



Roz's House

“In the heart of Burton St Leonards an extensive house was home to a retired couple down from London with a nurse and two servants”

I live in ***** House on The ***** in St. Leonards on Sea.

Who lived here before? Presently the house is divided into four flats. Three of them have names. Flat One on the ground floor has no name.

As I am taking part in the Strike a Light project, Cath sent me the 1911 Census for ***** House. ***** House is now Flat Two on the hall floor.

FACTS

From the **1911 Census** I find out that a retired solicitor called John Alexander Druce aged 53 born in 1858 in Clapham and married for 26 years to Emily Louisa Druce aged 48 born 1863 in Streatham lived in ***** House then.

Also living with them was a hospital nurse Harriet Kate Harris, single aged 42, born 1869 in Southampton. And there were two servants Mary Elizabeth Lelliot aged 21, cook, single and born in 1890 in West Grinstead and Agnes Mary Sprange aged 20, housemaid, single and born in 1891 in Cranbrook.



QUESTIONS

Was the nurse looking after John Druce or Emily Druce? Why was he retired so early? Or was that usual? Where did the servants sleep? Was ***** House a whole house then or already divided into 3 or 4 flats, with the ground floor being the kitchen and laundry, the attics at the top of Flat 4 being the bedrooms?

There is the remains of a dumb waiter in our kitchen, which links to the other flats. Sarah and Andrew in Flat One say they have parts of speaking tubes in their flat. So it seems there were connections between the flats. There is an outside stone staircase linking the three upper flats. Were they serviced flats where the servants of each flat shared the service area and the sleeping areas?

1911 Census St Albans

I looked to see if anything else is listed and found St. Albans, the present name of the top flat here. A retired surveyor of the New Zealand Survey Department aged 55, born in Ventnor Isle of Wight was living there with his son aged 20, a student RNV Reserve, born in Australia.

MORE FACTS

The ***** is a crescent of 13 Italianate villas built around an ornamental garden by architect Decimus Burton in about 1860. His father James Burton had planned the new town of St. Leonards on Sea from 1828 and had built large parts of Bloomsbury and St. John's Wood and collaborated with John Nash on Regent's Park. Decimus Burton was also an acclaimed architect responsible for the Wellington Arch and the Palm House at Kew Gardens and the layout of London Zoo.

To the west of The ***** was the Archery Ground founded in 1833. The Archer Club was known as the Queen's Royal St. Leonards Archers after Princess Victoria presented a banner when she stayed in the Royal Victoria Hotel, she later became Queen.

I looked up the **1901 Census** and I found the Druce family living in Ashburnham, Bishops Down Park Road, Tunbridge Wells.

The nurse, described as nurse trained, sick, is listed as born in 1868.

There are 4 different servants, cook, housemaid, parlourmaid, kitchenmaid (latter also born Southampton, aged 24, 26, 19, 15).

I looked up this Bishops Down Park Road, it looks onto the park Denny Bottom, looks like a wealthy area.

John Druce comes up as a shareholder in Great Western Railways.
He is mentioned in the 1892 London Gazette as a solicitor and executor for a will.

1881 Census John A Druce is at The Shrubbery, Streatham, aged 23 and a student of law.

1891 record shows Emily L Druce as daughter-in-law at Upper Gatton, Gatton, Reigate, aged 29 born in 1862 in Streatham. Also listed in this house are many Druces, about 6 siblings of John Druce, daughters-in-law, and a long list of servants. Seems like a very large house belonging to Alexander Druce, father of John A and also a solicitor.

QUESTIONS

Why did they move from Tunbridge Wells to St. Leonards on Sea? Was it to have the healthy sea air. Many people moved here for sea bathing also seen as health bearing. Did one or both of the Druces have TB? No mention of children any children of the couple. The nurse is clearly with them for at least 10 years. Or when John Druce retired did they downsize to this house?

Did they walk in The ***** Gardens? Or in St. Leonards Gardens? Did they promenade along the smart Marina shops and by the sea taking the air? Did the servants buy produce in Mercatoria and King's Road? Did they get the laundry done in Lavateria?

1901 Census *** House**

F. Pringle widow 67 of own means is living in ***** House in 1901. She has 4 servants, 3 female: housekeeper aged 49, maid aged 21, cook aged 25 and a male footman aged 29.

1891 11 The *****

Arabella Storey, widow, head, aged 47 from Bridgnorth, plus a caretaker.

1881 Census no *** House or no. 11 listed**

1871 Census *** House**

Fanny Pulteney aged 36 is listed as sister? Of the owner? Plus 4 children aged 0, 1, 2, and 3. And 6 servants: a male aged 60, and females 40, 28, 25, 18, 15.

I had a look at the other houses in The ***** in the censuses and found most of the owners over this time to be 'of private means', with 4 or 5 servants including butlers, cooks, maids and housekeepers. Several of the households were headed by women. Several seemed to have unmarried adult children living with them. During this time I found 2 families with 4 unmarried adult daughters.

Much more can be found out, it takes time. It's strange how interesting it is and how one can imagine the servants going back and forth with baskets to do the shopping and horse and carriages clopping around. How the servants and owners were living parallel but interwoven lives. Most of the servants seem young. The owners older, many retired. Did they have houses still in London?

