

# Tudor cottages that were nearly saved

A reader's letter in the *Surrey Advertiser* on January 25 asking if anyone remembered some long-gone cottages, led to a several replies. Here, the curator of local history at Guildford Museum, **Matthew Alexander**, tells the story of the houses and their demise

UNTIL 1957, a group of timber-framed cottages stood at the junction of Park Street and the Farnham Road in Guildford.

They had been built in late Elizabethan or early Jacobean times, using oak from the woodlands which then covered much of southern Surrey.

The roofs were constructed with the "queen post" or "queen strut" trusses, typical of Guildford houses at that time.

Two had the characteristic "jetty", where the upper floor projected beyond the lower.

The hillside rose steeply behind the cottages, and flights of steps were needed to enter them. These gave the group a picturesque appearance, which attracted the eye of many later artists.

They were originally built as four cottages, which could have been well-to-do tradesmen's or craftsmen's homes. However, as time passed and architectural fashions changed, the cottages went "down market" and were subdivided into smaller homes.

This was a common fate for Guildford's timber-framed houses; their construction made alterations simple. This versatility helped preserve many of them until the 20th century.

When house numbers were introduced, the first cottage became 12 and 13 Park Street. The others were considered to be in Farnham Road. This led to confusion when people spoke of the "Park Street cottages" or the "Farnham Road cottages". One became numbers 2 and 4 Farnham Road, the next 6 and 8 (with its impres-

sive chimney), and the last number 10. In Victorian times, their picturesque appearance made them the subject of many paintings and photographs. However, the accommodation they offered was increasingly below standard.

There was a single living room on the ground floor, with two or three bedrooms above. At the back was a scullery that contained only a sink and a cold water tap.

There was no indoor sanitation and they were damp and unventilated.

In 1910, it was proposed that the cottages should be demolished. This brought protests from those who wished them preserved for their historic and artistic value.

The protesters prevailed and the cottages were saved. Later, in 1937, a public subscription was even raised to help maintain them.

However, after the Second World War, attitudes changed. The cottages were certainly cheap to rent, at a time that housing was desperately scarce.

Nevertheless, the living conditions they afforded were considered unacceptable. In March 1954 Guildford Borough Council declared them unfit for human habitation. The council had another reason to see the removal of these cottages: the ambitious plans to redevelop the town centre meant that Park Street had to be widened.

However, by this time the cottages had been "listed" as being of historic importance as a group, and given a 2\* grade.

The Society for the

Protection of Ancient Buildings protested against their demolition, saying that the basic structures were still sound. Despite this, Guildford Borough Council insisted that they were unfit, and too dilapidated to be restored economically.

The Guildford Society and the West Surrey Society were consulted and reluctantly agreed that the borough was right. On July 6, 1955, Surrey County Council also formally accepted that the cottages had to go.

For nearly two years, nothing happened. Then, at the end of April 1957, the last tenants left the cottages and the owners made preparations to demolish them. Surrey County Council then seemed to have second thoughts about its decision in 1955, but its objections were over-ruled. In any case, demolition work had already begun and by mid-May had reached a point beyond which they could not be saved.

By the end of the month the cottages had been levelled and the site cleared. No detailed plans or other formal record were ever made of them.

In this way a Guildford landmark passed into history. The 1950s and 1960s saw many old buildings in the town knocked down to make way for new ones.

However, there grew an increasing feeling that historic buildings should be conserved wherever possible, and today it seems unlikely that, in the same circumstances, the cottages would have been destroyed.



Possibly the best view of the cottages in Park Street and Farnham Road. The arrows and numbers have been added to tie in with Matthew Alexander's article. The vintage pictures seen on this page are courtesy of Guildford Museum. Thanks also to Philip Hutchinson who e-mailed an almost identical photo to the one above.



Going going... Numbers 4, 6 and 8 Farnham Road.



Upstairs in one of the Farnham Road cottages.



A rather splendid chimney.



From left, the backs of numbers 2 and 4 Farnham Road and number 13 Park Street. The department store Harvey's in the High Street can just be seen on the skyline.



A rare view of the cottages looking back down Park Street. The hanging sign outside the Plough pub can be seen near where the lorry is parked. On the right can be seen part of Stanton's household furniture store.



A view of the backs of the cottages with demolition well under way.

## Red quarry tiles and a small kitchen range

READERS who replied to Elizabeth Gabriel's letter about the Park Street cottages included one from Annie Eyre of Guildford.

She writes: "My three brothers were brought up in the cottages in the mid 1950s.

"They had two bedrooms, small kitchen, a small living room, an open fire and a small cooking range with electric hobs in the kitchen.

"The floor had red quarry tiles in the kitchen. When the cottages were demolished my

mother and brothers went to then live in the prefabs in Southway Avenue in Westborough."

A Jacqueline of Godalming, who signed her correspondence from "a local", wrote: "Yes, I do remember the Tudor

cottages in Park Street, but what's wrong with dirt floors! My cottage is only Georgian, but it still has two dirt floors underneath; wooden spring ones above.

"It's no problem, and the tap, (Tudor style), was indeed a lux-

ury. Mine had no mains water until recently - only a bucket and well.

"They should have been saved. What a tourist attraction they would have been and a joy for all the artists to paint."

# Cupid's Corner

Advertising Feature



Kerry from Leap of Love.

### Leap of Love

LEAP of Love is an exclusive and personal introduction agency that helps people from all walks of life meet like minded people in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.

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See advertisement for more details.

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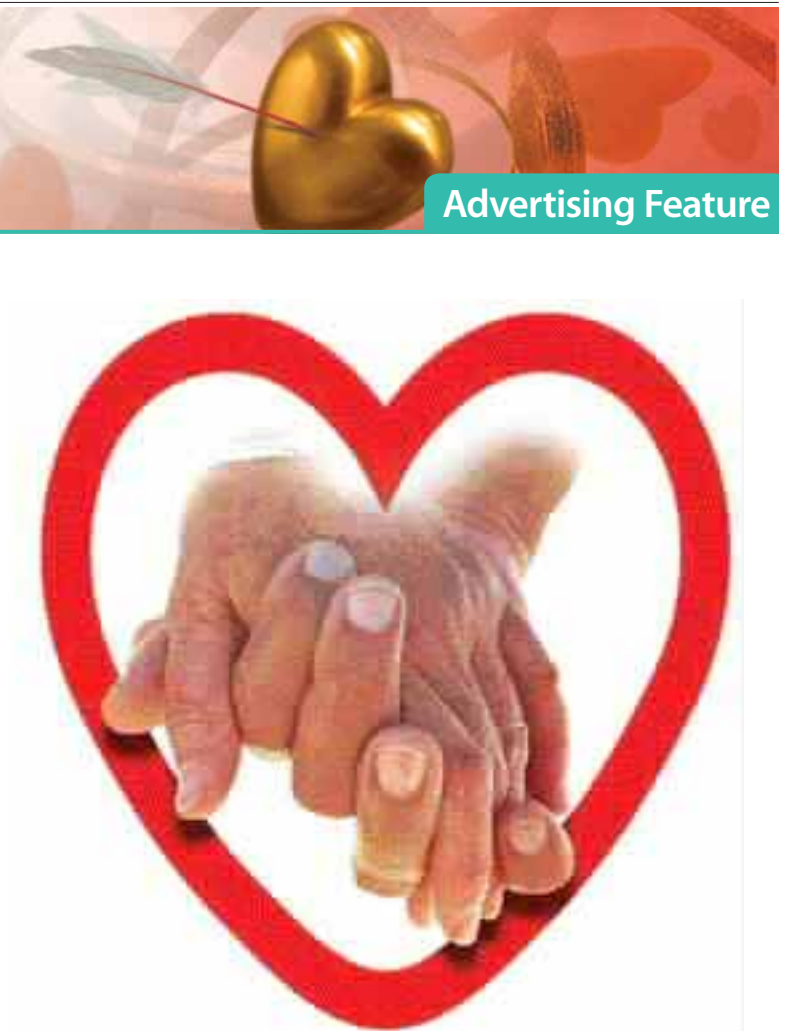
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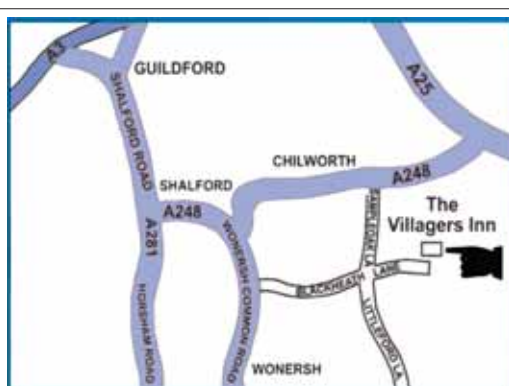
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