

Leatherhead & District Local History Society

Potted Histories No 78

Gimcrack Hill - Dorking Road - Leatherhead



Why Gimcrack Hill? , the definition of Gimcrack means appearing attractive and expensive, but in fact badly made, perhaps the surface of the road was poor in earlier days and hence the name was given and remains to this day. Roads became much improved following the recommendation of McAdam and others.

The stage-coaches passing through Leatherhead en route to Dorking and Worthing would have had to go via Gimcrack Hill. Their average speed would have been 10 mph. The coaches had no proper brakes but on steep hills, an iron plate, a skidpan or drag, was applied to the rear wheels, acting as a primitive form of braking. For many years one was embedded in the wall of the St.Mary's Road side of Gimcrack Hill, near the top. Much to the dismay of local residents it disappeared some years ago. It was a modest memorial to a carter, George Clark, who died in a wagon accident there. A similar device can be seen in Leatherhead Museum.

The 18th Century house on the left hand side of the picture is named after Sir Lawrence Weaver. In 1937 a health and education centre was set up as a memorial to him (he died in 1930 following a heart attack) and his wife Lady Kathleen (who had died in 1927 of pneumonia,) they were founders of the 'Ashted Potters'. It was opened by George Lansbury, the Labour MP, and despite a host of good intentions it failed to prosper and closed down in 1939.

Goff Powell

Extracted from- History of Leatherhead - A Town at the Crossroads - by Edwina Vardey L&DLHS with additions

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