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The Demolition of the Garage and Proposed Development of Flats

A meeting was called by the parish council, because there was a lot of opposition to the proposed development and the loss of the garage. On the evening of the meeting the hall opened with the parish council seated at a table in front of the stage, but the hall very quickly filled with interested villagers, so that the council had to retreat to the comparative safety on the stage. The hall by this time had filled up with very interested and angry villagers, so much so that the windows were all opened so that the people who could not get in, could hear and see what was going on from outside. Opinions were voiced. The meeting went on for a long time. The view was that the village was against the development. The result of course stands in the square for all to see, but Democracy had to been seen to be done. The then chairman of the Parish Council shortly afterwards emigrated to Australia.

This small exhibition shows a brief period of around thirty months in the late Twentieth Century which altered the character of the Market Square completely. I have included some earlier photographs of the Square for those of you that did not know it before the flats were built. The picture of the pub [with the two children outside] was The Lamb Public house, and the building on the end was at one time a Fish and Chip shop. It was demolished in the 1950s in order to build the Market Square Garage, which in turn was demolished in 1998/1999 for the erection of the Flats. These were offered for sale on the 30th June 2001.

After the garage was demolished there was a period of several months, when the soil was tested regularly because of contamination by oil and other garage waste from the previous 50 plus years. During this period, over forty large lorry loads of contaminated soil were removed and replaced with clean soil. The site was then passed as suitable for the building to start.

After the holes were drilled, each one had a frame work of reinforcing rods {which were welded together on site} lowered into it. Then cement was poured into the holes up to footings level. Then, of course, the footings were laid and the main structure was started.

After the pre-made floor of the first storey was installed, the building was taken up to the next level, and the same procedure was repeated for the top floor.

The Flats were offered for Sale 30th June 2001. As a small point of interest, the first occupier of the front ground floor flat was a member of a local business family, who had at one time a grocery shop in the premises which is now known as The Romany hotel. The wife of the second occupier of the same flat was the daughter of the landlord of The Lamb which stood on the site up until the 1950s.

The Flats and Skateboards

Shortly after the flats were in full occupancy, it was decided to add a pair of gates to the front of the arch, because of teenagers using the entrance to skateboard through the archway and across the small garden in order to jump onto the footpath at the rear of the property. This was before the skateboard ramp was built in the sports field.

These pictures show the work and expertise in building the flats (Thornberry). I also included some earlier photographs to illustrate the appearance of the square in the past. With all the changes that have taken place the square is still the centre and heart of the village. It is a meeting place for countless people and is used for special occasions such as the Golden and Diamond jubilee celebrations, and of course for the finishing post for the annual shirt race which always attracts a large crowd. The Morris dancers use it every Whit Monday. The annual fair comes every August, and of course Remembrance Day in November, and the lighting of the Christmas tree in December also take place in the Market Square.

Postscript.

Those of you that know me would have probably noticed that my surname was incorrectly spelt, on the posters. This is a common error as there are so many ways of spelling "Simmonds". My grandfather left Reading in the 1920s with two M's to his name leaving behind an H. G. Simonds with only one M, and a Brewery and a fortune! I still have only two Ms in my name, which prompts me to recall a situation in my shop.

Some years ago, I had an American lady who was a regular customer. After a few months she said to me would I take a cheque? To which I replied, "of course". She made her purchases and proceeded to write the cheque asking me how I spelt my surname? I told her, and she said to me, "That's interesting, I have five great uncles, back in the states all named Simmonds but all spelt differently. When they arrived in New York from Eastern Europe they embarked at Ellis Island and each went to an immigration officer to give their details and each officer spelt their name differently, so it ended up with five brothers with the same name, all spelt differently."