

Little Common in the Past

*[by Wendy Boorman, a former resident of Little Common
and who used to run the local Brownie Group]*

Early days...

In **772AD** King Offa granted some high ground surrounded by an area of marshes to a Saxon chief named Byrna. A piece of land in those days was known as a tongue or horn so Bryna's land became Byrnahornan or Barnhorn and a farm was settled here.

Cooden came about in the same way after a Saxon called Codigis was granted land further to the south by the sea.

In **1066** there were a few isolated houses scattered round the area but no village as a lot of the ground was still very marshy. At that time Cooden was known as Coding. About this time there were some very big storms after which the land began to dry up.

In **1588** the Wheatsheaf was first built as a staging post between Hastings and Brighton.

In the 19th Century...

By 1800 a village known as Slyders Common had built up with a big triangular green which was common land and used for grazing purposes. The Wheatsheaf Inn was across from this and there was also a blacksmiths forge owned by the Crocker family and a wheelwrights shop owned by the Dick family. The village pond supplied water to both of these. From the green there were cart tracks, one leading to Cooden Down and the sea, another to Barnhorn and a third to Bexhill this is now The Twitten, it went through St Mark's present church yard and past Kewhurst House which was then Lloyd's Signal Station.

England was at war with France and soldiers were stationed near Slyders Common. In 1805 the Sussex Weekly Advertiser reported that a soldier had been murdered and his body found on a little common, from then on Slyders Common was known as Little Common and from 1813 it appeared as such on Ordnance Survey maps.

At this time farming was the main occupation but it did not pay as well as smuggling. Little Common had one of the best known smuggling gangs in East Sussex, they were led by a family of respectable builders and carpenters, the Gilham family. Thomas Gillham had moved to Little Common about 1765 from Marden in Kent, he married Elizabeth Smith at St Peters Church in 1768. Thomas built two cottages 1 and 2 The Twitten about 1804 and left one to his son John when he died in 1829. Later generations of Gillhams lived at Peach Cottage in the Twitten and The Ark was their carpenters shop. Peach Cottage had many hidey holes and there was one on either side of the door, they were lined with bricks with a trap door over the top covered with soil and a tub containing a bush placed on top of them. Goods were placed in here if the soldiers came looking. One day they came without warning

and old Mrs Gillham sat on a barrel of brandy spread out her skirts over it and started knitting, needless to say when they searched the house they found nothing. There are many stories about the smugglers one being that once when they were caught they were locked in a Martello tower. They picked at the mortar between the stones and made a hole big enough to escape through except one who was too fat. Another is how Gillham wood got its name, it is said that Mr Gillham was so scared of the soldiers one day that he ran away and hid in the woods, hence the name Gillham Wood.

The Gillhams traded as builders from 1803-1960, Stephen Gillham lived and traded from Peach Cottage and built the original Church Institute, his brother William had a shop now Anne Marie wedding shop and brother Thomas had a jewellers shop in Church hill. Stephens's sons Harry and George traded as H & G Gillham from Cowdengate, Cooden Sea Road; until they ceased trading in 1960 it is now Gaby Hardwicks office.

Let's take a walk round the village...

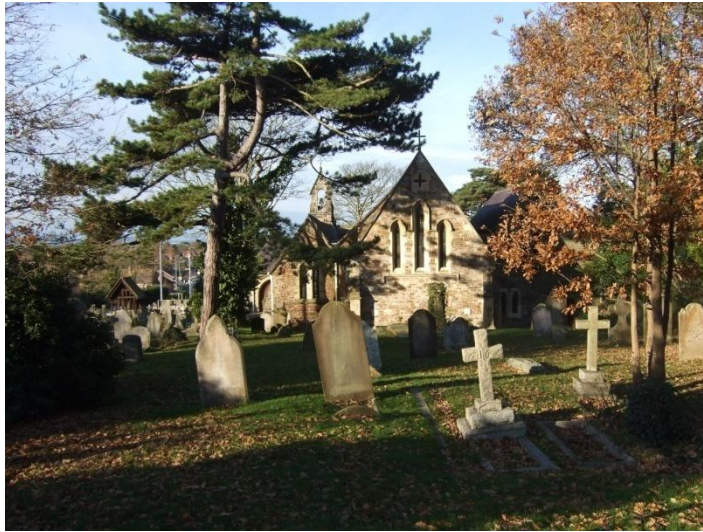
We will start at St Mark's Church; this was built in 1842 from material which came from the demolished Martello tower no 42 at Bulverhythe. It was brought by sea to Cooden Sea Lane, now Road and then taken by cart to the church site.

St Mark's was a chapel of ease to St Peters and was enlarged in 1885 and again in 1931 to keep up with the growing population. The Rectory was built to the north east of the church in 1877 and during the second world war was used by the government and the Rector the Rev Standish moved into the curates house at 8 Meades Road, later known as St Mark's Lodge.

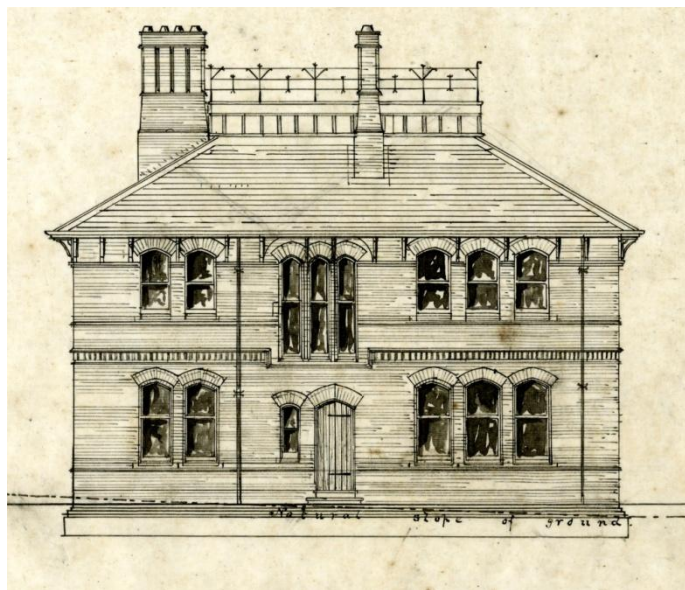
In September 1964 the Rectory and glebe, about 2.5 acres, was sold at auction to the Bexhill Borough Council for £9,850 to be used for sheltered housing. St Marks Close and Alexander Court were built on the site.



St Mark's 1870



St Mark's today



The Rectory 1878



The entrance to the Rectory

What is now the car park housed the Church of England school; on 13th June 1854 Sir Augustus Webster, Lord of the manor of Barnhorn gave waste land to the west side of the church for a school to be built. Material from the cliffs at Hastings was brought by sea to build the school and it was opened on 1st January 1855 having cost £323 17s 4d to build. It was enlarged in 1863 to provide a masters house and again in 1890. The school closed in 1960 and was demolished in 1967 making way for the car park.



St Marks Church of England School



Demolition of St Marks School 1967

Where the hall now stands was the Church Institute built by Stephen Gillham in 1912, this was after an appeal from the Rector and Churchwardens for a building to promote the spiritual, moral, and social good of the parishioners.

The site was given by the Rector Rev Neville Shaw out of the glebe for a nominal sum of £5. It cost a total of £865 1s 5d and opened on 9th October 1912.



Children outside the Institute



A party to celebrate the end of the war

Extensive modernisation and restoration and repairs were carried out from March 1986 to July 1988 thanks to a generous donation from Meg Walker a choir member. In 2008 plans were passed for the present hall and it was opened on 12th December 2009 by the Bishop of Lewis Wallace Benn.

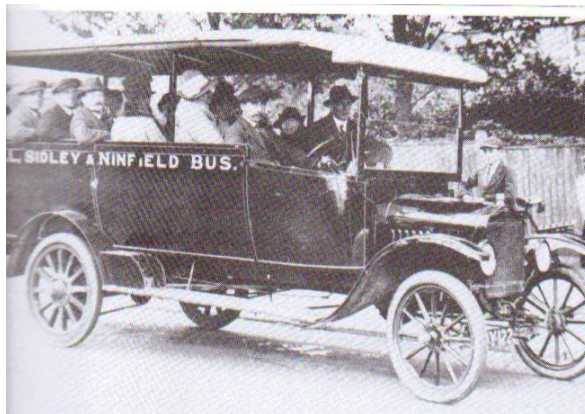


The Church Institute later known as the Church Hall



The present Church Hall

Leaving the car park you will see a block of flats, Church hill Court, in front of you. This was once the site of a bus garage, Carter and Lidstone Ltd, who in 1919 ran buses to outlying parts of Bexhill, Hooe, Catsfield and Battle. In 1926 they were bought out by Maidstone and District Bus Co who kept the garage until 1927 when they opened a new one in Terminus Road. The site later became a dye works and laundry by the name of London Valet Service, in 1962 it is shown on the map as a laundry.



Carter and Lidstone Bus



Church Hill Court site of old bus station

Let us now walk down The Twitten, the oldest thoroughfare in Little Common.

In the 1790's grants to build on the common here were granted and two pairs of cottages were built in 1804.



Twitten Cottage



Twitten Cottage today, built 1804 and..... April Cottage today built between 1808 and 1840

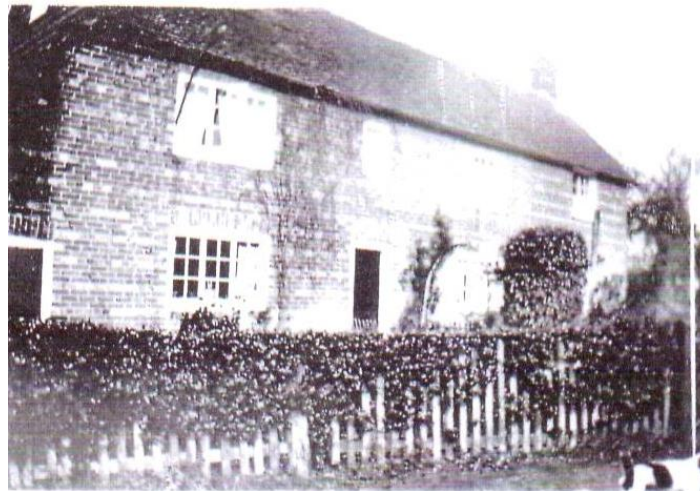


1 and 2 Twitten Cottages today, built as one cottage about 1804 and later divided into two

Six more houses were built in the 1930s but Peach Cottage was built in the 18th century and is the oldest. The Gillham family lived here for 150 years. It had a mangle house attached to it where the local women would bring their washing to be mangled on a large mangle which had three big wooden polished rollers about five feet long and six inches in diameter.



PEACH COTTAGE, LITTLE COMMON
From an old photograph



Gillham Family outside Peach Cottage



The Mangle House later became a garage



Peach Cottage today

Next to Peach Cottage is Mary Croft formally known as Eden Cottage this was built in 1830 and Richard Elliott, who owned Elliott's stores, lived here with his family. It is now owned by Dr Sheena Ashby and let for holidays.



Mary Croft with its own entrance



Peach Cottage and Mary Croft today

Opposite Peach Cottage is the old Gillham carpenters workshop now called the Ark. It was built by and owned by James Gillham and is shown on the 1840 tithe map. It remained in the Gillham family until 1960 when the firm of G and S Gillham was wound up. From then until 2002 it was used by a variety of people for mainly light industry. Dr Sheena Ashby then purchased it and had extensive renovations carried out for it to be used as an office and pop in centre for St Mark's Church and was dedicated by the Rev J Edmondson on the 2nd November 2003 in a torrential downpour fitting to its name. When the new Church Hall was opened in 2009 the office and pop-in centre moved into it leaving the Ark vacant. It was let to an architect for two years and then once again went through extensive alterations to become a holiday let.



Carpenters workshop



THE INTERIOR OF CARPENTER'S WORKSHOP, Little Common, earlier this century.

Inside the workshop



The Ark Pop-in Centre and Church Office



Chatting in the pop-in centre



In the Office



The Ark today





Interior of today's Ark

At the end of The Twitten where Pear Tree Court now stands was "Strides Castle"; this was the first village stores and was owned by Robert Stride and his wife Mary Elliott; they married at Hooe in 1818. They sold everything from bacon to women's clothes, from black treacle to shoe oil. It was called Strides Castle because he owned a bit of green in front of it a pond and Cannons Cottage formally Lloyds Bank and now being turned into a clinic. Cannons Cottage was named because about 1850 a Major Armstrong was demonstrating to the war office a new cannon, on this bit of green, firing at a Martello Tower in Normans Bay.

On Robert Strides death in 1855 the stores were left to his nephew Alfred Leaney Elliott and became known as Elliott's Stores still stocking everything you could think of and the first Post and Telegraph Office were also here. Alfred's widow and then his son Richard ran the store after his death in 1889 followed by his widow in 1922 and their sons Alfred and Edward after her death in 1937, until they closed it later that year and it was pulled down.

Elliotts Stores had oil lamps hanging from the ceiling and two counters with a central aisle. On one side were haberdashery and the other grocery. There were steps up to the door and bare floorboards inside, some badly worn; there was a stool for customers to use and the store was open until 8pm. Gunpowder, clay pipes and nails were sold alongside butter, tea and broken biscuits; you could even get your puncture mended there.

Richard Elliott is remembered, in an article in the Bexhill Observer 1961, as a tall, lean, grave but kindly bewhiskered man who knew what was in every drawer which covered the walls of his shop. He never became wealthy because he secretly helped those whose earnings were small but whose families were large. He was also lenient with the sick and aged and those who could not pay. On Sundays he would be seen dressed in his best black suit going to the Wesleyan Chapel where he was deacon.



Elliott's Stores 1936



The site of Elliott's Stores today – Pear Tree Court

Across the road in what is now Adams Electrical, Richards's brother Robert ran the village bakery for many years until it was sold to Mr Sherrington, also a baker



The bakery now Adams Electrical

The Post Office is now in its fifth position; starting in Elliott's stores it then moved in 1900 to Brookfield in Church Hill, which was a large double fronted house built for Robert Elliott. It had a small extension built on the side for the Post Office and Mrs Elliott took in paying guests. By 1910 it moved again to Cannon Cottage where a lean to building fronting Church Hill had been built for it enclosed by a picket fence. This was called New Jansi and Mrs White was the post mistress. Its next move was to Southdown House 20 Cooden Sea Road which was originally a butchers shop next door to the Lynmouth Dairy. In the 1930s it moved to Pear Tree Lane where it is today.



Post Office at New Jansi Church Hill 1910



Post Office at 20 Cooden Sea Road in 1912

You can see the pond opposite



The Post Office today

What is now the roundabout was the village green with the Wheatsheaf on one side; this had extensive alterations about 1878 but has remained the same since.

Some of the original building can be found on the inside.



The Wheatsheaf before its alterations



The Bexhill Harriers outside the Wheatsheaf



The Wheatsheaf today

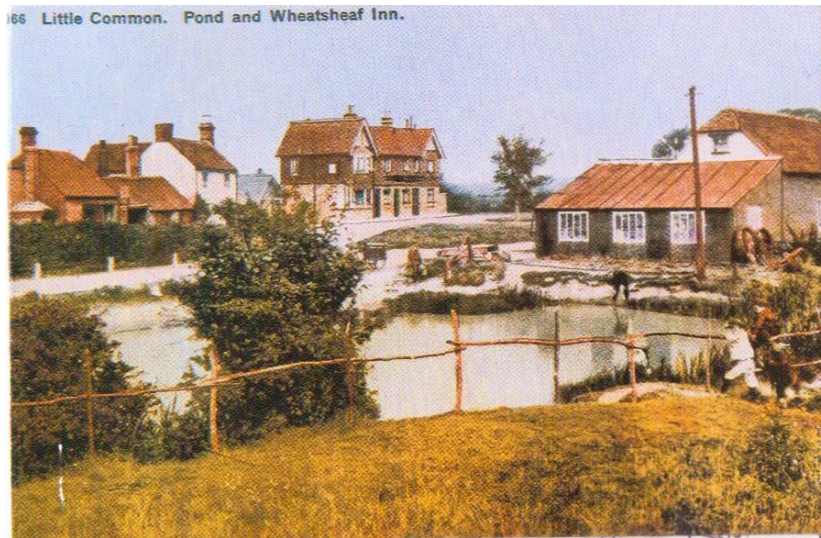
Across the track now, Barnhorn Road ,was the Forge and Forge Cottage; this was owned by Mr Crocker.



The Forge with Mr Crocker standing on the left



These pictures show the Forge, Wheatsheaf , the pond and the Wheelwrights.



Today Bibby's Tea Rooms stand on the site of the Forge

Next came Pond Cottages which used to flood when the pond overflowed, two shops then Freshwater Cottages, 2 Freshwater Cottages became the Reading and Recreation Room in 1907 and was open between 6 and 10pm every day. Freshwater Cottages were demolished in 1973/74 to make way for Colliers Court. After this was a house sideways on and then the Methodist turf Chapel, this was the first church in Little Common built in 1837 at the junction of Meades Road and Cooden Sea Road where MC Glass is today. It was replaced in 1859 with a brick built one at a cost of £62. The present Methodist Chapel in Shepherds Close was built in 1926.



Pond Cottages



On the right are Pond Cottages and on the left are Freshwater Cottages



The site of the Methodist Chapel

Walking from Meades Road along Cooden Sea Road were Meadside and Holmwood no's 40 and 42. These were demolished in 1970 to build the supermarket. The next two pairs of houses were built by J W Webb, 44 Brentwood and 46 Farley, this was the second site of the telephone exchange moving there in 1925 from no 68.



The next two shops 48 and 50 were built in 1963

54 Cooden Sea Road, now Reynolds Hardware, was built in 1880 as a shop and dwelling by William Gillham and it had a stable and cart shed at the rear. An extension was added in 1937 to lengthen the shop. For many years this was a grocers shop run by Mr B Duke and later Hills.



54 Cooden Sea Road today formally a shop with a stable and cart shed at the rear

56 Cooden Sea Road was called Laburnhum Cottage and later Cowdengate; this was built before 1840 and a fisherman John Barnes lived here for many years at the turn of the century and later Harry and George Gilham traded from here. It was built sideways on and in recent years the solicitors have had an entrance and porch built facing the main road.



56 Cooden Sea Road today

58/60 Cooden Sea Road were built in 1937 by H. Gilham on land owned by the family; they were originally called Mabran and Sarre.



58 and 60 Cooden Sea Road today

62/64 were built in 1902 by William Gilham Snr in the garden of 56 and were known as Providence Cottages.



62 and 64 today

66 Little Cottage, was built in 1956 once again in the garden of 56.



66 Cooden Sea Road today

68/72- this semi detached pair were not built at the same time; the taller one was built in 1891 by William Gilham as a detached cottage known as High Hedges and was later added to in 1914 for Thomas Gilham who was a jeweller and watchmaker to use as a workshop with rooms over. This was called Sunnyside and was where the first telephone exchange was situated in the sitting room, one switchboard and operating position operated by twin Gilham sisters May and Lillian. This moved to Farley House, 46 Cooden sea Road on 27th May 1925 and in 1963 a purpose built exchange was opened in Meades Road.



St Leonard's glass today was the first telephone exchange

The next pair of cottages were known as 1 & 2 Vernon Cottages and were built about 1880, 76 had an extension in 1986 for the chiropodist's surgery and I believe this is now 78.



74,76 and 78 Cooden Sea Road today

Where the Doctors surgery now stands was the Lodge, St Faiths Lodge, to the Little Folks Home or St Faiths Home. This was a convalescent Home for children with TB etc and today Mansell Close has been built on this area.



St Faiths Lodge



The Doctors Surgery today leading to Mansell Close

We will now come back towards the crossroads.

St Martha's Catholic Church was built in 1939; on this site originally was a Tudor House but I can find no details or photos at the present time. We continue on across fields until we get to the pond and Mr Dicks Wheelwrights. In more recent years shops have been built and today there is a new supermarket with flats above.



St Maratha's Catholic Church



These two shops with four flats above were built in 1964



The site of the Nat West Bank was the fire station from 1942-1944. The Nat West took over the site in 1974



Where these shops now stand was the site of Cooden House built in 1923



What is now the new Tesco Supermarket was once the site of Croker Forge , then Carter and Viner, which was demolished in 1970 leaving the main building and later became a garage

Crossing Church Hill Avenue we see in front of us The Property Cafe which was once the Dairy and this parade of shops has had several occupants over the years including butchers, paper shop and sweetshop



Church Hill Avenue



Property Cafe today



This parade of shops has had many different occupiers, butchers, sweet and paper shop to name a few.

We continue round and what is now a betting shop was the Crossways tea rooms formally the Wheelwrights owned by Mr Dicks. The pond ran from here to what is now Two Trees and was filled in when Walton Park was built about 1920.



LITTLE COMMON

The Crossways Tea rooms with the memorial



Once a tea room now a betting shop

Back to the roundabout, the former village green and the war memorial unveiled in 1920



Service to unveil the war memorial on 21st November 1920

We will continue up Church Hill on the left where the former Lloyds Bank, now a clinic, is situated would have been Cannons Cottage, already mentioned and past this Thornleigh with a later addition; this was once a house built for the Gillhams and is now Anne Marie Bridal shop.



Thornleigh today

Next we have a block of five terraced houses built in 1885 by William Gillham. Walter Mitten lived in the second one and ran his cycle business from here. Thomas Gillham had his watch and jewellery shop in the fourth one along until he moved to Cooden Sea Road.

A cottage named Black Cottage was used as the first Little Common Reading Room and Working Men's Club in 1890 it was open from 7-10pm



The houses today

The next block of five houses two semi detached and one detached were built in 1903.



The houses today

The last house before Green Lane is called Brookfield and was built for Robert Elliott in 1900 it had a small extension built to accommodate the post office and Mrs Elliott took in paying guests. It is now flats.



Brook field today.

We are now back to St Marks our starting point.

ophone: COODEN 1

LITTLE COMMON TRADERS ASSOCIATION

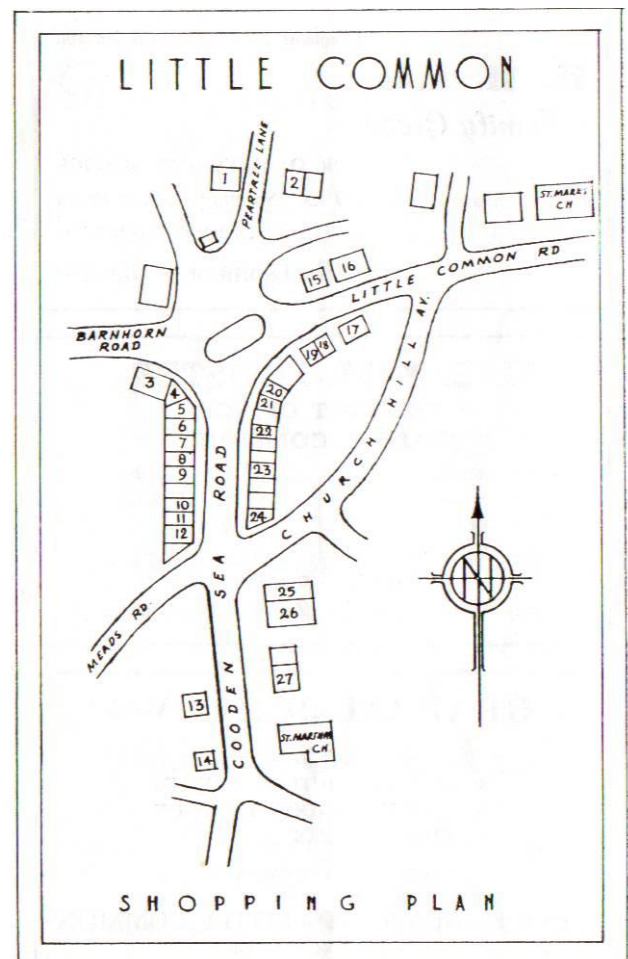
20 COODEN SEA ROAD
BEXHILL-ON-SEA

Executive Officers:

Chairman .. A. PRAEGER Treasurer .. FRANK WALTER
Vice-Chairman .. H. G. VINER Secretary .. G. E. FEWSTER

MEMBER BUSINESSES

Shopping Plan No.	Title	Business	Tel.: Cooden
1	FRANK WALTER & SONS	Television & Electrical ..	417
2	SYLVIA & D'ALBY	Scalp Specialist, Modern Stylist & Cutting Specialist	3047
3	COODEN ENGINEERING CO. LTD.	Motor Engineers, Vauxhall Dealers ..	210
4	ORCHARDS	Television, Radio, Cycles ..	2912
5	WESTMINSTER BANK LTD.	Bankers ..	521
6	THE LOFT TEA ROOMS	Cafe, Morning Coffee, Luncheons & Teas	
7	HENRY EARL	Baker & Confectioner ..	168
8	D. LYNDON JONES	Chemists, Cosmetics, Photography ..	3080
9	POST OFFICE	Stationers ..	1
10	MURDOCH & ISTD	Chartered Auctioneers & Estate Agents ..	2603
11	ELSA	Ladies' Hair Stylist ..	660
12	CHEALS	Newsagent, Tobacco, Confectionery ..	305
13	H. H. HILL	High-class Grocer, Wine & Spirit Merchant ..	108
14	KNITCRAFT WOOL SHOP	Wools & Embroidery ..	2925
15	LLOYDS BANK LTD.	Bankers ..	31
16	CHURCHILL DRAPERY	Children's Wear, Drapery & Wool ..	342
17	JOHN A. SHEPPARD	Family Butcher ..	112
18	THE FARM SHOP	Greengrocers ..	579
19	THORPE TATE & CO. LTD.	Surgical & Bespoke Boot-makers & Repairers ..	494
20	TOMMY TUCKER	Tobacco, Sweets & Stationery	
21	MIDLAND BANK LTD.	Bankers ..	443
22	RICHES & GRAY	Chartered Auctioneers & Estate Agents ..	2939
23	GRAHAM BURROWS	Gowns, Drapery, Men's Wear ..	541
24	MANOR FARM DAIRY	Dairy Produce & Groceries	23
25	CROCKERS	Hardware & Domestic Store	359
26	CARTER & VINER	Motor Engineers, Rootes Agents ..	143
27	MELLUISH	Library, Toys, Confectionery & Tobacco	



Little Common shops in 1959

I do hope you have enjoyed your walk back in time, please look at the maps and those who would like to take a real walk round the village may do so with different eyes.