

Laurel Bakery Mystery Object

Text: David Gibbs

Clearly, this object is associated with The Laurel Bakery, the last in the village. It closed in the early 1960s. The baker was Oswald Batstone. This artefact is something of a mystery as only photographs appear to exist, and we know nothing about size or the material from which it was made although it appears to be of thin metal. But what is it? Two holes in opposite corners suggest it might have been attached to something that was curved. Could it have been a sign? Another suggestion is that it might have been a stencil, possibly for marking flour sacks and used by the flour merchants who supplied the bakery. What do you think it is?



Update March 2013

Mary Paull found the answer, in a Church Magazine article written, it is believed, by John Hastings and published in the 1970s.

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

How many people in Merriott remember when the village bakery was at the corner of Tail Mill? We were reminded quite recently when another of our institutions came to an end and Terry Arnold retired from his printing and stationery business at Merriott crossroads. When Terry finally cleared out the last cupboards and drawers, he came across a printing plate that was used on the paper bags in which the baker wrapped his bread. He very kindly passed it on to us as a souvenir.

The printing plate has all the wording in reverse, but if you hold it up to a mirror it carried the message THE LAUREL BAKERY, in large capitals surrounded by laurel leaves; and underneath in a flowing script, O.J. Batstone, High Class Pastry Cook. Perhaps this will bring back memories to the old folk of the times when they used to bring their Sunday joints and pies to be cooked in the bakehouse oven for a very small charge.

What remains of the bakery now? The bakehouse chimney, long since idle, built at the back of an old hamstone house once called the Laurels, but now masquerading under another name. The bakehouse with its red-tiled roof, built as an extension to the house itself, now serving as a very roomy double garage; and at the bottom of the garden, a rectangular concrete slab that was once the floor of the stable where the baker kept his horse. The man from the Ordnance Survey asked to see it one day because they were revising the map of Merriott, and the stable showed up quite clearly on the current 6" map. Grandad, do you remember when Mr Batstone's horse and van delivered bread all round the village? The time came, alas, when it was decided to change to a motor van. The old driver said he was having none of that, so he said goodbye to his horse and retired to a little cottage the other side of Clapton.

So now it is all over, and if you want to find the house, it still has a variegated laurel bush peeping over the front wall, in spite of the new name by the gate.

A personal addendum:

It's good to be able to record an image of a simple everyday object linking two prominent village commercial enterprises of the mid-1900s. At the time the above article was written, I was not a granddad or indeed an 'old folk' but I well remember the bakery. Indeed, for a while I worked for Mr Batstone, helping out with the delivery by van during school holidays and delivering bread to certain customers by carrier bike throughout the year on Saturday mornings. And I can recall the cooking of Sunday roasts, at 4d (old pence) a time. I've added a few notes regarding my memories of the bakery to the items about St Katherine's Lodge (the current name for the property) in an article filed in the The Village section of this archive. Below is a photograph of the The Laurels as it then was, showing the laurel hedge that gave the property its original name. It is believed the lady at the gate is Mrs Batstone, wife of the baker.

