

BLACKHEDGE FARM ESTATE
APPROXIMATE LAYOUT OF GOLF COURSE
 1910 - 1921

Adapted from a contemporary map
 Scale: approx 8 ins = 1 mile

THE NORTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE GOLF CLUB, 1910 - 1922

By Eric Miller

This article is based largely on research carried out by Peter Smith, with additional material provided by Alan Gill and others



The Golf Course, with Crippetts Lane in the middle distance.
The house marked with a cross is Ferncliffe

1910: plans first mooted

Plans to open a golf course at Leckhampton were first publicised in the Autumn of 1910, when it was announced in the *Echo* that Mr A J Hobley, the professional of the Cheltenham Golf Club at Cleeve Hill, had selected the various holes at the proposed new club, originally to be called simply 'The Leckhampton Golf Club'. The first tee and the club house were to be on Leckhampton Lane at the Crippetts turning, with the first five holes and the last four on comparatively level land 'to suit elderly or non-strenuous players'.

In December 1910 the Blackhedge Farm estate was sold to Messrs E Baring and Harold A Webb and Roland J Webb¹. The estate comprised 267 acres, including pastures, Common Furze Wood, The Bittams, Blackhedge Grove and three acres of pasture in Shurdington. In the preceding month trees to the value of nearly £1,000, which might have been an embarrassment to golfers, were auctioned and cut down. The Webbs, from their office at 10, Colonnade, took the opportunity of advertising for sale 'Building sites commanding unrivalled views and abutting on the New Golf Links on Leckhampton Hill'.

By mid-January 1911 the links were nearly ready and the secretary of the club, Major Estcourt Harrison, was dealing with enquiries for membership and advised anyone visiting the links to take the tram to the Malvern Inn and then walk along Leckhampton Lane. A later advertisement stated that the club house was 'two miles from the Town Clock'.



The Golf Club House at the corner of Leckhampton Lane and Crippetts Lane
later known as the Red Bungalow, today Green Acres

In March 1911 an article in the *Echo* gave a description of the course. It referred to Crippetts Road as being ‘celebrated as the prettiest walk or drive near Cheltenham ... if no one be endangered [a player might] “fire” over it and the parallel stream’. ‘A short mashy stroke’ would reach the 4th green – a strenuous hole with a rise of 150 feet. Just opposite Hill Grange on the Birdlip Road an iron would put the ball on to a ‘most romantic and nature-provided green with high banks on all sides’. At 600 feet above sea level ‘the exhilarating air bucks the player to a high point of energy’. Expense was no object in creating the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th holes but ‘a badly pulled shot may hit a passing motor car’. A bay in the Blackhedge Woodland offered ‘an ideal spot for a picnic and just the place to open the luncheon basket and boil the kettle’. Three good shots down the Great Breach brought a fair player to the 15th and in sight of the club house across the woods, where ‘nothing but a restful field separates the player from the 18th hole, the golf house and tea.’ Certainly it is difficult today to envisage how the course looked in its heyday, though the photograph on the previous page gives some idea. One Leckhampton resident recalls that there used to be bunkers where Burley Fields Ponds have since been created.

In the Society’s ‘Bendall Archive’ is a large map of the Blackhedge Estate on which an unknown person has drawn roughly in red pencil the ‘plan of new golf course to be formed at Leckhampton’. The document thus appears at first sight to be the vital piece of the jigsaw which the County Record Office lacks. However, the layout of the eighteen greens differs in detail from that described in the *Echo*. Doubtless there were several attempts to devise the best route before Mr Hopley gave his final recommendation, and in any case there were subsequent reports of alterations and improvements to the original course. The map on page 28 therefore traces the general circuit followed by the golfers, based on all available sources.

Work proceeded apace during December 1910 and January 1911 to make the course ready. Although wet weather held up the laying of turf, draining, hedge-cutting, tree-felling, mole-catching, ditching, building the golf-house and the professional's shop and 'gravelling the motor-car enclosure' all went ahead. By April 1911 the links were in full swing and open too for play on Sundays, though no caddies were allowed then. The professional was a Mr Cecil Hobley (presumably a relative of Mr Hobley of the Cheltenham Golf Club) and he was busy coaching pupils. A steward was appointed in the club house.

A committee was formed, comprising Messrs F F Leaver, L W Barnard, G P Hopcraft, W H Hudson, T Bence, A Milne, S H Healing, W Bell Haworth and P Haddock, while Major Estcourt Harrison acted as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. In April 1912 a private company was formed with a capital of £2,000 and a registered office in the Colonnade, Cheltenham. The name of the club was changed to the North Gloucestershire Golf Club and the directors were E Baring and the Webb brothers, A J Vereni (who was also Honorary Secretary of the club). It was reported that the 'revised' links were much appreciated, with easier gradients and larger greens. Improved drainage and the use of horse-drawn mowers 'made an enormous difference' to the fairway. A new professional, Mr Lloyd, was appointed, and competitions were held for men and ladies. Later in the month an ex-champion golfer, Mr Hutchings, visited the course. He liked the alterations and 'astonished the natives' with some tremendously long drives.

During 1913 there were reports of more competitions and a silver cup was competed for monthly. The officers of the North Gloucestershire Golf Company Limited and the club's officials were by then

Directors: Messrs Edward Baring (Chairman), A J Verini, A Webb and E J Webb.

Company Secretary: Mr Edward Baring, Office, Montpellier Chambers, Cheltenham.

Captain: W Bell Haworth

Hon Secretary: Colonel Newall, Club House, Leckhampton

Committee: Messrs W Bell Haworth (Chairman), E M B Joyce, A Milne, W Baring, H A Webb, R J Webb and A T Verini

Professional: Mr C Lloyd

1914 was probably the most outstanding year in the history of the club. The club house (said to have been formerly a brick-built barn) had been completed and for Easter Monday an exhibition match was arranged between two famous champion players and the club professional, who was now a Mr Pearson. Mrs Pearson, the stewardess, had arranged lunch and tea for 200 hundred people. Then in July came the highlight of the club's history. A 36-hole match between Harry Vardon, famous British and American Champion, and Edward Ray, another champion. Edward Ray won the competition in the presence of what the writer called 'a motor car crowd'. Ray completed his morning round with a score of 62, said to be 16 strokes under bogey. The *Cheltenham Chronicle Graphic* printed some marvellous pictures of the play at the April and July matches including one of the members outside the club house. Another photo shows the players crossing the bridge – over the ravine which can still be seen below The Bittams on the way up to the Crippetts. The late Jean Bendall related that her father, Alfred Bendall, acted as a sort of 'honourable caddy' for Vardon.

1915 - 1918: decline and decay; part of course sold

The First World War all but finished the club's existence. During 1915 play continued but there are few reports of activities. In early 1916 (and again in October) 100 acres of land abutting Church Road and Crippetts Road were put up for auction. Two small lots were to be grazed by

sheep only and the golf club was to retain the right to play over the fields and to cut and mow them if necessary. Grazing was allowed on the remaining five lots, without concession to the golfers. In July over 200 trees, mostly in Common Furze Wood, were auctioned as timber.

In July 1917 it was announced that the entire freehold estate of Blackhedge Farm – 107 acres, including the former club house – was to be auctioned. It appears that this was the end of the club, though there was then no announcement to that effect.

In July 1918 another sale was announced in the *Echo* of the remaining lower portion of Blackhedge Estate and again the club house ('Golf Bungalow') with a description of the accommodation showing that it was by then a private dwelling. Amongst the relevant legal documents at the Gloucestershire Record Office is a Purchase Agreement dated August 1918 and headed Baring-Webb Building Estates, which shows that Mr William David Farrar² had purchased three of the lots. There was no mention of the bungalow, but according to the *Echo* some of the lots were withdrawn from sale and negotiated privately. It was evidently then that Mr Farrar bought the bungalow. Land Registry documents dated 1928 showed that he had absolute title to woodlands and land in Crippetts Road as well as to what was by then called Red Bungalow.

Creation of a nine-hole course

Following the end of the war a letter appeared in the *Echo* in June 1919 appealing for the golf club in Leckhampton to be resuscitated. In reply, Mr Farrar, writing from the Red Bungalow, said that if a committee could be formed he would award a competition prize and invited anyone interested to a meeting at his bungalow. As a result a strong committee was formed with Mr A Milne of Fairlands, Leckhampton Road, as secretary. An advertisement in the *Echo* invited membership and announcing that nine holes of the old golf course would be opened on August Bank Holiday – surprisingly quick work!

A further advertisement in September said that subscriptions up to March 1920 would be 2 guineas and that Mr C Lloyd had returned as professional. There was no further news of the club in the *Echo* until 1921 when it was advertised again with the old title North Gloucestershire Golf Links, now sporting a nine-hole course opposite Hill Grange Hotel, a fact which the hotel itself mentioned in its own publicity. In June however, the hotel was sold and the location of the club ('a sporting course on the level') was pinpointed as being opposite Rockholm.³ These buildings are marked on the map on page 28.

The last local mention of the club was in October 1921, when it was described as being opposite Rockholm and 10 minutes up from the tramway terminus. It was not listed in '*The Golfer's Handbook*' after 1921, though a photograph of the course, similar to that shown on page 29, appeared in the Great Western Railway's travel handbook *Holiday Haunts* for the 1922 season.⁴ On 7 December 1922, Edward Baring and Harold Arthur Webb gave notice that the company was in voluntary liquidation. 1922 therefore saw the end of the club and of golf in Leckhampton. It was in 1922 that the Lilley Brook course was opened, and its secretary was the above-mentioned Mr W A Milne.

Postscript

Today, opposite the house called Leckhampton Grange, across a five-barred gate and beside a track leading over fields and down the hill, is a ruined wooden summer house, some 33 feet long, 15 feet wide and twelve feet high to the apex of its roof. It incorporates a concrete-floored verandah next to which is a flat area of grass, now invaded by nettles, edged with a rockery. It is

sturdily built, with oak pillars and some attractive architectural details, such as the carved finials at either end of the roof. On one side, windows would have offered a view of the valley (now obscured by trees) and there were also windows at the verandah end. The cream and brown paint scheme of the interior, separated by a black line, can still be plainly made out. This must have been the hut to which members reported before teeing off on the nine-hole course, perhaps hiring clubs too and maybe drinking tea prepared on a stove near the inner entrance whose flue still hangs loosely from the wall near the inner entrance. It is nevertheless possible to imagine how it might once have looked (see below).

It is not absolutely certain that this was the actual or only club house, however. Further along on the same side of the road is a house called Shrublands, which Mary Paterson (who was brought up nearby at Craigside) recalls was traditionally known as the 'Club House', though no written evidence that this is so has come to light. Close to the summer house is an even more ruinous hut, in which groundsman's equipment could have been kept.

Sources

The Gloucestershire Echo, 1911-1922; *Cheltenham Looker-On*, 1910-1911; *Cheltenham Chronicle and Graphic*, 1914; *Annuaire*, 1913; *Nisbit's Golf Year Book*, 1914; *Golfer's Handbook 1921*, pp 393-4; *Who's Who in Cheltenham*, 1911.

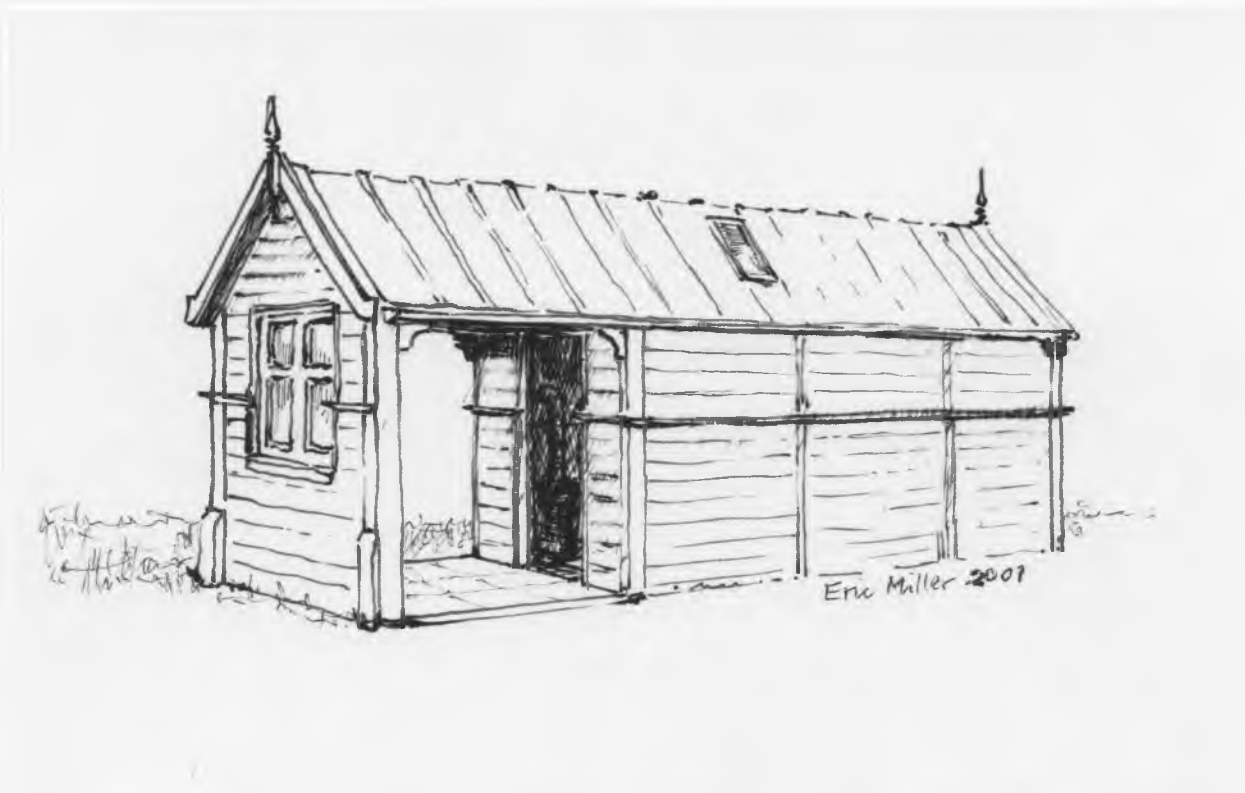
Footnote

¹ The latter were coal merchants with other business interests in the area, including (as we have seen earlier) the Battledown Brick Works and the Cheltenham Golf Club. A photograph in *'Battledown Tiles – the story of Webb Brothers'* shows a fireplace at the North Gloucestershire Golf Club made of Battledown fireplace tiles.

² Also a coal merchant: see following article

³ Hill Grange is now known as Leckhampton Grange, and Rockholme is the next house up the hill.

⁴ With acknowledgements to Geoff North.



Artist's impression of the probable club house for the nine-hole course

Coal and Coke Contractor to H.M. Government.

Telegrams:
FARRAR, Leckhampton.

Wm. D. FARRAR,

THE COLLIERY OFFICES,

LECKHAMPTON,

Gloucestershire.

Prices of
Best House and Steam Coals
and Coke,
and Horticultural Coals,
on application.

17 JAN 1910

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To-day's Special Net Cash Prices all per ton at Pit for Truck loads. I strongly recommend you to try at once. I shall be glad to receive your orders.

These Quotations are subject to reply by return, and Sales to suspension during strikes or any delays whatever beyond my control.



Leckhampton coal merchant William Farrar and his firm's bill heading

GIVING 'GRATE' SATISFACTION: FARRAR'S THE COAL MERCHANT AND LECKHAMPTON

By Terry Moore-Scott

Around 100 years ago, a housewife in Leckhampton buying coal or coke for the household fires could choose from a remarkably wide range of products with evocative names like Ibstock Main Screened Cobbles, Bolsover Opened Grained Hards and Desford Steam Brights costing between 6s 6d and 11s 0d per ton. I discovered this from an original price list (containing in all 17 different types of coal!) issued in 1910 by Wm D Farrar from the Colliery Offices, Leckhampton.

Many will remember Farrar's which, according to Kelly's Directory of 1968, was still operating out of an office in Albion Street, Cheltenham. In the same Kelly's a notice also claimed that the firm was established as far back as 1828 but the earliest certain record appears in commercial listings for Cheltenham of 1905 when the firm's office was at 11 The Promenade (near to Hooper's shop today). By about 1912 the company, trading as Wm D Farrar and Wrathall and Co, had moved to 4 Clarence Street.¹ The accompanying portrait of a rather dignified-looking Farrar comes from this time.

The company appears to have flourished for, in the 1923 Kelly's, W D Farrar is listed as having establishments (mostly depots) at the GWR Station Leckhampton, 103 High Street, the GWR Station New Street (ie adjacent to the former St James's Station) and at LMS Tewkesbury Road and, by 1959, an advert featuring the slogan 'Farrar's Coal Gives Grate Satisfaction'(!) listed the company's head office at 6 Albion Street as well as establishments at Cirencester, Gloucester and Tewkesbury.

William Farrar's connections with Leckhampton however were not just commercial. Around 1908 he was living in Ryeworth Road, Charlton Kings, but according to the *Annuaire* of 1913 he appears to have moved to Leckhampton where he lived at Highercombe in Hall Road. He later purchased the former golf club house (see article above) and lived there until November 1933 when the house was sold to John and Alfred Bendall.²

One poignant reminder of the family's connection with Leckhampton remains, for the village war memorial bears the name of a Corporal Howard Alan Farrar of the Queen Victoria's Rifles, the second son of William Farrar, who in 1915 was killed in action in Belgium. The boy has no known grave but is commemorated on the Menin Gate memorial and on the kerbstone of his parents' grave in Leckhampton churchyard.³ His mother died in January 1917, while William Farrar himself lived on until 1939.

Footnotes:

¹ From an advertisement in '*Cheltenham, The Garden Town*', 1910-1912 edition

² The 'Bendall Archive' contains an annotated copy of the sale particulars

³ From a record taken by John Hyde in March 1988; also '*Leaving all that was dear*', J Devereux and G Sacker, 1997

Acknowledgements

The author is indebted to Val Braunholz, Terry Enoch and Graham Sacker for their assistance and contributions towards this article.



The Leckhampton Court Foxhounds, with huntsmen
(Mr H W G Elwes)

FOXHUNTING and LECKHAMPTON COURT FOXHOUNDS

By Amy Woolacott

The idea for this article came about when the Society received from the 'Bendall Archive' a 1904 Cotswold Hunt map produced by the Ordnance Survey. The map shows hunt meeting places and smithies – essential to horsemen.¹ Much of the detail about Leckhampton Court foxhounds was kindly provided by Henry Elwes of Colesbourne Park, whose grandfather was Henry Cecil Elwes of Leckhampton Court.

Foxhunting

Foxhunting dates from the late 18th century, but the aristocracy also found amusement in hunting the stag, while the squire hunted the hare. The earliest form of foxhunting followed the traditions of hare-hunting and many squires kept a few couples of hounds and took them to the meet. Foxhounds are always reckoned in couples, usually an odd number making a 'pack', such as eighteen and a half couples. By the end of the 18th century the sport was organised on a far grander scale. More expensive, faster horses allowed greater distances to be covered, and both the squire and the aristocrat enjoyed the pomp and ceremony (similar to stag-hunting) that evolved. In the late 19th century some extremely long foxhunting chases were recorded; one from Salperton went almost as far as Barnsley Park - a distance of about eleven miles. Another went from Chedworth Wood to Roel Gate, nine miles - substantially more as the hounds run.

British foxhunting was originally meant as fast exercise for horses, which sometimes led to a fall and 'buying a piece of land' with the resulting muddy coat and breeches. Ploughed land was particularly difficult, but old ridge-and-furrow fields were much worse. Those riding to hounds were able to assess their horse's prospects as a good steeple-chaser. But as the decades pass some customs go to be replaced by new ones. Foxhunting has never been without its critics, and comments such as 'the unspeakable in pursuit of the un-eatable' summarise the disgust felt by some, but this is no place to raise serious criticism or any defence.

Gloucestershire has some of the best hunting country, and on a bright morning from October onwards, when the first frosts whiten the grass and the air has the smell of winter; when decaying bracken rustles in a wintry wind and the jay gives its discordant cry, then the pack of hounds would meet at the 'old inn' sharp at ten. (Meets now generally start at 10.45.) At the start of a hunt each follower would greet the Master, and see if any hunt servants had views on the day's prospects. The Master moved off first, with the whipper-in at the rear of the pack followed by the Field Master who checked the behaviour of hunt-followers. The Master put the hounds to covert. Most fox coverts were specially planted as three- or four-acre patches of conifer strategically located across the countryside. The hunt rule prevents 'holding up' a fox in woodland by surrounding it with riders and followers, unless to avoid riding over standing crops or among livestock. The field of riders would wait for the fox to break cover. When he did and had got well away the cry of 'halloa' was given and the huntsman blew 'gone away' on his horn, to which the hounds responded.

The hounds might then pick up the scent of the fox and burst into 'song' – thrilling both riders and horses. A fox usually ran with the wind, so that his scent, which only lasts about twenty minutes, was not carried back to the hounds. If the fox ran through cattle or sheep, or swam a brook, the scent could be lost, and then a 'check' took place. The Master made a 'cast' by taking

the pack in a circle round the area until the 'line' was hit. The hound which picked up the scent 'gave tongue', and away they went, hounds taking first place over everybody else.

In the Cotswolds riders had to take care with horses jumping stone walls and the risk of a knee-cut from sharp-edged stones. Another hazard was a horse losing a shoe when miles from home. After the hunt, the Master was usually last home, and only when all the hounds were safely back at kennels, as they were like children to him. Horses were cooled off, and sometimes given some beer in their drinking water.

I am sure there are few of us who can not recall the refrain of *D'ye Ken John Peel*:

'For the sound of his horn brought me from my bed,
And the cry of his hounds which he oft-times led;
Peel's "view halloo" would awaken the dead,
Or the fox from his lair in the morning.'

Local Gloucestershire Hunts

The Cotswold Hunt began in 1858 after the Cheltenham Stag Hounds were disbanded. Both the hounds and their quarry, which had been supplied by Earl Fitzhardinge from his Berkeley Castle estate, were withdrawn from the western slopes of the Cotswolds after the earl's death. The Reverend Francis Witts described in his diary a chance meeting in 1848 at the foot of Dowdeswell Hill where Lord Fitzhardinge's hunt and foxhounds were gathered for the chase. Great benefits came to Cheltenham by his lordship's making it his residence in winter and headquarters of his hunting establishment. In later years, known simply as Colonel Berkeley, he became 'a pillar of society', serving for a time as Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire.

The whipper-in of the famous Berkeley Hunt, which always wore yellow coats, was Charles Turner who became First Huntsman (keeper of foxhounds) of the Cotswold Pack at their kennels in Prestbury Road. Henry John Elwes was one of the trustees of the Cotswold Hunt, and the first Huntmaster was Mr Cregoe Colmore of Charlton Kings until 1871. In 1879 when the Huntmaster resigned, G B Witts took his place until 1907. Mr Henry Elwes of Colesbourne Park tells us that 'H J Elwes was a traveller and plant collector, but also enjoyed a good day's hunting. His son, Captain (later Colonel) Henry Cecil Elwes, enjoyed steeplechasing and later at the invitation of Herbert Lord, Master of the Cotswold, formed his own pack of foxhounds at Leckhampton Court in 1908.' Tom Pitman, who was engaged as whipper-in and stables huntsman, came to Leckhampton from the Llangibby Hunt in Monmouthshire, and his daughter, Ursula Tandy, who now lives in Old Bath Road, has many recollections of her father's enthusiasm for foxhunting.

The Leckhampton Court Pack

The Leckhampton foxhounds were assembled from the Cotswold Hunt, the Vale of White Horse Hunt - Cricklade, and hound sales at Rugby. Some hounds were loaned by Charles, 3rd Baron Fitzhardinge (1830-1916) whose portrait by William Edward Millais hangs in one of the rooms at Berkeley Castle. The Leckhampton hounds were housed at the Court stable yard where loose-boxes and kennels were located until 1912 and, Mr Henry Elwes tells us, 'they hunted the Painswick country and sometimes on the estate of H J Elwes at Colesbourne Park. For the more distant meets, the horses and hounds travelled by train, sometimes to Stonehouse, and on one hunt a fox went to ground in the privy at Fostons Ash Inn.'

Colonel Elwes's favourite hunter, The Continental, was Irish-bred, a good steeple-chaser and a terrific jumper. Henry Elwes says, 'He is alleged to have cleared two unjumpable fences with Cecil Elwes on board.' The Continental 'had a sad ending though in 1902. He put his foot into a

metal feed manger, severed an artery and had to be shot.' A monument to The Continental was erected in a field behind the Court. The inscription is now hard to make out but originally read:

'TO THE MEMORY OF
THE CONTINENTAL
BY BOULEVARD-FAIRHAVEN
FOALED 1891 DIED 1902
WINNER OF 25 STEEPLECHASES
AND THE FAVOURITE HUNTER
OF CECIL ELWES
BY WHOM THESE STONES WERE ERECTED'

Mr Elwes further recalls that 'in 1912 Cecil Elwes became master of the Burton Hunt until the start of the First World War. Much later, when in Alexandria, he came across a local hunt. Two of the hounds ran out of the pack and licked him, and he recognised them from his old pack. They were with an Egyptian hunt with an Italian Master.'

The Leckhampton hounds were evidently still kept on during the First World War, when the Court was used as a Red Cross hospital for wounded allied troops. At least, the photograph reproduced below shows nurses and military patients together with horses and riders. It is possible that it was taken on the same occasion as the one reproduced on page 36.



The Leckhampton Court Hounds with nurses and patients during the First World War
(Mr H W G Elwes)

Farriers and Blacksmiths



'Tudor garage' at Leckhampton Court
(from an engraving by Kip, 1712)

But, what of the smithies? Was a farrier ever resident at Leckhampton Court Stables, was there a blacksmith, if only for agricultural items? It is very likely there would have been. There is a rectangular building (with the appearance of a 'Tudor garage') to the south of Leckhampton Court, still standing today, though in a state of near ruin, which had a furnace and chimney in one corner, and could have served as a smithy. Who was the local blacksmith-cum-farrier? At the 1891 census William Crook Hicks, then 56, was a vet and farrier, with five other occupants resident at Westbury Villa, Pilley, now the site of Westbury Road. Also in 1891 William Colley² (64) was a blacksmith in Pilley Village.

A blacksmith's shop and stables were at the southern end of the Bath Road (on the west side almost opposite The Norwood Arms), but these had an adjacent weighbridge doubtless for quarry tram-road trucks, probably those bringing limestone and coal to the kiln where Ewlyn Road now is. It seems very likely that this blacksmith attended to a variety of needs, not least the making of shoes for tram-road ponies. The Forge in Exmouth Street, off Bath Road, was another place providing a vital service for the many horses used to draw the delivery carts of local traders.

There were numerous smithies in surrounding country until the early years of the 20th century due to necessity. Typical locations were at road junctions, or in the heart of a village. In 1904, the smithy at Shurdington was near Church Lane, but in 1838 (Enclosure map) a blacksmith's and adjacent pool were at Little Shurdington on land owned by William Edward Lawrence, south of The Greenway where hunt meets took place.

At that time, the bulk of a smith's work would have been farriery, because horse transport was only completely superseded by motor vehicles, considered a luxury at first, around the time of the First World War. In earlier times, horses were not the only animals to be shod; mules, asses and oxen were used extensively in rural areas, and the shoeing of farm horses would have provided the farrier with work well into the 1940s.

The 19th-century blacksmith and the farrier played key roles in everyday life. Their crafts were usually separate, though closely allied and often undertaken by the same person, especially in small communities. The skill of a farrier frequently extended to being a horse-doctor. The local blacksmith's shop would have produced anything from elaborate gates for the lord of the manor to the simplest of wall hooks used in the smallest of cottages, and it was very often a village meeting point for exchange of gossip while the indispensable services were carried out. There would have been a spacious forecourt, and quite often a horses' drinking-trough and tethering rings. The traditional chestnut-tree often stood near by and provided welcome shade in the summertime. This was at a time before the demise of many rural traditions and specialised crafts but, before long, the village smithy had to adapt to agricultural or ornamental work with iron.

The forge itself was a brick or stone hearth four or five feet square, with a large metal hood connected to a flue. The bellows were operated at one side, and on the other was a tank of clean water for cooling or quenching the work. The anvil stood in the centre of the floor on a block of

timber, specifically chosen to make the anvil responsive, and its ringing tones would have been heard all around the village.

It seems that horseshoes were first fashioned as early as the ninth century, and the idea soon caught on. The local farrier would have known most of the horses in the district, and kept sets of shoes ready made. Animals brought for shoeing would be allowed to accustom themselves with the surroundings, and young animals would often arrive with an older, more experienced one. The fore feet were examined first, then the hind ones. The old nails were removed, the hooves cleaned and rasped, often by the farrier's assistant, meanwhile the new shoes were being prepared for trying on. This produced quantities of smoke and a pungent odour, but the horse experienced no pain.

The cost of a blacksmith's services hardly varied from one village to the next. About 1904, fitting a horse with a set of shoes cost two shillings and eight pence. To hang and grind a scythe cost sixpence, and to bond a barrow wheel – one shilling. For cutting, welding and bonding a cart-wheel – using about 12 feet of iron tyre – the cost was four shillings. However, a system of barter or payment in kind was common practice having been the basis of rural economy for centuries. A local tradesman such as a baker might supply the farrier with bread in exchange for having his horse re-shod. Never the less, a blacksmith with an assistant had to pay the man's wages, buy faggots of wood for heating iron tyres, and purchase coal for the forge. Many items, like a cartwheel tyre made by the smithy, would last for many years; all for a few shillings. How times have changed!

Footnotes:

¹ The map, priced one shilling, shows hunt meet points in 'the Painswick country', or near Leckhampton Court, and the location of the nearest smithies, which on average were 2-3 miles apart.

² Was he by chance related to the William Colley, also a blacksmith, who met with a terrible accident at Frederick Thackwell's brickworks (see page 7)? - *Editor*

References:

Baily's Foxhunting Guide to Cotswold Hunt [and others].

Revd F E Witts: *Diary of a Cotswold Parson*, Ed David Verey, 1978

Peter Southerton: 'Hunting the Cotswold Stag', Cheltenham Local History Society *Journal* 14

THE OLD ROADS AND TRACKS OF LECKHAMPTON

By Terry Moore-Scott

It is good when one local historian's work triggers off someone else to delve further into the subject and this is what Amy Woolacott's highly interesting piece on the Evolution of Leckhampton's Street Names (*Research Bulletin* No1 (Autumn 1999)) did for me. What I found particularly interesting about that paper was the sense of time it conveyed in the evolution of Leckhampton's roads. Roads are after all not permanent features on the landscape and if we are to get a complete understanding, we have to look at the total picture of local roads and tracks over a long period. Inevitably, the resultant picture is a palimpsest of features of different dates: of ancient roads and tracks of medieval or possibly even earlier date (many now largely obliterated), later medieval or early post-medieval routes which developed around emerging village settlements and later, after a considerable time, the enclosure roads and turnpikes in the 18th and 19th centuries which brought about profound changes to local road systems and formed the backbone of the modern road network we see about us today.

I was also interested in the extent to which so many of the local roads and streets which we have come to take for granted are a relatively modern creation arising from the turnpiking of roads and the expanding urbanisation of Cheltenham since around 1800. It therefore occurred to me that if we could reconstruct how Leckhampton's roads and tracks looked in the period some time before 1800, we could very likely gain a good idea of how our predecessors were used to moving about over a much longer period stretching back many centuries when travellers went about on foot and on horseback and goods were moved by pack-horse or heavy carts.

To do this, I have consulted a range of documentary sources, early maps and plans, historic gazetteers and various books on the subject of old roads and tracks. Also, to give a well-rounded picture, the area I have covered extends from Sandy Lane on the east around to the Shurdington Greenway on the south. Since it is not always easy to define a number of the old routes by means of present day road and street names, I have given each one a number designation (Route 1, Route 2, etc.). These numbers also appear on the diagram maps provided.

Historic Background

We may reasonably assume that some of the roads and tracks that exist in our local landscape are much older than we think. We know that prehistoric man inhabited this area of the Cotswolds and could well have needed permanent trackways for moving about. The earliest settled inhabitants of Leckhampton who appear to have lived principally on top of our local hill and other hills nearby must surely have had recognised tracks between their settlements, out to their fields and grazing areas and for longer distance trading. The problem is that proving such early dates for any of our local routes is virtually impossible and all we can do is surmise.

The subsequent Roman period produced a network of arterial and secondary roads of sophisticated construction, some of which, like Ermin Street, still provide the basis for our modern roads although the minor trackways and roads that must have existed then largely remain elusive. The same applies for most of the Dark Age period that followed and it is not until the late Saxon period of the 10th century and then the Norman period, with the development of a nucleated settlement around Leckhampton that we begin to see the setting out of a network of roads and tracks much of which we can trace still today.

The earliest documentary reference to a road in the general area of Leckhampton (namely the Shurdington Greenway) actually dates back to as early as the 8th century but it is not until around the 13th century that references to particular local roads begin to appear regularly. The earliest plan of roads in Leckhampton is that taken from Norden's written survey of Cheltenham of 1617 (Figure 2). Unfortunately only the eastern half of the village is shown (and what is shown might be incomplete) but it provides clear evidence of the existence at that time of, for example, 'Colum Strete' (i.e. Church Road), Old Bath Road and an approach road up past the Court. In the main, however, we have to wait until the start of the 18th century for any volume of evidence about Leckhampton's roads and (as you will see from the detailed section following), there is a surprising amount.

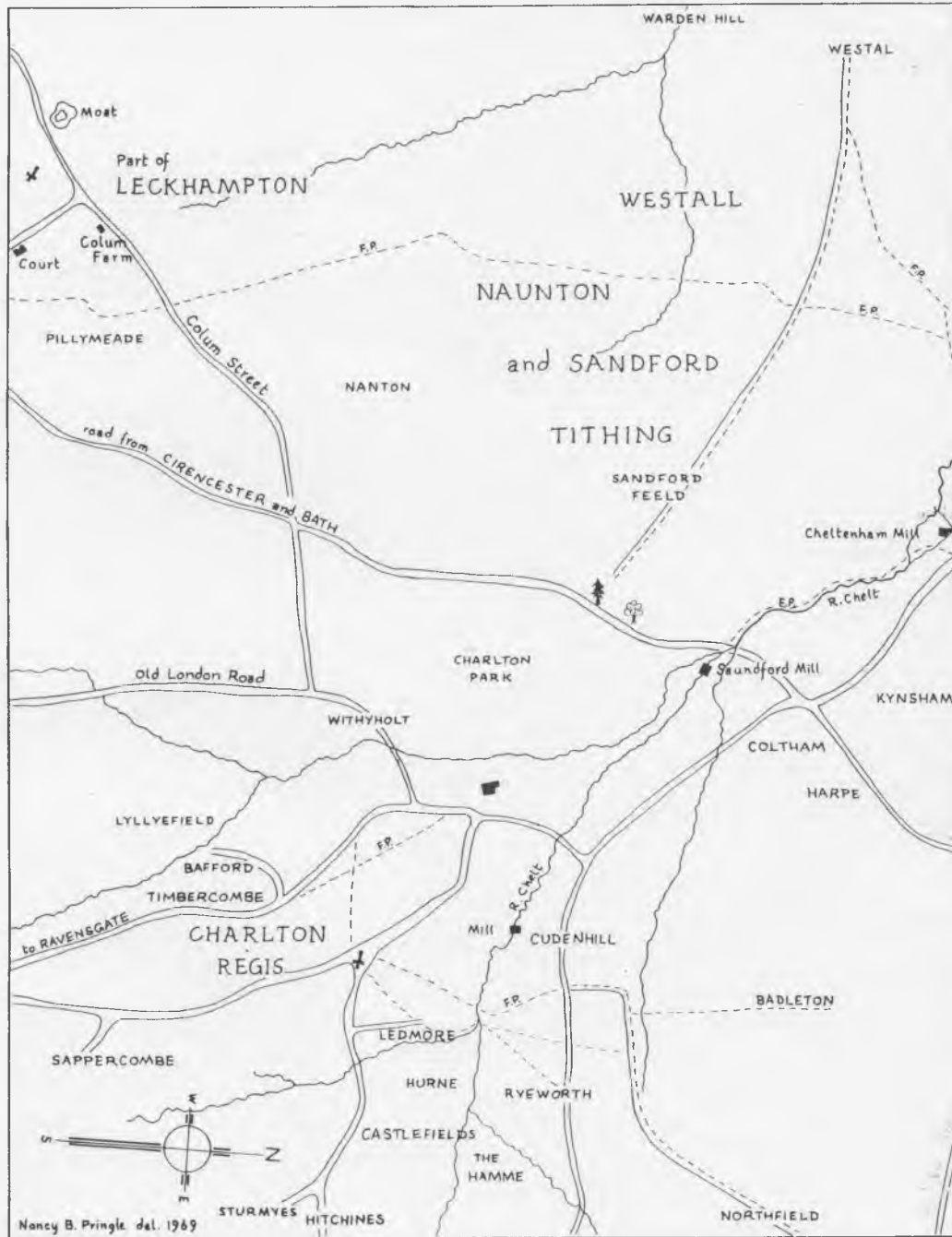


Figure 2. Extract from Map of Cheltenham, c.1607
(taken from Norden's Survey)

Details of Leckhampton's Old Roads and Tracks (see Figure 1)

Route 1. Old Bath Road. Referred to as *Edge Way* in 1270 and in 1350 as the *Vie Reg* (King's Highway). The road may however be a lot older than these references indicate. As an extension of Hales Road (also known in medieval times as the 'King's Highway'), it has been speculated that its existence goes back to prehistoric times when it provided the way between the Iron Age settlements on Cleeve, Leckhampton and Crickley hills. The placename Salterley has even been taken to suggest that this road was in ancient times part of the saltway network that extended south through Gloucestershire from the salt producing centre at Droitwich. It is described by Norden (1617) as the 'road from Cirencester and Bath' and in 1778 as the 'road from Cheltenham to Birdlip'. In the late 18th century, its lower end from Sandford Bridge up to the vicinity of Pilley appears to have been known as Pilford Lane and its upper reaches as the road 'leading from, Leckhampton to Birdlip'. The 1778 Inclosure schedule specified that it should 'for ever hereafter remain a public road or highway having a width of 40 feet. The road was implicated in a 1785 petition raised by Cheltenham citizens seeking a better road towards Bath by turnpiking the road 'from Bembridge field' (i.e. Cox's Meadow) to Birdlip and Painswick. It is not clear what results this petition had but, in 1831, a further petition was made to convert into turnpike the existing road 'from the turnpike gate on the London Road'.

Route 1a. Further up the Old Bath Road near to Tower Lodge, is a minor road going eastwards known today as Daisy Bank Road. On Crow's 1746 map, it is shown as a direct continuation of the Court drive leading uphill 'on to Hartley Hill' and Pinnell (1778) described it as leading 'To Cirencester'. It appears to have been a continuous route out of the village centre where it formed an extension of Kidnappers Lane (Route 6). How important it was is not clear but, in 1810, Daisy Bank Road was part of a planned new turnpike road from Cirencester to Cheltenham via Severn Springs and Leckhampton, linking up with the 'New Bath Road' (i.e. Leckhampton Road). This proposal was of course never taken up and Daisy Bank Road stayed a minor route of little importance apart from where it served a quarry-related purpose.

Route 1b. Upon climbing further up the hill, near to Salterley, a lane leads off on the south side to give access to the hilltop and on to Hartley. A stretch of this lane coincides with a section of Leckhampton's ancient parish boundary suggesting that the origins of the lane may be equally ancient, perhaps dating back even to prehistoric times when there was settlement on the hill top.

Route 2. Sandy Lane. Known today as a sedate residential road but only as far up as Southfields whereupon it changes to being a steep stony hollow-way climbing around the back of Leckhampton (or Windlass) Hill on to the crossroads above Seven Springs. During the 18th century and perhaps earlier this was once a coach road from Cheltenham on the way to London. At its northern end it originally began as a branch off the Old Bath Road at Sandford, crossing Cox's Meadow and the fields of Charlton Park to merge with modern-day Sandy Lane (near to the junction with today's The Avenue). This lower section was closed in the late 18th century to make way for the creation of Charlton Park with access off Sandy Lane towards Old Bath Road being provided via a newly turnpiked Greenhills Road (Route 3). The route was known as 'Sandy Lane' in 1545 and appears in two early sources (1617 and 1806) as the 'Old London Road'. Rather like Old Bath Road, its origins may date back a lot earlier since there is archaeological evidence of both Prehistoric and Roman settlement along its alignment, mainly in the vicinity of Southfields.

Route 3. The only other road in Leckhampton to have been described in the record as 'King's Highway', this was the principal east-west route through Leckhampton, as represented today by

Greenhills Road, Charlton Lane, Church Road and Leckhampton Lane. It was known to villagers in the 16th and 17th centuries as 'Colum (or Colam) Strete' and as the route 'out to the Collum fields' (i.e. the open common field covering the area between today's Leckhampton Road and the top end of Old Bath Road). Entries in the Cheltenham Manor Court leet of the early 1500's relating to the tithing of Leckhampton indicate that there were regular problems with flooding in 'Colam Strete' and local residents were fined for neglecting watercourses along it. In the late 18th century, it was referred to variously as 'the road from Leckhampton to Shurdington', as 'Pilford Lane' and as 'the road from Leckhampton to Cheltenham' (i.e. via the bridge at Sandford). Going east, it crossed Old Bath Road to link up with Sandy Lane and on some maps is shown carrying on into Charlton Kings. At its western end it provided a route to the medieval settlements of Shurdington and Badgeworth and thence probably into Gloucester.

Route 3a. On more than one 18th century map a prominent footpath is shown leading at a tangent off the south side of Church Lane just beyond Broadwell house, skirting behind Calves Close and Howe Mead and crossing Crippetts Lane to become a field track into the Burley Fields. On Pinnell's 1778 map it is annotated as a 'footpath from Shurdington' and is shown following the same route on a 1909 map of the proposed golf course (Bendall archive). The right of way still exists although today it peters out at the Burley fishing reserve.

Route 4. approximating to the top part only of **Leckhampton Road between Old Bath Road and Charlton Lane.** a relatively late arrival on the Leckhampton scene. In discussing the first roads to arise from the Inclosure Act for Leckhampton, R C Barnard refers to it as a short piece of road leading from the foot of the hill to the Malvern Inn. The 1778 Inclosure schedule refers to it as 'the *new* road leading from Leckhampton to Birdlip', also as the road from Leckhampton to Cirencester and the road leading to Pilford Lane. In fact the surveyors appear to have routed this new road up through the middle of the Collum open fields. At the start therefore, this road was merely a link between two more prominent roads (Routes 2 and 3) and a convenience for the residents of Leckhampton wishing to travel south towards Birdlip and Cirencester. It was not extended northwards to join Bath Road, until after the completion of the Leckhampton - Gloucester tramway in 1811. Bath Road itself was not fully opened until 1822; Leckhampton Road was first named thus in a record of 1841.

Route 5. A partial road or trackway passing over the area of Hall Road. This is first recorded in 1746 and shown crossing the open fields as a track through the fields to Moorend Farm. The latter was reached via a short curving spur (see Figure 1) but the route continued in the direction of the town, Pinnell's 1778 map actually describing its continuation as a 'footpath to Cheltenham'. Its alignment as it approached the area of the Norwood Arms may well be marked by the old parish boundary which at this point runs just to the east of Leckhampton Road. Support for this idea is provided by an 1823 plan of the Cheltenham Parish boundary which notes in relation to this particular stretch of the boundary that it follows 'an ancient lane now thrown into this ground'. The upper part of Route 5 was evidently superseded by today's Hall Road (first recorded as that in 1884). The 1778 map also shows that, before the turning into Moorend, there was an eastwards spur off the route leading 'to Naunton Green' (i.e. across ground later taken up by the old railway and currently by the industrial estate).

Route 6. Kidnappers Lane, the north end of Farm Lane and beyond; another of Leckhampton's ancient ways. The first documentary evidence of it comes in a terrier of glebe land in Leckhampton around 1700 which refers to 'the wayside' forming the border on the NW of certain 'lands' (i.e. arable strips) in Upper Stanley Field. The changing angular alignment of

Kidnappers Lane implies that its course was selected to respect the boundaries of furlongs in the open fields it was crossing. Crow's 1746 plan shows it crossing the open fields in this area and the 1778 Inclosure schedule refers to it as the 'road leading through the middle of Upper and Lower Stanley fields'. Where the lane makes a right-angle turn towards Farm Lane, a spur track (Route 6a) is shown running off northwards alongside the Hatherley Brook clearly intended to provide access to more of the Middle Field.

That Kidnappers Lane was more than just a local field track however is indicated by another reference to it in the 1778 schedule as 'the present road from Leckhampton to Gloster'. After merging with Farm Lane the route continued on as a track shown on Pinnell heading NW across the fields 'to Gloster' (note that Shurdington Road did not exist at that time). This latter stretch seems to have followed the line of the old Farmfield Lane and, further on, perhaps Hatherley Lane eventually reaching the area of the Golden Valley and the old Gloucester Road.

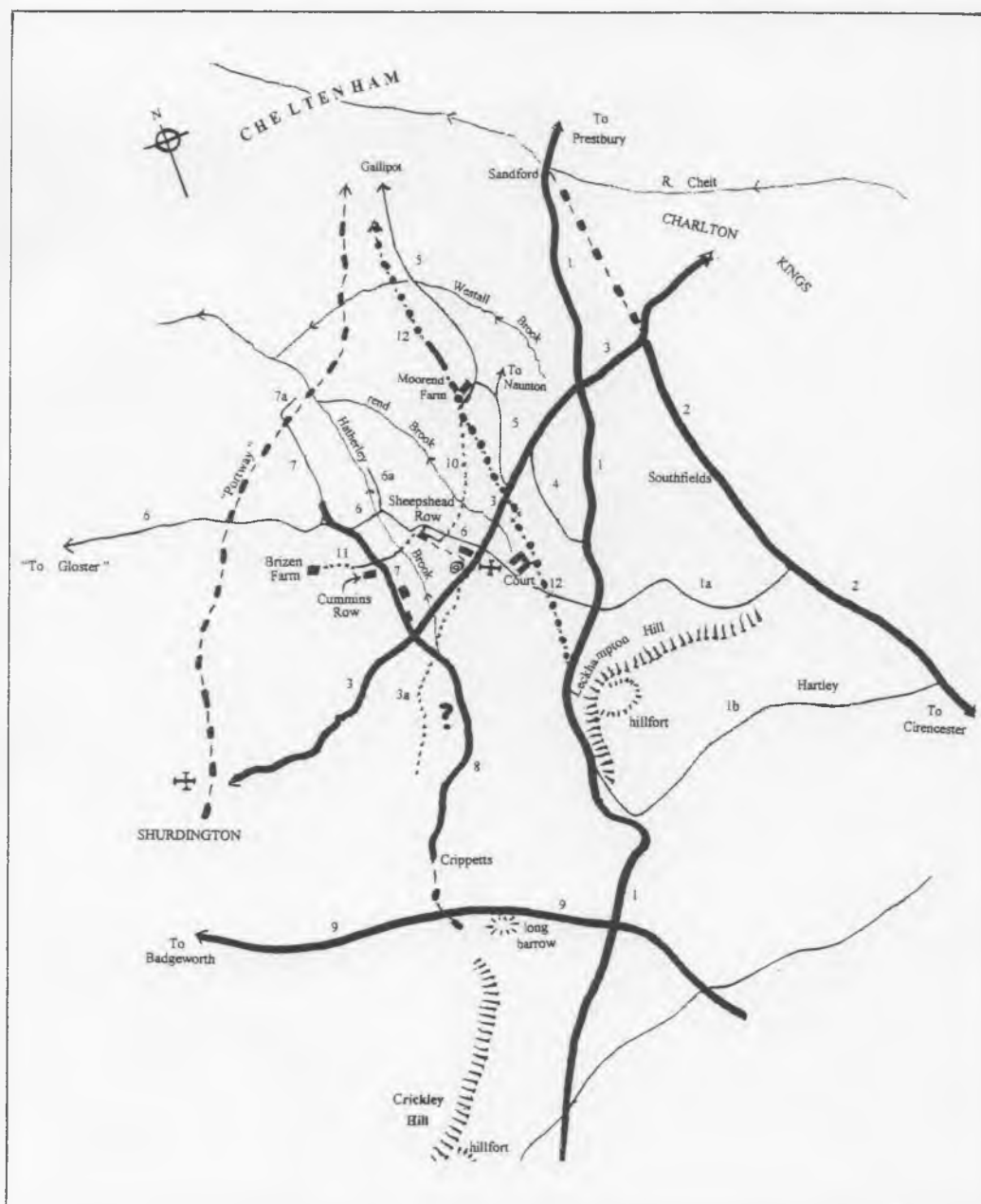


Figure 3. 'Crossing' Routes

In addition of course, the southern end of Kidnappers Lane was for a long time the means of moving about within and around the early village which lay to the north of Church Road encompassing a roughly rectangular area northwards to the areas of Moat Cottage, Sheepshead Row and Cummins Row (Croome's 1835 plan actually annotates this part of the lane as a 'green lane from Cummins'). Traces still exist of another early road or track, long ago abandoned, running past the moat from opposite the church gate towards Moat Cottage and beside Sheepshead Row, lining up with a straight section of Kidnappers Lane.

Route 7/7a. Farm Lane and beyond. Although linking with Crippetts Lane to form a single route to and from the hill the importance of this lane at least in later times appears to have been as a means of movement for the farms and other dwellings in the western sector of the village (like Elm, Leckhampton and Brizen farms and the cottages at Cummins Row) not only into the open fields round about but also as a route into the markets at Gloucester and Cheltenham. It is partially shown on Crow's 1746 map but is depicted in full on the 1778 map. This shows it as having a T-junction in the vicinity of Cummins Row, quite different from the straight alignment of modern Farm Lane. Having been joined by Kidnapper's Lane, the route became the way to Gloucester as described above (under Route 6) but it also led on to Merestones fields where a junction was eventually made with the 'portway' from Shurdington to Cheltenham.

Route 8. Crippetts Lane. This is generally thought of as an old 'greenway' leading to the Crippetts and Pinnell's 1778 map actually annotates it as leading 'from Crippetts Farm'. In 1835, its lower end was known as Bittums Road and, further up, as Cummins Furze Road - both names relating to fields that could be reached via it. The way it lines up with Farm Lane seems to indicate that it has for a long time formed a continuous means of access to the hill from much further afield in the vale. There seems little doubt either that at its top end it originally continued beyond the Crippetts, eventually linking up with the Shurdington Greenway, and on certain early O.S. maps it is shown continuing on beyond the Greenway as a footpath crossing the fields behind Ullenwood and close to the prehistoric burial mounds there. It may therefore have served as a route from the vale up to important prehistoric settlement and ceremonial sites on the hills.

Route 9. The Shurdington Greenway. I include this feature, as I did Sandy Lane, because although it is on the periphery of our area, it is bound up with other routes more closely related to Leckhampton. In her article on the Hundred of Cheltenham, the late Barbara Rawes refers to the Shurdington Greenway as 'a minor road called the Greenway which runs from west to east ...connecting Badgeworth (a manor belonging at the time to Abbess Eafe (of St Peter's Abbey Gloucester, AD 735-767) ... with her sheep walk on the Wold at Upper Coberley'. Like Sandy Lane, The Greenway today is nothing more than a rough track. This should not be allowed however to detract from what is an ancient local trackway that was probably an important link between the vale and the hilltop in early medieval times and probably much earlier.

Other, lesser, tracks and paths. Many of the small tracks and footpaths that criss-cross the village today as public rights of way have very likely existed for centuries. They will have evolved in response to the needs of local people who moved about mostly on foot between farms and other dwellings. By the time of the inclosures in 1778, some of Leckhampton's footpaths were deemed important enough to be included in the official schedule, such as one (**Route 10**) described as 'one public footway 3 feet wide from the south corner of Middle Field next to the road there to Parsonage Piece, Lot Meadow, Lower Sandfield, to Moorend and Cheltenham'. This particular alignment (see Figure 1) still exists as the footpath that runs alongside Burrows Sports Ground as far as Moorend Grove.

Various maps of Leckhampton from the late 18th century onwards have consistently shown another path leading eastwards from Brizen Farm, crossing Farm Lane at Cummins Row and eventually reaching Kidnappers Lane near to Sheepshead Row (**Route 11**). Interestingly, before the arrival of Shurdington Road in the early 19th century, this track seems to have been the only regular way out of Brizen Farm.

Perhaps the most intriguing though is a path first indicated to us on the Norden-based map of 1617 (**Route 12**) (see Figures 1 and 2). It is shown as a footpath running in a north easterly direction down off the hill passing just to the east of the Court and, after crossing Collum Street (Church Road), proceeding across the open fields in the direction of Cheltenham. Later maps show this same track starting out from the Birdlip Road at a point near to Bartlow House and continuing down the hillside to reach Church Road near to its junction with Hall Road. It is tempting to conclude that the line of this track was eventually taken up by the new Hall Road but Mitchell's 1806 map clearly shows the track running to the west of Route 5 (Hall Road's predecessor). After linking up with paths coming in from the direction of Kidnappers Lane (including Route 10), it carried on to pass to the west of Moorend Farm. A section of it appears on the 1778 map as a roadway described in the schedule as the 'road to Rough Breach bounding Walkhampstead on the east' (i.e. somewhere in the vicinity of Moorend Street). After crossing the Westall Brook, it proceeded on towards 'Gallipot Farm' (situated in the area later occupied by Suffolk Square) and traversed the area now covered by Montpellier Gardens to end up in the town. Although only one of many such paths in and around Leckhampton, this particular one has all the appearances of having once been a serviceable route down off the hill for people on foot, possibly with pack animals, aiming for Cheltenham by means of a more direct route into the town than that offered by Route 1 (Old Bath Road) and (Route 5) (Hall Road), the only ways available for that purpose before Leckhampton Road was opened up.

In Conclusion

Researchers who have looked closely at the way road systems have evolved seem to agree that essentially two types of ancient routes are to be found. The first, usually the very earliest routes, are what might be called 'crossing' routes, that is they pass across the area of a town or village without any direct reference to it - probably because in many cases they predate it. Typically they formed part of longer distance routes which evolved from earliest times in response to man's need to move about for trading and driving his stock animals (as for example from the Vale up on to the hills). Examples in this category around Leckhampton are Route 1 (Old Bath Road/Birdlip Road), Route 2 (Sandy Lane), Route 9 (the Shurdington Greenway) and Route 3 (Church Road/Collum Street). Route 8 (Crippett's Lane) may also fall into this category, as might lesser tracks such as the portway between Shurdington and Cheltenham (although it bypasses Leckhampton) and Route 12 (the track leading off the hill to Cheltenham).

The second category may be called 'radial' routes, that is they radiate around and out of a town or village specifically for use by the people of that place, for example to reach nearby markets and to gain access to surrounding fields. Routes 6 and 6a (Kidnappers Lane), Route 7 (Farm Lane), Route 5 (road out to Moorend and Naunton) and Route 1a (up hill past the Court on to Daisy Bank) seem to fit this category. Route 3 (Church Road/Collum Street), in addition to being a 'crossing' route, was also important to local inhabitants as a 'radial' route to nearby villages, as were the large number of minor footpath routes linking sites in and around the village.

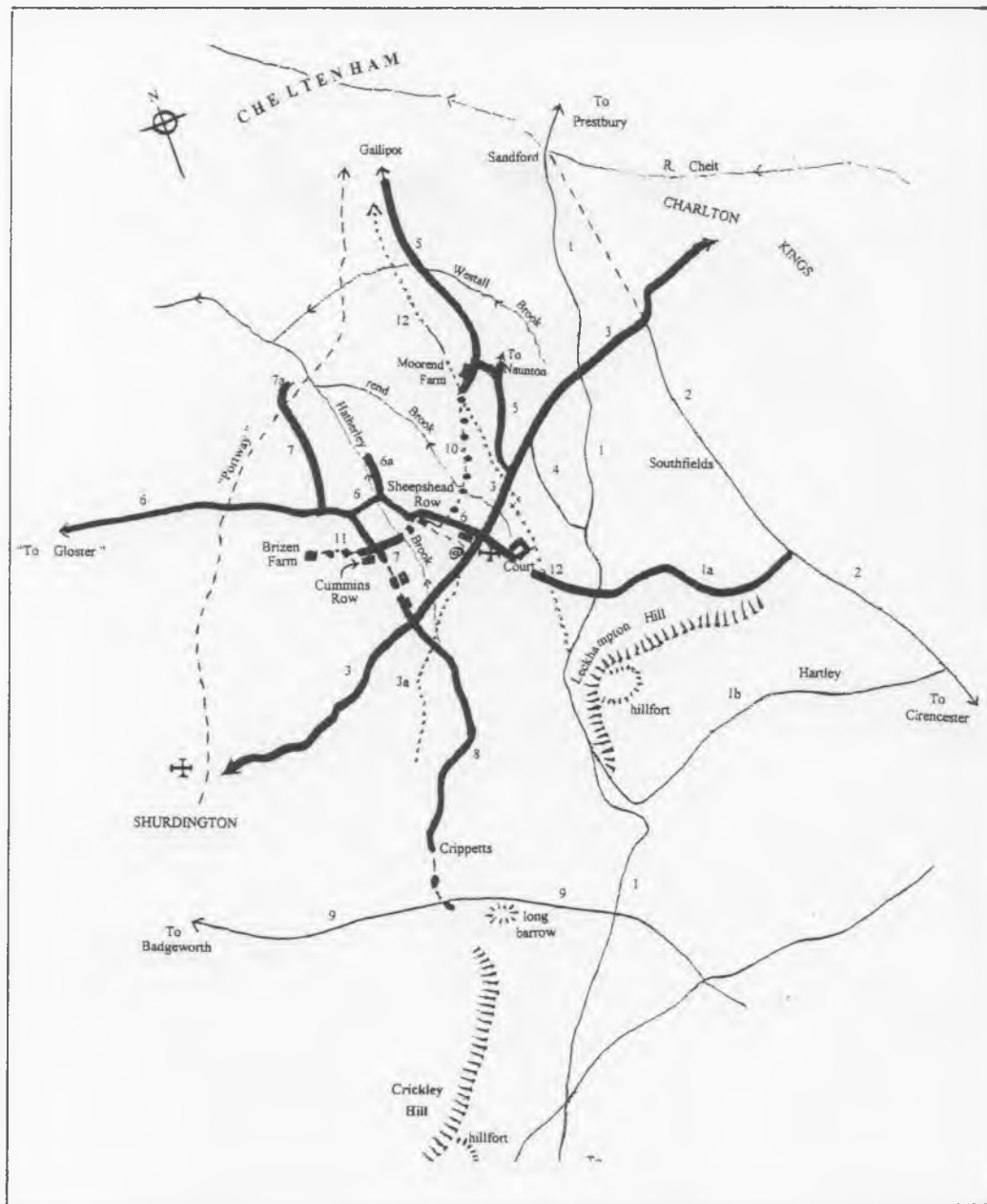


Figure 4. 'Radial' Routes

Looking at Leckhampton's 'radial' routes, it does appear that the routes into Cheltenham centre were relatively meagre. Route 3 (Charlton Lane, etc.) is the only one described as a way to Cheltenham (presumably because all heavier traffic had to use the bridge over the Chelt at Sandford) and Route 5 (vicinity of Hall Road) is said to have continued on to the town but only as a footpath. There admittedly was the Shurdington - Cheltenham portway but this seems to have been for light traffic only. By contrast, there were two well-established routes by which Leckhampton people could get to Gloucester: Route 3 (Leckhampton Lane and onwards through Shurdington and Badgeworth) and Route 6 (via Hatherley). Local farmers would certainly have gone to the markets at both towns but perhaps this tells us something about the relative importance of the two places for the ordinary folk of the village. The day-to-day needs of Leckhampton's tiny population would probably have been small and perhaps more easily satisfied at Gloucester rather than Cheltenham. Interestingly, in his notes on the Parish Records written in 1896, R C Barnard records that, in the 17th century, to buy a pound of pepper a particular young woman of Leckhampton had to go to Gloucester and he suggests that this accorded with 'what was known of the condition of Cheltenham at the time'.

Acknowledgements

My thanks especially to the staff of the Gloucestershire Record Office for their valuable help to me in collecting together material for this piece, and also to several fellow local historians (notably John Milner) who provided me with additional useful information.

Sources

The following maps and other documentary sources have been used to produce this compilation:

A. Maps

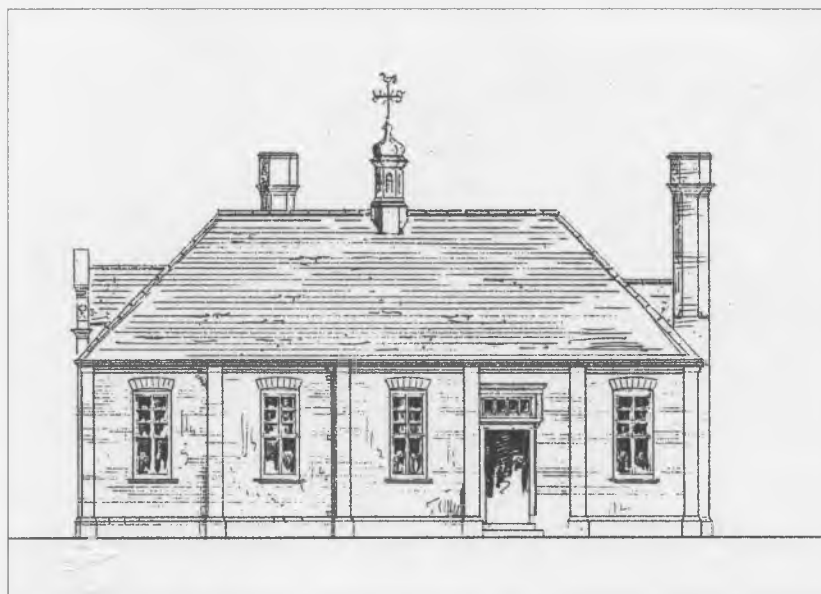
1. Map of Cheltenham, taken from Norden's Survey of the Hundred of Cheltenham, 1617; as published in A Saville, 'Pre-Regency Cheltenham, An Archaeological Survey' (compiled for Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, July 1975, and reproduced here with their kind permission).
2. A Plan of the Leckhampton Estate of Wm Norwood Esq by James Crow, 1746; GRO D303/P2.
3. A Plan of the Parish of Leckhampton by T Pinnell, 1778 (produced in association with the Inclosure Act for Leckhampton)
4. Map of the town of Cheltenham by Edward Mitchell; first published 1806 (as included in Saville 1975).
5. Plan of Leckhampton Parish by W Croome, 1835; GRO198a VE1/1.
6. A map Leckhampton and its Fields published in Leckhampton Local History Society *Research Bulletin* No1 (Autumn 1999), p 26.
7. Various early issues of OS maps of Leckhampton from 1884 onwards.
8. Plan of an intended Turnpike Road from Cirencester to Cheltenham through the parishes of Cirencester, Charlton Kings, Leckhampton and Cheltenham, September 1810; GRO Q/Rum 42.
9. A Map of the Boundary of the Parish of Cheltenham in the County of Gloucester as perambulated May 21st to 22nd 1823; GRO D2216/2.

B. Other sources.

1. Norden's Survey of the Manor & Hundred of Cheltenham, 1617; GRO D855 M7.
2. The 1778 Act of Inclosure for Leckhampton with its associated schedule; GRO D2025/10.
3. A True Terrier of all Glebe lands belonging to the Rectory of Leckhampton, 1679-1735; GRO D303 E12.
4. J Hodsdon, *An Historical Gazetteer of Cheltenham*; B.G.A.S., Gloucestershire Record Series Vol.9, 1997.
5. E M Clifford, Human Remains at Charlton Kings; TBGAS 60 (1938), 350-351.
6. P Purnell and E W Webb, An Iron Age site near Cheltenham; TBGAS 69 (1950), 197-199.
7. D E Bick, *Old Leckhampton*; published by the author, 1971.
8. B Rawes, The fields and field names of the Hundred of Cheltenham, Pt.1; Cheltenham Local History Society *Journal* No 6 (1988), 1-27.
9. B Rawes, Charlton Park Fields; Charlton Kings Local History Society *Research Bulletin* No.1 (Spring 1979), 3.
10. M Paget, Roads through Charlton Kings since 1700; *ibid.*, 18-19.
11. T Moore-Scott, A Possible Portway to Cheltenham; Cheltenham Local History Society *Journal* No.15 (1999), 49-52.
12. Note by R C Barnard on roads around Leckhampton arising from Inclosure; *Records of Leckhampton*, June 1897.
13. J Milner, A Medieval Road to London; *Glevensis* 14 (1988), 17-19.
14. Prof. M Aston, Interpreting the Landscape (1985), 141.
15. G B Grundy, The Ancient Highways and Tracks of Lower Worcestershire and the Middle Severn Basin; *Arch. Journal* vol.XCI (1934).
16. Gloucestershire Turnpike Roads; Gloucestershire Record Office 'Signal' Teaching Aid, reprinted 1976.
17. (Re: Bembridge Field) GRO Q/SR h 1787 A/3 and B/i.
18. C Taylor, *Roads and Tracks of Britain* (1979).
19. Leckhampton LHS 'Bendall Archive'.
20. R C Barnard; Cheltenham Manor Court Leet, Leckhampton Tithing (October 1529); *Records of Leckhampton* May 1897.

LECKHAMPTON FREE READING ROOM

By Owen Stinchcombe



‘The Early Cowshed’ – Leckhampton Local Board Room¹

In 1893 parts of the villages of Charlton Kings and Leckhampton were incorporated into the Borough of Cheltenham, with the result that the town’s Library Committee was faced with having to make provision for a further 7,000 potential readers. It was thought unlikely that many Leckhampton residents would use the town’s Public Library, because it was ‘so far off as to be practically of no value to the inhabitants’. It was therefore decided, as an experiment, to open a Branch Reading Room in Leckhampton.² (No consideration seems to have been given to treating Charlton Kings similarly, perhaps because the need there was thought to be adequately met by the reading room and 2,000-volume library of the Working Men’s Club and Institute.)

The Leckhampton Free Reading Room was established in May 1894 in Moorend Road, in the single-storey building, which had previously served as the Local Board Room and which was familiarly known as the ‘Early Cowshed’ – a term originally used jokingly to describe its architectural style. It was open on week-day evenings, and morning and evening newspapers were ‘constantly supplied’. In September 1899 a Book Delivery Station was added, so that residents could put in an order for books from Cheltenham Public Library one day and pick them up the next, without having to make the journey into town themselves. But to run the combined operation of Reading Room and Book Delivery Station required the attendance of an assistant librarian six evenings a week from 5 to 9 pm. The town’s Library Committee monitored the experiment closely and was soon complaining that the facility was insufficiently used. After issuing several warnings, it finally closed the Reading Room at the end of September 1903 as an economy measure.

There was an immediate outcry against this decision, and a group of public-spirited people decided to try to keep the enterprise going by voluntary effort. A number of willing subscribers came forward, from whom a Management Committee was formed. Between at least 1906 and 1913 the Chairman was Dr H R Lloyd Davies, while the Treasurer was Mr J B Ransford, who had previously been associated with the Victoria Hall at Bourton-on-the-Water.⁴ Cheltenham Town Council did not withdraw its support entirely. According to a press report, it 'evaded the discredit of not providing a Branch Library' by continuing to make the premises available, making the 'munificent(!)' annual grant of £4 from the rates and passing on to the Reading Room the £6 it received annually from the Guardians for the use of the 'Early Cowshed' during the day-time as a relief-pay station. The Mayor, who was *ex officio* President of the Reading Room, was persistently urged to try to persuade the Council to increase its grant. But the reply was always the same: £10 was an 'adequate' contribution towards the £60 per annum it cost to run the Reading Room.

It was a constant struggle to find the remaining £50. Apart from £8 raised from a concert in February 1906, the only source of revenue appears to have been voluntary subscriptions, and a plea for more subscribers was made at every annual meeting. It was feared for a time in 1913, when Miss Swift³ died, that the loss of her annual gift of £10 would force the Reading Room to close. But in the end the 'zealous and energetic' Secretary, Miss Geeves, obtained new pledges of £6.15s, and both the Mayor and the Chairman offered to double their personal subscriptions.

Meanwhile the service to the public continued virtually unchanged, the Committee claiming that the users 'had nothing to regret in the change from official to private control'. The Reading Room, to which access remained free, provided a generous supply of newspapers and magazines as well as a lending library. Books not available in the local library could still be ordered from Cheltenham Public Library and, 'by means of a system of portorage, brought to the door, so to speak, of the Hill Tribe'. However, borrowers now had to pay an undisclosed 'small fee' for the service. There are several references in annual reports to a Librarian, but the only name mentioned is that of Mr H Bettam, who gave 'efficient and courteous service' for some years before his death in 1909. The Librarian's salary was the largest item of expenditure (£19.17s.6d in 1911).

Although the Committee repeatedly stated that the need for a Reading Room and Library in Leckhampton had been 'abundantly' demonstrated, the statistics it published are not particularly impressive:

Year	Reading Room Attendances	Book issues (Local and Cheltenham)
1906	9,923	3,299
1909	c.9,000	c.4,000
1911	7,192	3,587
1913	7,777	3,408

As the Room was open for about 310 days a year, the average attendance varied between 23 (1911) and 33 (1908). The total number of borrowers is unfortunately not mentioned.

In 1905-1906 the function of the Reading Room was expanded to include recreational facilities. A small adjacent room was opened on two evenings a week for chess and draughts. According to the 1906 report, it was used 'chiefly by boys, on average 10 per night'. This was perhaps considered to be an inadequate response, for the facility is not mentioned subsequently.

It seems likely that Cheltenham Town Council was reluctant to spend more money on the upkeep of the building in addition to providing the annual grant, for in 1910 it was 'a few private subscribers' who had a gas lamp erected by the entrance.

Sources:

Other sources were: *Cheltenham Free Press* 6 Oct 1906; *Cheltenham Examiner* 21 Oct 1909, 27 Oct 1910, 19 Oct 1911, 24 Oct 1912, 23 Oct 1913; Annual Reports of Cheltenham Public Library Committee

Footnotes:

¹ GRO D2970/93, deposited by Messrs Barnard & Partners

² It is not known where the Reading Room stock came from. Although it is stated in '*1894 – the End of an Era*', p 7, that a Miss Buchanan had donated a sum of £500 for the purchase of books, the Library Committee report for 1896 makes it clear that these were intended for Cheltenham Reference Library.

³ Among Miss Swift's other gifts to the community were the gates to the Parish Hall

⁴ The *Cheltenham Annuaire*s listed the Leckhampton Free Library Committees. In 1908 they were as follows:

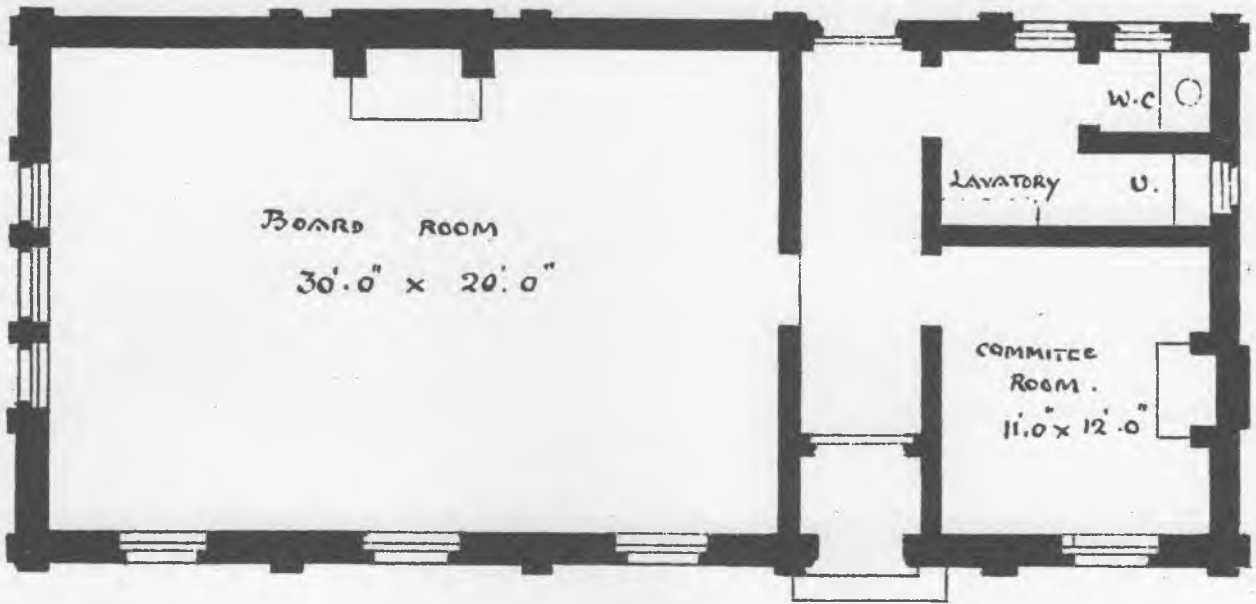
Dr H R Lloyd Davies, Chairman, 29 Leckhampton Road
Miss Swift, Porchester, 53 Leckhampton Rd
Miss Oakwell Smith, address not known
Revd J A Lindam, 1 Cotswold Lawn
G Davis, 2 Rosebank Moorend Park Road
W C Evans, address not known
R C Hawkins, address not known
J N Hobbs, Concord, Montpellier Grove.
W Hopkins, Stadacona, Moorend Park Road
Dr E Cocks Johnson, Avoca, 85 Leckhampton Road
K Lupton, Lystra, 69 Leckhampton Road
J B Ransford, Edgefield, 80 Leckhampton. Road
T P Waite, Burnbrae, 133 Leckhampton Road
H Warner, Licensee, The Norwood Arms
Honorary Treasurer, R F Beard, St Cloud Cottage, 99 Leckhampton Road
Honorary Secretary, Miss Geeves, St Cloud, 97 Leckhampton Road

In 1911 the names were largely the same, but the following new ones appeared:

W Revell, Brampton, Church Road
E Reynolds, Kyrewood, 2 Ewlyn Road
A L Stevenson, Wingrove, Moorend Park Road

(With thanks to John Randall for supplying these details)

(See plan of Local Board Room overleaf)



Plan of the Board Room, 50 feet x 22 feet 6 inches
(*Gloucestershire Record Office*)

(Continued from page 19)



Cotswold Potteries' bread crocks
The one on the right, with lid, shows the firm's oval stamp (*Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums*)