

MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LOCAL HISTORY NOTES - 2

Around Manor Road, Mitcham

By Constance Pope - June 1989

Reading through the booklet “Mizens of Mitcham” has taken me back at least 60 years, and, from what I can remember, there were a few more acres beyond Manor Road that were not mentioned, but may be of interest to people living in this area.

The petrol station as it is now, was a farm, “Browns”, and the alley alongside was a cart track on the side of a great pansy field. The track led up to a large house, “Sherwood House”. It’s still there, facing the factory estate in Comonside East, but in a dreadful state of vandalism and up for auction. The land all around, from the farm to what is now Walton Way, was all pansies and, with tall elm trees bordering the fields, it was a pleasant sight.

My aunt worked over there, and as she looked after me at times, I often went over there, and I can see her now with her sacking apron, and bundles of raffia tucked in her waist band. My Mother also worked for Mizens during the First World War, hoeing in the cabbage and potato fields, but she left there after I was born in 1916. I still live in that same house, but then it was 1, Willow Cottages, not Manor Road.

The land between these cottages and the ones that have been developed all belonged to Mizens and were called The Clays. They were the vegetable fields where my Mother worked, but they finished up as sports fields. I have no idea if the cottages near the Horse and Groom were all Mizens', (ours belonged to Pains), but I remember the family of Mr Dave King, known as Jim, who worked for Mizens for years. They lived in one of these cottages, and it went with the job. They grew flowers for cutting, such as pyrethrum, etc., on the land at the back of the cottages. I am 72 years and remember most of the Mizen houses in Grove Road, and the salad sheds. I also remember the greenhouses opposite the Holborn Schools, where as a child I bought a white hyacinth in a pot as a present for someone. Proudly bringing it home, I got to the old Beehive Bridge when there was a clap of thunder. Frightened, I dropped the pot and broke the plant. I was heartbroken. So whenever I see hyacinths now it reminds me of Mizens. I remember Mr Alfred Mizen and his daughter Alfreda riding horseback along Cedars Avenue on the Common; the only two horse riders in those days. I rode a fairy cycle on the Common once and was caught by Miss Farewell-Jones of "Brenley". She was most indignant, and said, "Get off at once! How dare you ride a bike on the Common." (I was nine!)

We never had much money but we seem to have survived without cars, televisions, washing machines, etc. We walked everywhere, to Mitcham, to Norbury; but to go to Tooting or Croydon we had to cross the Common and get a tram. We only had one shop and that was a house in Commonsides East. We had a travelling grocer with a horse and cart, come round on Saturdays. He also sold oil for the lamps we had to use as we had no gas or electricity. For washing clothes we had to light a fire under the copper to get hot water, and scrub the washing with soap. The children walked to school, the school in St. Mark's Road, and some children went to Gorrings Park, and we walked there and back twice a day. We usually went the Common way, as Tamworth Lane was mostly muddy, and when it wasn't muddy it was pretty gruesome, walking along the edge of the gravel pits, and the smell and the chemical dust from Typke's factory was terrible.

Fred Harvey used to drive the cows down the lane (Manor Road) to fields next door to where my aunt lived. Her house wall was in the field, and when it was cold they would stand along the wall where the kitchen range was, to keep warm.

We never seemed to get bored, there was always something to do - something in the house for your mother, running errands round to the shop, trees to climb, or somewhere to go and explore. On certain nights we used to sit along the bank of the ditch and watch the fireworks from the Crystal Palace, then go home and read comics or books by the light of a candle till bed time. But we did have highlights, like when the Daily Telegraph had their sports day. We were allowed to go over and enjoy the fun, and the brass band they usually had on these occasions. And, during the season, we were able to watch cricket and rugby in the sports fields between the two lots of cottages. Becketts, I remember, owned the refreshment hut between the fields, but that was mostly weekends.

Also on Sunday a few folk from Lonesome would walk through the lane to the Horse and Groom, for an evening stroll, (in summer of course). In those days there was a horse trough for the horse traffic, outside the Horse and Groom, and there were bench seats along the wall adjoining the farm. I remember children could climb up the back of the seats, and look at the animals in pens the other side, and if you were lucky and you had someone inside the pub, you might get a glass of lemonade and a Brighton biscuit brought out to you! A Mr and Mrs Jackson were landlords in those days, and they had a very nice rose garden.

Dawsons lived in the big house on the other side of Tamworth Lane opposite the Horse and Groom, and a Mrs Whittle lived in the adjoining cottage. I do not know if the big house was ever a Manor House, but it was a queer shape, with a flight of steps up to the front entrance, and a peculiar shaped roof, but people mostly went round the back.

My Mother came to Mitcham at the age of three in 1881, one of seven sisters and one brother. My Grandfather, a gardener, got a job as foreman in the osier beds, (willows), cutting the rods. They had come from Chiswick, and lived in one of the cottages in Tamworth Lane, near to the osier beds, which were on Bolstead Land, somewhere near to Pains. My Grandmother and the children had the job of stripping the bark off, called whitening, weaving them when they were ready and still supple for basket-making. I do not know how long that went on, as my Mother and her sisters went into service.

My Mother told us that these cottages we live in were built for Flemish basket makers. There must have been some sort of industry in basket making. I have tried to find out, without success; maybe I haven't tried hard enough. There was another sort of industry in these cottages - doing washing for other people. Two or three families, using a pram, would collect dirty washing from houses in Norbury, bring it home, wash and iron it, then return it to the people it belonged to and collect the money. Not a lot ! - but it helped out in those days, and sometimes cast-off clothing was given to the collectors, and that was a bonus. My aunt was one of the washers, and I can see the steam from the copper and smell the ironing, as she stood at the long deal table, ironing with irons that had to be heated on the kitchen range.

Should we have any illness, our nearest doctor lived in Lower Mitcham, but as doctors cost money in those days, we rarely had one, and we seemed to survive the usual childish ailments such as measles and chickenpox without medication from doctors. Our nearest chemist, when needed, was on the corner of St.Mark's Road, and I cannot remember us using that very often; except for once when I scalded my foot, and one of the neighbours cycled down there to get some oil to put on it.

We had our fair share of fog in those days, real pea-soupers. The school would let those of us who lived down the Common go home early. Vision would be but a few yards, real thick yellow fog. Some children might be met, but mostly we found our way home on our own. My Mother fixed a long string handle on a jam jar, and put a lighted candle in it to make a lantern for the fog, and many a time when using it, you would find folks tagging on behind, trusting that the one with the lantern did not get lost.

We were also blessed with floods in the lane, Manor Road, where we lived. The ditch alongside our cottages used to swell up with rain water and lay right across the lane, so another of my Mother's inventions was to fill a stone ginger beer bottle with paraffin, use a piece of flannel for a wick and light it as a lamp. My older brother worked at night at the chemical factory in Tamworth Lane, and, so that he could see the flood water in the dark, she placed the lamp on a board above the water line, the light reflecting on the water. The lamp lasted for quite some time.

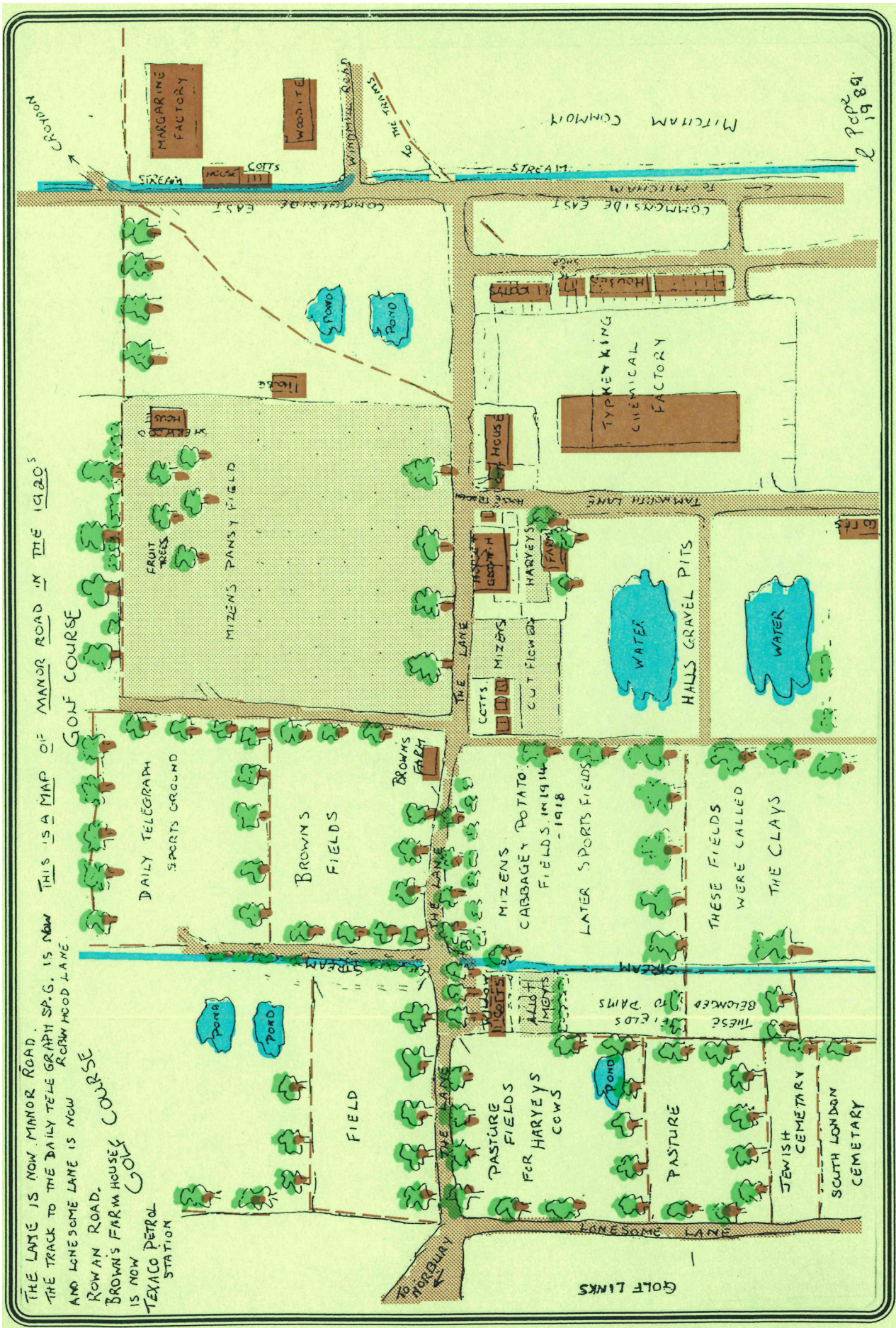
In the 1920's the Horse and Groom was a two-gabled building with a public bar, a private bar, which was also the entrance to the private part of the pub, and a saloon bar, which really was for the élite class - with wonderful large fish in glass cases on the walls, and a carpeted floor, and people in there spoke quietly. The public bar had sawdust on the floor, more for the beer that was spilt than spit! Plenty of noise in that bar, more arguments and singing that spilled over outside when the pub closed. The private bar really was quiet; you could have a conversation in peace. My Mother worked there for about 12 years, so I knew the place inside as well as out. I cannot remember when the third gable was added, before or after the Second World War.

Mitcham Fair was another event in our lives, especially the children. We made grottos of mud and stones, with flowers decorating them, and on Sundays or evenings, the only times people walked by, we would stand by our grottos chanting, "Please remember the Grotto, Sir. Only once a year. Penny, halfpenny, farthing, to spend at Mitcham Fair." We might have made about a shilling or one-and-sixpence, but to us that was quite a sum. We also had to watch out for the Gypsies when the Fair time drew near. They would camp up the lane with their horse-drawn caravans, and everyone had to be on their toes if they had chickens or anything else that might be useful and easy to remove. The children used to stop us and ask for money, or anything we possessed that they fancied. Thank goodness they moved on when the Fair got started.

There weren't many strangers came through the lane, but we did have an artist come and paint a picture of the cottages. He sat there most of the day, and Mrs Baker from the cottages gave him food and drink, and bought the painting off him. When her second husband died and the house was cleared out, the picture went to another neighbour who had helped the old man. The last time I saw it, a few years back, the neighbour said her son (who at the time worked for the Council) was taking it to the Town Hall. What became of it I do not know. I would have liked it; it wasn't all that special, but I did stand and watch him paint it.

Many years have passed since then, and it certainly was a different world from ours today. I have made a map of Manor Road as I knew it in the 1920's. It may not be quite to scale, but at least it gives some idea of what it was like.

Further information on Merton Historical Society can be obtained from the Society's website at www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk or from Merton Library & Heritage Service, Merton Civic Centre, London Road, Morden, Surrey. SM4 5DX



THE LANE IS NOW MINOR ROAD.
 THE TRACK TO THE DAILY TELEGRAPH SP.G. IS NOW ROWAN ROAD.
 AND LANESOME LANE IS NOW BROWN'S FARM HOUSES GOLF COURSE IS NOW TEXACO PETROL STATION.

THIS IS A MAP OF MANOR ROAD IN THE 1920'S

TO CROFTON
 MARGARINE FACTORY
 WOODS LITE
 HOUSE
 COTTAGES
 STREAM
 COMINGSIDE EAST
 HOUSES
 COTTAGES
 TYPKEY KING CHEMICAL FACTORY
 THE LANE
 HOUSE
 MIZENS COTTAGES
 MIZENS CUT FLOWERS
 HARVEYS FARM
 MIZENS CABBAGE & POTATO FIELDS, 1914-1918
 LATER SPORTS FIELDS
 THESE FIELDS WERE CALLED THE CLAYS
 HALLS GRAVEL PITS
 WATER
 WATER
 TAMWORTH LANE
 GOLF LINKS
 TO HOREBURY
 FIELD
 PASTURE FIELDS FOR HARVEYS COWS
 PASTURE
 JEWISH CEMETARY
 SOUTH LONDON CEMETARY
 POND
 POND
 POND
 POND
 MIZENS PANSY FIELD
 FRUIT TREES
 DAILY TELEGRAPH SPORTS GROUND
 BROWNS FIELDS
 BROWNS FARM
 COMINGSIDE WEST
 STREAM
 TO MITCHEM
 MITCHEM COMMON
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