

What's in a name?

Old street names can be used to uncover the history of a town or village and Aylesbury street names are no exception. A few examples follow but the history of many old street or area names have been lost in time. 'Castle Street' was originally the main entrance to the Town from Thame and Oxford. The lower part (beneath the entrance to 'Parsons Fee') was originally called 'Castle Hill'. Eventually the name was shortened to 'Catt Street' giving rise to the supposition that the street was named 'Cattle Street' due to the fact that sheep and cattle were driven to the town market via this route. Was there a castle? No-one knows, as no trace has ever been uncovered.

A 'Fee' was a piece of land held as part or whole of a feudal tenure. Records of old Aylesbury mention a number of these including 'Bawd's Fee', 'Castle Fee' and 'Brand's Fee'. The only remaining survivor of this group is 'Parsons Fee' which runs from 'Castle Street' to 'Church Street', and houses the historic 'St Osyth's' house.

'Common Dunghill' was not somewhere you would want to live. This area was situated at the junction of the 'Oxford Road' and 'Whitehill' and was apparently where the offal and refuse of the town was dumped. It must have stunk to high heaven. And can you imagine the rats?

By the 7th century a system of law and order had evolved that divided a community into 'tithings', or groups of ten men, each member of which was responsible for the conduct of the other members of his group. They were also obliged to ensure that a member charged with a breach of the law would be produced in court. The groups of ten men were then clustered into units of a hundred and from this comes 'Upper Hundreds' which is the road running between 'Cambridge Street' and 'Vale Park Drive'.

'Pitches Hill' is now called 'Rickfords Hill'. 'Pitches' was an old Aylesbury name. William Rickford owned the local bank and eventually became M.P. for Aylesbury. He lived in 'Green End House'. His house was formerly owned by Dr Bates, a prominent local doctor, who is better known as a member of the infamous Hell Fire Club.

There is an old reference to a building in Aylesbury known as 'The Temple'. But it is very unlikely a temple existed. The more likely explanation is that Temple Street and Square were named as a compliment to the Temple-Grenvilles of Stowe, who strove very hard to gain political support in Aylesbury. In the 1840s the family went bankrupt and all their property in Aylesbury was sold at fire sale prices.

'Temple Street' was formerly known as 'Cobbler's Row' or 'Cordwainer's Street' and was named after the number of shoemakers residing there. This makes sense because the

animals sold in the market were killed in the nearby slaughterhouses and then the hides tanned at the tannery which also stood nearby. What must the smell have been like?

'Hog Lane' is now called 'George Street'. The original name implies a congregation of piggeries.

The road that runs down the back of 'Kingsbury' was at one time just plain 'Back Street' and a place where the occupants of 'Kingsbury' maintained their dunghills. These were jealously maintained by their owners as when matured (and very ripe) they could be sold. Now the road is called 'Buckingham Street'.

Now called 'Church Street', the former 'Broad Street' was where the doctors, solicitors and moneyed people lived. This included Thomas Hickman, the founder of the Hickman's Trust, which now provides a substantial number of alms houses to the people of Aylesbury.

The road now known as the 'Bicester Road' was once the 'Gallows Road and Corner'. Apparently 'Gallows Corner' was approximately a quarter of a mile from the town, on the west side of the road. It was here that the common gallows was situated, prior to the creation of the new drop at the County Hall.

'Water Street' or 'Waterhouse Street' was named after the horse-powered pump and cistern which was sited there. The water was pumped up from the Friarage brook and it was from this source that the original water supply for the Town was obtained. The name was changed to 'Bourbon Street' in remembrance of the residency of the Bourbon family at Hartwell House. Louis XVIII escaped Paris in 1791 during the French Revolution and moved around Europe for a number of years. Louis landed in England in October 1807 and eventually took up residence in Hartwell House, with a retinue of servants and followers that grew over time to 140.

Louis remained in residence until the British Army entered Paris and Louis was proclaimed King. Louis finally departed from Hartwell House in April 1814.

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