

Village housing

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Part 1

It is not clear when the spellings of our earlier hamlets or our village road names changed but this certainly occurred over time. Sedgmore to Sedgmoor, Northend Woods to Northern Woods, Straight Piece to Straight Bit. Why did Fennels Way and Fennells Wood have different spellings? Even today street maps do not always record the use, or non-use, of apostrophes accurately.

The housing we see today in the village is very varied, from the two-up two-down terraced housing from late Victorian times, which was often owned by local landlords and rented out, through to the larger but often heavily mortgaged properties of recent times. All of these Victorian homes have now been extended and modernised as no one wants to have an outside toilet these days but until the village got a proper water supply our ancestors lived much tougher lives.

The houses in our early Twentieth Century roads were in large plots of land such as at Links Road where the first substantial family homes were built in the early 1900s but in the case of the 1920s bungalow dwellings in Fennels Way the properties themselves could actually be quite small despite the size of the plot. Few of these bungalows remain as they were, and most have now been extended to fill the plot, or the plot has been subdivided for infill development.

In the 1930s houses continued to be built along the principal roads, the row of semi-detached houses along Blind Lane being perhaps the most obvious example. Plans were also in progress for a Council owned housing estate off Heath End Road but then the Second World War began and everything was put on hold.

Part 2

The Council's pre-war housing plans finally went ahead after the war. Buckingham Way, Oakland Way and part of Bernards Way were all built by 1948, using POW labour to build the roads themselves. This housing was much needed to meet the demands of the post-war housing shortage, particularly for low-income families. These homes were mostly semi-detached houses, with some semi-detached bungalows for older residents, but none were built with garages although the gardens at that time were still fairly large compared to those built today. It simply wasn't imagined that the occupiers of these residences would have been able to afford a car. A new village community swiftly developed here using their large new green for various events.

The 1950s saw a new influx of residents moving into the village. Rugwood Road and Ring Road were again provided by the Council but a communal area for parking and garaging was now provided. New estates were also built by local developers for owner occupiers, such as the houses at Greenlands and Highlands, and those on the new Whitegates Estate, better known now as Green Crescent and Philip Drive. These were mainly of semi-detached houses but there was still enough room in the garden for a garage or a later extension. Fennels Farm Road and Southfield Road were built in 1959 and were primarily of bungalows providing the village with a diverse range of new homes for all ages and incomes. These bungalows also had space for garages or off-street parking.

These various estates, built on what had previously been farmland and orchards, were just the beginning of the huge changes which this village was to see.

Part 3

Looking through historic planning applications it is clear that various 1950s and 1960s developments were already being proposed long before the estates were finally built. It is therefore hard to know when the first houses were actually completed and the first homes on these new estates were occupied. One thing is certain, the village's proximity to major sources of employment made our location very attractive.

The 1960s therefore saw a range of building styles occur within the village. Many of these estates were predominantly of bungalows eg Hilda's Way, Hawthorne Gardens and Glenmore Close in what was then called the Fennells Wood Estate, or of chalet style housing such as at Highlea Avenue on the Carrington Estate as it was then called, and usually with garage space taken into consideration. Many of the bungalow homes were kept small in order to be affordable although quite a number of these properties have now extended upwards into their lofts. Larger detached family homes were also built, as can be seen at The Meadows and Cherrywood Gardens, thus providing a range of housing to meet most incomes.

By the 1970s bungalows had lost favour and houses were mostly being built. On some estates these tended to be smaller due to the smaller plot size as at Old Kiln Road where there is a range of housing, although the detached homes on the Orchard estate and the Fairway were of more generous proportions.

During all this time schools and shops were developed to meet the needs of the village population.

Part 4

The village of the 1980s was beginning to run out of available building space and both old and new residents were keen to preserve the countryside that surrounded it. It was, after all, a huge perk which had attracted many of us to live here in the first place. Jennings Field was one of the last of the estates to be built on village farmland and although it provided homes of varying size the properties tended to be smaller as demands on available land grew tighter. The village was now a vibrant community with a strong identity and most residents had no wish to become part of an urban sprawl consumed by neighbouring towns. The solution was therefore to build new homes on odd areas of spare ground or, when an older property was demolished, to build two or three homes where once there had been just one. These properties varied in size according to the space available. Subdividing larger gardens elsewhere in the village also provided infilling opportunities so our roads became a more eclectic mix of housing styles.

More recently the solution has been to build a small close of three or four houses or an apartment block where once a larger building previously stood eg at Fernlea Gardens and at Juniper Court, and although the outdoor space may be more limited there is less garden to maintain.

Now almost quarter of the way into the twenty first century we have a village which, during the Covid pandemic especially, proved that we were self-sufficient, had a friendly and supportive community, and that we thrived from our countryside location and our wonderful views. So, as our new display board says, 'treasure it always'.