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The first Woman Chairman of the Berkhamsted Rural District Council, Mrs. Stella Colling-Mudge, has resigned her membership of that body as she will soon be leaving the district. She will also be giving up her positions as Governor of the Dacorum College of Further Education and as Governor of Ashlyns School.

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A TECHNICAL SCHOOL—BUT NO STREET LAMPS!

Changing Northchurch

FEW PEOPLE are acquainted with Duncombe Road, opposite St. Mary's, Northchurch. At first glance it looks like a narrow cul-de-sac, but if you go ahead you pass by several old and new cottages before turning left into Alma Road and Bell Lane, or right into Seymour Road and Darra Lane.

There is nothing to detain the artist or photographer in Duncombe Road, but like other parts of old Northchurch it can tell a few stories.

On leaving the High Street, look at the west wall of the "George and Dragon", an old coaching inn. You will see marks left by the roof of a former adjoining building. For an explanation, we must go back to the time before Northchurch Terrace, on the opposite side of Duncombe Road, was built. The red-bricked villas replaced the old village stores and three small cottages, the bedrooms of the end cottage having adjoined the inn over an archway.

THORNE'S YARD

After a fatal accident—a man on a cart struck his head on the beams—it was wisely decided to abolish the archway and leave a gap between the inn and the new villas.

Formerly, Duncombe Road was known as Thorne's Yard, taking its name from John Thorne, who lived in one of the cottages and owned several others in the yard. Knowing that women and children disliked walking in the narrow roadway after dark, he erected a large oil lamp on the house at the corner of Thorne's Yard and Alma Road, providing the oil and paying Mr. W. J. (Jimmy) Bunn to clean and light the lamp. It was the only street lamp in Northchurch—the villagers were more scared of spending money on lighting than they were of the dark—and when Mr. Thorne died no one else provided the oil. The lamp was left to rust away.

Mr. Thorne kept alive a curious annual treat for the children, known as Betty Yens' (or Jenkins') Birthday. I quote two spellings given by old residents, but it is probable that the name of the good lady was Jenks, and that she was related to the Rev. David Jenks, who was rector from 1778-93.

The "feast" was a movable one, celebrated on the Thursday after Whit

Sunday. Mr. Thorne called his neighbours' children together for a race up and down the yard, with gifts of sweets to all the entrants, and a special prize for the winner. A trifling event, yet it was something the children looked forward to, and something that is still remembered by 88 years old Miss Susan Bunn, daughter of the lamp-lighter.

THE PHEASANT

Residents not only had an inn at the bottom of Thorne's Yard (the "George and Dragon") but a public-house at the top, the "Pheasant". In Victorian times it belonged to Fosters, who kept the Swan Brewery in Chesham Road and the malthouse in Chapel Street. The "Pheasant" has been a private house since 1922, when another beer-house in Northchurch parish, the "Stag" at Gossoms End, was also closed.

Opposite the "Pheasant", Mr. Charles Maynard not only baked bread for the village but cooked Sunday dinners for many of his neighbours. After disputes about the ownership of the dinners when they came out of the huge oven, he had the various pots and dishes numbered. Now the shop window is boarded up, and the old bakery is I believe, due to be demolished.

Returning to the High Street, we need not worry about the secret tunnel from the "George and Dragon" to St. Mary's Church. This legend is as absurd as stories of underground passages from the "Swan" and "Crown" to St. Peter's Church.

PLAITING SCHOOL

In early Victorian times the "George and Dragon" had a rival almost next door, the "Anchor". Its cellars survive beneath a private house with a slightly different name, "The Anchorage."

Yet another public-house, the "Bell", is believed to have given Bell Lane its name. It is now a shop at the corner of the lane. A little doubt as to its public-house ancestry is cast by an unconfirmed statement that the shop has always been a shop, and was once kept by a family named Bell.

To complicate matters, Bell Lane was once called Gray's Lane. Beyond the shop we see a row of old cottages, one still bearing a firemark, the badge of a fire insurance company, No. 7 was once

a plaiting school—not, I believe, the only one in the village. Its main function was to teach children the old cottage craft of straw-plaiting, but at some schools reading and simple arithmetic were also taught.

FIRE DOWN BELOW!

In Northchurch, as in other Chiltern towns and villages, families plaited straw for Luton and Dunstable hat-makers. One villager remembered the chaddy or earthenware pot which was filled with glowing coals and put under mother's skirts to keep her warm while plaiting. One woman set her petticoats alight and gave up using this form of central heating.

A little farther up Bell Lane we see the small Baptist graveyard, no longer accompanied by the chapel which was used before the large church in the High Street was built. Mr. H. Davis tells me that his father was married in Bell Lane Chapel in 1885. According to his handsome family Bible, this was the first marriage solemnized in Bell Lane, though other services had been held for many years before 1885.

WHISKY AND WOODWORK

On the opposite side of Bell Lane stands Northchurch Technical Institute. One of the first evening schools in the county, it was subsidised by—whisky!

In Victorian times, technical education was assisted by means of a direct tax on whisky. The sale of every bottle helped young men to quench a different kind of thirst—a thirst for knowledge. Then, in 1902, a new Education Act was passed and the whisky tax was wound

up, the substantial residue being distributed among County Councils. Hertfordshire's share was £1,150, and of this Northchurch received £250. Berkhamsted School also benefited from the whisky tax share-out.

The late Mr. William Dell, who could already look back upon nearly fifty years' service to the village when he was elected one of the first three Northchurch members of Berkhamsted Urban Council in 1935, devoted much of his time to the Technical Institute. He was actively connected with its humble births in a barn at Durrants Farm, where woodwork classes were held as early as 1892. At the same time, drawing classes were held in the village school. The first school correspondent was the Rev. Preb. R. H. Pope, then curate of Northchurch. He was succeeded by Mr. William Dell in 1900, and his brother, Mr. Edwin Dell, has been "head" for many years.

ONE OF THE FIRST

From Durrants Farms, the classes were moved to a wooden building in Bell Lane. Then, with the promise of £250 whisky money in 1902, Mr. Dell and a few other enthusiasts raised another £100, and in a matter of months the students moved to a new two-storeyed building which is still in use. One by one new subjects were added—arithmetic, shorthand, typewriting, dressmaking, cookery, and car maintenance, as well as woodwork, ironwork and drawing. Sometimes there have been as many as eighty students.

In the first World War the woodwork

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and ironwork students supplied a vast number of wood and iron splints and bed-tables to the Forces. In the second World War, evacuated schoolchildren were taught in the Technical Institute.

Northchurch was one of the first technical schools in the country to hold woodwork classes for women, an innovation which prompted a humorous journal to ask how women would manage to go on talking with mouths full of nails.

"BEORCHAM"

(To be continued.)

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