

Recollections of Old and New Kidderminster

(Kidderminster Shuttle 25 December 1909)

by Henry Bennett

II.

ST. GEORGE'S WARD.--There were only three houses in St. George's Ward worth naming when I first knew it. There was Leswell House, where Mr. Henry Woodward, the carpet manufacturer, lived for many years. Then High Bank, in Leswell Lane, where that very old mulberry tree stands on the lawn. This tree was as large seventy years ago as it is to-day. I have had lots of mulberries off it when young. The third house has not been altered very much except the Drill Hall at the back. Then the few houses in Leswell Lane were very old ones. At one time there was a little old man to be seen round Land Oak named Jacky Bromadge, who was said to be "not quite right," and there was a lot of truth in it; for some of the upper ten often got this poor simple fellow to walk to Birmingham, and take letters for sixpence and bring the answers back; because they could get it done quicker this way at that time than by posting. I do not say that Jacky Bromadge did not get a good feed at each end of his journey. This poor fellow got drowned in one of the Hurcott pools. Even this poor simple man could be trusted to do what was right—walk to Birmingham and back—for sixpence.

OFFMORE ROAD.--What a change in Offmore road. Lately I have been having a look round at the old cottages that were there when I first remember it. There are about thirty very old dissipated looking houses still standing; but there are not many of them occupied, as they are unfit for habitation. St. George's Ward, as it was seventy years ago, had about one hundred houses, so with that exception I have seen all the ward built as it is today. This speaks well for the Land Clubs and other agencies which commenced to take up the land about thirty-five or forty years ago. A good number of tradesmen, but the majority were working men, have been responsible for the developing of the Ward. The same may be said of the other wards of the town. When I say St George's Ward, I take the old ward as it starts at the corner of George-street straight up Coventry-street, and right round Chester-road and down Comberton-hill, along George-street to the corner of Coventry-street, which takes in the whole ward. So I have seen a great change in that part of Kidderminster.

ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOLS.—When I first remember St. George's Schools a man named Green kept the Infant School, and when he left he went to Worcester. About ten years ago I met his son in a railway train going to London, and we both enjoyed the chat about his father. A man named Hodges kept the big school for many years. He had a son an auctioneer, and his office was over the Market Hall, in High-street. And many of your readers will remember the auctioneer.

(To be continued).

Notes: The map below is taken from the Borough Plan produced by Jeremiah Mathews. It shows the layout of part of the St George's Parish as it was in 1835 and is very much how Henry Bennett would have known it in his very early years.

Note that George St, Cherry Orchard and St George's Terrace are incomplete roads in 1835, and only later were extended to meet Comberton Hill, George St and George St, respectively.

Bennett refers specifically to Leswell House [see Historic Kidderminster Project (HKP) report 451], High Bank (probably better known as Spring Bank House, [HKP report 457]) and, indirectly to The Shrubbery (the Drill Hall is in its grounds). It is strange that he overlooked another fine house 'Elderfield' [see HKP report 460]. All these houses are still extant to some degree or other. The Shrubbery has lost its top floor and Spring Bank House is now an undistinguished looking block of flats with most of its original features hidden or removed – but still there.

Two of the houses shown in the 1835 map of Leswell Lane (known then as Back Lane) can still be identified: they are presently numbered 8 and 18 and shown by arrows on the map.

(Bob Millward June 2013)

