

Recollections of Old and New Kidderminster

(Kidderminster Shuttle 1 January 1910)

by Henry Bennett

III.

COMBERTON HILL.—All the land past the *Railway Bell* was tillage land, and a Mr. Thomas Pitt, a butcher, of Mill-street, farmed it. The barn stood on the railway cutting. Mr. T. Pitt was the father of the late Mr. Pitt, whose farm was on the Stourbridge-road. There was a very old cottage in Yew Tree-road that belonged to the Gardener family. The O.W.W. Railway Company tried to buy the land for a very long time, but the Gardener family would not sell it because they had 'buses running to Worcester and Birmingham, and it still belongs to the Gardener family, some of whom still live in the little cottage, and it is a very good landmark. The road which led up to it was called Gardener's Lane. Mr. H. Herring's father built a house near, and then the road was made much better, and it is now called Yew Tree-road. There was no Lea-street or Lorne-street until about forty years ago. Farfield, as it is now called, was called Bigfield before the railway was made. The cricket field was in a meadow down the New-road, where Morton's factory now stands. At this time a Mr. Yeates rented it, who kept the *Black Horse Hotel*,—before he kept the *Black Horse* he was at the *Pheasant*, and before him a Mr. Cole was at the *Black Horse*—and afterwards he went to live at Gorst Hall. Shortheath, as it is now named, was called the "three-cornered piece," and past there was called Comberton Common, Gipsies used to camp on the left-hand side.

CHESTER LANE (OR CHESTER ROAD).—Chester Road was called Chester-lane. There was not a house on either side till we got to the Old Land Oak Toll House. An uncle of mine kept it. He was killed by the horses from the Oaklands, and his name was Jones. There was a toll bar at the top of Hurcott-road, which was thrown open at night. Linden Avenue was occupied as allotment grounds as far back as 73 years. My father had a part of it.

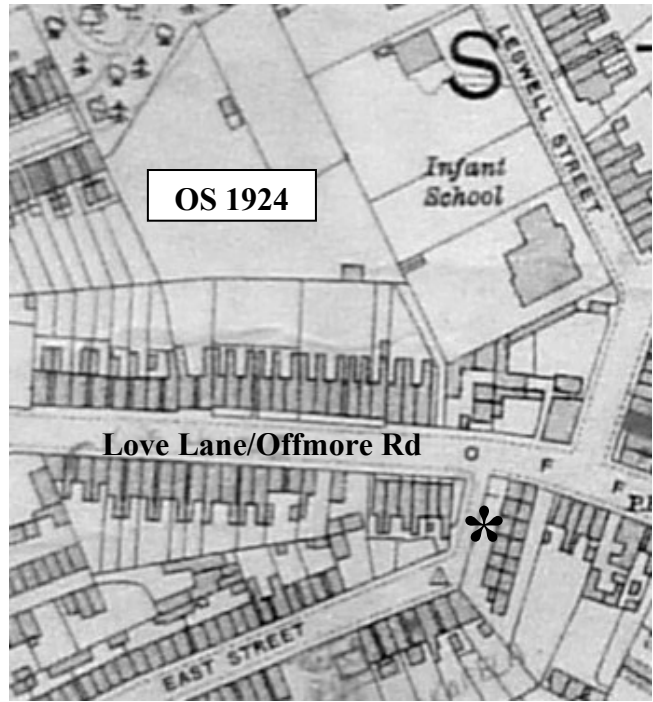
LOVE LANE.—Love Lane as it was called, was very narrow, and the "*Golden Fleece*" was a great calling-place for wool-sorters and combers. The *Railway Train* was built by a man named Kirkham. He worked at the dyeworks and kept the inn as well. This house seemed to take all the trade off the *Golden Fleece*, which soon closed. The name can still be seen on the gable-end. The first cottages that were built in Chester-road were built by two brothers named Hodges. They both went abroad, and never came back again. They worked at Lea's Mill, in Mill-street, and one of their sons still owns the property.

(To be continued).

Notes:

1. Historic Kidderminster Project report (number 493) discusses the history of Yew Tree House including the development of Yew Tree Road. The report can be seen on Kidderminster Civic Society website or as hard copy in Kidderminster Library.
2. Short Heath is the three sided area bounded by Chester Road North, Comberton Road and Chaddesley Road. The latter was called Spirit Lane until 1917 ('Kidderminster since 1800' by Tomkinson and Hall).
3. Chester Road became Chester Lane sometime between 1855 and 1860 (Trade Directories).

4. Love Land was the original name for Offmore Road the change occurring between 1881 and 1891. Census records for 1901 and 1911 provide information that tells us where the '*Golden Fleece*' was situated. In 1901 'Fleece Buildings' were numbered 27 to 38 Offmore Road. In 1911 'Golden Fleece Row' was at 27a to 32 Offmore Road. This places the site of the building on the corner of Offmore Road and East Street marked by * on the 1924 OS map. These are clearly a row of 'back to back' houses so the public house would have been, in essence, a 'beer house' occupying only part of the premises; presumably bordering Love Lane. The houses had been demolished by 1938 (OS map) leaving the ground vacant. It became a children's playground in the 1960s but returned to residential use with housing constructed in 2011.



In the 1851 census Robert Old is a 'Publican and Dealer' in Love Lane. In the Slater Trade Directory of the same year he is a Beer retailer of Tipper's Oak. Earlier in 1841 he had been a Wool comber in Tipper's Oak, Love Lane. Tipper's Oak was an earlier name for East St before it was extended through to George St. It seems likely, then, that it was Robert Old who ran the '*Golden Fleece*' as described by Bennett. In 1861 Robert Old was running the '*Railway Tavern*' (as distinct from the '*Railway Train*') as Bootmaker and Beerhouse keeper. Had he responded to the opening of the '*Railway Train*' by changing the name of the '*Golden Fleece*'? If so the '*Golden Fleece*' (as the '*Railway Tavern*') had a longer life than suggested by Bennett because George Dyer is licensee there in 1871. Or had Robert Old moved to new premises called '*Railway Tavern*' by 1861?

5. According to 'Kidderminster since 1800 by Tomkinson and Hall', the '*Railway Train*' was open by 1855. In that year the licensee was Mary Kirkham but she is also listed as being in Love Lane as a beer seller in the 1851 Slater Trade Directory, and Victualler there in the 1851 census (the previous entry on the census record was St George's Fields). So it seems that the '*Railway Train*' came into existence shortly before the railway through Kidderminster was opened in 1852.

(Bob Millward April 2013)