

Our Parish History

(Compiled by Arthur Jeffery)

The word Ashurst means 'ash wooded hill' and this name also occurs in the Kent & Sussex Weald where, co-incidentally, charcoal burning created 'ash' of a different sort. The Colbury name may have originated from Cola Hunter, a local Saxon Farmer. Cola's settlement, Cola's Burg or his burial plot "Cola Bury" may possibly be the source of the name - Colbury.

When, in AD 48, Vespasian, the future Emperor of Rome, led the 2nd Legion westward along the south coast of England, subduing rebellious natives as he went there was no resistance here in Ashurst and Colbury. Nobody was here to resist.

However, by AD 495 the Saxon invaders, Cerdic and Cynric, encountered settlements west of the River Test led by Prince Natonleod (hence Netley Marsh?). Much later during the Saxon period, farmland was cleared at Langley by Wulfgent, who gifted this particular area to his son, Cola Hunter, for ploughing and also for pasture, mainly for pigs.

Ashurst Wood was where timber was systematically burnt for the production of saltpetre, which in Tudor times was the raw material for gunpowder. Saltpetre was also used for tanning leather



(animal hides). The location of the Saltpetre House is west of the modern Ashurst campsite, just short of the Ashurst Lodge road.

Reference to Colbury in writing can be traced to the 1230's when monks at the Cistercian Beaulieu Abbey received a gift of land from a certain Robert de Punchardon. The said land was described as "some tenements at Colbury". Shortly afterwards, Herbert de la Buri granted more land at Colbury



to Beaulieu Abbey. Another twelve acres nearby was gifted by Herbert Faber of Rumbridge. Thus, the Abbey slowly built up the tithing or Manor of Colbury, and in 1317 this acquisition was confirmed by Edward II.

The monks of Beaulieu worked the land at Colbury and built a chapel for worship. Being a wooden structure, no trace of this chapel has been found, but it was probably sited in Prior's Bushes or Church Place.

The name "Asshurst" appears in court records dated 25 March 1314, when a certain Walter Puke was accused of misappropriating timber in Asshurst Wood. This court entry tells us that the timber trade was already established in Ashurst.

At this point we would draw the reader's attention to the disparity of size and area between the ecclesiastical parish and the modern civil parish. Places like Ashurst Lodge and Church Place Inclosure are in the ecclesiastical parish, but not in the civil administration area.

A hunting lodge had existed in Church Place woods since Norman times. There were several lodges strategically positioned in the New Forest to enable the King and his courtiers to rest up during their hunting expeditions. A court record of 1366 noted that the hunting lodge at "Houndesdoun" was repaired that year. Like the monks' chapel, the hunting lodge was built mainly of wood, and thus little of the structure survives; however, the 120 metre square earth mound at grid reference SU 343 097 in Church Place Inclosure is easy to find and small slivers of Cornish slate have been found on this site.

Henry VIII's reformation forced the monks of Beaulieu to vacate the monastery. The Beaulieu lands were leased cheaply to those merchants who had served the King well, amongst whom was John Mill from Southampton. He gained the lease of the Manor of Colbury in 1535. After the Abbey was finally dissolved in 1538, all the land became the property of the Crown. On 18 March 1544, Thomas Hopson purchased the Manor of Colbury, but later the same year he sold it to John Mill. Amanda Barker-Mill, the owner of the Barker-Mill Estate, can trace her family directly back to that Tudor merchant, John Mill, who died in 1551.

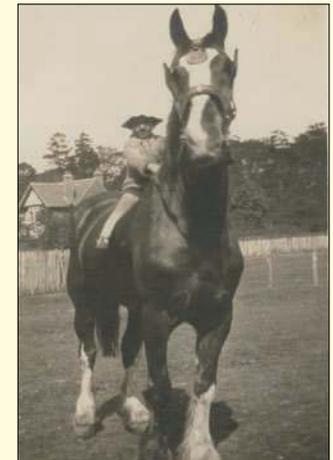
Also in Tudor times, the New Forest was organised into areas called "Bailiwicks" (the name still survives in the Channel Islands). A Master Keeper, responsible to the Crown, was appointed in each Bailiwick. The East Bailiwick's Master Keeper resided at Ashurst Lodge. Little is known of the nature of the first lodge buildings, but a substantial brick structure was built shortly after the restoration of the monarchy in the 1660s. The lodge was improved and extended in 1709. The farm



next to the Lodge, now Home Farm, was, like the Lodge, an enclave in the forest lands and was fenced off. The name “John Mansbridge” was recorded at this farm as early as 1681.

Meantime, the Civil War did not altogether leave our parish unscathed. At the outbreak of hostilities, the Mayor of Southampton supported the King, but the majority of the citizens felt otherwise. In August 1642, those supporting Parliament clashed with the King’s supporters at Hounslow. This skirmish took place at a time when both sides were urgently trying to recruit men for their respective militia.

By the end of the 18th century, Ashurst and Colbury were really just a few working farms and ancillary homes dominated by the two large estates, namely Barker-Mill at Langley and Colbury, and Winchester College at Fletchwood. Along what is now the A35 was the Rumbridge to Lymington Turnpike road opened in 1765. Hunter Inn and the Crown Ale House faced each other where today is the junction with Deerleap Lane. We know from a diary kept by Fanny Knight, a niece of Jane Austen, that on Thursday, 17 September 1807 “Uncle Henry took a sociable and we all (except Aunt Jane) had a delightful drive to Lindhurst and Lymington through the New Forest. We took some cold partridges and enjoyed ourselves very much and returned at half past five to dinner “ (at 2 Castle Square, Southampton). A “sociable” was a four-wheeled open



horse-drawn carriage with side seats facing each other. Visitors to Georgian Southampton, then a Spa town, were the New Forest’s first tourists!

The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 empowered parishes to be grouped into Unions to administer the Poor Law and build workhouses. The New Forest Union was formed in 1836. Some six acres of Crown land was set aside to build a workhouse adjacent to the turnpike road (now the A35). The united parishes of the eastern New Forest made a contribution to the cost. The Census of 1841 records 131 people living in Ashurst Workhouse, 77 of whom were children.

On 1st May 1847, an event took place which dramatically changed the village, namely the opening of the Southampton to Dorchester railway. A station was built hard by the workhouse. The station was named “Lyndhurst Road” because this was the nearest point to Lyndhurst before the line turned south to serve Brockenhurst and, bending back again, Ringwood. As a result, the line was nick-named “Castleman Corkscrew” after Charles Castleman, a Wimborne solicitor, who designed this twisting route in 1844.



Next to the station, stables were built. The railway company director, Mr Mills, was a keen huntsman and he and his friends caught the early train down from London for a day's hunting. Soon afterwards the Railway Hotel (later called the New Forest Hotel) was constructed, welcoming huntsmen and other visitors to stay longer.

The expansion of Ashurst came with its accessibility to the outside world. Economic growth began when sidings were built south of the station to allow timber from the New Forest to be loaded onto railway wagons.



It was Frederick Ibbotson of Mountfield House, Eling (now Colbury Manor), who financed the building of Colbury Church in Deerleap Lane. The church was consecrated in March 1870 by the Bishop of Winchester, and the Parish of Colbury was created two years later. A chapel for the Workhouse residents was built in 1874, thanks to Annie Sturges Bourne. The Civil Parish of Colbury was formed in 1894 and was the same size as the ecclesiastical parish. Frederick Ibbotson's daughter Marianne married into the Barker-Mill family in 1903.



Lyndhurst Road station witnessed David Lloyd-George making a speech during his whistle-stop tour of Britain at the time of the 1905 General Election. Lyndhurst Road, as the village was then called, was growing steadily. The First World War saw Indian troops stationed west of the railway where the modern campsite is situated. Their camp, like the one in Brockenhurst, became well established. As Hindu custom decreed, if a death occurred a funeral pyre was built.

In 1928, to commemorate those from the village who had died in the First World War, and in particular William her son, Marianne Vaudrey Barker-Mill erected Colbury Memorial Hall.

By the 1930s the level-crossing gates at the railway were replaced by a road bridge for the A35, and at that time the name “Ashurst” was being used more instead of “Lyndhurst Road” as the village grew in population. However, despite the village’s growth, the Colbury Civil Parish was dissolved in 1934 and incorporated mainly with Totton and Eling; the Forest section switched to Denny Lodge.



Ashurst and Colbury survived World War 11 relatively unscathed. A stick of five bombs came down in the area of Colbury Church and, according to Barbara Kemp, daughter of the village policeman, an aeroplane machine-gun attack took place on a Sunday morning as villagers were walking to church. The ditches along Lyndhurst Road provided surprisingly good shelter; whilst nobody was injured, the state of their clothing at church that morning was not at its sartorial best!



The Bratcher bungalow estate was begun in 1957, and within five years the village population had doubled. A decade later the Infant and Junior Schools at Foxhills replaced the old village school in Pound Lane. Colbury Church Rooms were opened in 1970, and more recently (1985) the Civil Parish of Ashurst and Colbury was reinstated, albeit administering a much smaller geographical area.

