

Woodlands, West Meon

Woodlands is a hamlet situated in the parish of West Meon. The settlement here is often wholly overlooked in regards to the wider history of the Meon Valley, but its story is as important as any other.



“Horseshoes Hill”, Woodlands, August 2022.

150 years ago, old Woodlands was a settlement of thatched cottages, farms, and a coaching inn. Woodlands became a part of the nearby Basing Park Estate in the 1880's, and as with many of the estate buildings, the old cottages were replaced by new, high quality buildings. The Upper House Farm development saw the demolition of a large farmhouse, several barns, and various dwellings, all of which were replaced by eight cottages and a model farmyard. A mission chapel was also erected in 1889, on the Woodlands Crossroads. It sat on the site of two demolished cottages, and was created by extending a pre-existing chapel, to form a new chancel and adjoining caretaker's cottage.

The architect for the Basing Estate buildings is not officially known, however the common belief is that the majority of the buildings were designed by George Rackstraw Crickmay, whose name appears often in the Basing Estate records. The Nicholson family, who owned and expanded the estate, were great church builders, erecting and renovating many churches and chapels in the area. The church at Privett was built by the Estate between 1876 and 1878, and was designed by Arthur Blomfield. It is not clear who the architect for the Woodlands Mission Chapel was, however it is likely the work of Mr Crickmay.

The extended building held its opening service on December the 1st, 1889, where it was reported that over 140 people were present. The chapel was fitted with various new stained glass windows, with three notable windows in the chancel, showing the Virgin Mary, Christ on the cross, and St John the Evangelist. It was built at a time when each of the estate employees were required to attend Sunday service. The Woodlands Mission Chapel, as detailed in the license of 1889, was built “for the convenience of the inhabitants residing at a distance from the Parish Church of West Meon”.



The Woodlands Mission Chapel, shown in 1905, from the Ray Stone Collection.

Since at least the 11th century, a chapel was also recorded as being at Punsholt. Dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, the chapel likely followed the history of that of the church of the Holy Trinity, at Privett, as at one point, both Punsholt and Privett were part of the parish of West Meon. In 1391, an indulgence was granted to those who visited and gave alms to the “fabric of the chapel”. Despite this, St Marys was already in ruins by the early 17th century, during which time it sat nearby to an old Manor House, belonging to the Catholic family of Loveden. This was the time of perhaps the most important period of Punsholt’s history, when, after many years in prison, the last of the old Westminster monks, Sigebert Buckley, came to reside at Punsholt. The monk’s statement of November 1609 was given here, and it is believed that he passed away in the Manor House. Tradition dictates the farmhouse at Punsholt as being on the site of the former chapel of St Mary, and certainly judging by records, the ruins of the chapel were the location of Buckley’s final resting place. Below Punsholt Farm is Pursers, a mansion now divided into three separate freehold properties.

In 1902, the 17th century farmhouse had found its way into the hands of Evelyn and Charles Higgens, who took to transforming a farmhouse into a compact country house. In 1902, they employed the architect Percy Morley Horder to carry out their wishes, and Pursers was given various new wings, its own large stable block, and a distinctive archway lodge house over the new carriage drive. Much of this important, previously unidentified work by Morley Horder survives to this day.



The now subdivided "Pursers", shown in c1910 following extensions by Morley Horder.



The Nicholson Family, at Basing Park.

Woodlands once also boasted a school paid for by the Basing Park Estate (in the private house now known as School Cottage), a coaching inn known as The Three Horseshoes, and even a shop. As far back as the late 18th century, The Three Horseshoes public house was trading. From the 1780's until at least 1836, an "extensive retail business" was run from a section of the building, in the trades of "grocer, linen and woollen-draper, haberdasher and crockery ware-man". A nearby field retained the name of "Shop Field" for many years. In days long since past, The Three Horseshoes stood on the London to Gosport Road, and in the late 18th century, a new Turnpike road was proposed to run from here to Botley. The area was already a prosperous place, with various shops and public houses within a few miles, and the busy fair at nearby Filmore Hill brought people to here from miles around. Towards the end of the 19th century, The Three Horseshoes Inn was sought to be closed, and the license transferred to a new establishment at Droxford, known as The Station Hotel. The Station Hotel was built in response to the building of the new Meon Valley Railway, and was situated nearby to Droxford Station. The license for The Three Horseshoes was given up in 1900, however it was later thought that the new building was not thought profitable until the railway line had started operating, so a temporary renewal of the Three Horseshoes license was permitted, until April 5th, 1903. The Meon Valley line opened in June 1903, and The Three Horseshoes was permanently closed.

The land at Woodlands was split into various tenanted farms, including Punsholt, Woodlands, Upper House, and Three Horseshoes. Woodlands and Upper House Farms became amalgamated following the ending of the farm tenancy of Mr Thomas Harris in 1886, as the following year, the vast series of barns at Upper House were built, and the main farmhouse demolished. Woodlands retained its farmhouse, but there were no great barns built to accompany it. It was commonplace for tenants in the estate farms to request for new buildings to be erected to replace the old farm buildings. One recorded mention of the building of the cottages at Punsholt Farm in 1883 required the tenant, William Andrews, to make a payment to the estate as contribution for the new estate labourers dwellings. The average farm labourer's hours on the Basing Park Estate (before the First World War) consisted of a work day of between 7am and 5:30pm, with overtime in the summer months. The cottages were rented to the farm workers for a weekly cost of 1 shilling.

Not all of the cottages at Woodlands were demolished and replaced. Some, like the two dwellings on Kitts Lane were demolished and never rebuilt. Behind The Three Horseshoes, there were two cottages which had been destroyed by fire by 1905, and much further up the hill, close to the junction of the A32, a cottage stood almost on the roadside. The garden of which is now only marked by a prominent yew tree.

This is only a small snippet of the history of Woodlands, but I hope it sheds some light on the interesting story of this small but important area of the Meon Valley.

Thomas Carpenter, Bramdean.

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