

Extracts from an account written 23rd Jan 1976

by Cuthbert Nethercott

At first the business was carried out at Exonia House, No. 32, Blackhorse Lane, (now demolished). an old property down the alley next to Sparrow Farm, renting as a yard part of old Wibley's yard opposite, now built on, (now 59 Blanche Lane) The toilet facilities left much to be desired. They were situated at the end of a public footpath and consisted of an old shack next to the pigsty, which was not a very comfortable sit-you-down, being the old box seat type. Whilst in the dark you had a rat run over your feet, or a pig poking its nose through the side of the boards. Actually, these pigs became quite friendly. There was no bolt on the door, just a piece of string, if engaged you had to wait outside in the rain or look over the fence at the pigs.

Having sold Exonia House, the Nethercott Family of seven took over Dove House, No. 24, Blackhorse Lane, (now demolished).

These days in the funeral business were very hard. Guy, the eldest son, would hire a horse and cart from Mr. Hollis at Sparrow Farm, go to Halsey's the Timber Merchants, of London Colney, and collect a full load of elm boards. These would be extremely wet, and would have to dry in our living room, around the fire. They could then be stored, ready for use. They then had to be hand sawn to shape, saw curved to form the sides, and made into coffins and polished. Mrs. Nethercott would then seal, line and fit, to complete the coffin, all work being carried out on the kitchen table. All name plates were written in Old English style by Charles Nethercott.

In those days the hearse was very rarely used, particularly for Clare Hall TB. Hospital funerals. Instead, the coffins, (maybe 2 or 3 at a time), would be pushed up to Clare Hall on a hand truck at night. The funerals were carried out by 4 bearers walking down to St. Giles Church, (some 1/2 mile away), changing over sides halfway. The cost in those days being approx. £11-0s.-0d. .

If not at school, the younger sons of the Nethercott family would walk behind the coffin carrying the hats, (earning 1d.). Often to meet them in the churchyard was a person known as Old Mickey Marsh, the grave digger. He smoked a pipe and had a bright faced shovel, (it used to be said that a labourer's shovel had to be so clean as to cook a breakfast on). This applied to Mickey. Having probably remarked a few unkind words because he was given the wrong measurements, thus having to dig out more ground than necessary, he would collect his money, (10s-0d) and go down to the White Hart.

In **1933** the firm took over the Old Red Lion, at the junction of St. Albans Road and Blackhorse Lane, formerly known as The Sun. This license was transferred to The Middlesex Arms. It was renamed Arlingham House, after the founder's second name,

From **1936** Cuthbert took over and the first mechanical vehicle was purchased, a 1921 A.J.S. Motor Box Sidecar, costing £4.10s. The next was a 3-wheeled baker's van.

Prior to this all plant and materials had to be pushed along on a hand truck, as far as Rabley, Ridge Hill, Bridgefoot House and Potters Bar. The firm grew and finished with 6 vehicles by 1971.

In **1946** both the building and funeral companies had grown to such an extent that the funeral dept, took over 148/150, Darkes Lane, Potters Bar.



Exonia House Blackhorse Lane. 1916



Dove House Blackhorse Lane. c1920s



Arlingham House, St. Albans Road 1936