

Binfield, Berkshire and some of its History

The name of Binfield is said to be derived from Old English meaning field where banter grows or alternatively open land where bent grass grows. The name Binfield is also close to the name of the local hundred Beynhurst. As part of a heavily forested area the development of the village was slow. Growth in building and population accelerated when forest was cleared after the Enclosure Act of 1813 when Forestal Rights were abolished. Parcels of land were sold for agriculture bringing farm labourers to the area. The perimeter of the village especially to the north maintains some attractive green areas.

The area with its proximity to London and Royal Households was favoured for the building of large country houses with parkland. There are four large properties all having the word Binfield in their title : Binfield Lodge, Binfield Park ,Binfield Place and Binfield Manor. Sometime these names have been interchanged which can be confusing. Two other large properties are Billingbear House and Allanbay Parkto the north of Binfield.

Servicing such properties encouraged the development of trades notably the brickworks in the area of Amen Corner. Beehive Lane there got its name from the shape of the kilns which were used in brick production .This area got its name from a religious group who exchanged social greetings with amen.

Binfield Park (1) is a very large property built in 1775 for Onesipherous Elliott and was privately owned for many years . The Vlasto family lived here in the 1920`s and 30`s . Mrs Vlasto was for many years president of the Women`s Institute. It was used as a military hospital during World War 2 and after the war a NHS facility for the disabled. It fell into disuse and more recently it has been divided to become a group of luxury homes. In early maps this was known as Binfield House but by the 19C this name was attributed to another property in Wicks Green

The Stag and Hounds (2) is said to have been used as a hunting lodge by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Legend says Queen Elizabeth 1 watched maypole dancers on the green from a window. An elm tree outside was reputed to mark the centre of Windsor Forest. This tree was cut down in 2004 after suffering Dutch Elm Disease. Another tree on the green has been planted in its place. The building also sheltered Parliamentarians during the Civil War.The lodge became a coaching inn in 1727.The 18C travel writer William Cobbett stayed there describing it as" a very nice country inn."

Binfield Manor (3) has had a long history. It was owned for some time by the Catholic Dancastle Family who were patrons of Alexander Pope. It was rebuilt in 1754 by Sir William Pitt, (a relative of Pitt the elder, Earl of Chatham) at a cost of £36,000.Hence the name of the bridge nearby. Pitts Bridge over The Cut is listed. More recently the manor was owned by the Strattons who let the lodges and orangery and made the manor available for film

sets. It is owned latterly by the Sultan of Brunei. It is heavily protected and has enjoyed much redevelopment.. It is rumoured to be his base for polo events.

Binfield is very proud of its association with writer Alexander Pope (1688-1744) so there are many features named after him. Near **Popeswood Road is Popes Manor ,Popes Meadow and Popes Farm**. Alexander Pope`s Catholic family moved to the area during a period when Catholics were expelled from London during the reign of William and Mary and an exclusion zone of 10 miles from London applied. In 1700 the family moved to **Whitehill House** now **Popes Manor**.(4) Here he continued his studies ,sang at the church mingled with local families .He enjoyed the company of other writers of the time John Gay, Jonathan Swift , Thomas Parnell and was a prolific reader and writer .He is renowned for his witty “The Rape of the Lock” and his Essays on Man and Essays on Criticism. All the more amazing as he suffered a disease which caused tuberculosis of the bone, fevers and pain. He grew to only 4ft 6inches.The house was sold in 1715 and his family returned to West London.

Whitehouse Farm (5) dated 1687 is an interesting example of an early farmhouse and one of the few of its vintage in the area. Around Foxley Lane are some new developments as we approach the village centre. The most striking building is **Binfield Place (6)** It dates from Henry VII`s reign but is mostly Jacobean with a missing wing. Superstition surrounds a 17C bas relief carving of a woman`s head dubbed the Luck of Binfield. The Catholic family the Dancastles occupied the house for many years and in the time of Pope. As the most traditional manor house in the village it has long been a hub of village with social events in the summer.

The nearby Wicks Green takes us to a quiet lane containing some of the oldest buildings in Binfield. **Binfield House (7)** was built in 1776 and for nearly 150 years was rented to a number of tenants including a well known historian Catharina Macawley Graham who was admired by the 1st American President George Washington and in 1788 she went to America to visit him. In the 19th century it was used as a school. In 1928 it was purchased by Lady Knox who with her husband Major General rebuilt and extended the house with the help of the architect Nugent Cachemaille-Day. The grounds contain a Ha-Ha, a half buried pillbox and a former walled garden .In the Autumn of 1940 it was the probable target of two stick bomb attacks owing to Major General Knox`s military planning meetings at the house. There was some minor damage in the area . There were no fatalities but a house on Terrace Road had to be demolished. In 1974 it was sold to Bracknell Forest Council. Opposite the house is **Monks Alley(8)** which probably takes its name from the fact that the Abbots of Reading had a summer retreat there. That building Elms Grove has now been rebuilt. The 17th century cottage with the intriguing name **The Kicking Donkey (9)** may have been a public house. A trove of broken early wine bottles (dated by Reading Museum as 1720s) and clay pipes were found while landscaping work was taking place near the cottage. Nearby **Wicks Green Cottages (10)** dating from the 16th and 17th centuries, altered in the 18th century and extended and listed in the 20th century were also possibly a public house.

Towards the north of the lane are the **Muir Almshouses (11)** founded in 1960 by Sydney Muir of Billingbear House ,another large estate to the north of Binfield Parish.

Finally back to the Jack o Newbury. Little history is available on this . The pub appears to be perhaps Victorian .However the old barn ,which is listed, feels as if it was part of an older set of buildings. Also of interest is why the pub was named after a Newbury character John Winchcombe. There are many unanswered questions in villages like Binfield.

June 2016 V. Richardson

Updated March 2017