

Recollections of Old and New Kidderminster

(Kidderminster Shuttle 11 December 1909)

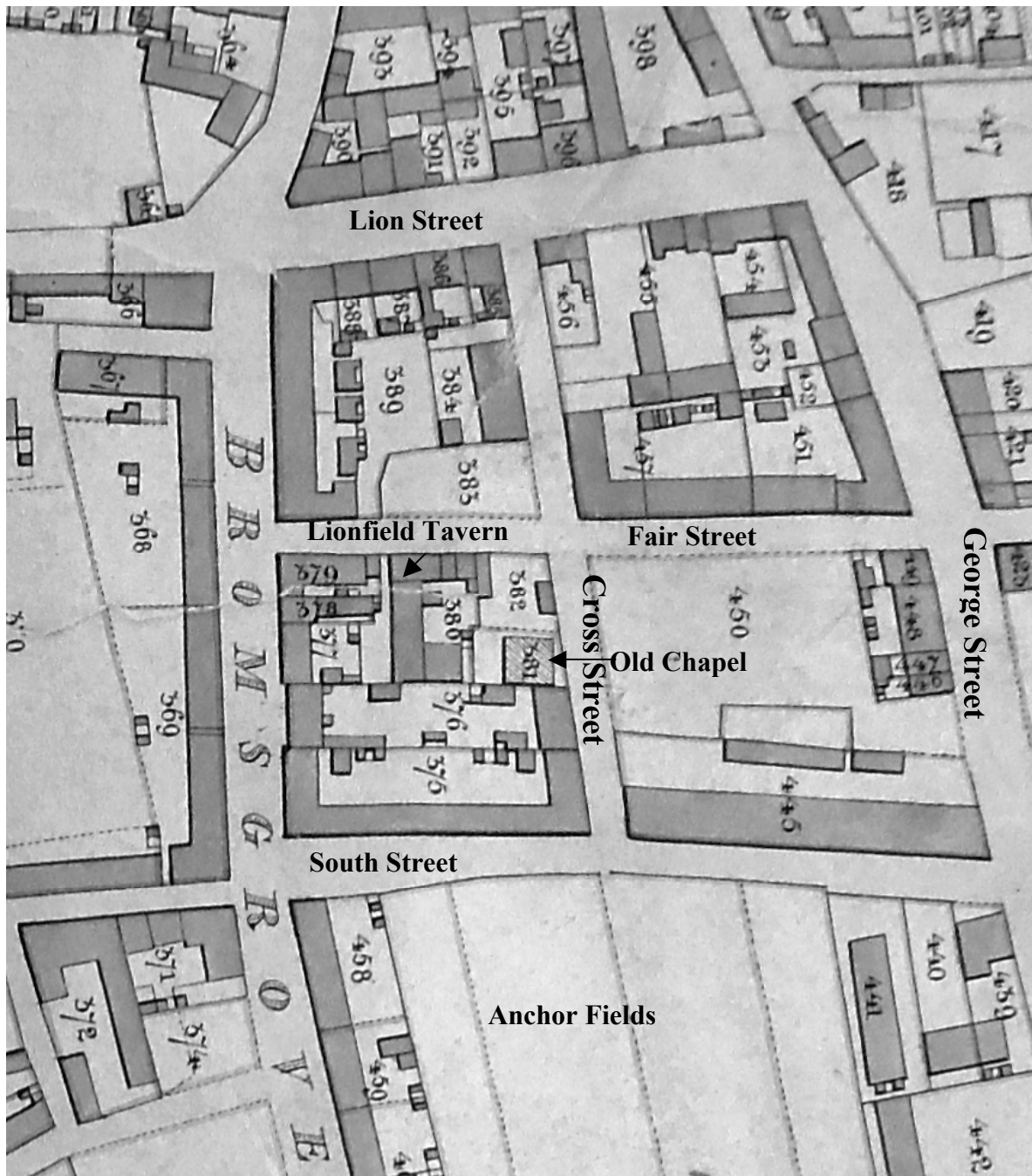
by Henry Bennett

I.

Sir,- A large number of old friends have repeatedly asked me to tell them what I remember about old Kidderminster. I cannot tell them anything before the year 1832, as that was the year of my birth. I was born at the *Paul Pry*, in Bromsgrove-street, which is now a pawnshop. I afterwards moved into Cross-street, into the house near the Old Primitive Methodist Chapel, where the bakehouse, the property of Alderman Taylor, now stands. I well remember the late Richard Godson's election, in 1837, he being carried shoulder high after he had beaten John Bagshaw. This was on July 25th, 1837. In the crowd was a noted character, called "Tommy Oliver," riding a donkey with a lady covered with Godson's colours. From that time up to the present I have always known something about electioneering. Where the iron church now stands, and all in Anchor Fields, were allotment gardens. Opposite the old chapel was a field used as pleasure grounds and for fairs. Opposite, at the *Lionfield Tavern*, lived High Constable Law. He wore a cocked hat. Bennett and Patch used to pitch their tents and stay there for weeks. Just about this time they were moving the turnpike gates from the Round House to Hoobrook. My father and mother went to live at the old "Round House", to take charge of the weighing machine, until the house was taken down, on the site of the Brinton Fountain. The "*Worcester Cross*" was at this time kept by a man named Jasper. This was a grandfather to the present Richard Jasper. On the Cross side of the road there were only three houses until you got to Hill Grove. Up Comberton-lane, as it was then called, there were only three lamps. The bottom one was opposite old Beck Swan's house, the old letter writer. The boys used to tease her, as they played by the lamp near her house. The Cherry Orchard was a very pretty sight in the spring, when the apple and plum trees were in full bloom. I and Miller Corbet with others helped to cut the trees down to make a way between Comberton-road to George-street, and George Holloway was the first to go across from Comberton-road to George-street. This road has proved a great boon to that side of the town. I remember when there were no houses from the *Railway Bell* all the way to Lower Comberton. The picturesque old gothic cottage, which stood in the middle of the Cherry Orchard, was the admiration of all—visitors and residents alike. Some of the old cherry trees are still at the rear of the houses in Lea-street. The cottage was burnt down just about the time that the land was taken over in building allotments. A William Snell (a sadler of Coventry-street) was the man who had the lot with the cottage on it, and he used it for workmen to make horse collars in, which were stuffed with straw, and by some accident a lot of straw took fire, which completely destroyed the cottage. Before the present road across the valley of the Cherry Orchard to George Street was made "a tip" was in existence for many years, to fill it up as it is today.

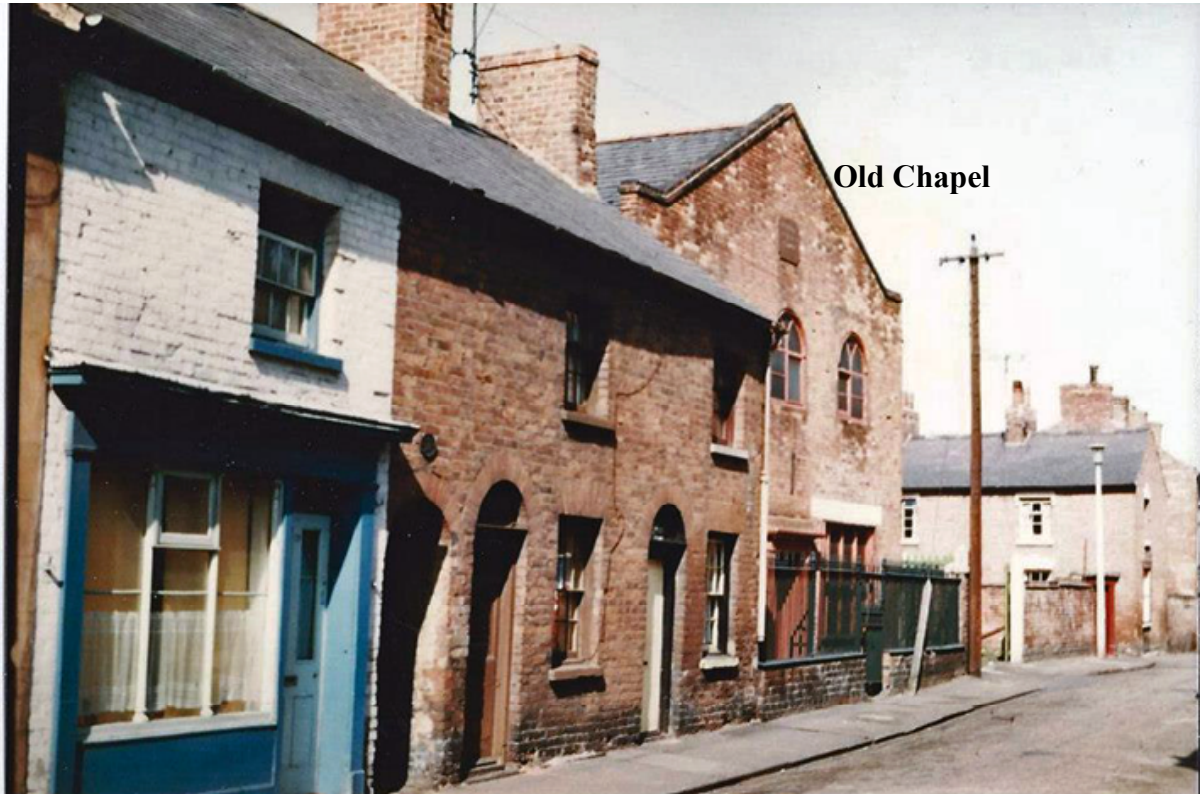
(To be continued)

Notes: The 1835 Jeremiah Mathews Borough map below helps to put some of Henry Bennett's comments into perspective. The Anchor Fields garden allotments are shown and also the field (450) opposite to the old Primitive Methodist Chapel where the fairs were held. The Lionfield Tavern is also marked. Street names have been added. Perhaps the name Fair Street arose from its proximity to the fair ground.



Jeremiah Mathews Map of the Borough 1835

It is interesting to compare the photograph below (probably 1950s to 1960s) with the 1835 map above. The photograph shows the old Chapel in Cross Street and the houses next door which were clearly in place when the area was surveyed for the Mathews map. In the distance a row of terraced houses have been built on plot 383 which is shown empty in 1835. Bob Millward March 2013



Cross Street photograph, courtesy Goff Jones