

# History of the Area and St Luke's

## Redbourn

The village of Redbourn lies on the chalky, western upland area of Hertfordshire close to the shallow, glaciated valley of the River Ver. There is considerable archaeological evidence to show that this part of the south Chilterns, based on the river valleys of the Colne, Ver and Lea, has been extensively settled and farmed since the late Bronze Age.

The present-day village dates back to at least Saxon times. The earliest settlement was probably at Church End and although St Mary's dates from circa 1100 it possibly replaced an earlier Saxon Church. It is possible that the area continued to be inhabited following the slow collapse of Rome and that there was settlement adjacent to Watling Street. It is probable, however, that the area had subsequently largely reverted to woodland with settlement beginning again in a series of clearings.

Evidence for this comes from the number of hamlets that incorporate "end" in their place name such as Revel End, Norrington End, Stags End, which can be found in the neighbourhood. Many of these settlements avoided the existing Roman road for reasons of security. The church was built adjacent to one of these small hamlets. Subsequently a wayside chapel to St James was built by St Albans Abbey close to the highway.

In 1178 a priory was built close to Watling Street adjacent to the chapel of St James to commemorate the finding of the supposed remains of St Amphibalus. St Amphibalus was a historic figure who played a significant role in Redbourn's medieval past. He was a Christian missionary from abroad who was believed to have been sheltered by Alban from persecution and converted him. The idea that he was later martyred on Redbourn Heath and that a Roman burial mound, found on the heath contained his remains, was fervently believed from the twelfth century. A lively cult developed, and the priory was established as a respite home for monks. The site of the priory was to the south of the common now known as The Park, but it was cleared away during the suppression and dissolution of the Monasteries. A stained-glass window in St Mary's church shows Amphibalus and finds from the site of the priory are on display in the village museum. The founding of the priory helped to shift the focus of the village away from Church End to the main road, known as Street End, leaving the church isolated some 800 metres away.

Redbourn High Street follows the line of the Roman Watling Street. Watling Street has always been a considerable influence on the growth of St Albans. This Roman military thoroughfare was not known by its present name until the 9th century. The name of the road then was "Waeclingas Strate". The Waeclingas were the Saxon settlers who lived near Verulamium. By the late sixteenth/seventeenth centuries the High Street was lined with coaching inns and shops taking advantage of the passing trade on one of the main roads to the Midlands. A significant number of these timber framed buildings still survive behind later brick facades.

The Georgian era was one of prosperity for the village. Redbourn was one of the first stops for the London mail coaches to Birmingham, Liverpool, and Carlisle. During this period several of the older timber framed buildings were reformed in brick in the new Georgian style and several substantial new houses were built. The coach trade was in decline by the mid-nineteenth century following the construction of the national railway network. A branch line of the Midland Railway was constructed from Hemel Hempstead to Harpenden with a station at Redbourn, but it seems to have had little effect on the local industry, other than agriculture, and Redbourn escaped from the dramatic expansion in size which affected nearby towns and villages.

As late as 1940 the County of London Plan could still describe it as having a "quiet, almost agricultural rhythm". Considerable housing development has taken place to the north of the Common since the Second World War. The railway branch line closed for passenger traffic in 1947 and completely in 1979.

After World War II Road haulage dramatically increased and Redbourn suffered from serious traffic blight until relieved by the construction of the M1 and subsequently the eastern by-pass in 1985. However, despite some regrettable losses in the past, in particular Redbourn House in 1955, many historic buildings still survive in the village especially in the High Street. The conservation area boundary, as designated in 1969, included most of the former Saxon and Medieval village settlement but excluded most of the post-war development to the north and east and the industrial sites to the south and east. However, there are three markedly different types of area within the larger boundary, and these can be identified as Church End, the Common and the High Street. In 2001 the conservation area was extended to include Scout Farm and the fire station, Crown Street, and a further section of Water End Lane as far as the ford.

Most people in the village were employed in agriculture. Until recently farms were located on the Common and south of the High Street, with fields close into the central area. Webb's dairy farm and adjacent barns still survive although no longer operating. Some of the surrounding farms were presumably associated with soft fruit growing for Russell Harborough's jam factory, located at the southern end of the High Street which has now been redeveloped as smaller industrial units.

As in other parts of the County, watercress was also grown in quantity from the early part of the nineteenth century until the 1960's and the watercress beds can still be seen next to the river. Large quantities were daily sent by rail to London, Manchester, and Liverpool. Straw plaiting was another former village industry associated with agriculture, making use of the abundant local supplies from the wheat fields.

Brooke Bond operated a tea factory on the site of the former silk mill, behind East Common from the 1920's until its closure in 1993. A brush factory is also recorded in the village on a site opposite the church. Other local trades included tanning, leatherworking, and brewing. The style and architectural form of buildings throughout the village is diverse and ranges from timber-framed cottages to substantial Georgian mansions.

### **St. Luke's School**

The fields at the top of Crouch Hall Lane and Blackhorse Lane belonged to Hillbury Farm. Hertfordshire County Council built a Secondary School to serve the village and the surrounding area. It was opened on 15 May 1963 by The Right Honourable Charles Hill MP. It was closed in 1981, remaining pupils being moved to other schools in the area. It remained empty until 1984 when St Luke's took over the site. At one time Oaklands College used one of the teaching blocks for post 16 provision. St Luke's is now part of the Blue Tangerine Federation.