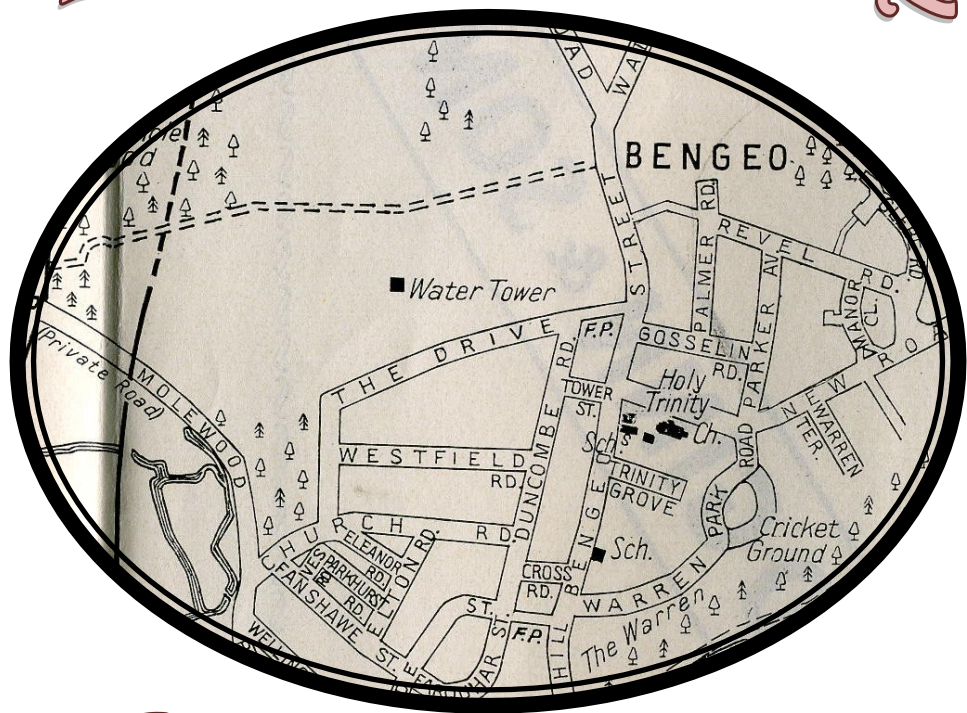


# The Drive



# A History

By

*Marilyn Taylor*

## Introduction

Having been asked for old photos of The Drive when the Street Party idea first started I have since been working on finding out as much as possible about the houses, who lived in them and when they were built as there is such a range of ages and styles of house in our road. Also it has developed into the history of the area before that. Many thanks go to all the people who have helped me with memories, photos and family stories that have help send me in various directions to look for more information. There is a list at the end but if I have forgotten anyone I apologise.

This street party for Queen Elizabeth II 's Diamond Jubilee seems to be the first one in The Drive as there were not enough residents for one on VE day when they were held in Duncombe Road, Tower Street etc.

Although The Drive is mentioned as a possible new road in a document and map dated 1910 when the council leased the land from Ware Park Estates for allotments, it did not exist as a residential road until around 1930 when the "New" Water Tower was built.

Each house in the road was developed by the person who bought the building plot so many different building firms were employed over many years.

This is a very personal work as I was born in The Drive in January 1955 .

All profits will go to charity.

Published by Marilyn Taylor, 30 The Drive, Bengoe

## Early Years

Most people think that it was called “The Drive” because the residents of Goldings took the route to Church, either St Leonards or Holy Trinity before Waterford Church was built but that may also be the reason for Church Road. Another theory is that it could have been “the drive” between the two estates of Goldings and Ware Park. The Old maps show it as a footpath or bridle path from Bengoe Street to Molewood Road and of course both ends still are the “twitchell” to Bengoe Street and the track to Molewood Road. Molewood Road then turns right and there is still a footpath you can take which would bring you out almost opposite Goldings. My father came up that way when there were the serious floods in the 1960’s and all roads were cut off. He had a Land Rover; the car that tried to follow him got stuck!

The fields were owned by the estate of Thomas Byde at Ware Park. They were rented at various times to various people and used for farming, allotments, animals and crops. Among these were the Wray family who made chestnut hurdles and fencing etc. They rented the corner of one of the fields near the tower which may be the buildings on the 1920’s map. They did not use the wood from the trees but bought in their supplies by horse and cart. The firm seems to have given up use of the field around 1930 when Mr Wray snr retired. He died 10 years later. There was also a “carter” named Farnham who lived in Duncombe Road and used part of one of the fields for his horse.

There were allotments in the area in 1914 rented by the Bengoe Working Men’s Club. There is an article in the Mercury of some ladies from Wellington Street being caught stealing vegetables by the farmer Mr Salmon of Bengoe Street whose land adjoined them.

## WW1

The area had also been used in the First World War by an artillery regiment. It was then still an unmade road with fields either side. They had horses and men on the south side & gun carriages on the north side. Heavy traffic made the road and fields very muddy so they bought in cart loads of stones from local pits to improve the surface. Hence we have so many stones in our gardens! The men were billeted on the field presumably in tents and the officers were billeted in houses around.

Mrs Mansfield had some in Tower Street. After the war the land was again divided into allotments that can be seen on the 1922 map and let to local residents and presumably the Bengeo Club and stretched to the site of the present Water Tower and probably beyond.



**Water Tower c 1930**

**Old Water Tower and Duncombe Road in distance**

**Photo the Saggars Collection**

## The Water Tower

The Corporation of Hertford decided in 1926 that there was a great need for improvements in the waterworks as Bengoe was losing its supply every couple of weeks when the pumps, reservoir and tower could not cope with demand as so many new houses were being built. The original site chosen in 1927 a 2 acre site the other side of The Avenue nearer the Molewood pumping station that was to be purchased from Mr R Abel Smith, but that needed permission from the trustees of Ware Park Estates which was not given but they offered the land and access from The Drive as an alternative. In 1928 this piece was agreed on and it was purchased for £140. It was an existing copse of trees measuring 3 rods and 35 poles which was there by 1880 but does not appear on the Tythe Map of c1841. A loan was agreed by the Ministry of Works to cover the costs, which with laying the road, plans, engineers fees, drains etc. was £8,235 9s 6d in total. The tower was designed by Messrs' L G Mouchel & partners of Westminster who were the civil engineers & supervised the construction and built by Concrete Piling Ltd of Westminster while another firm did the pipes and drains etc. During it's construction one and possibly two men were killed falling from it, though this does not seem to have been reported in the Mercury! There was a delay in construction due to a shortage of carpenters and the adverse weather. The rendering took from 17th Nov to 20th Dec 1929. It actually has 2 tanks one inside the other. Water was first pumped into the tank on 23rd Dec for testing and it was completely filled on 27th Dec and allowed to stand full until 30th Dec. When half was run off into the inner tank and it was cleansed and further tests carried out and leaks repaired. It was fully operational in spring 1930.

Hertfordshire Mercury June 1930 *There has been a large number of visitors to the new tower at Bengeo and it would be interesting to know the number of "snaps" that have been taken during the last week or so. Rising above the beautiful trees with which it is surrounded it presents a striking view just now and certainly does not take away the "Rural aspect" we hear so much about.*

The photo on the previous page showing the Tower in the middle of allotments with Duncombe Road and the Old Tower in the background must have been taken at this time.

It is described in 1929 as a 200,000 gallon tank standing 105 ft. in height. After a few years it was leaking quite badly and a repair was done in 1942 but this did not solve the problem so in 1948 a more major repair was made costing £351 18s 6d by Messrs' Wailes Dove Bitumastic Ltd of Westminster. The photo shows how the leaks froze and made quite large icicles.



### **Photo Saggers Collection**

In 2007 another repair was made . (The description has changed to metric!) Now it is a 30 metre high tower which has a capacity of 900 cubic meters and was built with a 75mm thick reinforced concrete slab roof with minimum steel reinforcement.

The ailing roof was re-established with a carbon fibre system.

## First Houses

The first houses built were originally Duncombe Road these were 128 Duncombe Road, Constable Cottages, The Bungalow and Lynn Regis all there in 1928 before the Water Tower.

The houses at this end of the road changed address several times as the road developed. What I always thought of when I was young as the "Police houses" now no 1 and 2 Duncombe Close were also 1 and 3 The Drive, then 2 and 4 The Drive when the numbers swapped sides. 128 or "Lockerbie" became no 1, The Bungalow became no 4, "Lynn Regis" became no 6

The other houses built around 1930 the same time as the Tower were currently no's 3 and 5 which when built were no's 2 and 4 "Tramore" now no 8 and no 12 which was given planning permission in 1930

The land at this point was still part of Ware Park Estates. The land in The Drive was divided into building plots and sold off consecutively to individual buyers, there was no choice of which plot you wanted. As the tower was here I assume it had to become a wider road for access so the houses were begun although it was unmade for many years. The residents had to pay to have it made up themselves around 1939-40, Hilda Siggers remembered they paid around £24 each, it was done as far as no 33 and the Water Tower entrance. Until it was made up the first residents used to fill in the many holes with stones from their gardens, probably a legacy from the Artillery.

The section past that was not made up until the 1960's.

## **Bengeo Lodge and Lodge Close**

In the 1800's the house had been lived in by a member of the Wedgewood family and the map of 1910 when the County Council rented the field on the North side from the Copse to a line almost in line with Duncombe Road for allotments shows that the triangle of land including Bengeo Lodge and The Yews was owned by the Wedgewood Trust.

The Bungalow that is now no 4 The Drive was part of Bengeo Lodge. Major Woodhouse leased Bengeo Lodge from about 1919 and he purchased it and extra land in about 1923 and then increased the size of the house to include more bedrooms and bathrooms. The building work was done by Mr G Roberts. The Major continued to live there after his divorce and right up until the early 1970's when he sold the house and moved into the bungalow.

Major Woodhouse was one of the Woodhouse families of importers of Masala wine. He and his brother had farmed his father's estate at Newsell's Park near Royston between leaving University and WW1. The estate was sold after the war and they concentrated on the wine business. In later years he was very involved with the local education committees, schools and

the Hospital. When they had the Assize Court at Shire Hall the judge stayed at Bengeo Lodge and all the traffic was stopped for his car.



**Bengeo Lodge  
Photo**

**Chris Woodhouse**



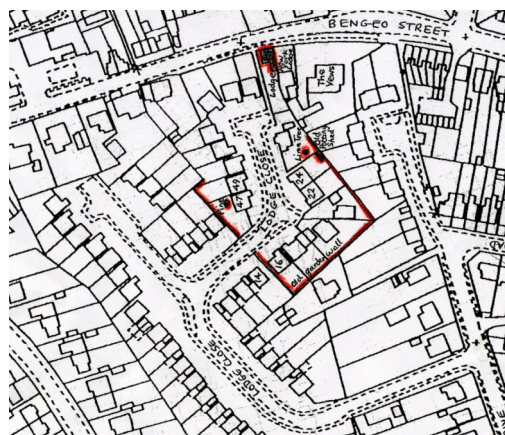
There was a 5 acre market garden owned by the Major and run by Mr Bill Jeffreys who lived at 131 Bengo Street and had worked on the building of the water tower. A lot of the first residents of The Drive used to go to buy produce much of which he grew and supplemented with extra supplies from our family business Taylor Brothers. During WW2 there were also Land Girls working there including on a few occasions my mother!

There is a map on which Mr Ron Jeffreys has marked which of the dividing walls in the gardens of the houses in Lodge Close were the original ones of the walled garden of Bengo Lodge.

Mr and Mrs Snell lived in the bungalow for many years. The Major had it built in 1928 probably for them, again by Mr Roberts as Mr Snell worked as his chauffeur. He may have previously worked for the Major's father .

The Major sold some of the land first in the mid 1960's and then the house itself in about 1970 for development and the house was demolished. The Drive end was built first with the access road being a building plot that had been bought by Mr Hawes of Duncombe Road but he used it as an allotment and his son

then sold it when Lodge Close was being built. If that had been built on Lodge Close would presumably had to have had access from Bengo Street. No 24 Lodge Close did and may still have the original Potting shed of Bengo Lodge in its garden.

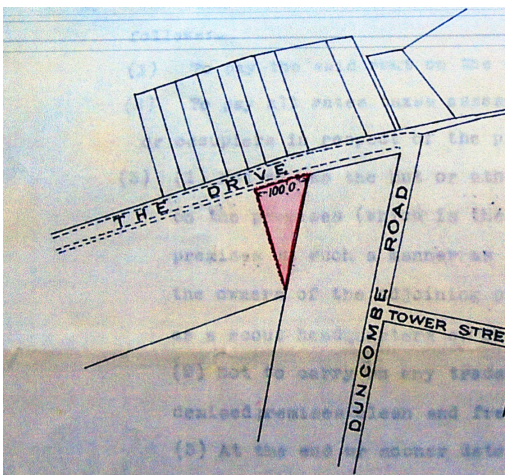


More detailed maps available to look at

## Lads Club and Scout Hut

The land at the junction with Duncombe Road was leased by Ware Park Estates, first in 1923 when it probably included the land that is now no's 3, 5, 7 and 7a though there is no map to show the exact position, to the then rector of Bengeo the Rev Oliver for the building of a hut to house a "Lads club" I don't know if it had any building at that point and it is not clear how many years he rented it for. It is possible it was divided up and George Roberts had some as a builders yard until he built current no's 3 and 5 in 1928 . Then in 1932 the smaller plot was rented to George Shepherd Page and George Duncan Galloway Cribb for 3 years for the building of a scout hut. This may have also had something to do with the Church Army at some point. They probably had it for longer than that as Betty Roberts remembers the scout hut there in the late 1930's and it is mentioned in 'Scouting in Hertford District, 1908-2000' as being there in 1935 for the 1st Bengeo Scout Troop.

The houses on that plot 7 and 7a were not built until after WW2



**Plan from tenancy  
agreement 1932  
HALS collection**

## Houses 1930's

These first houses were followed by no's 14 to 22 that were built around 1933, there is a photo taken from the top of the old water tower across to the new one showing these houses. No 10 was not built until around 1939 just before war broke out. On the other side no 9 was the next to be built followed by no's 11, 13, 21, 23, 25, 27. 29. 31, 33, 35, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49 and 51 all built between about 1937 and 1939. The outbreak of war stopped all building of new houses for a number of years. When the new County Hall was completed just before the outbreak of WW2 the men who worked for the county accountants W V Keen moved there from London. A number decided to buy land and build houses in The Drive and live side by side. These were Mr Jones (39) Mr Downs (41) Mr Scott (45) Mr Smith (49) ( his mother Mrs Smith (47) ) Mr Mitchell (51) . All the houses were completed between 1938-1939 and the families moved in. The premises that they had previously worked in in London were bombed as was Mr Smith's previous home in Hounslow! They worked a Co-Operative between them to build their houses Mr Smith found the architect & builder Mr Brimley though they had no financial help from the council & each paid for their own house. Mr Smith bought a larger plot with a T shaped garden so those either side had smaller gardens. The garden of 49 had an old footpath running through it in a straight line from The Drive to Church Road parallel with

The Avenue but a few yards west of it. Fences were put up by the house owners

**1930's from tower to tower  
photo the Saggars  
Collection**



## WW2

The Home Guard used the remaining field by the Tower for practice sessions in World War 2 and had to go and do watch duties up the Tower. There were no facilities so the bucket was emptied over the side, on one occasion over one of the member's bikes standing at the bottom!

There was a bomb that fell in the field at the back of the current Cowper Crescent and as at the time there were no buildings to stop the blast a number of the new houses in The Drive had windows broken but thankfully there was no serious damage to any of them and no one was hurt.

Some of the residents had evacuees including Mrs Saggars at 29 who had 3 lots, Mrs Roberts at no 12 and Mrs Downs at 41 but some of the families had relatives with them so did not have any extra space.

There was a bonfire and fireworks round the Water Tower which was floodlit for V E day. At that point only about ½ the road was developed with houses mostly finished down the south side and ½ way down the north side. After the war the field reverted to a cornfield with the Allotments at The Avenue side of the Tower and was such until building of the houses on that side and the field behind was still in cultivation until houses in Woodhall Close were built.

**Before Woodhall Close**

**Photo the Taylor Collection**



## Houses after 1945

After WW2 you had to have a licence to build a new house and there were restrictions on size and cost. The first house built on the north side, once licences were issued and building re started was no 34 "Oak Tree" in 1948 by Mr Arthur Cunneen. Ronnie lived there until her death in Dec 2011 and it is currently under offer to new purchaser's. The Oak Tree it is named after can be seen in an early photo of the new tower with Duncombe Road in the background I think this was one of those "snaps" taken in 1930. The Oak Tree was a local landmark sitting as it did in the middle of what was then a field quite a way from the rest of the copse.

This was followed by numbers 24 to 54 in the 1950's with a gap at no 26 where a road was at one stage proposed to link The Drive with the proposed new building of The Avenue, as we now know this did not happen and the house was built c1962.

There are a lot of stories of the various houses as each building plot was sold to an individual buyer to build their house unlike today when a developer tends to buy a block of land and build all the houses before selling them.

The plot at 32 was purchased before the war but the house was not built until after, My grandfather bought plots 28 and 30 to build two houses for himself and his son Gordon my father. In the end my grandfather bought a house in Church Road and sold plot no 28 to a family named Bracebridge, they found out he intended to sell the same weekend he decided and sent a telegram from South America, we never did know how they knew! Even in those early days The Drive was desirable. They built the house but never lived in it and it was leased to both the American and British Army before they sold it. 12

No 29 was built by Arthur Saggors and he and Hilda moved in in 1938 when they were first married. Originally it had a chain along the front wall but that went for the war effort never to be replaced. Hilda lived there all the rest of her years until her death in Dec 2010. It is currently being extended for a new family.

Miss Betty Roberts and her family have stayed in their house since it was built as have Mrs Doris Downs and her family, Mrs Enid Perry and her family as well as us the Taylor's. Some of the houses have had only 2 owners, some many more. I have tried to get a complete list of residents in every house if anyone would like to know how many people have lived in their house, but there could well be some missing names!

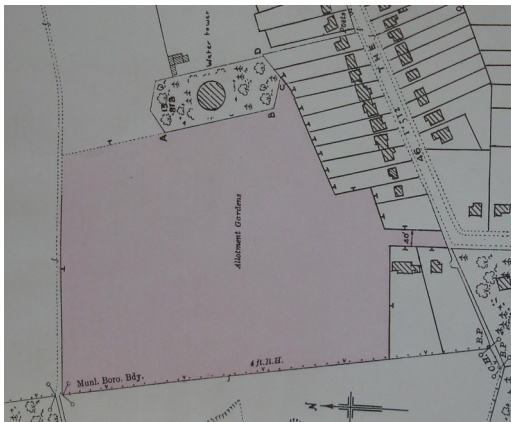
In the 1950's there were sufficient male youths living in The Drive to form the basis of a football team called "Water Tower Wanderers". I have a copy of the 1956-1957 handbook if anyone would like to see it. That year they played a number of teams including Bramfield, Golding's, Danesbury, Cuffley, Bengo Boys School, St Albans and Hertford Boy Scouts, Cowper School etc. The President was Mr L Keeble (no 33) and the Vice-Presidents Mr G Mansfield (father of Hilda Saggors no 29) and Mr H Smith (no 50) but the manager and chief organiser was Mr Frank Bevan (no 24) father of John who some will know as a coach driver for Reg's.

Numbers 53 and 55 were built in 1977 and 1987 and the original people still live in them. They were built in what had been the back garden of Mr Earl the butcher who lived in the house in The Avenue and had his shop on Cowbridge.

## “Onion Patch”

No's 56 and 58 were built about 1962 after the sale of the allotments by the Working Men's Club although the land they are on was not part of that sold. The Bengoe Working Men's club had originally purchased the land that they had leased as allotments from Ware Park Estates for £20 a year after the death of Squire Parker in 1954; they paid £100 an acre at that point. It was a story that made the national papers “Golden Onion Patch” etc. as the land made so much money £98,000 for 10.3 acres was unheard of in 1960 working out at just under £10,000 per acre. The buyer Hubert Leach had bought the other adjacent land for £2,500 per acre. It upset many members of the club at the time most of all Cllr George Mansfield who felt when the houses were built they would not be affordable by the working man. However the sale did get the club out of its financial difficulties and paid for the new two story club house that is still in Bengoe Street. There are copies of an article, sale catalogue and map here for anyone interested to look at. The club had in 1956 sold 4 acres of the land for £7,000 i.e. £1,750 per acre and the then club treasurer Mr Ernest Scott (no 45) said had they known they would have waited

and got a lot more for it. It was at this point some of the early residents felt it lost its “Rural atmosphere” that they had all been so proud of.



**Map of land sold**

**HALS collection**

## Residents

Probably the roads most famous resident to date lived for a while with his parents at no 9. Brian Wilde is best remembered as Foggy Dewhurst in Last of the Summer Wine but he also appeared in other sit com's such as Porridge.

At no 10 Mr Arthur Drury was well known as the owner of Drury Brothers the gentlemen's outfitters in Maidenhead Street his brother in law Mr Judd who also worked for the firm lived at no 6, their wives being sisters. James Judd who lived at no 6 as a child has gone on to be a world renowned conductor with both the Florida Philharmonic and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras amongst others around the world.

Both Leonard Keeble no 33 and Horace Gilbey no 31 served as Mayors of Hertford and Arthur "Oscar" Cunneen no 34 was Town Clerk. Mr Silversides no 15 was organist & choirmaster at Holy Trinity Church, Bengoe

Mr Roberts no12 worked for Simpson Shand & was organist at Waterford.

Mr Gibbard no18 had Masons in Fore Street called .

Mr Skinner no20 was the owner of Bridens bakers & caterers.

Mr Perry at no32 was company secretary for Addis's.

Mr Wren at no44 was the son of Josiah Wren the bakers.

Mr Arthur Sagggers jnr no 29 worked at De Havilland in Hatfield & Mr Arthur Sagggers snr was also a baker on Old Cross.

Other residents worked at County Hall, for various large firms in Hertford and some in London or like my father who owned Taylor Bros in Ware Road had their own businesses.

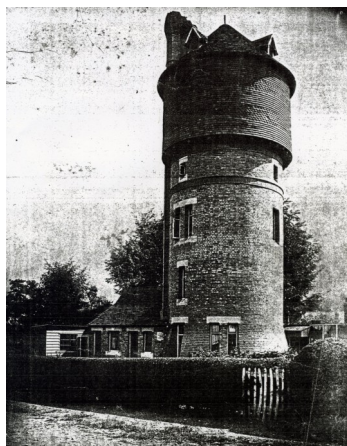


## The Old Water Tower

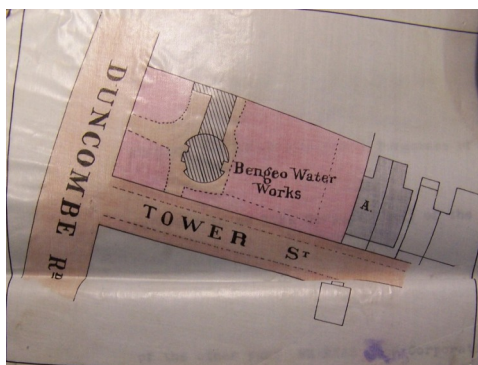
Not strictly The Drive I know but it was because this one got too small that the new one was built. A lot of people do not realise Tower Street is so called because originally it was a cul-de-sac with the tower at the end. It was built before most of the houses in Duncombe Road and before the Church Hall. This one was occupied and had round rooms on each floor with the top floor split into 2 bedrooms. It was built the 1870's and demolished sometime between 1935 and 1939 and the land was used for an air raid shelter for the ARP and a air raid siren.

When it was still in use the land around it was rented to Mr George Roberts snr a water engineer and builder and possibly lived in the tower itself at one point. He was the brother of Albert Roberts snr the grandfather of Betty Robert's (no 12 The Drive) and Jennifer Newton.

In the 1920's the ground floor was rented for an electricity substation the forerunner of what is there now and just before demolition a room was used by the Bengoe Scouts



Photograph Mr Whyman



Plan HALS collection

**A few of the houses before extensions etc.**



**No 29 in 1938**



**21 To 27 in c 1945**

**Gap at 19, 17 in distance**



**28 and 24 before**

**no 26 was built c 1955**



**30 c 1958**



**No 49 in 1939**



**36 in 1980's**

**The first residents of the road with dates of building  
c=circa for approx. date.**

**1** Collison c1905 **3** 1928 Weston **5** 1928 Neeve  
**7** c1948 Caldecote **7a** c1948 Halfhide **9** c1933 Wilde  
**11** c1939 Williams **13** c1937 Gailer **15** c1945 Silverside  
**17** c1945 Cutmore **19** c1947 Lake **21** c1938 Watson  
**23** c1938 Doxey **25** c1938 Newbury **27** c1938 Howie  
**29** 1938 Saggars **31** c1937 Waine **33** c1937 Keeble  
**35** 1938 built by Mr Keeble first resident Mr Sutton  
**37** c1954 Rushton **39** 1939 Jones  
**41** 1939 Downs **43** 1939 Browne **45** 1939 Scott  
**47** 1939 Smith **49** 1939 Smith **51** 1939 Mitchell  
**53** 1977 Hawkins **55** 1987 Allen  
Constable Cottages c1926  
**4** 1928 Snell **6** 1927 Collins **8** 1929 Cawston  
**10** c1939 Drury **12** 1930 Roberts **14** c1933 Wren  
**16** c1933 Bygrave **18** c1933 Gibbard **20** c1933 Skinner  
**22** c1933 Philp **24** c1950 Bevan **26** c1964 Doubleday &  
Goodey  
**28** c1958 Bracebridge built (Army rented ) **30** 1953 Taylor  
**32** 1953 Perry **34** 1948 Cunneen **36** c1954 Jennings  
**38** c1960 Armond **40** c1956 Eustace **42** c1952 Tate  
**44** c1954 Burroughs **46** c1956 Bower **48** c1956 Stalley

## Sources

### **Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies- County Hall**

Hertfordshire Mercury

Various tenancy agreements

Hertford Corporation documents and minutes

Various Maps

Details of the sale of land by Bengeo Working Men's club

### **Recorded memories**

Late Misses Kay and Mary Bedington, late Hilda Saggars, late Douglas Smith, also Ron Jeffreys and Alyson Vince by Tony Gardner for a yet unpublished book.

### **Photos**

Michael Saggars, Tony Gardner, Taylor family,  
Chris Woodhouse

### **Memories and help**

Robert Cunneen, Doris and Jacqueline Downs, Tony Gardner  
Andrea Humphries, Bob Hunt, Brian Jeffreys, Jennifer  
Newton, Enid Perry, Betty Roberts, Stella and Michael  
Saggars, Tony Salmon, Sally and Michael Searle, Chris  
Woodhouse and the Taylor family.