

# EMPLOYMENT

## Memoirs of how the villagers earned their living

### *Tape 1 -*

**Old Rectory, Old Mill, Hill House, The Manor and the Old Mansion.** Big houses employed many inside and outside

**Ewelme Down House** – Mr Winfield took out gravel from behind Frank Godden's house to build the road up to Ewelme Down House. Then used the hole as a refuse tip for household rubbish.

**Watercress beds** were sacrosanct, employed several people. Horses drawn carts took cress to Reading and Oxford.

**Farms** – 40 – 50 men employed up to WWII. Orpwood's employed 15-20 men on north side of village. He did not help on the land, only chased rabbits.

### *Tape 2 -*

**Ewelme Down House** - built about 1891 by Mr Lawson. Lord Graham after the First War. Mr Justins worked there.

**Hill House** - Grandfather worked part time for Hill House - the Eagle-Botts. Hill House occupied by Sir Donald Somerville - attorney general in the War. Then Lady Hambleden.

**Ewelme Park** - the Misses Keyser blockaded footpaths to train their race-horses, Sir Donald had to threaten them to open the paths again.

**Honey Factory** - employed about 40.

**Grundons** - started in 1947, another firm took gravel before that.

### *Tape 3 -*

**The Rectory** – Doreen Reason's first job at New Rectory for Rev Humphreys. 5/- per week wage with a half day off. Only staff. Lived in, hours 6.0 am bed at 9.0 pm. Had to cut mould off bread and cut into squares for communion bread. Mrs Humphreys a taskmaster - nailed a coin under furniture to test staff's honesty. Left after 3 months.

**Honey Factory** - Doreen worked there for 6 years. Mr Rowse had many hives scattered about, as business grew he imported honey.

**Farms** - Remembers helping out at harvest times.

**Motor Works at Cowley** - Doreen's husband worked as an Accountant at Cowley - cycled to Chalgrove to catch a lift.

### *Tape 4 -*

**Grundons** has grown rapidly, only sand extractor there in the 1950's. Seen decline in agricultural employment.

### *Tape 6 -*

**Cress beds** – always kept immaculately. The Miners' son used to sell bunches for 6d when the Smiths wanted a break. Remembers drought of 1976 when the steam and Kings Pool dried up. Water had to be pumped in to keep the cress alive.

### *Tape 8 -*

**Watercress beds** employed many people – 8 – 10 deep in the beds sometimes.

**Cowley** employed a lot of people before and after the War. Villagers who traditionally worked on the land found steady work at Cowley and it became very sort-after work. Reg Tuckwell cycled to Cowley from Ewelme. Later Mr Rosier filled up his car with workers and gave them a lift to the works.

### *Tape 9 -*

**The Old Mansion** - employed a married couple the Scoates as staff. He worked in the garden, she in the house. They lived in the staff quarters 1 bedroom, and 1 sitting room in the new wing pulled down after the war. The Scoates then went to live in the almshouses.

**Honey Factory** – she was against the project it wrecked Ewelme, whilst it was there.

### *Tape 10 -*

**Britwell House** – Amy Reeves worked at Britwell House for Sir Richard and Lady Gull. Went at age 14 as a temporary general maid, worked from 6 am to late evening with a gap in the middle of the afternoon when she could cycle to Wallingford to the cinema and be back in time for evening duty. She lived in and there was a big staff from buttons to butler. She stayed 2 years and was paid 5/- a week, including her board. She shared a bedroom with the other maids. Can remember the staff Christmas party which was a big affair held in the staff hall. Amy recorded a half hour interview with Radio Oxford on being a 'skivvy'. Alice (Beale) married name and her sister Jessie were maids at the Manor, Bryant was the odd job man at the Manor, Jim Busby was the gardener at The Old Mill House. Mr and Mrs Gilpin were the cook and butler at The Old Mill House for Mrs Bowles.

**The Manor.** Bryant was the odd-job man/gardener at the Manor.

The Old Mill House - Jim Busby was the gardener. Mr and Mrs Gilpin were the cook and butler.

**The White House** - Edie Burgess was maid for the Horsleys. He broke in horses and was not a nice man. He would put a pin under the saddle to make the horses prance up the street.

**RAF Benson** gave a lot of employment to village people. Opened in February 1939.

At age 16 also in Ewelme Post Office and village store.

### *Tape 11 -*

**Fords Farm** employed 4 local workers and casual labour came from Wallingford. They would walk as couldn't afford cycles.

### *Tape 12 -*

**Honey Factory** – first factory building built in mid 1950's. It was an importing and packing station. In the mid 1960's agriculture changed. Honey crop fell and we had to import. This was because fertilisers were used (insecticides) and penicillin. Sainfoin, a pink flower had been grown largely for sheep because it kept them healthy in the winter. In the 1960's it was easier to give sheep penicillin so they stopped growing sainfoin.

There was a high demand for honey. Demand has been rising steadily. When they arrived there were 3 beekeepers in the village. Gradually people found it easier to get it at a supermarket, just as they do their vegetables, instead of growing their own.

The crops have changed, to wheat in particular. There is no red or white clover because farmers spray their fields. Couldn't make enough of their own honey at a low enough price. Wages were going up, yields were falling so had to import. Retired in 1974. The business continues in Wallingford with son Richard as chairman/managing director.

Business mainly for supermarkets today, who set very high standards. Had to go because the buildings weren't up to standards set by supermarkets, eg bronze fittings instead of stainless steel. There was also limited space and consequently couldn't cope with demand. Quality controllers dictated what they could do.

Originally they had 1,000 hives. They employed 2 people. Norman Winfield and Wallace Miners. When they started the factory business really grew. The first barrel of foreign honey arrived in 1961 – how to get it out of the barrel took some working out. It came from Guatemala. They fetched some tyres and rolled it onto the ground and when the barrel was opened the honey was solid. Had to devise a heater to liquefy it – very primitive at first. It was a small industry as honey was regarded as a luxury. Didn't boom until 60's when health foods got going. Barbara Cartland helped their trade. When they went to an exhibition they were written to and asked if they wished Barbara Cartland to go to their stall – send some honey and she would come and see them – photos etc. Gave Mr Rowse her book on honey which was very good. She stated it was an aphrodisiac and as a result sales doubled. Couldn't cope with the demand and they sold out. Eventually they had a 20 tonne container lorry per day and filled 3,000 dozen jars of honey.

**Cress beds** – had cress near where the factory stood. The land their present house was built on was originally the vegetable garden and the stream was ideal for cress beds. The cress was brown because it was near the source, further down it was the more usual green. There was also brown cress at Chinnor. They did harvest it but it was hard work. The cress prospered under Walter Smith, when agricultural work was still largely done manually. Mechanisation came and food standards rose, the standards set by supermarkets was too high to keep up, so the cress faded gently away.

### *Tape 13 –*

**Ewelme Down House** – Her great grandfather carried the big stone to Ewelme Down House in a horse drawn cart.

**Cress beds** run by Mr Wally Smith and his family. Very efficient and sold to local shops and London. Employed 3 workers all local, Gerald Smith and Nick Smith.

**Honey Factory** - employed many local people. Before it was built it was a garden.

**Grundons** - started in 1950's but no tipping then. Lorries used to go through village which was a real nuisance.

**Cowley Motor works** – a lot of people employed there. Reg Tuckwell cycled there every day from Ewelme.

**Scrapyards** - Paint strippings dumped [in tip] top of Eyres Lane by the B4009 junction. Ray Main brought it.

### *Tape 16 –*

**Cress beds** - Remembers Depper Smith at the Cress beds, don't know why they called him Depper. Had two men who worked there. Children never trespassed on the cress beds. Her father gave Depper permission to use his garden as a right of way to the pool. It was cleared and replanted by hand.

**Honey Factory** - rarely had village people working at it. It caused a lot of traffic problems.

**Motor Works at Cowley** - took a lot of village men (including her husband Richard) as they paid so well - £30 - £40 a week! A bus would collect men from the top road.

RAF Benson employed a lot of labouring men.

### *Tape 18 –*

**Farms** - Worked building at Chalgrove and for Peter Acke at Ewelme Down. His older brother took over Lower Farm, but he had a tumor and sold it to Chamberlains. Pop Watts bought Levers Farm. Peter Acke bought Ewelme Down from Crew-King who bought it from Peter Gemmill. All the farms were sold out in 1957.

**RAF** - Arthur Walklin worked at the camp and got him a job there - went in 1958 and was there for 30 years.

### *Tape 19 –*

**Cowley works** came after WWI and many went and worked there.

**Army** place at Didcot employed too – most men cycled.

**Hill House** - Eagle-Botts in Hill House employed Norah Harwood when she was 14-21. Made a jolly good living and uniform was provided.

**The Rectory** - Humphreys at the Rectory.

**The Manor** - also had staff, **Mill House, Fifield** (Wainwrights). Orpwood's very generous during the war and made sure workers had enough rations. Hated dried eggs. Grew their own and pickled eggs in isinglass.

#### *Tape 20 -*

People had more domestic help than they do now because it was cheaper.

**Honey factory** quite small when she arrived then it was extended. There existed a myth that it provided employment for locals. If you saw the amount of cars you'd realise that many weren't local. Lorries in day in day out.

**Village Shops** - Closure of village shop made a huge difference to traffic. Walls sausages delivered in high truck as did bread and Kellogs. Quite a few locals worked in village shops. Approved of new housing on Honey factory site.

#### *Tape 22 -*

**The White House** - Staff were employed at The White House before the Buchan's lived there. There was not much division between rich and poor, people in local houses were not that well off anyway and everyone mucked in. Usually local people were employed because they were cheaper. Staff were also employed at the **Old Rectory, Ewelme Down House and Saffron House**.

**Cress beds** - gave employment to quite a few. Tappins collected hampers in horse-drawn vehicle and took them to Watlington Station for London.

#### *Tape 23 -*

**Fifield Manor** - Remembers the gardener employed by Mr and Mrs Wainwright at Fifield Manor, Mr Calcott. He came from North Oxfordshire. Had something to do with the scouts at Benson.

**The Forge** – Frank Godden was a blacksmith and worked at the Forge – did all the horses. Latterly he employed Mr Bailey from Henley to help him. He died in 1924. His son did a bit but was not professional.

#### *Tape 24 -*

**Cowley Motor works** - Aubrey, Ron, Leonard and Michael Gilbey (his son Bill) and his nephew Bobby Monday went to Cowley, left their apprenticeships/trades - money lured them away. He was an interior decorator apprenticed to a Wallingford firm and paid ?4.60. but Morris's paid ?9.20p! His brother Ron a fully fledged plumber and steam fitter left his job, and Eric was a plumber who left his trade.

**RAF** - Mick spent some years as a young steward at the Officers Mess at RAF Benson.

Mr Jones was a grave digger and was digging in the new churchyard one night when Mr Woolfly-Green, a poacher had collected rabbits from his snares. Mr Jones was in the grave and heard the footsteps coming along - lifting his lantern he shouted out 'Whats the time?' Woolfly-Green dropped his rabbits in fright and fled.

#### *Tape 26 -*

**Honey Factory** provided employment but was an eyesore. Lorries came and went but the roads were quieter then. The hours were tailored to suit mothers with school children. People sorry to see the factory move to Wallingford as young people could work there. Again the site was used to provide 'expensive' housing for outsiders.

**Watercress beds** - in full production when the we came. Remembers buying a large bunch which would last nearly a week. Best watercress available. Sent to London and local markets.

**Farms** provided some employment but the larger fields meant larger machines and fewer workers..

**Cowley Motor works** - when the Cowley factory closed it was a shock as many of the 'old' villagers worked there.

**Grundons** - provide some employment still and the Dairy to a lesser extent. There were 3 shops and a garage in 1969. Now only one shop left.

As the in-comer mothers went back to work they required cleaners and a new opportunity arose for the village ladies to do this.

#### **Tape 27 -**

**RAF Camp** provided a lot.

**Cress beds and honey factory**, mother cleaned there.

#### **Tape 28 -**

**Honey Factory** - Richard Winfield worked with the Honey Factory for 11 years. Same age as Richard Rowse – went to school with him in Ewelme. Remembers when it was first set up. Richard Rowse senior started the business after illness. He literally used to bottle honey and when the business got bigger he imported it. Judy worked at the Riverside Shop in Wallingford and at Dorchester and Henley until the children were born. She now works in the Conservatory at Notcutts, Clifton Hampden.

#### **Tape 29 -**

After leaving Icknield did an apprenticeship - basic engineering Oxford Lasers in Oxford. YTS money and earned £50 a week - exactly the tax break at age 17. There was a social stigma for taking apprenticeship. - generally considered someone with O Levels should take A levels and go to University. Didn't enjoy formal education. Preferred hands on working. Looked down upon for taking apprenticeship and not following academic course to University. Course was 3.5 years. Left with ONC - Ordinary National Certificate at age 20. In 1985/86 earning £50 a week. Cant remember how much he paid mother was supposed to be £10 a week.

No prospect of employment in Ewelme. Why should young people have to move 30 miles away to find affordable housing and a job? Ideal would be to have a locally provided place for work (ie cottage offices with a few units and facilities for a number of small businesses/professions) and get back to days where people worked and lived together. This also encourages socialising in the evening. Gives cohesion to community.

#### **Tape 31 - Interviewed by George Cannon**

How old were you when you left school?

*14.*

What did you do?

*The last two years I was downstairs teaching the babies. I was supposed to have left at 12 and it just came into Law to stop till we were 14 and I learned all I could and went downstairs teaching the babies.*

Did you like it?

*I didn't mind it.*

Did you ever feel you would have liked to become a teacher?

*No..*

What did most children do when they finished school at 12?

*The girls went into service most of them and the boys got jobs on the farms.*

What were the big houses in the village where the girls could work in service?

*There was the Manor and the Maxwells in **Saffron Cottage**, and the **Old Rectory** and Mrs Palmer [**High House**], Mrs Bowles at the corner opposite **The Shepherds Hut** in the **Old Mill House** where Miss Peacock used to live. The farmhouse at the bottom where the Cooks used to be opposite the Scott-Bowdens and **The Mansion** where Moira Calvert lives and the Burkitts [**New Place**] where the Styles live. Mrs Burkitt had that one built. They lived at the one on the Mill Pond until it was built.*

### ***Tape 38 -***

**Fords Farm** - work force- in 1952 there were Bill, his son and two cowmen, a pigman and a tractor driver, a gardener and a part time maintenance man. Today there is 1 – Nigel. They earned the agricultural wage of £6-£7 per week for a 7am –5pm, 5 days a week and Saturday up to 12 noon.

### ***Tape 41 -***

**War Work** - I worked in Oxford at John Allen Engineers of Oxford. I cycled to work to Cowley which took about ¾ hr to 1 hr. Working 47 hr week earning 12/2d. We made a lot of excavators, steam rollers and a verge cutter. Also a secret thing for borrowing. Had a War contract for making ‘loading teachers’ for teaching Naval cadets to load guns – for shells about 2.5 ft long 4-6 inches diameter.

### ***File 43 -***

When my parents were married in 1914, my mother had been a domestic servant and my father had worked as painter-decorator. He developed lead poisoning from this work and transferred to working as a gardener. They married on 17/6d a week. My father’s poor health was a boon in one way, for although he was called up at the beginning of World War 1 and went into the army, he was never fit enough to fight in France and he remained in the army in England until 1918. He became a gardener then and remained a gardener for the rest of his life, not only to earn money to keep his family, but also because it became a great pleasure to him.

Another job my father hated almost as much as he loved gardening was mending our shoes. Mother could not afford to buy more than one pair for each of us and I remember her telling my father we would not be able to go to school if our shoes were not mended. He hated the job and he added a lot of swear words to our vocabulary when he was doing that job. It is impossible to thank him enough for the fact that we were always well fed because of his perpetual work in the garden.

My mother made our clothes, mended them, shortened them, patched them and kept us reasonable clothed with the very fine limits of the housekeeping money. Many of our clothes came from jumble sales or given to her by philanthropic gentry. She spent most of her time in the evenings sewing and mending. She kept us clean and tidy and with endless patience she taught us girls to sew and knit and cooked us at least one hot meal a day. In the autumn she would make jam out of the surplus fruits of the garden and the hedges. With the drudgery of coping with the conditions in which we lived, dragging water from the springs, cooking on a coal range and with no electricity or gas, it’s amazing that she lived for 95 years. Certainly the survival of the fittest!

### ***File 44 -***

I was now working for Dick Wells, Builder. We removed some of the outside buildings from the KCB café which had to come down. [In 1942] These were rebuilt mostly down Mill Lane, Benson for Mr Horsefield, and some in the field to what is now Gurney’s Garage. There was no water available so my job was to dig a small well, which may still be there. By the time we were 16 we had to register for War work. I was already in the ATC at Wallingford. We could join the Home Guard, ARP, AFS etc. While in the ATC I managed to go flying twice, once at RAF Harwell and once at RAF Abingdon. One of the lads was killed at RAF Harwell in a flying accident. By the time I was 17 I was hearing rumours that my age group would be going down the coal mines. I volunteered for the RAF and was accepted in November 1943 and actually joined the Service on March 20th 1944.

### ***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.

**Paper Rounds** - In the early 1960’s I took on paper rounds to help with the pocket money. Initially I delivered in the lower village east of post office (Mr/Mrs Harris who replaced Mr/Mrs Cruise) and then, in addition, the upper round to the Council houses. I was paid 9/11d (approx 50p) for both rounds. Later on I took on the evening Oxford Mail paper round. This round would start when the van dropped papers at my

house 18:30 weekdays or 19:30 on Saturdays in the football season when the Sports Mail would be included. I had the additional burden of collecting the paper money on Saturday mornings and evenings. This was good in many ways because I got to know many of the people in the village and would often have lengthy conversations. One of my Oxford Mail customers was Mrs King, the retired milk lady. She always had interesting things to tell me. I would earn approx £2 per week from the Oxford Mail paper round.

Cowley Works - My father took employment with the Pressed Steel Car body manufacturing company at Cowley, Oxford. He used to cycle to Benson or other nearby villages to pick up a lift, or on some occasions, cycled all the way. (Villagers also used the local Bus services or taxis). By working nightshifts he was able to maintain our chicken stocks but our pigs were discontinued. When 'cycling back from work early in the mornings he would often pick mushrooms from fields, which we would have for breakfast.

My mother cleaned for Mrs Hedges, their neighbour.