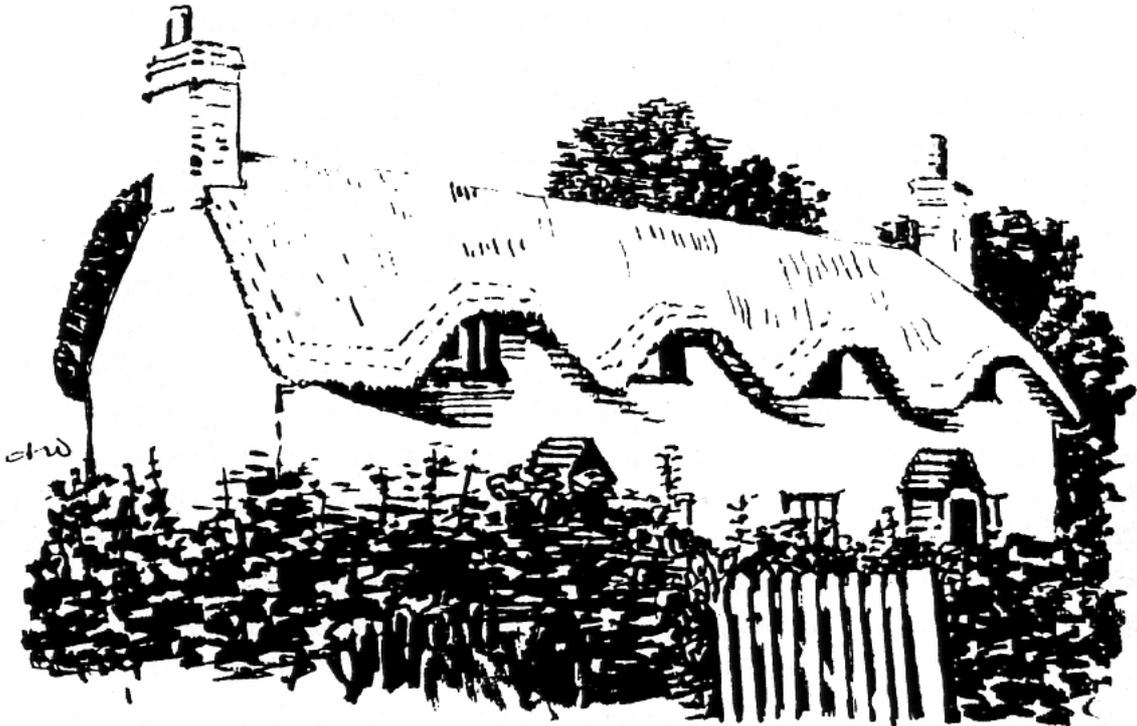


Houses

Mortimer may not have a stately home or many of the thatched and ornately half-timbered cottages of a picturebook village but it has its share of interesting houses of various periods.

In the early 1930s **Wern Cottage** in Mortimer Lane was a dilapidated building which had been condemned as unfit for human habitation. However, it was restored by Augustus "Johnnie" Walker who had rebuilt Knotmead and other houses on Brewery Common and made into a most attractive house, using the skill of local craftsmen.



Wern Cottage before restoration

Wern Cottage was originally a pair of cottages owned by Eton College until sold with the rest of the Rectorial Glebe in 1879. Its records go back to 1612, but it is almost certainly older than that, and when restored a plaque was built into the outside wall: ` *Built c1590; rebuilt 1933*. The builder was W. Chamberlain, who employed a number of Mortimer men, including Fred Ham the blacksmith who made the iron gates, and the Merricks of West End who did all the woodwork. The entrance hall, the dining room and drawing room are wood-panelled, the drawing room having an open fireplace with a handsome wooden surround on which are carved Tudor Roses. The old windows were replaced by leaded ones into which was inserted some very old stained glass of unknown origin.

The kitchen was built on to the back of the house and the original outside wall with its brick and timber is still visible. The stable block, like so many others in the village, has been converted into a garage. It is a tribute to the workmanship of the 1930s builders that a

Tudor building has been preserved as such a pleasant home.

Mortimer Hill, the most central of the village's grand houses, was originally part of the large estate of the Brocas family of Beaurepaire House at Bramley, who also owned Wokefield Park and Brocas Lands Farm. Harriot Brocas, who died in 1819, left Mortimer Hill to her nephew, Sir Claudius Stephen Hunter. Sir Paul Hunter, who inherited it in 1851, diverted the line of The Street away from its front entrance, and also enlarged the house, creating its present imposing appearance, with the drive sweeping around in a circle to the front door and the french windows in the eastern elevation opening onto a terrace and formal gardens beyond.



The land furthest from the house was farmed and a granary built on iron stilts was in use for 150 years. Sir Paul opened the gardens to many village events such as fetes, shows and school parties. The Hunter family continued to live at Mortimer Hill until it was sold to the Lambtons early this century. When the Lambtons sold the estate in the 1970s it was split into three; the main building became offices as well as a dwelling house; the stable block was turned into what an estate agent would undoubtedly call a delightful bijou residence, while the fruit farm became Pick your Own with a farm shop.

Chestnuts Cottage in Hammonds Heath was built as two cottages by the Hunter family in the cottage ornee style for their employees. It was one of the first houses to be built on the newly-enclosed common. One person whose family lived in the village for many years believed that Hammonds Heath was a corruption of Amen Heath, although this does not explain why it should have been called Amen in the first place. Chestnuts is one of the few houses in the area which has retained its thatched roof and it still looks much as it would have done when it was first built, with tall brick chimneys, whitewashed walls and bedroom windows peeping out from under thick eyebrows of thatch.

The house near Brewery Common at the top end of Nightingale Lane, now called South

Hill, has a long and chequered history. A dwelling is recorded on this site in 1775. On the sale plan of 1835 it was called **Goodwins** but when in possession of the Arundels in the later part of the 19th century it was known as **Knotmead** and was a small farm.

Johnnie Walker, who owned London Art Galleries, acquired Knotmead in the 1920s. He rebuilt a number of old houses on Brewery Common, including Wistaria, Whitethorn, Yew Tree Cottage and The Old Brewhouse. In 1937 he knocked down the old Knotmead and rebuilt it to a design of his brother's who was an architect. From then until recently it was called **Hazeley House**.

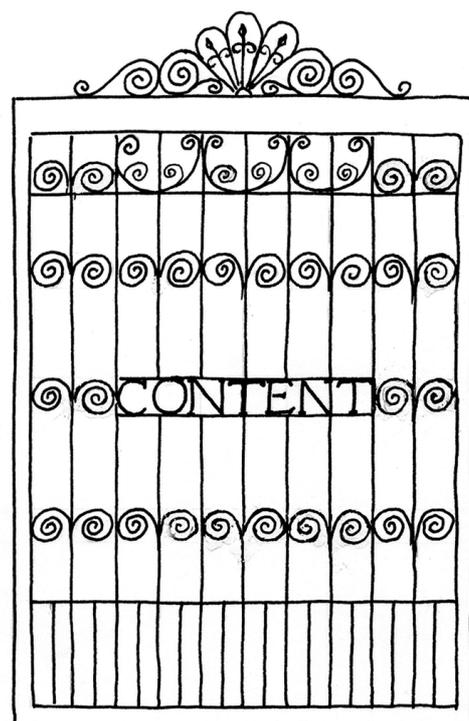
The building near the original entrance to the property was part of the old Knotmead, and Johnnie Walker turned it into a dairy. It is now a separate dwelling called **Hazeley Cottage**. In 1992, when extensive alterations were made to the outbuildings of Hazeley House, a new drive was made further down Nightingale Lane and the property was given its present name of South Hill.

Anyone looking at the house called **Content** (No. 72 Windmill Road) would probably think it was a fairly standard Victorian villa. It has, however, an interesting history. It was built as a small two-up and two-down cottage in the late 1800s and was bought by Jack Powell, who had a chemist's shop in St. Mary's Butts in Reading, and he altered it extensively. He knocked both the upstairs and downstairs rooms into one, built out bay windows and added a kitchen and dining room at the back. The downstairs room is a lasting memorial to his handiwork as it is panelled in wood, has a fireplace at each end, wooden settles each side of the fireplace at one end, an inscription on the firehood:

Let no-one o'er this settle bear away

What friend to friend in confidence may say.

and an inscription on a beam across the room: ` *This is the house that Jack built.* ', both inscriptions being in fine Old English lettering.



Jack Powell used his pony and trap to drive to his shop well into the 1930s. He had his stables at the bottom of his garden, and as he also owned the four cottages adjoining his own he drove round by the lane beyond the last of the four and around the back of their gardens, which accounts for the L-shaped garden of Content. Fred Ham, the blacksmith, made a cast-iron gate for the house which included the name Content though, sadly, this was removed when the occupants in the late 1960s knocked down Jack Powell's

conservatory, built a garage instead and made a driveway to it. The gate, however, is preserved at another house down The Street.

Saddlers, the last house in The Street, was built for Eton College as Mortimer's vicarage, probably in the 16th century. The tithe barn, some 66 feet long and 26 feet wide, stood in front, and behind the garden was the rickyard ground. Here and in the barn was stored the vicar's share of all the crops grown in the parish, a tenth of each farmer's produce. Between the Foudry Brook and Worden Lane was an acre of pasture, for tithes also applied to livestock.

The last vicar to live there was Joseph Heycock, who ran a small school. After his death in 1735 a new vicarage was built (Abbeycroft) and the old one became known as Parsonage Farm. It so appears on the 1872 Ordnance Survey maps, complete with the tithe barn.

Later, like many redundant farmhouses, it was divided into two cottages, one becoming a caf, recommended by the Cyclists' Touring Club. The other was occupied by the saddler; he had his business in the old stables and coach house and this gave the house its present name.

Brocas Lands Farm at the far end of Turks Lane was the last possession of the Brocas family in Mortimer, the widowed Sophia Ann having sold Wokefield House and moved to Beaurepaire. Her son Bernard mortgaged the farm, and when he and his two brothers died without sons it was auctioned and bought by the Benyon Estate in 1872.



The 17th century farmhouse retains its air of repose and its graceful sash windows, the Estate's proposal to rebuild it as they had all the other farms having been stoutly resisted by their tenant. The late O. S. Nock, signal engineer and railway historian, lived in Mortimer as

a small boy and was taught by the farmer's daughter in 1910. It was then in such a poor state that the children called it 'Hole-in-the-Wall Farm'.

The bold symmetrical rear elevation of **Wokefield Park** with its four three-storey bays and balustraded roofline is a noble landmark on the left of the Grazeley Road as one leaves Mortimer. The present building replaced the old Manor House of Wokefield about 1750, when the park and about three-quarters of the manor were acquired by the Brocas family of Beaurepaire in Bramley.

Earlier owners of the manor were the Danvers family from the 13th to the early 14th century, and the Plowden family from mid-17th to early 18th century. Edmund Plowden was Treasurer of the Middle Temple, a famous lawyer and a staunch Catholic. His son Francis sold the manor in 1627 to Peter Weaver, from whom it descended in the female line to James Morgan, whose son became the Vicar of Mortimer who built the windmill, and opposed the enclosure of the common.

When Bernard Brocas died in 1839 Wokefield Park was bought by Robert Allfrey and his grandson Herbert sold it to Alfred Palmer in 1900. When in 1936 it became St. Benedict's Approved School much building took place; houses for staff, workshops, etc, appeared in the park, and a chapel in the house.

In 1986 Wokefield Park became a conference centre and the new owners went to great trouble and expense to restore the house and remove some of the more unsightly additions.

Until the mid-1800s the only roads into Mortimer from the north east passed through Wokefield Park into Mortimer Lane or through Great Park Farm. Between 1860 and 1870 Mr Allfrey made a new road running from the north entrance to Great Park, alongside the Foudry Brook and into the village past Saddlers. This was a scheme to relieve unemployment.

Warennes Wood appears in the 1552 survey of Mortimer as 'Warnes Wood' held by Thomas Carter. Other old documents refer to it as 'Wardens Wood', echoing such old Mortimer names as The Worden and Wern Cottage.

The gravestone of a 17th century owner was inscribed '*Here lyeth the body of Thomas Headland who lived in God's Feare and died in God's Faithe and he hath ordained by his Will, to be given every yeare unto the Poor of Mortimer in Berkshire Twelve Dozen of Bread upon St Thomas the Apostle's Day, unto the Worlds End. Let no man judge of me, for as I am so shalt thou be.*' The Headland family were still in possession in 1718 and also owned the farm which still bears their name.

Warnes Wood then passed through several hands until, throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, it became the home of the Mowbray family, who renamed it

Warenes Wood, bringing to the village two names associated with the Mortimers. Sir John Mowbray who died in 1899 aged 84 had been a Member of Parliament for 46 years and became Father of the House of Commons. Warenes Wood was much enlarged by the Mowbrays, but Sir George, the last of his line to live there, modernised and simplified it, removing the large portico under which a coach-and-four could stop to set down its passengers.

The third road in Mortimer to be diverted away from a stately home was that past Warenes Wood. In about 1910 the Mowbrays arranged for the new road to be built through the woods below and out of sight of the house, all the earth-moving being done by pick, shovel and wheelbarrow.

The roads through Mortimer were often the subject of complaint: for instance, the Parish Council complained to Bradfield Rural District Council about the state of the road from the station to St. John's Church and beyond, which had been damaged by timber-hauling during the war. In 1926 the Reading to Mortimer road through Burghfield had deteriorated and it was later tarred and gritted.

Until the 1930s all the roads through the village were gravelled. By 1936 the main roads had been tarmacked but there were no kerbs or pavements and there was a water-filled ditch opposite the shops in West End Road.

Horse-drawn transport was still common in the 1930s and a number of houses in the village still retain their stables with haylofts above, although most have been converted into garages. They are visible at Fairlawn, Highgrove and Wayside in King Street and Hendred in St. John's Road.