A BRIEF HISTORY OF FORD STREET

Ford Street is a road that runs due south from Wellington in Somerset; it is an extension of the town’s South Street, starting at the Wellington bypass and running to the top of the Blackdown Hills. Below the summit, there used to be a stone to which the road would have led directly; this suggests Neolithic origins so one can assume that Ford Street has been used as a wayfare for thousands of years.

Ford Street is both a hamlet and a road, taking its name from a ford that once existed where the road crosses Haywoods Water, near to Woodlands House. The stream here was called the River Blacken and the old Blacken Bridge can be seen beside the present one, built when the motorway was being constructed in the early 1970’s.

The hamlet of Ford Street is situated almost 2 miles from the centre of town; it is here that the road splits and another road also known as Ford Street runs due west past Briscoe House to Monument Road. Ford Street, the hamlet that stands around this bisection, is situated on the lower reaches of a spur that runs down from just below the Blackdown plateau.

It is not possible to say when Ford Street first became a settlement yet it must have been attractive owing to the nearby presence of water; a stream still runs through the hamlet yet it is now underground but still audible if one stands above a drain hole cover. Nearby quarries indicate that there could have been people living here since about 700 B.C. when land on the Blackdown Hills was first mined.

We know something of the medieval era when the Bodley family lived in what is now a group of buildings including Bodley House, Bodley Barn, Bodley Yard as well as Middle Ford Farm, also known as Webbers at one time. However, since detailed records do not go back as far as this, the story really starts in the early nineteenth century when Tithe maps were made and printed.

In the early 19’th century, on what is now called **“**TheIsland”, a public house called The Rising Sun stood with a well nearby. By the end of the 19th century, this building was ruined and the plot of land had become a walled garden belonging to Lorna Doone, a large house that still stands over the road. Small **“**cottages**”** stood at either end of this patch but these became ruins and in the mid-1960’s, a bungalow was built here that is still occupied.

Lorna Doone, formerly known as Ford Villas, was a large property around 1900. Part of this was the present day Oxhayne, formerly Five Elms, which had a steam driven grist-mill yet when this no longer made commercial sense, it was sold off in 1908 as a separate private house on the understanding that windows were frosted up preventing **“**spying**”** on Lorna Doone. The house Lorna Doone became a cider factory with its own special **“**LornaDoone” apple and there are the traces of a number of orchards in the area.

Further up the road, The Brethren, had a chapel until the 1950’s in a house now known as The Old Chapel; they also used to meet at the Millroom in North Street, Wellington until about 1930. It was at the end of the nineteenth century that The Plymouth Brethren in Wellington became merely the Brethren as the movement expanded and adopted a priesthood when before there had been none.

There seems to have been a sense of community in Ford Street during the earlier part of the twentieth century with both a butcher’s and a baker’s while dairy products were available from Lorna Doone.

Some houses in Ford Street are much older than others. For instance, Rose Cottage was in existence before the mid-eighteenth century while newer houses were built in the 1960’s such as Waylands **(**formerlyRose Bungalow) that stands next door to Rose Cottage. In the second half of the twentieth century during the reign of the present monarch, Ford Street became a residential area.