

BUILDINGS

Memoirs of some of Ewelme's old buildings

Tape 9 -

Reading Room –Catherine Emma Hampden got up the money to build it with Miss Maxwell of Saffron House, and the Misses Quins of Manor House, as a men-only place. Saffron House where lived a dear old friend of my grandmother, Miss Maxwell. I believe it was a Dower House to the Palace when the Manor was occupied by the Crown. Miss Maxwell had the most beautiful garden. It stretched from the top road down to the bottom road and the original spring from which the Kings Pool and the watercress beds came from. After church we always called on Miss Maxwell and admired her garden. She was a rich old lady and had a chauffeur who lived in Kings Pool Cottage, Bert Billings, who married Dolly Godden (Frank Godden's sister).

The Old Rectory which was bought by Sir Claud Severn in the twenties. He added a rather unattractive wing which these days would never have been allowed with the Conservation Order on Ewelme. I have a very lovely picture of it as it was in the 1850's. What a pity to ruin such an attractive house.

The Mount - Further up the hill is a lane (where Chaucer Court now stands). There was a beautiful old house called The Mount but unfortunately it was allowed to fall down. It was the oldest, if not the oldest house in Ewelme and supposed to be where General Martyn, who saved the church during the Civil War days, lived. [She is getting confused with West Court]. In one part of the old house lived a Mr Cherrill. He ran a most useful carrier service to Wallingford with his horse and cart. When you required his service you would put a large cardboard plaque with a 'C' on your front gate.

Tape 34 -

Saffron Close - When I was there [at Saffron Close] Mr, Hall looked after the garden there was also a Mr Greenwood or a name similar who looked after the greenhouse. I remember when he was ill with pneumonia Granny Dymond looking after him he slept in a little room off the kitchen up a couple of stairs. We also owned the garden over on the other side of the road from Saffron Close [now Michaelmas Lodge], it had a lovely flowering pink horse-chestnut tree, I used to play in there for hours making mud pies and decorating them with pink blossoms! But I think that the Noel-Smiths [at Hill House] bought it or rented it and we didn't go in there any more. Just down the road from Mrs Strickland. They had tap-water. Mind you so did we but it had to be pumped up every day, we also had central heating but didn't use it during the war, but Lady Somervell [The Old Rectory] had hers on because I used to go there often and sit on her window seat and feel the heat on my legs. There were a lot of Medical Books in the Library I used to go in there on a sunny morning and read them. So perhaps someone did Medicine. The Coach House had a beautiful coach we used to play in that. And down on the main street where Rowse had his factory was a small shed it had clothes from many years ago. We had a go at those too. Dreadful children us Dymond gang!!!

File 43 -

Herbie Winfield who lived at Kings Pool Cottages - There was no electricity, no gas, no sanitation or piped water in the house. [Mains water laid on 1950/51]. My mother had to carry pails of water to the house from the springs at the bottom of the garden. This water was used for drinking, washing and bathing. Though this may have seemed unhygienic, the spring water was beautifully clear and cold. In summer mild and butter was put in a jar in the water – our refrigerator! A glass of this water in the summer was as good as an ice-cream. There was a big butt of rainwater at the back of the house, used for washing and for washing our hair because of its softness. Sanitation consisted of a bucket in a shed in the garden, the contents of which helped fertilise the garden and possibly contributed to the high quality vegetables and fruit which my father produced. For bathing a tin tub was brought into the corner of the kitchen. It had to be filled and a fire lit underneath to provide us with water for our baths and also for washing day. This day was horrendous to me as a child – what it must have been like for my mother, I can't imagine. I hated coming home from school on Monday to find the kitchen full of wet clothes and my mother tired and irritable – no wonder!

The cooking was done on a coal range, big black pots on top as well as the kettle which was always ready to boil, and an oven for basking. This coal range was cleaned and polished with black lead, and the hearth whitened. Cooking was hazardous and the coal range was to say the least temperamental. One can't imagine in these days of switching on, setting temperatures etc. what it was like to cook virtually by knowing our stove and guess work.

Lighting was given by oil lamps suspended from the ceiling and candles to take to bed. I always remember an oil lamp hanging on the wall just inside the door of my parents' bedroom, which shone some light into our rooms. I liked to be sure the bedroom door was open enough to see that light.

There were two rooms downstairs, the kitchen and what we called the 'front room'. In the winter this front room was rarely used when we were young children because my parents could not afford two fires. There were three bedrooms, one large one and two small rooms. The girls all slept in one bed in one small room and the boys in the other. In this small house my parents had seven children. There was no warmth in the bedrooms unless anyone was ill and then sometimes a fire would be lit in mother's bedroom. My mother used to warm half bricks in the oven in the winter and wrap them in pieces of blanket for us to take to bed. There would always be a chamber pot under the bed for the natural functions, for taking a walk to the garden in the middle of the night, especially in winter, was hardly welcome. At the best of times using that bucket in that shed was an ordeal, full of flies and smells in summer and freezing cold in winter. My father hated the job of emptying the wretched bucket so it often became too full and even more disgusting. It was not until 1946 that my parents were at last able to pull the chain (still in the garden until the 1980's) and had a cold water tap and sink installed in the kitchen. Electric light was installed in 1939 and gradually mother has some modern electrical gadgets - but she brought up seven children without these amenities.

These conditions were normal in the village for the poorer people in the days before the last war and as children we accepted them as a normal way of life. We were all as village people materially poor, our health and well-being depended very much on the hard work of our parents. Father not only worked as a gardener to earn money, he worked every light-hour at his own garden and allotment producing food for us, enough root vegetables and green vegetables to last throughout the year. We also had some chickens from which we had enough eggs varying according to the season. They roamed around the nearby orchard, and if one clucked, we hunted for the egg! We also had some beehives. The honey was often sold to provide money for our shoes or to pay the rent and rates. My father was not above poaching the odd rabbit or two to add to our diet. We ate good food; one advantage of living in the country in those days. I remember buying a quart of skimmed milk for 1/4d from the dairy at the Manor. The only fruit we had was the English seasonal fruit. The only time mother bought fruit was oranges for Christmas. She used to buy 6 penny worth of sweets once a week which was shared between us, but thanks to my father's hard work on the garden we had a good diet. My father became such an expert gardener that he took a lot of his produce to flower and vegetable shows. He won many prizes and the money was also used to cover the household bills. These shows gave us a great deal of amusement in some ways but in other ways we dreaded the events for we were not allowed to touch developing fruit and vegetables until the shows were over. We were also sworn at quite a lot if we were involved in helping him, but I realise now how important it was for him financially.

File 44 -

The road ran from St Helen's Avenue, which was the Benson by-pass straight on up the Old London Road - Beggars Bush Hill past the London Road Inn. There was a tea room and petrol pumps about half way between Benson and the first hangar, called the KCB. [Keep the Countryside Beautiful].

File 46 -

Days Cottage' - Located next to the Greyhound Inn. At the time of our occupation this house was rather small because it was divided into two, rent was paid to the landlord Mr Bill Edwards, who also owned the adjacent farm, at the rate of 10 Shillings (50 Pence) per week. The large open coal/log fire in the kitchen normally provided heating and a regular source of hot water from large blackened kettles. We could roast nuts and bake potatoes and I remember watching the ever-changing patterns and shapes as the fire burned. Bath night was once a week and it was always an argument as to who would be first into the hot water. Lots of hot water was prepared and the tin bath, which would normally hang against the wall from the nail outside, was brought into the kitchen and positioned sideways by the fire for warmth. It was not unusual, if wood was being burnt, for it to spit the occasional hot ember into the bath, hitting the occupant! We had an

outside bucket toilet halfway down the garden, which had a positive benefit to the rhubarb plot. At night we used the infamous chamber pot. Washing facilities were in another small building immediately outside the back door, as also was the larder (fridges – what are they?). The weekly washing was traditionally done on a Monday or Tuesday and it was frowned upon to deviate. To perform this task my mother used a large electric water boiler, scrubbing board, mangle and washing line, and of course a dry windy day. Air Raid Shelters were located between our home and the Greyhound, my father put these, along with other purpose built huts, to good use for his considerable stock of chickens. Halfway down the garden my father also kept some pigs. Not surprisingly rats were a problem and were dealt with by traps or by Mr Cleverley, from the Greyhound Inn next door, with his rifle. We had several apple trees.

Hampden Way - In either 1958 or 1959 we moved to the newly built council houses at Hampden Way (No 16). This provided the much needed space and the luxury of flush toilets and bathroom etc, though memories of life in the High Street are good.

Addendum - Farleigh – once the name of Lower Farmhouse – now Fields End. The Chestnuts – Cat Lane.

File 72 -

Lived at No 1 The Bank – three cottages behind the Shepherds Hut sometimes referred to as Monkey Island. Sold in 1995 at the death of his mother. No.1 the Bank was the only home my parents had, initially rented from 1938 when my parents married. Sometime during the 1950's the owner died, and the three cottages were left to his nephew. This person didn't want to make the journey to collect the rents, so the cottages were offered to the tenants at a price that was affordable to them all, even for my dad, on a farm workers wage. I was seven years old when we had a bathroom and toilet added to our cottage, previously it was trip to an outbuilding past the other cottages for the loo and a zinc bath that hung on the fence at the rear, to be brought in on a Friday evening for bath night in front of the kitchen range. Clothes washing was done in a copper standing over a fire in a lean-to shed by the back door.

Our neighbours were the Fosters, Les, Florrie and their children, Maureen and Malcolm in no.2 and Mr and Mrs Webb at no.3. Les Foster was a cobbler and had his shop in Crowmarsh. Les's claim to fame was when Steve Winwood (from the band *Traffic*) had come into his shop and requested Les to make him a pair of bespoke leather boots. *Traffic* were then living in Aston Tirrold. Jack Webb drove the delivery van for the Village store. I think it was called the International Stores, having been previously Greenway Stores, owned by Fred Greenway who then lived at a house called 'Brownings', situated across the ford. Mrs Webb was the only person that I've known to die of Lock Jaw (Tetanus) One day she came along to my mother and said that she couldn't open her mouth. She ended up in Wallingford hospital, never to recover. Mum visited her every week before Mrs Webb finally died. It was thought the tetanus resulted from a scratch from one of the raspberry canes in her garden.