

DISASTERS

Memoirs of some of the more dramatic events in the village

Tape 2 -

Fire - in rickyard [1927].
Garage fire fatality [1986].

Murder at White House [1941] during the war. Captain Horsley shot his wife in jealous rage then blew top of his head off. Edwards father in ARP and St John called to the house.

Fire at Smockacre. [March 24th 1986 – home of John and Irene Pollard]

Tape 3 -

Winter 1947 village snowed up for weeks. RAF Benson helped with snow ploughs.

Fires – garage, London Road Inn.

Murder at White House – Capt Horsley kept racehorses in stables to left of house. Shocked villagers.

Tape 5 -

The snow of 1963/3 so deep he was unable to deliver to Benson the usual way, had to go via Shillingford and sat for 2 hours at the roundabout due to the snow and blocked roads. The road between Benson and Ewelme had snow roof high on the parked cars. Cut off for 2-3 days but the villagers helped each other.

Tape 6 -

Winter of 1947 and 1962/3, couldn't get to Benson.

Murder – Mr Horsley used to drive her to Watlington – a pleasant man but unnecessarily jealous of his wife.

Garage - Death of Vic Smith at the garage.

Tape 7 -

Browne's big barn had a huge fire and water from Kings Pool was used to put it out, photo somewhere – in the last 30 years.

Tape 8 -

Winter 1947 - Grammar School closed in 1947 – snow so deep that all schools closed and moving generally was impossible. 1962 and 63 were also difficult but it was possible to walk and she walked to work getting there at 10.0 am.

London Road Inn burnt down 1942.
Mr Smith's accident.

The garage burning down.

Tape 10 -

Garage fire - Cyril Howell's garage caught fire in the night.

Smockacre Fire - Amy phoned for the fire brigade for the Smockacre fire in 1988. [1986]

Murder and Suicide - at The White House - Captain Horsley - a short, cocky man – who broke in horses and was not a nice man. He used to put tinctacts under his horses saddles to make them prance about in the street. Very jealous of his wife who was a charming lady, much taller than he. Edith Burgess worked for

them and ran with the children into a room and locked the door when he shot his wife. Saved their lives. About 11 am in the morning.

Tape 11 -

Winters 1947 and 1962 - The Thames froze.

Tape 12 -

Winter 1947 - No water for 6 weeks. Walked from Saffron Close down to the stream for water. Tom Wattworth ? said they could use his pump which was a long walk. Washed in tin bowl in front of a fire. Snow was 2 ft deep on open ground. There was no roof insulation. When they first came had to get water from well and pumped it by hand – the well was 90ft deep. Pipes in roof froze so brought water from the stream and discovered how little water one could get by on.

Saffron House - Had a major fire. The fire engine came from Watlington. However, they hadn't heard of Ewelme and went down to Benson. It started because Mr Rowse put bee keeping stands in creosote and heated them as he had been told this was more effective. Left them heating while having coffee and discovered creosote boils at a much lower temperature than water. As a result the garage going down towards the Jones' house had to be rebuilt. Mrs Rowse moved the wood out of the garage so it wouldn't burn while some builders working nearby watched. She had seen the smoke when going to the garden to get a lettuce. That end was originally the servant's quarters and the partitions are of wood so it was lucky there was no wind or the damage could have been a lot worse.

Tape 13 -

Winter of 1962/3 travel very difficult.

Barns on top of Rabbit Hill burnt – used by the courting couples.

Tape 14 -

Winter of 1962/3 – RAF Benson was the last airfield to open because used too heavy machinery which compacted the ice.

Tape 10 -

Murder at White House - Capt Horsley a small cocky man used to put tin tacks under his horse's saddles to make them jog about. Very jealous of his wife who was a charming lady, very much taller than he. Edith Burgess worked for them and ran with the children into a room and locked the door when he shot his wife. Saved their lives. About 11 in the morning.

Tape 16 -

The winters of 1947 and 1962/3 – can't remember 1947 but 62/63 the roads were blocked and no supplies got through. Electricity was cut off for a time.

Tape 18 -

Murder at White House - Major Horsley – in 1939 he was there. I was at East Illsey when he shot his wife and then himself. Thought she was being unfaithful with an officer from the camp.

Tape 19 -

Winter 1947 - Snow plough couldn't keep up with it. Watlington road closed. Had to be very careful with supplies. Snow still about in March.

The Mill burnt down early in the century.

Tape 22 -

Knife Grinders [1904] - Two Italians had a fight once on Firebrass Hill. One killed the other. The talk of the village for years. One is buried in the churchyard. One winter Firebrass Hill was completely cut off.

Orpwood's Fire 1927 - a barn burnt down.

Tape 23 -

Murder at White House January 21st 1941. Captain Horsley was a character, buried at Banbury and his wife is buried at Wallingford. She was a nice lady aged about 46 with 3 children. Winter of 1947 very bad, snowed up to March. Food got through though.

Tape 24 -

Winter 1962/63 - Village not really affected by bad winter of 62/63 roads only completely blocked for 3 days, and couldn't get to work.

Murder at the White House - must have been in 1941 remembers Horsley he drove a grey car with the wartime slit headlights. Story goes he was in a pub in Thame when he rang home and a stranger answered - drove home and killed his wife.

Knife Grinder murders - apparently one was just leaving the village and one arriving. The argument was about the one just having all the trade.

Tape 33 - (Interviewed by George Cannon)

I do remember playing on the fire engine. There were some vehicles and a fire pump in the farm yard and a large vehicle which had served as a fire engine. We used to run it down through the farmyard occasionally. How we pushed it back I don't know.

I remember the old engine that had a horse to pull it. They used it to pump the cess pool out in the cow yard. My brother and I got the end of the hose when it was coming out and squirt one another. There's a photo of it in there.

GC Is that the one that came from Benson?

Yes, there's a photo of it in there [exhibition] with four men each side of the pump.

GC Did you ever see it in actual use in the village?

When [Lower] Farm caught fire they had it down here pumping water but it wasn't very successful. Where Comdr. Browne lives now [Fields End] - they thought it was a spark from a steam engine going up the hill, it set the thatch on fire just past Bennetts shop, then it went up the rick yard and it was burning 2 days 2 nights.

Do you remember the **London Road Inn** catching fire?

Yes, I was with the harvest cart up at Ewelme Downs when that went up. Bill Parker was landlord.

Capt Stevenson was there up to the beginning of the war and into the war. And then Bill Parker came.

Probably 1942. It was Norfolk Reeds thatch. He came from the Red Lion at Britwell Salome. That was during the war and I think the RAF helped put a temporary roof on it which lasted for 40 years.

Tape 35 -

Murder at White House - Marjorie Miners said Major Horsley was a kind man who used to give her lifts to the doctors when she was pregnant. His wife was beautiful and he was very jealous of her.

Tape 41 -

Fire in rickyard in 1927. There were two fires. Bottom one being fired and the following night they had another fire. Orpwood's rickyards next to Tommy Bennett's shop.

Murder at White House

Major Horsley used to come to Cyril Howells for his car repairs, plus four man - a stable boy looked after horses. Married Lord Duveen's daughter. Duveen was a Judge. Murder? Remember it. Yes. My father

was at Maxwells then round the corner. Edie Burgess was the one there. A maid looking after the children. About 1942.

File 44 -

Knife Grinder Murder - My father's story always comes to mind when I'm driving down 'Fire Brass Hill' from Watlington into Ewelme passing the very spot where it happened. [In Feb 1904] An Italian organ grinder killed his friend by cutting his throat with a razor. My father remembers this from his school days in Ewelme, saying the murderer washed his hands in the Sheepbrook and then wiped his hands on a girl's apron, she being one of a group standing nearby.

Murder at White House - The top of this hill was marked by another crime: in May 1941 I was delivering meat from Mr Vaughn, of Benson, when in the company of Ray Vaughn (his son) we came to the home of Mr Horsley, [The White House] police were very much in evidence there and it turned out that he had shot his wife and then turned the gun on himself. It was a Saturday evening and I remember seeing the blitz over London, with ak ak bursts sparkling in the night sky.