

Audleys Wood

Extract of memories recorded by members of the Cliddesden Women's Institute in 1965.

Mr Bradshaw of Audleys Wood subscribed largely to replace the organ in the church in 1890 when a new pipe organ was put in, said to be a replica of one in St Paul's Cathedral. He gave it in memory of his wife Elizabeth who had died after a fall in the hunting field. Mr and Mrs Bradshaw were very good to the villagers in giving them parties at Christmas and a huge Christmas Tree with presents for everyone. The Fates soon dealt a further blow to Mr Bradshaw. Something was wrong with his 'shares' and he was unable to afford the upkeep of Audleys Wood, so he and his little daughter left.

Mr Henry Adolphus Simonds came to live there bringing his nephew and wife, Mr and Mrs L. de. L. Simonds. They carried on many of the good works of the Bradshaws. It was they who made Audleys Wood House so much larger, adding a glass Ball Room with a drained surround and draining so that tropical plants and flowers could be watered daily. There was a musicians balcony leading out of the bedroom over the Ball Room and the band played from there for the various Balls given often to about 1,000 guests. Buzzards of Oxford Street came to supply the refreshments. There was also a Servants Ball each year and for this Buzzards also supplied the refreshments. All the staff were invited, from the gardeners to the Farm staff. There was a cage of beautiful tropical birds brought home by Mr F.A. Simonds from South Africa in 1901, where he had been a serving officer.

There was a large staff in the House: a valet for Mr Henry A. Simonds, a butler, footman and odd-job man who cleaned knives, boots etc and swept up the backyard, carried up coal from the cellar and, in any time left, did odd jobs in the garden. There was a cook-housekeeper, ladies maid, kitchen maid, scullery maid and two house maids. Coal was kept in the cellars and also barrels of Simonds beer. The staff could have beer for their morning lunch break or a glass of milk if they preferred.

Pensdell Farm was occupied by a bailiff and he and his wife lived in the farmhouse at the bottom of the lane. (The house near the road is of much later date). All the estate workers had skim milk for ½d per quart. The thick cream was taken from the large pans and supplied cream and butter for Audleys Wood House. The Lodge at the Cliddesden Road end was occupied by the Head Vegetable gardener and the Alton Lodge by the gardener who looked after all the flowers and fruit grown in the Glass-houses. There was a strip of grass about 4ft wide from the Cliddesden Road lodge right up to the drive which was formed into a ring so that carriages could turn without backing. The drive also carried on to the Alton Road Lodge. That grass verge had to be mowed each week from end to end and the drive swept clear of leaves and rubbish. The tennis courts too were mown each week, they had a pony to pull a very large mower.