

The Hoddesdon Road, Stanstead St. Margarets

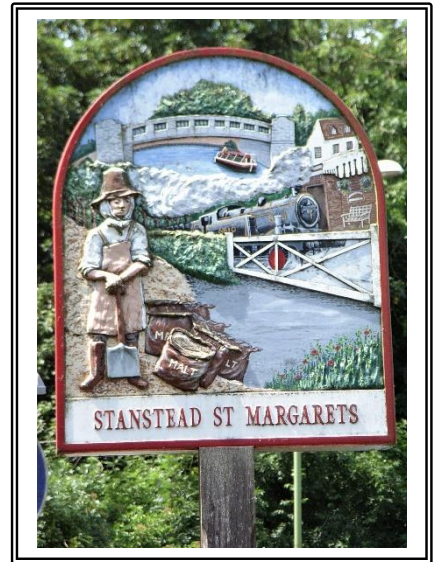
A Brief History

1780 to 1910

By
Stuart Moye

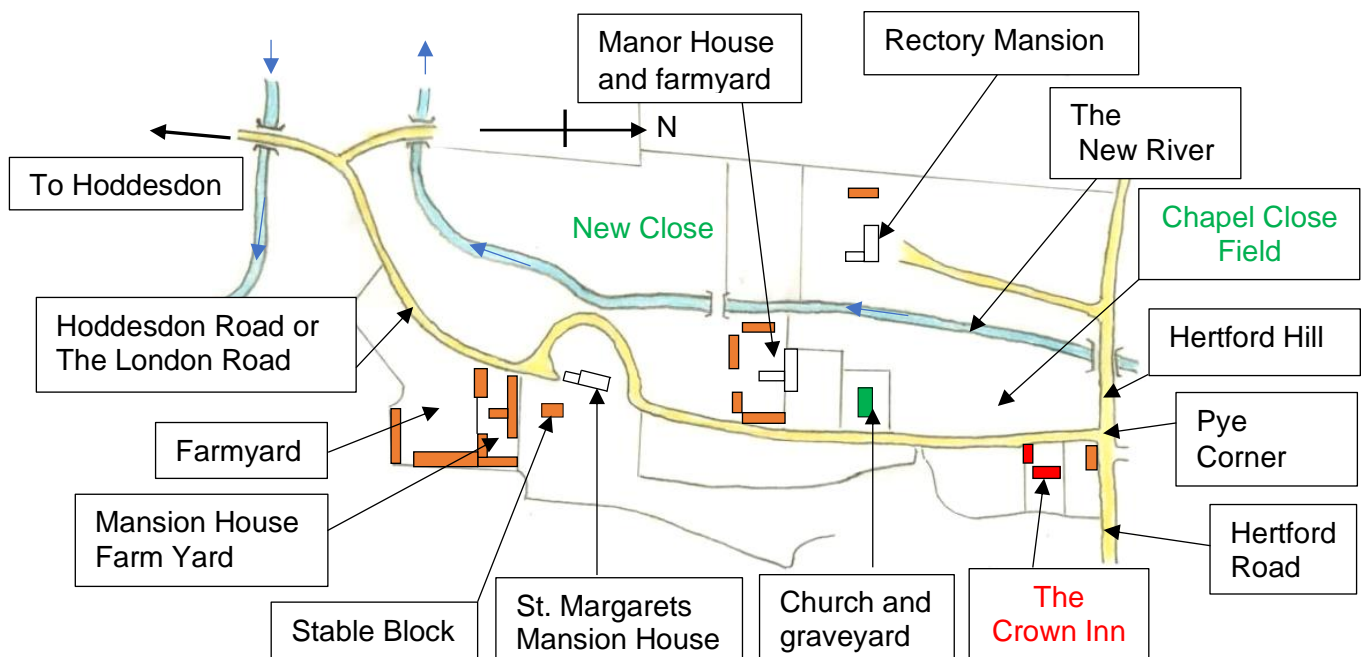
This article provides an insight into the changes along the Hoddesdon Road within the parish of Stanstead St. Margarets, between 1780 and 1910. The part of the Hoddesdon Road included in this study covers the length between its junction with Station Road southwards to where the road crosses over the New River. The section of road is only some 900 yards long which is the full north to south extent of the parish of St Margarets at this point.

This area of St Margarets was mainly unused land at the time of Domesday in 1086. In the following 100 years or so the De Burun family and their descendants drained the riverside meadows and began to create the new small Manor of Thele {Stanstead St. Margarets}. The small settlement was to eventually included a manor house, a church, farmyards and a small number of houses. Even by 1873 much of the land either side of the road remained in agricultural use.



The Hoddesdon Road St Margarets in 1782

(Based on the Amwell / St. Margarets Estate Map of William Cowper)



Notes

The stable block for the Mansion House survives today as the St. Margarets Clock House not to be confused with the Clock house in Stanstead Abbots.

The Rectory Mansion has been known as St. Margaretsbury since 1892. Hertford Hill is now known as Folly Hill and Hertford Road became Station Road after the railway arrived in 1843. Hoddesdon Road has been referred to as the London Road in the past particularly on some postcards of the first half of the 1900s.

The very obvious difference for today's locals is the detour of the road around St. Margarets Mansion House. The Mansion is thought to have been built in the early 1700s along with various outbuildings and adjoining farmyard. The additional structures included a stable block and an octagonal dovecote which survive to this day. The former stable block is today a very prestigious private residence called the Clock House located within part of the original gardens of the former Mansion House. Both the Stable Block and Dovecote are today protected by listed building status. The Mansion House itself seems to have been built on the pre-existing road which provided a well compacted site to build such a residence. Hence the road needing to be taken around the new mansion in a wide circle reaching almost to the bottom of the New River embankment. The Mansion House in the 1780s was the residence of Mr Bibe Lake and was to be severely damaged by fire just before 1800. Fortunately, the other buildings associated with it were far enough away from the blaze to be saved from the flames. The Mansion House itself was demolished and much of the salvageable materials were gathered together on the site and catalogued for sale. Meanwhile the stable block was converted to a gentleman's residence and the Hoddesdon Road was reinstated on what is suspected to be its original course. It is probable that some of the salvaged materials were used in the conversion of the former stables into a comfortable home along with other items sourced from elsewhere. The remaining salvaged materials were to be finally sold off in May 1825 within the grounds of the Mansion House. The following advert appearing in the London Morning Advertiser of the 11th May 1825.

SALES BY AUCTION.

Extensive sale of Building Materials, St. Margaret's, near
Hoddesdon, Herts. – By W. LEIFCHILD, THIS DAY
(Wednesday), FRIDAY and SATURDAY, at Eleven each
Day on the Premise.

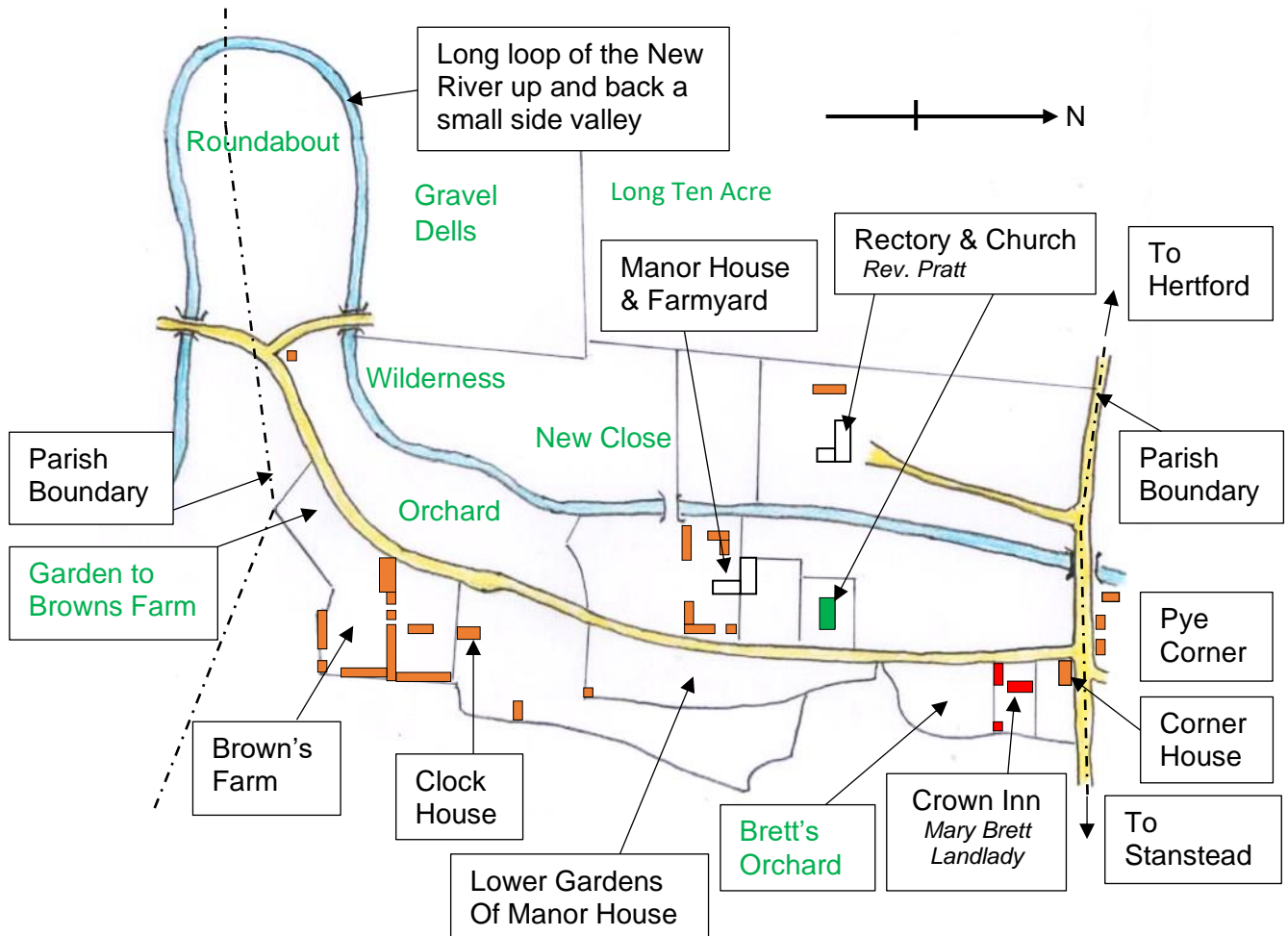
THE superior Materials, extensive Fittings – up and
valuable Fixtures &c of the St Margaret's Mansion House,
near Stanstead, Herts, together with a large range of domestic
offices, turret clock, dove-house, green-house, stone closet, with
iron door, forcing engines, about 15 tons of lead, in gutters,
cisterns, and pipes, iron wire fencing, and a variety of other
articles, the whole of which will be submitted by public Auction,
without the least reserve. – May be viewed two days preceding
the sale, and Catalogues had at all the principal Inns in the
neighbourhood; at Garraway's Coffee House; place of sale;
and at W Leifchild's Offices, Enfield Middlesex, – The above
premises are advantageously situate for land and water carriage,
being by the side of the high road between Hoddesdon and
Stanstead, and immediately contiguous to the navigable River Lea.

Advertisement retyped as close as possible to the original presentation

William Cowper whose estate map appears above was the Lord of the Manor of St Margarets from 1740 until his son Charles is recorded as inheriting this position by 1798. At some point it seems a vicar was not appointed when the post became vacant and the church was closed. Charles Cowper's sister Mrs Francis Cecilia Pratt married the Rev Joseph Pratt in 1890 and he came to St Margarets. On arriving in St Margarets, Rev Pratt discovered the church was being used by a local farmer as a store for equipment and other farming related goods. The offender was a Mr Heard who leased the manor house and the attached farm. Importantly he was a religious dissenter and was no doubt making a religious point in using the unused church building as a barn. The Rev. Pratt started to reclaim the church for its originally intended purpose from about 1807 and was to spend some £800 [*about £60,000 today*] of his own money on the church. This was to include the renovation of the east window and the installation of a bellcote, windvane and church bell in 1820. His wife inherited the manor in 1820 and subsequently her husband the Rev. Joseph Stephen Pratt became the vicar in about 1830. Apart from the demolition of the Mansion House and the straightening of the road there were no major physical changes to this quiet and small rural settlement well into the C19th. The next event in the parish was the tithe award of 1838/9 which provides us today with a well detailed look at the Hoddesdon Road area in St Margarets as it was at that time.

Hoddesdon Road in 1838

(Based on the 1838 tithe award map of the Parish of Stanstead St Margarets)

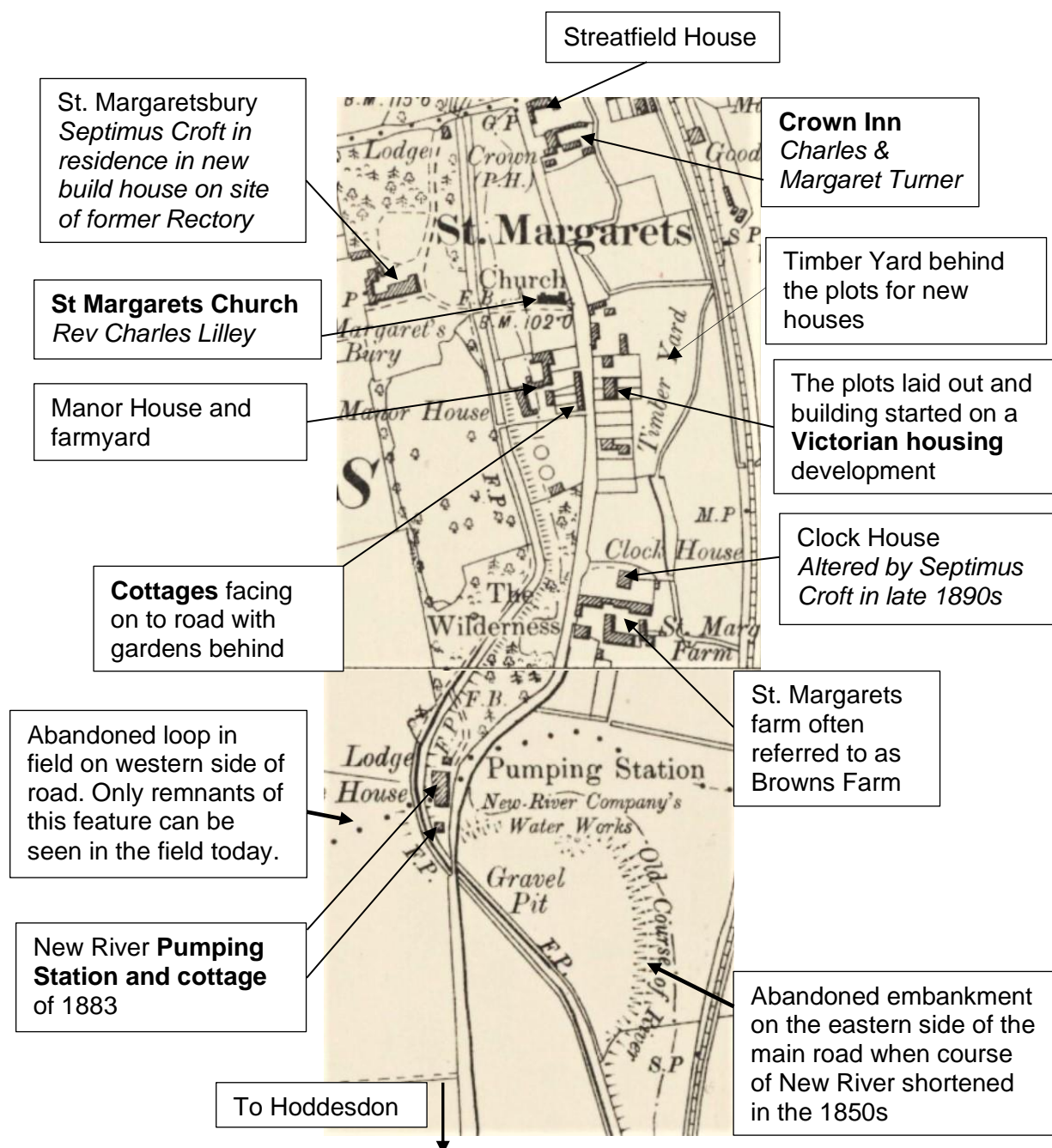


To put this small cluster of homes and three farms in the parish of St. Margarets into context it is worth noting that the total population of the parish in 1790 was 79 persons with about 30 of them living along the Hoddesdon Road. The population was to grow only slowly until the 1890s. In 1838 the little community at Pye Corner included the Crown Inn run by Mrs Mary Brett and the Corner House owned by Henry Streatfield and leased to Ben Hutchinson. This Corner House was later to be called Streatfield House although sometimes appearing as Stratfield House. Mrs Brett did not own the Crown Inn building but she did own the adjacent orchard in her own right. The orchard occupied the land that in the C20th was to be occupied by the Stocker family to run their coal merchants and motor coach business. Just across the Hertford Road in the Parish of Great Amwell were a couple of thatched cottages plus a further larger property, set back from the road, close to the New River. A little cluster of buildings had formed this isolated little hamlet on the Hertford Road for at least three centuries.

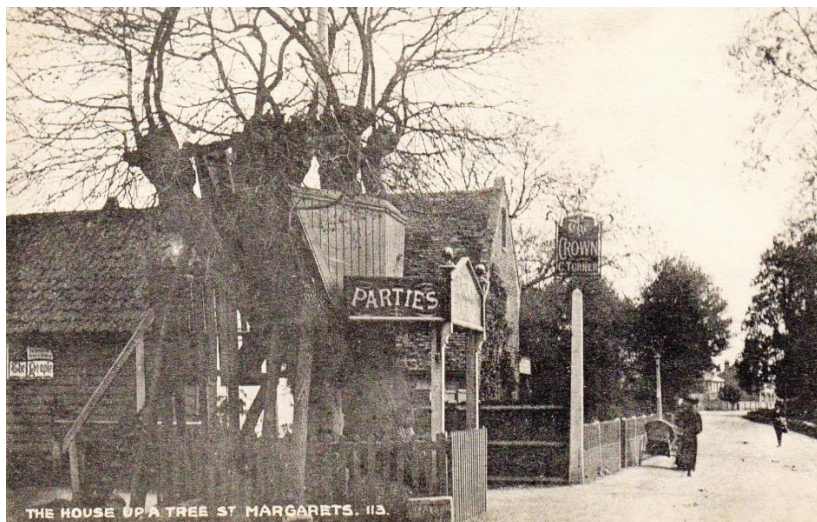
The Pratt family owned the majority of the land shown on this map including running the farm next to the Clock House. Henry Brown owned Brown's Farm and the fields in the area shown on the southern part of map. James Brown, believed to be his son, actually lived at the farm and farmed the land. Brown's Farm was a name that was still being used for this farm well into the C20th. One of the fields owned by the Brown Family was the Roundabout Field. This lay inside a large loop in the New River built in 1609 running along one side of a small side valley and then returning down the other. By this means the desired gentle gradient of the New River could be created without expensive embankments. However, over time the New River Company found the money to reduce the length of their watercourse with the loop at Stanstead St Margarets being bypassed by the use of an embankment in the years 1852-54.

In 1838 the quiet road that passed close to the church in St Margarets saw a little bit of excitement four times a day. This was when two stage coaches ran through southbound in the morning returning to their starting points in Much Hadham and Roydon mid evening. Local people would have been aware of a plan to build a railway from London to Cambridge and even perhaps to York, which did in fact reach Broxbourne in 1840. Even in 1840 the idea of a railway line passing through St Margarets would have been considered by local people as unlikely. Once the railway line was extended to Harlow [*Old Harlow*] in 1841 the Roydon coach through St Margarets was discontinued. It was about this time that news began to reach the local area of a proposed branch line to Hertford and that St Margarets might in fact have its own railway station. The railway and station was built quite quickly during 1843 opening on the last day of October that year. The stage coach from Much Hadham from then on only went as far as the new station at St Margarets and so the site of a stage coach turning at Pye Corner every weekday on its way to and from London came to an end. Although the railway caused considerable development to occur in Stanstead Abbots very little change occurred in this quiet corner of St Margarets. Indeed the 1873 survey shows no new houses had been built. It was not until twenty years later that the first signs of Victorian development began to appear.

Hoddesdon Road St. Margarets in 1895



The Crown Inn is first recorded as the Rose and Crown in 1756 changing its name some 50 years later to The Crown. It was able to offer a large entertainment room to the back of the main building as well as two halls to the rear. The two halls were ideal spaces for societies and clubs to meet. Like other pubs in Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets the Crown attracted a considerable crowd of excursionists from the East End of London. They would be attracted to the area by the Bank Holiday special events at The Rye House Pleasure Gardens and would then spread out into adjacent settlements from Broxbourne to Stanstead Abbots with some ending up at The Crown.



At the turn of the century and for a considerable number of years afterwards the Crown Inn was known for its 'House-up-a-Tree'. This view taken about 1900 shows how the tree house nestled in the splaying branches of the tree. Access to the tree house being via a set of steps on the pub side. The sign is an indication of the importance placed on the facilities available to cater for parties. The Landlord C. Turner displays his name on the pub sign a not uncommon feature in those days

A view from the middle of the road in 1905. The tree seems to have grown well although the advertising boards have been removed from the front of the tree. Christies provided the Crown with its beers from their brewery in the centre of Hoddesdon, near the clock tower. The meeting rooms to the rear of the Inn were accessed down the right-hand side of the pub



The Bean-Feasters from the East End of London had been visiting this area ever since the 1850s when Mr Henry Teale had opened his pleasure gardens at Rye House. His visitors provided many a local hostelry with much welcome extra income on High-Days and Holidays. However, for some locals the exuberance and coarse language of the East Enders could be more than they felt they should tolerate. Things must have been particularly annoying in August 1901 as a special meeting was held in St Margarets Barn on September 11th. A considerable number attended and the two publicans Mr Wormwell [Railway Tavern {Jolly Fisherman}] and Mr Turner [The Crown] were put under considerable pressure. Both explained how they did all they could to maintain order and keep the noise down on their own premises. A motion to ban parties in the two establishments at specified dates and times was however defeated when put to the vote. No doubt the balance between the disturbances on just a few days a year was offset for many by the extra income and employment for additional helpers on the days in question. In the end a letter was dispatched to the Chief Constable requesting extra policing on the days of the Bean-Feaster's visits.



This view of St Margaret's Church dates from 1905. The smart and well-kept exterior owes much to the work of Rev. Joseph Pratt including his addition of weather vane, bellcote and bell. The church is dedicated to St. Mary's but is more often referred to as St Margaret's Church. At the time of the photograph there was a footbridge over the New River behind the church to allow easy access from St Margaret'sbury for Septimus Croft the Lord of the Manor

A postcard sent in 1932 shows the terraced houses on the left built in the 1890s. To the right the carriage entrance to the Manor House can be seen with red brick terraced houses beyond. The cupola on the Clock House can be partially glimpsed beyond the last house on the left. Apart from the lack of a footpath and kerb on the left and the road as yet to receive tarmac not that much has changed in this view today



A view looking back the other way that gives a peek into the old farmyard area next to the Manor House. The building just to the left of the roadside cottages is in fact the old Manor House. There are gates across the entrance to the track that runs from the road all the way to the New River which once gave access, via a bridge over the watercourse, to the fields beyond. Interestingly the caption refers to the London rather than Hoddesdon Road.

Further southwards the road climbs up to a higher level and crosses over the new River. The gradient is dominated by the Rye Common Pumping Station and its associated cottage. They were built by the New River Company in 1883 and both are now grade II listed. The well is 204 feet deep and was designed to be capable of pumping up 2.75 million gallons of water per day. Initially worked by steam engines it was the first of the New River Companies pumping houses to be converted to electric pumps in 1935. From the start it purified much of the water for local distribution. This ceased in 1995 after which time all of the water was pumped directly into the new River.



The picture below was taken in 1910 with the photographer setting up his tripod and camera in the middle of the road. Helpful locals were needed for this type of picture due to the long exposure times involved. Even the horse appears to have been well behaved as there does not seem to be any movement blurring. The photograph captures well the very rural feel that this area of Hoddesdon Road and Pye Corner still retained at this time. The relatively new terraced houses can just be seen behind the passengers in the horse drawn vehicle. The long horizontal sign draws attention to the fact that the Crown Inn offers good accommodation for cycles and welcomes cyclists. There were at the time many people who would cycle in groups around country areas and some pubs became known for making particular provisions for them. Another local Inn that did this was the Pied Bull at the far end of Stanstead Abbots High Street.

