

## VILLAGE PEOPLE

### *File 46 -*

I remember Mrs Barkuss who lived in the cottages [East and West Cottages] opposite Mr Tom Heather who was next to the Greyhound Inn. Her house had not been wired up with electrics, she still used oil lights. She had a very old radio, and to power this she used accumulators. In order to recharge these accumulators she would carry them to Benson Village where Mr Vaughn, who ran the garage in Benson Village, would exchange them with those from the previous week. [Jenny Townsend Baker wrote subsequently in the Ewelme News that "Mrs Barkuss took her accumulators to Mrs Harris (Minnie) at The Terrace to be charged. We used to see her regularly go past our house at Watercress Cottages and return in about 5-10 minutes."]

When in need of a haircut our mother would walk us 2 miles to Benson village, where Stan Blissett had his shop next door to what is now the Somerfields supermarket. Alternatively, she would call in Mr Smith from Green Lane, he would use manual clippers and was always joking.

I recall the gas masks and our neighbour Mrs Lily Hedges incident. In the bottom of my mother's wardrobe there were two gas masks as issued in the Second World War. One was of these was full face with long convoluted breathing hose which terminated into a waist level filter box – it looked absolutely ghastly. The other was the full-face mask with filter. Unfortunately, my brother and his friend then aged no more than 7, decided that 80 year old Mrs Hedges, who lived next door, might be amused to see them wearing these masks, so after putting them on, they knocked on Mrs Hedges's front door. When Mrs Hedges eventually answered, rather than seeing the amusing side, she was frightened. My mother, her home help, had to rush round to calm her down with a small brandy. The gas masks were soon disposed of.

My father would always sell lots of chickens for Christmas and would employ people to pluck them in readiness. I remember Tom Heather (Church Organist) who lived at the opposite side of the Greyhound [now The Coach House] arriving every Christmas Eve to collect his chicken, he would sit and chat with mince pies and wine refreshment. He and his wife had the most beautiful garden - like an oil painting. They were very friendly people. On one side our neighbour was Mr Tom Mooring who was an old soldier. He took a liking to me and would show me his Cavalry uniform and medals, perhaps I was privileged being very young, as apparently older people were denied this opportunity. I remember him introducing me to my first cup of Oxo.

Horace Hedges was our next door neighbour in the High Street Ewelme. He lived with and looked after his mother, who needed a lot of attention. My mother was "home help" for Mrs Hedges and would often take me next door with her. Mrs Hedges seemed to like me and would often send me on shopping errands to the Chalkin's shop across the road. I do remember Mrs Hedges constantly shouting instructions and banging her walking stick - she must have been very hard work for Horace and I suspect this may have prevented Horace having a social life until later years. I remember seeing Horace leaning on his front gate in summer evenings - we would stop and have a chat. He told many stories of School days (mentioned Mr Quixley), the War and his days in the home with characters such as Stan Cutler and Fred Harwood. Freddie Belcher (lived at 2 Martyns Way and farm worker for the Edwards) was a good friend and would often chat with Horace. On Sundays Horace and his mother would always listen to the Billy Cotton Band Show on the Radio. Farming was his life and he would tell me all about the days when he used horses to plough, the coming of Steam Engines and Tractors. He generated my interest in farming such that my choice of toys would be farm orientated. He would cycle the short distance to work for Mr Orpwood/Chamberlain at Lower Farm and would in later years take me with him to experience farming. When we were allocated a Council House at Hampden Way Horace was given the opportunity to become our lodger. I remember helping clear all the possessions from Horace's High Street home. Virtually everything was disposed of into the "John Passey" lorry waiting outside. I and the Passey children were bringing down all the belongings from the upstairs attics which must have been forgotten for years. In hindsight some of this must have been collectors' material. Lily Hedges was buried on 16th May 1957 aged 78.

### *File 51a/b -*

Evacuees whose permanent accommodation, supplied by 'Captain' and Madame Horsley in the White House, was two stables with the names Miss Muffet and Golden Arrow. 'Captain' and Madame Horsley often came for a cup of tea and a chat, and my youngest sister would take my daughter to read to the Horsley children. Immediate neighbours residing in the Farm House [Cat Lane Cottages] were Mr and Mrs Walklin, Senior, who from the first introduction accepted us into their family. The supreme proof being to invite us to join them at their Christmas lunch table. Oh – the aroma of the turkey and fresh vegetables being cooked on the large fine range! Their two sons, Arthur who later married Irene, and the late Harry Walklin (who lost his life serving in the RAF as a gunner in a Wellington bomber) decorated our stables with green distemper. You can imagine how proud we were.

Jim and Tom Orpwood were the senior farmers in the village but each also had voluntary occupations. Tom, other than chairman of the evacuee committee, was also the village Special Policeman. When we returned to London we kept in constant touch with the Walklin family, either by post or visiting. Sarah Walklin (Mrs Walklin Snr) visited us on many occasions. She attended family weddings and my grandsons christening.

### *File 55 -*

Mr Paget - My father told me he dug the well by Paget's hut above the dairy - it would be about 20 yards west of the walnut tree which I think is still there! Paget was an eccentric who ran a market garden up [behind what is now Eyres Close] there at one time but was renowned for having invented the Paget lamp. You manually squeezed a trigger mechanism that drove an electric dynamo - a fore runner of the bicycle dynamo (in a way) that replaced the old King of the Road spirit lamps that I can just remember! The orchard was indeed there but was past it's best by my time and Mr Paget who used to live in "Paget's Hut" behind the dairy (and where my father had dug the well) was the inventor of the Paget lamp. Paget had run the orchard I believe. He had obviously been a character from all the stories about him still current when I was small.

### *File 65 -*

Lived at Brook Cottages as a child. Remembers the Moody's. Mrs Moody used to praise her son David. A lady and her husband visit every year to see where the Moody's lived. Moody's came from Northampton. He died when I got married. Moved to The Terrace and then to Long Wittenham.

Seat at the foot of the bridleway to Howberry Park – near the bend at Tidmarsh Corner beyond the cottages but before the bridge, discontinued when the RAF was built. Put up by Mr Lesley Green who lived at Lower End about 1950. Seat taken away when Mr Green left. [Photo of David Munday sitting on the seat in the photo archive].

Lower End used to be 4 cottages David Munday had end one. Mr Greenaway, my folks in the middle.

## **WATERCRESS BEDS**

### *File 46 -*

Watercress Beds - From my earliest memories in the early 1950's and into the 1960's the Water Cress Beds were always maintained in an absolute immaculate condition. They were a showpiece and water cress was in demand. The beds would be shuttered by wooden boards and extending from Kings Pool to just below the Shepherds Hut. I believe the business was run by a Mr Smith from Watlington, who himself a cress worker, used local village workforce.

### *File 69 -*

My connection with the Beds goes back to about 1932 when I was 11 years old and used to cycle to Ewelme from Benson where I lived, with my two sixpenny pieces (5p) to buy two bunches of freshly cut watercress; one for my mother and the other for my grandmother. Each bunch was about 4" diameter and tied with string to which Mr Smith or his helpers would add a loop so I could hang each bunch from the handlebars of my bicycle.

My great grandmother, was a pupil at Ewelme School from 1830 to 1840 and my father, was a lifelong friend of the Smith brothers. Through this connection I was given permission from about 1933 to 1936 to catch trout in the pools.

During the 1939-45 War, my father took van loads of watercress to the wholesalers at Oxford Market on Wednesdays and to Reading Market on Saturdays. He was able to do this because he had what was known as a 'B' Licence which allowed him to carry other people's goods within a radius of 25 miles, with petrol allowance for essential work.

Years later, during the very serious drought in 1976 when the Beds very nearly dried up and the water from the springs in Kings Pool did not reach the Beds, William – with my prompting – called at the Beds offering his services as a water diviner. He found two very strong water sources and suggested boreholes at either of these points. Without waiting for official permission, drilling began immediately and I understand 8,000 gallons an hour were soon on stream to save the Beds. This action was recorded in the Oxford Mail, Oxford Times and Wallingford Herald, and front page photos of William with his hazel twigs – which he cut from my trees when I was living at Brookside in Benson. William did not receive any reward for this neighbourly help but I did benefit when the water arrived in my trout lake in Brook Street, Benson.