

## 9. Merton Cottages Nos. 2, 4, 6 & 8 West Road



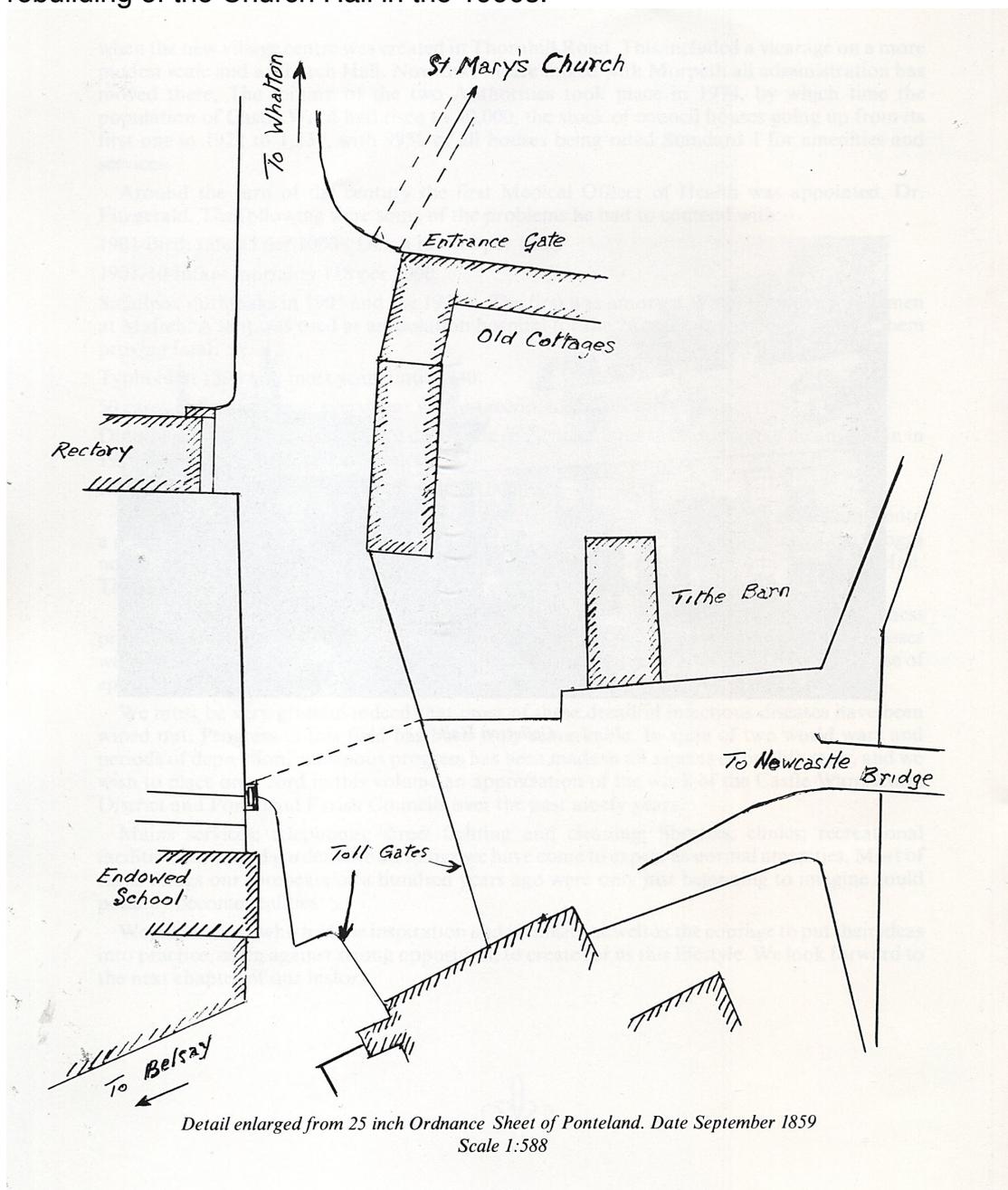
Merton Cottages (or “College Row”) appear at first sight to consist of a pair of semi-detached houses, but in fact they comprise Numbers 2, 4, 6 and 8 West Road (reading from right to left). They may have been variously subdivided in the past and with different entrance arrangements from those now to be seen. Old photographs show that in 1905 there was no entry or porch on the left hand side of the dwellings, as seen above [1] and at the time of writing an internal amalgamation of numbers 2 and 4 has been granted planning approval.

These dwellings bear witness to the fact that Ponteland has had a long connection with Merton College, Oxford. The way the relationship arose is remarkable: in 1262 Peter de Montford – who is thought to have occupied the fortified “Ponteland Castle” on the site of the present Blackbird Inn – was seeking to acquire land and property in Ponteland and made a bargain with Roger Bertram III who was the Lord of Ponteland living in Mitford. He thus acquired *“two bovates (approximately 40 acres) of land adjoining the churchyard and the advowson (the right to appoint the vicar) of the church, in return for a sparrowhawk, two oxgangs (approximately 30 acres) and a dwelling with land”*.

Unfortunately, in 1264-5 de Montford was involved (with Bertram and others) in the “Barons’ War” against King Henry III. This failed, as a result of which penalties were exacted by Walter de Merton, the Chancellor to Henry III, who

was in the process of founding a College for the education of priests in Oxford. Thus Peter de Montford was obliged, on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1267, to make over all his property "to be converted for the said uses of the Scholars and Brethren (of Merton College) for their increase in number without let or hindrance from me or my heirs." [2]

From that time to the present day Merton College has held patronage of the church and has also been Rector with the duty of maintaining the chancel. Great tithes on corn went to Merton whilst the vicar claimed small tithes including Easter offerings and the grass in the churchyard. The College paid for the restoration of the chancel in 1885 and contributed towards the rebuilding of the Church Hall in the 1990s.



As a consequence of the need for a new school following the Education Act of 1870, an appropriate site close to the former Endowed School was sought. An

area of land immediately to the south of the Church appeared suitable, and the Master and Scholars of Merton College (the owners) were prepared to donate it for the purpose. There were, however, some “Old Cottages” built up against the boundary wall of the Churchyard which would need to be removed. [2] [3] These also belonged to Merton College, who agreed to build replacements on the North side of West Road, almost exactly opposite where the Barclays Bank would later stand and Merton Cottages are the result. [4]

Merton Cottages are built in brick in the Garden Wall Bond and with slate roofs. The walls embody contrasting horizontal lines of light-coloured brick at nine separate levels and most of the windows still retain their unusual sliding casements. The Cottages are of some architectural interest but also represent an exceptional and long-standing historical connection between Merton College and the village of Ponteland over 750 years.

[1] “Images of England; Ponteland.” ISBN 0 7524 1806 8  
John Turner. Tempus. 1999. p. 76.

[2] See Notes of a Church visit in 2000 or the Church Guide: “The Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Ponteland” both by Professor Richard Bailey.

[3] “Ponteland; One Thousand Years of History”. ISBN 0 9510381 0 9  
Leslie Almond/Ponteland Local History Society. 1984. p. 60

[4] “Ponteland Through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” ISBN 0 9510381 1 7  
Leslie Almond/Ponteland Local History Society. 1992. p. 5.