

DAVID SIMPSON AND THE AGE OF THE BUILDER

BY RICHARD THOMAS

The age of the builder had arrived in the Harrogate Area a great deal earlier than the 1887 commencement of the Duchy Estate. The Duchy of Lancaster had been active in promoting building on its estate in the town for some considerable time.

In the summer of 1839 the Duchy identified a Mr Howgate as a suitable person to produce a plan for the development of Duchy lands at Low Harrogate, advising that it was not their intention themselves to build but to grant building leases to suitable applicants. This concept of 'building leases' is one which great landed estates have used to considerable effect and value. The Grosvenor Estate and other similar great estates in what is now Central London being useful examples.

The plan provided by Mr Howgate on 29th October 1839 envisaged building on the West side of Swan Road (then Swan Lane) between York Road and Well Hill; 8 houses were envisaged. This is the Eastern boundary of the Duchy Estate.

Thomas Shutt (who later designed the Pump Room) was Superintendent of Building at a fee of 2% of each building he inspected. His task was to ensure high Duchy standards.

The buildings, now known as Promenade Terrace, were constructed by a Mr Walker in the agreed position and form a very handsome and pleasant group. They are still mostly residences apart from the Studley Hotel and Orchid Restaurant. It is thought that the building of the terrace on a plinth was to protect the adjacent mineral wells.

The major part of the Duchy was constructed between 1891 and 1909. The builder selected for the building leases being David Simpson, who was instructed to commence at Ripon Road and build in a westwards direction. This is eloquently demonstrated by the Queen Victoria post box on Ripon Road at the eastern end of Duchy Road, when contrasted with the Queen Elizabeth II post box on Cornwall Road at the western end of Duchy Road.

The transformation of the area from mostly agricultural land resulted in disturbance of existing occupiers. I find it interesting that the description of the Metes and Bounds of the Borough in 1884 refer to ‘the South-West angle of an Occupation Road leading to Jenny Plain Farm, thence along the Southern fence of the said Occupation Road to the Ripon Road’. This Occupation Road is the Ripon Road end of Duchy Road up to Wood View, which lead to the farm on a site now known as The Long House on Kent Road.

The use of land at the West end of Kent Road and Duchy Road had been abandoned by Notice to Quit given by the Tenant to the Duchy in 1897. The tenant was Harrogate Golf Club, which opened in June 1892. The course was described as being ‘very sporty with hazards consisting chiefly of hedges, ditches, wall, coppices, gorse, fern banks, a quarry and Oak Beck. As the author of the 1991 history of the Club remarks ‘Sporty’ seems to have been an understatement.

The 9-hole course was the home of the club until 1897. A timber pavilion was created with a tin roof and Teas were obtainable from Miss White who lived in the cottage opposite. The Duchy, however, built a slaughter house close to the pavilion. In 1895 the Committee arranged for some cover and shelter for the offal cart and manure pit ‘more particularly in the hot weather’.

In 1897 the Club abandoned the course and moved to their present location between Starbeck and Knaresborough. More suitable development then commenced on the area they had vacated.