaknesses of English landed society and what were to be the difficulties of market gardening in the inter-war years. In fact, just as there was development down in the Stour Valley, so a

small new community began to emerge on the hillside to the south. Although life was difficult there, people made a go of it and, by the outbreak of the Second World War, there were some. The ending of quit rents in 1935 may have made buying easier by then. houses between New House Road and Iffin Road. And this was not just a matter of a few houses but of an emerging community. This was soon well integrated into the Civil Parish of Thanington.

### **The crucial sales**

On 20 September 1919 Finns of Canterbury sought to auction the 1350 acres of the Milton Estate for Lt Col. M.G.E Bell. This included land in Milton, Thanington, Nackington, Petham and Lower Hardres parishes. The auction was part of a nation wide sell off of land due to rising costs and falling agricultural income plus the imposition of death duties. In fact, in 1885 the Duke of Marlborough had said that “were there any effective demand for the purchase of land, half the land in England would be in on the market tomorrow” With revenues briefly rising due to the war many held off selling but, from 1918 death duties had major impact due to the high casualty rate amongst landed families in World War I. This further undermined the position of their class because it provided a large number of the many young officers who died. Tax rises and the withdrawal of war time guaranteed prices for grain also had an impact. All this led to a huge sell off of landed estates, often to sitting tenants. In fact one quarter of all land in England may have changed hands at this time making it the largest transfer of property since the dissolution of the monasteries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

While New House Farm, described, as we have seen, as comprising arable, pasture and woodland, with three buildings, was not sold, the arable land between Iffin Road and the ‘road from Canterbury to Petham’, as it was then usually known, was sold at auction in September 1919. The lot, then rented out to the Miles brohrs, amounted to 68 acres 1 rod and 21 perches (on which tithes were payable to Thanington Church as was a quit rent to the Manor of Thanington). We do not know what the price was.

The land was bought by one William Henry Vipan, a name which was still remembered by some older residents at the end of the last century. He was a well-to-do retired surgeon then living in Canterbury. His residence was a large new property (having been built before 1913), known as Castle House, 37 Castle Street which later became the (now lost) Norman Castle Hotel. The site is now covered by the Castle Street Indoor car park.

Vipan had been born of good family in Soham in Cambridgeshire in 1842 and, after training at Guys Hospital, had probably lived and practised in Southend and Hampshire before moving, about 1896, to Horton Court outside the city. Although he was then described as a farmer-surgeon, he had probably retired from both occupations by then, as he is not recorded at the K&C and used a bailiff to manage the land he had bought south of New House Farm, probably from the Eastbridge Hospital. This purchase probably explains why he was also interested in the adjacent land in Thanington High Lanes when

it came on the market. He also owned land at Swarling Manor. By the time of his main purchase, some twelve years after he moved into Canterbury, he was officially described as a 'retired surgeon'. He died on 23 January 1925 and was buried in St Nicholas Churchyard. In his life time he was a considerable Tory activist with a very strong interest in agriculture, having been an early and forceful member of the NFU.

In any case, on 20 September 1919 he (together with a sleeping partner called Philip Currie from Dorset, of which nothing is known) acquired the 68 acres east of the road to Petham from Lt Col. Bell and Sir Charles Sackville-West, another senior army officer and probably also a sleeping partner. This was to prove a crucial decision because, rather than adding to other farm land and being kept as one largish farm, the purchase was, within six months, divided up into seven smaller lots of about ten acres each and raidily sold off. Sale was presumably by private treaty as no adverts seem to have survived. Interestingly, the sale excluded mineral rights which remained with Bell and Sackville-West. Maybe they hoped that the recent discovery of the East Kent coalfield might be prifitably repeated in Thanington High Lanes.

Nonetheless, the lots seem to have sold rapidly, no doubt because of the desire of tenants and others to get land of their own, in line with the national trend. Others may have seen their purchase as part of the 'land fit for heroes to live in" promised after the war. However, in at least one case Dr Vipian seems to have advanced the money for the purchase, providing a full mortgage of £200 for the ten acre plot. This must have been very helpful for the very modest purchasers. It also suggests that Dr Vipian did not see his dealings as simply the chance for a quick profit or as a means of paying off other obligations. Given his strong views on agriculture it is probable that that these dictated his decision to divide up the land. He may have hoped that, by doing this, he could help revive agriculture at least through small holdings. Given that he was in his 80s he may simply have wanted to get his opurchase off his hands. In any case, housing does not seem to have been intended.

In fact, his will, drawn up the previous year, shows no suggestion that he felt any obligation to help post war reconstruction or agricultural development. It is actually is obsessed with his family, including his son who he clearly did not trust. He left his three children, who included two probably unmarried daughters, a tidy sum of £15,601 gross. This would be worth just under a million pounds today.

Whatever, Vipian's reasons, it was his purchase and its subsequent division and sale which ultimately made possible the development of a new community. Without it the land could easily have been absorbed into neighbouring farms and remained undeveloped. So, by taking advantage of the new availability of land (following the war and the agricultural depression), and especially by breaking it up and selling it to a very different kind of person from the big landowners of the past, he is, in a way, the grandfather of 'Hilltop'. Had he kept the land as a single entity then the history of the area would have been very different, and much less developed.

Of course, it was not inevitable that there should have been building after the sale. Other factors were to explain why this happened. The plots (most of which were then, as we have seen, being leased by George Miles) were transferred to new owners between 11 and 31 March 1920. We know that the initial buyers and their purchases were as follows, working up the hill from the junction of Hollow Lane and New House Lane:

- 1 Amy Christian Head: 5 acres (31 March 1920)
- 2 George James Ford: 10 acres (11 March 1920)
3. Thomas Moat Tucker: 10 acres (11 March 1920)
4. Percy Henry Hoare 10 acres (11 March 1920)
5. Charles Baker & Fred Baker: 10 acres (11 March 1920)
6. Percy Adolphus Tolputt: 10 acres (25 March 1920); and
7. Edward Gibbs & Albert Edward Gibbs: 13 acres 1 rod and 21 perches (31 March 1920).

Of these, two plots were sold on very rapidly, the smallest probably being sold on to one Percy Southfield in the early 1920s while the Ford plot seems to have gone to a builder from Wincheap called David Amos. 'Tommy' Tucker was described as a labourer. When he died early in 1940, his plot was sold off by his executor Edmund Lillywhite, the son of William, who then worked Wincheap Farm. It was bought in December of that year by Arthur Legge, a builder's foreman and former Parish Councillor, then living in Iffin Lane and known locally as a poultry farmer. The price was £150. This lower price reminds us that farming continued to be difficult in the inter-war years. Indeed the lack of facilities rather required people who were willing to become pioneers of a sort. Interestingly, New House Farm was finally sold off to a local tenant farmer called King in 1927, whose daughter married Fred Hincliff.

### **The pioneering phase**

The initial purchasers also seem to have been ordinary Canterbury people, often living in Wincheap, which may explain how they knew that land was available on the hillside. Their motive for buying was not development but, as one long time resident says, to be able to live off the land. Thus the Southfields raised chickens, and, less successfully, sheep. Their eggs were sold to a visiting carrier. They also sold clover and other foodstuffs for horses belonging to a Mr Pope who farmed on the opposite side of Hollow Lane from Wincheap Farm. And some of the plots were soon in operation as market gardens, sometimes providing produce for their own shops, whether cabbages, potatoes, fruit or even eggs. This was the case with the Bakers who had a greengrocer's business in Church Street St Pauls and the Hoare plot which supplied the family business in Union Street. By the late 1930s several residents of Iffin Lane were also described as small-holders, poultry farmers or greengrocers. The main orchard area went to Tucker and Hoare. There may, by then, as noted also have been a few hops grown, somewhere near where St Faith's now stands.

Not all the purchasers actually lived on their land at the start. Some, however, used

ex-army huts then being sold off by Ministry of Munitions after war, possibly coming from a sale at Shornecliffe on 25 February 1920. Four of these huts were cut in half and then brought up on carts, three going into Iffin Lane ('The Bungalow', 'Fairview' and 'Orchard View'). There was also one in the bottom part of New House Road, which was later replaced as were those in Iffin. More orthodox houses followed in the early 1920s, built by the Southfields, the Tolputts, the Tuckers (in Greenlands) and, later the Hoares. By 1930 there were about 18 houses in New House Road (as it was initially called), including some in what is now the Close, and rather fewer in Iffin, although this seems to have developed first. Some of these were built on slices of the original plots, and increasingly the land sold off was that fronting on to the Lane.

Thus Tucker sold the plot on which Sandford was built (the name coming from the architect who donated plans as a wedding present to the Knotts). 'Mulroy' (now no 51) went to Captain E.A. Smith, an engineer of Petham, while 'Belmont' and 'the Haven' were built in what had been the garden of 'Holmewood' (now 'Torn an Forth') Some of the initial purchasers, notably the Bakers and the Tolputts, also seem to have bought land beyond their initial ten acres. The Gibbs, who may have been related to earlier tenants of Iffin Farm, possibly added their 13 acres to Iffin Farm since there seems to have been no building on their land.

There seem to have been three reasons for the new building. One was the desire for new 'rural' homes close to Canterbury which encouraged the emergence of a market. This enabled people to recoup some of their initial outlay and pay off any loans they may have incurred. The second, and more important, reason was the fact that some of the initial purchasers were themselves builders. Thus Amos and Tolputt both sold off land and built new properties, sometimes doing this to finance home improvements of their own. Thus it was the former who built the old wooden 'Greenlands' for Tommy Tucker.

In the latter's case he reworked some of the houses at the bottom of the Lane. He also used materials from a French Jesuit educational institution, installed in Hales Place overlooking the city in St Stephens and which was sold off in 1928, to build concrete houses at the top of the lane on the land which he had bought from Dr Vipan. He also sold off a certain amount in the second half of the decade to a former miner called Troup. Tolputt was also known as a 'dealer' and went round the streets buying and selling. He probably used a shed known as the 'Old Tabernacle' as one of his workshops. This was situated in what was then nicknamed the Red Road - the inlet leading to Guest's farm - because, as can still just be seen, it was surfaced with red bricks and dust. His main residence was eventually in 'St Omer', now no 59, part of which he once rented out. William Boughton, who was to be a pillar of the Community from the 1930s, was also a builder and erected his own house.

The third, and equally important reason, for development was that it was proving very hard to make a go of market gardening. When people moved in the area was described as "rough, wild and open" with few facilities so it had to be fully cleared and made ready for vegetable produce. But this needed water, which was not easily available,

save for one or two wells and these were not always available for general use. For a while, in fact, water had to be lugged up on carts from the waterworks whether for plants or for work on the houses being erected. And it was often touch and go as to whether the plants got enough water. The first houses thus had large rain water tanks with crude filters on their roofs to provide their water. Life in the two new lanes really did need a pioneering spirit. And charity grants suggest that, no more than the Ashford Road area, was it a very prosperous place. Some residents who remembered those days certainly looked back on it as an extremely hard and difficult period.

This deprivation helps to explain why there were so few facilities in the area. Indeed, such was the lack of services in the Lanes that residents claimed that it was called Thanington Without because it was without all the things they wanted. It did, from 1927, have a shop but not much else. The shop, known as May Cottage Stores was a wooden hut in the front garden of 'Maycott' or what is now 34 New House Lane. Prior to the Second World War this was run by Mrs J. Austen (mother of Doris Boughton) and her husband Victor, a victim of a gas attack in the 'trenches'. There was also a library of kinds nearby, open for an hour on Tuesday evenings in the old Mission Hall in Hollow Lane, which was situated opposite the entrance to Hollowmede.

But for the rest, the area was indeed deprived. From the mid 1930s demands were made for a phone box, for street lighting, for piped water and for a school bus. Only the call for piped water was successful. This was provided in the later 1930s when pipes were laid. Sewage, however, depended on septic tanks until well after the Second World War. Some residents have unhappy memories of digging them out as late as the 1950s.

Electricity was demanded in 1934 and again in 1939 but did not arrive until the late 1940s. So linked hopes for street lights, six in New House Road and one in Iffin Lane, came to nothing. People apparently depended on carriers such as Mr Scrivener and Mr Goodman bringing lighting oil and soap up to the new houses. However, some road signs were installed and it is probable that the road was metalled (or gravelled) before the last war. Yet there was then so little traffic that grass still grew in the middle of the carriageway. This was maintained by a road sweeper called Revell who lived on the site of what is now 'Westwinds'. In fact there seem to have only two cars owned by residents before 1939 along with a couple of lorries or carts.

The lanes also began to get names. In the documents of the early 1920s they were still referred to as the road 'to Petham' and 'Stone Street'. But, by late 1920s, when the line of the former was altered, it was referred to as either New House Farm Road or just New House Road. The naming may have been done by Mrs Southfield who had to give the GPO some indication of where to deliver mail, emphasizing how rough and ready things then were. The choice of name presumably reflected the fact that it went past the farm (whose own designation is lost in the mists of time) but it could also have been a nod to the fact that new building was then going on.

However, there was no numbering and names seem to have been changed quite frequently so that it is difficult to know precisely how many there then were. What we now



think of as the Close was then known as New House Lane. The next inlet was, as we have seen, known as the Red Road. However, no name seems to have been given to the next inlet up the hill, where there was then, in any case, only one house, a bungalow known as Clydebank. Iffin Lane seems to have settled down as a 'Lane' although it too was often known as a Road, for a while and could be spelt Iffen.

### **A Developing Community**

Some of this may have been due to the fact that the emerging community was quite active in the Civil Parish. By 1935, as we have already seen, Thanington was big enough to justify an appeal to Kent County Council to endow it with a Council instead of just an annual Meeting. This application was successful and the Parish Council thus came into being. Its first Chairman was F.G. Leigh, a retired sanitary engineer, of Dunrovin (32 New House Close) who moved in sometime during 1930-31. He had previously chaired the Parish Meeting and been active in its affairs, apparently riding round the area on a large tricycle. Leigh was to serve as Chairman until 1939-40 and remained on the Council until 1946. He also represented the parish on Bridge Blean Rural District Council, then the main local authority for the area north and south of Canterbury. The Lanes also had other councillors including Percy Hoare and, as we have seen, Arthur Legge of Orchard View, Iffin Lane. They both served in 1935-37. William Knott, who joined the Council in 1935, was to be the Council's longest serving member.

These processes of change and expansion were not unique. In the late 1920s both New House Farm and Iffin Farm were finally sold by the Milton Estate which had been running them under Reynard J. Cooper of Cooper & Wachter as a Bailiff. The first went, as already noted, to the King family, who were related by marriage (and by origin as butchers) to the Ashendens of Cockerling Farm and Thanington House (later Thanington Hotel and now, sadly, the Canterbury Hotel) while the second was bought by the Mounts. At the same time there was a good deal of building, both private and public, down on the A 28, with the beginnings of the Council Estate on land in part reclaimed by the City from Thanington Without.

Another change came with the death of George Bowdler Gipps on 12 November 1929. As his only son had died in action at sea in the War, the family thereafter disappeared. Following this the Manor Court lapsed although residents were amazed to be told that the quit rents on their property could be redeemed by one off payments. This news caused much angst and amazement amongst people in the area who had not known their property was still 'feudal'. Tithes also disappeared after the mid-1930s.

One of the strange things is that, in all this, there was - as we noted at the start - no development on the north western side of New House Road. The reason for this seems to have been that KCC placed a block on this through a Restriction of Ribbon Development Order of 19 May 1937 made in pursuance of the 1935 Ribbon Development Act Section 2. This banned development on the fringes of narrow lanes on road traffic grounds. The order covered New House Road from the Chartham Downs junction to the

junction with Stone Street at the City boundary. Unfortunately its exact terms are now lost. It is possible that the Lillywhites of Wincheap Farm, and others then applied for compensation because the Order prevented them from erecting any new buildings close to the roadside.

The order remained in force until at least 1949 but may then have been superseded by one of the post war Town and Country Planning Acts. The Act itself was finally repealed in 1989. Long before then precedent, and the strength of Wincheap and New House Farms, helped to ensure that there was no new development on the city side of New House Road. There is no evidence to suggest that a similar block existed in Iffin Lane although one resident of Hollow Lane claims that there was a ban on building behind the phone box because there was a spring there which fed the waterworks.

Despite this, it is clear that there was the beginnings of a small community of perhaps 50 or 60 people. Amongst the houses in New House Lane, not so far mentioned, they lived in 'The Nest', 'May Bungalow', 'Sunnyside', 'Tower View', Bankside, Noranda, Hereitis, Highlands, Heytor, Pallanza, Mostyn, Greenways, 'Fairview', 'Orchard Close', 'A la Montée', 'Sunnyview' and 'Kaysashwell' plus, in Iffin, 'Wisteria Cottage', 'St Marguerite', 'The Hideaway', 'Turramurra' and 'Woodside'. In fact development was probably more restricted to these two roads than has subsequently become the case. And we do not know if the community then included Stuppington or the one new house in upper Hollow Lane.

In any case, it was still a modest area. Thus, as we have seen, there was apparently only a couple of private cars plus a lorry or two before the war. Yet it was an active and self aware community even if local Directories seemed uncertain whether to classify it as part of Thanington or as an integral part of the city. Getting to the city was not that easy so people had to work together to improve their lives. The fact that children had to walk long distances to school may also have helped the community spirit, enhancing a sense of shared hardship.

### **The Second World War**

This was to be reinforced by the impact of the Second World War. This was brought home no doubt by the fact that, as the war memorial in St Nicholas shows, people from round about lost their lives whether as combatants or civilians. Some people along the Ashford Road were in fact killed by air raids. And no doubt many more served in the forces. Whether any of those whose names are recorded on the War Memorial in St Nicolas' Church came from the High Lanes is not known.

In part it would also have been brought home by the fact that New House Farm was a Home Guard post, based on the Nissen Hut which still stands below 77 New House Lane. Personnel - who were always in short supply - used to bunk down in the farm. There was also an Air Raid Precaution hut on the corner of the Red Road, while on the field opposite there was an army gun and some army tents. This was probably another anti-aircraft battery along with the one stationed on Upper Horton Farm, where Nissen huts still

survive. Apparently some houses in the lane were hit by the shrapnel the guns created while the soldiers would provide local children with the odd hot meal.

One resident also remembers that telegraph poles were once placed in the field facing the Lane to stop German gliders from landing in case of an invasion. Equally, there were barrage balloons tethered in the grounds of Wincheap School, though this apparently did not prevent it getting bombed. At least one house had its own Anderson shelter. And the congregation of St Nicholas were given instructions on what to do if there was an air raid during a service.

The war also made an impact thanks to things like a flying bomb landing near the Waterworks (or in the woods opposite Upper Horton) a rear gun turret coming down near Iffin Lane and, so it would seem, a Spitfire crashing at the entrance to New House Farm. A number of high explosive bombs also fell between Iffin Lane and Nackington Road. Dog fights and Baedeker raids were also visible overhead at times. And many residents also recall large flotillas of RAF bombers, with their fighter escorts, flying overhead on their outward path to the continent and fighters limping back. V2 trails were also visible on occasion.

Some of the empty plots in the middle of New House Lane were also used as allotments during the war. Then, for a few days before D Day a Canadian battalion was stationed near Hands Wood, just south of the bridle way between New House Lane and Iffen Lane. And no doubt the war had other, less visible, impacts on the new community and its spirit. There is thus a report of a VE Day party, for the whole Road, held in the Red Road with ice cream supplied by Jack Short, manager of Jackson's scrap metal merchants in Canterbury. Presumably he lived somewhere nearby. So, clearly, the War did not undermine the new community. Indeed, it may actually have encouraged it. And it probably also helped people to start thinking about the future.

## **Post War Consolidation**

In the 40 years following the end of the Second World War the Thanington High Lanes community saw a fivefold consolidation of its physical and social existence. To begin with, the pattern of farming began to change. Secondly, there were major changes in housing. Along with this came, on the one hand, the increasing availability of cars which significantly changed the nature of the area and its life, and, on the other, the provision of new facilities. Finally, its community life took on a more institutionalised form, thanks to the erection of St Faith's. Then, by the mid 1980s, if not before, this consolidation began to slow down somewhat as post war dynamism ran down. However, this was far from being the end of the story.

## **The agricultural side**

Although the main farms in the area remained in place they were to change in several ways. Wincheap Farm, which was a varied operation with hops at the bottom and arable plus sheep (with some cows) in the fields west of New House Lane, remained in the hands of the Lillywhite family until the 1960s when it eventually passed to the Howlands. Stuppington, Iffin and New House Farms all began to move into intensive fruit farming, at the expense of arable. The last in fact moved into both 'Pick Your Own' and into association first with the East Kent Packers' organization and then with other similar bodies. For a while it was also linked to Iffin Farm which passed from the Mounts to the Kings in the early 1970s. However, Iffin was soon sold off, due to family problems, and went its own way. Upper Horton Farm also grew 'Pick Your Own' strawberries at one stage. Conversely the Merton farm lands to the east of Iffin, which had been given over to fruit, began to revert to arable.

What was perhaps more significant, was that between the two main lanes, a new fruit farm emerged, starting a little above the Close and running up to the 'Clydebank lane' as well as through to Iffin Lane. This was built up by the late Ken Guest and his family. Beginning in 1951, after working for Finns and having started out life on the Ashford Road, he bought six acres from the Bakers, This was followed by purchases from the Hoare plot and from others, possibly successors to Legge, called Butterfield and Knife. The latter was himself a small holder with pigs who, lacking a boar, brought his sows up the lane to the Guest's boar to be serviced.

But, along with livestock, the farm became one of the last cherry orchards in the Canterbury area, and expanded to take over orchards previously farmed by the Hoares, which initially included rows of conference pears, French plums and soft fruit. The farm also supplied fresh eggs and other produce to residents. The main crop became cherries. Unfortunately, the measures needed to protect the cherries against birds did not always go down well with other residents.

Number 76 was also given planning permission in 1982 to become a small holding although this did not happen. A Dutch farmer did, however, grow lettuces in the Plantation area where there were also other unsuccessful efforts at farming. All this helped to keep a rural element at the heart of the community. And some residents still remember that there were then dew ponds around while the fields still had proper boundaries so that rain water did not run down the highway.

## **Building work**

While this was happening, the extremities of the new farm were becoming more developed. In fact between 1945 and 1985 over 80 new homes were built in the area. So, whereas one resident remembers that there used to be many empty plots on the Lane, this became much less common. Some of this development came through the selling off of part of existing small plots for houses. This was very much the case with parts of Iffin Lane and the 'Clydebank' lane. The latter went from one to three and

eventually five houses by the 1980s, the size of plots getting smaller as the process went on. There was also infilling in the Red Road and New House Lane itself where a builder called Kelk put up at least five houses in the 1960s. Hollow Lane was also affected by this process of fragmentation, partly because the land was sold off by an unsuccessful farmer-builder called Murphy.

At the same time, a number of houses were considerably changed by their new owners. New exteriors and extensions were common. Indeed the wooden Clydebank turned into a brick bungalow in the early 1950s while 'Westwinds' replaced an earlier residence. This happened in other places. It all meant that names could often change and are not easy to correlate with the present numbering. At one stage the Close was numbered as part of the Lane which means that, since the renaming of the Close (which led to it having its own numbering) there has been a gap in the numbering of houses in the Lane. Those who are interested in this and the houses can find a listing on the Parish Council website. Corrections and changes can be suggested to the Clerk or the writer.

The major consolidation, however, was in the completion of what was then New House Lane but was to become the Close. Bridge-Blean Council renamed this as such in 1967 when the Road itself was formally reamed as the Lane. This may have reflected the fact that the roadway was still very rough and ready. There were a number of houses in what was to become the Close before the war but the track serving them petered out some hundred yards from the main road, thus justifying its title of a 'lane'. Then, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this changed when a sixteen bungalow development was built by Cardy beyond the track, ending with a turning circle at the A firm called Iffin Lane end. This was probably built on land originally owned by the Amoses and then sold on. Peak Developments also apparently built bungalows between the old houses and New House Road.

Owners of the older houses complained first about what this was doing to their track and then about the fact that, when the Rural District Council agreed to make up the Close in 1972, all houses had to share the costs. A meeting was held with KCC in February 1973 to clarify the situation. This seems to have been successfully done and the Close settled down happily enough. By then both the Close and the Lane had been remetalled. However, many of the houses in the Close are apparently still subject to a covenant not to raise pigs, possibly to protect existing pig farmers from competition or infection.

The following year there was an application for planning permission to build 30 homes somewhere in Iffin Lane but this never materialised. Nonetheless, by the late 1970s development in both lanes had become more continuous and modern. In the course of this, a number of old passage ways, usually running behind gardens, were subsumed into the gardens of new houses. This was the case, for instance, south of the third inlet to New House Lane. However, with one exception, there was still no building on the city side of the Lane. The exception was 'Windy-Ridge', a property built,

after much argument with Bridge Blean planners, as a farm manager's house for the King's. This suggests that, by then, the Ribbon Development Order had finally lapsed.

### **The Coming of the Car**

Part of the development was clearly due to growing prosperity. This encouraged a trend, first seen in the 1930s, towards the creation of a wider and more varied social order in the area. Purchasers were less local than in the past and came from different social backgrounds. All this both reflected and promoted car use so that some front gardens became given over to parking. The new houses in the Close, of course, all came with garages. Indeed, their availability was one of the things which made such properties saleable and usable, there still being no public transport in the area. However, it is remarkable how many people do not use their garages for their cars!

Cars made an impact in many other ways at this time. Increasingly cars became more affordable and accessible, leading to a growth of those using the Lanes. The refusal of bus companies to come up our way encouraged the use of cars. As a result there were unsuccessful calls for a 30 mph limit in both 1954 and 1974. There was also a demand for road markings, for instance a white line near New House Farm, none of which were acted on at this time. However, the central turning zone was established at the junction with Hollow Lane in 1984. In the 1960s, on two occasions the question was also raised as to whether the roads should not be widened and proper lay-byes created. This linked to new development and facilities and also reflected annoyance at the way that kerbs and pathways were being eaten into and mud spread on the roads. Indeed a public meeting was once held to protest against the impact parking was having opposite numbers 37 to 39 New House Lane.

Road safety was also a problem, especially with a crash of lorries in Hollow Lane which threatened children walking to school. This was one reason why in the 1950s there was much interest in getting a proper footpath to town for children and others. Eventually, despite objections from environmentalists, a high level path was agreed and the land was made available by Edmund Lillywhite of Wincheap Farm in return for diverting a path which ran straight across his land. This was constructed at a cost of £2,500 in 1959 but it soon caused problems because of a lack of safety railings which took time to install. The path also rapidly became overgrown. It could also be misused by young cyclists. Car usage also tended to reduce the number of children and others who walked down the lanes.

The state of the roads also became a major cause of concern as traffic increased. With the road now clearly metalled, it being further chipped and rolled in 1980, water increasingly tended to run down the carragwe way towards the city. This continued even though a soakaway was installed in February 1964. There was also concern about the state of Hollow Lane where rubbish was often dumped (attracting rats), chalk and stones slipped into the roadway and the trees grew too close overhead, reducing light. Nonetheless, while the motor car brought the community

closer to Canterbury, it also increased awareness of the way transit and parking affected the Lanes. So it both helped and hindered the development of community feeling.

### **New Facilities**

Probably because of the car, the community also lost as well as gaining facilities in these years. By the 1950s the shop was being run by Mrs Goldrup, a distant relation of the Boughtons. She then sold up when her husband died leading to a number of owners taking over, none of whom seem to have been able to meet the challenge of the new supermarkets. In May 1955 for instance, a Mr Parr from the shop approached the Civil Parish for support in an application for sub post office, as requested in a petition by residents. Unfortunately this was turned down in mid 1956 because it was under two miles from the existing Post Office in Wincheap. By the time the shop was revived by the Richards, who hoped in 1973 to get an off licence, it was probably too late and the shop closed a few years after. It was later, after some rebuilding, hoped to make it a day centre for the elderly but this never took off.

Against this must be set things like a telephone box, street numbering and the provision of mains sewage. The idea of having a phone box, which had been sought before the war, was renewed in 1946. But the GPO, as it then was, would only install one if there was a subsidy from the Parish Council. This it was not at first prepared to give. But in 1948 it agreed to do so, only to find soon after that, happily the government was making funds available so that the subsidy was not needed. Thereafter the phone box continued to serve the community for many years, despite vandalism. This started early so that in 1968 thought was given to having it moved up the road to St Faith's where it would be less hidden from view. This never happened and the increasing availability first of land lines and then of mobiles meant that it was soon largely abandoned, even by vandals, eventually in the new century it was taken out altogether without any public opposition.

The idea of renumbering had been mooted in 1944 and seems to have partially existed, informally, before the War. This would explain the running round of New House Road numbers into what was then New House Lane. However the real impetus for change came from the Civil Parish Council which, in May 1964, called for New House Lane, New House Road and Iffin Lane to be renumbered. The proposal was referred to Bridge-Blean RDC which agreed to the first two suggestions and erected the requisite name plates. However, Iffin Lane was never given numbers. As already suggested dealings with the GPO helped to turn New House Road into New House Lane. However, a good deal still remains unclear about the whole business of renaming and numbering.

The name Close - for what had previously been known informally as New House Lane - was suggested to Bridge-Blean by the Parish Council in February 1967 in conjunction with planning application for the 16 bungalows. This change may have

been to make the new properties more saleable. It certainly made them more identifiable. It could also have ended the problem of traffic turning into the track, thinking this was where the main road went, and not realising it was a cul-de-sac. Calling it a Close might have made this clearer to drivers.

However, the Council told a parishioner at an Annual Assembly that it was GPO who wanted the changes. The proliferation of houses may have made it feel that there would be too many names to be easily located. It was possibly also because of the way numbers tended to get mixed up because the existing informal numbers in the Lane went round into the Close. However, instead of making numbers jump across the Close, the numbering of the upper part of the Lane started where the old numbers left off. So while the Close got a rational system of numbers, the Lane was left with a gap. Not surprisingly the GPO apparently went on making mistakes about which numbers were where, so that mail was still misdelivered. Later infilling has complicated matters, at both ends of the Lane, but there has never been any stomach for a wholesale and more logical renumbering.

Drainage came in later in the 1960s thanks to public pressure in 1965. This led to a public meeting with the Bridge-Blean engineer. Drainage schemes were laid before the Annual Parish Assembly (as the general meeting was called by then) in 1966-67. Work started the following winter but the contractors went bankrupt and another firm called Bowzell was successfully called in during early 1967 to finish job. This was completed by 1968 and cess pits were, at last, left behind.

In the 1950s and 1960s other facilities were considered. Thus there was regular pressure for a bus service, such as existed in the North Ward. But either the cost was likely to be too much or companies like East Kent Road Cars and Drews refused to reroute their services. There was also in late 1952 a call for the old library to be restored. And it seems to have started up, in St Faith's no doubt, the next year. Unfortunately, by the winter of 1960 it was reported that "Mr Goddard could no longer look after it". A meeting held but this produced no volunteers to take over responsibility and it seems to have lapsed for a while. However, by the mid 1970s KCC was paying the Church rent for using the Hall as a Library. This must have ceased by the beginning of the next decade when the Mobile service expanded.

Consideration was also given to having gas installed in the area in 1961-2 but the cost was so large that the idea was not preceded with. Equally, while children were often allowed to play in the field opposite St Faith's after lambing, there was no children's playground. The idea was frequently mooted but none of the local farmers were, into the 1980s, willing or able to provide any land for this even though a grant was made for equipment by the local Lottery. Equally, the idea of a playing field opposite the hall, once promised by Lillywhite, never materialized. But demands for a larger post box were successful.

And, while electricity supply, which was anticipated when new houses were being built in Iffin Lane in the late 1940s, became a norm, the community failed to



agree on the provision of street lights. The idea of having them was renewed in the late 1940s and early 1950s but public meetings in 1947 and April 1951 voted against the idea. Subsequent enquiries in the 1960s also led nowhere and it was not until the late 1970s that the Parish Council decided to act and signed an installation contract. This was resisted by residents who signed a petition against it. However, a referendum in 1979 showed 72 in favour and 43 against. Nonetheless, since the idea was to have lights on existing poles, 'way leave' for their installation had to be sought and this was more often than not refused. Intrusion into what some residents saw as the 'rural' nature of the Lanes seems to have been the main reason for rejection although they would also have impinged on some specific houses.

So, in the end only three lights were actually installed. These were in New House Lane at a cost of £700. The whole affair got very heated and unpleasant, leaving the Parish Council and the proponents of the scheme somewhat bruised. This was probably the least happy experience of the period. And it showed that there were limits to the depth and unity of community feeling.

### **Institutional Development**

Despite this the community was able to institutionalize its existence in several ways. To begin with, in 1947 the Parish Council area was divided into two and a separate South Ward was created, and two councillors were allocated to it. This came into effect in 1948 along with minor changes to its boundaries. The Parish also attracted charitable donations. What it did was reported on notice boards, situated first at Homewood and then, after vandalism, in front of St Faith's. In the 1950s some St Nicholas PCC meetings were held in St Faith's. Annual Civil Parish Assemblies also began to be held there on an alternating basis from the 1960s. The Hall was then used as a polling station in replacement of the Hollow Lane Mission Hall which was not used after the 1950s. By the 1970s Councillor Knott wanted St Faith's to be used for ordinary Parish Council meetings, in alternation with ARSC, but this did not happen. Only occasionally did the Parish Council leave the Ashford Road for St Faith's. So, when it came to celebrations like the Coronation and the Silver Jubilee the South Ward, following the example of VE Day, went its own way, organizing its own events and often raising more money than its larger northern neighbour.

All this became important when Parish Councils were invited into the town and country planning process. Planning matters were discussed in passing from 1959 and from January 1962 the Rural District Council regularly made brief details available to the Parish Council so that it could comment. This it did, establishing a special sub-committee that year. The habit continued after 1974 when, as part of a national re-organization, Canterbury City Council replaced Bridge Blean. Residents soon responded to the trend by seeking Parish Council support for their applications. Generally the Council was supportive of developments which did not incur objections from neighbours.

Even more significant perhaps was the creation of permanent social and cultural organizations for the area. The roots of this are hard to discern as the relevant minutes and accounts are both incomplete and often hard to interpret. We do know that, on 12 October 1945, 24 residents met in 'Homewood' and decided to build a hut for "social gatherings and religious services". Oddly enough there is no mention of where the hut would go, presumably because it was known that land would be available. In fact, on 7 March 1946 Victor Austen of Maycott sold the plot on which St Faith's now stands to the PCC of St Nicholas (and the Diocesan Board of Finance) to be used for 'ecclesiastical' purposes, making a significant profit in the process.

The reasons for all this were probably that services had already been held in houses along the road and there was some public pressure for more Christian activities in the Lanes. And in 1940 it had been said that while people would like to go to St Nicholas, this was difficult because they felt it was "so far away". Given that much the same thing was already happening in the north of the parish, where the old Ashford Road Social Club grew out of a VJ Day celebration there, it may also have reflected optimistic post war social aspirations. There is no record of VJ day having been celebrated in the Lanes.

In any case, the New House Road residents set up a committee and raised money for the hut through various social events, such as theatre visits, trips and notably regular Whist Drives. There was also a box in the shop for contributions. A non denominational Sunday School, which was to be run for many years by Doris Boughton of 'Mostyn', began in April 1947. She, like her husband, was also to be a driving force in developing a community spirit in the Lanes. Open air services were also held on the site in the summers of 1947 and 1948.

Raising money, however, proved easier than getting the hut. The expectation had been that they could buy one ready made but this proved hard since prices were rising along with the costs of proper installation. There were also difficulties with the PCC who the Committee had opted to have manage their funds and buy any hut. There was some doubt about the propriety of the PCC doing this but this was eventually overcome and the Committee was reconstituted as a sub-committee of the PCC and residents were co-opted on to the latter. Interestingly the new Vicar, the Rev. Arthur Stevens, observed in March 1949 that there "seemed to be more community spirit" on the Lanes than in other parts of his parish.

Even so, with little apparently happening on the hut front, the residents seemed to grow restive and canvassed the return of their monies. The PCC also seems to have had some reservations about the residents' interest in the project. However, the difficulties were overcome by mid 1950, though how we do not know. It was certainly agreed that a more permanent hall would be built using voluntary labour, which had previously been resisted. Professionally prepared plans, inspired by sketches by Mr Shand of 'Here-it-is', were drawn up. Thanks to an interest free loan from the brother of a resident, the New House Lane committee was able to provide the PCC with a

further sum for the scheme while both St Nicholas and the Diocesan Board of Finance made contributions. By this time good relations seem to have been restored.

Work started in the spring of 1951 and proceeded very quickly and successfully thanks to the labour of the local residents and machinery from Wincheap Farm. The hall was dedicated to St Faith because the dedication service was to be held on St Faith's Day, 6 October 1951. Pictures of both were printed in the Parish Magazine which had carried regular reports on the project. The finishing touches were added in 1952 and the Hall went on to become a major resource for the community. Day to day responsibility passed to the Residents' Committee on 1 January 1952. At first it seems to have been used by a specific subscription charging Club - which offered badminton amongst its activities - but this only lasted about three years. The fact that it did not remain a closed Club may well have made the Hall more accessible to the wider community.

### **Life with St Faith's**

Keeping things going thereafter was not always easy. On the one hand, maintenance was a problem with the roof needing work in 1955. Things must have been especially difficult when heating was by coal fired stoves which had to lit and cleared. This ended in 1959 when Mr King of New House Farm financed a new heating system. The following year the hall was redecorated. The heating had to be renewed in the 1980s. On the other hand, not everyone enjoyed having the hall nearby and, almost from the beginning, there were complaints about children hanging around outside and excessive noise at the end of events.

There were also regular uncertainties about the management of the hall. In theory locals were responsible for the day to day running of the Hall but this did not always work and there was some discussion about this with the Rev. Skepper in 1967. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s the Rev. Louis Baycock was very active in organizing repairs and activities. Thus the outside was then painted, the floor resealed and insulation improved. A joint management committee was then set up. The Lanes were regularly represented on the St Nicholas PCC and took a not insignificant part in its affairs, whether financial or in producing its magazine.

Moreover, socially things did not always go so well. By 1954 the Whist Drives were reduced to once a fortnight instead of once a week and eventually they petered out altogether. And there were complaints about lack of interest and the difficulty of finding officers. Nonetheless, the Social Committee ran musical and gramophone evenings, Beetle drives, sales of work, theatre outings and combined pantomime visits and children's parties. A Teenage or Youth Club was also established but apparently closed in May 1967 though it may have re-emerged in the 1970s for a while. The Hall celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a dinner in 1976.

Nonetheless, for all this period regular services and a Sunday School was held there. Services were at first weekly, normally evensong, but from 1967 this became

fortnightly and in the mornings. Attendance at major festivals like Christmas, Easter and Harvest was good. Indeed, when once invited to join with St Nicholas for harvest, the residents made it clear to Rev. Baycock that, thinking of themselves as a village as they did, they preferred their own events.

Such activities thus managed to give some shape to what had become a community of some 160 houses and perhaps 300 people. Indeed when one resident asked for planning permission on Iffin Lane his case was dismissed by the authorities, inaccurately and - for some risibly - because the proposed building was 'outside the village'. Nonetheless, despite being as one resident called it, isolated, all this was a real advance on the situation at the end of the war. So, by the late 1980s it was recognizably what it is today. It had obtained most of the facilities that it had been demanded when development first started. But it had not overcome all its problems and divisions. Not everybody, in other words, was always active in the new community. Nor did everyone agree about its nature and activities. And the High Lanes were still exposed to the influence of outside events over which its inhabitants had only limited control.

## **The Contemporary Scene: Change, Renewal and Outside Pressures**

The last thirty five years or so have, in fact, seen further changes in the life of the Thanington High Lanes area. Thus there have been some alteration in its setting and activities, notably where farming is concerned. Equally traffic has become more of a problem even though there has been much less in the way of new development or the provision of facilities. Happily, the community has been able to adapt to both of these thanks in part to the revival of its own social organization.

However, increasingly, the area and its inhabitants have found themselves under pressure from the large scale developments forced on the District Council by government policy, notably on housing. And while, for the moment, the Lanes have been spared over-development, the possibility of their being swallowed up by new estates and made simply a suburb of Canterbury, has not gone away. Such pressures would obviously have implications for the Lanes' communal life.

### **Changes on the Land**

The land on which the Thanington High Lanes are set changed quite drastically from the 1980s. On the one hand, fruit cultivation began to decline. The Guest farm ceased to grow cherries commercially and grubbed up a number of trees switching to set aside and grazing. Both Upper Horton and, later, New House Farm gave up 'pick your own', to concentrate on contract production for supermarkets, food manufacturers and especially Ribena, often using East European student labour. This may have been related to the rejection of an application to create a proper Farm Shop on the

premises. The appearance of the farm could also change rapidly as, understandably, old trees were dug up and eventually replaced, sometimes by different species. Indeed, around 2014, the farm started growing cherries. These were sometimes sold to passers by along Stone Street. And the ownership of Upper Horton changed several times, being once a property of the Co-op before the latter's travails led to it passing to a research organization.

The old Iffin farm was also split up and reverted from fruit to pasture and other things. Part of its land was also used by horses, linked for while to the Riding School for the Disabled that emerged, somewhat controversially, at the top of New House Lane. In fact there was something of a trend to business development in the area, beginning with the creation of a Montessori Nursery School in Orchard House in the late 1980s. Some residential properties have also been used for professional activities. Thus there has been B&B in Iffin Lane. Another change was the burning down of the lovely old barn on the farm.

Another example of farm land being used for new purposes came through Wincheap Farm. In 1986 this ceased to operate in the old way and its implements were sold off. The part of the farm below the new A2 was, for a brief while, a farm shop and cider shop before being used for machinery workshops and, for some time, retail rustic furniture warehouses and, ultimately, a site for new housing. The owners of Wincheap Farm did carry on farming, however, moving into part of the old Iffin Farm into a new mixed farm under the name of Iffin Meadows Farm. This became the base for a construction machinery and free range egg operation. In the course of all this field sizes seem to have grown.

The rest of the Wincheap land was bought up by Paul Tory, a farmer who had lost his land to the Channel Tunnel. His first thought was to build a large new house on the site of the old hop sheds as a home for his daughter but this was rejected. Hence, in the late 1980s, he applied to turn the land above the A2 into a golf course. Permission for this was granted in 1991 and then extended to a further nine holes. Since then, although the planning permission was regularly renewed, there were no moves to develop the land. Instead it has been used as a contract operated arable farm. This held good even when the development of what became Saxon Fields was starting up, although the northern fringe was taken into the new development.

In fact, the aim of creating a golf course ended by the turn of the century and the land was re-designated. And Tory became a developer, trading as Pentland Homes, and hoping to build opposite New House Lane. This was a forerunner of the pressure for large scale developments which was eventually to impact on the Lanes community. At the same time, there was also further, albeit limited, development of housing in the existing Lanes. About one house has been added each year, often quite large ones, and usually as infilling or replacement of older structures. This happened in Iffin Lane, lower New House Lane and Hollow Lane. In some cases some of the very oldest houses in the area have been, or will be, replaced. At the same time buildings

damaged by fire were replaced. Extensions to existing houses were also quite common. On the lowest reaches of Iffin Lane, just above the phone box, two very big houses were built, changing the aspect of that part of the Lanes. All this gave a new twist to the appearance of the area as did the arrival of double glazing and bricked forecourts.

There were also two relatively big ventures on the fringes of the area. Thus, in Stuppington Court Farm, from the mid 1980s, Knights both developed the farm buildings as attractive houses and then added some new large houses, making a fair sized and self-contained development. Much more recently, Pentland built an unusual 50 strong estate behind Wincheap School. This led to the creation of a new roundabout, marking the first entry to the Lanes. However, rumoured expansion behind New House Close was blocked by the planners. Nonetheless, the area became more developed and this had implications for traffic.

### **Traffic and Facilities**

These developments have obviously had an impact on both traffic and facilities. Both changed the aspect of the lanes and their place in the wider administrative pattern of the county. Where traffic is concerned, some of this was locally generated. Fruit lorries, nursery school-run SUVs and the many extra cars in new and existing houses have certainly added to the flows. Parking and deliveries have added to the problems, often eating into the road sides.

At the same time, some of the traffic comes from outside. As traffic problems in the city worsened, thanks to the Council's inability (or unwillingness) to grasp the problem, increasingly the Lanes came to serve as a rat run, helping commuters to avoid blockages on Wincheap and elsewhere. Traffic also came from Petham and other villages. The development of a new road through Homersham must also have encouraged this tendency. This meant that, instead of single cars, residents were increasingly faced with a stream of cars coming through. And, at least one fatal accident, took place in Hollow Lane.

The increasing weight of traffic also had physical effects. Wear and tear obviously increased with passing places being carved out of the road side in some places. Damage to the carriage way also increased so that much of the area had to be resurfaced in the early 1990s. Pipe laying was a further complication. But pot holes remained a problem as did surface water. This often poured down New House and Hollow Lane to gather on the new roundabout, depositing much mud in the process. The latter was also increasingly dangerous, partly because of the overhanging trees. A resident persuaded the County Council to trim them in the early 1990s but since then nothing has been done so that the road became increasingly dark and dangerous.

There was some remedial action but not enough. Warning signs about falling rocks were installed in Hollow Lane as a result of Parish Council pressure in the early

1990s and, later, long desired 30 mph limitations. Road markings were improved at the junction of Hollow and New House Lanes. And the building of the Homersham development meant that residents now had easier access to the new shopping facilities on the A28. At one stage the Council seemed to be thinking of making Hollow Lane one way southwards only, forcing all traffic to use Homersham for access to the retail park and the city, but this never materialized.

In terms of facilities, the idea of street lighting surfaced unsuccessfully again in the early 1990s. Gas finally came to the Lanes a few years later although, because of the charges involved, many have continued to rely on oil delivered by tankers. Before this a Mobile Library began to call on alternate weeks and a Post Bus to link the area with Canterbury twice a day. This service was withdrawn by the Post Office some twenty years ago and much effort was then devoted to creating a replacement bus or taxi service to replace it so as to assist elderly residents who lacked their own cars. . Some successes in this was achieved in 2012 but this proved relatively short lived.

Long before this, of course milk and newspaper deliveries also found their way up the hill, much more regularly than in the past. Many households also got on line deliveries from supermarkets. And the covid19 pandemic helped to encourage ice cream and fish and chip sellers to visit some of the lanes. However, before then the telephone box at the bottom of New House Lane - which had been the object of such desire before the war - was finally removed, after years of trouble with vandalism, killed off by the spread of mobile phones. Its disappearance followed years after the White Horse badge had been stolen from the New House Lane road sign. Broadband speeds, however, were relatively good although, being at the end of somewhat uncertain electricity circuits, the area was often hit by power cuts when the rest of Thanington, not to mention the city proper, was unaffected.

In terms of institutional identity, there have been some changes since the mid 1980s, altering the setting of the Lanes, and to an extent the facilities available. To begin with, the boundaries of the South Ward and the Parish in general were changed in 1987, following on the building of the A2 bypass. Because this was beyond the bypass, the Council estate was then added to the Civil Parish. The latter also lost both its part of Wincheap (and the land up Hollow Lane to the south of the A 2) and the land immediately north of the Downs Road. This was added to Chartham. Thanington Without gained land on the north side of the river under the shadow of Harbledown Hill. Given the merger the Civil Parish Council asked for the name to be changed to the simpler - more accurate and historical - Thanington but this was rejected. Canterbury preferred to stick with what they, wrongly, thought was the romantic old name.

This change widened the civil parish spread of the community. Thus, for the first time in almost 50 years, the Lanes provided the Chairman of the Parish Council. It also continued to supply a Vice Chairman into the new century and, for the first time, the Parish Clerk. Previously they had all come from the North ward. The Parish Council now hears reports on activities in the area as part of its Annual Parish Meeting, held

each spring. These were, for a while, held alternately in St Faith's and the Ashford Road Community Association Hall. More recently, they have moved to the Resource Centre on the Ashford Road. This is a major facility available to residents and has done great things for the council estate. Attendance at Annual Parish Meetings, which are held across the Parish, including at St Faith's, is often disappointing.

More recently, a major change was threatened after the Council decided to reduce its numbers. This then led to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England suggesting that the Lanes area be transferred to a new rural ward, stretching southwards from the city. This may have been because the Conservative Party submission cheerfully, but wholly inaccurately, described the North Ward as Thanington and our area as Thanington Without. The suggestion was then successfully resisted on the grounds that all the areas' connections were actually with the city and not the countryside. All the Lanes, in other words, ran into Wincheap. Moreover, representatives from the villages were unlikely to have a real understanding of the needs of our community. For once the Commission listened to local opinion and agreed to keep the Lanes in the Wincheap Ward, thus avoiding an unfortunate breach. And a couple of years later one of the sources of confusion was removed when, following a Community Governance Review, the City Council agreed to amend the Parish name to what it had always been in the distant past, plain old Thanington.

### **Revived Social Organizations**

Perhaps more importantly for most residents, the great event of the last 35 years has been the revival of its basic social community organization, Hilltop. Following its decline in the 1970s and early 1980s it gained a new impetus later in the decade. This then led to a formal reorganization in 2000. The renewed body then went on to expand its activities, raising money and eventually taking over responsibility from the Church of England. This led to the first major renovations and alterations in years, allowing Hilltop to play an increasingly active role in the community life of the area.

Because of the stagnation of the early 1980s a questionnaire was circulated in April 1986, seeking interest in the Social Committee. This seems to have been positively received as, out of it came an infusion of new blood, reflecting the expansion of housing in preceding years. This helped the renewal of the Hilltop Social Club. It began to play a wider role, symbolised by the production of a quarterly newsletter, 'Hilltop News'.

Then, when a regular Quinquennial Inspection by the Diocesan Architects suggested that St Faith's was at the end of its useful life, the Club was presented with a new challenge. And it was not one which the Church was likely to meet, given that, in line with national and local social trends, the numbers of people from the Lanes attending services were falling. St Nicholas itself was also facing problems though it went on paying many of the Hall's charges. So a further local initiative was started to try and sustain the hall. In fact, following a public meeting on 19 October 2000, a new



body, the Hilltop Community Association, was set up. This drew on the impetus of the Social Club and inherited some of its name, though because of the imprecision of the term 'Hilltop', Canterbury has been added to its official title.

Run by an elected executive committee and a Board of Trustees HCA set as its objectives the continuation of a vibrant local community; the retention of the 'village hall'; the maintenance, management and refurbishment of the hall; the provision of non-denominational services; and the development of recreational activities for the under 12s. The Association came into existence in the autumn of 2000 and, through its various working groups, has done a great deal of remedial and upkeep work on the Hall. Thus, taking the Social Club under its wing, it went on to provide recreational facilities for many residents as well as for the young, including quiz evenings, Tai Chi and a lending library of fiction. And all this allowed it to obtain recognition as a charitable body, under the aegis of the Charities Commission.

It also started new fund raising activities including barbecues, themed evenings and a 100 Club. Moreover, a website was created and a new storage unit placed behind the hall, allowing the hall itself to be more easily used for social use. All this enabled it to build up a basic fighting fund. However, as the Diocesan Architect's verdict was not accepted, no provision was then made for major redevelopment. Repairs were, of course, carried out. Unfortunately its value to the community has not always been fully appreciated since the Hall and its surrounds have, at times, suffered a certain amount of vandalism.

The Association actually became an officially recognised charity as the Hilltop Community Association (Canterbury) in 2003. It then entered into what proved to be difficult negotiations with the Church over the possibility of taking over the hall. Consideration was therefore given to entering on an 'Albermarle' scheme for leasing and running the hall. Thought was also given to the possibility of rebuilding the hall. This would be financially and legally challenging. However, after a long drawn out and often difficult negotiation with the Diocese, in 2013 Hilltop obtained a long lease which allowed them to develop the hall as they see fit, providing they could generate the monies necessary. And increasingly the Hall was known as the Community Hall rather than St Faith's. The energy of successive chairmen of the Association played a large part both in this and then carrying things forward successfully.

The following years, as a result, saw a new approach to fund raising. As well as continuing its rich mix of social events, which continued to be profitable, Hilltop began to look outside, following the example of the Ashford Road Community Association. This too had had its ups and downs but eventually gained lottery funding to enable it to rebuild its premises completely. Many applications were made to a series of charitable and other foundations. Enough of these were successful, including from the Lottery Fund, KCC and the Allchurches foundation, to allow plans to be drawn up for an extension and, by 2020, the roof was renewed. This facilitates the completion of the planned work although fund raising will have to continue. .

During the covid19 lockdown, the Association developed an enhanced social role. Using email and other means, it provided a helpful support network. Showing commendable concern and energy, it offered shopping, cleaning and other services for residents who needed help. All this showed that the revival of the late 1980s was still on going and sustaining community life.

### **The Threat of Over-Development**

The energies of Hilltop were not, of course, limited purely to domestic matters or bricks ad mortar. In fact, residents began to engage with wider developments in the city. And, as time went on, these became increasingly threatening for the area. These started with the drawing up of a Design Statement, aimed at ensuring that local voices were on file to be considered when new buildings were proposed for out eara. Then, when new planning policies threatened to make the area a major development site, there was a massive new mobilization amongst residents, protesting at the idea. Then, as the authorities' ideas began to change, this led to the creation of a new, more political, organization representing local opinion.

The first thing that happened was the drawing up of a Village (or Community) Design Statement in 2004-5. A VDS is a document detailing the nature of a community and its desires for future development. It is meant to serve as supplementary guidelines for planning applications affecting the community. Producing one for the High Lanes began with discussions with Canterbury City Council. Following a workshop in July 2004 it was drafted by a volunteer team of residents and was further developed as a result of suggestions both from the City and from the generality of residents to whom it was submitted, along with a questionnaire. As well as offering a voice in future planning decisions, the act of drawing up a VDS also had the merit of focussing residents' attention on the nature of the area, its history, and its present needs and priorities, helping to keep alive the life and unity of the area. All this helped to generate activity and concern for the area. And it was hoped that it would have an impact on future developments.

In the event, it was somewhat overtaken by wider national developments which were unforeseen at the time the VDS was drawn up. Thus, in 2009, the District Council, acting under what was then called the Local Development Framework suggested that several thousand houses might be built between New House Lane and Ashford Road, so as to meet government imposed housing targets. This caused an immediate local outcry. Large numbers of residents attended meetings and petitioned the Council against the idea. In fact, it prompted an almost unparalleled popular mobilization. Clearly the High lanes community did not want to be swamped by vast new developments.

This possibility of over development on our doorstep did not immediately come about. This was because the election of the coalition government in May 2010 led to thie LDF being set aside. However the threat remained, and developers were regularly

sniffing around the area and seeking to nobble its representatives. In any case. The LDF threat had, by then, prompted the formation of an Action Group, representing Hilltop, Iffin, Merton and New House Lanes (HIMN) to oppose building opposite New House Lanes and encouraging the use of brownfield sites. It held its inaugural meeting on 10 March 2010. A new group was felt necessary because Hilltop CA, as a charity, was largely barred from 'political' campaigning. Nonetheless, this was and remains, the source of new community activity.

Nevertheless, HIMN was set up to enable the Lanes to monitor developments and try and influence them in sensible directions. This soon led to an alliance with other Residents' Groups, first in southern Canterbury, and then across the city. Locals were aware that it would be all too easy for the Council to play one area off against another and thus push its plans through. In the Lanes people were also aware that large scale development elsewhere in South Canterbury was likely to have damaging spillover effects on our area.

This reflected the Council's 2012 search for a strategy for future development to fit in with the coalition's shortened and liberalized National Planning Policy Framework . This came out in March 2012 and was accompanied by a Localism Bill which seemed to encourage micriplans. All this led to the Council issuing of a paper which identified two possible focuses of development, one in south Canterbury and the other north of us. The dangers of the latter were reinforced by the emergence of a proposal from Pentland and Quinn's for what was grandiosely called 'New Thanington', something which would involve a virtual new town with various facilities. Agents for the scheme made strenuous efforts to soft soap residents into support it but did not succeed. The lanes also had visites from the Chief Executive and the then Leader of the City Council, John Gilbey.

In the end, the Council opted to focus development on south Canterbury and on what became known as Mountfield Park. At times Council spokesmen suggested that they had deliberately chosen this to save our area but the truth is that the access through New House Lane was judged grossly insufficient by councillors. In any case, this was eventually expanded into a new Local Plan in 2013, renewing concerns among parts of the community which were aware that, if New House Lane had not been fingered by the Council, on grounds of visual amenity and inferior roads, the threat to it was still there. After consultation, of which the Council took little notice since the overwhelming number of the 7,000 comments were received were hostile, the draft was referred, as the law requires, to a public examination by a Planning Inspector. This took place in the summer of 2016 and HIMN was represented amongst the locals who listened and spoke against it.

Half way through the hearings the Inspector adjourned them because it became clear that the Council could not show, as it was legally obliged to do, that it had enough land to build the required number of houses to fulfil the Plan. This provided an opportunity for Pentland and Quinn to represent their plan, now downgraded to

Thanington Park and making much of the idea of building a new Hospice there, something which won it wide support despite the planning objections. This was then taken on by the Council and given outline planning permission. Residents reacted badly and were unconvinced by meetings held by the Prince's Trust in December 2016. Nonetheless, the Plan was finally approved, with the inclusion of Thanington Park.

Although it was a couple of years before building works commenced, by when it had been renamed 'Saxon Fields' the pressure on the area remained. Of course, historically minded might ask why the Fields should be called Saxon when the area was settled by Jutes and not Saxons. This increase in pressure was partly because Quinns, who had detached themselves from Pentland, came forward with a new proposal for an 400 house development to the east of the Thanington Park site, on whose facilities it hoped to piggy back. All this meant that, to the north there was likely to be a major new development with some 1150 houses with more traffic and, possibly, some new facilities. Although there was to be a gap between the Saxon Fields site and New House Lane, this means that access out of the Lanes area is likely to be more difficult and more crowded.

Throughout all this, HIMN went on monitoring and representing the interests of residents of the Lanes. However, the time all this took, the complexities of the planning process and the fact that building was going to remain somewhat distant from New House Lane meant that public interest in planning matters began to decline in the Lanes. The fact that the treasured view towards the cathedral would not be much affected also helped in this. As a result, HIMN quietly subsided in early 2019. However, something like it could well be needed in future.

As has become clear the High Lanes community exists in a fast changing environment. Change is bound to come whether because of developments outside our area or, as in the past, because its residents generate their own internal dynamics. In other words, while, at the time of writing, the community may now be 'made' thanks to its hundred years of history, it is far from being 'finished', let alone set in stone. It is, and will remain a community in evolution. History, in other words, never stops. Our own times will become the past sooner than we think. Moreover, new things can come to light which throw light on the past. New selling and building can lead new people to look at new arrivals to look at their deeds. I hope they will pass on their findings so that all can benefit from what they reveal.

In the meantime, I hope that this introductory survey will serve to show something of both the long term history of our area, such as it is, and of how, a hundred years ago, the Hilltop community first came into existence. Equally, it tries to suggest how and when it has subsequently developed. Others may have other ideas and additions and corrections will be welcome as long as I am involved. However, it would be nice to think that other residents might in future take up the story.....

*CHC*