

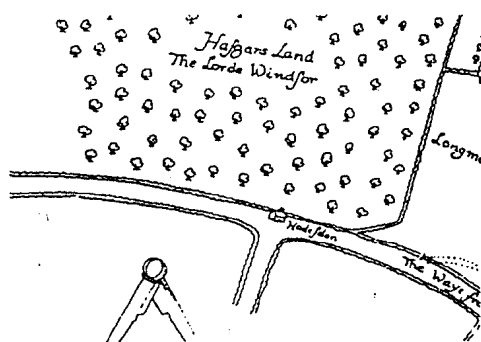
The Newsletter

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ELM COURT MUTTON LANE

The earliest known property on the site of the present Elm Court was shown on the plan of Wyllyotts Manor lands dated 1594. At that time it was occupied by Hodesdon, a well-known family in South Mimms in medieval times.



By 1792 it was noted as on which formerly stood a cottage. There is no reference to Elm Court in the 1871 Census Returns but ten years later there were three buildings mentioned - Elm Court, Elm Court Cottage and Elm Court Lodge. Sarah Row, widow, was the cook in the house and William Owen the gardener occupied the Cottage. The first recorded owner was Henry Gilling, in 1891, perhaps he was the original occupier but there is no evidence yet discovered to support the claim. The Revd. John Bell on resigning as principal of Totteridge Park School, in 1893, became the tenant and headmaster of Elm Court School. From 1896 to 1908 he was also chaplain to the Earl of Stafford, at Bentley Heath Church.

On the 28th July 1899, at the annual garden party, the academic prizes and athletic awards were distributed by the Hon. Mrs. S.Ponsonby, of Elmfield. The Census (1901) records the Revd. John Bell, his wife Maria and his sister Mary Bell at Elm Court. John Prosser and Frank Moon were tutors, while Charles Johnstone, recorded as a manager, was a visitor. There were fifteen pupils from 5 to 20, with an average age of 12.4 years. The domestic staff consisted of Cook, Laundry maid, Kitchen maids, Housemaid, Serving maid and Groom. They all came from South Africa, except the Kitchen maid who came from Granada. The Revd. John Bell died on the 15th June 1908 and his body was interred at Bells Hill Cemetery, Barnet.

In 1910 the executors of the Gilling family were still the owners but the family lived at The Elms, Hadley (destroyed in the 2WW). Eliza Gray was the occupier until 1927, when Mrs.Oldfield, later Mrs.Fraser-Oldfield became resident. According to my information it was then run as a private school for young ladies. When she died in September 1930 the property was left to the Poor Teachers' Association to be used as a convalescent home. It was not felt to be suitable for that purpose and was purchased by Albert Pinching for the Middlesex County Council, for use as a Community Centre. In early 1940 Mr, Marshall was installed as the first Warden.

While it was empty vandalism had taken place, which required a team of volunteers to replace windows, doors, etc. The caretaker, Mr.Winfield rebuilt the staircase. The Centre was just becoming very active, with about forty different organisations using the premises, when two bombs landed in the field and it required re-glazing all over again. Whist Drives and Socials were regular features of the Centre, The Cranborne Gospel Mission (later the Evangelical Free Church) commenced there, while the Society of Model Engineers had a very popular layout in the loft. The Centre was the birthplace of the local Service Units and the Elm Court Football Club was formed. It later amalgamated with Furzeffield F.C. and then formed Potters Bar F.C., about 1956. The Potters Bar Allotment Association used the Old Lodge (now demolished) as a store and had a membership of over 700 in the Second World War. A group of model aeroplane enthusiasts made some superb models and so the pattern continued until the 1960s. That was the time when the Middlesex County Council thought of Potters Bar having a Youth Centre. Mr. Roy Merrin was appointed the first full-time Youth Leader in 1965 and so Elm Court became a Youth Centre. Though in 1947 there had been an organisation using Elm Court called, "The Potters Bar Youth Society".

As with most youth movements the leaders came and stayed for a short period, some of them making a greater impact than others. In their time the club flourished and was well supported. While Roy Merrin was there funds were raised towards the first phase of the re-building scheme and in 1969 a new Sports and Social Hall was opened. When Stephen Hall became Leader and stayed for three years, he and his wife opened the Club for seven days a week to the youth of the area. The name was changed to Elm Court Youth & Community Centre.

During the 1970s two shower units with eight changing rooms were built, six for weekend football and two for the Centre. Later the gym had its off-peak heating system replaced with fan-assisted heaters; as a result it was used by mums for daytime badminton,

In January 1980 David Simpson through his energetic leadership saw the Centre extend its activities to include Ice and Roller Skating, 'Attic' and Craft Sales and a programme of re-decoration. He left in December 1988. In the early 1990s, Hertfordshire County Council re-organised the Youth Service, with Youth Leaders becoming area based. As a result Elm Court lost its Youth Leader and the Voluntary Management Committee had to do more fund raising. In that time they have managed to maintain and improve the Centre with income from Car Boot Sales.

I express my gratitude to Tom Shirley for all his help in preparing this article and to Hal Partridge and George Case for their comments.

Brian Warren