

# **The Emergence of a Community**

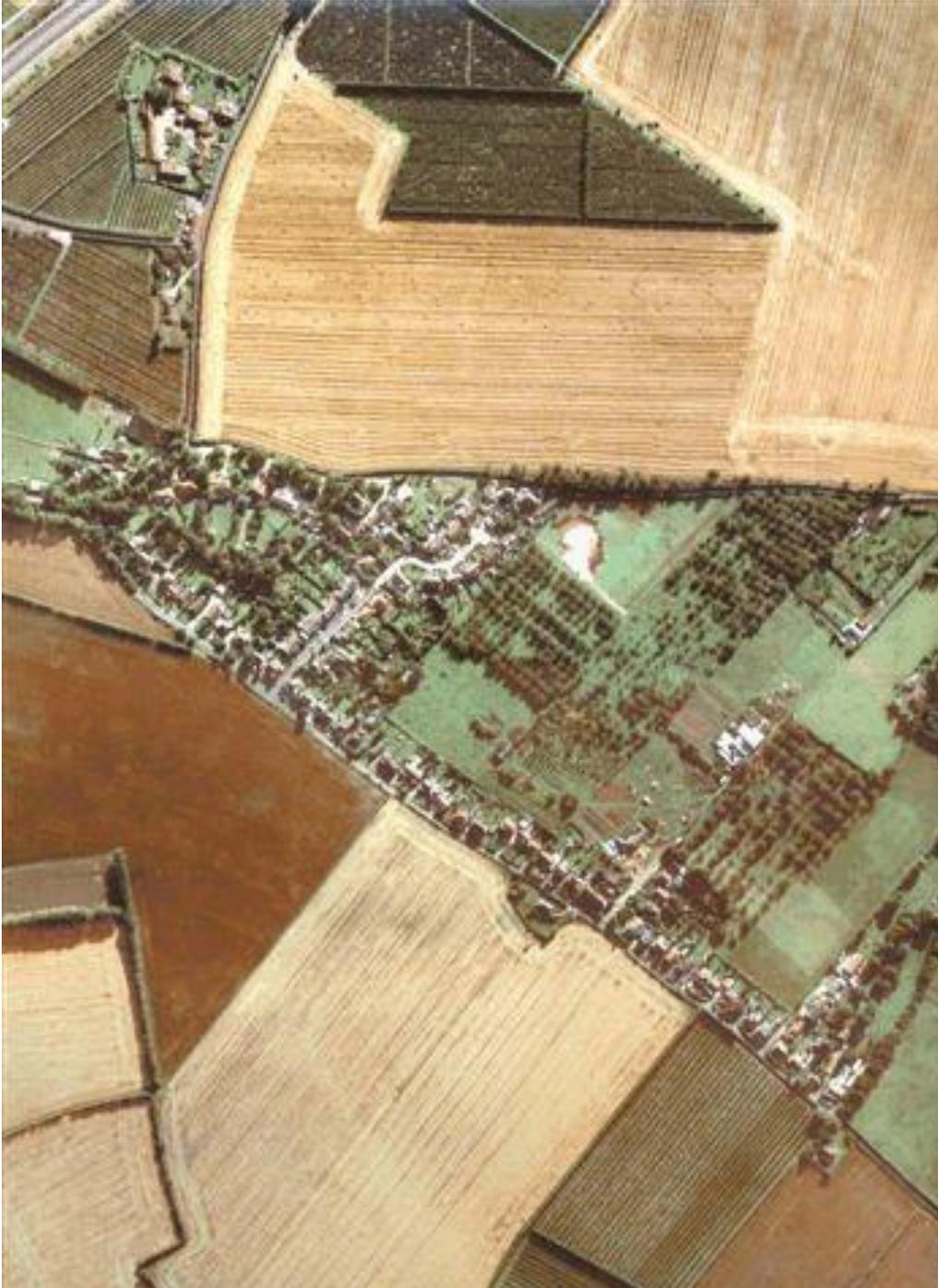
**An Introduction to the Origins and Development of the  
'Thanington High Lanes' area outside Canterbury**

Clive H. Church  
'Rufflands'  
72A New House Lane  
Thanington Without  
Canterbury, CT4 7BJ  
Tel: 01227-458437  
E Mail: [clivehchurch@freeuk.com](mailto:clivehchurch@freeuk.com)

*30 July 2005 - 22 Jan 2006 / rev 2011-3*

The author's thanks for the original edition go both to all those residents who have provided him with information (whether written or oral) and to the staff of the Local Studies Centre (Canterbury Library), the Cathedral Archives and the Kentish Studies Centre (KCC Maidstone) who found materials and answered questions. Any errors are his alone. And any corrections or additions will be gratefully received. Copies are also available on the websites both of *Hilltop CA (Canterbury)* and on that of *Thanington Without Civil Parish Council*.

For the revised version, which takes the story a little closer to the present, double thanks are due to David Lewis for his photographs and, especially, for his hard work on inserting the photos and reformatting the text. Corrections and suggestions will be welcomed by the author.



1: Overview of Thanington High Lanes

## The Origins of the 'Thanington High Lanes' (or Hilltop) area 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 houses only on one 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 brought otherwise unrelated lands together and then made them available to people from Canterbury who were able, between the two World Wars, to exploit them for their own purposes. Hence history has produced an unusual community, involving houses at the top of Hollow Lane, Iffin Lane and New House Lane 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. The Cornish would have called it 'Thanington High Lanes', given that much of it is in the south ward of the Civil Parish of Thanington Without. Moreover, it has developed along a series of lanes crossing the hills on the south-east of the Stour Valley and leading into Canterbury.

What unites this somewhat scattered area is partly its often unappreciated history, partly its relative isolation on the rural fringe of Canterbury and partly a number of social factors. 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 Without Civil Parish Council [TWPCPC]. Thus there is much evidence of local involvement in TWPCPC 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.

In the long term past there were only a few farms in the area. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many of them passed into the hands of large scale 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.

## **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 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. Rather, 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 they 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 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 one 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.

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 were 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. 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. 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 Farm looks to have been built earlier as it has 16<sup>th</sup> century elements, it could have been redeveloped by Gipps in the 1770s, a few years before Iffin and Stuppington Farms were rebuilt. In any case the farm was, and remains, a handsome building as the pictures show. It also has the second deepest well in the county, an old oven and a remarkable old barn.

**Comment [CHC1]:** Insert Illustration 2 (NHF) from Thanington PDF, plus 3 (Well); 4 Fireplace; and 5 barn (chose one of three please)



2: New House Farm



3: New House Farm well



4: New House Farm fireplace



5: New House Farm barn

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. 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. 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 eventually 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.

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. Whether any children living in the farm cottages which emerged in the 1880s 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 tenant farms 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 brothers, 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 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 estate 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 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 so it was withdrawn from sale. This was the case with

New House Farm. Much of the land was 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 £1900, 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 Cockerling and, until 1911, Iffin Farm. In that year Iffin Farm 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 land 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. Much of this was 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. There were few if any hops although, down on the main road, there were some highly reputed hop gardens, hence the name of the pub which is 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 felt it necessary to provide 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 short term purchases since war was about to change things dramatically.

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

The old pattern of isolated farms above a centre of gravity along the Ashford and 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 33 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 nationwide 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. They provided a large number of the young officers who died. Tax changes 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 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. The lot 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, 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. He was

born of good family in Soham in Cambridgeshire in 1842 and, after training at Guys Hospital, had probably lived in Southend and Hampshire before moving, about 1896, to Horton Court outside the city. Although he was then described as a farmer-surgeon, he was probably retired from both, as he is not recorded at the K&C and used a bailiff for 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) acquired our 68 acres 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, the purchase was then divided up into seven smaller lots of about ten acres each and sold off within six months. This 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 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 Vipan 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 Vipan 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 these dictated his decision to divide up the land. Certainly, his will, drawn up the previous year, shows no suggestion that he felt any obligation to help post war reconstruction. In fact it is obsessed with his family, including his son who he clearly did not trust. He left his heirs the tidy sum of £15,601 gross, about £500,000 in today's money.

In any case it was his purchase and 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 enterprise 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 were sold on very rapidly, the smallest plot probably being sold on to 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 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.

### **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 also, by then, 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 a sale at Shornecliffe on 25 February 1920.



6: The Bungalow in Iffin Lane



7: Another very early house in New House Lane

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

**Comment [CHC2]:** Insert from Thanington PDF 6 The 'Bungalow' in Iffin Lane and 7: Another very early house in New House Lane

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.



8: A now extended early house from New House Close

Some of these, were built on slices of the original plots. 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

**Comment [CHC3]:** Insert from PDF  
8 A now extended early house from  
New House Close.

loans they may have incurred. The second 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' (now replaced by the Limes and its neighbour) 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 Vipian. 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 reason for development was that it was proving very hard to make a go of market gardening. When people moved in the area was "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 Thanington High Lanes then 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 looked back on it as an extremely hard and difficult period.

This helps to explain why there were so few facilities in the area. Indeed, such was the lack of services in the Lanes that residents said 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



9: New House Road before it became a real Road, showing the shop in the little hut.

Second World War it 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.

For the rest, the area was indeed deprived and deserved its nickname of 'Thanington Without everything'. 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 GPO some indication of where to deliver. 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 around 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. Further details about them can be found in my history of the Parish Council on the CHAS website,

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 a Bailiff, Reynard J. Cooper of Cooper & Wachter. The first went to the King family, who were related by marriage (and by origin as butchers) to the Ashendens of Cockering 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. Following this the Manor Court lapsed while his remaining quit rents could be redeemed by one off payments. This was much to the

amazement of some 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. Unfortunately the County Archive seems not to have a copy of the Order.

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. The fact that children had to walk long distances to school may have helped the community **spirit**.

**Comment [CHC4]:** Insert from PDF 10: Winter in Hollow lane, showing how valuable the high level path must have been.



10: Winter in Hollow Lane showing how valuable the high level path must have been

### **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 both large flotillas of RAF bombers, with their fighter escorts, flying overhead on their outward path to the continent and the 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. So clearly, the War did not undermine the new community. Indeed, it may have encouraged 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, 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. However, by the mid 1980s, if not before, this consolidation began to slow down somewhat as the post war dynamism ran down.

### **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 opposite 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 then passed from the Mounts to the Kings in the early 1970s. However, Iffin was soon sold off 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, he bought six acres from the Bakers, having started out life on the Ashford Road. This was followed by purchases from the Hoare plot and from others, possibly successors to Legge, called Butterfield and Knife. The last 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. 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 still 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, 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 to become the Close. Bridge-Blean renamed this as such in 1967 when the Road finally reverted to being the Lane. There were a number of houses there 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. On the one hand there was a sixteen bungalow development by Cardy beyond the track, ending with a turning circle at the 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 successful. Most of the houses in the Close are 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, to a wider and more varied social composition in the

area. Purchasers were less local than in the past and came from different social backgrounds. All this also 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 in 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 linked to new development and facilities, the question was also raised as to whether the roads should not be widened and proper lay-byes created. This 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 clearly metalled, it being chipped and rolled in 1980, water increasingly tended to run down the road. 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 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 mobiles meant that it was soon largely abandoned, even by vandals.

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. In the process New House Road seems to have been turned into New House Lane. Why this was done is not clear. In fact a good deal 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 the planning application for the 16 bungalows. This change may have been to make the new properties more saleable. 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 a call for the old library to be restored in late 1952. This 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. 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 things like VE day, the Coronation and the Silver Jubilee the South Ward 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.

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 the Lanes. Open air services were also 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 the loan of machinery from Wincheap Farm. As the next illustration shows, at least eight workers were involved. And the press obviously thought, some half century later, that such efforts were quite unusual. It does not seem that people came forward to identify the people in the picture.

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

10 October 28, 1999

*Canterbury*



## Spare-time hall builders

**F**IFTY years ago these men built St Faith's Hall, at Thanington Without, in their spare time with money raised by residents.

The building's half-century anniversary will be celebrated next year with a barbecue and a meal.

The hall committee want to commemorate the men who gave up their time to erect the hall, which is now used for a variety of community activities.

The problem is that information about the construction has dimmed with

the passage of time.

Committee member Joan Gower said it was believed that all but one of the original workmen had died. She thought the only surviving builder was Ed King, who lives near the hall in New House Lane.

She wonders whether residents recognise any of the faces in the photograph we reproduce today of the workmen taking a break from their labours, in 1951.

"If any readers know who these men are I would be delighted to hear from them," she said.

Mrs Gower can be contacted on 01227 451492.

With winter just around the corner, our other Memories picture takes a look back at the 1963 big freeze.

It shows what was probably a familiar chore - thawing frozen coal sacks over a brazier at the West Station.

The picture is from the Kent Messenger Group/Breedon Books publication *Images of Canterbury*, which takes a fascinating look at city life between 1930-70.

It is available from local book shops, priced at £14.99.

11. The 1999 newspaper report on the erection of the Hall

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, as did the Ashford Road Social 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, as we can see from the next illustration. The 1951 Plaque celebrating the consecration of the Hall can be seen in the top left of the picture. The clock has twice been three times replaced since one shown here, the latest celebrating the contribution of Cyril Gower who is seen with his back to the camera on the bottom of the left hand table. The lady at the head of the table is Doris Boughton.

As well as social events, 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.



12: The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner in St Faith's

Such activities thus managed to give some shape to what had become a community of some 140 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: Adaption and Renewal**

The last twenty years have, in fact, seen further alteration in the life of the Thanington High Lanes area. Thus there have been further changes in the setting notably where farming is concerned. Equally traffic has remained a major problem even though there has been much less in the way of new development and facilities. And the community has been able to adapt to both of these thanks in part to the revival of its own social organization.

### **Changes on the Land**

The land in 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 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 old Iffin farm was also split and reverted from fruit to pasture. Part of this was used by horses, linked to the Riding School that emerged, somewhat controversially, at the top of the 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. This later reverted to being an ordinary nursery. Some residential properties have also been used for professional activities.

Another example of farm land being used for new purposes came in 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 while a farm shop before being used for machinery workshops and furniture warehouses and, ultimately, a site for new housing. The old owners of Wincheap Farm also turned the bulk of their 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 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 but this was rejected. Hence in the late 1980s he applied to turn the land above the A2 into a golf course. This was granted in 1991 and then extended to a further nine holes. Since then, although the planning permission has been regularly renewed, there have been no moves to develop the land so far. Instead it has been used as a contract operated arable farm.

However, the aim of being a golf course has now ended and the land has been re-designated. And Tory has become a developer, trading as Pentland Homes, and hoping to build opposite New House Lane. Indeed, when the Local Development Framework lapsed after the coalition election victory in 2010, the idea was relaunched as 'New Thanington'. And this is being strongly pushed even though it was left out of the initial draft of the 2013 Local Plan. The LDF threat had, by then, prompted the formation of an Action Group, representing Hilltop, Iffin, Merton and New House Lanes to oppose building opposite New House Lanes. This was felt necessary because Hilltop CA, as a charity, was barred from 'political' campaigning. Nonetheless, This was and, to an extent, remains, the source of new community activity.

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. All this gave a new twist to the appearance of the area as did the arrival of double glazing and bricked forecourts. There was also one new big venture, in Stuppington Court Farm where, from the mid 1980s, Knights both developed the farm buildings as attractive houses and added some new large houses. However, rumoured expansion behind New House Close was blocked by the planners. All of this suggests that there have been further changes in the social composition of the High Lanes community.

**Comment [CHC5]:** Insert from PDF 13, 14, two pictures of Stuppington Development.



13: Stuppington Development (1)



14: Stuppington Development (2)

### **Traffic and Facilities**

These developments have obviously had an impact on both traffic and facilities. Fruit lorries, nursery school run SUVs and extra cars in new houses added to the traffic flows, as did the discovery of the lanes as a rat run avoiding blockages on Wincheap and elsewhere. Parking and deliveries added to the problems. All this led to controls including the long desired 30 mph limitation and the creation of some more lay-bys. Wear and tear obviously increased so that much of the area had to be resurfaced in the early 1990s. But pot holes remained a problem as did surface water. However, on one occasion at least in the early 1990s, the trees in Hollow Lane were cut back to help visibility.

In terms of facilities, the idea of street lighting surfaced unsuccessfully 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 ten years ago and much effort has been devoted to creating a replacement bus or taxi service to replace it. Some successes in this was achieved in 2012. Long before this, of course milk and newspaper deliveries also found their way up the hill, much more regularly than in the past.

In terms of institutional identity, there have been three main changes since the mid 1980s. 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 it was beyond the by-pass the Council estate was 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 A2) and the land immediately north of the Downs Road. This was added to Chartham. Conversely, 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. And 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. The Parish Council now hears reports on activities in the area as part of its Annual Parish Meeting, held each spring. These are still held alternately in St Faith's and the Ashford Road Community Association Hall. Attendance remains reasonable.

### **New Developments**

Secondly, the apparent decline of social activity was reversed. Because of the stagnation of the early 1980s, in April 1986 a questionnaire was circulated seeking interest in the Social Committee. Out of this came an infusion of new blood, reflecting the expansion of housing in preceding years, and the renewal of the Hilltop Social Club. This 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, and this at a time when, in line with national and local social trends, the numbers of people from the Lanes attending services were falling so that the Church was seen as unlikely to be able to sustain the hall, a further initiative was undertaken. 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 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 sets 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. And taking the Social Club under its wing, it has also provided recreational facilities for many residents as well as the young, including quiz evenings, Tai Chi and a lending library of fiction. It also started new fund raising activities including barbecues, themed evenings and a 100 Club. Moreover, a website has also been created and a new storage unit placed behind the hall which has now been redeveloped for social use. Unfortunately its value to the community have not always been fully appreciated since the Hall and its surrounds have suffered a certain amount of vandalism.

The Association 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 has also been given to the possibility of rebuilding the hall. This would be financially and legally challenging. However, after a long drawn out negotiation with the Diocese, Hilltop finally in 2013 obtained a long lease which will allow them to develop the hall as they see fit, providing they can generate the monies necessary.

The third element was the renewed sense of identity developed by planning problems. In the first place the drawing up of a Village (or Community) Design Statement in 2004-5 helped to generate activity and concern for the area. 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 has been drafted by a volunteer team of residents and will be developed as a result of suggestions both from the City and from the generality of residents to whom it will be submitted, along with a questionnaire. As well as offering a voice in future planning decisions, the act of drawing up a VDS also has 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. It may also offer a spring board for future developments. Unfortunately it has rather been ignored by the city's planners in both the LDF and then the Draft Local Plan.

Nonetheless, as already noted, when in 2009 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, there was an immediate local outcry. Large numbers of residents attended meetings and petitioned the Council against the idea. In the event, the election of the coalition government in May 2010 led to this being set aside. However the threat remained, and developers were regularly sniffing around the area and seeking to nobble its representatives. So the HIMN Group (Hilltop, Iffin, Merton & New House Lanes' Action Group) was set up to enable the Lanes to monitor developments and try and influence them in sensible directions. This has led to an alliance with other Residents' Groups first in southern Canterbury and then across the city. In particular there was resistance to a developer's proposals for a 'New Thanington'. The final picture shows the view from New House Lane towards the Cathedral which residents are so keen to preserve.



15: A winter view (actually taken in December 2013 despite what the camera claims) of the view from New House Lane to the Cathedral

The publication of a new Local Plan in 2013 partly renewed concerns amongst the community. While many were relieved to find that the New House Lane site had not been fingered by the Council in the Draft plan on grounds of visual amenity and inferior roads, a few appreciated that the threat to it was still there. Developers continued to press the Council to drop its decision to concentrate development in the Barton area and return to the 'New Thanington area'. Moreover, large scale development elsewhere in South Canterbury is very likely to have damaging spill-over effects on the High Lanes area.

All this could help residents collectively adapt to the ever changing environment in which the High Lanes community exists. In other words, while the community may now be 'made' thanks to its 95 year history, it is far from being 'finished' let alone set in stone. Change is bound to come whether because of developments outside the High Lanes or, as in the past, because its residents generate their own internal dynamics. If this introductory survey contributes to a general understanding of the past, present and future of the new community, and encourages a celebration of its centenary in 2018, it will have served its purpose. And perhaps it will be of interest to others, whether those faced with similar problems, or those just interested in the forgotten shadows of the history of Canterbury.