

People are frequently confused by Elstow's street numbering which appears, to say the least, somewhat illogical.

The High Street, for example, has houses starting at no. 170, whilst West End starts at no. 215 and has bungalows numbered 20 to 30 - next door to nos. 215 and 216!

There are explanations for most (but not all) of these strange numberings;

Firstly, the three figure numbers are not *street* numbers; they are Whitbread *Estate* numbers, dating back to when the Whitbread family owned most of Elstow. And the Whitbread Estate numbers for Elstow begin where the numbers for Whitbread Estate's cottages in Cardington village end.

A hundred years or so ago, a house in West End numbered, for example, 228, would simply have been known as '228 Elstow' and everyone who needed to know where in Elstow that was located would have known. But then, officialdom decided that all residential roads should have street names and so the official postal address for 228 Elstow became 228 West End, Elstow. Similarly 206 Elstow (the Post Office on the High Street) became 206 High Street, Elstow.

It used to be the norm, when Whitbread Estates sold a property, for the new owner to have to remove its estate number and give the property a name. But, by the 1950s, Whitbread Estates appear to have abandoned that requirement. This is why Elstow now has several houses that are in private hands yet still bear Whitbread estate numbers, whilst others *have* had their numbers removed by their new owners: e.g. no. 205 became "Pilgrim House" and no. 173 "The Old Cottage"

Also on the High Street, there are properties which Whitbread Estates have never owned – e.g. the Swan Inn and The Green Corner – and so have never been allocated a number. So you have houses like no. 204 (now, confusingly, called 'West End Farmhouse'), which has several properties between it and what was no. 205.

In the mid 1970s, Bedford Borough added considerably to the existing confusion, after Whitbread sold the old cottages on the High Street for £1. The Council restored these cottages, converted them into flats and maisonettes and added bungalows and a few houses, to form a sheltered accommodation complex, which they named "Bunyan's Mead". The Council then ..... gave these dwellings a whole new set of numbers!

And so the High Street's numbering became even more bewildering than before. On the west side of the road, the designations went: no. 204 (Prudden's cottage), the Swan Inn, The Green Corner, 205 (Pilgrim House) – whilst opposite no. 205 was no. 174 and numbers 1 to 4 ( Bunyan's Mead)!

It was suggested to the Council that they should renumber the *whole* of the High Street, but the official view was that would be too difficult - despite the fact that they had just renumbered an entire block of cottages!

This complicated saga has a somewhat amusing sequel.

As part of the Progress Way/ Wigram Close development in the early 1990s, some new houses were built at the northern end of the High Street, opposite the old school and chapel. The developer and Council, very sensibly (for once), did not allocate numbers to these houses but gave each one a name instead.

However, in more recent years, the occupants of these houses have begun adding numbers, picking up the numbering from the old Whitbread estate houses that stand immediately south of them. Thus, these new houses, all in private ownership and which were never owned by the Whitbread Estate now bear *fictional* Whitbread Estate numbers!

In West End, there is one further bizarre piece of numbering.

When, in the mid 1970s, Bedford Borough Council built some bungalows, just east of numbers 215 & 216, they numbered them Nos. 20 to 30! I have not yet discovered why. If anyone knows the answer to this anomaly, please use the Contact Form to get in touch with me.

Clive Arnold, Curator Moot Hall. November 2020