

Cold Harbour, Bassett House and surrounds

Recollections by Bridget Wight

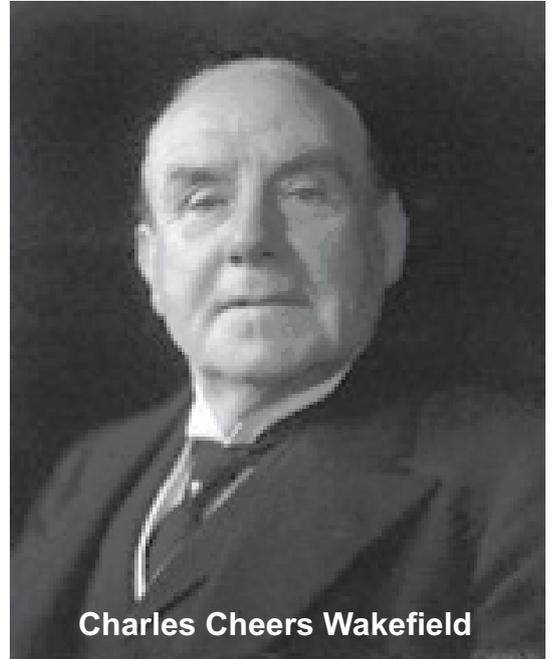
The Cold Harbour house and land deeds go back to 1696. In the Kent archives.

It was a farm with 33 acres and came as a dowry for the marriage of 'Northhamptona Court'. She could not write but made her mark. It was an old parchment.

Lord Wakefield, a great benefactor for Hythe, bought the grounds for Bassett House and tried to buy Cold Harbour and Rosary Gate but was unsuccessful. He built the house and the Italian garden, with a huge mini sort of Crystal Palace on it. Everything of the best, as he was not short of a 'bob or two'. The house he built was of the same style as MacMillan's house, (Birch Grove) Queen Anne style. It was a very big house including an organ in the hall.



It is said that his wife, Sarah, would not live there, she lived in the white cottage, next door.



Charles Cheers Wakefield

Viscountess Wakefield of Hythe
and her daughter
by Charles Haigh-Wood
(1856-1927)



1947

Mrs Wight was told many years ago that originally that site was a monastery and that the road/hill was called black ooze not blackhouse after the black ooze monks, who at some stage in their lives were 'naughty boys' and it got disbanded. That is what she was told and it seems possible.

Blackwose, alias Canons-Court, is a manor adjoining to Sene farm, in this parish, which had the latter name from its having been a religious house for canons, of the Premonstratensian order. It was dedicated to St. Nicholas, and was a cell to the priory of that order, at Lavendene, in Buckinghamshire; but the revenues of it being very insufficient for the support of the members of it, who deserting their abode here, wandered about the county, to the scandal of their order; which induced the chapter of it, at the instance of the barons, that is the free burgesses, of Hythe, to unite this cell to the abbey of St. Radigund, of the same order, with the liberty of continuing it, or of converting it into a grange or farm, which latter the abbot of St. Radigund's did, removing the canons and other members of it to his own abbey. In which state it continued, among the possessions of the abbey, till the 27th year of king Henry VIII. when it was suppressed by the act of that year, as not being of the clear yearly value of two hundred pounds. - The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent - Edward Hasted -vol 8 p205

Going back to Bassett House, the next owner was Dr Leader, an inventor (*Solomon Leider, probably born in Poland, Changing his name to Dr Sidney Arthur Leader (known as 'Pluto')*). He said to Hythe Council that he wanted a place where he can think and invent. His inventions included artificial eyes and skin [see *A Long Time in the Making p157*]. It got bigger and became a mini-factory, selling out to Portex. Portex were told they could have a factory there provided they put in a static water tank. At that time the pressure of water on the hill was absolutely appalling. And they didn't! So, when they had the fire, the fire brigade were here very well within good time and it was like a Keystone Cops comedy film, where they rushed up their ladders and all the water just went 'wweerr', no pressure. Then they pumped the water up from the canal via various tenders. Well by that time of course the whole thing had gone up.



It was started because they were a very untidy lot and they left a lot of 'muck' and all sorts of things and that was that! Within 24 hours, all the lead that was in reach, from the house had gone. (People think it is just today but it isn't). After all that it remained empty for a long time. Eventually, They (the Wights) and Gerry Walter, who lived in the White Cottage, (who ran the shoe shop), got together and bought the land so that they would have some say in how it was developed. They also got what was the Italian Garden. Eventually the man who bought Castle Scene, who was a local builder, and with 'another person'. (complicated story)

The woman who owned Castle Scene, 34 Blackhouse Hill, also owned Cold Harbour. She got very ill and her daughter sold Cold Harbour but kept the field (in front) along with Castle Scene. So when it came to Bassett Gardens, Mr Sharp expressed interest and we said well, you've got the field, which makes a lot of difference to us. What about just doing a swap? Ok, yes he said. So we did. He got Bassett Gardens and we got the field. And so he developed Bassett Gardens into what it is now.

Originally, the way to get to Cold Harbour, was you came up the side of what is now Blackhouse Rise, up the field, where there was a cart track and by garages and old farm buildings, much older than the house.





There is a little sort of causeway for the foot people to come from the field and the Front door was probably where the French windows are now.

So that was how it was that Lord Wakefield had to let the householders in. He had to make the drive to let people in and out. And that drive actually goes with this house (Cold Harbour) and the other houses have right of way.

Mrs Wight came here in 1954. She thinks the house was built out of a previous dwelling. The actual walls are 'all sorts' and of some age, with the exception of the kitchen which was added on in the 1920s. So it's rocks, you name it. (suggesting mixed wall structures). The latest house dates to around 1840 [there is a water hand pump outside dated 1806]. They did get the deeds from the Hythe archive. Someone told Mrs Wight that the deeds were in the archive and that she was shown them 'and they were fascinating'. It had been a farm with a lot of fruit trees when they moved in.

The theory behind the name of the house, there were two or three. There are several Cold Harbours along the south east. It is said that they were stopping places for pilgrims going to the cathedral. It could go back to when the Romans were here 'collis arboris'- (wooded hill). French 'col d' arbre' (ridge of trees). There is a Cold Harbour House at Lymne'.

The lych gate and farm outhouses pre-date the house. The only deeds that she has date to about 1900.

Bassett Gardens had a big tall wall right up to the road, which was moved back when the new development was built in order to improve visibility to the road.

There were 2 fish shops in Hythe, the one at the far end run by a man called 'Fullager'.