

DELIGHTFUL AND BRACING

Blackmore
End and
Porters End
*The Legacy
of the
Baxendales*



Peter Hale

“DELIGHTFUL AND BRACING”

**Blackmore End and Porters End -
the Legacy of the Baxendales**



Gertrude Baxendale

Blackmore End

**by Peter Hale
for The Kimpton History Group**

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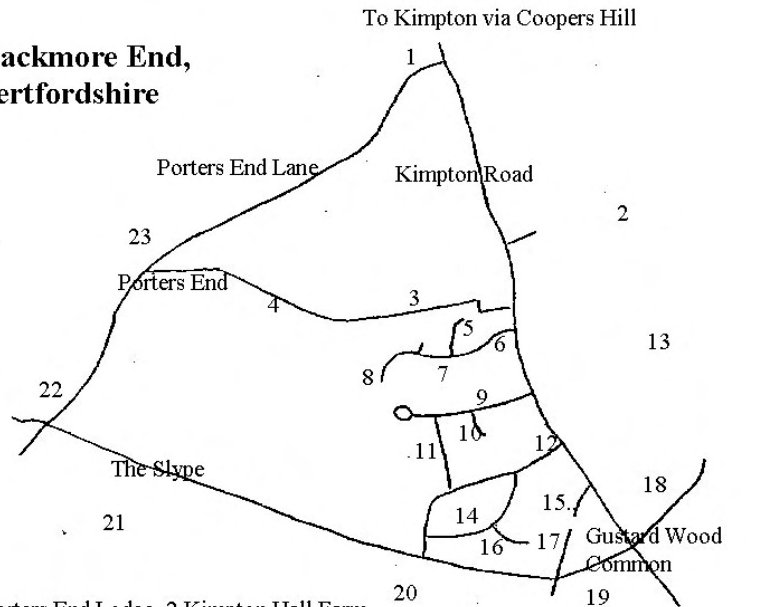
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**Blackmore End,
Hertfordshire**



- 1 Porters End Lodge 2 Kimpton Hall Farm
 - 3 The Drive and Lime Avenue
 - 4 The avenue of trees
 - 5 The site of the Baxendale house
 - 6 The Lodge 7 Beech Way
 - 8 Blackmore Manor 9 Blackmore Way
 - 10 The Paddocks 11 Brownfield Way
 - 12 The Broadway, cottages on the corner
 - 13 Hall Wood 14 Dale Avenue and Burton Close
 - 15 Firs Drive 16 Hog's Island
 - 17 Gustard Wood - shop, The Cricketers, Tin Pot
 - 18 Cross Keys 19 Golf Course
 - 20 Allotments 21 Turners Hall Farm
 - 22 Raisins Cottages (Cheristead Cross)
 - 23 Beanswick
- The ancient boundary runs 22-11-12-18

1. WHY ARE WE HERE?

In 1927 an estate agent described Blackmore End as "delightful and bracing" and today agents call it "sought after" but it is no village – there is and never has been a church, a pub, a shop, a village green, duckpond or anything that makes what we think of as a village for Blackmore End to call its own.

400 feet up on the edge of what is geologically known as "The Blackmore End Plateau", surrounded by the valleys of the Lea, the old Kym, and the Mimram and sharing it with the ancient village of Ayot St Lawrence and scattered historical houses such as Bride Hall and Mackerye End, Blackmore End is the only settlement of any size, perched on one side of a minor road (not even a "B" road). But the handful of mid-19th century buildings: the lodge bungalow in Kimpton Road, a house and the wall in The Drive, and the avenue of trees leading across the fields to Porters End House all give evidence of real history here, and a real community, and that is what this book is about.

Present day Blackmore End owes its existence to the unique combination of two separate but coinciding strands – the Baxendale family, once owners of Britain's biggest haulage firm, Pickfords, and the economic and social situation of 1920s England.



*Evidence of an earlier Blackmore End –
the wall in The Drive and Lime Avenue*

2. THE BOUNDARY

The district council boundary running between The Broadway and Blackmore Way is only known to readers of maps and anybody who wonders why the dustbins in The Broadway are emptied on a different day. But this boundary is of major historical significance, and we can blame the Romans – or maybe even the Celts - for the fact that administratively most of Blackmore End is run from Kimpton and Letchworth rather than Wheathampstead and St Albans, whatever the Post Office says. And we can blame the Baxendales for the fact that the boundary does not today follow any obvious course, as we shall see in a later chapter.

The boundary runs from just behind the Cross Keys and along the eastern edge of Gustard Wood Common, then towards Blackmore End down the middle of Kimpton Road. At the junction with The Broadway it turns westward to a point to the left of the pair of Victorian cottages, roughly where the sign for "The Broadway" is placed, following the route of Kimpton Road at that time. The tapering stretch of lawn belonging to the first house in The Broadway to the left of the cottages' garden marks in fact the track of an old road which formed the boundary and once ran along the ends of the gardens in what is now Blackmore Way. It ran where the barrier stands in Brownfield Way and it continued along within the wooded strip between the end of Blackmore Way and Porters End Lane, to a point opposite where Raisins Cottages are on the junction with Sauncey Wood Lane. You can see the remains of the track in the woods at the field edge there.

We can safely surmise that this track is very old. It follows the high ground of The Blackmore End Plateau. In the 19th Century a group of keen historians known as The Viatores attempted to track the Roman roads in Britain. They identified it as Roman, though on what evidence we do not know. Roman and pre-Roman finds have been appearing at Turners Hall Farm on the south side of the Slype since at least the nineteenth century and recent excavations have confirmed a major Roman and pre-Roman settlement, and since the Slype did not exist then it is certainly likely that a track ran at least roughly in the area. A Roman chariot bell is reputed to have been found in Kimpton Road. So first Celts, then Belgae, then Romans may well have trod the path so regularly that, when the Saxons came, they used it as they did many other tracks, as a boundary marker. Whereupon ditches

were dug and hedges planted. Remnants of these ditches and the road bed can be found in at least one garden in Blackmore Way.

Just prior to the Norman Conquest the track features as the boundary of the parish of Wheathampstead and is described in the Deed of 1060 recording the gift of the parish lands by the Saxon King Edward the Confessor to the Abbey of Westminster. It may be even more important as the de facto boundary of the Danelaw, that portion of North and Eastern England that in the 9th Century King Alfred had agreed should be ruled by the Danes. Although the boundary was said to be the River Lea the Parish of Wheathampstead spans it and so the northern boundary – our track – could well have served as the actual boundary.

Two stone crosses are recorded in an 18th century document describing the bounds of the parish of Kimpton. One is at the point where the boundary track meets Kimpton Road just in front of the Victorian cottages on the corner of Broadway, and the other, called Cheristead Cross, where it meets Porters End Lane.



On this early 19th Century map, the road shown below "Blackmoor End"(i.e. to the South) is not The Slype, but the track along the boundary.



The Old Road which marks the boundary between Kimpton and Wheathampstead Parishes ran from Kimpton Road (above) to "Cheristead Cross" on Porters End Lane (right), between today's Blackmore Way and The Broadway



3. THROUGH THE AGES

Just before the Norman Conquest the Manor of Kimpton, including present day Blackmore End north of the boundary, was owned by Aelveva, the widow of the Earl of Mercia, son of Lady Godiva. Aelveva's grandchild Edith was the wife of Harold II, the Anglo-Saxon king defeated by William of Normandy at the Battle of Hastings. After the Norman Conquest the land was forfeited in favour of Odo, King William's half-brother and Bishop of Bayeux, who in turn let it to Ralf de Curbespine. It was worth, according to the Domesday Book, £12 a year, and Ralf had to supply two knights for about two months each year to fulfil his duties to the King.

The Manor of Wheathampstead, including Gustard Wood and The Broadway, remained in the ownership of the Abbey of Westminster despite the Norman Conquest.

As the years went by manors began to be divided through sale, forfeiture or bequests. South of Blackmore End lay the Manors of Herons (where Henry II kept his mistress) and Sauncey, which also spread into Kimpton Parish. North and East lay Hockenhanger and Leggatts. Later, large estates grew up comprised of several farms, not always neighbouring – for example, the Garrards at Lamer also owned considerable land at Raisins and on Kimpton Bottom. A great swathe east and north of Kimpton parish was ultimately owned by the Brand family, the Lords Dacre. But their domain (now owned by Oxford University) stops the other side of Kimpton Road from Blackmore End. On the other hand, Gustard Wood Common remained literally "common" land, with the rights of the inhabitants on its borders to graze animals and to gather wood and food preserved, even though the land remained in the ownership of the Church (as it does today).

Several local farmhouses date from the 16th and 17th Centuries – for example Kimpton Hall, Herons and Astridge at Gustard Wood, Ramridge on the road to Peters Green, Tallents on Kimpton Bottom, and the original house at Porters End. There also was a farmhouse at Blackmore End.

The Church of England had the right to levy Tithes, originally one tenth of the farm's income per annum, on local farms, to support the vicar or rector in the Parish. The Tithe Map of Kimpton of 1837 shows us that the land now forming Blackmore End within the parish of Kimpton was linked to and named after Porters End.

4. THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

By the early 19th Century Porters End Farm, covering Blackmore End, was owned by a family of millers from Offley, the Oakleys, together with part of the adjoining Turners Hall Farm towards Mackerye End, in all 520 acres.

In 1842 The Oakleys decided to build what became their ultimate family home, Lawrence End, near Peters Green. Richard Oakley, the then head of the family, passed an interest in the land to James Oakley, of another branch of the family (in such a way, incidentally, that "no woman who shall become his widow shall be entitled to dower (i.e. income) out of the hereditaments and premises").

The various fields and buildings were let to a variety of tenants. The immediate occupier of the land around Porters End Farm estate was a family called Kidman, who were recorded there in the first of the modern censuses in 1851. Nobody is recorded as living in Blackmore End. In the next census, 1861, there is nobody recorded at either place.

Hertfordshire has always been attractive for country estates, and with the growth of London as a commercial and industrial centre and the coming of the railways, it was inevitable that outsiders would continue to be tempted to settle here.

In 1865 as part of this movement one Richard Birley Baxendale bought the whole of the estate from the Oakleys, for £1,000, and the scene was set for the transformation that was to come.

There still lingered the influence of the ancient manors – Charles Benet Drake Garrard, of Lamer, was the Lord of the Manor of Sauncey, and he required a further £175 and eleven shillings (55 pence) to surrender his rights over a few fields that lay in the ancient Manor. Under the deed Baxendale also agreed to pay "a heriot when it happens" – in other words, as was customary, he pledged his "best beast" or "dead chattel" to the Lord of the Manor on his death.

5. THE BAXENDALE WEALTH

Richard Birley Baxendale, the man who was, in life and death, to shape modern Blackmore End was born in Eccles in Lancashire. Birley, as his family called him, was the third son of one of England's more prominent entrepreneurs, Joseph Baxendale, and his wife, Mary Birley.

While many early industrial entrepreneurs were in fact old aristocratic families with centuries-old landholdings who learnt how to exploit the coal, iron ore or clay on their land, or had the wealth to foster invention, others were enterprising members of the "lower" classes, such as tradesmen or merchants. The Baxendale family was of the latter stock. Eventually, though, the twin pillars found it beneficial to intermarry, money and status combining to create the English aristocracy and the untitled but socially important landed gentry, the source of the JPs, county councillors, Master of Hounds, Army officers and clergymen that ruled England until the 1950s.

Born in 1785 Joseph Baxendale was the son of an eminent surgeon in Lancaster, Josiah. But his family was far more involved in trade than in the professions. His grandfather was a Freeman in Liverpool, and Joseph, by all accounts a man of great energy, left home at 20 to, as he put it, "fight his way in the world". After a spell working in London, he was able to borrow money in 1809 from relatives to buy into a prestigious calico printing firm, still young at 25. A vivid memory of this time was being shot at during a bitter labour dispute. In 1816 Joseph married Mary Birley, herself the daughter of a wealthy cotton mill owner from Lancashire. In his earlier career Joseph had transacted business with the Birley family. Clearly, Joseph had impressed the Birleys.

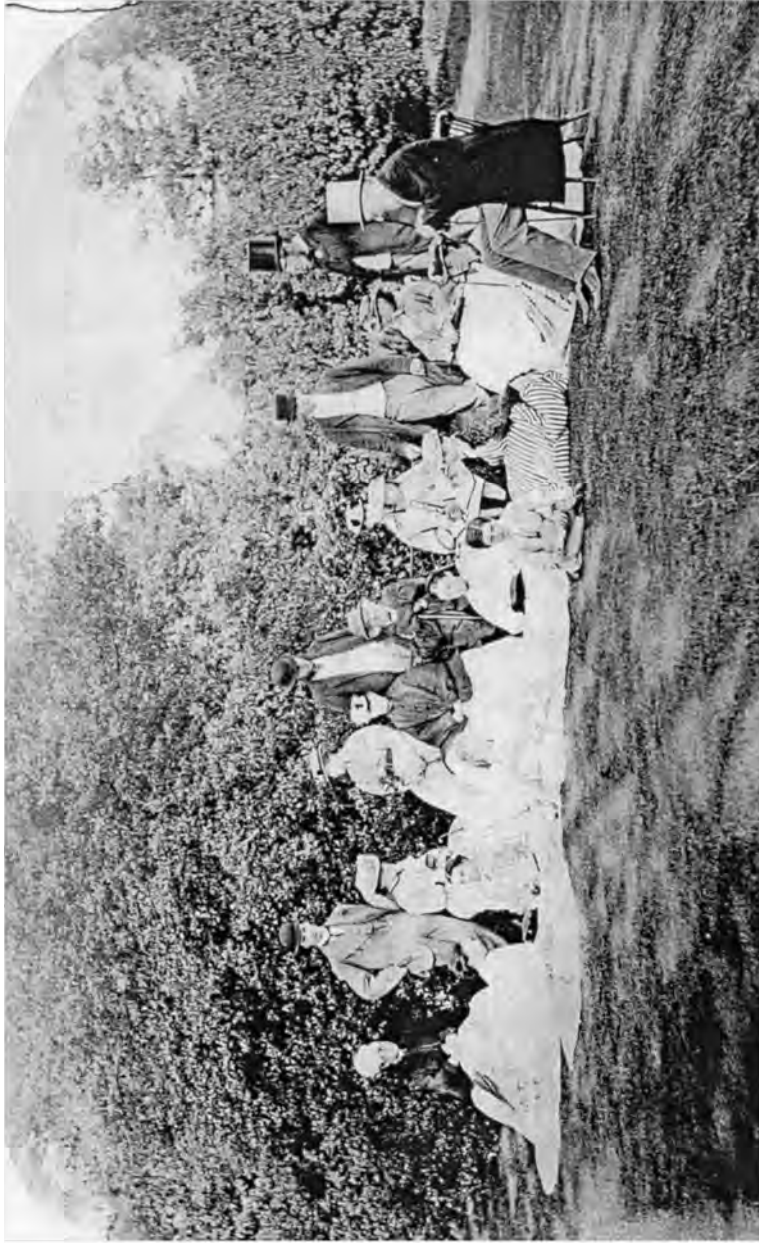
Mary's brother Hugh was a Major General of the Royal Bengal Artillery, and, incidentally, Mark Birley, the restaurant and nightclub owner formerly married to Lady Annabel Birley, later James Goldsmith's wife and after whom he named Annabel's nightclub, is a distant descendant of Mary Birley's family.

As England's industrial wealth grew and with it the trade in manufactured goods, Joseph became aware of the need for better means of transport and haulage. This led him in 1821 to the rescue of a near-bankrupt firm of hauliers based near Manchester, Pickfords.

Although the carrier or haulage trade was extensively regulated, subject to parliamentary interference and burdened with legal obligations, it was, nevertheless, very competitive. For the right firm, ensuring fast, certain and reliable transport could also be very profitable. Pickfords had become "one of the most extensive...carrying businesses in the kingdom" with a dense network of regular routes between Manchester and London by road and canal. Agents and warehouses were established throughout the network to handle the increasing cotton and silk trade. Following the death in 1799 of Matthew Pickford, who had been the main driver of the expansion to date, ownership of the firm had been divided between various family members. It was a boom time for inland transport, as merchants shunned its traditional rival, coastal shipping, because of the very real threat of war with Napoleon. Pickford's partners expanded further, until, in 1815, and apparently quite suddenly, the firm was unable to pay a major debt to a canal company. Other creditors including banks began pressing for their money. Traffic turned down, two partners withdrew their capital and without centralised financial control, the cash ran out.

In a deal brokered by his wife Mary's brother, Joseph Baxendale and two other Lancashire businessmen, bound together by ties of marriage and business, agreed to provide finance. They negotiated terms to take over the reins and sort out the mess. It was worse than they thought, and even though they were not legally obliged to pay any earlier debts it became commercially necessary to do so. To restore Pickfords Joseph risked considerable amounts of money – mostly borrowed – and his reputation. An early letter from Josiah to Joseph implores him to "endeavour to make yourself a perfect master at Book-Keeping. The advantage you will ultimately receive from it, there is no appreciating." This was the advantage the Pickford family lacked. With the bankruptcy of the remaining Pickford partners and Joseph's managerial skills, sheer dedication and hard work, he became the manager of the business and, by 1830, had restored its predominant role in Britain's internal trade.

Over the following decades Joseph Baxendale developed Pickfords into one of the major haulage firms in the country. He understood that the modern world needed reliability and certainty – he would win business by delivering goods on time and in good condition. Although Pickfords, through ultimate mismanagement, became in the 20th century truncated to just the modern



Joseph Baxendale at home with his family at Woodside, probably in 1865, on his 80th birthday

household removal firm we know today, in Joseph's day it carried millions of tons of the new industrial products by canal and road, and, importantly, by the newly expanding railway network. Efficiency required good administration, and as a contemporary recorded "his clear system of forms and arrangements, by which a hold of the goods conveyed is maintained. until they reach their destination, continues to be the basis of the carrying business all over the kingdom".

A man of prodigious energy and drive, dominant without being domineering, Joseph moved permanently South and acquired Woodside House in Whetstone, on the then newly improved Great North Road on the Middlesex-Hertfordshire border, closer to the centre of commercial power. From there he would travel forth in his specially constructed carriage to superintend Pickfords' various activities around the country and to its new headquarters in the City of London, at Wood Street. From his Town house at Park Village, Regent's Park, he would superintend traffic on the Regents Canal and write extensively to the Marquess of Salisbury at Hatfield House who was a director of the canal company. He also sought – as was done in those days – Army commissions from the Marquess for his nephews.

By 1830 there was a new means of transport firmly established – the railways. For Pickfords, though, there was one important difference. Canal owners owned only the waterways. The hauliers owned the barges which carried the traffic. Railway companies, on the other hand, not only owned the tracks, but also rolling stock. How – and indeed whether – independent hauliers such as Pickfords could use the railways for their business resulted in bitter disputes, uneasy alliances and legal complications which were not settled until well into the Twentieth Century. Eventually, they would transform Pickfords, and not for the better.

Convinced of the value of the railways, Joseph became the director of several railway companies, and was responsible for the first regular cross-channel ferry service linked to a railway, from Folkestone to Boulogne. He personally financed the construction of Folkestone harbour when his fellow directors declined to risk the company's money on this venture. His interests in railways spread to France, Belgium and eventually as far as India.

A philanthropic man and deeply religious, he was on the board of trustees of Christ's Hospital, the almshouses in Barnet. Baxendale Road in Bethnal

Green is named after him - the land had been bequeathed to Christ's Hospital and Joseph arranged for its development into a suitably wholesome estate. Like many such entrepreneurs he had developed a social conscience and was praised for his care of his employees by Samuel Smiles, a prominent liberal campaigner for the working classes.

By all accounts Woodside was a significant house - the small road in Whetstone called Baxendale is on the site, and a B&Q superstore stands at then entrance. A care home called Woodside House commemorates the old house, and its park remains as part of a private housing development. A 60s office block also shares the site. Whetstone was then a growing village and Joseph gave a plot of land next to Woodside for the building of the Church of St John the Apostle, in which is to be found the Baxendale family vault. Woodside Park tube station on the Northern Line is named after the house and the estate, although ironically for somebody who lived for the railways that line was not actually finished until the year of his death, 1872. He, and in time his four sons, acquired several large estates around London together with fashionable houses in the better London squares.

Haulage was a major lubricant of the industrial revolution, but as the Victorians strove to develop swift and certain means of transport, goods were inevitably delayed and damaged. Disputes between Pickfords and their customers over delays helped develop the law of commerce. In one particularly famous case – Hadley v. Baxendale – Joseph successfully limited the amount of compensation Pickfords had to pay to a mill owner for the late delivery of a repaired shaft, and the principles in that case still rule today. A claimant can only receive compensation for a loss which could be foreseen at the time as the likely result of the other party being negligent. It must have helped that Joseph's brother, Lloyd Salisbury, was a prominent lawyer. Many members of the Baxendale family have practised law over the years and there are at least two prominent barristers of that name today.

Another famous 19th Century Baxendale – possibly related – was the original founder of the company which was in the 20th Century to give us the Baxi enclosed coal fire, and the Baxi boiler, still going strong. That family also showed strong philanthropic principles as it was until recently owned by a trust for the benefits of its workforce.

Profits at Pickfords rose steadily. Between 1821 and 1861 they rose from around £11,000p.a. to £36,000, though they began to fall off after that. In his later years Joseph's share of the profits was between £8,000 and £17,000 p.a. – the equivalent today of about a million pounds. Although much of this was required to be reinvested, some was no doubt distributed. It was considered at the time that an income of £5,000 per annum was necessary to live like a proper landed gentleman.

In 1847, after a period of ill health caused in part by the legal disputes, Joseph handed control of Pickfords to Birley and to his two elder brothers, Joseph Hornby and Lloyd, who went on to be directors while Birley did not. His younger brother Salisbury became a barrister.

A history of Pickfords reveals that "what [Joseph's three sons] contributed to the management of the firm cannot really be said. They seem to have relied on senior clerks" and Joseph "more than once complained of the business being left to take care of itself" The history even manages to get Birley's first name wrong – referring to him as "Robert". Joseph Hornby admitted that they all lacked their father's dedication. Birley and his brothers certainly placed less emphasis on the business side of life. In later years, Birley's nephew, Joseph Hornby's son Joseph William, was asked to join the board of the Phoenix Insurance Company, a significant concern until its recent acquisition by Sun Alliance. He was reputed to give as his qualification the fact that he had swum though Harrow and rowed through Pembroke College, Oxford. Incidentally, his emotional connection with the land rather than business was consummated in his marriage to the last heiress of the Earl of Egremont.

As well as country sports, yachting seems to have been another pursuit of the Baxendales, both Birley and his brother Joseph Hornby owning substantial (and expensive) boats and becoming members of the prestigious Royal Yacht Club.

The Baxendales had extensive connections with Hertfordshire. Joseph served as a Magistrate in what was then called the "Liberty" of St Albans, and was the Deputy Lieutenant of Hertfordshire and Middlesex. Commercially, St Albans was on the route of one of Pickfords' main services, to the Midlands and the North, using what was to become the A5. Another route would have been the Great North Road, and then again there was the business link with



*A Pickfords local van in Luton, 1906.
Though taken after Birley's death, this kind of service was the
basis for Pickfords' prosperity in his time*

the Marquess at Hatfield House. Hertfordshire was a favoured county for Joseph's sons as they also occupied estates at Scotsbridge in Rickmansworth, Totteridge House (near Whetstone, and still standing), and Bonningtons, near Ware.

In 1872 when Joseph died he left his sons a personal estate of £700,000, perhaps about £40 million in today's money, and which yielded an annual income of £30,000, about £1.6m today. Woodside in his will became a home for impoverished ladies, and much of the land was sold off. Lloyd subsequently used his portion of the inheritance to build a mansion at Greenham near Newbury (where the famous airbase now lies – the house becoming its officers' mess), employing the then-rising architect Norman Shaw, subsequently to become designer of the Savoy Theatre and Scotland Yard.

By his father's death Birley had already built his future home at Blackmore End, on the site of what is now Beech Way.

6. RICHARD BIRLEY BAXENDALE

Birley was born in 1823. The third son, he was 5 years younger than Joseph Hornby and one year younger than Lloyd. Salisbury was four years younger than Birley. Birley was to die before any of them, for he suffered all his life from a weak heart - he suffered a serious debilitating illness in 1865, the year he bought the Porters End estate. He also had three sisters.

All the Baxendale sons married into families of landowners, rather than locals, and all married at the age of 29 or 30. After the fashion of the times the wives seem to have been somewhat younger. Joseph's sons would have been eminently suitable bachelors, moneyed, with good incomes, and they would have sought suitable wives to carry on the Baxendale name. In 1853 Birley, 30, married Caroline Anne, 19. She was the daughter of the Darrochs, Scottish gentry from Gourrock, on the Clyde estuary, and friends of the Birleys. Sadly, she died in childbirth four years later. Their baby, unbaptised, died shortly afterwards. And a week later many of Birley's prints and papers were destroyed by a major fire at Pickford's Camden depot.

Caroline and Birley had lived at Joseph's London house in Park Village and at Loudwater near Rickmansworth. She never saw the house Birley was to build and never lived in the area. Both Caroline Anne and the baby are buried in the family vault at St John's, Whetstone.

Three years after the death of Caroline, in 1860, Birley married again, this time to Gertrude Chichester. He was 37, she was 19. The Chichesters were (and are) a Devon family of long recorded lineage with titled forebears. The world of the City businessman was melding with the world of the land. Gertrude was one of five daughters and ten children. An old friend of Birley's, a Mr R Holland, had wooed one of Gertrude's sisters and had taken Birley down to Devon to meet the Chichesters. While the subsequent marriage between Birley and Gertrude appears to have been relatively harmonious, that was not the case with Holland who also failed dismally in several business ventures. There would have been considerable social contact between the Birleys, Baxendales and Chichesters as there were several marriages between the families. Birley Baxendale's sister Mabella married Hugh Birley, her cousin, and their son Hugh Arthur Birley married Gertrude's niece Amy.



Gertrude Baxendale, 1861, taken at Ayot

Although it was not until 1865 that Birley bought the Porters End estate he had by then moved to the area, first to Ayot St Lawrence, and later to Wheathampstead House (still standing today at the end of Lamer Lane). His brother Joseph Hornby described it as "small". From there he would have seen the railway arrive in Wheathampstead in 1860 directly opposite, and the birth of his only child, in 1864. Wheathampstead House afterwards became the home of the Earls of Cavan. It is probable that the Baxendales knew the Cavans as an early photograph of Gertrude was taken at Ayot where they had also lived.

We can only imagine Birley's feelings towards his family. Born as one of seven, with many uncles, aunts and cousins, with a growing number of nephews and nieces, the typical Victorian family was large not only because of unreliable family planning. But his first wife had died in childbirth and left no heir, and sadly (perhaps) for Birley Gertrude was to bear only the one child, a daughter. Following the tradition of carrying on family and first names, she was christened Gertrude Mary, Mary after her grandmother. Her family called her "Tottie".

Birley had his town house at 35 Portman Square, London, and it was there that his marriage to Gertrude took place. Portman Square, off Baker Street, was one of the most fashionable London Squares built originally a century earlier and "esteemed next in beauty to Grosvenor Square, as it is in dimensions, [and] consists of the largest and the best of mansions". Along with aristocratic residences such as Home House, built by Robert Adam, the square had also been the location of England's first Indian restaurant, the Hiduoostanee Curry House in 1809, and "the celebrated Mrs. Montague's residence, situated in a little park and lawn... a very pleasing effect, not a little improved by the moveable temple erected by the Turkish Ambassador". Birley's house was demolished in 1961 and replaced with an office block. 35 Portman Square is now the address of Carlton Television.

7. THE PORTERS END ESTATE

The boundary of the land Birley bought ran the full length of Kimpton Road, from the top of Coopers Hill to the edge of Gustard Wood Common. This, incidentally, is the reason why there are no houses on the other (east) side of Kimpton Road apart from the Red House, which was never his. He owned much of what is now Firs Drive, but not a wide strip of land where the older cottages on the Common stand. The estate included land on both sides of The Slype (which did not exist then, as we shall see) and much of Turners Hall Farm. It took in land the Gustard Wood side of Mackerye End Lane, what are now Raisins Cottages on the crossroads (where Cheristead Cross stood, later known as Choristers Cross). The estate took in all the fields you can see on the north west side of the whole stretch of Porters End Lane (that is, on the left going towards Kimpton), up to the top of the slope which runs down to Kimpton Bottom. Odd pieces of separate land also went with the property, to the right of the Brogdell – the hill leading down into Lower Gustard Wood - for example.

The 1837 Tithe Map of Kimpton Parish is a fascinating document as it shows the buildings and fields of the time. It was drawn up to record the payments due to the Vicar from the agricultural proceeds – the main source of revenue for the Church of England at the time - and the rents due to the "Impropriators" of the lands in the Parish. The Impropriators – distinct from the Owners of the land - were entitled to rent as a throwback to manorial days. Sometimes – as in Kimpton – the Vicar was also an Impropriator and received two bites of a quite handsome cherry. The other main Impropriator was Lord Dacre. Porters End's impropriator was the vicar, then Frederick Sullivan, who in his own right as owner held substantial lands lying between Luton Road and Kimpton Bottom as far as Tallents Farm, and along the High Street almost to Claggy Road. He also owned land between Kimpton Bottom adjoining Birley's land at Porters End.

The fields were smaller than today, and for historical or agricultural reasons, noticeably smaller than those belonging to Kimpton Hall Farm on the other side of Kimpton Road. All the fields were named, some with names that must have gone back centuries even then – Readings (on the north of Porters End Lane), for example, Great and Little Hozes (between the end of Blackmore Way and Porters End Lane). Cow Pasture lay between Porters End Farmhouse and the lane, next to Little Bread to the south. Gurnetts lay

between Blackmore End farmhouse (where Beech Way now runs) and the footpath next to the present number 18 Kimpton Road. Other names were more prosaic – Ten Acres is a field named on the Tithe Map, but other deeds mention it as Four Wants, (roughly the top end of Blackmore Way). There was Four Acres, Long Five Acres, and Round Five Acres (all where Blackmore Way and Beech Way are today); Lime Avenue stands on Eight Acres. The land was mainly arable with some pastures and the some small woods – one remaining one being Deep Dell (today just The Dell) behind Porters End House. The Tithe Map suggests that Coopers Hill has "moved" since it gives that name to the stretch of Kimpton Road going south from the top of present Coopers Hill – that is, towards Wheathampstead, not Kimpton – as far as the first dip. Thereafter it is Tinkers Hill. Modern Coopers Hill was known as Hungry Hill. It was on Frederick Sullivan, the Vicar's, own land.

Over the boundary in Wheathampstead parish lay Kitchen Close and Badger Dells, roughly halfway along The Slype today. A small group of cottages and small fields lay at Hog's Island, west of the Common. Ownership was mainly by the Revd. Martyn, of Turners Hall Farm, but the Oakleys owned some of the fields and some were noted on the parish Tithe Map as part of Porters End Farm.

Across the Kimpton Road, Hall Wood was bigger than today and spread nearer the road; another large wood grew behind Kimpton Hall Farm. The bridleway that today is just a path skirting the fields over to Hall Farm was a wide track, with trees and hedges on the left. Kimpton Road itself, then probably still going under the name of Blackmore End Lane or Road, was as narrow along its full length as its narrowest part today. Where it now runs straight at the junction of The Broadway it curved gently to the right and its old route is still in use as the access to number 88 and the cottages. It turned sharp left running roughly where the first stretch of The Broadway is – technically still part of Kimpton Road judging by the fact that the road sign says not "The Broadway" but "leading to The Broadway". A sharp right turn took it back to the present route. The biggest change would be the view of Gustard Wood Common - just grass. Sheep, grazed by the commoners, kept the vegetation down and the trees from rooting. Only gorse and juniper grew, and the name was then "Gursted Wood" - the wood where the gorse grew.

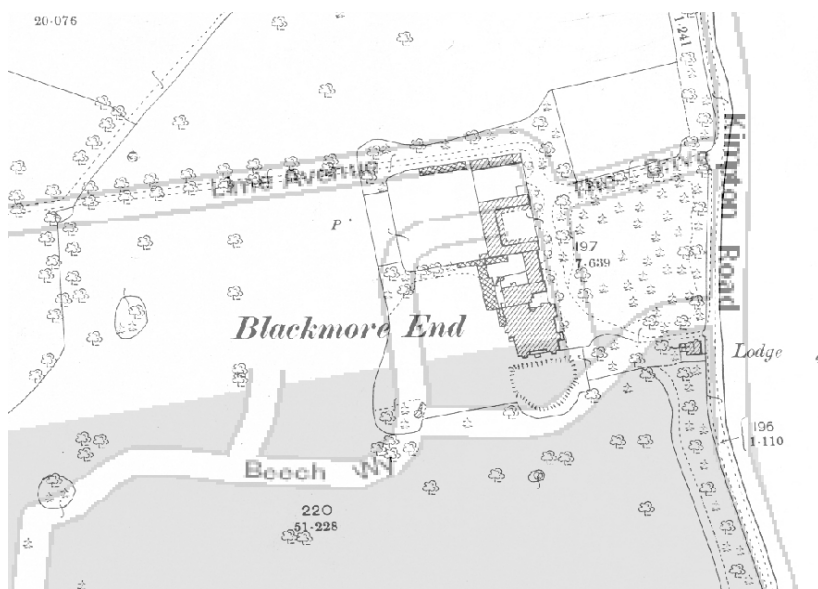
The state of the road would have been atrocious, like many roads of that day. It is said that on the Great North Road running through Hertfordshire farmers opened up their fields as by-passes for the worse stretches and that coachmen and carriers were happy to pay "tolls" to avoid breaking axles or getting irretrievably bogged down. Pedestrians had the choice of walking in narrow ruts or on the churned-up ground between them where the horses had trodden. No wonder Pickfords and the rest of the business community saw the railways as the way of the future.

Farming was mixed, with cattle and sheep serving the final marketplace of London, transported there by the railway at Wheathampstead. It would have been very tranquil, although as old records suggest there was a constant toing and froing of the agricultural workers as they went from task to task. The lowing of the cattle and the singing of the birds would have predominated – the only mechanical noise the tolling of Kimpton parish church bells. At night there would have been utter darkness and silence, except for the cries of foxes, owls and the occasional village dog.

But it was not all a rural paradise. We know this from the mid-19th century census. Road names were not then fixed, and were identified when they had to be by the names of residents, or particular characteristics. As well as Hungry Hill, local names included "Beggary Lane" (now Ballslough Hill) and "Starving Lane" (now part of Luton Road). Many agricultural workers' wives and daughters were making ends met by plaiting straw for the hat factories in Luton.

Porters End was the main farm, as we have seen, but there was a house at Blackmore End where the Oakleys had lived, also roughly where Beech Way is now. Old maps show a group of four buildings – a house and three barns - arranged in a square courtyard. It was like Porters End farmstead and a very typical farmyard pattern for the area. Further along Kimpton Road towards Kimpton, on the left on the first hill (known as Tinkers' Hill) late 18th century maps show a house called "The Hill", (roughly where numbers 10-14 are now) but by the early 1800s this had disappeared. Another house mentioned in old deeds of the early 1800s, "Leapers" (or "Lepers, also known as Cutlers") does not show on the Tithe map or other maps but may have been near Porters End.

Despite the rapid industrialisation of the 19th century in Britain, large portions of the country remained rural, and in Wheathampstead and Kimpton over 60% of the population engaged in agricultural work. Mechanisation had come in in only a very small way and there were of course no tractors or mechanical road vehicles. The rhythm of the agricultural year still reigned, with harvest celebrations recognising the reality of long hours toiling in the fields. Rural customs were still practised, and, above all, the country house and its estate was an anchor for the economy, and a major employer.



The site of Birley's house superimposed on to a modern map

8. WHAT BIRLEY BUILT

The Oakleys were moving up in the world, and the sale was to raise money to build their next house, Lawrence End near Peter Green, which still stands and where the family has recently returned. We do not know how the Baxendales knew the Oakleys, but local records suggest that Birley was in contact with them and discussed where his house should be situated. He chose, eventually, to build it on the site of the old farmhouses, but apparently Richard Oakley felt that a site on Porters End Lane, overlooking the village and Kimpton Bottom, would be better. Certainly Birley would have had a better view, but we might not be living in Blackmore End today if he had taken that advice.

At that time older country estates were effectively self-sufficient, Kimpton Hoo and Lamer Park being typical. Consisting of a number of farms, income was derived from tenancies for the outlying acreages while a "home farm" provided food for the domestic table. It was in most years possible to live on tenancy income, though this may well have varied with harvests. The estates of "newcomers", such as Birley, were not self-sufficient, although the aspiration to make them appear so was, of course, there. Without the income from Pickfords, it is doubtful that Birley could have set up the type of establishment he eventually did.

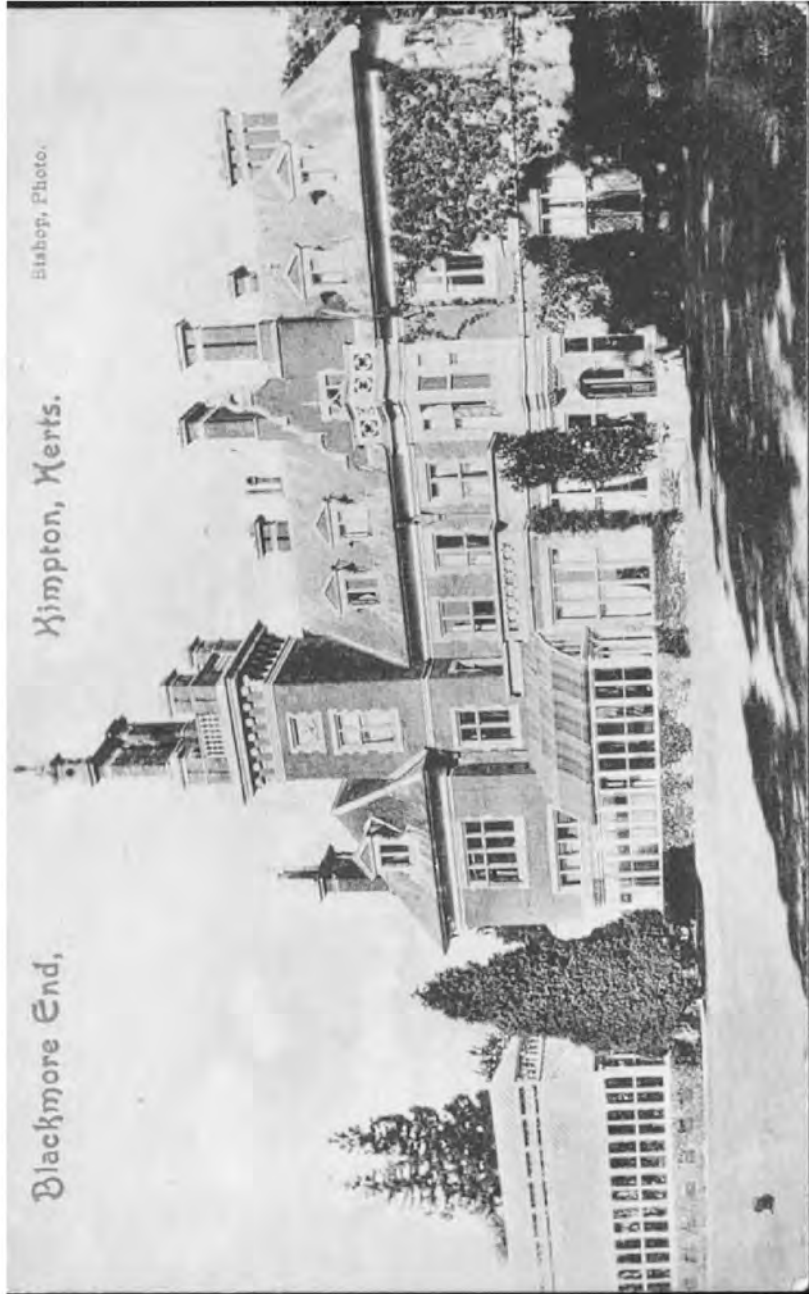
For this was Birley's rural dream, and on it he built a magnificent house, which was completed by 1869, when his brother visited him in his splendid new home. Here was where Birley would indulge his passion for country sports. His Turners Hall land ran down to the Lea near Cherry Trees, where there was excellent fishing.

The house itself, named simply "Blackmore End" as though the house and the place were as one, was not of a particularly beautiful or harmonious design, but it was certainly large enough for an aspiring country squire. At one end there were the steep slate roofs and gables and domestic bay windows typical of Victorian villas, but at the back the design owed more to both the Italianate and the baronial, with square stone windows and irregularly spaced features breaking up the façade, all surmounted by a tall crenellated tower with an ornate railing at the top and two mismatched chimneys. At least two Eighteenth Century Adam marble fireplaces warmed the rooms beneath. The tower housed the water tanks, the water being

pumped up from the 160ft deep well by ponies harnessed (out of sight) to a large capstan. It was then stored in a large underground tank, entirely lined with ceramic tiles, before being further pumped up the tower.

If you were of sufficient status to be allowed in by the front door, you would have entered a "vestibule" 23ft by 13ft (itself more than twice the size of an average modern living room), which led to a Staircase Hall 40ft x 36ft. You could have turned into the Billiards Room 24ft x 16ft for recreation, or into one of the six other reception rooms or, alternatively, if being entertained to dinner, the 26ft by 22ft dining room which would also have given you access to the conservatory or "Winter Garden" where a variety of the latest discoveries in flowers and plants from the burgeoning Empire grew. If you were staying – as many guests did – one of the fourteen principal bedrooms – some with en suite WCs - or three secondary bedrooms would have been allocated to you. Your maids might have joined Mrs Baxendale's in the five maids' rooms. Other servants – the Baxendales' or visitors' - were accommodated in the domestic wing, unless they were coachmen when they would have been put up in the stable block, which featured an architectural idea from India, the veranda. Behind it, the walled garden furnished vegetables for the table.

Today, still marking the old entrance drive, the lodge bungalow still sits in Kimpton Road, now at the junction with Beech Way. The drive ran at right angles to the lane through carefully spaced trees to the front of the house – on the left, a sunken garden (a trace of which remains in at the front of no. 1 Beech Way) – a haha behind to protect it from the sheep on the rest of the estate. The drive bore right along the front of the house and on to the stable block and the walled gardens on the left. The wall standing between the Drive and Beech Way and part of no. 9 The Drive are all that now remains, though, as we will see, more of the house survived until relatively recently. The drive then turned back towards Kimpton Road and it will come as no surprise to know that that portion is the first stretch of today's "The Drive". On the left, at the corner of the drive and Kimpton Road, was a square field – possibly a paddock. The other end of today's "The Drive" and Lime Avenue follow the course of an avenue of lime trees that were planted to link the House with Porters End Farm.



Birley's house from the rear(West). The tall turret is the water tower



The staircase. On the window behind, the intertwined crests and initials of Birley and Gertrude

The immediate environs of the House were laid out as a garden. A cedar tree grew prominently behind the house. The rest, now covered by houses, right down to the common, was parkland. Beyond that, as today, was farmland.

The estate had its own icehouse, smithy and carpenter's workshop secreted in the Dell (the woodland behind Porters End Farm), and a comprehensive drainage system that found its way into the fold in the field that can be seen between Lime Avenue and Porters End Lane. When in the 1930s and 1940s the present houses came to be built they used this system – some of the houses having to be sited so as to avoid the drains – and the drainage of that road remains something of a tangle despite the modern mains. That fold in the land was wooded until after the Second World War. Water was piped from the tower at the house and from the farm to several fields and a secondary system of wells and pipes fed the other fields on the estate.

Over time, Birley made use of the industrial and scientific developments of the age. Just as Pickfords was keeping up with steam power, the ponies were replaced with oil-driven pumps, and the house acquired its own gas-making equipment with a gasometer also tucked away in the woods by the Dell.

Porters End Farm became the "home farm" for the estate, providing produce, together with the extensive walled garden around the house, the orchard and the Winter Garden. Separately, Turners Hall Farm was let and operated as stand-alone basis.

As well as the lodge on Kimpton Road (then probably known as Blackmore End Lane, but in the census simply referred to as Blackmore End, like everything else to do with the Baxendales) Birley also built the lodge at the corner of Porters End Lane to signal the approach to the estate. He built cottages for his workers, in some cases replacing older dwellings, for example at Beanswick opposite Porters End Farm, and at the curiously-named Hog's Island, now on the Slype, and much altered. He built similar ones at "Cheristead Cross" (Raisins End to us), the pair of cottages on Kimpton Road, now numbers 90 and 92, a pair on the corner of The Slype and The Common, and two pairs on the Brogdell. These cottages are substantial dwellings for the era – especially as labourers' residences - and would have been quite a contrast from the often unsanitary cottages

elsewhere in the vicinity. They incorporated underwater tanks, to collect rainwater (no mains water, of course). Obviously Birley had followed in his father's tradition of those who saw a duty to society as the counterpart of their own self-improvement. It is probably fair, however, to point out that the first Act of Parliament to address public health, the Sanitary Act, had recently been passed (in 1866) giving local parishes the powers to compel the "removal of nuisances" - the insanitary dwellings responsible for the recent epidemics of cholera and typhoid. There were – by law – to be no more open sewers and privies draining into ditches.

As we saw, the old road marking the (still valid) boundary between Kimpton and Wheathampstead ran across Birley's land. So did another track, leading from further along Kimpton Road, opposite the path to Kimpton Hall Farm. The first part of this is still a footpath, but instead of turning right at the end of the garden of the house on the corner (no. 18) as it now does, it ran straight on. At the opposite corner of the field a spur ran to the right towards Porters End Lane along the other side of the field from the present path and across what is now the garden of Paddock Lodge. Going straight on, the remains of the track could still be seen until recently as the odd wedge of waste land in Lime Avenue, now the site of Wood End House. It then ran across Lime Avenue and along the edge of the field behind present day Beech Way, Blackmore Manor and Blackmore Way until it met the old road.

Paths like these would have been walked regularly by farm workers and servants. If we are unkind we can say that the rather spoiled Birley's view. If we are kind, he may have been worried about security. Whatever the reason, Birley wanted them closed. He notified the Kimpton Parish Vestry, the precursor of the modern civil Parish Council, that he was going to close the road. Perhaps travellers between Gustard Wood and Batford would have found the other routes (for example the paths leading across from Herons Farm - the other side of the today's golf course) too difficult. Possibly he felt a duty toward travellers, or perhaps he wanted to keep a direct way open to the southern part of his estate. In any case, he built a new road across his land – several feet wider - which became known officially as "The Slype".

The minutes of the vestry meeting of 23rd April 1874 record "Richard Birley Baxendale applied to stop road on parish boundary 1554 ½ yards from Blackmore End Road to Raisins Cottages, average 9ft 6in wide. Replace by

1608 yards of road in Wheathampstead Parish 16' wide (finally agreed to be 20' wide). Another 656 yards of foot path average 3' wide also to be diverted towards Marshalls Heath."

If you have ever wondered why the Slype is straight, it is because it is a new road - in effect the Blackmore End bypass. Slype means a covered passage, usually in a church or monastery. It was also the name given to a field lying between Hall Wood and the wood which grew at the time behind Kimpton Hall Farm. The other path – certainly between Lime Avenue and the old road – was not replaced. Travellers could use Porters End Lane.



Where Birley's house stood is now the back gardens of these houses in Beech Way

THE BAXENDALES AT HOME

Birley was a very wealthy man. The business of Pickfords was in the hands of capable clerks and managers. How did he spend his time? The diary of Joseph Hornby Baxendale, Birley's eldest brother, survives and it makes fascinating reading on the life of a moneyed member of the Victorian commercial aristocracy.

Both Birley and Joseph Hornby owned large yachts, so there was the sailing - once, twice, three times a year. Round Britain, over to Ireland, across to France, and up to Germany and Denmark. Joseph took his wife - perhaps Birley took Gertrude. Then there was visiting. Scotland to see the Darrochs (the family of Birley's first wife). To Lancashire, to see the Birleys. To Devon to see the Chichesters. Birley would have gone to Surrey to see Joseph, to Greenham to see brother Lloyd, to Ware to see brother Salisbury. The London season kept them at their London houses from February to June. Parties, balls, shooting with and on the estates of friends from school, and friends of friends. Hunting - Joseph and Lloyd kept horses at Welwyn and hunted with Lord Dacre at Kimpton Hoo, almost certainly Birley did too. Because after the fashion of the time he divided his time between his town house, his country house, and his firm's premises, legal and other documents refer to him as "of Portman Square, Blackmore End in the Parish of Kimpton, and Gresham Street".

When Birley was at home visitors would have been able to admire his collection of well over a hundred items of 18th century silverware. Cups, teapots, porringers, soup tureens, sauce boats, asparagus tongs and fish slices, candlesticks and toast racks, mostly solid silver, weighing all together some 3700oz with some individual pieces as much as 107oz, and collectively, at current values, worth about three-quarters of a million pounds for the metal alone. There were also plated ware, and "objects of vertu", items such as gold and tortoiseshell snuff-boxes, needlecases, painted and enamelled decorated boxes, scent bottles and figurines.

On the walls Birley's art collection was fairly conventional - landscapes, Dutch or Flemish, Venetian scenes, and pictorial records such as "The London and Glasgow Coach" and "A Match between The Duke of Grafton's Colt 'Waxy' out of 'Primula' and Mr Wilson's Colt 'Wizard' at Epsom, May 1809" by Sartorius, noted for his paintings of horses. Birley's early 18th

Century Brussels tapestry, 13ft 9in by 13ft 6in, showing the Triumph of Coriolanus at Rome, would have been fairly prominent.

What was life like at "the big house"? In 1956 Lady Grierson, related to the Earl of Cavan who occupied Wheathampstead House after Birley, recorded for posterity the reminiscences of a former maid (unfortunately anonymous):

"I began going to work before I left school; I had my hair in two plaits down my back - black hair I had then (you wouldn't think it!) and I used to walk across the Common in the early morning and give a hand in the dairy at the big house, and the milk came up from Porter's End and I used to help with skimming it and scouring out the big flat bowls and washing the stone shelves. Later on I started going regularly every day to work in the kitchen of the house. I didn't live there at first but I had to be there eight o'clock of a morning, or before.

"Wonderful big place it was - red brick house with a tower and balconies and great hot-houses filled with fruit and flowers all down one end, the kitchen-side, what they used to call the Winter Garden.

"Yes, they had a big staff, of course. But that was nothing out of the way for big houses when I was a girl. I don't remember there being more than one or two family while I was there, but there were always guests. If not staying in the house, there were people every day to meals and everything done in the best possible way. There was the Housekeeper - she was head-housemaid as well; and then a Butler and a Cook - she was Norwegian I think, anyway not English, very wicked she was - and a lady's maid besides - I think she was foreign too. Then of course there was the two footmen and second and third housemaids, and the boy; all living in. And the coachman, he lived in one of the lodges and three others in the Stables, and then gardeners. There was the scullery maid besides me in the kitchen, and they called me kitchen maid but I always said I was Jack-of-all-Trades and master of none!

"First thing in the morning when I got there I had to help with the breakfasts; there were three breakfasts to get. There was the Room (that's the Housekeeper's room) and the Hall and then of course the House. What did I wear? We all had coloured cotton print frocks with plain white aprons tied in a large bow and a white mob cap sticking up in front with a ribbon

*Mistress and servant.
Gertrude in 1861 and
George Mears, later her
coachman, with his wife
Eliza, outside their
Baxendale-built cottage in
The Brogdell*



round it, and black stockings. In the afternoons the housemaids all changed into black frocks, but not the kitchen maids.

"We had family prayers every morning and all the servants had to go. I can't quite remember but I think it was in the morning room - I get so mixed up, there were so many rooms, outer and inner hall, drawing room, dining room and morning room: billiard room, gun room, smoking room. But the room I remember had a marble mantelpiece and a lot of furniture, very comfortable, and any amount of pictures all over the walls, and flowers and ferns and that sort of thing in great big vases.

"After breakfast I washed up dishes and perhaps helped in the house a bit; then I had to start with helping prepare lunch. Oh yes, always piles of dishes, huge ones with massive covers; you don't see them like that now. But there was plenty of hot water from the range, and outside the ponies pumped the water every day, walking round and round. I'm not sure the well isn't still there now: I think it is, and the Cedar tree - that's still there, by Lime Avenue, with its branches low on the ground: the tree where they used to come out and have tea in the summer, with their pretty light-coloured dresses trailing on the grass, and their parasols and their big hats. That's about all that's left now, that tree - except the stables, or part of them, you can still see them.

"Hundreds of dishes I must have washed up; but I didn't mind, I was happy then as I am happy today. And we were always busy; there were no days off then you know, only a few hours off. But what did we want with days off when there were all those lovely grounds to walk over? I'm talking now of when I went to live there: I must have been 17 or 18 then.

"In the afternoons what did we do? The Housekeeper used to say 'Do as you like; go out in the garden if you like'. Sometimes we went to gather fruit, strawberries or raspberries perhaps - the biggest ones for the dining room. Or we would help pick up the potatoes. Or I used to go up to my room which I shared with the scullery maid. It was a lovely room: we had a coal fire in it when it was cold, and gas light - the gas was made by the Blacksmith at the farm.

"Then there was dinner at night - four courses every night and many more if there was a dinner party. Mind you, I'm only telling you what was natural, it

was the same everywhere. I don't know why anybody should be interested. Very often there were great big tea parties and we made everything, all the bread and cakes. We thought nothing of using three or four dozen eggs in a day - and the great slabs of butter that used to come in from the dairy!! The cook used to let us two girls have a taste of the things in the kitchen before they went through; the left-overs always went to the pantry.

"Oh, and there's something else I must tell you; On Sundays it was church at Kimpton, always. The carriage used to go every Sunday, and there was the wagonette for the Staff. Of course I couldn't go because of the lunch but I can remember the hurry and bustle getting ready and everyone scared of being late and keeping the horses standing.

"I was ten years there in the kitchen and I got five shillings a month; afterwards, when I got a place as cook it was £30 a year. If there was a big party in the house the coachman used to send the stable men in to help wash up and have a bit of supper in the Hall - we had a lot of fun there. And at Christmas there was parties for us in the house - for the servants. We used to go through in the evening, after our work was finished and there would be a great fire burning between the dogs, and we used to have games and dancing - waltzes, polkas, Lancers, that sort of thing - and everyone joined in, Madam and everyone. But I always liked the Irish jig best!"

There would have been extensive socialising among the landed gentry. The social status of the Baxendales was certainly high, but it is interesting to note that the Cavans, their friends and neighbours at Wheathampstead House, were an Irish noble house, and therefore considered lower in status than the Garrards, at Lamer, who though not aristocracy, were English. The Garrards would also have been higher than the Baxendales and the Birleys as their forbears in trade were from centuries past. The Chichesters, on the other hand, were an old noble family for generations, serving King and country over the centuries with an active Army connection. Were the Baxendales and the Birleys not a little below them? Their intermarriage, mentioned above, suggests not.

In the 1871 census the inhabitants of "The Mansion, Blackmore End" were Birley "Gent. farmer 294 acres, employing 20 men and boys". Gertrude and Gertrude Mary, then eight. 10 servants lived in including a groom, and a cook. Although some servants were local, the census shows that others came

from places including "Scotland", Norfolk and London. Good servants – recommended by the gentry among themselves - were always prepared to travel, sometimes, we gather, in search of marriageable partners. Given the state of the roads, it is perhaps surprising how much people did move around.

In a separate house (either the lodge or a detached dwelling in the stable wing-walled garden complex) lived their gardener, another servant, their coachman and a carpenter. In the various buildings making up Porters End Farm lived Mr Croft the bailiff and his wife, two labourers, a groom and a gamekeeper.

In comparison with his brothers' Birley's estate was only modest. But he lived well. In 1872 Parliament began an enquiry into landed estates in England. The entry for Blackmore End gives an assessed rental value of £582.15.0 p.a. Even in today's money - perhaps £35,000 - this was no fortune - and it is clear that Birley had relied upon his inheritance, his share of Pickford's profits, and any partner's fees to maintain the estate and his life style.

In 1878, Birley died from his weak heart. He had lived at Blackmore End perhaps ten years. He left a widow of 37 and a daughter of 15. His body was placed alongside his father's and his first wife's, in the vault in Whetstone.

Perhaps a measure of how much he differed from his father was the fact that there is no obituary or mention of his death in the City Press, the newspaper recording events and news in the City of London, home of Pickfords. (On the other hand, there are plenty of articles about danger from bicycles, traffic congestion, and the fashion for modern extravagance rather than saving for the future. Crime reporters wrote of drunkenness, indecent exposure, careless driving, and cruelty to horses, while money was available "on easy terms". There was even an article extolling the beauty of the sheer anonymity of the City, contrasted with the nosiness of the villager towards one's every movement. The late Victorian era, perhaps, was not so much unlike today.) Neither did the Herts Advertiser report his death.

10. GERTRUDE AND LIFE AFTER BIRLEY

After Birley died Gertrude stayed on at Blackmore End. Birley's will effectively made it necessary, for although over the years he had gradually made it more beneficial to Gertrude, the property was left in the hands of Trustees. Until only a few months before his death Birley's will had left Gertrude only an annuity, but a revision made that month enabled her to benefit from all his income. However, Gertrude was under an obligation to "maintain and educate" their daughter. When she became 25, or married if earlier, Gertrude Mary was to receive the then substantial sum of £5,000. After Gertrude's death the property was to be held for the benefit of Gertrude Mary "not to be subject to the interference of her husband" until her death. The trustees could then sell the property if all her children had either become 21 or, if female, married earlier, and they were to benefit. While in those days it was not uncommon to bequeath land to future generations, not to one's spouse, one wonders what conversations Birley and Gertrude had over money and the late amendment of his will.

In 1881, at the age of 17, Gertrude Mary was away at a small girls' boarding school in Hove, the town where she was to spend much of the rest of her life, in the stuccoed splendour of Brunswick Terrace, near the sea front.

Gertrude Mary, like her mother, married young, in 1883 at the age of 20. He was 42, Col. Arthur Hare Vincent, a career soldier in the prestigious 3rd King's Own Hussars originally from Summer Hill, Co. Clare, Ireland. It was his second marriage and Gertrude Mary gained two step-sons, Berkeley (who was 12) and Arthur Rose (7). She also gained a country house in East Grinstead and the Irish residence in Summer Hill.

Marriage to Col. Vincent may not have been entirely to her mother's liking. Whether or not Gertrude Mary was influenced by the marriage settlement that would fall to her we do not know. But it was to give her independence. Independently-minded women were not uncommon in the Baxendale bloodline. Back in the 1860s Birley's youngest sister Jane overcame her father's resistance and at 45 married a Mr Butler who she brought to live with them at Woodside. Her brother Joseph Hornby remarks that it was "an unhappy story best left untold".

Vincent was not a heroic military man and despite being a member of "the finest Cavalry in the sub-continent" when in India rose only steadily through the ranks and there is no special mention of him in the Regiment's records. It is believed that the marriage was not a happy one, but over fourteen years together they had 5 children, four daughters and a son. They gave them all names beginning with "A" – Aileen, Angela, Ailsie, Arthur and Azalea. The Irish spelling of Ailsa and Aileen suggesting that it was Arthur's idea. His son Arthur by Gertrude Mary was distinguished from his son Arthur by his first wife by his second name: Birley. Aileen eventually married a military man, Lt-Col. Henry Hamilton-Wedderburn, and the military connection became important in Gertrude Mary's life and it was instrumental in bringing her old childhood home back to life. The family later married into the family of Lord Cadogan.

Because Pickfords was then a partnership, on Birley's death his interest had to be bought out and Gertrude's income was no longer dependent upon the performance of the firm. This was fortunate, because Pickfords' fortunes began to turn down after the deaths of Birley's brothers – Lloyd in 1882 and Joseph Hornby in 1886. Their sons in turn took over as owners and directors, but made some less than commercially sound decisions in a business environment made worse by the continuing desire of the railway companies to control the passage of goods on their lines themselves, and not through carriers like Pickfords.

We do not know how the trust money was invested, although, probably, after the fashion of the time, it would have been in property and in fixed-interest securities. As the value of money remained broadly stable during the latter part of the nineteenth century - indeed at one point deflation set in - Gertrude was unlikely to have had money worries.

It is probable that Gertrude had independent income for the Chichesters were no paupers – for whatever reason, although the trustees had the power to sell Blackmore End so long as the funds were used for the purposes laid down, they did not. She could have moved by persuading the trustees to sell and invest the capital provided they were mindful of their obligation to attend to Gertrude Mary (we do not know Col. Vincent's monetary affairs) and to preserve capital for the benefit of her grandchildren. Perhaps, as a Devon girl at heart, country life seemed to suit her.

She had already thrown herself into active encouragement of local tradesmen and "good causes". As we saw, even the servants, despite the hard work and low pay, seemed to have had jolly good fun!

The gulf between the rich and the poor in the last two decades of the 19th century was enormous. The average wage of a manual worker, including most soldiers, policemen and domestic servants, was less than £50 a year or £1 a week. In basic manual work you could reach this level only on the basis of a twelve or fourteen hour day and seven day week. Wages of under 10 shillings (50p) a week were not uncommon. The calculated poverty line was 21 shillings and eightpence a week (£1.08p). It would, however, cost Gertrude several hundred pounds a year to keep her carriage, groom and coachman alone. Attitudes to poverty were difficult to understand - the (gentry) magistrates in Southampton fined an impecunious family £9 for failing to provide sufficient food for their seven children out of 15 shillings (75p) a week, thus reducing their income even further. But £1 – if you had it – would buy thirty gallons of milk, or fifteen pairs of shoes. Pinafores for Gertrude's maids were 1 shilling and elevenpence three-farthings (i.e. fractionally under 10p). The average rate for a seamstress to make a pair of trousers was fourpence halfpenny (about 2p).

Gertrude seems to have acknowledged something of this gulf. For she became known as a local benefactress with, as her obituary was to put it, an "ever open purse" for anybody recommended to her as in need. It would be churlish to ask whether she maintained the Victorian distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. She did help those who helped themselves as her support for local organisations shows, and the local health visitors were her prime interest. The local gentry had sustained English villages for centuries. The late nineteenth century saw the first move towards that sustenance becoming a concern of the state. Local councils on modern lines first appeared in 1894, while Boards had already been set up to oversee public works and health. Gertrude would not have known it, neither was she really to see the effect, but the days of the gentry in "the big house" were beginning to be numbered. But Gertrude willingly carried on her obligations, shared with her husband, to provide a measure of comfort for the poor. Again, to quote her obituary, she played the "fairy godmother" to all those in need. Her tenants received very welcome Christmas gifts (even if we learn that they were often flannel garments) and her once-a-year entertainment

was much enjoyed. Gertrude also supported local commerce, seeing it as her duty as the owner of a country house to support local tradesmen. She bought as much as she could from the area, and the area could supply most things, including uniforms and carriages. We may shudder slightly at the deference and patronage, but it is probably not fanciful to say that the attitudes of landed ladies such as Gertrude meant that England's social revolution, when it came, was rather peaceful than in some other countries.

Gertrude began to distance herself from the Baxendales. It may be that Gertrude's nephews were too engrossed in Pickfords, or that Gertrude came to suspect their judgement on investments. Whatever the reason – and we can believe that Gertrude was a fairly determined lady – the Baxendale connection with Blackmore End legally ended in 1888. The two original trustees were Birley's two elder brothers, Lloyd and Joseph Hornby. On their deaths the trusteeship stayed initially in Baxendale hands passing to their two sons, Gertrude's nephews, though it took some months for their appointments to be made. Within two years, however, one nephew resigned. We see a neighbour and friend of the Baxendales', Henry Smedley Rice of The Firs, Gustard Wood, becoming the first outside trustee. Within a month the other Baxendale nephew had resigned and Gertrude's brother Hugh joined as trustee. When he died, the Revd. Lionel Stevens, Vicar of Kimpton took over, to be joined on Rice's death by Gertrude's and Hugh's nephew, Richard Herbert Chichester. By contrast, all these transfers of trusteeship took only a few days to be documented.

To help with the running of the estate Richard Chichester's brother John Reginald later moved into Porters End Farm and was to become the land agent. The final trustee taking over from Stevens on his resignation in 1907 was Revd. Sir Frederick Sullivan, of Norfolk.

The Kimpton connection was proving good – this Frederick Sullivan (who had inherited a baronetcy through his uncle) was the grandson of the Frederick Sullivan who was Vicar of Kimpton and owner of Stoneheaps in the days of the Tithe Map and Birley's purchase of Blackmore End.

For the next 30 years life seems to have gone on as before at the big house. On the country pursuits front, there are mentions of polo matches in the field behind Fox Covert – the wood along the old boundary track – probably on the field at the corner of The Slype and Porters End Lane. There were visits

from the Vincent and Chichester families, and the family of Gertrude's granddaughter's future husband – the Hamilton-Wedderburns. And as local legend has it royalty in the shape of the teenage Prince of Wales, the future Duke of Windsor, Edward VIII, who was a frequent guest of the Cavans at Wheathampstead House. It is also not unlikely that at some time Bertie, Edward VII, who came to the throne in 1901, may have been a visitor. Both Princes were keen horsemen. A close neighbour at the Baxendale London house in Portman Square – still retained by Gertrude – was Alice, Mrs Kepple, Bertie's long-term "paramour". After 1903 Bertie, then King, was frequently in the area as a guest of the Wernhers at Luton Hoo. Bertie was also a fellow member of Birley's at the Royal Yacht Club, and Gertrude had kept on Birley's yacht.

Wheathampstead had become a "sought after" location for the moneyed. In Lower Luton Road Cecil Harmsworth, the newspaper magnate and owner of the Daily Mail had his country house and gave fishing parties on the Lea. Parties of Londoners were brought by rail to the station and conveyed by wagonette to the golf course on the common, which had opened in 1898 and at that time occupied most of the Common, on both sides of The Slype and Lamer Lane. Wealthy stockbrokers from the City occupied the larger houses including Delaport.

Gertrude did not remarry, and continued to support local tradesmen and societies, significantly the District Nursing Fund, hosting the Kimpton Horticultural Show and on two recorded occasions giving the Sunday School children the run of the estate. It was mentioned that the children "did not know" Blackmore End very well. But they "seemed very sorry when they had to go" even though it had rained heavily that day, and that Mrs Baxendale "was most kind in exerting herself to ensure the success of the treat". Opening country estates to local children was obviously the done thing - the same edition mentioned the annual treats given by Mrs Oakley at Lawrence End for the children at Peters Green School, which were "always most perfectly organised". We also know that when the newly-formed civil parish council of Wheathampstead exercised the very first power given to it, to seek land for use as allotments, she let the field on the Slype still occupied by them today on a yearly tenancy.

*Gertrude's grave in
Kimpton Churchyard.
The text reads "Until the
day break, and the
shadows pass away"*



Her closeness to the church is remembered not only by her appointment of clergymen as trustees, but also in her gift to Kimpton Parish Church of the lectern in the shape of an eagle.

Gertrude's concern for her fellow parishioners extended to their moral well-being. In the mid-1880s she joined with Lord Dacre, Lionel Stevens, gentry and villagers of all classes to campaign to do away with the Kimpton Statute Fair. Throughout the country annual so-called "Statute Fairs" had been held for centuries, originally as places for the hiring of agricultural workers. By the late-19th Century, however, they had degenerated into pleasure fairs with little hiring but much, as the petition put it, "cause of immorality", being "injurious to the inhabitants of the Parish". The petition was successful.

The census of 1881 records Gertrude, still only 40, at home that evening accompanied by two young men in their twenties, One was William Ingram, a stockbroker, the other described as a cousin but also named Ingram. With Gertrude that night were also a Mrs Lingham, 45, carefully designated in the fashion of the day as with a handicap - "imbecile", and a Harry Barclay, aged 20, also "a cousin", also "handicapped" - a "lunatic".

Gertrude's financial circumstances still permitted 13 servants of various descriptions to live at the House, and four more, with their families, in the Porters End buildings. One of the house servants, a 44 year old housemaid from Northamptonshire called Ann Webb, had been granted an annual income of £25 in Birley's original 1872 will, which probably doubled her earnings. She nevertheless stayed on.

Ten years later in 1891 and her guest that night was Lionel Stevens, still a trustee and 42 to her 50. The number of servants, grooms, etc, had not diminished, and Ann Webb was still in service.

Still twenty years later at the 1901 census Blackmore End house held 14 servants, plus four coachmen and stablemen, and there were seven more staff with their families in the lodges and farm.

Although many of the servants from earlier years had moved on, Gertrude retained a number of loyal staff including Ann Webb, still unmarried in 1901 at the age of 64. The Oake family, originally from Greenwich, also served

her faithfully for many years. Charles Oake was the estate carpenter and his wife, Eliza, had six children while living at the Lodge at Porters End Lane. One of the sons went on to serve at the House as a stable lad, and the daughters also went into service as maids. Another son took after his father and is recorded as his apprentice. John Lawrence, the bailiff who took his post between 1871 and 1881, remained over twenty years, with his wife Elizabeth, five years older, but in 1901 at the age of 62 he was soon to be replaced by Gertrude's nephew. Joseph Wheeler from Hampshire occupied Blackmore End Lodge as Gardener for over twenty years, though by 1901 his wife Martha, from Denbigh, was not listed as living there – she would have been 63. Their five children were all born and grew up there, though either they, or the census-taker, was confused about their ages, the youngest daughter, Louisa, losing three years between 1881 and 1901 and Joseph himself gained six years in that time (from 43 to 69). Similarly, George Archer, a local man and a groom, living in the Baxendale cottages in the Brogdell, lost four years between 1891, when he was 55, and 1901, when he was only 61. Transcription errors or just ignorance – either is equally likely in those days.

William Feltham, the Gamekeeper, a Norfolk man, 48 in 1881 was still active in the post twenty years on, having gained a wife, Sarah, two years older, from Leicestershire. The geographical spread of the servants was still wide. George Mears, one of the coachmen, George Archer's neighbour in the Brogdell for twenty years, came originally from Norfolk, and was 40 in 1891. He had been in service in Loughton in Essex where he had met his wife, Eliza, eight years older, and where their three children Alice, Edward and Ada had been born. Other long-standing tenant families, this time locally born, were the Manning family in Hog's Island, headed by William, a labourer in 1891, but horsekeeper, one step up, in 1901, and the Arnolds, in Raisins Cottages (or Lodge, or New Raisins, as the cottages were variously known). Here Will, a shepherd, 25 in 1891, lived with his wife Lizzie, 24, and their two young children Ella and Gwendoline. One apparently unfortunate family, and possibly the recipient of Gertrude's help, were the Jeeveses, in Hog's Island. George Jeeves, a farm labourer, is recorded there in 1891 aged 35 with a wife, Annie, 33, and two children, George 6 and Rose, 4. By 1901 Annie is missing, but two more children had arrived – Ellen, 12 (though not apparent in 1891) and Ida, 5.

Over the years of the censuses we can track the sons of these tenant families often following their fathers' trades, and daughters often becoming parlourmaids. Strawplaiting as an occupation, to earn more than just pin-money which we saw in 1840s, had by 1870 virtually died out – cheaper plait from the Far East was being imported.

Gertrude was there on census day 1901, with her two eldest grandchildren Aileen and Angela, 16 and 13 respectively. Frederick Sullivan was the guest that night, not yet a trustee. Aileen had not yet married the army officer guest on her mother's polo field, Col. Henry Kellerman Hamilton-Wedderburn. She was living almost permanently at Blackmore End until her marriage. At the Portman Square house, two further servants kept guard over the valuable paintings.

Intriguingly, over in Hove, the census records for 1901 show Gertrude Mary and Arthur Vincent at home with three servants, one Arthur's trusty valet from Ireland, but of their three other children there is no record either there or elsewhere in England and Wales. Gertrude Mary's youngest child, Azalea, was three years old.

In later years Gertrude employed Jack Andrews as a butler's boy. Jack's prime responsibility was sleeping with the silver (as we saw, the Baxendale silver collection was worth a pretty penny). After World War I Jack became the landlord of the Royal Oak pub on the road to Hitchin, in those days a humble beer house for the local farm labourers.

In the summer of 1909, at the age of 68, still faithfully supporting the parish, Gertrude fell ill. Gertrude Mary swiftly came from Hove to nurse her. Aileen was in Ireland, but received a telephone call which brought her to her grandmother's side just before she died in September from what was described as a "haemorrhage of the brain, followed by paralysis", or, more simply, a stroke. The press described her death as the loss of "a great benefactress".

The break with the Baxendales was emphasised when Gertrude was buried in Kimpton churchyard, not in the family vault in Whetstone, where her husband lay, and where her daughter was later to be interred. Her father has equal billing on her gravestone with Birley, and clearly she felt strongly the ties of religion, Kimpton, and family. Her grave can still be seen prominently

positioned in the graveyard, with a winged angel over the simple headstone, in the fitting company of the Dacre and Oakley family plots. The text, possibly somewhat dated even in 1909, reads "Until the day break and the shadows fall away".

Gertrude's estate was valued at £16,275.9s.8d, perhaps £1m today. Given that the capital in the estate was held in trust for her grandchildren, this is a remarkable figure. The world that Gertrude left in 1909 was beginning to be very different from that which Birley had left. The problems of poverty were beginning to be seen as problems of society. Lloyd George and the radical reforming Liberal government was firmly on the side of the labouring classes, and the Labour party had been born. While death duties were still low, there was a clear signal that the support of the poor was to become the responsibility of the State, paid for out of taxation. 1909 was the year of the first old age pension. Of course, it was to be the First World War that made the first big social change.

Although manned powered flight was six years old Gertrude would probably not have seen an aeroplane. Nor, unsurprisingly, is she listed as a owner of a motor-car in a local memoir of that time. On the other hand, we may today be able to share with her the performance of a local actor. We do not know if Gertrude went to London in 1905 to see the stage debut of the 18-year old Reginald Owen, born in Gustard Wood, but would certainly have known him, the Owens being well-established local builders. He went on to make over 80 films in Britain and Hollywood. One of his best-known roles was as Admiral Boom in "Mary Poppins", in 1964, eight years before he died.

For five years Blackmore End stood uninhabited by a Baxendale. In 1910 Kelly's Directory, an annual publication listing by village local tradesmen and gentlefolk, which had faithfully recorded under Kimpton the presence of "Blackmore End, the home of Mrs Baxendale", records it as the property of "Mrs Vincent, of Portman Square, London" and tenanted by a Mr Dundas Simpson. John Chichester's presence at Porters End Farm was, however, mentioned. In 1914, it records the house as empty.

11. THE GREAT WAR – A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

But the outbreak of war in 1914 led to a chain of events that was to revive the house and forge a link between two branches of the Baxendale family. Joseph Baxendale's elder brother, Lloyd Salisbury, had two sons, one of whom, the Revd. Richard Baxendale, had by the 1870s six children, all of whom chose to make their way in the then burgeoning Empire. Two sons and two daughters ended up in the new colony of the Federated Malay States, a scattering of settlements around the Malay peninsula. One of the sons, Cyril, was among the colony's first rubber planters. A charismatic man, he had tried his hand first at farming in Australia (he lost his inheritance) then mining in Malaya. Turning on account of illness to agriculture, he grew coffee then ramie fibre, both unsuccessfully, and then, almost by happenstance, tended some rubber trees on his land. He was to become extremely well connected in the rubber industry, and at the same time dabbled in journalism. Cyril returned from Malaya to fight in the war, and after a spell in France was put in charge of the defence of London.

Cyril's brother, Arthur, joined the Malay colonial administration and became Government Superintendent for Posts and Telegraphs. Arthur married a distant relative, Violet. Violet was the link to Joseph's side of the family, for she was Birley's great-niece, the grand-daughter of his elder brother Joseph Hornby.

As we know, during World War I thousands of soldiers were entrenched in a war of attrition in Belgium and Northern France. At each advance across no-man's-land casualties were enormous. During the war an estimated 750,000 men died and two and a half million were wounded. Facilities for the wounded in Europe concentrated on immediate surgery – there was no room for convalescence or recuperation for those unable to make an immediate return to the front. Gas and terror wrought less apparent human damage.

Although chaotic at first, a "cascade" system of hospitals was developed, so that the less immediate the need for surgical treatment and the greater the need for recuperation or long term care, the further away from the front the patient was treated. Back to England came the gassed, the amputees and the shell shocked. Rigidly divided into officers and other ranks, they were assessed, treated and passed down the chain.

The need to accommodate the wounded led to calls for suitable places. Where better, in fact, than the peace and quiet of the country. All around the land country houses were made available by a landed gentry accepting their duty to their country, Alice Kepple, Birley and Gertrude's old neighbour at Portman Square, included.

On the Baxendale side, Lloyd Harry, Birley's nephew, still lived at the Gilbert Shaw mansion at Greenham which his father had used his inheritance to commission. It was natural for him to offer up Greenham as a wartime hospital, in his case for wounded members of the Belgian army. Gertrude Mary, with her army connections, followed suit and offered Blackmore End as a hospital. But such an establishment needed funding, for public services were not developed.

Gertrude Mary seems to have stayed closer to the Baxendales than her mother. The Baxendales had, as we have seen a social conscience. Gertrude Mary turned to Cyril. From among his and Arthur's widespread connections in Malaya there was organised a band of "patriotic residents" (the "Subscribers") among both the British and Malay population. With their support Blackmore End opened as "The Federated Malay States Hospital" or "FMS Hospital" for short.

The Central Committee of twenty in Kuala Lumpur, both British and Malay, was chaired by The Hon. Sir Edward Brockman, Chief Secretary of the Malay States Government, and consisted of senior government officials from the various Malay states. Supported also by the Chartered Bank, it appointed a Committee of Management in London of nine. Several members of this committee, including Sir W.M. and Lady Treacher, had also been active in public life and in the sponsorship of education in Kuala Lumpur and Taiping in the Malay States. An Honorary Quartermaster, a Mr G Harold Day, oversaw the house, where the Matron, Miss E M Willis, had Sisters Moon, Alcock, Douglas, Smith and Miles and at least 23 nurses under her command. Resident and Consulting Medical Officers including Wheathampstead's long-serving physician Dr Smallwood were on hand or on call. Both mental and physical disabilities were cared for, the hospital having a Consultant in Mental Diseases (J Chambers) and a Masseuse (Miss Maud Louise Smythe) with an assistant (going only under the name of "Miss Jones").



*Above, Arthur Baxendale,
and right, Cyril,
respectively the govern-
ment official and the
rubber planter of the Malay
connection*



The house as the hospital. Note the wooden walkway on the left leading to the huts in the grounds

F.M.S.
HOSPITAL.

STATION: WHEATHAMPSTEAD

TELEPHONE NO.
WHEATHAMPSTEAD 17.

BLACKMORE END,
KIMPTON,

WELWYN, HERTS.



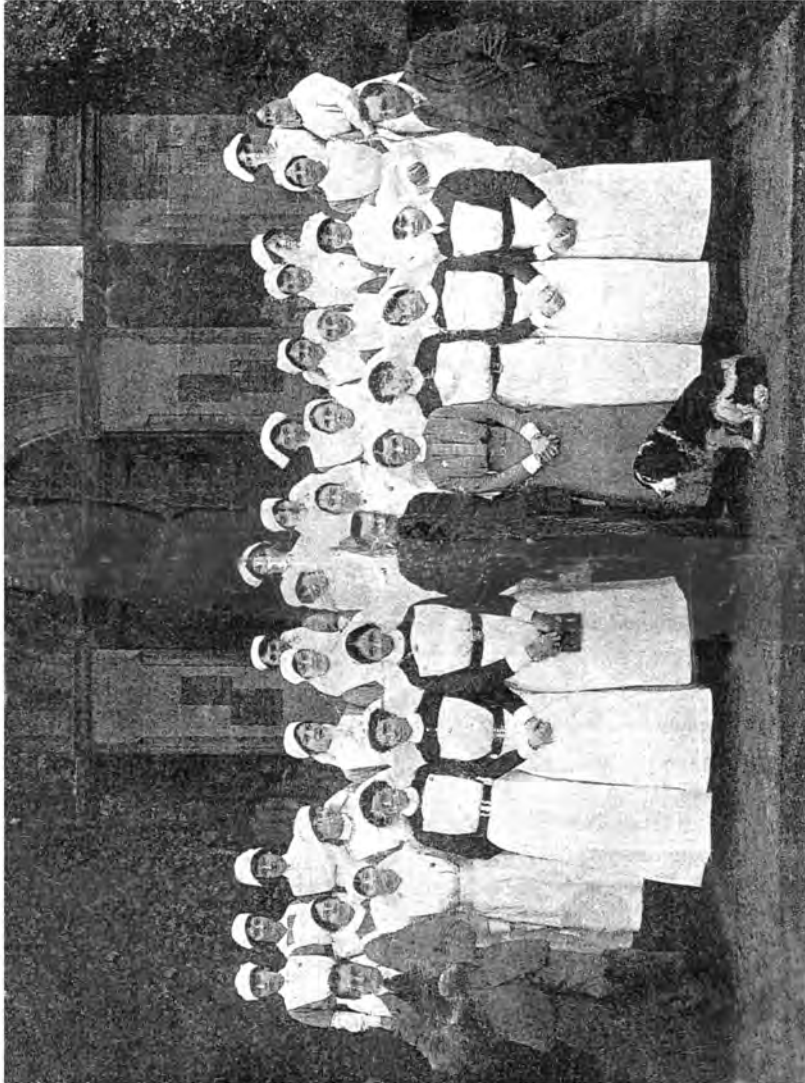
*The FMS Hospital official notepaper.
Note the address (Kimpton) and the telephone exchange
(Wheathampstead), the opposite of today*

Operating under the aegis of Edmonton Hospital, it housed 214 men, not of officer rank, and formally opened in "Michaelmas" (September 29th) 1915. Gertrude Mary's gift to the nation was to run until six months after peace was declared (although it seems still to have been open in 1920). The hospital was run by the Hertfordshire Red Cross. Wounded soldiers were first treated at Edmonton, then moved out to Blackmore End, and other such hospitals including one at Digswell, for recuperation. No official records exist today, but there are recollections and old photographs of soldiers relaxing on the steps of the house and on Gustard Wood Common, where the Cricketers was the favourite pub (it is the house three doors down from The Tin Pot, whose popularity or otherwise is not recorded). A similar hospital – for officers – was established for a short while at Lamer House, where, unlike at Blackmore End, the Garrard family was still in residence and their teenage daughters were among the nurses. Similarly the Wernhers – despite their German background – had opened up Luton Hoo.

Gertrude Mary's youngest daughter, Azalea, was a nurse at the hospital. It is recorded in the social history of the time that this was the era when the old rules about chaperoning fell into disuse. However, unlike Lamer, Blackmore End was not a hospital for officers so perhaps mutual attraction was uncommon between the then twenty-one year-old and her patients.

Other nurses at the hospital were local volunteers (VADs). Among them was the 18 year-old daughter of the farmer at Kimpton Hall, Eleanor "Queenie" George. At least one garden party was given at the farm for the soldiers' benefit. Queenie had no formal nursing training, she just learnt on the job. According to her daughter, Pauline, she probably did not do things like injections, "but she was a very practical, capable person". The Georges, like many local people, had friends and relations with sons in the war. One family they knew, the Strongs from Lemsford, lost all five sons. Queenie's fellow nurses at the hospital, who may have been local girls too, included Nurses Armour, Blake, Metcalfe and Mitchell.

From postcards, the brochure, and from Queenie George's photograph album we have a fascinating picture of the atmosphere at FMS. Contrary to what we imagine were the standards of the day it seems to have been rather informal and even somewhat cosy. Relaxed-looking groups, a few on crutches or in bathchairs or wheelchairs, but mostly able-bodied, sit on the common, on the porches of the huts, around the house.



*Rescued from the litter; a photograph of the Hospital's medical staff.
Queenie George is on the left, next to the gentleman*

*Queenie George, 18, in
her nurse's uniform.*



*Below, soldiers outside
the South end of the
house.*

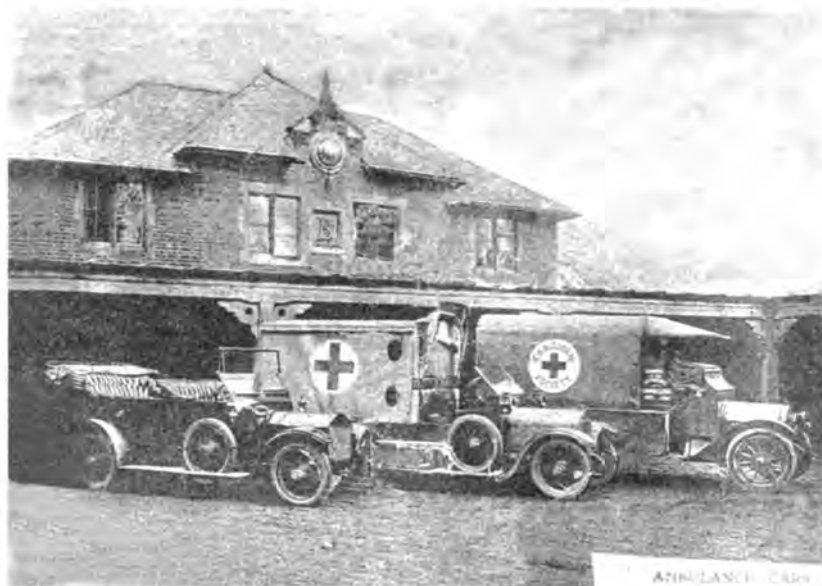


F.M.S. Hospital, Blackmore End, Gussard Wood. 9 Pub. by: A.E. Nicholls.

*A patient's comment on
how he came to
Blackmore End.*



*Below, another rescued
photograph.
Ambulances in the
stable yard. The one on
the right is a gift from
the Canadian Red Cross
in
Campbellford, Ontario*





*Sister Bessie
Smith*

*Wounded
soldiers in
"Hut 3"*





*The hospital Masseuse,
Miss Maud Smythe, is on
the right*

*Soldiers and
villagers at a
garden party at
Kimpton Hall
Farm*





*Patients of Nurse Queenie George:
Above, "Tich"
Below, "Ibbotson, Canada, McCaffery and Sister
[Amy Miles]"*



Sadly many pictures in Queenie's own collection are sadly too faded to reproduce here.

The stable yard, with the letter "B" prominently carved in the brickwork reminding all of the spiritual owner of the house, became a receiving point for ambulances, and a photograph of the yard shows a Canadian Red Cross ambulance donated "by the Citizens of Campbellford, Ontario". In the grounds temporary buildings housed, inter alia, a large recreation hall with billiard table.

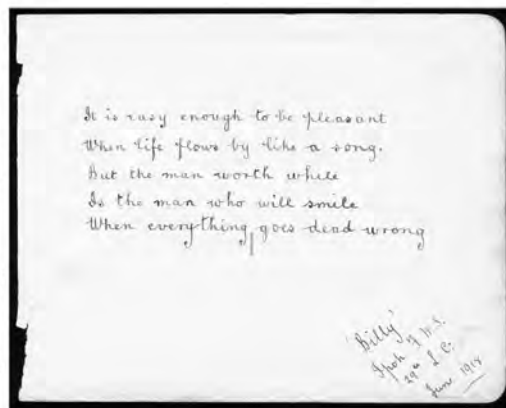
The Committee in Malaya ensured that Subscribers were kept informed (and interested) in the hospital by circulating photographs and newsletters. Soldiers from "FMS" visited "their" hospital on leave and were encouraged to relay their impression of "the beneficent and practical work" being carried on. The Malay committee was especially keen to inform Subscribers of the "wind-swept freshness" of the location, on "the knoll at Wheathampstead". Indeed, as they wrote in one pamphlet to exiled Englishmen in the sub-tropical heat "the best time to visit the hills of Hertfordshire is the Springtime, when the countryside has put on its new mantle of fresh green, when the commons are ablaze with the yellow gorse, the warm sun is shining in a blue sky, and the air is alive with the full-throated song of the birds." There may not have been much exaggeration in that description in those days.

Soldiers from the hospital were not all disabled. It is very probable that many were suffering from either gassing or shell shock. Many were able to spend their recuperation on the Common, at the Cricketers. The Bracey family, keepers of the pub and the shop next door, had a daughter Cicely, who was in her teens at the time. She kept a scrap book and many of the soldiers were happy to provide her with keepsakes of their time at "FMS" as it was known. Sentimental verses predominate – it must have been a lonely time for many of them. They also made their way down to Kimpton village where they became a frequent sight in their hospital blue, and in those days mixing with the locals - they were, after all heroes from the front – was easy. A Kimpton schoolboy of the era records how one particular soldier managed to arrive at his house just as tea was being served, his mother's cooking "no doubt affording a pleasant change from the hospital diet". He also recalls



*Taffy from South Wales wrote to Cicely in June 1918:
 "I've looked these pages o'er and o'er, to see what others
 have written before, but in this quiet little spot I simply
 write Forget-Me-Not"*

*While Billy
 wrote:
 "It is easy
 enough to be
 pleasant, when
 life goes by like
 a song, But the
 man worth
 while is the man
 who will smile
 When every-
 thing goes dead
 wrong"*



how one day at school "Teacher Mabel" asked him to carry a message to a passing "Mr Baker", much to "the great amusement of Mr Baker's two companions". Several married local girls, including Doris, the daughter of the Goldhawks, the butchers. Because they appeared able-bodied their reasons for being at FMS were not always understood – the schoolboy solemnly recorded quite late in life in his memoirs that the soldiers "were recovering from malaria caught in Malaysia".

Between villagers and soldiers there were concerts, Christmas parties, football and cricket matches - the impact, socially (and economically), of the arrival of over 200 men and support staff in the area would have been quite sizeable - the equivalent of a large new village appearing overnight. Many of the soldiers were from the Commonwealth, mainly Canada, as well as remoter parts of Britain, bringing a glimpse of the wider world.

The War also brought columns of marching soldiers through the area, and special policemen recruited from the villagers to take the place of the regular policemen who had been mobilised. With their blue and white armband, badge and truncheon, they enforced the black-out when the zeppelin raids began. Zeppelins were indeed not uncommon in the area, but residents had no need of an air-raid siren. Terrified by the sound of the engines, flocks of pheasants in Ayot Wood would screech their way over towards Kimpton and Blackmore End, giving more than adequate warning.

We know that at least one soldier died at the hospital. The grave of Robert Hoggins, a Royal Army Service Corps driver, can be found in Kimpton churchyard. He died in June 1918, at the age of 24. No other records can be found; perhaps he had no family back home, wherever that was, to receive the body. Today, Kimpton Church still receives funds from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to maintain the grave. Another young soldier, Edgar Smith, from Essex, came to Blackmore End suffering from trauma and the recipient of the Military Medal for his courage. Over eighty years later his son, Malcolm, found a postcard of the hospital in his father's papers and made a journey to see what remained of the house. His father had chosen never to talk about his experience in the War.

12. THE END – THE BEGINNING

In 1918 the Chichester connection ended. John, though 40 years of age, served in the War and in 1917 married Audrey Chapman. Their daughter, June, was born in 1918 and John moved back to the West Country at his wife's request. However, social relationships with the Oakleys continued and still continue to this day. The farm and the lands around the house were let to a Mr Richard Worboys.

Gertrude Mary herself was awarded the MBE for her services. Lloyd Harry's wife received the Medal of the Queen of the Belgians for her work at Greenham.

Gertrude Mary's step-children were also honoured during and after the war – Berkeley was knighted and was to have a prominent army career with the Iniskilling Dragoons, rising to Brigadier-General after serving, inter alia, with the British forces in Iraq in 1924. Arthur Rose, a lawyer, gained the CBE in 1919, spending much of his life in Ireland and becoming a Senator in the Irish Free State parliament.

In the years after the war, Gertrude Mary is not recorded by Kelly's as living at Blackmore End - after all, she did own two other country houses, and both no 3 and no 4 Brunswick Terrace, Hove, and the family's town house in Portman Square. She inherited the income from the estate, but still the capital was in trust for her children.

Col. Vincent had died in 1916, and by some accounts the marriage had not been a happy one. Reinforcing the view that she felt closer to her father's family than Gertrude may have, Gertrude Mary had taken the name of Baxendale again and became known as "Mrs Vincent-Baxendale". The hyphen seems to have been optional.

In the Ladies' Who's Who of 1920, Gertrude Mary Vincent -Baxendale is described as "an enthusiastic collector of old engravings and old china, all her homes being perfect museums of antiques. Recreations: motoring, music and literature." The description "enthusiastic" seems to have been a euphemism as she is said to have been something of a magpie in her passion for collecting.

But she was not in good health. A long-term diabetic, she died on 7th October 1922 in Hove, from an ulcerated foot. She chose to be buried with her father, his first wife, and her grandfather and grandmother, in the vault at Whetstone.

Even before her death the trustees were raising money to make settlements to her children. The first part of Birley's estate to be sold was Turners Hall Farm – the Slype making now a convenient boundary with the main estate. At the Peahen, St Albans on 6th September 1922 the farm, 167 acres with its "charming old fashioned farmhouse" (still standing today) was auctioned by Messrs Thurgood Martin and Eve. The tenant, Charles Woolatt, had given notice to quit, because, it is said, his wife found the house too lonely. Presumably the trustees decided to take the opportunity to sell. It was bought by the Burton family, who, in addition to the price for the land (said to be £3,000) had to pay £105 for the standing timber ("hedgerow elm, oak and ash").

Gertrude Mary may have survived to see the first, and still the only, house built on the east side of Kimpton Road. The Red House, next to the Common but just inside Kimpton parish, stands on two-and-a-half acres of land that, unlike the surrounding area, had come into the ownership of the Bailey Hawkins family of Stagenhoe. The house was built for his daughter in around 1921.

Aileen set about sorting out her mother's affairs. We see she placed a personal advertisement in *The Times* on 21st November that year seeking "any persons having in their possession boxes or parcels or a single stone diamond necklace deposited for safe custody by my mother the late Mrs Vincent-Baxendale of 35 Portman Square or Blackmore End, Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire or any information concerning the above necklace kindly communicate with me, Mrs Hamilton-Wedderburn, 3 Lygon Place, Grosvenor Gardens, SW1". It sat alongside advertisements from an "ex-captain in urgent need of appointment", a booklet promising to explain the risks as well as the attractions of farming in South Africa and the offer of the transfer of a lease for a service flat with a "pre-war" rent of £150 p.a.

By this time all Gertrude Mary's five children had reached the age of 21 and the trust's purpose came to an end. After 44 years Birley's grandchildren could inherit. Some sales of paintings had already taken place to settle

amounts on two of them. Over the next couple of years the extensive collections of Birley and Gertrude Mary (both hers and hers under her marriage settlement) - pictures, silver, objects of virtu, jewellery, furniture - were auctioned off, with Christies being a major beneficiary. By way of example of the artworks that she owned independently of her father's settlement, a view of Florence by the minor 18th Century painter Thomas Patch was sold for 48gns (£50.40). Christies sold it again in 1999 for £232,500.

In Brunswick Terrace, Hove and in a recently-acquired house in Brighton all Gertrude Mary's personal effects were sold, in situ, at sales lasting two or three days. As for the Portman Square house, although a relative of Col. Vincent's, Captain Patrick Rose Vincent, was recorded as a voter there in 1921 together with her and a servant, no voters are listed in the following years, only the occasional caretaker. We can assume the house was also sold.

After a previous but unsuccessful attempt to sell it through advertisement, an auction of the Blackmore End Estate took place on 18th August 1926 at The Peahen, St Albans "by the Trustees of the Will of Richard Birley Baxendale". Knight Frank and Rutley were the agents. There were 403 acres in all, and it was felt necessary to divide the estate into several lots. The biggest lots were Number 1, containing the house and immediate garden together with a strip of the park running along Kimpton Road towards the common, also taking in the area of the paddock at the end of what is now The Drive, and Lot no. 2, the next band of ground round from the sites of numbers 20 to 36 Kimpton Road, round the back of Lot 1, through what is now the top of Blackmore Way as far as the old road. Lot no. 3 took in the area now covered by The Broadway and Dale Avenue, while no. 5 was Porters End Farm. Other lots were a band along The Slype, Hog's Island, and various other cottages and parcels of land. The house itself, built in the 1860s, was described as "Modern" – estate agents' exaggerations are not just a recent phenomenon. The catalogue extolled the literary connection of Blackmore End, which "almost adjoins Mackerye End, which Charles Lamb has immortalised in the most charming of all his 'Essays of Elia'". It talks of Lamb's boyhood affection for "hearty, homely, loving Hertfordshire" with its "pleasant green plains and fruitful fields".

There is a final footnote on Pickfords. Intense competition and a poor business decision by Birley's nephews had dissipated much of the

company's prosperity. Eventually, in 1912 it merged with a rival firm Carter Paterson, and transferred all its carrier trade to them. Pickfords shrank to the firm we know today. As the Baxendale and the Pickfords connections to Blackmore End were finally severed, just down the road the Carter Paterson family were moving in - at Herons Farm by the golf course on Gustard Wood Common. However, Carter Paterson was about to sell Pickfords' removals and heavy haulage business to the Hays Wharf Company, severing the connection again. Later, though, Carter Paterson went on to use the old stables at Blackmore End for storage.

It was not a good time to sell land. The attraction of a country estate such as Blackmore End was not obvious. After the War, servants were not so easy to find and wages had increased. Although the spectacular stock market crash of 1929 was still to come, the world's economic health had not recovered from the conflict. Britain was in recession, poverty and unemployment were growing, and wages were being cut. The General Strike three months earlier in May 1926 set the tone. However, not everybody suffered - for those still in work, and especially for the middle class professionals, the fall in the price of goods meant that a comfortable life with many of the new consumer goods could be gained and maintained. But farming was also in the doldrums. Also, other estates were on the market including the Dacre estates at Kimpton Hoo.

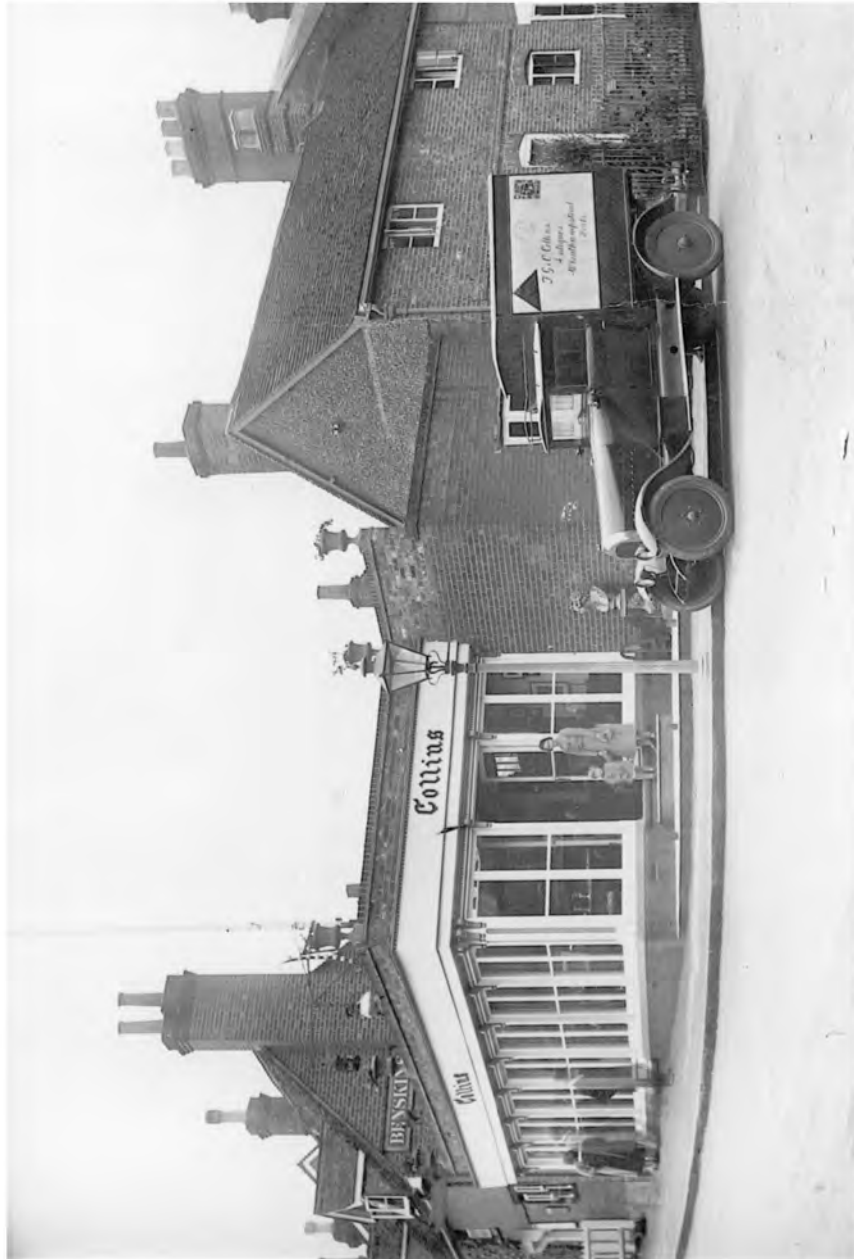
The 270.681 acres of Porters End Farm were sold to the Lock family from Stevenage for £4,100. Eric William Tudor Lock was an estate agent, but his father had been a farmer and Porters End was intended for his son, William Dawes. There was also a daughter, Rosa. Rosa still lives on the Blackmore End "estate" and her story forms a later chapter in this tale. It seems that although the conveyance to purchase the farm was signed in October 1926, Lock's solicitors were doubtful about the right of the trustees to sell, and required a repeated declaration in November from Gertrude Mary's eldest daughter, Aileen, that Gertrude Mary was in fact dead and that all her children were of an age to inherit. Given she had already made similar declarations in 1922 when Gertrude Mary died, and in March 1926 in readiness for the sale, Aileen must have wondered at the cheek of these provincial clerks.

Apart from the farm, Lot no. 3, and a few cottages and odd fields, bidding was low for the rest of the estate – bids for the house reached £1,100 – so the reserve prices were not met and the trustees revised their plans.

A second auction was held two months later in October. The trustees had decided that the whole of the house would be worth less than the sum of its parts. They charged Perry and Philips, a firm of auctioneers (and also upholsterers and cabinet makers) from Bridgnorth in Shropshire, near where Richard Chichester then lived, with knocking it down for its fixture, fittings, and materials. Over three days, bids were sought for such lots as 120 oak and pine doors, 33 marble fireplaces, valuable roofing slates, lead fittings, four stone steps 13ft 6ins wide with stone stringing, four stone steps 9ft wide, a sundial from 1818, a massive weathervane 6ft by 10ft high, lengths of brick wall, a cooking range 6ft 6ins long and two gas stoves, 11,000 sq ft of parquet oak and pine flooring and 12 excellent bathroom and lavatory fittings. You could also buy a 12in lawn mower and a boot scraper, radiators, lamps, and the 160ft of veranda over the stables (but buyers were not to demolish the wall supporting the coachman's cottage). Anything left after two days was sold in bulk, and the buyer had six months to demolish the house.

One of the most prestigious of the lots was no.187, the staircase. "Handsome and massive" it had 25 risers (the average house staircase has 13), each 4ft 9in wide. With 60ft of handrail, the ten newel posts each 7in square with carved and turned tops held panelling 21 ins high with carved circular decorations and twisted columns. "Included with this lot" was 40ft of panelling on the wall side, the main beam carrying the landing and the oak brackets carrying one half-landing. The underside of the staircase was also oak. Buyers of Lot 188 could take away from the gutted and deserted house six leaded-light and coloured glass panels decorated with the husband and wife monograms "RBB" and "GB" and a crest – half Baxendale, half Chichester; 19½in wide and seven feet high, these panels formed only the lower half of the staircase window, itself raised about six foot from the floor, at half-landing level.

Part of the conservatory was purchased by Charlie Collins, the antique shop owner, furniture restorer and part-time taxi driver from Wheathampstead, who in the latter of those roles ferried many potential buyers up from the



*Gertrude's conservatory reincarnate.
Collins' antique shop, 1931. Sam Collins and his mother are on the steps*

Station. Collins ran his antiques firm from the Railway Hotel (later The Abbot John, now a house) but had plans to create a permanent shop on a site next to his house in Church Lane, on the corner of the High Street, next to The Swan. A spectacular fire caused by an oil-stove had burnt down the cottage which had stood there in the 1900s and he had bought the site after the War. Five years later the conservatory became the new corner shop of Collins Antiques, where it still stands, now a listed building. The ornate pots on the roof are also believed to come from the house. The conservatory and various other bits and pieces cost Charlie Collins around £14.

It seems that along with this sale the rest of the original Lot 1, the land around the house, was also sold; in January a third auction was held (this time back at the Peahen) to sell the original Lot 2 and the land along the Slype. This time, the Slype land was divided into "capital" plots for building. To attract buyers, the agents waxed lyrical about the setting calling it "bracing and delightful", and mused about the "many Celtic and Roman artefacts" found in the area. "Capital" was slang for splendid, "bracing" was the term used in the famous Skegness seaside poster to describe somewhere with healthy and clean air – important in those days of smoky and polluted industrial towns. The railway stations at Wheathampstead and Harpenden were pointed out to tempt buyers, as was the bus service three days a week from Kimpton to Welwyn. As it happens, only one of the plots has ever been built on, the present Hog's Plough.

A Luton builder and solicitor named Henry Cunningham Brown (described in the conveyance as "Gentleman") together with a Richard Oakley, a Metal Merchant, also of Luton, had bought the house in the second auction, and finally bought Lot 2. They paid £2,500 and began demolishing the house. A couple of years later Oakley sold his share to Brown.

A complicated series of conditions required Brown to continue to supply water to some parts of the estate and the farm, so that he had to leave the water tower standing. He also left the stable block and walled garden, and some of the conservatory. In fact it became an advantage to Brown because he could offer piped water to the houses he intended to build. If there were buyers for the houses, that is. In the new Blackmore End there were going to be houses other than for estate workers, and permanent residents who were not dependent for their living on the Baxendales.

13. CHICKENS AND PONIES – THE 1930s TO THE 1970s

As a place to live Blackmore End, in an era of low car ownership, was not entirely ideal. Although estates of houses - the result of cheap labour, low interest rates and the relatively prosperity of the middle class – were springing up round London, they were served by the railways and the trams and trolley buses that made travel to work cheap easy and reliable. Blackmore End only had a railway station on a slow branch line two miles away.

An irregular bus service had begun to serve Kimpton from St Albans in 1922. Brown persuaded the bus companies - St Albans and District and London General – to divert the service from the direct route to Kimpton along Ballslough Hill and to run it via Blackmore End so that the new residents could then take the hourly busses down to Wheathampstead Station (for trains to Luton, the new town of Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, or up to Town) - or ride on to St Albans.

Still only those seeking rural life par excellence would choose Blackmore End. For if you wanted to live in more organised surroundings, by a station and with shops at hand, you could choose the new houses at Welwyn Garden City. A wide range of pleasant detached and semi-detached houses close to St Albans and Harpenden were also available.

The first houses Brown built – recycling, it is said, the bricks from the old house - were the semi detached houses in Kimpton Road (now nos.38 to 48) and round the corner in the Drive, on the old paddock. The design was based on that used for council housing - a sensible decision in those days since public works to replace foetid slums with houses fit for the heroes of the war and their families had led to the introduction of high standards and (for the day) modern amenities.

After a year or so Brown then switched to building detached houses – three of them along Kimpton Road between the lodge and Blackmore Way, which he rented out, whether because no-one would buy them or as an investment we do not know. An Act of 1932 had brought planning controls to rural areas, and this may have influenced the pattern of development. Brown then appears to have taken the decision to sell off individual plots. Over these

years the Lock family also sold off one of the stonier fields from their land further along Kimpton Road (today's nos.10 to 18).

Over the years car ownership grew (there were 187,000 cars licensed in 1920 and 2,034,000 in 1939). It was this growth and the tendency for ribbon development that led to the 1932 Act. The attractions of Blackmore End - its quiet, its rural aspect, its bracing air - became more appealing. The area began to attract a number of retired people, older single women on independent means, and engineers and office workers from Vauxhalls. Access to Vauxhall was easy – until 1942 there was a direct road from Kimpton to the Vauxhall works via Peters Green. That year Mosquito aircraft began to be built on the then new Luton airfield and the road was closed for security. It never reopened and today is severed permanently by the runway.

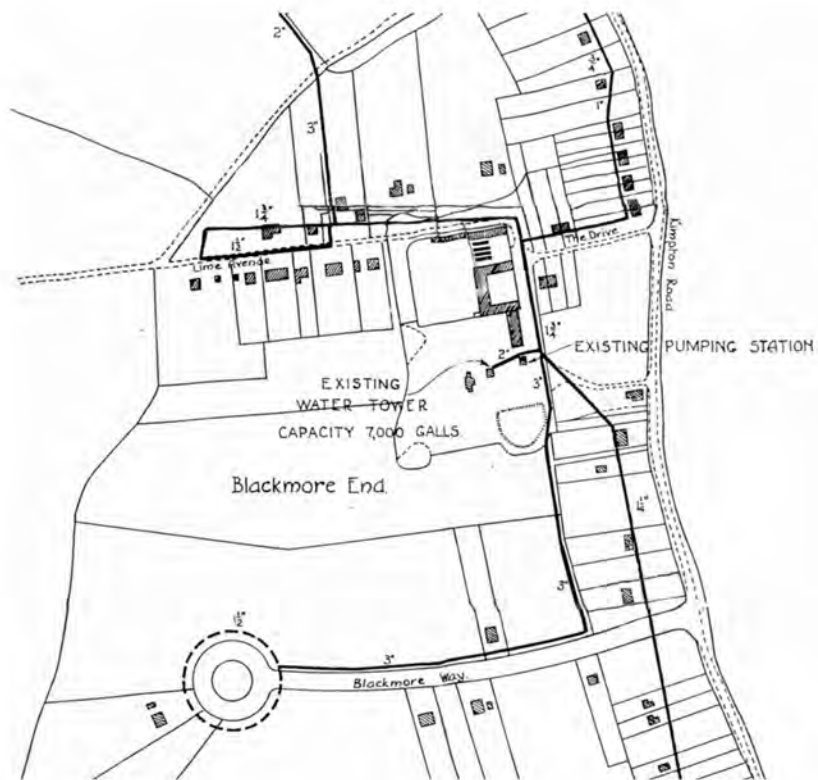
Individuals bought plots and commissioned builders to erect houses, or sometimes local builders such as Arthur Carter of Luton bought plots and built "catchpenny" or speculative houses which may or may not have sold. Many houses are individually designed, but some resemble one or two of their neighbours, and the building line is irregular. In Lime Avenue the building line is also irregular - this time apparently because of the pattern of sewers leading from the house and the risk to the foundations.

Electricity arrived in the 1920s with the overhead power lines erected by the North Metropolitan Electric Supply Company that still pass from The Drive, over the gardens of nos.12 to 18, across Kimpton Road and down the hill.

Twenties and thirties electoral rolls help show us how Blackmore End grew. There were no voters registered for 1927 even though the vote had been opened to women that year. As the 1930s began, gradually more and more names were added to the Hitchin lists as the decade passed. All had the address "Blackmore End" - no street addresses in those days, since houses could be identified from their names (no numbering either). Some people had no house name - simply "Blackmore End" so perhaps they lived in the old stable block or the lodge. Others lived at houses whose names ran from the natural, like "Woodlands", "The Spinney" and "One Oak" to the geographic, like "Aislaby", to the prosaic, like "Wayside", the exotic, like "Tywyni" and later "Bunderley Orme", and the personal, like "Beatrix". Some of these house names remain today.

Because of the loss of menfolk in the war many of Blackmore End's residents were single ladies. Over half the houses in the Drive and Lime Avenue, for example, belonged to women. Names like the Misses Henderson, retired schoolteachers who used their house as a holiday home, Mrs Wooley, Miss Williams, Miss Cotton, Mrs Chapman, Miss Henshaw and the unfortunately named Miss Deed appear as owners on old documents, together with the four Misses Symons, one of whom tried (probably unsuccessfully) to keep the local children from misbehaving.

Mr Brown also found buyers for the site of the old house and the parts not demolished. A Mr Boisselier, possibly connected with the Boisselier Cocoa Factory in Watford, bought the southerly (left hand) part of the grounds. A little behind the site of the old house he built a new dwelling which residents today recall as being rather colonial in style with a big veranda. He called it "Tower House" after the water tower which loomed forlornly over it. After a few years he sold it to Charles King. King had become the chief engineer at Vauxhalls in 1919, and was responsible for the 14/40, one of Vauxhall's best-selling saloons in the 1920s. During the First World War he had worked on a sadly abortive project for a new type of aircraft engine. In 1925 Vauxhall was taken over by the American General Motors, and King probably thought of Blackmore End as a pleasant place for his retirement. On the veranda he would sit and watch over his grounds. Mr King presided over much of the Baxendales' fruit orchard, and his garden was a magnet for the local children, as we shall hear. Brown had sold off the lodge and its grounds now stretched across the main arm of the original drive – as a result there was no direct vehicle access to Kimpton Road. To get to King's house you could go a number of ways – down The Drive, turn left in front of the old stables, past the old coach house that became no. 9, through a gate and the round the footprint of the old house site, via the sunken garden, which was still there. Or you could turn right in The Drive, go round the side of the stables to the end of the wall. A track then ran to the left, just before no.1 Lime Avenue, which led round the back of the walled garden. This met a path coming down from the fields and took you to the side of Mr King's house. Or, directly from Kimpton Road, a path led from next to one of the first houses to be built near The Lodge, to the back of the sunken garden. It is still there, but you have to peer into a hedge to find it.



1939 - a plan of Blackmore End showing the built-up plots, the water supply from the tower, and the remains of the old house

A remnant of the sunken garden, still to be seen in Beech Way





*Above, one of Brown's first houses, as yet unchanged.
Below, the old coach house as transformed for the Allinghams*



At this time the stable block and walled garden still stood. After Carter Paterson part was used by the Hatfield removals firm of Tingey for storage. In the old coachman's house lived the Minchins with their daughter Peggy. In another part of the stable complex, the coach house, lived Sidney Allingham, Mr King's chauffeur. Beside the house stood Birley's old engine house, still pumping water up the tower for the benefit of the growing population. Martha, Sidney's wife, was Swiss (or, according to one resident, Swedish, but in those days in any case noticeably foreign) and had come over at some time during or before the War as an au pair and had married. She worked at Lamer House, was a keen archer and gardener. Over the years the Allinghams bought adjoining strips of land and planted an orchard. They may also have tended an old garden that had lain between the old house and the stable block.

The water tower and pump house had become the property of the local council, Hitchin RDC. In 1948 when mains water arrived Hitchin RDC sold the land to the Allinghams, who wanted to extend their gardens. HRDC set two conditions: reduce the water tower - the turret that originally dominated the west front of the old house - to twenty feet immediately, and demolish it completely within twelve. Marsha Allingham is said to have done both - with her bare hands.

You can see today where the entrances to the stables and the walled garden were. In the stretch of wall facing down The Drive towards Kimpton Road there are two places where the brickwork in the wall is newer than the rest and where the bushes along the wall are replaced by tar and gravel patches. There is the remnant of a window too.

If you follow the old wall enclosing the old stable block and walled garden round the corner to its end, you then pass into the old parkland and into the avenue leading down to Porters End. This would have been a visual point for the end of the road called The Drive and the commencement of Lime Avenue. But it isn't. Across the avenue was a gate outside today's no.11 (you can still see one post) - beyond lay the farm. The further gate, the one that still exists, was installed later when houses were added to the end of Lime Avenue after the war by the farm's then owner (see the section on Porters End). That gate marks the point at which one of the tracks closed by Birley in 1874 ran across - Wood End House, built in the 1990s, stands on a former odd-shaped waste ground marking the path to the right. Until it was

built people still crossed it "unofficially" to reach the "official" footpath from Kimpton Road to Porters End Lane. It was a good way to take your dog. To the left the track has disappeared.

The Second World war found Blackmore End still a patchwork of houses on irregular plots with water still supplied from the old house. The main built-up areas were The Drive, Lime Avenue and part of Kimpton Road. Keith Seymour, who lived in Kimpton Road from 1933, remembers only a handful of houses in Blackmore Way. Names from that era on old deeds are Allen, Thrupp, Smith, Ross and Pope. A few houses had also been built near the Common side on what is now Firs Drive and Dale Avenue - a track ran up to the Kimpton Road where the big house, The Belt, had been built dominating the junction. Today, The Belt is hidden by new houses but can still be found tucked away behind.

ARP wardens watched the dogfights and the bombers from a lookout by Kimpton Hall Farm and might have seen the German fighter that crashed by Anells End and the pilot bale out, only to be caught along Kimpton Bottom.

After the war, as the rationing of building materials began to relax, building started again and a surprising number of houses were built in the early fifties. Cunningham Brown had died in 1951 and his executors were busy selling plots. But it was still rural. The first major development on any scale came in the late 1950s and early 1960s when Brownfield Avenue, on Brown's land, and then the Kimpton Road end of The Broadway, on Lot 3, was built up.

The patchwork nature of the development also explains some of the odder garden shapes and the strange unbuilt areas. Over time the original requirement of one house per acre survived only as long as the owners wanted a garden of that size - or chose to do without the capital gain of the sale of part. Pieces of land have been tacked on to existing gardens in The Drive, and especially around the old stables ownership of some of the land has been unclear. Some purchasers had bought large plots, building a house or houses along the road, and maintaining the rest as fields. This happened in parts of Kimpton Road, and along Blackmore Way. Eventually the fields were then incorporated into neighbours' gardens (such as the one to the north of Brownfield Way) or were finally developed (such as The Paddocks).

The plot sizes also explain why, when the Post Office came to number the roads in the 1960s, several gaps in the numbering were left to allow for (more) infill development. They also left scope for four more houses to be built on the way to Kimpton by starting the numbering at 10. Thankfully they have not been built, although people were beginning to worry when the owner of no.10 bought part of the field alongside and constructed a new, long sweeping driveway that might have been designed to be shared with new houses. It wasn't. Oddly, the numbering of Kimpton Road breaks normal practice by starting at the end furthest from the post town - confirmed, in the 1920s, after some years of being "Kimpton, Welwyn" - as "Wheathampstead, St Albans".

It was not until the late 1960s that the other half of the Broadway development was completed. This included Burton Close, built on the gardens of some of the earlier houses in Dale Avenue and on land that had not formed part of the Baxendale Estate but had belonged to the Burtons who had bought Turners Hall Farm, the Braceys of the shop, and Benskins, the Watford brewery that owned the Tin Pot.

Somehow, we get the impression that, despite the enormous changes in the world outside, life in Blackmore End must have changed little between 1930 and 1970. A sense of history remained - The Slype was still known by many - even relative newcomers - as "The New Road". The comfortable detached houses in their acre grounds attracted residents seeking peace, quiet, security, a garden in which to grow vegetables keep chickens, the odd pony. Most of the original houses are not particularly large, so it was a quietly middle class or even lower middle class neighbourhood, and it would have been relatively inexpensive, suitable therefore for those on fixed incomes. But you could live here and work elsewhere. Lynn Cross, who grew up in Kimpton Road, tells how her father chose Blackmore End because the 304 allowed him to travel reliably to work at the school in Sandridge. There would have been a fair sprinkling of commuters waiting for the bus to take them down to the well-kept wooden platform on the single track railway at Wheathampstead for the train to London - either direct to Kings Cross or change at Hatfield. Unfortunately, late nights were not catered for by British Railways (since 9 to 5 working was the norm) and the latest you could leave London by train was 6.30. Special ticketing arrangements did, however, permit travel on the Midland Region's route from St Pancras to Harpenden,



This 1951 map still shows the Baxendale house, demolished in 1927 (the long building pointing downwards in the centre). The dotted line across the map towards the bottom is the boundary – where the old road ran.



A few larger houses were built near the Common after the sale of the estate. This one, now lost in the 1960s development of Firs Drive and The Broadway, had its own lodge, where the chauffeur lived, and paddock for the inevitable ponies.

but, for some reason, not St Albans.

Each house was bound by a covenant not to engage in any business venture (dictated by planning restrictions, but also conveniently protecting the character of the neighbourhood). This is why there are no shops – or come to that, pubs here. Residents were not inconvenienced, because there were ample ways to cater for one's daily needs locally in Kimpton and Gustard Wood. Jenny Fowler, who spent her childhood in Brownfield Way, recalls how "We used to go to Kimballs' shop on the Common, or to Owens Corner". On the other hand, Lynne Cross's mother "wouldn't go to the shop on the Common – everything smelt of paraffin". Kimballs' shop was that originally run by the Bracey family. The shop lasted until about 1990. The Kimballs kept a donkey on the field behind their shop and lead it out on to the Common for a daily change of grass. One of Jenny's memories of those time is its eeaw that could be heard for hundreds of yards. There was a short cut to the common in those days – before Kimpton Road was straightened when the full length of The Broadway was completed, the sharp bend by the old cottages was dangerous for children. So Jenny and her friends were allowed (or went anyway) through the garden of The Belt, and out down its drive to where Firs Drive now starts. That road was also not there then. From there, on to the Common and the path that led directly to the shop. The path today bears more to the right and there is no trace of the old route. The shop in Owens Corner in Gustard Wood was in one of the wooden cottages on the road down to the entrance to Lamer Park.

Larger goods too were no problem: "We did not need a car", as Lynne Cross explained, "My mother would ring up Welwyn Department store and they would deliver the next day". For everyday needs, roundsmen would call to sell bread, milk, and meat. The local milkmen from Kimpton were a regular sight – Messrs Bradley, Hyde and Andrews are names that are remembered. Felix Sparrow, who lived in Porters End from the 1950s to the 1980s recalls how Moss, the grocer in Kimpton, would deliver on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while Grey, the baker, came every day. If you were a regular customer Simons, the butcher in Wheathampstead, would make a special delivery on short notice. The milk lorry and float seem also to have conveyed a number of local children from time to time. There were lots of little shops on Kimpton even in the 1970s – even the young Lynne Cross "even then wondered how they could make a living – just a few



*The road from Wheathampstead, 1950
By Delaport Lodge - today a jumble of traffic calming measures*

tins and sweets". Most of them were run by old ladies who would materialise magically as children appeared outside. For the essentials – a bike, a gun, for example, there was Wren's where Wheelwright Mews runs now. Sam Stokes, who has lived in Kimpton Road since the 1950s, recalls: "I wanted a ball valve on a Saturday afternoon and I went down to Wren's and I got one". It was also a petrol station (five gallons of Jet for a pound) and indeed had been a wheelwright's in the 1920s.

As in the days of the big old house the pubs of Gustard Wood retained their attraction. By now the Cricketers had long disappeared, as had the Royal Exchange in the Lower village. But the Plough on the road to the golf course remained in business. Sam Stokes remembers the "two classes" of Christmas dinner that would be served there for members of the Golf Club "one for the lower class and one for the rich golfers". Jenny remembers that The Tin Pot was the "posh" pub, "where you would go with a girl friend for cocktails - there were flowers on the tables", while the Cross Keys was the place for farmers, gamekeepers, and countrymen. The family garden was unthought of. What is now the restaurant was at one time a small shop. The shop may not have lasted too well – it is rumoured that temptation of the products of the pub side of the business became too great for the shopkeeper.

The rule against businesses was not necessarily obeyed (and we doubt it is today) – several professional people ran businesses quietly from home. A well known designer lived in The Drive, for example. When Rosa's sons began to do work for local farmers the arrival in Lime Avenue of the odd tractor was not unknown, though some of the neighbours looked askance. The most well known of local businesses was run by the Lollys, who look over Mr King's house on the old Baxendale site. They made great use of the gardens and orchard, and possibly even the walled garden, to grow fruit and vegetables of all kinds, all offered for sale to the neighbourhood. The Lollys' smallholding became a meeting place for the community, and it must have been pleasant to see the old Baxendale site once more in the centre of life. Unfortunately, for once the authorities were obliged to put an end to it.

The numerous and relatively wealthy single and retired people living in the area needed or wanted help with their daily life, and Sam Stokes recalls the mornings being full of "women coming up from the village to work up here" on foot, on the track past Kimpton Hall Farm. Earlier it would have been the era of the maid – later the daily. The gardeners would come up the road by



*Blackmore
End, 1962.
The Slype is at
the foot of the
picture, the
long pale
roofs at the
top right are
the old
stables, now
Beech Way*

bike, including a famous character Mr Onions, reputedly an Italian prisoner of war, although nobody seems certain if he was Italian or he had been in an Italian POW camp. Mr Onions (pronounced variously like the vegetables he would no doubt have been digging, or "o'nions") is remembered as working for Mr King, and the Lollys, and for being a jobbing gardener in the 1950s and 1960s – at that time, "a bit of a poacher". You would have found characters like Mr Onions in many walks of life at that time. Some of the original residents, as they grew older, seem to have found their acres too much to handle. Jenny Fowler, delivering newspapers in the late 1960s, remembers one overgrown garden with a path that was barely visible leading to a dark front door. The house was called "Tywyni" – she never saw the occupier, but knew that she was an old woman – not a witch, surely. House names were still important although the road was numbered in the 1960s.

There were more children as the years went by, and they had free rein. This was an era fondly remembered by Lynne Cross: "There was no traffic". In the 1950s and 1960 they went all over the place – it was not uncommon for young children to spend all day out of the house as far afield as Ayot, Wheathampstead, Codicote. On bikes, but more often on ponies or horses: "ponies were our bicycles". The large gardens were considered ideal for keeping them in. With no traffic, the kids could ride over, often with minimal bridles, to Batford, to Whitwell, to Peter's Green. Though most would have been from relatively well off families there was no snobbery on the part of either child or parent. "We looked up to the farm workers' children on the common, they knew where all the good hideaways were and how to find things in the woods." Gangs would form "it would be Kimpton versus Wheathampstead" – girls as well as boys. "It's the sense of freedom that has gone". Even in the 1970s children would go off carol singing – Jenny remembers: "we were always welcome" and would be invited in. They would work their way down through Gustard Wood to the old house at Delaport where the Colonel would invite them in and ask them to sing for him. Children would often be invited into elderly people's houses – men as well as women. Today the motives of the men might be questioned. The old ladies "we visited as a matter of course – they always smelt a little funny". Today, Halloween is thought of as an unwelcome American import but it seems to have reached Blackmore End in the 1960s. Lanterns would be carried round the houses where everybody welcomed the little games of trick or treat.

At a time when attitudes to morality were very strict in some respects – no illegitimacy, marriage was enforced – other behaviour, including behaviour towards children, was not condemned. Nor was it hounded out, as it may have been today. There are memories of one gentleman about whom the schoolgirls like Jenny Fowler were warned, but not steered clear of, who would walk down to Kimpton school in the afternoon and ride back on the bus. He was a friendly man, by all accounts. The community watched him, but there were no hysterical demonstrations outside his door.

Mr King's acres – the garden and orchard of the old house – were magnets for the children and residents recall their childhood spent scrumping for apples and raiding the apple store. Mr King's grandchildren often came to stay, and it seems that though he may have appeared a little fierce, especially when he prowled the garden with his shotgun, he never seemed to catch or challenge the children who he must have been aware of. Children in those days were naturally respectful and scared of adults, but both parties played their role in the idyllic country childhood. Another house which was a magnet for children was in Lime Avenue, as its large garden had a moat and an island "camp".

In the days before anything but the most basic legislation on the employment of young people and before the Health and Safety Inspectorate the boys of Blackmore End would spend their days helping – it seems genuinely helping – at Kimpton Hall or Porters End or one of the other farms in the area, such as the one that stood next to where Titmuss' New Mills stand now, which was full of chickens. Rosa explains how "My son was allowed to drive the tractor and rake up the hay and was given five bob." and her sons would also help with the milk deliveries: "they knew that if they dropped a bottle it would break". Boys like Sam Stokes's son David were employed as beaters for the pheasant shooting on Kimpton Hoo, and the sound of shotguns carried by boys in their early teens simply meant another dead rabbit or bird. In fact the adults had no compunction in shooting – young larks were a great delicacy during and after the war. Birds feature in many memories of that age. Sam Stokes remembers great flocks of sparrows descending whenever he went to feed his chickens.

The beginning of the end of Blackmore End as a rural retreat came with Beech Way - despite opposition - in 1976, which removed the evidence for the existence of Blackmore End. It is a pity that the builders did not see fit to

name it Baxendale Way. Down came the old stables and house, though the boundary wall and the coach house, no. 9, survived, as do the engine room and the underground water tanks. Beech Way re-established a vehicle entrance off Kimpton Road. The Lodge lost some of the garden it had gained after the sale of the House and so did the large fifties house on the corner of The Drive - a house described by one resident as "American" in its design and internal fittings, and now scheduled for demolition. No.2 Beech Way is also in that garden. No.1A Beech Way was later built in the back garden of the house next to The Lodge, finally cutting off the path that had led to Mr King's house. About that time residents of Blackmore Way fought off plans for an extension of their road from the Spinney at the end round to the Slype, building on the fields between there and the old road.

Later Blackmore Manor – rather a meaningless name as Birley's house was never a manor, but a mansion, and it was not sited there anyway - was built on the garden of one of the original houses in Blackmore Way, the home of Mr Justice Kingham, who later moved to Kimpton. The odd drive and gate beside the road still echo the old. It was felt by the planners that access was better via Beech Way. Later in the 1990s came The Paddocks, on one of the odd plots left over from the Brown days, once a chicken farm. Mr Cunningham Brown's family still owned the roadway of Blackmore Way. On the building of the Paddocks local residents attempted to track down the family but were unable to do so before the house builders succeeded and bought the roadway themselves.

In the severe winter of 1962 it seems Kimpton was cut off for a couple of days – the children managed to get to Wheathampstead with the help of the milk lorry. Helicopters hovered overhead dropping food, though nobody can quite recall if that was for the villagers or for the livestock. The snow was so high as to cover the gate of the track to Kimpton Hall Farm. With the milder winters such snow has not been seen for many years but in 2003 a sudden fall, apparently unexpected by the road gritters, made the hill from Kimpton and the hill from Lower Gustard Wood practically impassable. For a brief while there was a sense of isolation, but that in 1962 would have been much greater. The silence would have been that of Birley's era. A complete silence, broken only by the church bells from Kimpton and the whistle from the engine on the Wheathampstead line.

14. PORTERS END

The farm that the Lock family bought in 1926 was very different from the country house and park that we see today. The house was the typical Hertfordshire long, low structure that still stands at Ramridge and Ansells End. The large barn, converted in the last couple of years into a dwelling, formed one side of the farmyard - at right angles to the house, and was flanked on two sides by byres and stables. A magnificent cedar tree (like the one at Blackmore End) stood on the lawn. The cluttered but serviceable cobbled yard was full of implements, hay, straw, chickens and animals. "Toadstools" - poles to hold sheaves of corn off the ground and out of the way of mice - were dotted around the yard.

Instead of the long straight drive that is the main entrance now, access was through the brick-walled yard that stands across from Beanswick Cottages, where at the time of writing an empty functional slab-sided barn stands but for which planning permission has (again) been sought for housing. To reach the yard one had to pass round the side of the building standing opposite the house and the main yard was divided further into two. The drive further along the lane towards Raisins End (now accessing the barn) was but a track across a field. The only houses nearby were the Beanswick Cottages, built by Birley. Birley's improvements still stood - the gasometer and the carpenter's shop in the Dell, and beside the house the laundry, a two storey building with "a washing place at the bottom and a sorting and ironing at the top and a room beside which went the full height which we always thought was the drying room". A shed housed a water pump and an generator. Piped water served every field.

The Locks moved in with their milking herds and "hangers-on", and continued the arable and pasture farming of the Birley's home farm. Rosa recalls how "The thing moved very quickly and Mother didn't want a car so she wasn't interested in what was going on here. So it wasn't till we got here that we explored the things around. It was quite a treasure trove." Rosa remembers the old water tower of the house up at Blackmore End, "a landmark for many years".

It was hard work, of course, but they had time for riding and county events. Rosa, who was 20 at the time she moved there, trained as a photographer at the Regent Street Polytechnic, travelling in by train from her then home in

Stevenage. She took beautifully evocative local prints and she was also a keen photographer of horse shows, despite being confined, by the technology of the time, to a maximum of six heavy glass plates per trip.

In the 1927 register of electors Porters End Lodge was occupied by Gordon Cowell, the Locks' ploughman. At Beanswick lived other workers on the farm - Walter and Oliver Hedfield and Rolph Hay.

Horses were still the main motive power, and the annual round of ploughing matches organised by Oaklands College in St Albans enabled the Locks to join in the entertainment, meet their friends and colleagues, and have their fields ploughed for free.

Faster, but possibly less reliable, were the steam traction engines which contractors hired out during the season. One of which was Olivers, the machinery firm at Wandon Green which is still going. The engines came in pairs, one at each side of the field. Between them, on cables, were suspended six ploughshares which were driven back and forth across the field. It all sounds rather cumbersome and the arrangement can only have lasted until the individual tractor came along. In the days before the second World War tractors were rare and the Locks were not tempted: "they brought a tractor and they put a lad on it and the next thing they knew, it was stationary in the middle of the field and my brother said "what happened to it" and the boy said "I wanted to see how fast it would go".

In 1940 the Locks sold the farm. Eric Tudor Lock moved to Kimpton High Street, and a house in Lime Avenue bought. Rosa married the son of the manager of Welwyn Stores, and raised her family in Blackmore End. The buyer of the farm was George Sparrow, a partner in the local estate agency of Palmer Mandley and Sparrow. He also owned Mackerye End Farm. Just after the war, the farmyard was transformed. Away went most of the byres leaving only the bare shells around the outside, and the great barn. The house was reclad in brick in neo-Georgian style - the house we see today. Internally the rooms were re-arranged. The present entrance drive was installed with direct access to the house. It remained a working farm, however, and the old entrance yard and great barn were used, freeing the former yards as open space in front of the house.



*Rosa Lock
(now Leitch)
as a student,
left. Her
family bought
Porters end
from the
Baxendale
trustees.*

*Rosa was a
keen photog-
rapher and
took the
atmospheric
records of life
on the farm
on this and
the next page*





*1935:
The
plough-
ing
match
on
Porters
End
Lane*





*Above: Snow at Porters End Farm 1933/34
Below: Gordon Cowell, the Locks' ploughman, on Porters End Lane*



Felix Sparrow, George's wife, recalls the great herd of Guernsey cows in the barn. Their milk would be allowed to settle – rich clotted cream and golden yellow butter at the top, "skimmed" milk below for feeding to the calves.

Over the next two decades George Sparrow built the other houses in Porters End – the so-called lodges - and two at the end of the avenue leading to what was by then Lime Avenue, for the farm workers and for his son and daughter. But by the early 1980s George decided to give up farming, and the land was sold to the Ward family at Mackerye End Farm including the old entrance yard. All but one of the lodges were sold to owner-occupiers. As a rural setting with good access to London (despite the closure of the Wheathampstead railway) and elsewhere (the M1 came in 1959 and the A1(M) not much later) Porters End found the value that Blackmore End had already. Complex arrangements were made to continue the water supply to all the houses although by then mains water had arrived.

In the early 1990s Mackerye End and Porters End Farms passed into new ownership and the farming was contracted out. The herds of cattle were no longer seen. The farm manager, Mr Beere, moved on and his lodge sold. The link between dwellings and land was severed. Offers for parts of the land were made - part of the field down by Raisins End Cottages became part of the smallholding of Jennyview, itself an outpost of the old Porters End Farm. Paddock Lodge's garden expanded into the neighbouring field. A few years later the farms changed hands again to another commercially-minded owner whose offer of the sale of parts of the farm to bordering homeowners in Blackmore End was enthusiastically taken up leading to further subdivisions of the field pattern. Then ownership of most of the land changed yet again and it is now owned by a City financial institution. The farmworkers' "lodges" have been extended and in one case (West Lodge) replaced. Close your eyes and ears slightly, though, and much of Porters End Lane probably looks much the same as the Locks saw it, especially as it has escaped the kerbs that line Kimpton Road.

15. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name Blackmore End is not recorded before about the 13th Century when there is a brief record of a lady known as "Kateryna de Blackmore", of whom little is known. However, the name is almost certainly much older. What does it mean, and what is its derivation? A historical study of Wheathampstead written in the 1970s surmised that it was named after the two ponds that lie, now dry, on the corner of Gustard Wood Common on the way to the Cross Keys. The theory goes that the ending "more" was originally the Anglo-Saxon word "mere", meaning pond. Apparently that is the derivation of Stanmore – stony pond. To support the theory, the author relates part of the ancient deed granting what is now the parish of Wheathampstead to the Abbey of Westminster in 1060. Gustard Wood Common lies, as we saw, on the boundary between Wheathampstead and Kimpton. In the Deed, the boundary line is described by a series of landmarks – maps being, at that time of course, somewhat unreliable. The boundary is described as passing at one point by "The Gil Mere" which is believed to be the ponds on the common. Presuming that over time they became rather muddy (not unlikely) the author believes that Gil (whose meaning is unclear) was replaced by Black, the colour. Thus Blackmore means Blackpool.

However, this is not the only possible explanation. The same history of Wheathampstead also quotes a handbook by the Ordnance Survey saying "many Roman sites have been found in fields called Blacklands, or similar". These names indicate noticeable changes in the colour of the earth. Earth goes black with "the accumulated dirt of long occupation" or when old buildings are destroyed by fire. In the area, finds have been made in fields called Blackcroft and Blakeys. So is it not likely that our Black also refers to such a settlement? All the more so, because what is later described as "Blackmore End" lies about half-a mile from the ponds, further north along what is now Kimpton Road. It seems improbable that the name would be taken from something so relatively far away, especially on foot. There also seems to be no real reason why More should not in fact mean "Moor". Blackmore End is, of course 400 feet above sea level, and while not the highest point in Hertfordshire (despite local legend) certainly fits the description of "moor" in Anglo Saxon as a stretch of rather damp land (think of the clay). This is "Moor" as in "Moorgate", London, as well as in "North Yorkshire Moors".

Later spellings of Blackmore don't really help, though. "Blackmer" is recorded in the 18th Century, "Blackmoor" in the 19th.

The name "End" is better understood. It means clearing and is especially common in Hertfordshire and Essex. If you think of Ansell's End, Rye End, Mackerye End, Porters End, Raisins End, you will get an idea of the kind of location – away from the main centres of habitation like Kimpton and Wheathampstead, the sites of what became relatively prosperous farm communities in a relatively well wooded but settled landscape.

So we can make a plausible theory that at some time, round about where Beech Way is now, a Belgic house and/or a Roman villa were built, were demolished, burnt or fell down, and later settlers used the already cleared site to build their farmhouse. The land was black, it was high up but on goodish agricultural ground, and they called it Blackmore End.

Porters End is simpler in that it is recorded as being in the ownership of the family of Richard Porter, in 1342. Other than that, though, little is known. Gustard Wood, as we saw, means "place of the gorse". Beanswick, the name now carried by two cottages built by Birley on the lane opposite Porters End Farm, on the site of an earlier group of buildings, is first recorded as simple "Bean Wick", or Bean Farm, in 1637. Old deeds suggest that the name may have then applied to another field in the vicinity "to the south" of Porters End (the present Beanswick is to the north). Many of the place names in the vicinity are named after the families who owned them – for example, Raisins End after Edward Reason in 1607, which explains the local pronunciation as "reeson's". Ansell's End is named after the Aunsell family. The "Rye" in Rye End, on the other hand, means "by the water" in Anglo Saxon.

Kimpton means "homestead of Cyma", an Anglo-Saxon personal name. Wheathampstead, incidentally, is believed by some to have nothing to do with "wheat" – the first syllable being derived from "wet", due to the marshy state of the river Lea. In fact "Wettamsted", with the accent on the first syllable, is the old pronunciation.

16. WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

What might Blackmore End be like if Birley and his family had not died when they did, or had lived differently?

If the house had been sold earlier than 1926 then there might be no houses here at all - before the 1st World War there might have been a buyer for the estate as it stood. Or, if the land round Wheathampstead had been developed like that round Harpenden when the railway came then houses and estates might have spread up from there through Gustard Wood to Blackmore End. The reason they did not is that, unlike the estates at Harpenden, those round Wheathampstead – the Garrards' at Lamer, the Upton Robins' at Delaport, the Cavans' at Wheathampstead House, the Broockets' - were all occupied by their owners. It was absentee landlords that sold up at Harpenden. Perhaps if the railway line at Wheathampstead had more actively promoted its services to London, and if financial pressures or family affairs had forced the estates to realise money, things might be different.

A sale after World War Two would have run into the new Town and Country Planning Act and it is unlikely that the plot land sales that characterised the thirties would have been permitted. Perhaps an enterprising builder would have planned a large housing estate but with Hertfordshire destined for New Towns at Hatfield, Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead, it is probable that development would have directed there. And if by chance the house had survived to the present day, then its fate might have been to be converted into flats after, perhaps, a spell as a training centre or private school.

Today, we have Blackmore End, ringed by green belt but with a fair amount of infill development going on, and not so badly affected by Luton Airport (though for how long?). Perhaps the most encouraging thing to read is the recommendations to Hertfordshire County Council in the assessment of the Blackmore End Plateau: "maintain the tranquil qualities of the area. Protect the area from further active recreational facilities and built development."

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The history of Pickfords mentioned is "Traffic and Transport, an economic history of Pickfords" by Gerard L. Turnbull, published by George Allen & Unwin, 1979.

Lady Grierson's interviews can be seen on the Wheathampstead village website.

Peter Hale, April 2004

DELIGHTFUL AND BRACING



Situated on a “bracing” plateau between Wheathampstead and Kimpton in Hertfordshire, within “easy reach” of St Albans, Luton, and Welwyn Garden City, the two settlements of Blackmore End and Porters End have histories just as interesting as any traditional village.

This illustrated book tells of the nineteenth-century couple who gave the area its present shape – Richard Birley Baxendale and his wife Gertrude, nee Chichester – and how their country estate became, after their deaths, firstly a Great War hospital and then the home of a rural community with a delight in country living.

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