A WALK AROUND NOMANSLAND.

Starting from the Wheathampstead cricket club.

At the entrance to the car park on the right hand side is a white house which was originally a shop for the locals of Nomansland, which sold nearly all everyday things for this community, and when it was sold it became a kennels where they bred famous Scottish Terriers, and at one time were used in an advert for a famous brand of scotch whisky and filmed on the common.

Opposite is the eating house "The Wicked Lady". This was previously known as "The Park Hotel" and before that "The King William the IV". In 1875 the trustees of a Mrs K T Dance respectfully informed the inhabitants and gentry of Wheathampstead, that the "King William IV" public house had now opened under new management as "The Park Hotel". Support was especially solicited to the excellent stabling of loose boxes, and exercise and training ground attached to the Hotel, which was situated in the immediate centre which housed the late Mr Leigh's celebrated pack of foxhounds.

Support was also solicited to the cricket, archery and quoits ground. Annual subscription to private select cricket ground, one guinea, to the ground on the common 5 shillings. Annual subscription to the private archery ground one guinea, public ground 5 shillings per annum or 1 shilling per hour.

The Welwyn band played in the hotel grounds every Monday from 4pm- 10pm. Refreshments were provided, a ladies coffee room, and carriages ordered to meet the train. This establishment was for many years a favourite training residence for pugilists (boxers). The most notorious was on may 30th 1833 when Simon Byme fought Deaf Burke (Byme was champion of Ireland at that time). In a battle lasting three hours 16 minutes, and 99 rounds in which Byme died four days later.

In 1588 local militia were reviewed on Nomansland before going to Tilbury to defend London in the event of the Spanish Armada making a successful landing.

Horse races were also held regularly on the Sandridge side, from West End Farm to the cross roads between 1829-1837 and in 1829 King George VI won the St Albans cup with one of his horses.

During the 1700s Nomansland was notorious for highway robberies, Dick Turpin and Tom King used to meet there regularly on their way to other counties. The most notorious robber in these parts was Lady Ferrers of Markyate, dubbed the Wicked Lady. During this time a gibbet was erected at the top of the hill towards St Albans, as a warning for thieves.

Running parallel to the B65 (main road from Wheathampstead to St Albans) was a river where the local shepherds brought their sheep while grazing on the common (now the river has gone underground where the outfield of the cricket pitch dips and turns under the cricket pavilion).

People living on the common called "commoners" had grazing rights for their livestock and were also allowed to gather kindling for the fire. The rights came into being if you had a special brick in the fireplace of your home, which allowed this. Now of course this doesn't apply as a recent law say's that the gathering of kindling and the grazing of animals is forbidden.

Wheathampstead Cricket Club was formed in 1800's when a few matches were played, but the first recorded match was in 1824. In 1899 an agreement was reached with the Chapter Estates Manor and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England, to use the said cricket pitch and enclose the square on three sides, and to keep it in good repair for the annual sum of one shilling demanded for the privilege of the use. The agreement was signed by a local publican and a blacksmith for Wheathampstead cricket club dated 9/2/1899. It was not until 1924 that Sunday games were allowed on the pitch. On the outfield of the cricket pitch towards the main road lies a "Pudding stone' marking the division between Wheathampstead and Sandridge which in former days dictated the boundary between the rival monasteries of Westminster and St Albans. Sadly as years have gone by there is only a small part visible of the stone. Under a scheme by St Albans District Council provision has been made for the preservation of the stone as an object of antiquity.

It was known as a "growing stone" and marked the spot where one of the contestants died in a bare knuckle fight in 1855,another pudding stone stood 30 yards from the front gate of the 'Fletchers ' house at number 16 the common. This line of puddingstones stretched for more than 200 miles in a great arc, through the Home Counties and East Anglia and was originally placed within sighting distance of one another. These stones were used to mark out an ancient trackway dating back to the stone age and went through Essex, Suffolk to Grimes Graves near Thetford, crossing the river Lea at Cheshunt then going westerly through Millward Park, Bullens Green to Hill End, thus marking the ancient Belgic highway from the iron age camp at Prae Wood to Wheathampstead. Later part of this highway was used for pilgrims to East Anglia. After Caesars invasion of 54bc the Belgic seat of government was suddenly moved to Wheathampstead.

The original square that the cricket was played on was a lot smaller than today, and many famous people played here. The most notable was Apsley George Benet Cherry-Garrard who was a member of the British Antarctic Expedition with Captain Scott from 1910-1913 and he played in a match just before he went to the Antarctic. Moving towards the southern side of the common you pass the gorse and rare

heather. Now that grazing has now stopped the undergrowth and the amount of woodland has increased also the rabbit population. The culling of rabbits used to be once a year, this is not the case now as it used to involve dogs and guns. So now tree felling has to be used to control the areas of heath land and sometimes parts have to be temporarily fenced off.

Across Ferrers Lane the common towards St Albans the large area is now open and cut once a year for hay. During the second world war it was farmed with potato crops to help the war effort, and in the distance you would see aircraft from De-Havilland practicing 'circuits and bumps' ready for the war.

After the war the Romany gypsies came and took over the common it was a lovely sight with their colourful horse drawn caravans they were lovely people.

On the intersection of Ferrers Lane and Down Green Lane on the right and left sides can be seen great hollows where clay and gravel were dug out. The clay was for the making of bricks. Then later on local rubbish was tipped to bring them up to the levels that are today.

In the west end corner is a farmhouse where Malcolm Saville the writer lived and wrote his books. [one of these was "Trouble at Townsend" (1946) A Gaumont film which starred the young Petula Clark. Filmed at Malcolm Saville's home at Westend Farm in Hertfordshire.]

Walking back towards the cricket pitch there are a group of houses. Originally there were thirteen now only six. Each house had its own well for water.

In 1875 number one Nomansland consisted of one living room and one bedroom with eleven people living there.

In 1919 Amwell Farm, consisting of a homestead and two cottages, was sold for £2,000.

Coming back from the cottages in the woods can be seen the remains of a concrete roller which was used to roll the square for the cricket. This concrete is encased in a metal cover and replaced the original one drawn by horses that had their hooves covered with sacking so as not to damage the square.

There are many more interesting tales about the happenings on this common.

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