

ROUNABOUT RINGWOOD & SURROUNDING VILLAGES

NOW and THEN



**Church Hatch,
Market Place.**

Considering its imposing architecture and important place in Ringwood's history, it is remarkable how few old photographs exist of the house we know as Church Hatch. For although it stands directly next to the Parish Church, the house is tucked behind another important building, Old Bank House, which conceals it from many of the views taken of the Market Place. The old photograph shown here must have been taken on a market day around 1900.

In the 18th century the house, then known as 'The Hornes', was owned and occupied by the Willis family, who for several generations were influential wealthy lawyers and stewards of Ringwood Manor. The house is pictured on a 1769 map of the Willis estate, a copy of which now hangs in the Church Parish Rooms. The Willis family also owned the adjacent building (then the old Crown Inn, now Old Bank House), so it seems that they did not mind that their own frontage was obscured by their more prominent neighbour. In 1779 bachelor owner John Willis stabbed himself to death, leaving a fortune of over £100,000 to a lucky nephew.

During the early 19th century my research shows the house was owned by Robert Hicks, a carrier* who became a banker with partner James White. Robert and his wife Elizabeth had four daughters; the eldest married Ringwood surgeon Thomas Dyer and another married lawyer Robert Parr, one-time Town Clerk of Poole. By this time the house and its extensive grounds (now part of the Furlong Shopping Precinct) appear to have been called

'The Parks'. In the early 1830s Elizabeth Hicks, by then a widow, retired to Poole and the house was sold to another family of lawyers, the Davy family, who occupied the house for the rest of the 19th century.

During the early 20th century Admiral G.H. Hewitt and family were in residence until in 1914 the house became a private school, originally called Ringwood Collegiate. In 1926 a new headmaster changed its name to Ringwood Grammar School, which it remained until 1946 when the school relocated to Bourne-mouth. It was then used by the Department of Social Security until 1981. Since then the house has been converted to private offices for rent. Exactly when the name Church Hatch was first used is unknown to me.

Ringwood's iconic Jubilee Lantern installed in 1887, can be seen between the buildings in the old photo but the picture was taken from a much higher viewpoint, probably from a 1st floor window in the buildings opposite.



*A carrier is a specialist in the leather processing industry. After the tanning process, the carrier applies techniques of dressing, finishing and colouring to the tanned hide to make it strong, flexible and waterproof.