

The Old Court House

Traffic passes through Aylburton but rarely stops. This is a shame as there would be much to interest the casual traveller if only the main road weren't there. Well I suppose we must all live and accept the world as it is.

There are no less than ten listed buildings in Aylburton including one scheduled monument (the ancient cross). One of these on the main road is a fascinating place. Roy Thomas, whom many of you will already know, gave me a 'guided tour' of it the other day. He lives in a charming listed property at 89 High Street with the name of 'The Old Court House'.



The property clearly has 16th century Tudor origins with the remains of a mullion window to the front but, more intriguing, is the interior with remains of where iron bars would have been inserted in door and window frames perhaps indicating its original purpose for the temporary incarceration of local miscreants. Many old villages had this holding facility prior to trial and sentence and, with the village pill close to a very active smuggling route, the need was obviously clear.



The interior of the Old Court House was never in fact inspected when the original grade II listing was applied. It is very likely that the original building consisted merely of the structure at the rear of the building and the front was a later addition. Certainly the thickness of walls in the middle area would tend

to confirm this assertion. The entire area inside the building is resplendent with original oak beams and the customary wind braces and frames have been lovingly restored by past and present owners.



The whole of the building with its bread oven and its nooks and crannies has a homely family atmosphere and I am assured by Roy that there are no frantic howls of old prisoners keeping him awake late at night.

Priors Mesne House

Whilst a little out of the immediate area although still in Aylburton, Priors Mesne House has a very interesting history and is now under new ownership. I hope to contribute more details in a future issue but, suffice to say, the house was the backdrop to the 1985 film 'The Assam Garden' starring Deborah Kerr and a famous wild garden with many exotic plants was created there by Henry Cook (1832-1927), an ex Surgeon General in the Indian Medical Service.

The First Lydney Hospital in Aylburton

In Aylburton High Street number 46 is a fine example of a substantial Victorian building. Built almost entirely of stone, the new owners Sharon and Jamie Cooke can be justly proud of their new acquisition but villagers might not be quite so aware of the part it played in the history of our village largely due to the philanthropy of the Bathurst family and more particularly one Mrs Mary Elizabeth Bathurst (nee Hay).



Drawing by Eric Rice



Mrs Mary Elizabeth Bathurst

In 1882 Mrs Mary Bathurst of Lydney Park who was herself crippled by paralysis conceived the idea of opening a hospital for the residents of Aylburton and Lydney. A lease at £30 a year was obtained on a house owned by Mr Joseph Taylor at the far end of

Aylburton High Street and the 'Cottage Hospital' was opened there on October 11th 1882.

The Reverend J J Trollope, Vicar of Lydney, officiated at the opening ceremony. It was apparently a memorable day and the culmination of the considerable effort expended by Mrs Bathurst.



Strenuous efforts were made in the early days. Medical staff were recruited and in 1885, 27 in-patients were being treated and according to records all but four were cured. Unfortunately Mary Bathurst died in 1885 so she only saw the fruits of her labours for a limited time. The hospital was supported by

much in the way of charitable donations raised by many local events and the participation of the various local churches of all denominations. Within 10 years the number of in-patients had risen to 264 and a thousand or more out-patients had been treated.

Patients came from a wide area including Alvington, Woolaston, Tidenham, Hewelsfield, St.Briavels, Parkend, Yorkley, Pillowell, Whitecroft, Coleford and Sharpness. For several years it was



clear that a new bespoke hospital was needed for the area and the new Lydney hospital was built on the Bream Road and the foundation stone laid on 2nd November 1907. The Aylburton hospital was closed and the new Lydney hospital was to take a leading and invaluable role in the 1914/18 Great War.

Footnote:

For further reading an excellent small book was published by The Friends of Lydney Hospital and written by R A J Bell.