

# PRIMROSE HILL: a lost delight

by Eileen M. Bowlt

What a charming name, but one that can no longer be found on maps of this area.

John Millichip's painting (see p 28) depicts old Primrose Hill Farm that stood at Great King's End, some way behind The White Bear PH, until the mid-1960s. The area at the junction of three ancient roads, Sharps Lane, Wood Lane and Ickenham Road, was known as Great King's End Green.<sup>1</sup> The avenue called King's End is relatively new, having been driven from Ruislip Station through fields called Wythycrofts or Widdicuts, only in 1906, to provide building plots on land belonging to King's College. The pretty name, Primrose Hill, was in use by Victorian times, but no earlier references have been found. The cart track leading from Wood Lane to the farm buildings is now called Chichester Avenue.

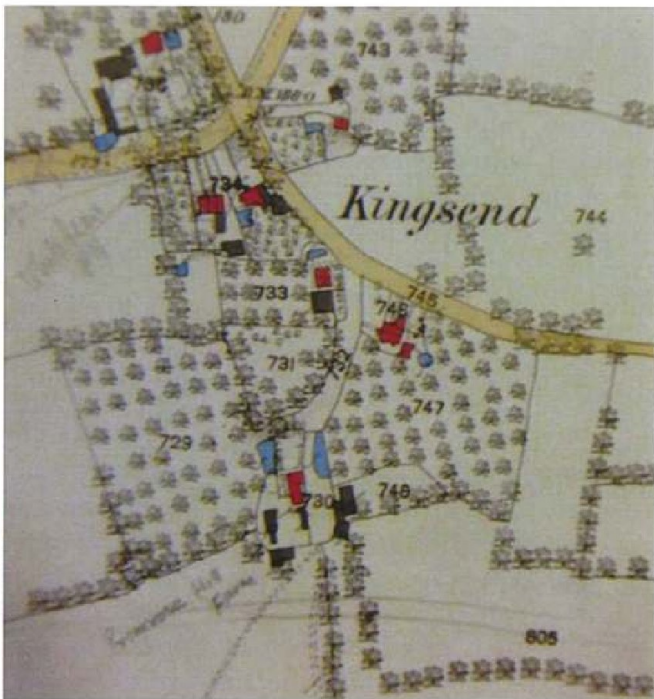


Fig 1 - Primrose Hill Farm, 1865 25" OS map

Primrose Hill Farmhouse is the red building marked 730. Barns, sheds, stables etc are dark brown. There are two ponds at the entrance to the farmyard. John Millichip seems to have been painting within the open shed opposite the farmhouse. The cluster of cottages on the corner of Wood Lane, now called Tudor, Laurel and

Primrose Cottages are labelled 746. There is another very small detached cottage to the east of Laurel Cottage and a larger one east of Tudor Cottage.

## *The Primrose Hill area in the days of Elizabeth 1*

There seem to have been two homesteads on the airy hilltop in 1565. The Terrier<sup>ii</sup> made by King's College in that year shows Agnes Priste as the owner of the house that became Primrose Hill Farm, but then known as Hodge Hammonds. Fourteen acres of pasture land in three closes spreading down the other side of the hill to the border with Ickenham, and an orchard went with the house.

The Terrier also says that Richard Nelham owned a cottage 'lying north against Wood Lane', a description that fits the building now divided into three homes, Tudor Cottage, Primrose Cottage and Laurel Cottage on the corner of Chichester Avenue and Wood Lane. There was a six acre close beside the cottage and 46 sellions (strips) of land in the common fields of Westcote that went with it. The Tudor Cottage section is timber-framed and dates from the 16th century, but the other two are additions of the 18th and 19th century respectively.

## PRIMROSE HILL FARM



Fig 2a - Primrose Hill Farm  
at the turn of the 19th/20th century





**Fig 2b - Primrose Hill Farm**

The low building with the porch has a Tudor chimneys and the visible upper window embrasure is immediately below the eaves, typical of a house built c.1600. It appears to be part of a lobby-entrance house, half of which has been demolished and replaced with the single storey timber-framed addition on the left on the same footprint. Like all houses of that date in this area the roof is tiled. The ground floor window has been altered and is obscured by creeper. The wing is too high to have been contemporary with the main house, but a line of brick a foot or so below the eaves (see Fig 2b) might indicate that the roof has been raised at some time. This could be a Victorian addition or a rebuild of an earlier wing.

The lobby-entry plan, where the entrance door opens into a lobby at the side of a central chimney, became common from the beginning of the 17th century. Bury Street Farm, originally a hall and crosswing style house, had the hall demolished and rebuilt as a lobby-entrance c.1600. Something similar perhaps happened to Agnes Priste's house, sometime after 1600.

The exact date of and reason for the alterations cannot be determined. Part of the house could have been damaged, possibly by fire, or fallen into a state of disrepair, or the owner

may have simply desired a more fashionable dwelling. From Court Books and surveys Primrose Hill Farm (Hodge Hammonds) remained with the Priste/Priest family until the end of the 17th century, when it passed to John Crosier of Ickenham between 1685 and 1707<sup>iii</sup>. The marriage of Elizabeth Stafford Crosier to Edward Hilliard, a lawyer in 1779, led eventually to a great deal of land descending to the Hilliards, so that the Ruislip Enclosure Map and Award (1806 and 1814)<sup>iv</sup> show Edward Hilliard senior owning Primrose Hill Farm, along with practically all the land on the south side of Wood Lane.

### *Who lived at Primrose Hill Farm?*

The people whose names appear in the Terrier, Court Books and the Enclosure Award, are the owners of the properties. The Terrier gives a fairly clear picture of the proprietors in the parish of Ruislip, but does not reveal who lived in the individual houses. Twenty-two people owned more than one cottage or messuage, so clearly some renting and leasing was in progress. Agnes Priste, who was a widow, also owned Kemps Hale, a cottage and meadow in the corner of Wood Lane and West End Road, where Master's Court and Sherley's Court now stand.



She could have lived at either property. The Crosiers and Hilliards were very large landowners, based at Cowley House and certainly did not live in Ruislip and we have to discover the names of their tenants from parish rate books and census returns. John Bray was Edward Hilliard's tenant at Primrose Hill Farm in 1806<sup>v</sup>.

William Weedon was farming at Primrose Hill by 1851 and with his wife brought up a family of ten children there. They were all living at home in 1861 and comprised the largest family in the parish, as shown in the census returns of that year. William had been succeeded by his son, Walter, in 1881 and three years later, Edwin Ewer of Wilkins Farm (another Hilliard property) took over the tenancy of Primrose Hill and Field End Farm on West End Road as well, while continuing to live at Wilkins Farm on the High Street (Tesco now on the site) until his death in 1914.

### *A laundry at Primrose Hill?*

During the ensuing years, when the farmhouse was not needed for a farmer, it was evidently rented out. It might even have been a laundry for a time. The 1891 census shows Thomas and Emma Blakemore living there with seven children, the two youngest, a baby and a two-year-old, both having been born in Ruislip. The family had previously moved around the country as older children had been born in Sheffield and Surrey. Thomas was a proprietor of a laundry and Emma his assistant. Did they run a laundry at Primrose Hill? It would be quite feasible, having plenty of outbuildings to house equipment and ample drying space, but where were the customers? The five Young sisters ran a laundry at 1 Cambridge Villas in the High Road, Eastcote from 1899 until 1939, but there were more gentry living in that part of the parish to use such services.

The Blakemores had gone by 1901, when two families seem to have been sharing the farmhouse, those of Thomas Collins and George Weedon. Both men gave their occupation as 'Carter on farm'.

### *An exotic interlude*

For a few weeks in 1893 William Nicholson who later became the famous artist, lodged at Primrose Hill Farm. He was about to marry another artist, Mabel Pryde, at St Martin's and he

was establishing a residential qualification so that banns could be called. The marriage was solemnised by the Rev Thomas Marsh Everett on the 25 April and witnessed by Daniel Collins and Charlotte Weedon.<sup>vi</sup> Neither bride nor groom had local connections. William Newsam Prior Nicholson was from Newark and his bride from Edinburgh, where her father had been headmaster of a Ladies College. The couple had met at Hubert von Herkomer's School of Art at Bushey four years earlier. They are said to have eloped together. After the ceremony they moved to Denham and were joined shortly afterwards by the bride's brother James Pryde and another couple who had also recently eloped, Edward Craig (Ellen Terry's son) and his new wife.<sup>vii</sup> The Nicholson's four children included the well-known artist, Ben Nicholson and Nancy who became the wife of Robert Graves.

His period at Primrose Hill Farm coincided with William Nicholson's experimenting with printmaking and his earliest known print is entitled Primrose Hill Farm.

### *The Ewers*

Edwin Ewer of Wilkins Farm on Ruislip High Street was a tenant of the Hilliards. The 1902 Ruislip Parish Rate Book<sup>viii</sup> shows that he had become the owner of several Hilliard properties, including Primrose Hill Farm. His son, Edwin Shatford Ewer, married in 1910 and a new house was built for him and his bride at Primrose Hill, designed by F.H. Mansford, an architect who had built the first house in the new King's End Avenue.

The original farmhouse retained its name, and the new house was simply known as Primrose Hill. Colin Gooderson, grandson of Daniel Collins said that the new house was known as 'The Big House', although the old farmhouse was later known as Primrose Hill Cottage.<sup>ix</sup> Sadly no picture has so far been found of the new house.

The 1927 King's Gazette Directory, places Primrose Hill in Wood Lane. It looks as if Primrose Hill was losing its identity. The Ewers were in their house and Daniel Collins and Charlotte Weedon were living at the old farmhouse, which may have been divided into two cottages. The area was sometimes referred to as 'the Garden of Weedon'; there were so many members of that family living in the vicinity.



Mr Ewer died in 1955 and his widow sold the farm to Glaxo to be used as a farm. After a time Glaxo moved to a farm in Breakspear Road for their experimental work and sold Primrose Hill Farm to Wimpey. All the old buildings were swept away and the present estate was built in 1965.

### **TUDOR, PRIMROSE & LAUREL COTTAGES**

Tudor Cottage could have been the house owned by Richard Nelham in 1565.



**Fig 3 - From the left, Laurel, Primrose and Tudor Cottages, garage and early 1970s houses**

Tudor Cottage has the queen posts and collar beam exposed in the front gable, but the tie beam upon which the posts stand is hidden. The door and porch are not part of the original building. The original main door would have fronted Wood Lane as the door of Primrose Cottage does in this picture.



**Fig 4 - Rear of Tudor Cottage in 1936  
The gable end in the picture above is on the left**

Timber framing is exposed on the long south wall and there is a fine chimney at the western end. The chimney attached to the gable is

a late 17th century addition. The crosswing at the eastern end was originally built with an overhanging upper floor, according to the inspector from the Ancient Monuments' Board who visited in 1936, and was underbuilt with 18th century bricks. The underbuilding, apparently whitewashed, can be seen on the right of the photograph. Underbuilding a jetty was one way of increasing the floor space of the ground floor and was done at the Almshouses on Eastcote Road. Tudor Cottage was almost certainly originally been a two-bay house, one room thick, with a jettied crosswing.

There are some well -preserved trusses (tie beam, queen post and collar beam) both in the main house and the crosswing. A window embrasure with mullions intact survives upstairs in the long north wall, which also has braces,

In the mid-18th century, the house was almost doubled in size by the building of what is now **Primrose Cottage**, which retains sash windows c.1740, creating a much more substantial house. Other local houses had fashionable changes made to their frontages in the 18th century. The Old House at the bottom of Bury Street had its timber frame covered with stucco, but the rear resembles the back of Tudor Cottage.



**Fig 5 - Rear of the Old House,  
Bury Street in the 1930s**

**Laurel Cottage** is a very small Victorian addition, which has been slightly extended in recent times.

The house was owned by William Anderson at the time of the Ruislip Enclosure (Map 1806, Award 1814)<sup>x</sup>. It has not been possible to trace the descent from Richard Nelham in 1565. There is no suggestion in the Award that the house was divided into two cottages at that time.



By 1837 the building was owned by James Weatherly<sup>xi</sup> who occupied it himself. Again only the one house is mentioned. However, perhaps the Laurel Cottage addition was made and the rest of the house divided into Primrose and Tudor Cottages between 1837 and 1851, because three households headed respectively by John Weedon, an agricultural labourer, John Weatherley and John Collett who were both hay binders were established there at the time of the 1851 census. The 1857 Ratebook<sup>xii</sup> specifically describes the building as three cottages. William Weedon, the tenant farmer at Primrose Hill Farm, was then owner of the three cottages and continued to let them to hay binders and agricultural labourers.

The three households there at the time of the 1901 census were headed by Richard Keen, a hay dealer; William French, a Police Constable; and John Kirby, a carter on a farm.

The coming of the railway to Ruislip in 1904 opened up new jobs for people who would otherwise have worked as farm labourers. Charles Martin, who was in Laurel Cottage by 1911, was a Platelayer on the Metropolitan Railway. The Martins stayed there and Miss Margaret Martin lived her whole life at Laurel Cottage, dying in the late 1980s.<sup>xiii</sup>

Street directories, including Kemp's Ruislip -Northwood Directory that began in 1956, refer to the cottages as Wood Lane Cottages and Laurel Cottages at different times. Tudor and Primrose Cottages seem to be late names appearing around the 1960s.



**Fig 6 - Primrose Hill on the 1914 25" OS map  
Shatford Ewer's new house is number 752**

*What a pity that so attractive a place name  
should have disappeared so completely.*

<sup>i</sup> King's College Archives (KCAR): RUI/450 Doharty's Map of King's College Demesne 1750

<sup>ii</sup> KCAR: RUI/182 (Terrier 1565)

<sup>iii</sup> British Library: Add MS 9367 (Court Book of the Manor of Ruislip) and Add MS 9368, fol. 198, (Survey 1685)

<sup>iv</sup> London Metropolitan Archives (LMA): MR /DE RUI E2 1-2 (Enclosure Map and award)

<sup>v</sup> LMA: DRO 19 E2/21 (Ruislip Parish Rate Books)

<sup>vi</sup> LMA: DRO 19/A1

<sup>vii</sup> Mainly from Wikipedia

<sup>viii</sup> Transcript in Local History Room, Manor Farm

<sup>ix</sup> Letter from Colin Gooderson to author, 22 July 1982

<sup>x</sup> LMA: MR /DE RUI E2 1-2 (Enclosure Map and award)

<sup>xi</sup> LMA: DRO 19 E3/2 (Ruislip Valuation 1837)

<sup>xii</sup> LMA: DRO 19 E2/39 (Ruislip Parish Rate Book)

<sup>xiii</sup> Information from Mr & Mrs Pride of Tudor Cottage

