

A history of  
**Poplar Cottage**  
Compton, Surrey

Philip and Sally Gorton  
2012



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## Acknowledgements

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*'A little robin sweetly singing  
Come to my window on Christmas day  
And from his little throat came ringing  
A most melodious lay'*

This was sung for many years at Poplar Cottage by the Jackson children, Hilda, Phyllis and Louis, outside their parent's bedroom door on Christmas morning.

## Introduction

Poplar Cottage is a charming, brick built dwelling located on the edge of Compton common, at the eastern end of the village. Erected in the late 1820s, the plot on which it stands was illegally enclosed from the common some years earlier.

The cottage is well built with many attractive features and sits within a good sized garden in a very pleasant position. It is not surprising then that its turnover of owners and occupiers has been low; its first owners, two generations of the Etherington family, lived at the cottage for almost fifty years and the Jackson family, who took up residence in 1909, stayed for over sixty.

Its surrounding land has formed part of the life and activity at the cottage in various ways; cattle has been grazed there by several occupants and the garden too has been a productive area, housing chickens and pigs and providing fresh fruit and vegetables. At one time it also acted as an outdoor laundry drying area during warm weather.

The building has been enlarged several times since the 1820s and many modern comforts have been added. The common is no longer an open grazing space but is now wooded and the pace of life both within and around the house is much altered. Poplar Cottage has absorbed these changes and it continues to be enjoyed as a family home of much character.



## Common land

The history of England's common land is an essential part of this story. The role that it played for many centuries, both countrywide and locally, leads us to the creation of Poplar Cottage and shows us how and why the house was first constructed.

For countless generations, commons were a vital part of both the medieval and later communities, providing a living for those who lived on or near them. It was and frequently still is a part of the land of the manor and is owned by the lord of the manor. However, the occupiers of certain properties have rights over the land. These common rights have existed since time immemorial, certainly since early Saxon times and quite probably for long before that.



*An extract from John Rocque's map of Surrey, c. 1760, showing the unenclosed Compton Marsh and numerous encroachments*

The determined actions of the people who claimed these rights in the past have ensured the survival of common land. In some places, for instance near large cities or on particularly fertile land, the commons could be potentially very valuable but the persistence of a handful of stubborn commoners who refused to give up their rights prevented the owner from using or developing the land as he wished.

Due to both lawful and illegal encroachments, the total area of common land has always been shrinking. One of the principal reasons for this was the erection of houses by those seeking a place to make their home. The practice was widespread and, during the later sixteenth century, the illegal enclosure of common land and the erection of cottages was regarded as a growing problem. The population of England was rising and an increasing demand for housing meant that many people made whatever provision they could. This frequently meant enclosing a piece of common land or roadside waste on which to build a home. To modern eyes this seems quite audacious; the squatter would simply enclose a piece of land in a suitable place and erect a dwelling on it.

As the seventeenth century progressed, the growing population gave rise to more unlawful building but this was increasingly tolerated. Faced with the problem of an illegal settlement, the manor court had a choice of removing the offending house or giving the cottager leave to remain by granting a lease, thus making the squatter a legitimate tenant of the manor. This arrangement could be of benefit to both parties for the lord could now hope to gain an income, albeit small, from an otherwise unproductive piece of land.

Such leases were being granted in the early seventeenth century, although the stagnation of population growth in the later part of the century probably reduced the amount of encroachment onto common land. However, after about 1720, the population began to increase once more and there was an upsurge in the incidence of illegal squatting on the commons. Evidence of these settlements is easily recognisable; they usually have irregular boundaries, are generally quite small and appear as islands in the waste or as bites out its boundaries.

Compton Common was formed of the waste of the manor of Compton Westbury, the lordship of which has been owned by the owner of Loseley since the mid sixteenth century. An extract from John Rocque's map of Surrey from about 1760 shows that the Pease Marsh was then an area of unenclosed wasteland which stretched from Compton village spreading out down the valley to its widest point along the Portsmouth Road. This shows quite clearly that there were various encroachments, standing out as characteristic bites out of the waste.

Some of these constructions form today's distinctive and familiar landmarks in the village. Island Cottage can be seen standing on its own upon the common and a few other encroachments are dotted around the margins of the waste such as the Withies, The Cottage and Brook House. Poplar Cottage, however, had not yet been built and would not make its

appearance for several further decades. There are various documents to provide evidence of this; as well as being absent from Roque's map it is also missing from the Ordnance Survey map of 1810 and is not shown on Greenwood's map of 1822.

Throughout its history there were other, more formal enclosures made on Compton Common. The almshouses that lay against Polsted Lane, on the site of Compton Cottage, were owned by the trustees of the poor and had probably been granted for that purpose by the lord of the manor. A part of the lower common was given by James More Molyneux for the creation of allotment gardens in 1845 whilst land for a new school had been granted in 1841.

## The origins of the plot

The plot occupied by Poplar Cottage began its life somewhat typically, as one of Compton's unauthorised encroachments. It was taken from the common in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century by Joseph Hollis, a retired maltster from Guildford, who lived in a cottage in the vicinity. His house is no longer standing but it existed until the 1960s and was situated between Poplar Cottage and the school.

Hollis had owned the lease of the cottage since at least 1777, but it is not known when he took the land from the common. However, he was granted a copyhold tenancy of the plot at the manor court held in 19 April 1804, which is the first reference to the property.<sup>1</sup> The plot is described in the manor court rolls as "*All that piece of parcel of ground parcel of the waste of this manor containing about six rods little more or less situate lying and being in Compton aforesaid adjoining partly to the leasehold house of the said Joseph Hollis in Compton aforesaid and partly to the common there on the east and to the common on the other side thereof*", for which the lord of the manor was to be paid a rent six pence each year.

Despite being given this grant, Hollis still had territorial ambitions. At the manor court held in October 1808, it was reported that he had tried, in the interim, to enlarge his holding even further: "*Joseph Hollis had encroached on the waste of this manor by enclosing part thereof adjoining to his garden in the Pease Marsh in Compton aforesaid*". On this occasion he did not get his way, however. It would seem that James More Molyneux decided that enough was enough and the court roll records that "*it is ordered that the same be thrown open*".

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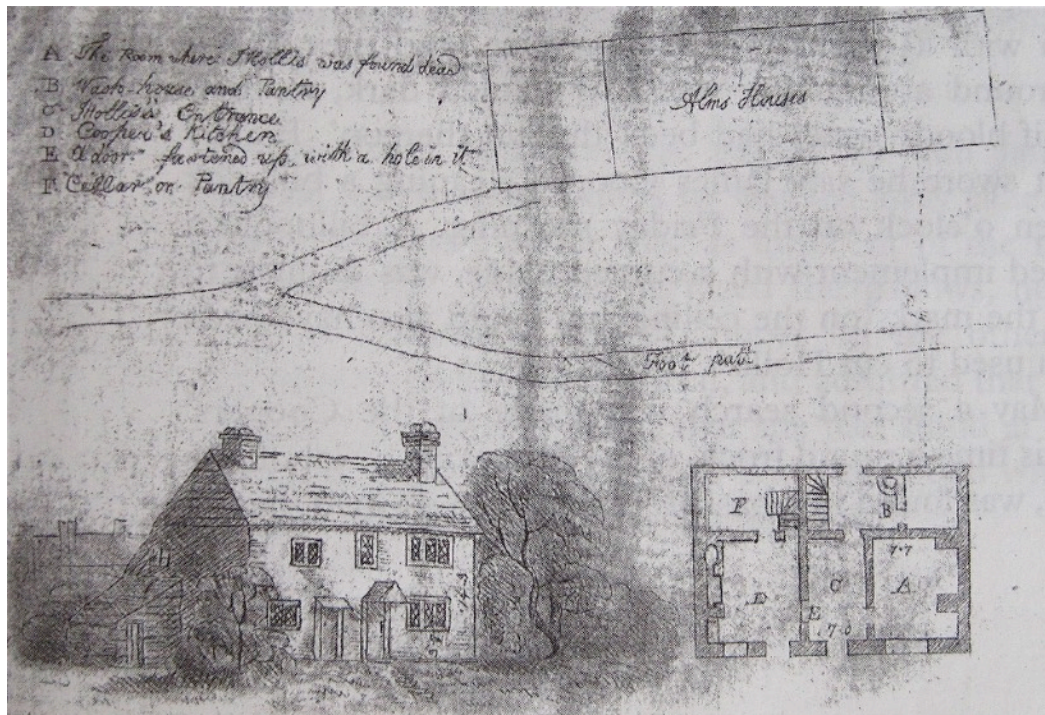
<sup>1</sup> Manor court roll, ref: LM/S/4, Surrey History Centre. Copy of court roll with current owner of the house.



## The murder of Joseph Hollis

During his working life Joseph Hollis had lived with his wife Elizabeth in Holy Trinity in Guildford where he owned a tenement and a garden. This is noted in his will of 1777, together with the fact that he also owned the leasehold of a cottage at Compton, complete with some land. Clearly, his business as a maltster was highly successful.

Subsequently, he retired to his cottage in Compton where he occupied himself with his hobbies: he enjoyed a bit of small-time farming and, as we have seen, he also made various attempts to poach a few more segments of local land. Such activities by a man who had no need of money may have made him unpopular and later events have shown that he was not discreet about his wealth. Indeed he took many opportunities to make his fellow villagers all too aware of their relative poverty.



*The cottage of Charles Hollis that was demolished in the 1960s.*

Perhaps he was simply an unwise elderly man who had lost his sense of proportion. Whatever the reasons were for his conduct, one man was sufficiently at odds with him to lose all sense of proportion himself. James Cooper was Hollis's tenant, who rented a part of the same cottage. He was in arrears with his rent and, expecting little leeway after a row with Hollis, was in an extremely aggressive frame of mind. On May 4th

1809 he entered the section of the house that was occupied by Hollis and repeatedly beat and stabbed his landlord. Hollis, who was about 70 years of age at the time, stood no chance against his attacker.

The newspaper reports of the murder commented on the fact that Hollis had been rather avaricious and quite showy with his wealth: he had carried sizeable bags of money around and would ostentatiously pull them out whenever he had to pay someone. He had evidently been proud of his success and his attempts to enclose bits of the common for his own benefit suggests that he had been a man with an eye to the main chance.

James Cooper and his elderly mother, who had lived with him at the cottage, were both tried for Hollis's murder at the Surrey Assizes on August 14th. Mary Cooper was subsequently acquitted but her son was found guilty of this brutal crime and hanged.

## Henry Etherington

When Joseph Hollis had made his will in 1777 he left his property in Holy Trinity, Guildford, and his house and land in Compton to his wife Elizabeth. If she should die then it would go to his brother John or to John's heirs.<sup>2</sup> In the event, he outlived both his wife and his brother and it was his brother's son Charles who inherited both the leasehold cottage and the copyhold plot in 1811.<sup>3</sup>

Charles Hollis retained the cottage, the lease of which had only about twelve years to run before it reverted to James More Molyneux. Under these circumstances, he most probably rented out the property. However, he decided not to keep the copyhold land that had been granted to his uncle a few years before, in 1804. Instead, he sold the plot to Henry Etherington in 1812.<sup>4</sup>

Henry was a farmer, variously describing himself as a yeoman and a husbandman. How much land he already had is unknown but it is likely that it would not have been a large area. Most of the land in the parish belonged to one of four large estates: Eastbury Manor, Field Place, Loseley and the glebe lands. The remainder was divided between much smaller landowners who owned perhaps just a few fields each.

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<sup>2</sup> Will of Joseph Hollis, Surrey Archdeaconry Court 1777, DW/PA/5/1810/11/01, London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Westbury manor court baron, ref: LM/S/4, Surrey History Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Land Tax records.

It seems likely that he rented his fields from one of the larger landowners and relied on the common rights to graze his animals. At the time of the tithe survey of 1841 his widow, Mary, rented just one field from the Loseley estate next to the eastern edge of the common near the avenue. This suggests that she may not have inherited any land at all from Henry.



*An extract from the tithe map of Compton, 1841, showing Poplar Cottage on plot 293. Hollis's cottage is on plot number 294 next to the almshouses on plot 292.*

In 1826, Henry Etherington succeeded where his predecessor had failed for, at the manor court of 10 October, he was granted a copyhold tenancy to “*all that piece or parcel of land part of the waste of this manor situate and being in Compton aforesaid containing by estimation seven rods more or less*”. For this tenancy, he was to pay the lord six pence each year.

Just over eighteen months later, on 4th June 1828, Etherington mortgaged both the six rod and seven rod plots, taking out a £70 loan at five percent interest with George Clarke, a grocer from Alfold. This was not some sort of dubious deal; at that time it was common practice for people with money to invest to offer mortgage loans. Small traders usually had money

to lend and, in the absence of the financial institutions that existed in later years, it was to such people that prospective borrowers would turn.

The mortgage document contains the earliest reference to a house on the plot. It was added into the text after the document had been written which suggests that the house was a recent addition to the property. This implies that it was constructed in around 1827/28. It seems very probable that Henry Etherington took out the loan to finance the building of the house.

## The original house and its early occupants

Henry Etherington's new home consisted of a small, brick-built cottage with a slate roof. This modest dwelling still remains at the heart of the present structure.<sup>5</sup> The bricks were almost certainly made locally as there were a number of brickworks on the Pease Marsh. It is possible that they were made by Henry Barnes, who owned the brick kiln and fields just off New Pond Road near Binscombe. The slates came from further afield for they were imported from Wales or Cornwall and would have been transported to Compton by boat, the final leg of their journey being along the River Wey Navigation.

Significantly, the tithe survey of 1841 shows that there were no outbuildings on the plot, which suggests that Henry had a farmstead of some description elsewhere. In the event, he did not live long enough to enjoy his new home for many years for he died in June 1832 aged 52 years, leaving his widow Mary as owner and occupier of the house.

It is most likely that Mary shared the cottage at this time with her four children. Thomas, the eldest, was twenty years old at the time of his father's death and his two sisters, Beaufoy and Harriet were fourteen and thirteen years old respectively. The youngest, James, was aged just ten. Both Henry and Mary had been 42 years old when he was born, which was quite a late age for childbearing in those times.<sup>6</sup>

Mary is listed, along with unnamed 'others' as the owner and occupier in the 1841 tithe survey but two years later Thomas was admitted as the owner of the property, subject to the mortgage agreement of 1828.<sup>7</sup> At this time he was a 32 year old bachelor and his occupation is given as a tile maker and coppice cutter.

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<sup>5</sup> Inland Revenue Valuation 1914, IR125/3/88 & IR58/34179, The National Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Mary is also listed as 'Maisie' and 'Mercy' in various documents.

<sup>7</sup> Copy of the court roll.

A few years later, on 14th March 1846, Thomas married Caroline Broadfield, who was ten years his junior and who came from Pirbright. Their first child, Thomas, was born in 1847. They were a very fecund couple and by 1851 Caroline had already borne four children, two boys and two girls.<sup>8</sup> By this time, Thomas's elderly mother Mary was no longer living at the cottage and had made her home close by with James, his wife and their small daughter.



*An Edwardian view of the Avenue showing the open grassland of Compton Common.*

Mary Etherington died in January 1856, having reached the age of 76. It is unlikely by this time that she had returned to live at Poplar Cottage for Thomas and Caroline now had two more children to look after. The couple were to have eleven children during their fifteen years of marriage. Remarkably, nine of their offspring, four boys and five girls, survived well beyond infancy.

Families of this size were by no means unusual, but it is hard nonetheless to imagine how exhausting this must have been for Caroline. How very difficult too for Thomas, to keep so many hungry and active children fed and clothed. Moreover, the scale of the little cottage was quite at odds with the size of the family and one can imagine that the youngsters, like most of their contemporaries, spent a great deal of their time out of doors.

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<sup>8</sup> 1851 census return.

The house was situated next to the new village school and we can see from the census return of 1861, where the eldest five children are listed as ‘scholars’, that some of the family were attendees. They would have been deemed to be fortunate for school attendance at this time was neither compulsory nor free; a fee was payable for each pupil. Some families received financial help from the church or another patron to send their children to school. The family finances, as we shall see, were not in good shape; perhaps another body gave them some assistance or perhaps Thomas continued to send his children to be educated, regardless.

Sadly, Caroline Etherington died in 1861 at the age of just 38. Her youngest child Jane had been born about two weeks before. Thomas, who was by now approaching middle age, had the responsibility for ten youngsters, six of whom were less than eight years old.<sup>9</sup> Jane did not survive her mother by many months and by late April 1862 Thomas was left with his nine surviving children.

The census returns for the time show that many other Etheringtons lived in the vicinity and one would hope that they were able help the family in these difficult times.<sup>10</sup> His two eldest girls, Ann and Pamela, were now aged about fourteen and twelve and they would have been experienced and skilled in many domestic and maternal tasks. Charles was nine, an age at which many boys were earning some of their keep and seven year old Edward may also have been able to earn a few pennies here and there, undertaking odd jobs.

Whatever contributions his family and children were able to make, it was not enough to prevent Thomas from running into serious financial difficulties. By 1865 he surrendered all his property to John Rhoades, a grocer from Haslemere. He had transferred the balance of his mortgage to the latter at some point prior to this date. He had also increased the sum of the loan to £100, at five percent interest.<sup>11</sup>

Five years later, not surprisingly, he was still in great difficulty and was unable to pay the capital of his mortgage. Perhaps he was unable or unwilling to receive any sound financial advice for he unwisely took out a further loan of £100 from John Rhoades. On this document recording the transaction, Thomas has made his mark, rather than a signature, which shows us that he was unable to write. Knowing this, perhaps it is not surprising that he had been so determined to send his children to school.

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<sup>9</sup> Compton parish registers, baptism and burial records.

<sup>10</sup> These were not Thomas’s siblings but were probably cousins or from other branches of the family.

<sup>11</sup> Copy of the court roll of 1865.

By 1871 Thomas was still at the cottage with Charles and his three youngest daughters. Charles had followed his father's occupation, working as a carpenter in the building trade. The three girls, Caroline, Louisa and Sarah were still scholars. Caroline was now fourteen years old, which was a late age for a village girl to be receiving an education at a time when it was not compulsory. At that time the household was completed by Ann Vincent, Thomas's elderly mother-in-law.<sup>12</sup> She is listed as a housekeeper but she must also have provided companionship for her grandchildren, whilst receiving a safe haven herself.

John Rhoades died in 1875 and Thomas passed away the following year, aged around 64.<sup>13</sup> When Thomas Etherington's death was proclaimed at the Court Baron, requests were made for anyone who held a claim on the property to come forward. Nobody appeared and indeed, given the scale of the debt to be repaid, it is hardly surprising. One cannot imagine that any of his descendants were in a position to settle matters.

This, then, is the rather poignant ending to the connection between Poplar Cottage and its first owners and occupants, the Etherington family. Their time there had lasted for nearly half a century. At this stage, it is most likely that the ownership of the house and other property held by Thomas passed to the executors of John Rhoades. It remained in the hands of the trustees for some considerable time.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, in 1896, they sold the cottage and its land to Emily Maria Tugwell, a single lady in her mid thirties who was, as we shall see, was no stranger to the house.<sup>15</sup>

## The arrival of the Tugwell family

Emily was not a wealthy woman and in order to purchase the property she had taken out a mortgage from her married sister, Sarah Ann Mellersh.<sup>16</sup> It was quite a sizeable loan of £150, repayable at an interest rate of four and a half percent and at the time it was more than Emily could afford. Extra help came from another, older sister, Elizabeth Tugwell, who gave Emily a short term loan to assist her with the investment.<sup>17</sup>

Both Elizabeth and Emily worked as laundresses, an occupation which does not sound particularly lucrative, but it evidently gained Elizabeth

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<sup>12</sup> 1871 census return.

<sup>13</sup> Westbury manor court baron of 19 July 1876, ref: LM/S/17, Surrey History Centre.

<sup>14</sup> Out of court memoranda - 27 October 1876 and 14 March 1895.

<sup>15</sup> Conveyance of 4 June 1896.

<sup>16</sup> Copy of the court roll of 5 June 1896.

<sup>17</sup> Acknowledgement of loan by Emily Tugwell 1 August 1896.

enough income to be able to help her sister at this time. As we shall see, it was a mutually beneficial arrangement. Emily, for her part, was not indebted to Elizabeth for long; by December 1898 she had repaid the loan and the latter had formally acknowledged this.<sup>18</sup>

It sounds as if Emily was determined to own Poplar Cottage and indeed she had every reason to be, for it had been her family home for several years. In 1881 Emily and Elizabeth were living with their widowed mother at the cottage and all three were working as laundresses. They



*A late nineteenth century laundry with a tub and its dolly, a brick built copper and mangle.*

were evidently making a reasonable income and were able to employ a live-in servant who also contributed to the laundry work.

The Tugwell family were not new to the area. Emily had been born in Compton as had at least five of her siblings. In 1871 she was living close by at Brick Kilns in New Pond Road with her parents, Sam and Elizabeth and some of their offspring.<sup>19</sup> No doubt Emily knew various members of the Etherington family and she would have attended the village school with Thomas's younger children.

By 1891, the last census record of the century, the three Tugwell ladies were still resident at Poplar Cottage. Emily's mother was evidently blessed with good health and stamina for

she was still making a living as a laundress and was now aged 71. It is just as well that she was so robust, for there was no pension available to

<sup>18</sup> Acknowledgement of 5 December 1898.

<sup>19</sup> Census return of 1871.



such people and her poorer contemporaries frequently ended their days in the workhouse.<sup>20</sup>

The Tugwell family were still at Poplar Cottage at the beginning of the new century, albeit with some changes. Elizabeth and her mother were no longer there and Emily, who was now aged 40, was the head of the household. The other occupants of the cottage were her brother Frank, who was blind and had no occupation, his wife Ada, who also worked as a laundress and their two live-in servants.



*The Inland Revenue valuer's map of the early 1910s shows how the Poplar Cottage plot number 96 has changed shape since the tithe survey of seventy years earlier. Note that the school has been built, as has the semi-detached cottages that now stand on the site of the almshouses.*

## The laundry at Poplar Cottage

The washing, drying, starching and ironing of various items played a major part in the history of Poplar Cottage for nearly three decades and provided a respectable income for various female members of the

<sup>20</sup> Census returns of 1881 and 1891.

Tugwell family and their servants. But what a tiring way to earn a living! It was hard, heavy, physical work and any woman or girl engaging in this occupation needed a great deal of strength and endurance.

What sort of processes would Emily Tugwell and her family have followed? What kind of knowledge did they need and what would Poplar Cottage have looked, sounded and indeed smelt like during all these various activities?

When the family arrived, the house had grown a little from its original size, for a small extension had been added onto the back of the cottage by 1872. This can be seen on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map of that year. It may have been merely a lean-to but it is possible that it subsequently served a practical purpose as a laundry storage or drying area. A well outside the cottage, which has now been covered over, provided the water supply for the house.

The ladies would have needed at least one large copper to undertake work on this scale, which suggests that the main body of the house had to contain their enterprise. These built-in vessels, boxed in by and suspended on bricks, were often made of thin cast iron and could hold up to 40 gallons of water apiece. When the fires were working below them the atmosphere in the house must have been extremely hot and steamy.

Only the dirtiest and most robust garments were boiled in the copper, having been pre-soaked in soda. Popular stain removers for badly soiled articles included lemon juice, onion juice, milk and urine . . . certainly the latter three would have been readily available! More delicate items were set aside to be washed by hand and with this process, the Tugwells would benefit by the new availability of cheap soap. Until about 1880 soap had been very expensive and the cost had been compounded by the addition of a heavy soap tax, levied until 1833.<sup>21</sup>

Our laundresses may have rubbed items against a fluted washboard to remove stubborn stains. Hand spinning was normally achieved by manoeuvring a large wooden dolly in a tub - a very tiring process and one that required much strength. The newly invented upright mangle would have enabled Emily and her fellow workers to wring out and flatten the various items. If it was continually wet, the interior of the house must have been quite overwhelmed by racks of drying articles. On warm and sunny days however, the garden and possibly the common at Compton would have been festooned with laundry on lines and clothes horses and small items draped on bushes.

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<sup>21</sup> The National Trust book of Forgotten Household Crafts by John Seymour. Dorling Kindersley 1987.

WITH EARLY POSSESSION.

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SURREY.

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**Particulars and Conditions of Sale**

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PROPERTY

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COAL AND WOOD SHEDS,

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*Auction notice of 1909.*

Commercially made starch was now readily available, should it be needed. Finally, a number of flat irons would be required, along with faultless judgement on the part of the ironer. Using the hob of the kitchen range, the irons would have to be used as soon as they had heated to the exactly the correct temperature. Perhaps the laundresses also used a polishing iron which was often employed to impart a starched, thin glaze.

All of these processes required great skill as well as stamina and there were many other specialised services within the field that the ladies may have been able to offer their customers. We do not know how much income was generated by all their efforts but it would be fair to say that Emily worked very hard and thoroughly deserved to acquire her cottage.

## The early twentieth century house

By the end of 1908 Emily had repaid some of her mortgage but she still had a certain amount that was outstanding. In November 1908 a transfer document notes that the remainder of the debt had been transferred to a Miss E M Mellersh.<sup>22</sup>

The following summer, on 12th August, Emily enfranchised the house and its plot. This was an important move as it made the property a much more attractive and secure prospect for future purchasers. It freed it from the yoke of manorial dues and obligations, such as they were, and converted it from a copyhold to a freehold dwelling. The transaction cost her £50, which she paid to Gwendoline Carew More Molyneux McGowan, the Lady of the Manor.<sup>23</sup>

This arrangement was clearly the prelude to a second important event; namely, to complete the sale of the house and plot. Emily was now approaching fifty and perhaps she wished to undertake lighter work with such money as she had made. If so, it would be understandable. Four days after she had enfranchised the property she sold it to Albert Frederick Jackson, a carpenter who was living with his wife Lucy and small daughter Hilda in Chapel Lane in Milford. He paid Emily £300 for his new home.<sup>24</sup>

Like Emily, Fred had borrowed money to buy the cottage. His mortgagee was Francis Bryden, who lived at the Priory in Church Street, Godalming, and was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He advanced the sum of £250 to Fred, at an interest rate of

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<sup>22</sup> Transfer document of 14 Nov 1908.

<sup>23</sup> Enfranchisement document 12 August 1909.

<sup>24</sup> Conveyance of 16 August 1909.

4.5%. It was a very good move in all senses, for the Jackson family would remain at Poplar Cottage for over sixty happy years.

What sort of home did the Jacksons acquire? The Inland Revenue Valuation, undertaken in February 1914, gives us an interesting insight into the property as it was about one century ago: '*Freehold. 1 Acre. Old detached brick built cottage containing two bedrooms, two sitting rooms, kitchen, scullery, large garden*'. This confirms that the house was a modestly sized dwelling that was just a little larger than a 'two-up, two-down'. However, it was well built and with its good plot of land and its position in such a lovely setting Fred, Lucy and their little girl must have been thrilled with their new home. It is time to take a closer look at them.

## The arrival of the Jackson family

Frederick Jackson was born in Kingsfold, Horsham in March 1879 and was one of thirteen children. During his childhood the family moved to the Baynards area of Rudgwick and Fred and his younger siblings had attended the school in nearby Ellens Green. As he grew up, Fred acquired various practical skills; he learned how to maintain bicycles and earned a little pocket money mending punctures. He also taught ladies to ride for one shilling an hour. When his parents moved to Monksgrove Farm in Wanborough during the 1880s he helped on the farm and also took on the responsibility of a milk round.

By the end of the century the Jacksons were very well known in Compton and, in particular, Fred's eldest brother was making his mark. William Jackson was a skilled builder and carpenter who had already begun to construct Compton's most famous landmarks. His partnership, Jackson and Heal, constructed Compton Cemetery, Watts Gallery and later, the Congregational Chapel. They also carried out some alterations to



*Fred and Lucy Jackson in 1906.*

Limnerslease.<sup>25</sup> Fred worked for a while as a carpenter for William and in 1904 he helped to lay out the wood block floor at Watts Gallery. Many years later, in 1929, Fred undertook some carpentry work on the new Congregational Chapel that was being built on the edge of the village green. The Jackson family attended services at the chapel and were very much involved in its life until it closed in 1968.

On 23rd June 1906 he married a local girl, Lucy Barrow, at Godalming Congregational Church.<sup>26</sup> Lucy was three years younger than Fred and had grown up in Compton. Her father had been a highly skilled plantsman, holding the post of head gardener at Field Place, one of the most prestigious properties in the area. After he retired the family had moved to Farncombe and were living in George Road, near the station.

After their marriage, Fred and Lucy rented a house in Milford for a few years and Hilda was born there in 1907. After moving to Poplar Cottage in 1909 the couple had two more children, Phyllis and Louis. When World War I broke out in 1914 most of Fred's contemporaries, in the course of time, went to participate. Many young men from Compton would never return. Fred was deemed unfit to fight, however, and was employed as a munitions worker, making lathes that were used to produce shell cases.

In 1916 he left Poplar Cottage in the hands of his wife and young family while he was sent to Sheerness to work in the shipyard. His food and lodgings were apparently very poor and his health was further undermined.<sup>27</sup> Compared to the fate of many of his friends and family, however, this must have seemed like a relatively minor ordeal.

Despite his apparent frailty he must have had much stamina and determination; family memoirs note that he fell foul of the shop steward for working too hard! He was able to come home on leave occasionally and his visits to Compton were enriched by the gifts of chocolate that he brought for his family. It was very difficult to obtain at that time so this was a rare treat indeed.

During the war a group of soldiers, en route to France from Aldershot, camped on the village green. The Jackson family housed two of their number for a period, a bombardier and a corporal, and an outside shed was adapted to stable their horses and fodder. Hilda remembers the thrill of being lifted on to one of these huge beasts. The soldiers and their hosts

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<sup>25</sup> William Jackson's partner was a Mr Heal of Compton. The company also constructed some cottages at Withies Lane for pottery workers.

<sup>26</sup> This is now the Bel and Dragon restaurant.

<sup>27</sup> He was given to understand that he had a weak heart.

looked after each other; sometimes the men brought fondant sweets for the children and, if the soldiers sneaked out to the 'stable' for a furtive smoke, Lucy would keep watch for an approaching officer.

## A happy childhood at Poplar Cottage

Fred and Lucy and their family were very content in their home on the common. We are so fortunate to have Hilda's memoirs, written in the 1980s, that contain many vivid and affectionate details of a country childhood. She enjoyed her lessons at the village school and remarked that her young sister was a particularly able scholar. She felt blessed to be able receive a midday meal; many of her contemporaries had too far to walk home and made do with very basic rations. They were not even able to partake of a hot drink. By contrast, the Jackson children were given a robust main course and a pudding - the latter issued on strict condition that all their green vegetables were eaten up.

The school curriculum included a good grounding in general knowledge and the children were also given lessons in art, botany and gardening. Each pupil had a small plot of ground near the school to cultivate. The Rev. Gwynn, rector of St Nicholas's church, came to the school on Friday mornings to teach the children religious knowledge and Hilda had good memories of all these studies and of her teachers, except for the frustrating cookery lessons. The school's 'ancient', coal fired stove was hopelessly unequal to the task of baking anything and she describes the inevitable outcome as 'anaemic'. Despite this, the girls had to purchase the ingredients and pay again to take home the results of their efforts.

There were few luxuries at the school but studies were enlivened by occasional treats such as school concerts and displays by the travelling conjurer, who would visit the pupils and entertain them for a fee of sixpence per child. Country dancing for all ages took place on the village green and Hilda was an enthusiastic participant. Country dance books, compiled by Cecil Sharp, provided a wealth of material for these events and were complete with instructions and tunes.<sup>28</sup>

Empire Day on 23rd May was celebrated in the village with much enthusiasm. Schools were closed at 11am and Compton's children, including the Jackson family, took part in maypole dancing on the village green. Puritan style costumes were worn on this occasion; dark haired girls had a rose pink ensemble and fair ones wore turquoise. The girls all

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<sup>28</sup> Some of the books came from a clearance sale at Limnerslease in 1928, which was held there after Mary Watts died.

wore white bonnets on their heads. These costumes were also used for numerous fetes and flower shows, so they made a regular appearance in Compton.

The boys, poor souls, were also dressed in period mode for these events and their costume included brown suits, dark pink stockings and white floppy hats. One can imagine that they took part in the dancing under some duress, to say the least. This is borne out by Hilda's notes; she remembers that the girls found them very annoying for they lacked a sense of direction and tangled the ribbons!



Lucy was a skilled needlewoman and embroiderer and was probably responsible for many of these creations. She was also famous for her rock cakes which she baked on Saturday mornings and distributed to her children and other eager youngsters. The diet was full of carbohydrates; puddings such as spotted dick, suet pudding with syrup and buns are referred to but such food was inexpensive and provided important fuel.

*Lucy Jackson with her children, Phylis (left), Hilda and Louis.*

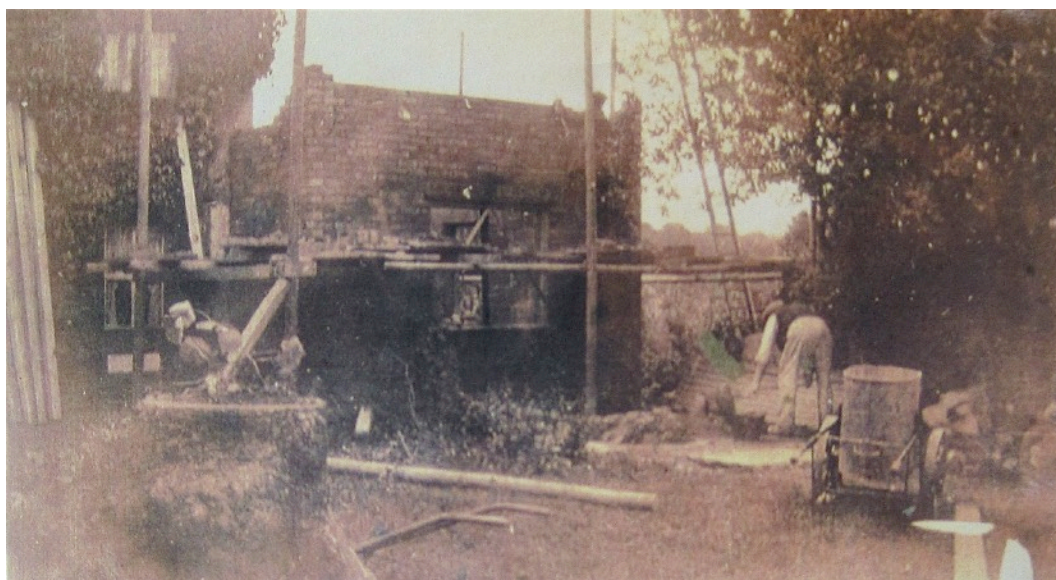
One particularly charming memory that Hilda relates took place in the garden. In the milder months Fred would mark out the family initials with an old hoe and sow drills of mustard and cress seeds. When the cress was ready the children would cut some salad from 'their' piece and take it in proudly to Lucy, to be added to the tea table.

The young Jacksons led a very healthy life with an abundance of fresh food, fresh air and exercise. The siblings were very close but Louis



perhaps had a more challenging time, for being the youngest it was always an effort to keep up with his sisters. Hilda records that he was shy than the girls and when his sisters gave confident recitations at family gatherings he longed to do the same. Eventually he felt able to contribute, but not until he was safely ensconced under the table.

On another occasion he had been dressed in his best for Phyllis's birthday party. Just before the celebrations began he wandered out into the garden and attempted to walk along the top of the wall that surrounded the piggery, a feat that his sisters were now very adept at. He overbalanced and fell in, covering himself and his outfit with noisome substances. Lucy had to fish him out and 'fumigate' him and the birthday party was a little late in starting.



*The eastern extension to Poplar Cottage being built in the 1920s.*

Despite their healthy lifestyle, the children and their schoolfellows were prey to a number of serious illnesses such as pneumonia and scarlet fever. The latter affected some sixty villagers of all ages, including all the Jackson children and those who were infected spent a miserable and fairly prolonged time at an isolation hospital in Guildford. Some of the nurses were very unkind, denying the patients water and Hilda records that she was so desperate for a drink that she drank the water from a bowl of primroses by her bed. <sup>29</sup>

Her bouts of pneumonia were endured under happier conditions and give us an interesting insight into some interior details at Poplar Cottage. She

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<sup>29</sup> This horrible illness continued to affect Compton. The authors' mother./mother - law spent 17 unhappy weeks at the isolation hospital in 1930 at the age of six. The nurses were still unkind.

was moved into her parents' bedroom and she describes it as it looked in about 1918. The wallpaper had a pattern of daffodils entwined with pale blue ribbons and over the fireplace hung a popular religious picture. This image, found in numerous households at the time, depicted the broad and easy way to hell and the narrow way to heaven, with its many traps. It was topped by a large and very alert eye.

On the floor were two beautifully made rugs woven from long strips of material. Both had a beige background and one depicted a black sheep in the foreground, the other a black horse. These were prized possessions in the house and were not so hard wearing as the rag rugs in the kitchen and living room. Lucy's mother, who still lived at Farncombe, kept the family supplied with a continual succession of the latter; one can imagine that they must have been subjected to a great deal of wear and tear and that her efforts were most gratefully received.

## Changes at the house

At about the time of the scarlet fever epidemic in about 1920, or very shortly afterwards, the Jackson family decided to enlarge the cottage. Hilda's childhood account describes it as a three bedroom dwelling; her parents used the main bedroom, she and Phyllis shared the second and Louis had a small room to himself. Perhaps, now that the family were beginning to grow up, it was a good time to extend and modernise the house. Fred's background and connections with the building trade must have given him many ideas and helping hands to carry out the works.

Hilda's account notes that *'Our dear little sitting room with windows facing south, east and west and a fireplace built cornerwise had to be demolished to make way for a larger room with a new kitchen behind and two bedrooms above. One of the old bedrooms was converted into a bathroom with a w.c. It must have been chaotic for mother trying to keep everything going with such an upheaval for so many weeks. She must have given a sigh of relief when things were back to normal. No more trips out to the w.c. holding a candle with one hand and shielding the flame with the other.'*<sup>30</sup> *Having a hot water system was now a luxury, especially after using wash basins and ewers, in which the water sometimes froze, in our bedrooms.'*

In about 1930, shortly after the extension was added the village was connected to electricity, saving Lucy a great deal of time filling oil lamps and trimming wicks. Fred paid £30 to have a supply installed and the

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<sup>30</sup> The facilities were at the end of the garden path, discreetly hidden behind two yew trees.



*This painting of Poplar Cottage by Henry Sage was given to Ted and Hilda Epplestone as a wedding*

Jacksons were then ready to bring the household utilities right up to date; they purchased an electric iron (how the Tugwells would have enjoyed that) electric fires and a new cooker.

A chimney fire in the living room at Poplar Cottage revealed an interesting piece of the house's history. When the fire continued to smoulder Fred became worried and had some of the brickwork taken down to see if the cause could be revealed. A bacon loft was discovered inside the chimney, which their predecessors would have used to smoke hams. The cause of the fire was a beam above the loft, which had caught alight. This beam still had several large hooks attached to it from its working days.

Hilda's account notes several other changes to the structure of the building. On one wing of the house there were three very tall chimney pots. They were ceramic, in a shade of yellow and had a moulded design. The family very much liked them but became concerned after a series of heavy gales that they would crash down onto the roof. In the end Fred had them taken down and they were placed in the garden, filled with soil and planted with trailing nasturtiums.

When the family had first moved in to the cottage there had been a winding staircase. This must have been very inconvenient for the Etheringtons and the Tugwells, for every piece of upstairs furniture, on any scale, had to be hoisted in or out through the bedroom windows. Not surprisingly, the Jackson family soon replaced this staircase with a straight one.

One other feature remembered in Hilda's childhood is also worth noting. Like the bacon loft, the chimneys and the old staircase it was created and used by past inhabitants but, unlike them, it was not attached to the house. Out in the garden the children and their friends were making happy use of a rather unusual swing. Many years before, two large ash trees had been grafted together to make an arch and ropes had been hung from the fused structure. A date of 1880 had been carved into the trunk. We shall never know if this is when the trees had been joined or whether it had happened earlier but what cannot be doubted is that several generations of children had derived great pleasure from it.

## The children grow up

As they grew up, the Jackson children made their various ways in life. Hilda, who had inherited her mother's skill with the needle was employed for a period at White's, a large Guildford store, in the haberdashery



*The wedding of Ted and Hilda Epplestone in 1934.*

department. In June 1934 she married Ted Epplestone in a ceremony at Compton Chapel and they moved to Worthing. A number of fine photographs survive of their wedding day, including some taken in the garden at Poplar Cottage.



*Compton Common in the early twentieth century.*

Phyllis, who did not marry and remained living at Poplar Cottage, trained as a secretary and found a good position at her uncle's garage, based at the bottom of Guildford High Street. Louis became a mechanic and worked for many years at Dennis Motors as their chief experimental engineer. During World War II both Louis and his father joined the local Home Guard and Phyllis undertook fire watching duties.

At this time a further extension was added to the back of the house above the old kitchen. It was intended to accommodate an evacuee and in 1943, a lady from London, Connie Smith, moved there from Farncombe Hill, where she had been temporarily billeted. It was a lucky move for both Connie and her hosts for as well as finding a safe haven she and Louis fell in love and were subsequently married.

In the meantime, poor Hilda had endured much sadness in her short married life. In 1937 Ted and Hilda's two year old daughter Marion contracted polio in her right leg after paddling in the sea at Worthing. Then, tragically, Ted died of colitis, aged only 28, later that year. The Jackson family offered Hilda and Marion a home and the two of them returned to Compton to live at Poplar Cottage.

## Marion May

Marion's formative years were spent at Poplar Cottage, having arrived to live there at such a young age. She was brought up at the house by quite an extended family that was made up of her mother, her grandparents, her aunt and uncle and even her uncle's wife-to-be. This situation was not as unusual as it would be today. A higher incidence of early deaths left many mothers or fathers widowed at a young age and in this case Hilda's own



*Fred Jackson in the late 1960s.*

bereavement was followed by the upheavals of war. Family units were broken or scattered and most rural households acquired a lodger or some evacuees.

The presence of their small granddaughter was a very enjoyable one for Fred and Lucy and Marion thrived at their house. She attended the school and enjoyed her lessons. Like her grandmother and mother, she became clever with her needle and over the years began to rescue and amass a wonderful collection of period costumes.

Marion's memories have helped us greatly to gain a picture of the house and garden and those who shaped them during the early and middle part of the twentieth century. From the perspective of a small child, Compton in war time did not lack excitement. A Scottish Canadian regiment were camped near to the house and they had their own band. Their leader, splendidly dressed with a leopard skin sash and holder on his shoulder would lead the kilted musicians as they paraded up and down The Avenue.

There was a dug out in the garden in which the family tried to sleep when the night time alarm was given. Initially, Marion was carried to this in blankets and placed into a makeshift crib. She recollects, on one occasion, being tucked into this 'cocoon' while her grandfather and uncle watched a dog fight outside.

The arrival of a doodlebug was very frightening and Marion can remember being at school, huddling together with the other children, who were all praying. Later in the war, on the night of D Day she was ensconced for the entire night in Phyllis' bedroom, watching out of the window as the bombers crossed the sky in droves. It was an awesome and unforgettable sight.

There was safer sort of childhood excitement some years later when a George III penny was found in the house. This had been placed in the ceiling of the old kitchen, where the utility room is positioned today and it was discovered by Fred in the 1950s.<sup>31</sup>

The garden itself was a continuing joy to all the family. It was in a fine position, adjoining the common and with a gate on one side leading to the allotments. When the Jacksons had arrived a splendid poplar tree adorned the premises but this had fallen down by the time that Connie Smith arrived in 1943 to lodge at the cottage. She thought it a pity that Poplar Cottage was missing its 'namesake' and so a new tree was planted that still stands today, near to the house.



*Marion at Poplar Cottage in 1949.*

The Jacksons purchased two greenhouses and these were put to good use for flower, fruit and vegetable production. As well as basic vegetables such as onions and cabbages, the family enjoyed delicacies such as asparagus, a dish that would have been expensive and hard to obtain in other circumstances. Fred built a rockery and a long rose border. At one time, Marion

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<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, its whereabouts is not known today.



remembers, there was a large damson tree. He also built a seat to the right of the house and carved the family's initials on it.

Fred was not the only member of the family with green fingers. Hilda was also a very gifted gardener and as well as helping at Poplar Cottage she undertook gardening work for Mrs Terry, who lived at The Grange. She never re-married after losing Ted and this activity was a great healer for her.

One horticultural incident is remembered with much amusement. Hilda had planted some beautiful and rather rare blue poppies at Poplar Cottage which she had taken some trouble to obtain. The vicar's wife had paid a special visit and had greatly admired them. Two days later they disappeared and 'the gardeners' were horrified. The culprit turned out to be Aunt Phyllis who had been unaware of their value and had become very zealous with the hoe.

Brigadier Longbourne from Loseley House unwittingly provided another amusing family anecdote. He was a familiar and imperious figure in Compton and would arrive without warning on horseback, at the houses of various villagers. To summon their attention he would strike their front doors with his riding crop. One day he arrived with a brace of pheasants for Lucy. She was pleased with this generosity of course, but was quite unable to mention that she had already 'acquired' a couple that day by other means!

Fred had cow sheds at back of his plot of land and there were also some sheds for storing hay. He kept a variety of cattle and at a later date he also kept chickens and bees. He must have been blessed with boundless energy for as well as all these home based activities he also served as a parish councillor in Compton. He undertook this duty for forty-five years and one of his particular passions had been to keep the local footpaths accessible to all.

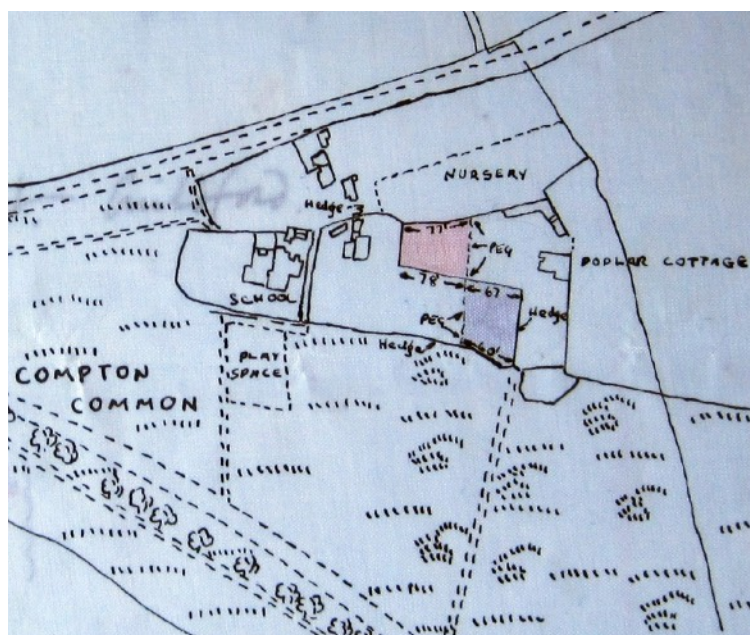
The end of the 1950s marked a period of change for Poplar Cottage and its inhabitants. Firstly, there was sadness when Lucy died in April 1959. She was aged 76 and had suffered for some time from arthritis and a weak heart. Like his daughter, Fred found much solace in his garden. Later that year, an opportunity arose to swap part of his land for a section of the garden of Joseph Hollis's old cottages. As a result, the formerly L-shaped Poplar Cottage plot became a neat, almost square shape.

Fred set about landscaping his new garden, putting in espalier fruit trees and also standard apple trees, some of which are still standing today. He also built the stone summerhouse at this time. These projects were not

easy to begin with for there was a severe drought in the summer of 1959 and the family had many other priorities to see to.

Those in the village who had crops and livestock experienced many difficulties. The rain did not materialise and livelihoods were threatened. However, there was a reprieve for the Jackson family for the well, which was still in use at the time, saved the situation. A pump was set up to push the water up from its recesses and the old copper, with its generous capacity, was utilised to hold it. Fred and the family continued to use the well until the 1960s.

By the end of the 1960s Fred's health was in decline. Marion, who had remained living at Poplar cottage with her grandfather, mother and aunt, married Dennis May in August 1970. By the time of their wedding Fred was in a care home and was too unwell to attend the celebrations, although he was aware that they were taking place. Two weeks after their wedding, Fred passed away.



*Fred Jackson lost the pink plot and gained the purple one in the land exchange of 1959.*

After leaving Poplar Cottage Hilda and Phyllis both continued to live in the area and for quite some years they shared a house at Milton's Crescent in Godalming. Phyllis lived until October 1983 and Hilda, who spent the end of her life in Bramley, passed away at the beginning of 1989.

## The changing shape of the landscape

For many years Fred Jackson had run a smallholding at Poplar Cottage. He began in a very modest way, when his children were quite young, when he purchased Nancy, his first cow. His second cow was a Friesian

and the family had called her Daisy. Both animals came from very good stock and they provided milk and cream for the family. The cream was skimmed from the top of the milk and butter was made from some of the cream in a Daisy churn, with the children being very much involved in these operations. The big larder at the cottage, with its stone floor, slate shelves and northerly aspect made an ideal, cool spot to store the dairy products.

In time, Fred ceased to be involved in his building work and began to increase his herd in earnest, the lure of agricultural work being too strong to resist. He followed the same principles when purchasing his stock as he had when buying Nancy and Daisy, investing in the best quality breeding animals, secured from reputable suppliers. As well as grazing



*Cattle on Compton Common in the early twentieth century.*

his cattle on the common at Compton, he rented fields at Polsted, Wonerish and Milford as the enterprise grew.<sup>32</sup>

To those people who lived in Compton before the mid 1960s the sight of cattle in the fields was a very familiar and enduring one. Nowadays however, the common with its dense belt of trees is swiftly passed by numerous motorists who would hardly be aware of the small clutch of

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<sup>32</sup> More information from Hilda's childhood memoirs.

buildings nestling in its midst. For hundreds of years however, right up until the late 1960s, the sight that we see today would have been unrecognisable to passers by, whatever their mode of transport. The changes were begun in the early 1960s by Brigadier Longbourne, who thought that it would be fitting to plant some oak trees on the common. Most of the locals were not happy with the idea and for some while the cattle that were grazed by Fred Jackson kept the planting operation under some control. Eventually, however his health declined and he was unable to continue this occupation. The grazing cattle had prevented seedling trees from growing. However, as soon as Fred ceased to keep the animals, the trees rapidly advanced and within a few decades the common changed almost beyond recognition.

## A new era at Poplar Cottage

When Frederick Jackson died in 1970 he had reached the venerable age of ninety one. This was quite an achievement for a man who had been deemed too unfit to undertake active service in World War I. One can conclude that, as well as good genes, Fred's healthy lifestyle must have been a contributing factor. He had plenty of fresh air and fresh produce and he kept himself active. He was involved with village life and he was fortunate to have a close and loving family.

After his death the cottage was purchased from his executors in 1971 by Mrs Pratt, a doctor's widow, who paid £17,000 for the property. She had not moved very far; prior to her purchase of Poplar Cottage she had been living in Brighton Road in Godalming, near to the premises now occupied by Scats hardware store. She was joined at the house by Mrs Amies, who acted as her companion and housekeeper.

During her decade at the cottage Mrs Pratt made quite a number of changes to the house, both structural and cosmetic and she also had a variety of practical tasks carried out such as re-wiring and re-plumbing. Some of the old roof slates were removed, to be replaced by tiles and she converted a section of an upstairs, L shaped bedroom into an en suite bathroom. She used this as her own suite; Marion May remembers that her bedroom had been Fred and Lucy's old room.

Downstairs, the coal hole and storage area at the side of the house was extended and the new space was made into a very pleasant study and craft room. She invited Hilda and Phyllis to visit her when the alterations to the house had taken place and they had found them very attractive.

Like her predecessors, Mrs Pratt had various accomplishments. She loved her garden and it continued to flourish under her care. Greg Warren, a former neighbour, recalls that she spent a great deal of time in it and the results were always a pleasure to behold. She enjoyed a warm relationship with his parents, Don and Mary, who kept the adjoining allotment orchard and the three of them spent much time working in there together.



*Fred Jackson's makeshift sheds were still standing when the Hunt family moved to the cottage in 1982.*

Mrs Pratt was a very good needlewoman and she made good use of the new craft room. Many of the soft furnishings used in her home apparently bore testimony to her skills. She was also a respected bridge player and Compton residents and friends often enjoyed a visit to Poplar Cottage to sharpen their minds in convivial surroundings.

When Mrs Pratt's executors sold the property it was marketed by Messenger May Baverstock at an asking price of £95,000. The particulars describe the upstairs floor of the property as having a master bedroom with an adjoining bathroom, three further bedrooms and a second bathroom.

On the ground floor there was now an entrance hall, a drawing room, a dining room, a kitchen, a cloakroom and a utility room. Mrs Pratt's new addition is also there, described as a study. The half acre of garden is still listed as a lovely area and it sounds as if, judging by the details given in the sales description, many of the features designed by the Jackson family had been retained.

## The Hunt family

The current owners, David and Julia Hunt, came to Poplar Cottage in November 1982 and have every intention of staying there for as long as possible.

It is a happy family home and it is still wonderfully positioned for the family's professional and social needs. Let us hope that they are able to enjoy the house for many years to follow and that it continues as a charming feature of Compton's landscape.



## Appendix 1 - Owners and occupiers of Poplar Cottage.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Occupiers</b>
1828	Henry Etherington	Henry and Mary Etherington
1832	Mary Etherington	Herself
1843	Thomas Etherington	Thomas Etherington Mary Etherington
1846	Thomas Etherington	Thomas and Caroline Etherington
1862	Thomas Etherington	Himself
1865	John Rhoades	Thomas Etherington
1881	Trustees of John Rhoades	Emily and Elizabeth Tugwell (sister)
1896	Emily Tugwell	Herself
1901	Emily Tugwell	Emily, Frank and Ada Tugwell
1909	Frederick Jackson	Frederick and Lucy Jackson
1959	Frederick Jackson	Frederick Jackson Hilda and Marion Epplestone Phyllis Jackson
1971	Mrs Pratt	Mrs Pratt Mrs Amies
1982	David and Julia Hunt	Themselves