

By Bookham U3A Social History Group for Senior Moments website

THE TALE OF VICTORIA COTTAGES

Two of Bookham's oldest surviving cottages provided a great research topic for the local U3A Social History Group during the 2020 lockdown. Here is the full story following that research.

Familiar today as the premises of England's House Dental Practice, the semi-detached cottages at numbers 28 and 30 High Street, Great Bookham, date back at least to 1548 when sources show they were occupied by a Dame Elizabeth Durden.

The building itself was occupied in 1615 by Edward Hilder, brother of the local churchwarden, Ralph Hilder. It was modified in the 17th century and separately occupied as two cottages from the 18th onwards to the present day.

Originally covering some two acres, the timber-framed building once had a hole in the roof for smoke release. What is thought to be an original wood staircase survives inside as well as first floor windows that were originally constructed for leaded lights in diamond shaped panes. A well located in front of the cottages provided water for hundreds of years and was still used by the last private occupant of No 28 until she died in 1990. More of that later.

In 1750 the owner is known to have been Thomas Howard, nephew of Francis the 5th Baron Howard of Effingham and it was recorded in 1760 as part of the Grove Estate, covering what is now the top end of the High Street and Lower Shott. The land was bought in 1775 by John Dawnay, 4th Viscount Downe, and when Laura, dowager Viscountess Downe, died in 1812 the cottages were known as England's 'Hame'. They had a separate malthouse, barn, stables and outhouses as well as an orchard.

In 1839 William Henry Dawnay, 6th Viscount Downe was still the owner. At some point they were renamed numbers 1 and 2 Victoria Cottages and also known individually as England's (today's No 30 High Street) and Victoria Cottage (No 28) respectively.

Of course, property ownership is one thing but who actually lived in the cottages? It is hard to place family names at precise locations using the 6 April 1841 census or that of 30 March 1851. However it is known that in 1841, Daniel Crockford and his family were among residents of cottages located between the Saracen and Ring inn (now No 1 Grove Cottages across the Guildford Road but then un-separated from the village street) and Fairfield House. Today's High Street was then known as Bookham Street although it would become Upper Street during the next decade.

In 1841 the Crockfords had the Elliotts as neighbours on the Fairfield House side and Daniel Bexley on the other, with a John Amey as a lodger. This is the first known reference to the Amey family at what may have been one of the Victoria Cottages but Ameys had actually been evident in Bookham at least since 1737. (Later church records show that a labourer called James Amey and his wife Rachel had five children baptised at St Nicolas: Thomas in 1806, Emma in 1809, Francis in 1812, John in 1814 and Stephen in 1818. The last two were fathered while they were living in an almshouse. At the time Bookham's almshouses were in Church Road, near Sole Farm Road.)

In 1851, Daniel Crockford was listed at 21 Upper Street, while Fairfield House was number 22. The numbering system had changed with the Saracen and Ring now number 19. No 20 housed Mr McNaughton, a groom, and his family. Grove House was listed between them.

The 7 April 1861 census shows the Amey family living at Mercers Row, Great Bookham. Among them was baby William, just a year old then but who would be registered as an adult living with his wife and children in Victoria Cottage 30 years

later. That year the Crockfords were listed at 4 Upper Street with the Lee and Huggins families their neighbours in numbers 3 and 5. Fairfield House had become No 9.

In 1861 too William Grantham, a baker, and his family were registered at 28 Upper Street, as were dressmaker Caroline Arrow and her niece. However No 30 is shown as The Crown inn, so it seems that Upper Street may then have been numbered downhill from the Grove end rather than uphill from the church crossroads as applies to today's High Street.

Ten years later in 1871, Daniel Crockford was now widowed but living with his sister and son. Thomas Huggins, a 'proprietor of houses', lived nearby while the Steadman family lived in Fairfield House. If Daniel was actually living in Victoria Cottage, Benjamin Lee, a gardener, and his wife may have been resident in England's.

The 2 April 1871 census shows the Amey family still living nearby at Southend Cottages, Guildford Road, with William then aged 11. In 1871, Grove House, its stables, Fairfield Cottage and the High Street were listed with their occupants but with no clear indication of who lived where.

Another ten years on and in the census of 3 April 1881, bricklayer John Atkins, age 44, and his wife Amelia with their family were the tenants at England's. Hugh Hamilton, a gardener, appears to have been living next door but it is not clear in which building.

Daniel Crockford, then aged 75 and also working as a gardener, still lived with his sister in Victoria Cottage but he died in June that same year and by 1891 his sister had moved into the almshouses at Frere Cottages, now in Flint Close off Leatherhead Road. (Opened in 1889, these are named after Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of Bombay, India.) The Crockfords had lived in the Victoria Cottages for at least 40 years.

In 1891 John Atkins and his family were still in England's while Victoria Cottage was now home to William Amey and his new wife Emily. They had married the previous year and now had their first child, George. Sadly, aged two, he died of tuberculosis in 1893 when their second child, their daughter Florence, was a few months old. They had two further girls, Alice, born 1895, and Kate, born May in 1899 but tragically William himself succumbed to tuberculosis aged only 39 in September that year.

The landlord had changed two years earlier in 1897 when the cottages were purchased by Mrs Mary Chrystie, the local property owner and temperance campaigner who bought several local inns, including the Saracen and Ring, in order to shut them down. She paid £3100 for the cottages and adjacent land and built the Victoria Coffee Tavern next door, a strictly non-alcohol establishment. Known today as Rayleigh House, it is now occupied by Fine Fettle, Henshaws and a number of flats.

The 31 March 1901 census shows the widowed Emily Amey, aged 37 and earning her living as a laundress, in Victoria Cottage, No 28 High Street with Florence, aged eight, Alice six and Kate, not yet turned two. John Atkins and his family were still living next door at England's but he died in 1906 and Amelia in 1910.

In 1906 Emily Amey started working at the Barn Hall in Church Road as caretaker and cleaner. She was paid 4s/6d (22½ p). It became a lifelong commitment as she remained in the job for the next 43 years, retiring aged 85 in 1949 on a final wage of 7s/- (35p). To the very end she would scrub the floors on her hands and knees and trudge backwards and forwards between Victoria Cottage and the Barn Hall to ensure the place was always locked securely.

As well as her job at the Barn Hall she also worked for many years as caretaker at St Nicolas Church, cleaning the building, changing the altar frontal, and taking the choir robes back to the cottage for washing. This she did by hand, using cold water from the well and then ironing them at home.

A U3A group member discovered a historic postcard on eBay dating from 1907 and addressed to Mrs W. Amey, Victoria Cottage. Postmarked Guildford, it reads: 'Went to

Whites and found hat there and paid for it to go by post. Cheer up as well as you can.' Kelly's Directory shows William Edward White and Sons as an outfitters in Guildford 62-64 High Street and 45-46 North Street at that time.

Further research showed that Emily Amey's mother, Jane Elizabeth Godwin, had died 3 April 1907 and the postcard been sent only a couple of days later. The hat may have been for the funeral. Mrs Godwin was a widow who had lived all her life in Upham, Hampshire. However, she was buried at St Nicolas Church in Bookham and her death was registered here. She may have come to stay with her daughter and grand-daughters when she was too old or ill to work.

The next census on 2 April 1911 showed Emily Amey, widow and charwoman, then 47, at Victoria Cottage along with Alice, 16, and Kate, 11. Florence had gone. (She was now working in service at Walton-on-Hill with a Dr Richards and his family, one of two servants. In 1920 she married Henry Griffiths, the blind organist at St Nicolas Church. They lived at Beckley Cottages, Leatherhead Road.)

Victoria Cottage was said to have four rooms. Next door, England's had six and both sons of the late John and Amelia Atkins remained there. Alfred Atkins, aged 43, was now married to Isabella, 37, and they had their four children with them as well as Alfred's brother Thomas and a boarder. Alfred was a gardener at Eastwick Park estate and his wife made and sold boiled sweets to the local community.

Mrs Mary Chrystie died in 1911 but both Victoria Cottages were purchased from the estate for £1175 by her sister Selina Chrystie. She would keep them until 1924 before selling them on. However the tenants would change little in subsequent decades and the Ameys in particular would retain a constant presence for nearly the whole of the century.

The Atkins family occupied England's for well over 30 years but in 1917 it became home to Albert Scott, Bookham's voluntary fire chief and parish clerk. Six years earlier he and his wife Caroline had been resident at the Rectory, Great Bookham, listed as gardener and caretaker respectively so they were not newcomers. They were still in England's at the start of World War 2, according to the National Register of 29 September 1939, Next door then were Emily and Kate Amey, together with a six-year-old schoolchild called Sylvia Ingold who may have been a wartime evacuee.

Emily's second daughter, Alice, had married and moved on but Kate, a spinster had returned to live with her at Victoria Cottage after several years in service with different families. Her time away from Bookham began in 1931. The passenger list for the P&O ship *Ranchi* that left London on 20 November 1931 bound for Bombay, India, lists Kate Amey, a nurse of Victoria Cottage, Great Bookham, as a 32-year-old passenger. India was given as her 'country of intended future permanent residence' and she lived there for three years, looking after the children of a British family, the Scotts.

In 1934 she returned to Britain with them and worked for them at Forbes Road, Edinburgh. By 1937 she was listed as a voter at Grantham's in Chiddingfold, Surrey, and in 1938 at Orchard House, Green Lane, Guildford, in each case apparently as a servant. However shortly after the outbreak of World War 2, she was back living with her mother at Victoria Cottage. She never moved again. She and her mother helped provide school meals at the Barn Hall both in wartime and later as well as continuing their activities at St Nicolas Church.

Ten years later in 1949 Emily and Kate were still in place at No 28 High Street but Albert Scott - no known relation to the family in India and Scotland - was now alone following Caroline's death in 1945. He too was gone by 1951 after some three decades living at England's and Ernest and Edith Tanner had moved in, staying for two more years before the building became empty in 1953.

Both Victoria Cottages were then bought by the local solicitor and L&DLHS founder Stephen Fortescue who had moved to Bookham with his parents in the 1930s and married in 1952. He and his wife Mary lived at No 30 from 1954 until 1957 with the Ameys as their

tenants next door. He refurbished England's, installing a modern water system for the first time after finding a dead cat in the well.

In the absence of a garage or driveway, Stephen housed his car in a nearby shed rented from the owner of a corner shop. During this time he also transformed the front and back gardens, re-turfing and planting two apple trees in the front. They were later removed again after the fruit was stolen by what he later described as 'local louts'.

The Fortescues eventually moved to Lower Road with an office a few doors down the High Street but Stephen continued to own the cottages through a commercial firm. England's was let for a few months to a series of tenants including a doctor and an accountant. In 1959 Quentin and Josephine Gapper moved in as tenants before moving to Farnham.

Emily Amey died aged 95 in April 1959. She had lived in Victoria Cottage for some 70 years, sole tenant of No 28 since the beginning of the 20th century. In her last years she was rewarded for her service to the local community by becoming the first honorary vice-president of the Bookham Community Association.

Kate - or Miss Amey, as she was now known - continued to work at the church after her mother's death and was a keen member of the Bible study group. Having taken over the tenancy of Victoria Cottage from Emily, she lived on to the age of 91 and remained there until her own death in 1990. So this was at least 150 years since the first known Amey resident, lodger John, had been registered in one of the two cottages and well over two centuries since the earliest record of the Amey family in Bookham. Amey Drive, off the Lower Road, was named after them.

Because Kate was just the second tenant of Victoria Cottage since 1900 the rent was fixed and could only be put up if there were improvements to the premises. She rejected any such rent increases so the cottage was never properly modernised. A St Nicolas Church member who knew her told a U3A researcher that his wife had gone there a number of times and it had been like stepping back 100 years. The cottage had been very dark inside with only cold water and minimal other utilities.

Miss Amey participated in the church's Bookham Scenes traditional plays over several years. One of the characters, played by a young boy, was an ancestor of hers and she took great amusement in calling him her great, great and possibly more, grandfather. She is buried in St Nicolas churchyard.

Not long before she died she gave Stephen Fortescue a miniature wooden coffin, about six inches long, which she had used to save cash for her own burial. It was presented to Leatherhead Museum for the collection of local artefacts. Victoria Cottage was finally refurbished after her death and the well filled in. Its location is still visible outside the two cottages.

Miss Amey had had John and Jillian Thomson as neighbours next door in England's from 1960 until at least 1963 and Edwin and June West until 1965. A firm called Profile Publications was there in 1966-67. Vacant for long periods, it was used on and off for commercial offices. In 1990 solicitors Parry Kirkby were there. Eventually the dental practice arrived in 1992 and this too changed hands some years later when dentist James McCormick was succeeded by the present team.

No 28 High Street, increased in value dramatically after Kate Amey's death. With the freehold now shared, the property was sold in October 1999 for £162,000. Two subsequent sales followed in 2013 and November 2016 when it fetched £350,000.

Sources:

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Bookham in the Twentieth Century (Culley, 2000)

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Ancestry
Tithe Maps, The Genealogist
The Census 1841-1949
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St Nicolas Church records
England's House Dental Practice



Victoria Cottages in the early 20th century.



**Emily Amey
(1864-1959)**



**Miss Kate Amey
(1899-1990)**



England's House Dental Practice team (from the England's House website)



Location of Victoria Cottages from 19th century Ordnance Survey