



Photograph taken
2021 - provided by
Mike & Liz
Pinnock

Bunyan Lodge

The early history (1876), Wood End, Bluntisham

Photograph
approximate 1930's
(notice the
introduction of
electricity pylons)
provided by Mr Peter
Searle



Bunyan Lodge is a prominent house in Wood End, sited on the sharp right hand bend as you leave the village. We recently unravelled some of its early history, and to our surprise found that not only are its origins linked to a major Act of Parliament (reform of the Poor Law) but that it was built by (or for) John Wheatley, described in Tebbutt's book "History of Bluntisham cum Earith" as: "...one of the most remarkable men who have lived in this parish in recent times".

Two acts of Parliament were responsible for changing the use of the land up at Wood End, which up until then had been the site of the parish's poor cottages and a workhouse. Part of this land is where Bunyan Lodge now stands. These are:

1834: Poor Law Amendment Act – (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor_Law_Amendment_Act_1834)

1835 a subsidiary act “ .. to facilitate the Conveyance of Workhouses and other property of parishes and of incorporation or union of parishes in England Wales” (Abstract of Title to Bunyan Lodge, 1939)

The 1834 Act placed the responsibility for the care of the poor in England and Wales on Poor Law Unions. The Poor Law Unions and their workhouses took over this responsibility from the Church of England parishes. This set up an entirely new form of “aid” for the poor of each Parish. Several Parishes banded together to form a “Union” that ran a workhouse. Relief could only be given in workhouses: in this area it was delivered by the St Ives Union, and the workhouse was at Limes Park, London Road (now converted to private residences). The 1835 act seems to have been a legal process to allow the assets of each parish, previously used for poor relief, to be transferred to the Unions – in this case the St Ives Union.

Thus the deeds to Bunyan Lodge record that on 13 November 1839, John Wheatley of Bluntisham paid to the St Ives Union £21 to purchase the “freehold cottage or tenement situate in Wood End in Bluntisham....are part and parcel of the heriditaments part whereof was then lately used at the Parish Workhouse”. So in effect, the land and buildings were sold to raise money for the St Ives Union, who built their workhouse in 1837-8 (see <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/StIves/>).

Tebbutt records that the Bluntisham workhouse on the site was not pulled down until 1935. Bunyan Lodge was built in 1876 (stone above front door), at the time John Wheatley still owned the land and all property on it and it was originally built as two cottages.

John Wheatley died in 1888 and his will left “all that his newly erected cottage or tenement called Bunyan’s (sic) Lodge....with the yard garden outbuildings and premises adjoining and belonging unto and to the use of the said Ellen Butcher her heirs and assigns for ever” .

See Tebbutt’s book for an account of John Wheatley’s life and many achievements: he seems to have been a classic Victorian polymath. Largely self-educated, he was the village carpenter, a gifted amateur astronomer who constructed his own telescopes and corresponded with leading astronomers of the day (Herschel and Lassell) and a musician who constructed his own instruments. He was so dis-satisfied with the local craftsmen, when it came to constructing mirrors for telescopes, that he finally built a furnace in his garden and did the job himself! Of course, probably his best-known contribution to the village is his part in the building of the Bluntisham Meeting House (Baptist Chapel), and in particular his wood carvings.

Ellen Butcher became Ellen Bloomfield upon marriage and continued to own Bunyan Lodge until her death in 1938. The two cottages know as Bunyan Lodge are then recorded as being sold to William Alfonso Fox. It is not until his widow sells the property in 1979 that the deeds record it being “formerly two cottages” – so we presume that W A Fox converted the two cottages into the single property of today.

We are delighted and privileged to be the custodians of the house today! We have been told that some of the bricks used in Bunyan Lodge were left overs from the building of the Bluntisham Meeting House in 1874. If anybody has any information about this or any of the above we would be glad to receive it.

Thanks to Mike & Liz Pinnock for the article - February 2021