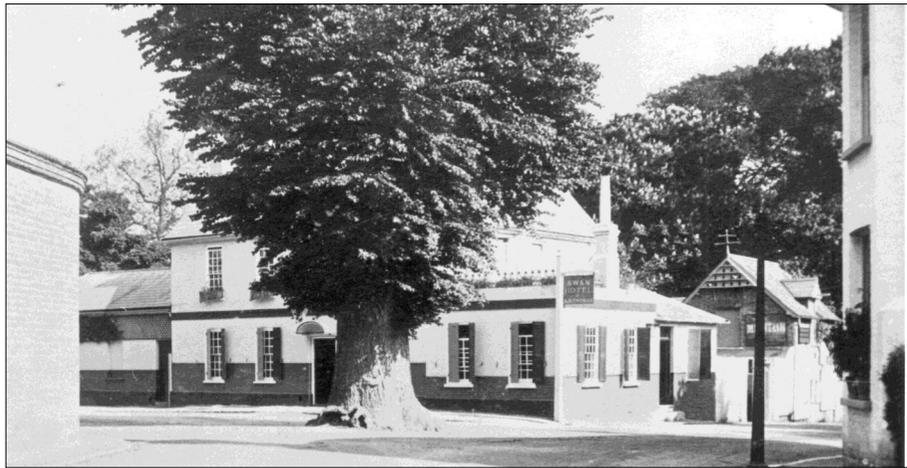


A Window on West Wickham

Services

Piped water first came to West Wickham between 1877 and 1884. Gas arrived in 1893 and because of the great increase in demand it became necessary to build a 12inch main from Beckenham in 1929. The telephone service arrived just prior to 1914 with the telephone exchange being housed in a barn next to The Swan public house. Mains electricity arrived in 1914. 1928 saw main drainage which up to that time had been to cesspools.

By 1933 the transition from village to suburb was almost complete and in 1935 West Wickham was transferred from the Bromley RDC to the newly formed Beckenham Borough.



The Stocks Tree outside The Swan

In the middle of the road stood the large elm tree, known as the Stocks Tree. Damaged when sewers were laid and being in the way of the buses, it was moved to The Blake Recreation Ground in Beckenham Road in 1935 but unfortunately came down in a storm. A symbolic loss, it was commemorated in the village sign. There is also a plaque near the library dedicated by Fred Hunt who had lived in Elm House facing the old tree. A small section of the bark is on display in the West Wickham Library.

In 1956 the completion of a road started earlier (Glebe Way) linked the High Street with Coney Hall. Before being built the crossroad at The Swan was a 'T' junction, apart from a track that led to a farm.

In 1900 Barclays Bank in the High Street was a butcher's shop

A Window on West Wickham

The Domesday survey of 1086 records the presence of 24 taxable holdings in West Wickham which were probably small farms. In addition to the 24 farmers and their families, the Lord of the Manor had 13 serfs and there was a church and a mill. The mill would probably have been a water mill possibly located at the bottom of the High Street where the White Hart (now La Rioja restaurant) had a pond.



White Hart 1900

Most of the area around West Wickham was woodland with tracks to the local neighbouring areas of Beckenham, Croydon and Hayes, which met at Norwood Cross (the crossroads in West Wickham). Records from the 1400s show that the property on the corner was called Smethes, the site of which later became The Swan.

The Manor (of West Wickham) was bought by the Heydon family in 1469. The son, Henry Heydon, married Anne Bullen a great aunt of Ann Bullen (or Boleyn) who was the unfortunate second wife of Henry VIII. The Bullen family owned Hever Castle.

The Heydons rebuilt the manor house known as Wickham Court, which is now a Grade 1 listed building, and also rebuilt the little church, St. Johns on the Hill. Both buildings have been extended over the years.

In 1580 Wickham Court and the Manor were sold to the Lennard family who resided there for over 300 years.

In the 1700s the original rectory of St. John's was on Corkscrew Hill. This is now the administration offices of the Glebe Housing Estate, Bencurtis Park. The rectory which became known as Glebe House was for many years the home of Colonel and Mrs. Chamberlain who were well known in West Wickham. During WW II, King George VI came to inspect the 55th Battalion of the Home Guard and was entertained here. It eventually became Bencurtis Park, named after the chairman of the Old People's Welfare Committee, now known as Age Concern.