

The 1920s was a pivotal decade in the development of the ancient area of Churt into the village we know today. It was the era in which Churt acquired its centre!

Churt today is a rather wealthy village in the Surrey Hills lying about halfway between Farnham and Haslemere. Historically there was no nuclear village of Churt and it's certainly not a typical pretty English village with houses nestled around the church and village green. There is a crossroads at the centre of the village with the pub (late 19C) on one side and the school (1870) on the other. Fronting the road and leading down towards the crossroads is a run of five or six shops built in the late 1920s or early 1930s.

For centuries Churt was an area of scattered farmsteads where small farmers eked out a living on the poor soil. Right up until at least the middle of the nineteenth century Churt was remote and backward. In a court case reported in the [West Surrey Times](#) on 28 January 1871, which was headlined DEPLORABLE IGNORANCE, the chairman of the magistrates remarked that he found great ignorance among the witnesses in this neighbourhood.

Change had begun with the enclosure of the surrounding common land (the waste of Farnham Manor) between 1850 and 1857 when the area attracted the attention of developers and people wanting to have a country residence. The old farms were bought up and some large new mansions were built. Churt started to change.



This 1912 OS map shows clearly how few houses there were in what is now the centre of the village – the crossroads with the pub, the Crossways, and the school.



The centre of Churt as shown here on this 1938 Ordnance Survey map (note the houses built around the periphery of the recreation field) is a direct result of changes brought about by the First World War. There has been very little change in the centre since this map was published.

As soon as the war ended, in December 1918, plans were made to provide a permanent memorial in the village. About 20 people attended a public meeting on November 22 when it was suggested that the provision of a village Recreation Ground would be a suitable memorial. A small committee was elected and asked to find out what support would be forthcoming for this scheme and to report back to another meeting. The scheme, which was generously supported by the wealthy parishioners and friends of the Parish, was approved and it was agreed that the 10-acre Crossways Field lying between the pub and the Institute in the centre of the village would be purchased. Five and a half acres would be reserved for public recreation and the remaining area divided into quarter-acre building plots to be sold originally only to ex-servicemen. There were at least 75 ex-servicemen to be considered and four

plots were reserved for shops. If there was not enough demand from the returning soldiers other parishioners could apply. A few plots could be sold for other purposes as well. The price for the plots was £20 with the exception of the corner site. Trustees were appointed and they became responsible for the land purchased. A plan of the land to be sold was exhibited at the Crossway corner of the field. And here it is.



By September 1919 all except four of the building sites had been applied for, mostly by ex-servicemen. Plots 5 and 6 were to be sold as a shop site. One plot was conveyed to the school governors for use as a school garden, still in use as the school field and used for sports, etc. One plot of land remained unsold, and in 1928 the village hall given to the village by Frank Mason, a local businessman, was opened on this site. One of the Hall's early Trustees was David Lloyd George, who had come to live in Churt in the early 1920s.

In September 1919 the magazine reported that considerable progress was being made with the Crossway Field. The Recreation Ground was to be sown in the autumn, and the cricket pitch to be turfed. The field was levelled using a steam roller, grass sown, turf laid, a grass tennis court constructed and a children's playground provided. A pavilion, an ex-army hut, was provided by Mr Abbott, who also provided the memorial gates and gate posts.

In October 1920 the vicar was able to write *I am sometimes told that Churt is a dull place, and that nothing is being done to provide entertainment and recreation for the village. I find that there are Football and Cricket Clubs and a promise of a Tennis club next summer, the Women's Institute with a full programme, the newly constituted Recreation Ground Committee have organised a Dancing Class, regular series of Whist Drives and social evenings; also a class for Young People between ten and sixteen. There are Scouts for the boys and Guides for the girls, an Institute for young men, a Parish Library, without mentioning the Religious organisations of the Parish. It is hardly fair to those who run these things for the general good of the community to say that nothing is being done to provide wholesome recreation.*

And during the next few years the shops and the village hall were built.

By 1939 the shops must have been flourishing since this advertisement appeared in the Farnham Herald of December 16 1939.

*The Plague of Darkness imposed on us until the Fuehrer lets the people of Poland and Czechoslovakia go is a very unpleasant obstacle in our daily lives. This hindrance to shoppers can be minimised to a great extent by doing your shopping in Churt instead of wasting the precious daylight in bus journeys, perhaps standing in queues in wintry weather and other discomforts. Our shops are warm and only a few minutes from your own cosy fireside.*

*Fishmonger, Greengrocer, Hairdresser, Tuck Shop, Newsagent and Confectioner, Ladies' and Gents' Outfitter, Chemist, Baker, Ironmonger. All in Churt!*

(Many more and much more varied shops than we have today!)

As a result of the provision of the Recreation Ground, and the development of the land around the field the layout of the village came to resemble the Churt that we know today, with its run of shops and houses along the main road and with more houses bordering Hale House Lane (the lane running from west to east).



The 1920s really were an important decade for Churt!