

# A LITTLE HISTORY OF SOUTHCHURCH

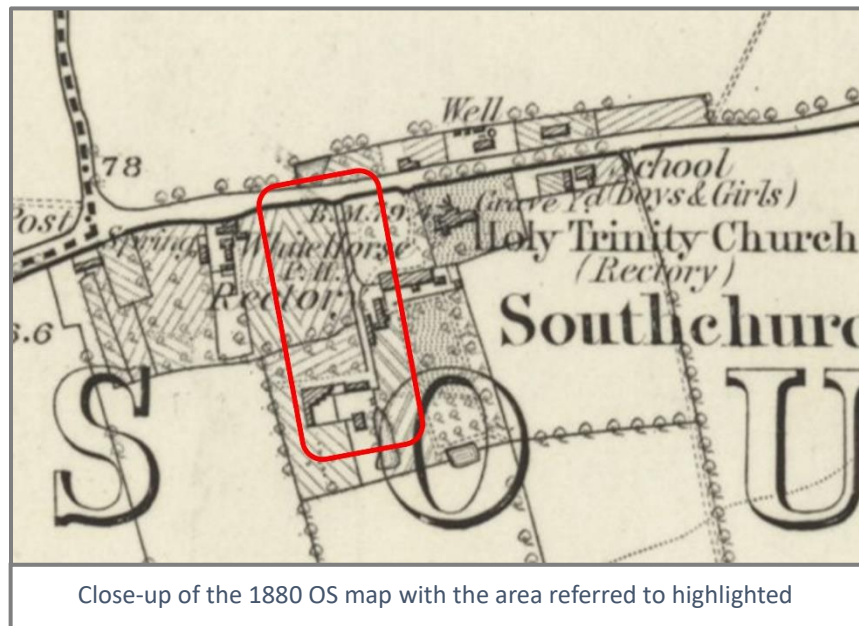
By Mike Penry

## Episode 21: THE PARISH TITHE BARN

There follows the reminiscences of a parishioner, drawn from our archives. It was written between the wars, and we'd love to identify the author, so please let us know if you have any idea.

“Three quarters of a century ago, before the Parish House (now known as the Church Hall) was built, our social life at Southchurch was centred on “The Barn”. Where now Southchurch Rectory Chase meets the Boulevard a five barred gate opened on a hedged cart-track bordered with giant nettles. It was rutted and muddy, with only one light halfway, and on a rainy night, if going to a social, one was wise to wear wellingtons and carry your dancing shoes. It passed the side entrance to the Rectory and the length of the kitchen garden wall, eventually ending where a narrow path on the right led through a gate to the part of the Glebe which stretched to the White Horse.

On the south side stood Garon's cottage; on the north rose a superb mulberry tree, thought to be the very one, or its descendant, planted when Henry VII, anxious to cultivate a silk industry, ordered one to be planted in every glebe. The land to the north and west had for some time been let out as allotments, cultivated mostly by men of the congregation who supplied magnificent decorations at Harvest



Close-up of the 1880 OS map with the area referred to highlighted

Festival. Beside these stood the parish tithe barn - wooden, thatched and looking as ancient as it was.

It was a fair-sized structure and held a good crowd of us. Round the wooden walls were clothes pegs on which we hung our hats and coats, as there were no cloakrooms. A very large coal-fired “Tortoise” stove stood in the centre (and much in the way!) giving good warmth after going for a while, and a heavy curtain at the door kept out some of the draughts. There was a small kitchen, a stage about knee-high with no curtains, a storeroom filled with school benches which added seating to the assortment of chairs varying in style and reliability, and one lavatory – concrete floored, icy cold and spidery!

This sounds unpromising, but the Barn gave us many hours of friendship and fun. We made our own concerts, joining our soloists in the choruses of “Love's Old Sweet Song” or “The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington”; we rigged up curtains - not always successfully - for plays for which we came down already in costume under our coats, to leave room for those who had to change during the play to do so in the storeroom (with no heat, little space and the scrabble of rats or birds in the thatch above the ceiling). Knowing the difficulties we applauded all efforts whole-heartedly.

Sometimes a magic lantern enchanted us, or we sprinkled powdered chalk on the floor and slid on it until it was slippery enough for dancing. The “Valeta” and the “Military Two-Step” mingled with the waltz and the new “Foxtrot”, and the music was supplied by the ancient piano and perhaps a violin.

All seasons brought their fun - the Allotment Show, the Annual Bazaar, a big birthday party – the old clock over the door told time for them all.

### **The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington**

There was a youth and a well-beloved youth  
And he was the squire's son  
And he loved the bailiff's daughter dear  
That lived in Islington

Yet she was coy and would not believe  
That he did love her so  
Nor at any time would she to him  
Any countenance show

But when his friends did understand  
His fond and his foolish mind  
They sent him up to fair London Town  
An apprentice for to bind

And when he had been for seven long years  
And never his love did see  
Oh, many a tear have I shed for her sake  
While she little thought of me

Then all the maids in Islington  
Went forth to sport and play  
All but the bailiff's daughter dear  
Who silently stole away

Then she took off her silk and gown  
And she put on her ragged attire  
And she rode away to fair London Town  
Her sweetheart to inquire

And there she went along the highroad  
The weather being hot and dry  
She sat upon the little green bank  
And her true love came riding by  
She started up with a colour so red  
Catching hold of his bridle and reign  
"Oh one penny, one penny, kind sir," she said  
"Would ease me of much pain"

"Before I give you a penny, sweetheart  
Pray tell me where were you born?"  
"At Islington, kind sir," she said  
"Where I have had many a scorn"

"Oh then, do maiden, tell to me  
Oh, tell me whether you know  
The bailiff's daughter of Islington?"  
"She is dead, sir, long ago"

"If she be dead, then take my horse  
My saddle and bridle also  
For I will go to some far country  
Where no man should there me know"

"O stay, O stay, thou goodly youth!  
She standeth by thy side  
She is here alive, she is not dead  
And ready to be thy bride"

"Oh, farewell grief and welcome joy  
Ten thousand times therefore  
For now, I have found my own true love  
Whom I thought I should never see more"

Women's Fellowship and Mothers Union meetings tended to end punctually at 4 pm; the windows on the south side overlooked the yard and cowsheds, and the noisy arrival of the Rector's three cows for afternoon milking made it impossible to hear a speaker. Girls' Friendly Society meetings saw us rehearsing for area competitions in drama or choral singing or the country dancing then much in vogue; "Up a double, back a double, set and turn single'. We came to the Barn for missionary talks, for cookery or needlework demonstrations and for discussions on the introduction of the 1928 Prayer Book, hotly opposed by some as 'Popish'".

Southchurch was much less built-up in those days - we could walk through cornfields to the sea front. With little traffic there was a less hurried atmosphere. Perhaps something of the feeling of a village community was still there, and our Barn was a very happy centre for us. When the Parish House, with its wonders of big modern kitchen, cloakrooms and "real" stage was built we used the Barn much less and, when the incendiary bombs of World War II made the wooden walls and crumbling thatch a fire risk, it was pulled down."



Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century drawing of the church

**Come back in a couple of weeks' time for Episode 22:**  
"Memories of the Past".

- More delightful reminiscences of our parishioners.
- Recalling the times of Reverends Welch and Elphinstone.

See all Episodes of 'A Little History of Southchurch' [here](#)