

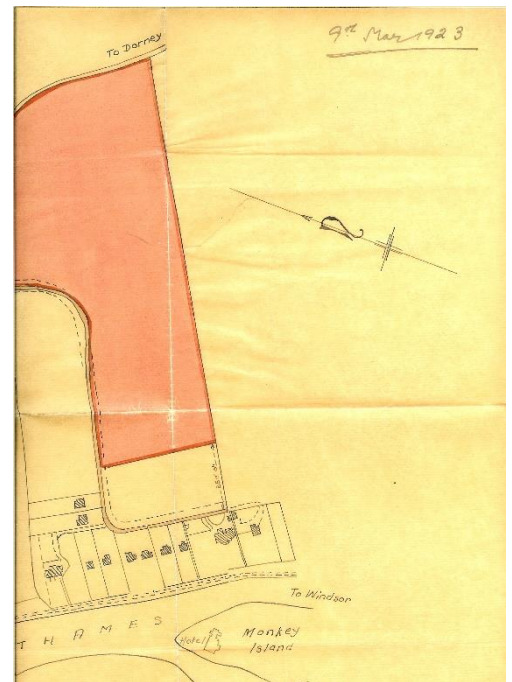
DORNEY REACH IN 1921

Before 1902, Dorney Reach did not exist as a residential area. The land was used by tenant farmers to grow arable crops. Then the landowner, Colonel Palmer, decided to develop for housing part of a field in the north east corner of the parish, next to the river. Between 1902 and 1910 eleven individual large houses were built in spacious grounds. Fitted out with servants' quarters, billiard rooms, tennis courts and such like, they offered the convenience of nearness to Taplow railway station combined with "*unspoiled rural surroundings*" and a relaxed riverside lifestyle. A ferry boat took passengers across to Monkey Island and there were even regattas held in Dorney Reach in 1912 and 1913.

Initially, all but one of the houses were rented out and the occupants changed frequently. The 1921 census gives us a picture of who was living there on the night of June 19th.

At the southern end of the riverside houses was Bray View, now called Touchdown. One of the few houses to be owner-occupied rather than rented, on census night the only residents were the owner's chauffeur, wife and baby. The owner at this time was probably Charles Bertram Liddell, who was certainly there by 1923. Born in China, the son of a wealthy tea merchant, Charles worked in the motor trade before the First World War, in which he served as an officer in the Royal Engineers. He married in 1917 and had two children. The 1921 census shows him in London where they lived in a flat. So, the house in Dorney Reach, which he kept until the late 1920s, was presumably used for weekends and holidays.

Next door was Riverdale, recently purchased by Joseph Gardner. He was living there with his wife and ten-year-old daughter, with one domestic servant and a visitor. Joseph's father was a farmer, in White Waltham and later Maidenhead Thicket, and his wife Jane had been brought up by her aunt who was the miller at Hambleton Mill. Joseph however worked in financial services in the City of London. He had previously lived in Thames Ditton after his marriage in 1909. The Gardners left Dorney Reach around 1930 and later lived in St George's Hill, Weybridge.



The neighbouring house to the north, Willowcroft, was rented by Vera Serkoff who lived there with her younger sister. Keen readers of this column will recall that I have written previously about Vera, who claimed to be a widowed countess with Russian connections. She was in fact Scottish. In 1921 both Vera and her sister, then middle-aged, said their occupation was journalistic work. Vera was indeed a prolific author, whose stories for adults and children were often published in newspapers. During her time in Dorney Reach, her written output concentrated on non-fiction books, on such subjects as the interpretation of dreams and fortune telling. She stayed in Willowcroft until she died in 1933, when her sister moved back to London.

Continuing up the bank, the tenant at Rippledene was Herbert Edward Carmalt. His stay really was brief – he was not there in 1920 and left in 1923. From London, he had married in 1911 but their only child was not born until 1919, after he had seen service in France as an officer in the First World War. Herbert was another resident who must have commuted to work in London, where in 1921 he said he was a ladies' hat maker in Regent Street. On other occasions, he was said to be a salesman in millinery or sportswear. At Rippledene, the family employed a live-in domestic servant.

The house now called Melrose was rented between 1921 and 1924 by David Leonard Oliver. In 1921 he was a company director in the textile trade living there with his wife and staying with them was his wife's sister and her husband. David had also served in the war, as an officer in the RASC, attached from the British Red Cross to the French Red Cross. After leaving Dorney Reach, David returned to London and changed career, becoming a barrister and JP.

Another army officer was living next door at Meadowcroft (now River House). Philip Arthur Hibbert rented this house from at least 1921 until 1929, then moving to Taplow. Originally from Wales, he had fought in the First World War and was wounded in action in France in 1916 and again in South Africa in 1918. In 1921 he was still in the army, assigned to the War Office, but later worked in the private sector as managing director of a dying and cleaning company. He had married in 1919 and their first child was born while living in Dorney Reach in 1924. In 1921 they employed one domestic servant living in.



The Mead was another rented property occupied by a former army officer. Kenneth William Elder had served in the Boer War and then in World War I when he rose to the rank of major. He was not however a professional soldier but an accountant who became Secretary of the Phoenix Insurance Company in London. His first wife had died only a few years after their marriage and by 1921 he had been widowed for 15 years. A few months after the census, he remarried and settled in Dorney Reach where two daughters were born in 1923 and 1924. Kenneth and his family moved to Sussex around 1928 and one of his daughters later described him setting off for work: *“My father was a businessman typical of the era. Each morning he would leave the house smartly attired in his business suit, complete with a fresh buttonhole for the jacket. This would very often be a rose, prepared daily and left ready for him in the hall. He always wore a genuine bowler hat to*

work each day and a silk top hat on special occasions. If he had a Board Meeting to attend, he would wear his tailcoat. Thus attired, he would travel by car to the station and then by train to his London office. The formality of his dress, and of his general demeanour, was quite typical for the era for people of his status in life, and especially so for those who spent their days in the world of commerce.” Although this description relates to Sussex rather than Dorney Reach, it's not hard to imagine the commuters through Taplow similarly attired.

Ambrose Francis Pollard who lived at the Chalet (now the Clock House) was a former manager for a brewery in Southwark. He had retired to Dorney Reach with his wife and adult son Francis Charles, who became an architect and building developer. Unlike most of the neighbours, the Pollards were long term residents who invested in local properties. They owned the Chalet and rented it out after moving in 1927 to Banksyde (later Tirra Lirra), a new house they had built on the riverbank south of Bray View. In the early 1930s they moved upriver to Dorney End, next door to the Chalet, which they also bought. Francis married the daughter of the tenant at the Chalet and they raised their daughters and remained at Dorney End until after his death in 1974. The Pollards kept a live-in servant to do the cooking and housework.

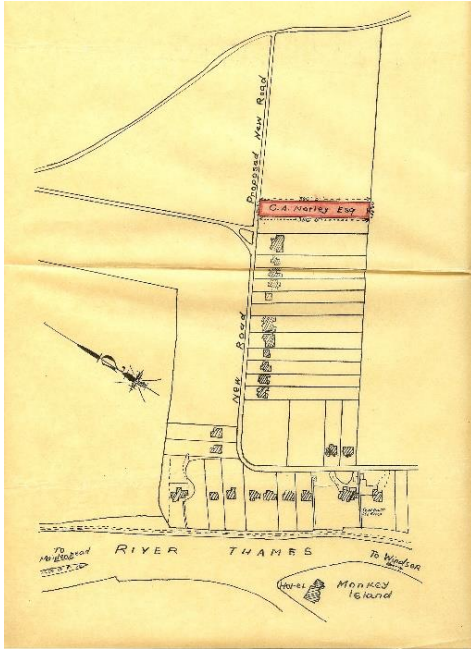
The northernmost house beside the river, Dorney End, was empty on census night in 1921, because its owners Herbert and Louisa Woodfield were in London, which was perhaps where Herbert worked as an electrical engineer. They had married in 1909 and bought the house soon afterwards, but by 1923 they were renting it out.

The remaining two houses in Dorney Reach were built at the bottom of what became Harcourt Road. In 1921 Island Close was rented by Herbert Ambrose Cope, an engineer who had married in 1911 and worked in London. He served as an officer in the Royal Engineers throughout the 1914-8 war and was in Dorney Reach by 1917 when he was renting The Mead. He made the move to Island Close by 1919 and stayed there until the mid-1920s when he moved to another new house on the riverbank, Littleholme (now Gable End), which he bought. The Copes stayed till the early 1930s.

The last house was Dorney Reach House, originally called The Elms. Henry Wordley had moved here from London after retiring as a senior civil servant. In 1921 he was living there with his wife, two adult daughters and mother-in-law. During the war, the house had also been home to another daughter and her young son while her husband was away serving as an army officer. The young

couple had both worked in the offices of the Prudential Assurance Company in London, where he subsequently continued his career. The Wordleys left Dorney Reach in 1923.

What does the census tell us about Dorney Reach in 1921? It was a world where the men went out to work and the women stayed at home, often supported by one or more servants who lived in the house with the family. There were few young children and most of the men worked in London. Other sources tell us that families often came from London and sometimes retained a home there. The shadow of the First World War loomed large, with many of the men sharing experience as officers. The houses in Dorney Reach were mainly rented and stays generally short.



It's possible that a factor leading families to move away was the rapid development of Dorney Reach from the 1920s. In 1919 Colonel Palmer sold a further 33 acres of arable land for building. The first new houses were built in 1923 to the east of Harcourt Road, detached houses with large gardens but more modest in scale than the riverside dwellings. Newspaper advertisements in 1924 offered houses ready for occupation or built to order. By April 1927, 33 of these houses had been built, plus three more large houses on the riverbank. Almost all the new houses were owner occupied. Development continued in the 1930s and by 1936 Dorney Reach had grown to 63 houses, plus Oak Stubbs Cottages in Marsh Lane, a terrace of four cottages for retired farmworkers. What had begun as an exclusive and secluded riverside retreat had become a commuter housing estate with a much more diverse population of residents.

Virginia Silvester
