

OLD SEVENOAKS.*

BY GEORGE F. CARNELL, F.R.H.S.

I HAVE been asked by the Hon. Secretary to prepare a Paper upon the changes which have taken place in the town chiefly within my own memory of upwards of sixty-three years. I will therefore take my audience on an imaginary ramble, commencing at the southern end of the town, down High Street and London Road to the South-Eastern Railway Station, then back to the junction of the two principal streets, taking in the Middle Row, and afterwards from the High Street to St. John's. Starting from the Sole Fields at the extreme south of the town, where the battle between Jack Cade and the Royalists was fought on 24th June 1449, the beautiful estate now called Park Grange, formerly Sevenoaks Park, breaks upon our view, where stood the stone-built mansion of the Lambarde family, which was removed about half a century ago. Its noble avenue of oaks extending to the Common still remains.

Entering the town itself, we have on the left Oak End the residence of the Misses Northey, the front of which was entirely remodelled about fifty years ago; on the right the Grammar School and Almshouses; and opposite the Grammar School is Oak Lane, at the bottom of which are the Flow Fields, where formerly was a sheet of water on which I have often skated. In winter time the water flowed between the steep banks on either side, but the place is now occupied by a mound formed of earth thrown up from the tunnel of the South-Eastern Railway.

Returning to the town, observe the quaint old house jutting out into the street and overhanging the footpath

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just beyond Oak Terrace. I have not been able to find any date upon it, but it is probably one of the oldest in the town.

Sevenoaks Church and its monuments have been lucidly and interestingly dilated upon in the description from the pen of our Rector which we have heard read to-day. I will only remark that the absence of monuments to the owners of Knole is no doubt to be accounted for by the fact of their family place of sepulture being at Withyham.

A short distance further on, just beyond a very awkward bend in the street, there used to stand the "Old Curiosity Shop," kept by the late Mr. John Hooper—an authority in his day on old books, paintings, furniture, china, and works of art and vertu. Few persons came to Sevenoaks without going to see his collection and have a chat with the worthy proprietor. Opposite is Six Bells Lane. In the slanting roofs of the back of the houses, in the High Street at the top of this lane, are some curious attic windows, one above the other, after the style of continental towns. Further on, opposite the "Bricklayers' Arms Inn," formerly stood some old houses with rooms on the ground floor some feet below the surface of the street, the upstairs rooms being attics, from the windows of which it would have been easy to shake hands with passers-by on the pavement. Further on is the White House, formerly the residence of Mr. Charles Willard, Clerk of the Peace for Kent, with its fluted columns and many windows. Next to the grocer's shop (Mr. Russell's) stood a butcher's shop with a landway on the northern side. These have given place to the avenue leading to the delightful residence of our churchwarden, Mr. Laurie. Next is the house and shop of Mr. Outram, leather-seller, said to have been formerly the property or residence of Archbishop Morton from 1486 to 1500. In the front may be noticed some oak carvings, and within there is a stone fire-place with the arms of the Archbishop, as well as more oak carving and panellings and very thick oak beams. Below is the Oddfellows' Hall, formerly called the Coffee House or Old Assembly Rooms, where the County Balls were held. Opposite stands the "Chequers' Inn," from which used to

start at 8 A.M. the Sevenoaks coach—"The United Friends"—Peacock, coachman, who bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Tony Weller, immortalized by Dickens. Between the Oddfellows' Hall and the "Crown Hotel," some forty years ago, stood an ancient inn called "The Wheatsheaf," with its tea-gardens and skittle-ground. North of the "Crown," where the Granville Road commences, was a block of shops with a builder's yard at the back, and then an alley, malodorous and pestilential, called Brand's Lane, which formed the outlet to the Crown Fields and Kippington. Sixty years ago the fields now occupied by South Park, the Granville, Argyle, and Gordon Roads, and the lands adjacent, were called Covell's Farm, and used by the late Mr. William Covell. In the field on Tubs Hill, where is now Eardley Road, a few years ago stood a windmill, a picturesque feature in the landscape. The mill-house still remains.

Returning to the junction of the London and Dartford Roads, opposite the old post-office there was formerly a pond called the Cage Pond, with a belt of trees round it. There, in years long gone by, was a ducking-stool, a mode of punishment now happily obsolete, used upon such of the fair sex as were convicted of being common scolds, these by the wisdom of our ancestors being deemed a public nuisance. Opposite, in front of the present Coffee Tavern, was a weighbridge, with a toll-house attached, where heavy vehicles paid toll.

Now for the Middle Row. The square between Mr. Philpot's shop and Mr. Ellman's was formerly called the Butter Market. Close by, at the corner of Mr. Salmon's Library, within the present century there stood on fair days (12th and 13th October) male and female servants waiting to be hired. Between High Street and the London Road were the shambles, with their labyrinthine passages and many openings into both streets; part was called the fish shambles and part the flesh shambles. Some remains of these are still traceable. In Dorset Street, in front of the shop of Mr. Pearce, fishmonger, may be seen the date 1605. The King's head over this was put there recently by a former owner. The ground floor of the old Market House, now used by the Y.M.C.A., was formerly open and used as a

public thoroughfare, as well as occasionally by butchers and other tradesmen. It is possible that in a building which stood on the same spot the assizes were formerly held. From "A Topographie or Survey of the County of Kent, by Richard Kilburnie of Hawkerst, 1659," it appears that assizes were held at Sevenoaks as follows, viz.: before Justice Gawdy and Baron Clerk, 22nd February 1587; Baron Clerk and Queen's Sergeant Puckering, 25th February 1590; Justices Gawdy and Kingsmill, Monday in the first week in Lent, 1600; and before Justice Bacon and Sergeant Crossfield, 5th August 1647 and 5th September 1648.

On the 1st July 1837 Our Most Gracious Majesty was proclaimed Queen in the town of Sevenoaks by my late father Thomas Carnell, who was also the Society's first Hon. Local Secretary for the Sevenoaks District.

In the centre of the road, opposite 130 High Street, was formerly a well, now arched over. I have heard that there was a tree on each side of it, north and south. There was a pump attached to the well against the wall of Bligh's Family Hotel. This last is an ancient building. On making some alteration a few years since a girder was discovered bearing the date 1206, but this was unfortunately removed and has been lost. Opposite to this stood Suffolk House, formerly the residence of the Dukes of Suffolk. The mansion, which faced south, was taken down about 1820, and the terrace called Suffolk Place erected near its site. I have heard that what is now Messrs. Smith's brewery was formerly the stables to the mansion; on it appear the initials "H. F., 1724," referring to Sir Hy. Fermor of Kippington, a former owner. Close by, until recently, stood the Veterinary Hospital of the late Mr. John Ashton. At the back was a barn, now pulled down, which was occasionally used for theatrical purposes. Here, at an early period of his career, the great Edmund Kean is said to have performed. The paddock of Knole formed the grounds attached to Suffolk House. The land where the Constitutional Club now stands, and the public Pleasure Grounds, I remember covered with larch trees, which gave a romantic appearance to that entrance to the town.

The Old Vine Cricket Club, in the days of a former Duke of Dorset, used to send a powerful eleven into the field. The club was revived in 1848, and still flourishes. Below was Vine Court, now pulled down. It stood in its own paddock, and forty years ago a high-class ladies' school was carried on there. Some of the houses, where the five roads divide, were formerly used as barracks, whence the name Barrack Corner.

The Congregational Church and the houses on each side of St. John's Road occupy the site of a house, now pulled down, with grounds attached. This and the neighbouring lands were formerly called Gallows Common, from the execution-place of criminals being near the top of Bradbourne Road.

On St. John's Hill (west side), formerly called Workhouse Hill, stood the Union Workhouse, pulled down about 1846. A short distance to the north is the mansion of Greatness, near which stood the curious silk mills, the ruins of which still remain. They were for many years carried on by the late Mr. Peter Nouaille, a name always dear to Sevenoaks. His daughter, at an advanced age, is still living at St. John's Lodge.*

I have now endeavoured to sketch the changes which have taken place in the town during the last sixty years. In place of the post-chaises and four of the times of our grandfathers, the numerous fast coaches which passed through daily in the days of our fathers, and the circuitous railway journey *via* Tonbridge and Red Hill of our own earlier days, we have now a first-class railway station at each of the northern ends of our town, and Sevenoaks, lying on the direct route from London to Paris, is on the high road to the World. So "the old order changeth; yielding place to new."

* Miss Anne Nouaille died 25th November 1897.—G. F. C.