

Housing development in Goring 1870-1914

When we moved to Goring in 2004 our house was in a road with the unusual name of Nun's Acre. The properties were built in 1970 but it did not take long to find out that a big house of this name had formerly stood on the site. I started to research it and it turned out to have a very interesting story which has been told elsewhere¹.

I then started to look at other properties in the village and realised that Nun's Acre was only one of many large Victorian houses, several of which had disappeared under housing developments. These include Icknield House, Elmcroft and Glebe Court. Some of the old houses have been converted into apartments like Court Gardens or to other uses like nursing homes e.g. Thames Bank and Lyndhurst. In others such as Holmlea (now called Wolverley House) and The Grange the house was retained and the gardens sold off for housing.

Why were there such a large number of mansions in Goring, all built within about 30 years? Conversely, why are there so many smaller brick-built semis from the same period, mostly at Cleeve but also scattered around the village e.g. Milldown Road, Elvendon Road? There did not appear to have been the kind of industry or factory usually associated with such houses.

I started to investigate by looking into land ownership. In the Society's archives room in the Community Centre is an amazing amount of information gathered by members over the years. I was able to look at the tithe map and award which shows who owned the land when the tithes were commuted in 1848.

The major landowner was Samuel Weare Gardiner who was an absentee landlord, living at Coombe Lodge, Whitchurch. He bought his estate here in 1819 soon after the open fields were enclosed by Act of Parliament. He came from a Bristol family that had made its money from slavery and sugar.

As shown by the section of the tithe map, the village centre was just a few farmhouses and cottages gathered around the church and mill. The rest was open fields; most of the land in the parish is actually up on the hill behind Goring.

The first big house to be built was The Temple on the river bank at Cleeve, probably by Samuel Gardiner himself. The exact date is not known, but in 1861 a farmer, Mark Taylor, lived in the 'Temple House'. A very faded old photograph of the building exists. The ladies are wearing crinolines, dating the picture to the 1860s.

In 1866 Samuel Gardiner died and left his Goring estate to his son, Charles Lawrence Weare Gardiner. In 1871 Charles Gardiner, aged only 21, was living alone at the Temple with six servants. This young man became known as Squire Gardiner and he was a great benefactor to the village. I tried to find out more about him, but he proved elusive. I looked for family papers in record offices and libraries and had little luck. However in the Oxfordshire History Centre I came across a very significant document.

It showed that in 1873 Charles Gardiner mortgaged his Goring property, including The Temple for £10,000. Times were hard in agriculture and it was difficult to make a good

Goring tithe map 1848 showing the centre of the village surrounded by open land [GSLHS collection]



income from farming, but was this the reason for raising such a large sum of money? A chance find by Bob Ridley, whose article on the Cleeve Park Estate appears on p.21, led me to a possible reason for the loan. He found reference to him in a book on an expedition to the Arctic in 1876. I did some more research in old newspapers and discovered that Charles Gardiner had not only funded the ship that made the voyage but he also went on the expedition²! It could well be that the Goring mortgage was used to fund this voyage of discovery.

Why Goring?

Whatever our Squire's reason for raising capital, from the early 1880s he began to sell off his land in Goring. This was the time of the Thames boating boom, when trippers flocked to the Goring Gap to enjoy the river, go fishing, and take walks by the water and on the surrounding hills. Artists came here to paint and draw and writers were also attracted to the district. The railway station gave easy access for visitors and it also enabled a new phenomenon – commuting. Wealthy and professional people based in London wanted houses for country pursuits. They could travel up and down to the city daily by train, or visit here at weekends. Goring was an excellent location for their new homes.

Most of the initial development took place on the Cleeve side of the High Street. The first big house to be built seems to have been The Mount a somewhat mysterious property by Cleeve Crossroads that is completely invisible today because it is surrounded by trees. In

fact this was not built on land owned by Gardiner. Instead it belonged to the Pittman family who had been associated with Cleeve Mill and wharf for many years. James Swallow Dodd, an architect whose father was the miller at Goring, designed and built the house and seems to have lived in it intermittently. He took out a 99 year lease on the land as early as 1870.

When General Fife and his family moved to Goring in 1880 they first lived in The Mount. He was newly retired from India where he had been involved in building the railways. He commissioned the first house on Gardiner land, Clevemedede, in 1882. I gleaned these facts from his obituary in the local paper. The Fifes played an important role in village life for over 30 years. The house still stands and has been divided into apartments whilst a row of modern townhouses stands in the former front garden. The land that ran down to the river was sold off in Edwardian times and a Tudor-style mansion, Cariad, was built in 1912 on this and the adjacent plot (formerly the river garden of Court Gardens). Cariad, in turn, has been replaced by blocks of flats (Cariad Court).

Left: *The Mount* and right: *Clevemedede* [GSLHS collection]



To follow came Nun's Acre, which I have already mentioned and which I know the most about. This was built in 1886 by Percy Stone, an architect with a practice in London. His wife came from the Powys Lybbe family who had long associations with both Goring and Streatley, and this could have been a factor in his choice of Goring for a house.

Land with river access seems to have sold first. Streatley View, (now called Rest Harrow) overlooking the Gardiner Recreation Ground and fronting Cleeve Road, had a separate boathouse down by the lock. This is the one that today still has a thatched roof. The owner was William Hallett an estate agent with offices in London and Reading. He seems to have been a major player in the building development that followed. He was also a Catholic and held services in his boathouse for a few years, before being instrumental in building the Catholic church down Ferry Lane in 1897.

The block of land between Cleeve Road and the railway soon became filled with houses. Subsequently, the gardens have been sold off and smaller properties built on the plots. Owners of houses on what is known as the Gardiner Estate collectively own a small river garden between Thames Bank and Nun's Acre. Access to the river was clearly important.



1912 Ordnance Survey map showing the housing development in Cleve

One house with an enormous river frontage was Thames Bank. The date when it was built is not clear but James Dodd is recorded as designing a villa for Ernest Bayldon in 1884. I would hardly describe Thames Bank as a villa, but in the 1887 *Kelly's Directory* a house of this name was listed and the occupier was E.H. Bayldon.

This wealthy stockbroker later bought a lot of Charles Gardiner's land and took over most of his remaining

estate when Gardiner married in 1891 and moved down to Devon. The two men may have had other links as Bayldon also moved to Devon. He did not seem to live in Goring for many years, but bought up land here as an investment.

To return to Thames Bank, its next owner was Frederick Shoolbred who bought it in 1890 and extended the property. He was also very rich, being the owner of a department store in London's Tottenham Court Road. His main residence was in Brighton and he apparently used to charter a whole train to bring his retinue, including carriage, to Goring. The story also goes that Mr Shoolbred was not accepted in Goring society because he was in trade. As a result he was not allowed to join the golf club set up on Lardon Chase at Streatley by General Fife and his sons. His reaction was to buy Warren Farm on the next hill along and make his own golf course where he was taken round in a donkey cart.

Other big houses that appeared in this area at the time were Court Gardens, Oriol and Icknield House. What is now called Bridge House on the corner of Thames Road and the High Street was built a bit earlier in 1884 by Sam Saunders the local boatbuilder. He called it Willowside.



What was happening on the other side of the High Street? Holmlea at the top of Station Road (now called Wolverley House) was built in 1882 for the Wellsted family who had a department store in Reading. I wonder if the locals ostracised them? They appear to have had little involvement in village affairs.



Houses started to appear down Manor Road, formerly a track, but these were built well back from the river because the flood plain was on that bank. Their boathouses were a long way from the houses. These properties included: Long Meadow, Tower House, Boyne Court, Heath Barton and The Grange. Elmcroft, built for Charles Gardiner after he moved out of the Temple, was not a riverside property.

Manor Road [Janet Hurst collection]

Now as rich people moved into the village, they needed servants to work in the houses and gardeners to keep the large and beautiful grounds. This army of support staff often had families, so where were they to live? Goring had only a few old cottages and these were occupied already by farm labourers and tradesmen. The answer was to build houses especially for the servants, but at a distance from their place of work.

As a result Charles Gardiner built pairs of semis at the top of the High Street. Mr Shoolbred built the big red brick houses on Red Cross Road that back on to the railway. The Rev Hunter Fell, a troublesome elderly clergyman who owned The Cottage, now Ferry House, erected the row of cottages behind the present Social Club. Mr Telford Simpson, firstly of Icknield House but then of The Temple, built brick cottages on Elvendon Road for his staff.



*Charles Gardiner's cottages in
Goring High Street
[Janet Hurst collection]*

Of course the large number of building workers, plumbers, carpenters, roofers and other tradesmen associated with the growing village also needed somewhere to live and so cottages were built for rent in Elvendon Road, Springhill Road and Milldown Road.

I have mentioned only a few of the houses that sprung up in the 1880s and 1890s and the Edwardian era. In 1871 the directory entry for Goring showed:

PRIVATE RESIDENTS: CLW Gardiner, The Temple + clergy

GENERAL TRADES: 14 farmers, 8 pubs & beerhouses, 5 shops, 3 boot/shoemakers, 2 millers, 2 coal merchants, 1 saddle & harnessmaker, 1 builder, 1 butcher, 1 painter & plumber, 1 tailor, 1 chair turner.

Note that important residents are listed first, separately from the tradespeople, shopkeepers and farmers.

By 1899, there were 44 Private Residents and 46 'Commercial' entries which included farmers, shopkeepers, pubs and apartment houses, a bank, architect & surveyor, carpenter, boatbuilder, chemical manure manufacturer, brick & tile maker and a hairdresser.

The population had swelled even further by 1911 with 86 Private residents and 72 'Commercial' entries. Newly listed since 1899 were watchmaker, motor garage, solicitor, dairymen, music teacher, dentist, haulier, dressmaker, chemist & druggist, news correspondent, fire brigade, cycle agent and a newsagent. The population of Goring doubled over the 40 years from 930 in 1871 to 1785 in 1911. Goring had changed from a farming village to a small town.

Contrast this with Streatley, just over the toll bridge, which was very picturesque with its mill and famous hill, much frequented by artists, writers, walkers and anglers and boasting two hotels. Here Mrs Morrell the major owner did not permit building development on her land. The population hardly changed between 1871 and 1911.

The architects and builders

So who designed and built all these houses? As already noted in connection with The Mount, we had an architect who lived in the village, namely James Swallow Dodd, who had trained in London. I think he was responsible for a lot of the houses in Goring, both large and small. He was not just a local architect though and operated from offices in Reading for over 40 years. He designed both Newbury and Wallingford Corn Exchanges, and had many commissions on the Oxfordshire/Berkshire border. He seems to have soon rented out The Mount, for his address for many years was Glebe Cottage, the Gothic revival house that

adjoins the Miller of Mansfield. Dodd was a nonconformist. Both he and his father have gravestones in the dissenters' section of the churchyard. James Dodd died in Goring in 1907.

A well-known Reading architect also plied his trade in Goring and seems to have been a developer, buying up land for housing. This was William Ravenscroft. He designed Holmlea and Streatley View, along with the Catholic church for William Hallett. In fact Ravenscroft appears to have owned the land on which the church was built, having bought it from Sam Saunders who at one time had planned an estate there. Ravenscroft developed that whole site, submitting plans to Goring Rural District Council for several different sized houses on the plot where Crossways now stands. Other properties he is known to have designed include:

- 1882 Holmlea
- 1884 Grove Farmhouse
- 1885 'New house for Mrs Stokes' (vicar's wife)
- 1888 Streatley View
- 1893 Elmhurst
- 1897 Springfield & Pound Lock semis, Station Road
- 1897 Catholic church
- 1898 Conversion of maltings to Morrell Room, Streatley ... *and many more*

Strangely Percy Stone did not design any more big houses in Goring after his own, Nun's Acre. He seems to have concentrated on public buildings like the Working Men's Club erected on land donated by Squire Gardiner, the extension to the school in Station Road and the Parish Room, now our Village Hall. He also designed Saunders boathouse and showroom in 1894, a handsome building by Goring Bridge that has endured through the years. Percy does not seem to have got on with William Hallett, if some acrimonious correspondence between the two about the Gardiner Field in the parish magazine is an indication of their relationship. Upsetting the main estate agent and surveyor in the village was probably not a good way to get commissions for houses. Percy's wife died in 1898 and he left Goring to live on the Isle of Wight. Nun's Acre and its contents were sold. The buyer was F.C. Strick, another millionaire, who ran a shipping line. Later he bought Thames Bank after Mr Shoolbred died.

Other Reading architects are known to have designed properties in Goring, as is shown by the building plans submitted to Goring RDC after 1894 when the latter was formed as a result of local government re-organisation. The architectural styles of the Victorian and Edwardian houses in Goring were fashionable and reflected the diversity of their age. They merit a separate study.

Many of the buildings were put up by Thomas Higgs & Son who were based in Station Road. Mr Higgs lived in what is now Sprimont House and his yard was opposite on what is now Bellême Mews. He began to build speculatively himself, as well as for the architects and other developers. His work was not restricted to the small houses, many of which he rented out. He also built the larger ones, and carried out many adaptations and extensions.

Of course builders from outside the village were also awarded contracts here. Smallbones of Streatley were involved in building projects in Goring, as well as some smaller firms.

Business expansion


With the increase in population, business boomed in Goring and we became well supplied with shops selling all manner of goods. In turn the prospering shopkeepers and tradesmen began to build large houses for themselves. For example, Henry Lacey Smith, the postmaster and owner of Thames Fancy Stores, built Lyndhurst and Ernest Mitchelmore, manager of the Miller of Mansfield, commissioned William Ravenscroft to design him a house down Croft Road with a completely unpronounceable Welsh name.

Some areas of the village remained undeveloped mainly because they did not belong to Gardiner. A good example is Lockstile Field which was owned by the Allnutt Charity, responsible for the almshouses and school at Goring Heath. This land was not sold off until the 1960s.

Utilities

Another factor aiding building developments was the formation of the Gas and Water Company in 1887 which supplied many villages in the area, not just Goring and Streatley. The roads were dug up so that water mains and gas pipes could be laid. The gas works and water reservoir were situated at the Springhill Road and Icknield Road junction. Electricity had been produced for lighting by Goring Mill since 1894. Our village was one of the pioneers of hydroelectricity in the country. There was no mains drainage. Thames Bank had a septic tank and presumably the other big houses did too. Building plans show drains and soakaways. The cottages had an earth closet in the back garden. Bathrooms only existed in the biggest of the houses of the well-to do.

1894 business advertisements [Janet Hurst collection]

<p style="text-align: center;">GORING HOTEL.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ye Miller of Mansfield,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CLOSE TO RIVER,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">And only 3 minutes from G.W.R. Station, main line.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ONLY HOTEL IN GORING,</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>And acknowledged to be the most complete house on the river.</i></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">PRIVATE SITTING ROOMS.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">TABLE d'HÔTE on Sundays,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">In time for last up train.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">ERNEST MITCHELMORE, Proprietor.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Telegrams, "Mitchelmore," Goring, Reading.</small></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">V.  R.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">POST OFFICE & THAMES STORES, GORING-ON-THAMES.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">H. L. SMITH,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Family Grocer, Tea Dealer, AND PROVISION MERCHANT.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AGENT FOR W. & A. GILBEY'S WINES AND SPIRITS.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">STATIONERY AND FANCY WAREHOUSE.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">TAUNT'S PHOTOGRAPHS & BOOKS, A VERY LARGE SELECTION.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">THE NOTED DRAPERY & BOOT STORES.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Families waited on daily. — Deliveries to Clevee, Streatley, Gatehampton, &c.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">ESTABLISHED OVER 80 YEARS.</p>
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Sources

Carrying out this kind of research is like doing a large jigsaw puzzle. You have to find pieces of information from a wide variety of sources and then try to build up a bigger picture. Sometimes clues come from quite unexpected quarters. The main sources are listed at the end of the article.

There is a particularly important source called the Inland Revenue Valuation Survey of 1910. This was a government scheme set up to raise taxes when property changed hands. Every landowner in England and Wales was sent a form to complete about their property, however small. Even advertising hoardings were included. The information provided was copied by clerks into field books which are now kept at the National Archives. Each property was given a number and its location marked on a 6 inch to the mile OS map. The information given includes the owner, occupier, a detailed description of the property and sometimes a plan, plus various financial values. Other records relating to this scheme are in the Oxford History Centre.

All 519 field book entries for Goring have been copied on to record sheets, which are slowly being entered into a database which will enable various analyses to be carried out. This is very much a work in progress, but already some key findings are emerging.

The tax was never put into operation because of WW1. Similarly this catastrophic event put paid to most house building. Apart from reduced demand, most of the men who would have built the houses were called up and no labour was available. This phase in Goring's history and development was over.

Janet Hurst

References

1. *GSLHS Journal* No. 10, 2008, pp 6-10
2. *GSLHS Journal* No. 14, 2012, pp 22-26

Sources

These included decennial census returns, maps, local guide books, trade directories, newspapers, architects and builders journals, parish magazines, photographs and drawings, title deeds, sale catalogues, local council building plans, electoral rolls, rate books and the Inland Revenue Valuation Survey 1910-14 records.
