

Recollections of Old and New Kidderminster

(Kidderminster Shuttle 22 January 1910)

by Henry Bennett

IV.

THE VICARAGE.—There is not much change in the Hoo-road since the Vicarage (now St George's) was built. I well remember it being built. I also assisted a cousin of mine named John Jones to plant some trees on the bank of the Vicarage boundary of the road before the wall was built. Thousands of the bricks that were used in the building of the house came out of Broome's big stack at the old mill in Mill-street. They were rented by the well-known firm of "Donkey Dutton" and Ben Reynolds, with their tandem of three donkeys. When they had unloaded they came down the hill with the animals hooked three abreast at a motor speed.

About seventy years ago Mr. James Hooman lived at The Copse (Hoo-road), until he left the town. Then his partner, Mr. James Pardoe followed in occupation, and remained there after the great failure of the firm known as "Pardoe and Hooman."

THE WORCESTER CROSS.—The old weighing machine for a very many years used to stand, or was fixed, in the road at the corner of Green-street, and was a noted land-mark. On the beam of the machine there was the face of the brilliant sun, and the old machine can be seen to-day at the Tannery in Orchard-street. It was sold to Isaiah Moore before the Round House was pulled down. The meadow where Green-street is now, and where Lord Ward (afterwards the Earl of Dudley) built the power-loom sheds (now known as the Stour Vale Mills, and in the occupation of Messrs. Woodward, Grosvenor and Co. Ltd.), was rented by Mr. Dovey, the butcher of High-street (Lipton's shop), and afterwards by his son, Thomas Dovey. My father rented the land from Mr. W. H. Chellingworth, of Park Attwood, where the Worcester Cross factory (formerly H. R. Willis's) now stands, until it was sold for the present building.

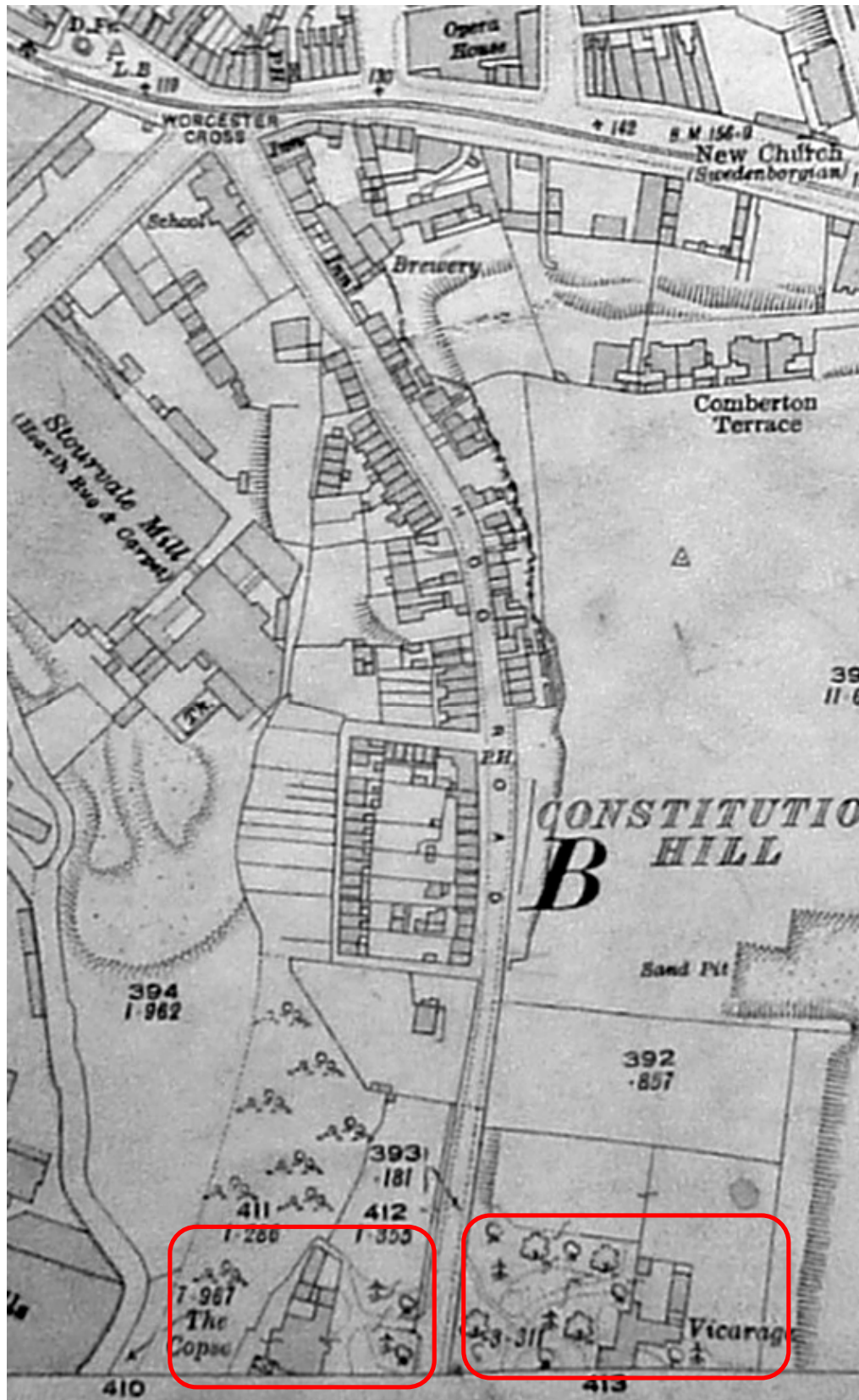
The year 1853 was the year of the great strike of the hand-loom weavers. They held their meetings in the "*Shakespeare*" yard in Coventry-street; the landlord was a man named Harry Barber. It was said at the time that the weavers put him in the "*Shakespeare*" to look after their interests, and after one of the meetings—it was a Tuesday night—they decided to carry a board round the town with the printed words on it: "A penny a yard and no surrender." This strike lasted eight weeks. and there are many who were children at that time who have vivid recollections of the hardships which many families passed through during the struggle. The "*Shakespeare*" did well while the poor weavers and their wives and families were starving. Many of the men left the town and their families, and never came back. Thus out of evil came good, for no sooner had the strike ended than the manufacturers commenced to build for the steam power loom. As I have previously mentioned, Lord Ward was the first to come to the assistance of Kidderminster by erecting the sheds, which were let to some eight or ten manufacturers, whose names were painted up over the entrances. The firm of H. J. Dixon and Sons came into existence in my recollection. William Green followed by erecting the works now occupied by the Victoria Carpet Co. Then Watson & Naylor's spinning mill was built, and it is pleasing to note that the sons of the old firm are still in Green-street employing a lot of labour; not forgetting that the works of Messrs. Morton & Sons is on the one side of Green-street with the New-road frontage. I wish also, to note that this piece of level land from Worcester Cross to the Corporation pumping Station has some of the finest works erected upon it in the old Carpet Borough.

I well remember all the meadows on the Green-street side of the Stourport-road being flooded and two men named George Colsey and Bill Lench jumping off the bridge in the New-road near the Castle, and swimming all over the meadows; and came back to the starting place, and then jumping into the water off the flood gates, and came through the gates with the rush of water. The man, George Colsey, is living to-day and is nearly 90 years of age, is hearty and full of vigour, and relates the exploit as if he could do it again.

(To be continued).

Notes:

1. 'The Copse' and the 'Vicarage', mentioned above, are outlined in red in the 1924 OS map below. They were just at the top of the hill going up Hoo Road just before the football ground. The Vicarage building still survives.



2. The Shakespeare Public House, Coventry Street. Demolished when the Ring Road was built.



The first known reference to the Shakespeare is in the 1828 Pigot Trade Directory. It was also sometimes known as the Dudley Arms and is marked as such on the 1883 OS map of Kidderminster.

3. The section of Jeremiah Mathews Map given below dates from 1835. It shows the Toll Gates at Worcester Cross. The weighing machine referred to by Bennett would have been situated close by. At the time this map was produced Green Street had not been constructed but the road to Worcester along via Aggborough along Hoo Road (once known as Hoo Lane) is shown.



(Bob Millward April 2013)