

9. Merton Cottages (or “College Row”) Nos. 2 & 4 West Road.



Known as Nos. 2 and 4 West Road, Merton Cottages have been variously subdivided in the past and may, at certain times, have comprised more than two dwellings with the extra numbers 6 and 8 derived from earlier cottages on the same site. Old photographs show, however, that in 1905 there was no entry or porch on the left hand side of the dwellings, as seen above. [1]

Ponteland has had a long connection with Merton College, Oxford, and these cottages bear witness to that fact. The way the relationship arose is remarkable: in 1262 Roger Bertram exchanged, with Peter de Montford, “*two bovates (approximately 40 acres) of land adjoining the churchyard and the advowson (the right to appoint the vicar) of the church, in return for a sparrowhawk, two oxgangs (approximately 30 acres) and a dwelling with land*”. Unfortunately, in 1264, de Montford was involved (with Bertram and others) in a rebellion against the King. This failed, as a result of which he was obliged, on the 24th March 1267, to make over his property “*to be converted for the said uses of the Scholars and Brethren (of Merton College) for their increase in number without let or hindrance from me or my heirs.*” [2]

From that time to the present day Merton College has held patronage of the church and has also been Rector with the duty of maintaining the chancel. Great tithes on corn went to Merton whilst the vicar claimed small tithes including Easter offerings and the grass in the churchyard. The College paid

for the restoration of the chancel in 1885 and contributed towards the rebuilding of the Church Hall in the 1990s; other benefactions have included assistance in the 1960s to build Merton Hall (effectively a village hall, much used by the elderly).

As a consequence of the need for a new school following the Education Act of 1870, an appropriate site close to the former site (see Item 2) was sought. An area of land immediately to the south of the Church appeared suitable, and Merton College, the owners, were prepared to donate it for the purpose. There were, however, two small cottages built up against the south boundary wall of the Churchyard which would need to be removed. These also belonged to Merton College, who agreed to build replacements on the North side of West Road, almost exactly opposite where the Barclays Bank would later stand [3] and Merton Cottages are the result.

Merton Cottages originally presented as a pair of perfectly symmetrical semi-detached houses, taking their designation as Nos. 2 and 4 West Road from two older cottages previously demolished. They are built in brick in the Garden Wall Bond and with slate roofs. The walls embody contrasting horizontal lines of light-coloured brick at nine separate levels and most of the windows still retain their unusual sliding casements. The Cottages are of some architectural interest but also represent an exceptional and long-standing historical connection between Merton College and the village of Ponteland over 750 years.

[1] "Images of England; Ponteland." Pub. 1999. ISBN 0 7524 1806 8
John Turner. Tempus. p. 76.

[2] From Notes provided by Professor Richard Bailey to accompany a guided tour around St. Mary's Church in the year 2,000.

[3] "Ponteland Through the 20th Century" Pub. 1984. ISBN 0 9510381 1 7
Leslie Almond/Ponteland Local History Society. p. 5.